

7. THE RELEVANCE OF ART CRITICISM IN AESTHETIC RECEPTION OF ARTWORKS

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Abstract: *One of the most important tests through which the cultural vitality of an artistic community can be examined is art criticism. Art criticism has the role of analysis, interpretation and evaluation of artworks, having important responsibilities to the public interested in the visual artistic phenomenon and also to the evolution of artistic taste. The comments of art critics have managed to provoke public debates on art-related issues or have effectively contributed to the reception and promotion of artworks. The art critic creates a connection between the artworks exhibited in galleries or museums and the public who appreciate the aesthetic value of the works, in terms of explaining the context and the artistic phenomenon, so as to outline the communication between artists, critics and viewers, from the perspective of dynamics of new structures and forms of visual expression. In this context, the public formed through the visual education can be prepared and opened in receiving the aesthetic message of artworks.*

Key words: *Art criticism, connection, communication, visual expression*

1. Introduction

The contemporary society is undergoing of numerous transformations in social, economic, also in scientific and artistic terms. The arts support the insertion of all these factors along the way, adapting to changes, evolving according to the dynamics of trends and contemporary aesthetic orientations. Today, the act of creation receives new dimensions, new values (political, cultural, aesthetic, etc.), establishing a new relationship between all internal structures and external phenomena. In this context of changes, the visual artists have always sought new challenges, so the emphasis has shifted, in particular, on experimental aspects, on originality.

The dialogue between the artwork and the public is interesting because, in the reception of contemporary visual expressions, several factors interfere, among which the most important is the level of artistic education of the viewer. On the other hand, although the public prefers traditional art, also appreciates the value of innovative searches of visual artists. Fine arts education can be achieved through the connection between art galleries, through the exhibited works, art critics who explain the artistic phenomenon and the creative formulas of the artist and the public who appreciate the artistic value. It is necessary to create a communication track between artists, art critics and viewers, because art evolves and new forms of expression appear, and the public must be prepared to understand the transmitted message.

In order to understand the artist's message, the contemplator (or, the receiving art audience) it must first recognize and decipher the elements of the plastic phrase, the symbols, and „the structures of meaning brought into play by an

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artistic image"²²⁵. The visual perception is the result of a long process of accumulating knowledge, and human is able over time to change him self and to develop new forms of perception. One point of view in this regard is held by Nathan Knobler, who believes that just as „the education and the effort are required of the artist to produce his work"²²⁶ the public also should have „often equivalent education"²²⁷ to react and to enter in dialogue with the artwork, otherwise the artistic creations will be a mystery „until he is ready to react to them"²²⁸.

2. The reception of artworks through the public eye

In interpreting the expressive and communicative information of the artwork acts „a combination of sensory information, the past experience, intelligence and emotional attitude, intensity of concentration and even physical condition"²²⁹ of the viewer. Psychologist Rudolf Arnheim finds that there is an interdependence between the inner world and the outer world of the artist in expressing his creative ideas. „The human mind receives, shapes, and interprets the image of the outside world using all its conscious and unconscious resources, and the realm of the unconscious would never be accessible to our experience without the reflection of perceptible things"²³⁰. The sight of each of us modestly anticipates the artist's ability to create images which correctly interpret the experience using an organized form. „The visual act offers a maximum possibility to explore the reality, among the sense organs of human, the eye offers approx. 90% of the information received from the environment ”²³¹.

Through the complexity of the visual language used and the load of the transmitted message, the artist's creation can be understood by a receiver who is able to understand the artistic sensibilities of the creator, to decode and to perceive the artistic value of the work through personal feelings, otherwise the receiver becomes a mere spectator of the artwork. „The meaning found by the layman in the artistic object depends on the artwork, but it also depends on the viewer's own intellectual and emotional condition as well as his ability to perceive the work before his eyes."²³² The artistic receptivity is a native characteristic, but especially acquired through education, in school or family, etc. „The public is quite uninformed and art, unfortunately, remains a luxury, usually reserved for educated categories. Ordinary people consume, in the happiest case, decorative art, from interior design, to jewelry, stained glass, mosaic. The easel art, which was once appreciated by traditional families, is for a slightly smaller audience, one who can simply appreciate a combination of energy and a message”²³³.

²²⁵ Cristian Nae, *Moduri de a percepe. O introducere în teoria artei moderne și contemporane*, Editura Artes Iasi, 2013, p. 133

²²⁶ Nathan Knobler, *Dialogul Vizual*, vol I, Editura Meridiane, București, 1983, p.27

²²⁷ *Ibidem*

²²⁸ *Ibidem*

²²⁹ Nathan Knobler, *op. cit.*, p.26

²³⁰ Rudolf Arnheim, *Arta și percepția vizuală*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2011, p. 443

²³¹ Jenö Bartos, *Structuri compoziționale*, Editura Artes, Iasi, 2005, p. 92

²³² Nathan Knobler, *op. cit.*, p. 13

²³³ După cu afirma Daniela Zbarcea în Evantia Barca *Colecționarii români preferă arta interbelică* interviu cu Daniela Zbarcea în *Era news Educație și Cultură*, 2016 - <http://eranews.ro/daniela-zbarcea-colecționarii-romani-prefera-arta-interbelica/> ERA news Educație și Cultură, 22.07. 2016

Today we find that the audience, to which the contemporary artists naturally address, has reached to a low level of receptivity to the themes approached by artists or rather the audience is intrigued by the way which the contemporary artist presents their message. Or perhaps the limits of art have been pushed so far, arousing of the public a rejection reaction, even if the message has been deciphered. Umberto Eco considers that the more important is the way in which the message is shared²³⁴, which „includes the properties specific to the artistic field, of the communication channel”²³⁵. So compared to the classical communication, „the art emphasizes the form, the inventive way in which the message is coded and transmitted by the artist.”²³⁶ „The artwork is no longer seen only as an artifact whose formal value is paramount, within the framework of Kantian-inspired aesthetic theory, but as a complex system of interpersonal communication”²³⁷.

3. The role of art criticism

One of the most important tests through which the cultural vitality of an artistic community can be examined is art criticism. Art criticism has the role of analysis, interpretation and evaluation of artworks, having important responsibilities to the public interested in the visual artistic phenomenon and also to the evolution of artistic taste. The comments of art critics have managed to provoke public debates on art-related issues or have effectively contributed to the reception and promotion of artworks.

An art critic who wants to better understand the contemporary artistic phenomenon it should have as priorities to visit galleries, exhibitions, museums and also to visit artists' studios frequently, in the sense which „the studio dialogue, the exchange of ideas with an artist or another are very important throughout the critic (art / na.), for enriching his perceptual experience, his own thinking about art; the possibility offered to the critic to know directly the plastic thinking of the artist it turns for him into a special spiritual food”²³⁸. About the art critic, the esthetician Andrei Pleșu appreciated years ago: „it is a feverish conscience (...), a humble hero who desperately tries to keep together the ambitions of creators and the demands of art consumers”²³⁹. The art critic creates a connection between the artworks exhibited in galleries or museums and the public who appreciate the aesthetic value of the works, in terms of explaining the context and the artistic phenomenon, so as to outline the communication between artists, critics and viewers, from the perspective of dynamics of new structures and forms of visual expression. In this context, the public formed through the visual education can be prepared and opened in receiving the aesthetic message of artworks.

Art criticism plays an important role for understanding artistic messages transmitted by artistic productions, as well it can contribute to making the most

²³⁴ Umberto Eco, *Opera deschisă*, Editura Paralela 45, Pitești, 2005, p. 56

²³⁵ Cristian Nae, *op. cit.*, p. 156

²³⁶ *Ibidem*

²³⁷ Cristian Nae, *op. cit.*, p. 153

²³⁸ După cum afirmă Adrian Guță în Elena Andrei, *Intânirea dintre imagistică și concept* – Interviu cu Adrian Guță în *Eastern Europe art events* ianuarie 2011- http://artclue.net/adrian_guță_%C3%A2;22.07.2016

²³⁹ Andrei Pleșu, *Ochiul și lucrurile*, Editura Meridiane, București, 1986, p. 98

complex and proper assessment of the conditions under which an artwork is produced. The artwork is not just a mental image, in order to become an object, subject to our contemplation it must take shape and to be properly elaborated. Thus the artwork is „a fruit of human ingenuity, born of the collaboration of the inventing mind with the shaping hand.”²⁴⁰ The dilemma which Rene Huyghe brings to the discussion about the quality of the artwork is the relation between beautiful and emotional. On the one hand are important the ability to communicate and transmit the message, the emotions, the moods and on the other hand, it is essential the elaboration of fine art, „the conquest of form”, the harmony.

4. The art criticism in Romania before and after 1989

The fine arts chronicles of the communist years were part of the same *optimistic* conception regarding the fate of the Romanian people through „their ability to make a creative, innovative contribution in the direction of national and social progress”²⁴¹. In the fine arts chronicles dedicated to *State Exhibitions* or other exhibitions, art critics had a harsh tone towards „the *monotony*, of *inert* color, the *schematism* of fine arts solutions”²⁴² of the artists, who were finally determined to reproduce in their works the *socialist realism* of the country²⁴³.

At the time were many influential art critics who published in the review of *Fine Art* among Eugen Schileru, Ionel Jianu, Mircea Popescu, Mircea Deac, who made laudatory analyzes about the *engaged art* of some remarkable artists. The fight against the abstract art which was considered „the official art of the capitalist world, thus opposed to socialist realism”²⁴⁴, was constantly debated in this publication. The *Final report on the communist period by the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania* it's specified that „from the party's point of view, the people do not need bourgeois artistic products. The prose, poetry, theater, criticism, literary history, the sciences have the right to exist only on the condition of adopting dialectical and historical materialism (as the only doctrine), and art in general is not allowed to exist outside *the general cause of the proletariat*. The analysis and value judgment of an artwork can be made only from the perspective of its contribution to the construction of the socialism in the R.P.R.”²⁴⁵. In fact, everything that came from the West was considered degrading and it was threatening to influence the visual arts, film, music, literature, etc., the way of life of the population. So, each issue of the *Fine Art* publication was opening with extensive comments about the homage exhibitions illustrated with the image of party and state leaders.

According to the state policy also the magazine (art criticism) „continues to pursue for a long time the liberal aesthetic line open to more or less experimental

²⁴⁰ Rene Huyghe, *Dialog cu vizibilul*, Editura Meridiane, Bucuresti, 1981, p. 389

²⁴¹ Radu Negru, *Cuvânt înainte* în Catalogul Expoziției Interjudețene 1973, p. 3

²⁴² Magda Cârnci, *Artele plastice din Romnia 1945- 1989*, op. cit., p. 44

²⁴³ A devenit legendară declarația unui șef UAP a filialei Iași din anii '50, care a raportat centrului că la Iași artiștii nu fac artă abstractă, fiind cu toții realiști (socialiști).

²⁴⁴ Magda Cârnci, *Artele plastice din Romnia 1945- 1989 op. cit.*, p. 55

²⁴⁵ Tismăneanu, Vladimir, Dobrinu, Dorin, Vasile, Cristian (editori), *Raport final asupra perioadei comuniste realizat de Comisia prezidențială pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2007, p. 490

research, even if the information on Western art is progressively diminishing and that on Romanian art is becoming more and more selective”²⁴⁶. Towards the end of the 1970s, a period of relative political and cultural openness, art critics sought a gradual change in the mentality of the public, who was significantly out of step by the cultural chronology of the time²⁴⁷. After this period, the cult of personality and the idea to glorify the supreme leader began, being established the *Romanian Song Festival*, which promoted popular artists and the cult art was replaced with folk art which was predominated by amateur, „the only one that, in the vision of the leader, should have been supported”²⁴⁸.

However, we must also mention the existence of a current in support of the cult (professional) art. Among these critics we mention Ion Frunzetti, Dan Hăulică, Radu Negru, Virgil Mocanu, Răzvan Teodorescu, Alexandra Titu, Mihai Ispir, Theodor Redlow, Andrei Pintilie and Constantin Prut²⁴⁹. In Iasi, Radu Negru²⁵⁰ was one of the most important art critics, nationally recognized, „he was a phenomenon, he was an art critic like Iasi never had”²⁵¹. During these difficult years, the art critics have shown professionalism in the field of Romanian visual arts in an effort to recover „the course of international artistic evolution”²⁵². „Towards the end of the 1980s, all the older and newer themes of propaganda were introduced into the routine. Confused, the specialized sections of the CC of PCR decided to merge all the *creations* dedicated to the party, the new human, the revolutionary conquests, the communist hero, the socialist Romania, into one, the apothotic one, dedicated to the leader”²⁵³.

Among the „eighties”²⁵⁴ fine arts commentators we notice Magda Cârneli, Pavel Țușară, Adrian Guță, Ileana Pintilie, Anca Vasiliu, Călin Dan, who wrote and published articles and news about the remarkable events of Romanian contemporary art, and as far as possible, about international art. Before the 1990s in Iasi, although „criticism was suffering”²⁵⁵, we mention the names of deserving art critics, such as Steliana Delia-Beiu and Doina Lemny (as well as some writers, such as Aurel Leon), and after the change of regime, the role of commentator of the exhibitions openings was assumed by Dumitru N. Zaharia, Valentin Ciucă, Gheorghe Macarie and more recently by Petru Bejan, Maria Bilașevschi, Cristian Nae and others.

Some professional artists also entered in the area of art criticism such as the painters Val Gheorghiu, Traian Mocanu, Teodor Hașegan, the graphic designer Ion Truică and Magda Sficlea from the design area, who were reflecting in the

²⁴⁶ Magda Cârneli, *Artele plastice din România 1945- 1989 op. cit.*, p. 99

²⁴⁷ *Idem*, p.137

²⁴⁸ Tismăneanu, Vladimir, Dobrinu, Dorin, Vasile, Cristian (editori), *op. cit.*, p. 507

²⁴⁹ Autor, care în mod frecvent a publicat cronici plastice și în revistele și ziarele ieșene.

²⁵⁰ Pentru meritele sale, astăzi o sala de curs de la ITA, Facultatea de Arte Vizuale și Design îi poartă numele.

²⁵¹ După cum afirmă Dragoș Pătrașcu în interviul publicat de Mirela Ștefănescu în volumul *Ieșeni ai artei vizuale contemporane*, Editura Artes, Iași, 2020, p.101

²⁵² Magda Cârneli în *Critica de artă în România din 1980 și până spre prezent*, în *Revista 22*, www.revista22.ro-31.08.2010, 22.05.2016.

²⁵³ Tismăneanu, Vladimir, Dobrinu, Dorin, Vasile, Cristian (editori), *op. cit.* p. 507

²⁵⁴ Adrian Guță, *op. cit.* p.35

²⁵⁵ După cum afirmă Grigore Ilisei în interviul publicat de Mirela Ștefănescu în volumul *Ieșeni ai artei vizuale contemporane*, Ed. Artes, Iași, 2020, p.78.

numerous fine arts chronicles the Iași artistic environment and bringing in the same time an important contribution in creating an image on local visual creation. In Iasi there has always been an effective art criticism, a role assumed by people who have specialized in this discipline. The specialization History and Theory of Art was established in 2008, at the Faculty of Visual Arts and Design, from the George Enescu University of Arts from Iași²⁵⁶ which forms art critics thus creating new generations of theorists and art critics.

The use of digital technologies in the creative process, but also by art critics and the general public is a natural evolution to contemporary challenges for all those involved in artistic activities. New technologies are becoming useful and alternative tools to support, reproduce and spread the message of the artwork, as a symbol of the new *media age*, and the aesthetic tendencies acquired by the new generation²⁵⁷, more and more preoccupied about technology along with the older artistic expression define the value of contemporary cultural heritage from Iasi²⁵⁸. The future of culture „depends on a significant and conscious change of direction”²⁵⁹, therefore, the arts of the future are based on various forms of interdisciplinarity, on new digital technologies, on new and traditional artistic activities, and also on the directions of the evolution of world culture, according to the spiritual patterns of the time.

5. Conclusions

Everyday life, and without exception, the art world have profoundly changed during this time that we are going through worldwide, so the reconfiguration of creative activities in a virtual world it will certainly have surprising consequences in the evolution of visual arts. The entire global exhibition program has been disrupted by the pandemic crisis, many of the exhibitions have been rescheduled or canceled, so that the changes have been and are felt by all those involved in organizing exhibitions, art symposia, conferences, etc.

If we refer to the visual arts exhibitions, these continued to be organized in the online environment, so these were partially and temporarily repositioned in a digitized reality. It is certainly a positive thing from the perspective of the artist, the art critic, and also the public, maintaining therefore the beneficial connection between these three entities in the effort to maintain the dynamics of visual arts in a city which the cultural life constantly vibrates.

The situation of art critics is in line with the dynamics of art, a field which is adapted to the new challenges of today's society. Thus, art critics and artists are now also dedicated to complementary actions such as *artistic curator* and *cultural management*, areas useful for artistic practice, which together bring many benefits to the visual arts.

²⁵⁶ In anul 2015 Universitatea de Arte „George Enescu” a devenit Universitatea Națională de Arte „George Enescu”

²⁵⁷ Vezi Ștefănescu Mircea, Ștefănescu Mirela, *Land Art – The harmony between art, nature, landscape*, publicat în Revista Lucrări Științifice a Facultății de Horticultură din cadrul USAMV Iași, vol. 2, nr. 57, Iași, 2014

²⁵⁸ Mirela Ștefănescu *Arta vizuală ieșeană între tradiție și inovație*, Review of artistic education, nr. 13-14/2017, Editura Artes, Iași, 2017

²⁵⁹ David C. Korten, *Globalizarea societății civile*, Boomfield, Conn, 2001, p. 156

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