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ABSTRACT

Since antiquity, art has been a universal way of concrete-sensual expression of non-verbalized spiritual experience, primarily aesthetic, one of the main, essential, along with religion, components of culture, as a uniquely creative and productive spiritual and practical human activity. In this article, the authors demonstrate its influence and power on the life and attitude of a person. In the process of analyzing the novel *The Goldfinch* by Donna Tartt, the authors show that art helps people to discover more of themselves, to realize themselves, to go into their inner world – the world of their ideas and dreams. It helps to break away from reality as it is and get into a completely different, opposite world. Tartt's novel demonstrates that by being associated with art, people can taste immortality. The article aims to demonstrate the undeniable power of art based on the analysis of the novel, to show that art has unlimited value because it is not just a decoration or addition to life, but a part of existence, the sense of life. On the basis of a detailed examination of the novel, the authors make conclusions that the role of art is invaluable in human life.

Keywords: art; artworks, philosophy of art, value, being, aesthetics, catharsis

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a widespread belief that both the creation and the perception of art are purely subjective and, accordingly, do not require a special and, moreover, a philosophical theory. Even Hegel (1999), in his introduction to his lectures on aesthetics, specifically discussed the shortcomings of the point of view, according to which philosophy should not make art its subject, and genuine art, in turn, does not need philosophy (Hegel, 1999). Meanwhile, thanks largely to philosophy, we can talk about what art is in general and what its boundaries are, how it is connected with our emotions and cognition, what can be considered work and what is its structure, what is an art form and why its meaning changes with time? In this article, we look at the functions and meaning of art in general, investigate the value of art based on the novel *The Goldfinch* by Donna Tartt, and show its undeniable powerful influence. The idea is to show how subtly the author demonstrates the immortality of art in the pages of her novel and to prove that it has an infinite value.

The purpose of the article is to demonstrate the undeniable power of art, based on the analysis of the novel *The Goldfinch* by Donna Tartt, to show that art has an infinite value because it is not just a decoration or addition to life, but a part of existence; the sense of life. The analysis of the novel as the study of this issue is interesting from philosophical, cultural, social and linguistic points of view.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1 Research Publications Analysis

The interpretation of art as a specific epistemological phenomenon, as a special form of cognition, permeates the history of philosophical and aesthetic thought. V. P. Pankurin (1990), M. S. Kagan (1997), E. Yi. Fainberg (1997), H. Klinke (2014), T. Adajian (2018), V. Limonchenko (2018), Ye. Popov (2019), A. Karimov (2019), N. Dyadyk (2020), N. Blokhina (2021) consider art in their works, first of all, as cognitive activity, which is

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Depending on one or another point of view on the ontological grounds of truth, art is interpreted in one case as imitation Plato (Fine, 2008), G. Hegel (Hegel, 1999), F. Shelling (Shelling, 1966), in the second – as reality reflected by artistic means and techniques (Lifshits, 2000). In the third, art acts as a personality model, as a characteristic of the being of a subject, such as self-expression (Kant, 2019, Heidegger, 1993).

Martha Nussbaum (1990), Iris Murdoch (1992), Richard A. Posner (1997), consider in their works the relationship between philosophy and literature.

Revealing the meaning of art, its purpose and value is one of the main goals of modern philosophy of art (Davies, 2013; Pećnjak, 2015; Nikitina, 2018; Mengzhong Zhao, 2019; Pözlner, 2020; Khassanovet al. 2021).

2.2 Database and Methodology

The methodological foundations of the research are the activity approach, the dialectical method, the method of systems analysis, general logical methods of cognition, such as analysis and synthesis, as well as the method of ascent from the abstract to the concrete, the principle of the unity of the historical and the logical, historical-comparative and structural-functional analysis, existential, as well as socio-cultural and semiotic approaches.

3. RESULTS

Philosophy has long been concerned about the essence of such concepts as “beautiful”, “imitation”, “image” and many others, which seem to be self-evident. But in reality, they are constantly redefined depending on the evolution of artistic processes and the specifics of philosophical views. The same eternal questions remain the problem of truth in art, the relationship between ethical and aesthetic, the value of the author’s expression and social functions of art, as well as the importance of the role of those who perceive art, and other issues. Their urgency becomes, perhaps, even more, acute with the loss of the still recently unshakable criteria of art (D. Dixon, 2020).

If we try to briefly formulate the essence of the new European concept of art in its classical paradigm, then it comes down to a mimetic understanding of art in the mode of expressing beauty in it as a specific form of non-verbalized knowledge and can be described as follows. Art is secondary in the Universe. Its works are not the product of direct divine creativity work and not the creation of nature, but the work of human hands (Gebauer, 2020). They are created according to the principle of “imitation” of objectively existing reality (divine, metaphysical, spiritual, natural, material, man-made, social, mental, etc.) in artistic images that allow you to penetrate into the essential depths of the displayed objects, which are not available for knowledge and comprehension by no other means. The essence, or truth, has always been associated in the European tradition with beauty, exquisiteness, therefore, art was ultimately understood as an expression or creation of beauty, giving the subject of perception aesthetic pleasure. As Richard Hamann, a prominent historian and theorist of art in the first half of the 20th century, wrote: “The essence of fine art is to facilitate the aesthetic vision of the world, or, moreover, to realize it in general” (Hamann, 1980, p. 8). In true art, we find our true essence. The truth contained in art helps a person to enrich himself spiritually, to comprehend the entire depth of the universe and to appreciate it as a whole and beautiful. Artistic truth is a specific truth that differs from scientific truth, first of all in that it contributes to the formation of spirituality, the acquisition of the values of being, values of the spirit, such as Truth, Goodness, Beauty. This truth contributes to the satisfaction of the highest spiritual needs of a person, his spiritual growth (Clammer, 2021).

4. DISCUSSION

Essential Functions of Art

The main goal of art is to activate the aesthetic consciousness of the subject of perception up to the achievement of aesthetic pleasure (in optimal situations – catharsis), which testifies to the withdrawal of the recipient's spirit in the process of perceiving a work of art into the worlds of non-utilitarian spiritual being, to other levels of reality (or consciousness), different from the level of everyday life, to the levels of aesthetic (all-encompassing) contact with the Universe, achieving spiritual harmony with it, that is, the real fullness of being (J. Kirwan, 2019; R. De Clercq, 2019).

Along with this basic and essential function of art, without which it does not exist as such, it loses its metaphysical meaning, in different historical epochs, in different cultures, social environments and cultural institutions, in which the artists themselves were included, works of art performed and are performing and other, non-aesthetic, but sometimes very significant social and utilitarian functions: political, ideological, sacred and cult, confessional, moral and ethical, compensatory, entertaining, etc. (Gorodeisky, 2019). These are the functions that were perceived as more significant than the actual aesthetic, and sometimes as the only functions of art at certain historical stages and in certain social situations. "Works of art reflect the spiritual side of life of the humanity and are passed down from generation to generation" (Poplavskiy, 2020).

Leitmotif of the Protagonist's Life

The plot of Donna Tartt's novel *The Goldfinch* is built around the traumatic experience of the protagonist who survived a terrorist attack in New York. Although there was no real explosion in the Metropolitan Museum and the events in the text are fictional, the works of art that the author mentions in her novel do exist. The fate of the protagonist is inextricably linked with the picture *The Goldfinch*, which also "survived" a traumatic experience. As in Maupassant's famous story *The Necklace*, forgery and emptiness will be the leitmotif of the protagonist's life, in this case, Theodore Decker.

From the very beginning, the canvas becomes the worldview of the hero-narrator, because not only the one who creates but also the one who is ready to understand the beautiful is an artist in a broad sense. After all, the Deaf to beauty, with a consumerist approach to art, are not able to create the real, eternal. At the same time, the present lives its own life, builds the world around it, is life-giving and life-affirming, conquers death and transcends its limits.

It is the art that the hero perceives not as a dead reflection of reality, but as a world that exists according to its own laws, is a living multifaceted in its diversity. Therefore, it is appropriate to raise the question of the synthesis of arts in the novel. This is achieved by a skillful combination of visual and auditory details creating convex emotionally saturated images filled with the heartbeat of life (Demenev, 2021; Rami H. Gabriel, 2021).

Link Between the Protagonist and Karel Fabricius

Theo Decker, the protagonist of the novel, as a teenager with his mother attends an exhibition dedicated to Dutch artists, which in reality never was (it all happens at the beginning of the book). There Tartt introduces one of the main protagonists of the novel – the painting *The Goldfinch* by Karel Fabricius.

Karel Fabricius (1622–1654) was a Dutch painter widely known as Rembrandt's most talented student. Vincent van Gogh, in particular, admired him. He is called Jan Vermeer's teacher, which is not entirely true. But Fabricius really influenced the formation of the Delft school of painting, including, indirectly, the aesthetics of Vermeer. Fabricius' life and career came to an abrupt end in 1654, when the Delft powder warehouse exploded. The artist died at the age of 32. Some of his work was lost due to the same catastrophe, but some paintings still survived, in particular, the same *The Goldfinch*. Do you feel the similarity? An explosion at a powder factory. Explosion at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, which exhibits a painting in a novel. People are dying, paintings are dying. But *The Goldfinch* remains. What does this goldfinch stand for? What is this magical, influential image around which a large, multi-page novel is built? We see a super-realistic image of a bird, written in trompe l'oeil genre that is "optical illusion" when it is difficult for the viewer to distinguish a fictional image from reality. Fabricius, using artistic techniques, creates the illusion of depth. He does this through working with light and shadow, foreshortening, using highlights on the rings and legs of the bird, on the plastered wall. Bright touches of colours contrast with lighter and dull colours, emphasizing the visual effect of "reality". Fabricius's writing style is not photographic. It is rather closer to proto-impressionism. During the restoration, the researchers saw that many small dents, "wounds" were preserved in the painting; apparently, it was in the artist's studio during the explosion. So, a picture can be understood as a bearer of memory: a picture (more broadly, art) is a surviving witness of a tragedy and, in a sense, a bearer of traumatic experience (G. Gebauer, 2020).

On a small board originally a closet door there is a depiction of a small bird sitting on a roost. It is the central character, a goldfinch (lat. *Carduelis carduelis*), depicted in full size. It sits on a blue box with a lid enclosed by two wooden half-rings attached to the wall. This is both its feeder and the place of its imprisonment. The bird sits on the top ring, a thin chain is attached to the foot to hold it. The painting is signed and dated "C fabritius

1654". Karel Fabricius is one of the first artists to transform the traditional Dutch genre of painting (Kaptereva, 2006). Instead of depicting an episode or carefully detailed narrative, it creates a coherent atmosphere for the picture. All its elements, and interior elements as well, carry a single mood. The action becomes insignificant, priority is given to contemplation, pure experience of reality (Rotenberg, 1971).

The experiences of the hero are intertwined with the history of the picture, uniting into a certain single image of Theo-goldfinch. Donna Tartt achieves this effect through her internal monologues. Theo Decker is like the same bird that has fallen into a trap, with a chain on its leg and its own "house-prison". The living experience of perception and experience of painting, which is present in Tartt's novel, contains a premonition of a certain new dimension, the symptoms of which can be caught, accompanying the hero of Theo Decker's novel. It is the art that acts in the novel as the saving "medium of being", determining and directing the fate of the heroes.

Signs of Being, Signs of a New Reality

The key theoretical and methodological provision of the article is the thesis: "only within the aesthetic attitude of a modern person, being is available... Not so much traditional types of ideology, not so much technology, not so much scientific knowledge and critical philosophy but specially organized aesthetic experience allows a modern person to "take root in being" (Zhelezniaket al., 2017; Radeev, 2017; Kormin, 2019).

Taking this position as a basis, we will try to find in the text of the novel signs of being, signs of a new reality, accessible to art due to its "medial" nature. "To learn is, first of all, to consider the matter, object, being, as if they were emitting signs for deciphering, for interpretation" (Delez, 1999, p. 29).

New York, April 10. "Portraiture and still lifes: works of the northern masters of the Golden Age". The dramatic story described in the novel begins with this exhibition. The plot, the beginning, the driving energy and the plot background of the novel come from a compact art history foundation, the scientific content of which the author, most likely, does not take into account, relying on the receptivity and living experience of her characters.

We intend to look closely at this. A mother and a son in the museum. The son would prefer to spend this time in a completely different place for entertainment: "not too inspired by the prospect of looking at a bunch of pictures with the Dutch in dark clothes" (Tartt, 2015, p. 31), but mother really wants to see the works of her favorite artists. Rembrandt, Vermeer, Fabricius, Hals are a subject for study and love. The study of painting is "pure bliss, just paradise" (Tartt, 2015, p. 27). We choose several names or works in the ocean of art to immerse ourselves in them, to balance the shallow waters of our lives.

But where does bliss, enjoyment and happiness await us? Does not the medium of art carry the news of a new reality, of a new mode of human existence that has begun to open up to us? Once in the museum, the hero suddenly feels "strangely" isolated from everything. An important element of the new dimension of artistic experience is the motive of falling out of the current everyday life, the current time and the given space (S. Hoffding, 2019).

The novel strikes the judgments of Theo's mother, a graduate of the Faculty of Art History at New York University, a young woman in love with fine arts, about the masterpieces of world painting and about their authors The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp by Rembrandt, The Merry Drinking Companion, The Regents of the Almshouse by Frans Hals, works by Vermeer, still lifes of Adrien Court, her perception of beauty, eternal and temporary (Shalimova, 2020). The heroine of the novel Audrey Decker explains in detail the meaning of what is depicted in the paintings. She notes that it was Dutch artists who first noticed and conveyed the very edge when the mature begins to rot: "They really knew how to work this edge, the Dutch painters – ripeness sliding into rot" (Tartt, 2015, p. 25). She draws the son's attention to the vulnerability, the fleeting beauty of the ideal, seemingly fruit: "The fruit's perfect but it won't last, it's about to go" (Tartt, 2015, p. 25). The mother teaches her son that all living things do not last long. This is what Dutch still lifes say. If you look closely, you can see microscopic traces of death, which is present everywhere (Tartt, 2015, p. 32). The point, however, is different. The fruits on the table and on the canvas have already begun to rot, but in the picture they will rot forever. The painting captures decaying flesh, but the depicted flesh does not decay.

Secondly, she brings her son to a general conclusion, on the basis of which he will be able to further analyze any image in the paintings: "Whenever you see flies or insects in a still life – a wilted petal, a black spot on the apple – the painter is giving you a secret message. He's telling you that living things don't last – it's all temporary. Death in life. That's why they are called nature mortes" (Tartt, 2015, p. 36). She "seeks to show that a dead thing, created by a skilled artist, looks like a living thing" (Frejdenberg, 1998, p. 141). The mother touches upon the philosophical theme of the predetermination of being, teaches humility, acceptance of the finiteness of existence and the ability to enjoy every moment of life. She also tells his son that art is forever. "People die, sure," my mother was saying. "But it's so heartbreaking and unnecessary how we lose things. From pure carelessness. Fires, wars. The Parthenon, used as a munitions' storehouse. I guess that anything we manage to save from history is a miracle." (Tartt, 2015, p. 52). This topic passes through the entire novel, clearly determining the infinitive value of the art (Schechtman, 2019; Strevens, 2019).

The labyrinth of halls of the museum helps the incipient process of the parallel transition. This is associated with oddities, concerning primarily what happens to the hero, and not what he is experiencing. The reason is that it

hangs on the walls: dense, mimetic, to a deceptive effect, painting. But this flower will never wither, this fly will never fly up, no one will open this book, this knife does not cut off the ham and do not take a sip from this glass. It is important to feel that the world of these pictures is different, it is more different than the lunar landscape. Suddenly the boy falls into a “stupor of wasted time” because a trail has formed behind his mother, in which time was absent. It is the magic of the novel’s narrative that reveals to us that strange shifts in time are not the essence of experience, but symptoms of entering an event that has its own necessity and its own destiny. The boy perforce finds himself on the brink, where a different order of being fits right next to reality. That is art (Pepperell, 2019).

Art as salvation from the hardships of life

The painting must be considered for a long time. This is a simple but very valuable observation. A session of a picture contemplation in terms of duration should not be inferior to the time of listening to a piece of music of similar importance. Only in this case, painting begins to “intonate” the artistic meanings expressed in it. The mother teaches the son that it’s necessary to look at the goldfinch for a long, long time in order to understand how this “pet” is written. This is how the symbolization and even mythologization of the picture by Fabricius and its feathered character begins. The picture occurs at the centre of a fantastic incident. The means of such mythological-symbolic circulation are very effective (Cassirer, 2020). All the plot lines of the novel revolve around *The Goldfinch*. The picture carries a light that simultaneously possesses the qualities of a transcendental mystery and this-worldly authenticity. The picture finds itself in the epicenter of an explosion, repeating the explosion in Delft that killed Fabricius, and the Goldfinch survived in both disasters. The painting is a mysterious point around which the physical space and time continuum and destinies are exposed. Finally, associations with Raphael’s *Madonna with the Goldfinch* and the Gospel symbols explaining the red stripe around the bird’s beak are inevitable. It does not follow from this that the goldfinch is like a bird and as a painting is some kind of exclusive myth. But the chosen tool quite allows to break through the “peaceful” course of everyday life in order to make visible a new reality, if only in the form of an excess. The explosion and everything that followed reveals amazing things. In this life, there are people-goldfinches. They are aliens, on whom a glimmer of the mystery lies. Together they form a reality of a special kind, in which Theo finds himself, a single semantic space, closed in the novel by D. Tartt and which has become a sense-forming, a kind of island, where horror recedes before beauty. Such islands are created on the basis of the principle of “connected isolation” (P. Sloterdijk, 2016). Lonely unhappy people are trying to survive together and separately at the same time, joining the beauty to the best of their ability. In the light of such mutual assistance, V. Babitskaya also reads the novel: “Art was invented as psychotherapy, offering the reader catharsis, and Tartt returns to the novel this direct, simple, consoling function: both directly, in the form of a sermon on the last page, and indirectly, by its very length of her book in time” (Babitskaya, 2014). The life of the main character of *The Goldfinch* was fueled by the sincere joy that he is the happy owner of a rare treasure – a painting by the great artist that depicts a lonely bird on a perch. For the teenager Theo, the picture becomes both real salvation from the hardships of life and a ray of light in the darkness of misunderstanding and despair. By and large, Theo Decker has changed under the influence of art, the painting *The Goldfinch*, where the bird is depicted chained to a perch. Thoughts about the inevitability of death can turn a person’s everyday life into a meaningless action with a constant expectation of a sad end. But these thoughts, which have a destructive effect on the psyche of an adult, young child or adolescent, give great value and uniqueness to every minute of life (Mastandrea et al. 2019, Menninghaus et al. 2019).

Having become a fateful subject for Theo, the picture intensifies the psychological load of what is happening in his soul. The painting *The Goldfinch*, which does not breathe the universality of the images depicted on it, does not embody universal human eternal values, making one tremble, penetrates deeply into the boy’s soul and mind, helps to form his own understanding of life. The glow emanating from the goldfinch fills Theo with spiritual enlightenment. “It was too — too much — tempting to hold her in my arms and never look. I quickly shook the picture out, and its light immediately enveloped me, as if in music, a secret sweetness that was felt only in the deepest, blood-stirring harmony of correctness — this is how the heart beats evenly and measuredly when you are next to a person who loves you, who never will harm you. The strength, radiance, freshness of the morning light emanated from it, which brought sharpness to all objects, at the same time making them rounder, sweeter than they really were — making them more beautiful also because it was a part of the past, irreplaceable by its part ...” (Tartt, 2015, p. 340). Words are powerless over what aesthetics designates with the concepts of “truth”, “content”, sometimes “spirit” of an artwork. “Scientists, humanists, and art lovers alike value art not just for its beauty, but also for its social and epistemic importance; that is, for its communicative nature, its capacity to increase one’s self-knowledge and encourage personal growth, and its ability to challenge our schemas and preconceptions” (Sherman, Morrissey, 2017).

Art promotes spiritual growth and moral purification of a person. The novel *The Goldfinch* tells us about the power of art, its influence on the life and attitude of a person, about how it can turn the whole life, helps to survive and remain human. “A work of art lives in history through each person’s history of its remaking. And

so, re-enactment allows for knowledge of self and other, the sharing of feelings in every case worked through” (Daniel Alan Herwitz, 2008, Carbon, 2019).

5. CONCLUSIONS

In the highest achievements of artworks, a person creates the soul and thought, emotion and time, calculus and infinity, the entire completeness of personality, raising his individual “I” to the totality of the whole world. It is no accident that it is noted that art, having colours, sounds, images as its material, affects emotions and intellect, the depths of the subconscious and the heights of consciousness, the entire human psyche. Art recreates a person for himself in a sense of all the wealth of his creative powers and life manifestations. The value comprehension of art, which carries the mentality of the individual, ethnos, people in all the plurality of its artistic styles and genres, opens up to a person the idea of the sense of life.

Tartt wrote a great novel about the power of art, combining painting, music, literature, and even restoration, and the complex relationship of originals with genius copies. Indeed, the novel shows that by being associated with art, people can experience a taste of immortality. Life is unpredictable and short, and art has infinite value because it is not just a decoration or addition to life, but a part of existence; the sense of life.

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