

Conference Paper

Stone Cutting in the Urals: Towards the Question of Regional Cultural Features

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Abstract

This study considers the phenomenon of the Ural school of artistic processing of colored ornamental stone as an educational process. Education in the field of stone-carving art in the Urals, despite following the all-Russian principles for the development of an art school, is a unique phenomenon, due to geographical and socio-cultural factors. The training of stone cutters arose along with the need to process stone directly in the vicinity of material extraction. The educational process was developed in the Soviet era as a means to gather personnel for stone-cutting production. More recently, the development of this artform has produced a new approach in the education of specialists in the artistic processing of stone. Both the traditions of the educational process and the problems of today are examined, revealing the general picture of the development of the trend. The study, regarding the development of a separate direction of the educational process, will supplement and concretize the general picture of the development of not only the Ural, but also the domestic art school.

Keywords: educational process, Ural stone-cutting school, artistic processing of colored ornamental stone, educational institution.

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1. Introduction

The history of stone-cutting education in the Ural region is conditioned by the entire development of Ural stone-cutting art, which forms an important part of Russian culture. The works of Ural stone-cutters gained wide-spread international fame before 1917, they were admired during the Soviet era, and today Ural stone-cutting art continues its evolution. Consequently, we believe it interesting to explore an educational foundation that nourishes this phenomenon creating a continuity of tradition and experience, as well as a system-based professional approach to education.

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2. Materials and Methods

Although Ural stonecutting education has been developing as part of Ural art school and has been traditionally considered within this context, this unique educational tradition deserves more specific research, since it has no comparable phenomena in Russian history and provides wide recognition to the region, making it a centre of stonecutting art.

The need for education in stone-cutting in Ural was determined by the demand for master stonecutters at the new stone-working factories established in early 18th century during the first industrial exploration of the region.

3. Discussion

At the beginning of stonecutting education in Ural we find the figure of V.N.Tatishchev (1686–1750), head of the state mining industries. According to V.B.Semyonov, “He created the workers’ schools of a special type. Here the students not only mastered reading and writing, but also were taught mechanics, drawing, turnery, welding, metal works and stone cutting” [1].

The more specialized stonecutting education appeared thanks to A.S.Stroganov, who since early 19-hundreds held the joint position as the head of Ekaterinburg Cutting and Polishing Factory and of the Gorny Shchit Marble Works. In 1800 a factory school was established at the Ekaterinburg Cutting Factory called “School of Literacy with Classes in Drawing, Moulding and Stone Cutting”. It was a rare, if not unique, Russian educational institution that openly taught stonecutting art. Stroganov regularly supplied the factory school by new textbooks “for mastering the drawing basics” and with drawings “from nature” made by academic artists and copied by Yekaterinburg students. “After five years of schooling the students received certificates confirming that they had mastered a craft and completed three years of elementary schooling,” writes T.B.Parnyuk telling about life and work of stonecutting master N.D.Tataurov [2].

The most talented students were sent by Stroganov at the Imperial Academy of Arts, which from its foundation provided specialisation in the applied arts. A perfect example of such career can be found in the life of Yakov Kokovin. Though he was born in a peasant serf family and was a serf himself, thanks to his talent he was accepted, with the patronage of A.S.Stroganov, at the Saint-Petersburg Academy of Arts. After graduating and returning to Ural, Yakov Kokovin’s life and work centred around Yekaterinburg Cutting Factory, Ural region and stonecutting art.

In general, the school based its teaching on copying method, which correlated with the factory work “from a pattern”, as well as with the traditional canons of classicism – a style that was introduced in Ural stone-cutting art in the latter half of the 18th and continued into the 19th century. Architectural details and vases were produced by the Ural masters based on drawings and templates by major Russian architects sent from Saint-Petersburg. This is confirmed by the research of outstanding Ural art historian B.V.Pavlovsky [3]. “Templates” for master germ cutters were found in engravings, medals, but mostly copies of other germs, most often antiques. [4]

The Ural masters compensated the lack of artistic freedom in design and artistic choices by their aesthetic taste in the choice of stones, whose qualities and characteristics they thoroughly understood. Sometimes they even changed the drawing; their talent, taste and polishing skills determined the final look of the work. Knowledge and careful attitude to the materials was taught and transmitted both in schooling and in practical guidance, in conjunction with the stonecutting craft. This resulted in a typical characteristics of Ural stonecutting crafts transmitted through educational process and preserved to this day in the art of contemporary Ural stonecutting artists.

The next stage in the development of Ural stonecutting education occurred with the rising standards of artistic education. Yekaterinburg School of Art and Industry was established in 1902 as a branch of Baron A.L.Stieglitz College of Technical Drawing (Saint-Petersburg). It taught future stonecutting artists. S.P.Yarkov carefully researched the history of this school [5]. Students were accepted at 12 based on a single drawing examination. The teaching was based on the ideas of realistic exploration and representation of reality through art. As a result, student acquired skills and techniques allowing them to create artistic images “from nature”, using their real-life impressions where the “raw” material of life is reflected through art becoming an image and an artistic phenomenon. As a result, the school graduates were fully prepared to work in their professional capacity.

Their high level of preparation is proven by the fact that the school graduates easily found work in metropolitan stonecutting workshops, including the most prestigious (for example, Faberge company in Saint-Petersburg). The demand for stonecutting works was high, as well as the demand for stonecutting masters.

The last class graduated from the Ekaterinburg School of Art and Industries in 1938. By that time, after changing its name several time, the school was known as the Sverdlovsk Vocational School of Visual Arts.

The first post-war years were a period of reconstruction after the devastation of the war. The reconstruction of Ural stonecutting craft during this period was also an

important issue: the question of transmitting traditions and experience to the younger generation. The need to educate new professionals led to the establishment of specialized educational institutions: factory colleges based on the pre-existing local traditions of stonecutting art. At the time, Ural stonecutting industry suffered from the lack of professional artists; therefore, the goal of such colleges was to restore the traditions.

One of the largest colleges of this type was Artistic Craft Vocational School No.42. It was founded in Sverdlovsk in May 1945, immediately after the end of the WWII, and accepted its first class of students in September of the same year. Production base of the college was formed by the “Ural Proletarian” factory and plant no.10 belonging to Uralskiye Samotsvety trust. Among the first specialisations were stonecutting and gem cutting. In 1948 the first group of young professional graduates established the creative groups at the main factories. These groups were engaged in artistic stonecutting and jewellery design. Gradually the alumni of this college filled the shortage of professional artists, creating artistic continuity with pre-revolutionary traditions, skills and techniques thanks to the tutoring of the experienced masters who transmitted to the younger generation not only their knowledge but also their love and understanding of their materials. As a result, educational process continued to develop the pre-revolutionary tradition of creating images based on the stone’s natural qualities. As any other material, stone has its own characteristics expressed in its quality, composition, colour and hardness. Individual characteristics of a concrete stone, its structure, layering, streaks and shades of colour can be successfully utilized to create artistic images. Thus, the basics of an artistic image can be already found in a suitably shaped and sized stone. Ural stonecutters typically avoid trying to “force” a pre-designed motive into a stone – rather, they prefer to find within a stone a unique image produced by nature itself, a single correct solution for the particular stone; by processing it, they strive to “uncover” such image and to present it to the viewers thus demonstrating unique original qualities of their material.

An important factor of local educational tradition is its close connection with the industry. Skilled factory masters served as teachers to the students. The college’s educational program included all stonecutting styles and techniques used at the factory. A wide choice of material meant that the students had to understand colourful ornamental stones, their deposits, their qualitative and comparative features.

Also important were general the artistic subjects based on mastering the principles, rules and laws of constructing a realistic image and transforming a form depending on the original composition. Such methodological approach facilitated the design of original artistic projects, freedom of artistic expression and a search for new forms.

In 2006 Art Vocational School No.42 was transformed into the Ural Professional Vocational School “Rifey”, which in 2013 received college status. Over the long period of its existence, this educational institution has preserved its main methodological approach that transmits stonecutting skills, knowledge and understanding of stone properties and artistic techniques to create successful compositions and images.

The efficiency of this approach is confirmed by the collection of college museum, which features works both by its students and teachers produced since its foundation.

The universality of their education prepares the graduates for work either in industry or as individual artists, enlarging creative groups and unions

The next stage in the development of stonecutting education in Ural is higher education within a program based on the broad training in basics of visual arts, the development of artistic thinking and individual artistic approach. The works of famous Ural artists A. I. Zhukov, a graduate of the Department of Industrial Art at the Sverdlovsk Institute of Architecture (1977–1982), utilize a wide range of creative approaches. In his art academic forms co-exist with stylized and generalized images, enriched by characteristic expressiveness based on symbols and allegories.

In 1991 Ural State Academy of Architect and Art (today a university) opened specialisation *Stonecutting Art* as part of its higher education program *Decorative and Applied Art and Folk Craft*. The enrolment in this specialization required prospective students to pass examination in drawing, painting, decorative composition, as well as in a number of general subjects. It was believed that, to successfully master a higher education art program, students had to be proficient in technical skills, in order to concentrate fully on the artistic exploration. As a result, exams were only available for prospective students who had already possessed professional skills, usually the graduates of craft schools and colleges.

Unfortunately, today Ural Academy of Art and Architecture does not offer this specialization. However, during the short period of its existence, the academy has contributed to the development of stonecutting art by educating talented artists. Thus, the works of G. A. Ponomaryov are built on academic interpretation of form, skilful interpretation and realistic approach. The large-scale multi-figured compositions of I. V. Golubev made in polyolith technique impress the viewers with their bold compositions, complex perspective and strong angles.

Artistic stonecutting was also taught in Magnitogorsk. In 1966 Magnitogorsk Pedagogical Institute opened the Department of Art and Graphic. The first teachers at the new faculty were graduates from Nizhny Tagil Art college: B. G. Gagarin, V. A. Portnov, A. V. Portnova, L. A. Vykhodtseva. As a result, the south of Chelyabinsk region acquired

a new artistic and cultural centre. Magnitogorsk surroundings have always had rich deposits of landscape and patterned jasper, with Orsk jasper deposit located nearby. When the city was being built, it was often decorated with wonderful agate stones possessing characteristic patterns, not brightly coloured but complex.

The city had dozens of amateur masters working with the stone: at the geological exploration service, at the children's technological club and at the tourist club. In 1978 A. G. Sadovshchikov, the graduate of Magnitogorsk Department of Art and Graphic, established a stonecutting workshop at the department. Professional stonecutting specialization developed in pedagogical institute, first in 1982, as part of the art teaching specialization, and then in 1995, as part of the specialization in decorative and applied arts

As is traditional for Ural, training in artistic metal work (smith and engraver) and jewellery was well-established. At first, the stonecutting workshop trained students in the craft of gem-cutting of semi-precious stones (cabochons) and the Roman and Florentine mosaic. In 1990s close collaboration with smithing workshops facilitated wider development of mosaic techniques. Thus, until Magnitogorsk State University (the successor institution of Magnitogorsk Pedagogical Institute) was merged with the Magnitogorsk State Technical University, the department trained masters of Florentine mosaic. There were only 2–3 graduates per year. These graduates later founded educational courses in creative stonecutting in the town of Sibay (Bashkirgeologiya) and established specialisation *Decorative and applied art and folk crafts* in the College of Culture and Art (town of Uchaly) [7].

Wrought metal tables were decorated with the Florentine-style geometric mosaic. Pannos are more diverse: here we can find decorative landscapes and thematic subjects (usually hunting scenes), as well as a wide range of still lives. Unlike Sverdlovsk school, the choice of stones is more colourful, including shades of jasper, serpentine and marble.

Today specialized vocational institutions continue their training programs for stonecutting artists – programs that date back to the Soviet era. *Stone Cutter* specialization is available in the “Rifey” Ural Professional Vocational School (former vocational school no. 42) in Ekaterinburg.

Artistic stonecutting is taught in the Ural College of Applied Art and Design (Nizhny Tagil), a branch of the Moscow State Stroganov Academy of Design and Applied Arts, as part of the vocational specialization *Decorative and Applied Art and Folk Crafts*.

Artistic stonecutting specialization that focuses mainly on soft stones (gypsum, selenite, spar) is available at the Kungur State Art and Industry College, a branch of Moscow

State Stroganov Academy of Design and Applied Arts and former Professional Technical Vocational School no. 58.

Contemporary economic and social situation creates various challenges. Senior master of “Rifey” vocational school S. V. Purtova has provided a pessimistic assessment of the current situation in stonecutting education. According to her, “The demand for these highly specialized professionals has declined considerably, the younger generation is losing interest in this profession. This is reflected in the falling number of students.” [6]

4. Conclusions

To sum up, Ural educational tradition of artistic stonecutting has almost three centuries of history. First appearing as a result of industry demand, this tradition facilitated the development of stonecutting art and passed through several stages of evolution, from purely technical skills to vocational education, finally to the level of higher education and up to the challenges of modern world. Because of this, we face the questions: how to preserve this rare and specialized profession, how to transmit it to future generations, how to prevent the loss of this unique part of regional culture.

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