

Conference Paper

Trends in Contemporary Decorative and Applied Art (Based on the Materials of the Ural Triennial of Decorative Arts)

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Abstract

This article discusses the processes that are taking place in contemporary decorative art. We are using materials and experience of the All-Russian open exhibition II Ural Triennial of Decorative Art, which brings together both domestic artists and masters from the neighbouring countries. Analysing different sections of the triennial (textile, glass, stonecutting), we explore various artistic trends and their potential to, eventually, become established schools of decorative and applied arts. Increasing acceptance from the professional art institutions is also recommended and required, since in Russia decorative art is still excluded from the list of “fine arts”. The example of the Ural Triennial shows that contemporary decorative artists are engaged in active experimentation, combining traditional and new materials and techniques. The result is a promising glimpse into the future of decorative and applied arts.

Keywords: contemporary art, arts and crafts, Ural Triennial

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1. Introduction

The current developments in visual arts can be classified in different ways. Decorative and applied art (DAA) is a fully legitimate part of these processes, but it naturally contains several historically conditioned contradictions. One of them is a separation between folk art (crafts tradition), professional decorative art [1, p.9] and artistic design [2]; the others are classifications between traditional and actual art, applied and original art and so on [3]. In Russia decorative art is still excluded from the list of “fine arts”: museums and collectors are reluctant to work with the modern DAA objects; researchers are typically based in large museums and have limited time at their disposal; the oldest educational institutions in applied arts are forced to prove their usefulness; applied artistic workshops and workshop production have almost ceased to exist. Under such conditions discussing the prospects of decorative art is difficult but necessary: since

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artists and schools exist and, therefore, new generation of artists emerges, willing to work in this specialization.

It is gratifying that one of the main trends in decorative art is a return of major regular DAA exhibitions and the shift in their localization from the European part of Russia (here Ural Triennial is a good example), as well as a lively interest in this project expressed both by the artists and by the audience. The exhibition's periodic schedule allows to trace the smallest changes happening in decorative and applied arts over the course of three years (in case of a triennial).

2. Materials and Methods

Moscow art historian L.Kramarenko, who classifies professional decorative art as a separate type of art, notes tremendous style-developing task faced by the artists who work with traditional materials [1]. Let us assume that DAA are based on the combination of materials, technique and artistic idea – especially in professional decorative art. As a rule, the artists get their inspiration either from the materials (by using traditional or unusual materials), from techniques (perfecting existing techniques, combining different ones, searching for the new, technologically determined, approaches), or conceptual projects [4]. At the same time, in decorative art the search for suitable material expression of an idea is directly connected with the search for forms. In all cases, both form and content work together to create an artistic image. Ideally, all three aspects should be intertwined.

The key classification of DAA is based on materials: stone, ceramic, metal, glass, textile. The most numerous section of the triennial is dedicated to the artistic textile. Textile had been traditionally classified as a flat-image technique (tapestry, carpet, curtain); however, stylistic experiments of the latter half of the 20th century [5, p.34] eroded former genre distinctions and led to the realization that art knows no borders. The concept of material object as a spatial structure influenced all types of decorative art. Therefore, DAA has three main spatial forms of object realization: surface, relief and volume.

3. Discussion

In the sphere of “pictorial” surface we see compositional inventions based on traditional visual arts: line, dab, colour, texture (here we find the “woven paintings” by S.Gavin, O.Yemelyanov, E.Dementyeva, V.Abramov; “textile graphic” by A.Shmakova,

S.Fedorchenko, K.Turbel; calligraphic compositions by E.Manerova; “textile graffiti” by S. and V.Ganzin, L.Makarenko, S.Goncharova; “textile lubok” by M.Rusanova, O.Sevastyanova and N.Chukhlovina). All these experiments in art types and genres are tied to the search for expressive language and drawing technique that could be used in textile. This search can be rather striking: an ability to think in contemporary categories is realised through the intensive interaction between geometric forms in batiks by S.&I. Maximov, tapestries by N.Lavrentyeva and A.Gorazdin, in the combination of “electrical” colours and black background in the pannos by E.Denisova.

There is also a common trend towards simplified and schematic compositions and generalized forms reduced to their symbolic representation (N.Akchurina, M.Korolkova). In his tapestry *Mir dlya tebya (World for You)*, O.Oreshko utilizes highly ascetic composition, limited colour scheme and well defined tones, creating an extremely accessible representation of the artist’s idea.

Decorative compositions also utilize the quotation technique typical for all contemporary art: when direct or associative references to the recognizable landmark images of the past and the creation of bridges in cultural memory become a tool to immerse the viewers into an intellectual game with the meanings, making such artworks multi-layered (*Vokrug Parmy* by E.Abdalova, *ALTEUROPA* by M.Kruchinina, *Taynaya zhizn’ chyornogo kvadrata* by G.Khramtsova).

The tapestries of I.Smagina are an example of photo-realism. It is important to note that application of this technique in handmade weaving requires masterful skills of tapestry weaving on a high-density ground.

The relief works are exemplified in tapestries of O.Pogadayeva, felt pannos of Yu.Terekhina, textile works of O.Netsvetayeva and textile “filigree” of O.Kozyukova. Another type of relief works utilizes piled tapestry weaving within the framework of contemporary textile art. This trend is being developed by European artists L.Freisen, V.Barragao and others. Works of Russian artists either experiment with “reincarnation” of traditional tapestry (*Transformatsiya* by V.Morozova) or imitate organic forms (*Dushi beskrayniye polya, (Infinite Fields of the Soul)*, by M.Grischenko).

In decorative art, which is not tied to certain forms by a tradition (compared to ceramics, stonecutting, jewellery art, small sculpture) – for example, in artistic textile – volume is represented by art objects made in textile sculpture technique. Saint Petersburg (N.Tsvetkova, I.Yablochking) and Belarus (N.Lisovskaya, N.Kon’kova, Kh.Vysotskaya) artists enthusiastically develop this trend. In the works by Yekaterinburg textile artists, volume and three-dimensionality is usually found in textile dolls represented at the exhibition by T.Fyodorova’s *Lovets snov (Catcher of Dreams)*.

The concept of “art object” becomes indispensable when trying to classify a three-dimensional work made in mixed technique with different decorative materials. While in Western and in Russian actual art art-objects have long become a fixture [5, p.43], at the DAA exhibitions such works began appearing only recently; they are rare and undoubtedly deserve a special research. They show attention to the conceptual side of the art [6].

A special place in the developing trends of contemporary decorative art is occupied by the spatial and three-dimensional works that aim to immerse the viewers into a special space designed by the artists. [7] According to the classification of Andre Kenzy [5, p.36], this is an “environment” type of works, when an artwork allows the viewer not only to go around it, but also to enter it from the inside. Such works are represented at the triennial by O.Pogadayeva’s spatial composition titled *Istoki (Origins)*.

As for the explorations into the technical possibilities of decorative fibres, here we find a tendency to imitate in textile other materials and techniques (metal, mosaic, sgraffito etc.). *Hi-Tech Verdura* by M.Shirokovskikh uses visual technique based on the deliberately raised counted-thread twill weave developed by B.Migal and F.Yakubauskas. M.Kosenkova’s *Prazdnik plodorodiya (Harvest Festival)*, with its textile mosaic image of the World Tree, and M.Obvintseva’s felt relief, expand the possibilities of materials. The same goal is found in the use of technologically new materials (plastin, synthetics) in the art object by Kh.Vysotskaya *Rozhdeniye Evy (Birth of Eva)* and in the use of mixed techniques (V.Grekova and B.Klochkov, S.Bakshayeva, I.Manerova, E.Baryshnikova). The search for the unusual solutions inspires artists to recover forgotten techniques rarely used in original artistic works – for example, macramé lace in E.Zavyalova’s *Peizazh s derevom (Landscape with a Tree)*.

A relatively new trend for the triennial are the works made by digital printing on fabric (N.Lisovskaya, V.Goresky): they are based on different approach to craft and on the desire to introduce a new language of decorative art through digital technologies.

As a local art project, triennial featured micro-textile trend (works of less than 12 cm along the longer side). The works of the project *Mikro. Tochka otscheta (Micro. Point of Reference)* demonstrate the high degree of freedom in the choice of materials and techniques, despite highly constricted dimensions that force the artists into the “crystallization” of images, into precision and virtuosity in the way they express their ideas. This trend has a long and successful history in the European part of Russia and abroad, but has only recently been introduced into the Ural region. An idea of “suitcase exhibitions” is also promising in terms of ease of moving and showing the works that can be exhibited in any venue.

The most promising in terms of future perspectives are some examples of modernizing approach to traditional crafts used by artists with original talent and contemporary approach to composition. *Rukavitsy Meley* by T.Konovets are composed as an art object exploring the Tree of Life theme; E.Pavlova's canvases made in harness weaving technique present a diptych dedicated to the Baikal lake; *Tartma* accessories by Z.Gilyazova lose their utilitarian context and become a work of art, doubling its aesthetic value. In I.Ignatyeva's *Kruzheva vremeni (Lace of Time)* visual effect is increased through the use of authentic historical object (a wooden "podzor" (cornice) of Russian traditional "izba") combined with the original artistic work. We see simultaneously an "entrance" into the tradition, as well as a staging of the planned effect, since historical objects are a universal archetype; they are recognizable.

These works by masters of artistic textile demonstrate the main areas of development that can be discerned in all types of decorative art. All these trends exponentially increase variability of classification: surface compositions utilize non-traditional techniques and new materials; they include raised elements; three-dimensional compositions, apart from the need to design spatial structure, require drawing skills and ability to work with colour.

The section of artistic glass was represented by an extremely large number of works for the first time in the Urals, thanks to the participation of teachers and students of Moscow Stroganov Academy. In their works glass actively experiments with usual qualities (transparency, weight, fragility), as well as with the unusual ones (plasticity, colour, texture). Apart from the traditional purposes of glass compositions (stained glass *Vremena goda, (The Four Seasons)*, by Ya.Boltutskaya), glass objects become increasingly spatial, they "become a tapestry" (*Karavan* by M.Magerramov), they lose their materiality, soaring in the air (*Ravnovesiys* by Yu.Merzlikina and A.Zinchuk). There are interesting variations produced with optical glass, mirrors, techniques that deliberately show the process through which the glass shape was created. A.Shirinskaya shows a new technique in her spatial composition *Vesennyya kantata (Spring Cantata)*, where the combination of deliberately fragile coloured "laced" glass and geometrical shapes of wooden cube platforms is enhanced by the directed light staging the entire spectacle. Elaborate lighting concept of the spatial object allows to classify such objects as installations – a highly promising trend for exhibiting DAA works.

The section of artistic ceramics is represented by many artists, some of them showing singular objects, others – series, still others – decorative spatial compositions. Traditionally expressive are the shapes of ceramic objects, which are, essentially, decorative sculptures: their utilitarian function is completely lost, but its initial parameters survive

in a new object – a vessel (A.Purik, G.Belova), a plate (G.Vizel, L.Kozlova, A.Mikhaylova) etc. In particular, sculptural qualities of shape are well exemplified by monochromic compositions (V.Portnova, A.Yegorova, I.Tolkachyov, G.Mukhametchinna). Introduction of colour traditionally enhances ceramic sculpture, especially with the use of modernist technique of imitation surface – for example, imitating textile (*Kormilitsa (The Wet Nurse)* by S.Grekova-Prokhorenko). In general, an important feature of ceramic works is attention to textural quality of their surfaces, their “emotional shade”: deliberate roughness, graininess or dullness, depth or lustre, fragmentation or unity – all of this combines to produce a desired artistic effect. The quality of decorative form is directly connected to the art of creating surfaces: this is the skill that produces artistic quality of an item, its character and emotional flavour.

In terms of themes, many artists are typically interested in the archaic, in the profound, original cultural experience of humanity (*Los' (Moose)* by A.Migas, *Neoliticheskiye chainiki (Neolithic Kettles)* by E.Krasnova, *Vozvrascheniye k proshlomu, (Return to the Past)* by G.Vizel, *Drevniy Khram, (Ancient Temple)* by D.Omelchenko). Also, some works are marked by a certain thematic lightness and everyday humour, which undeniably indicates multiple possibilities of ceramics to realize widely different artistic concepts of any scale – from monumental to small-scale ones (*Keramoboty* by E.Repnikova, *Beributy* by O.Novk, *Atlant* by L.& D. Plesovskikh, *Gimnastika* by O.Elsakova).

Apart from this, artists working in ceramics are expressing themselves in pictorial surface (surfaces by A.Migas; plates by A.Krasnov, A.Kutuzova and D.Serova).

Particularly effective is a combination of different materials in enameller art: most often, the artists try to enrich the work's texture by introducing new materials. The shine of enamel surface often combines with wood or unpolished metal (I.Dyakov, E.Kosovich), or, in more rare experiments, with textile (hand weaving, painting) in the art object *Vzglyad (Glance)* by V.Mukhachyova. Because of the smaller scale of the works, descriptions of enamel items often mention colour, luminous quality of material, texture, more rarely new techniques. The triennial featured work by I.Lemonova *Shapki sen'kam* – an interesting attempt to introduce pencil drawing technique into enamel art.

Applied items can be rarely found at the professional shows – therefore, their introduction is particularly valuable (*Chasy – The Clocks* – by B.Klochkov).

The most unexpected discoveries in shape creation and material juxtaposition happen in jewellery art. As soon as the artists refuse to work from the precious materials, which represent value in themselves and enforce certain rules of working them and perceiving them, they immediately turn to pure forms, intricate processing and, as a result,

precise and balanced images (*Den' pervyi...* by K.Glazyrin, *Priblizheniye* by A.Gorinova). Contemporary jewellery art balances between art and design; its best examples include both trends – laconic shapes, precise styling, use of synthetic techniques and materials are borrowed from the design, while obviously handmade quality, original artistic vision and thematization mark these works as the objects of art.

Summarizing the triennial results, we can highlight the following trends in jewellery and stonecutting sections of the exhibition: the tradition of respectful attitude to stone, its intricate processing, tactful use of companion materials are preserved by the established artists (N.Kuznetsova, A.Miroshnikov, A.Zhukov). The works of the young artists rarely demonstrate such deep reverence for the material (M.Pastukhov) preferring eclectic and external effects. Regrettably, the exhibition does not feature enough stonecutting works. It is unexpected to see witty thematic solutions, such as *Dom oborony (House of Defense)* by A.Popov, since jewellery art, due to its elite status, is rather conservative in this respect.

4. Conclusions

The balance between talent and continuity, tradition and actuality is a key question in contemporary decorative art. The example of the exhibition II Ural Triennial of Decorative Art shows that each type of decorative and applied art has its established masters whose works are valuable in any manifestation (E.Krasnova, N.Chukhlovia, O.Oreshko, V.Grekova, B.Klochkov, L.Baytsayeva, A.Vesyolkin, Yu.Merzlikina, M.Mukanov and others). The search for meaning and images, the creation of messages are always present in their works, due to the high quality of their art; they are expressed in suitably quality forms creating a harmonious whole. It is interesting that established masters are the ones who prefer to experiment with most avant-garde techniques, demonstrate high understanding of modernity in their compositions and technological innovations (Yu.Merzlikina, A.Gorazdin and others). Evolution of the artist's skills comes with experience: every master must walk this road. Therefore, the best solution for an artist is an existence of students and followers. Therefore, establishment and development of schools is a condition required to preserve decorative art in contemporary situation, since in DAA object creation is uniquely dependent on the existence of well-equipped workshops, materials and human resources possessing an entire wealth of theoretical knowledge and practical skills. The problems of DAA are inextricably linked to the problems of contemporary society, culture and education (when the primary task of education is considered to be not the development of individual mind, but the creation

of marketable education services). “If the new ideas have to find their new artistic forms, then an artist... has to develop and coordinate his/her physical, sensory, spiritual and intellectual potential in harmony,” writes I. Itten [8, p.10].

Not all trends delineated above mark a consistent movement into the required direction. First, some changes may be a tendency of a particular artist or art group; second, as has been mentioned before, the development usually occurs in schools, when a theory is put into practice many times, when it acquires its adherents and critics capable of proposing innovations. Singular examples are not a proof of a well-developed trend; they only demonstrate the existence of such trend and the possibility to develop it further.

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