

Conference Paper

Visual and Stylistic Trends in Contemporary Tapestry Art (the Case of Olga Oreshko's Tapestries)

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Abstract

This article discusses the original tapestries, artistic techniques, features of the artistic language of the famous Yekaterinburg artist Olga Oreshko, who inspired the emergence and development of the Ural school of art textiles. Olga Oreshko creates a unique vision of modernized Middle ages using visual and symbolic language that comprises a distinct artistic style. The wide variety of her characters and images unites many spheres: from philosophical meditations and insights into art history, to the images of nature, observations on feelings and expression of emotions. Most of her artworks are characterized by visual images imbued with deep inner meanings. Olga Oreshko's artistic textiles are unique for Yekaterinburg art. They have exerted considerable influence and gained a large circle of supporters and enthusiasts. Thus, the art of Olga Oreshko is a cultural phenomenon of regional importance that continues to influence the development of tapestry school in Middle Ural.

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1. Introduction

Tapestry art has appeared in Yekaterinburg quite recently. The origins of this art are closely linked with two surnames – Nina Kazantseva and Olga Oreshko. Nevertheless, it was Olga Oreshko and her fascinating determination to explore the art of weaving, who charted a path towards the development of artistic tapestry in Ekaterinburg. Her proactive position in art and her constant output of woven artworks demanding in the amount of time they require to produce have led her to become a centre of a large circle of tapestry art supporters.

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2. Materials and Methods

The art of Olga Oreshko is a cultural phenomenon that has enabled the establishment of a tapestry school in the Middle Urals, impacted and continues to impact the artworks of textile artists. Her works have set a visual, graphic, compositional and stylistic direction for an entire new wave of textile artists. There are several generations of contemporary decorative artists that can be considered her students, either who are immediately because they study under the supervision of Olga Oreshko, or indirectly by learning from her works in the exhibition venues of the city. Not all of them have become textile artists but the principles of developing artistic image that they learnt from Olga Oreshko can be seen in all their artworks.

3. Discussion

The phenomenon of Olga Oreshko is in unique visual style of modernized Middle ages. The themes of her early tapestries, the composition of tapestry surface, a plastic way in which the figures are used, and the portrait-style depiction of her characters clearly resonate with the tapestry cycle from the Cluny Museum. Her *Lady with the Unicorn* (1995) contains the features of self-portrait reflected back in time, combining together the four elements (a bird, a spinning wheel, a snake and a winged inspiration), a distant appearance with the shimmering inner sensitivity. In each one of her works, she includes a little story with revelations about life, a story of a being, of things she had seen and had lived through. At the same time, her works don't narrate. So, this personal meta-story that became a part of her identity gets sealed inside the weaving and transforms into an art message for her audience and students.

A while ago, when Olga Oreshko was a research supervisor of the diploma project produced by the author of this article, she made a pronouncement that had a great impact on the visual context of Ekaterinburg contemporary tapestry and decorative arts produced in the Ural State Architecture and Art University: "to draw a horse you don't need to draw the animal itself, you just need to draw the space five minutes before the horse appears or five minutes after it leaves". It is this attitude to space as a full-scale partner in composition construction that shapes the contemporary visual language of the Ural school of tapestry.

Tapestries of Olga Oreshko, as well as works of her students, are characterized by the three-dimensional ornamentality. Her ability to treat space as an equal participant in composition involves the viewer into the story. The space doesn't just make the tapestry

composition breathe; it also forces the viewers to breathe too by wrapping them and immersing them into the open art of weaving. The image starts to lose its contour and dissolves into the space. The contour is lost as a silhouette and a tone, when it is submerged in the art of weaving, its ornamentality and texture – *Ada and Eve* (1992), *Lady with the Unicorn* (1995), *The Wilkway* (2007), *With the Bird* (2012).

The rigid contour was never a characteristic of Olga Oreshko's tapestries. Even in her early works her line was vibrating. Partially it can be explained by the unique features of weaving technique, but also by the fact that she makes most of her sketches with water colours. Even the technique of delicate filler threads woven by hand, as opposed to pounding them, creates a soft contour immersed into the image space. The technique of blurring the contour with the texture of woollen threads emerged in the later works of Olga Oreshko also creating depth, special warmth and visual vibrations in the tapestries' webbed surface.

As a matter of fact, Olga Oreshko treats all her tapestries as live musical surfaces, so it becomes characteristic of her art [1]. She doesn't think of her art as decorative in the traditional sense that we attach to it, meaning flat, ornamental, following the rules of formal composition by association [2]. She doesn't style her works in accordance with the canons of decorative and applied arts. Olga Oreshko doesn't treat "her tapestry as decorative art", doesn't use ornaments, schemes, doesn't choke all of the webbed surface with images [1]. The breath of life is far more important for her, the awakening of the viewers' feeling of free immersion into the textile art [1]. The fact that Olga Oreshko doesn't close her works in frames speaks about her message for open communication between the audience and the textile surface. The viewer can always look at a perfectly completed back side of the tapestry and feel the exquisite edge of the woven painting. Engaging the viewer to check the back side of the tapestry is like peeping backstage in the theatre, it is a deep dive into "the mise en scenes" playing out on the tapestry surface.

The pictorial surface of her tapestries is also unique in spite of their seemingly monochromic nature fine threads connect an unbelievable number of multicolours. We can see turquoise, cobalt and emeralds in the cold and warm shades, grey and golden surfaces. Her artistic space is boundless, it surrounds the viewer with its vibrating microcosm. And only the specialists know how much work is behind this way of optical colour blending and how difficult it is to keep the exact equivalence of tones when using this method.

Olga Oreshko's tapestries are so easily recognizable because they encompass subtle rhythmic lines that are rooted into the pictorial structure of the tapestry backdrop.

The structural feature characteristic of her tapestries is a creating an “additional surface” above the original webbed one – the falling white snow or flying birds construct an extra-level that transcends the boundaries of composition making it deeper and infusing it with special vibrating space – *Consolation. Folded wings* (2011), *Planet* (2013).

One more difference of Olga Oreshko’s tapestries is their intimacy, where even large monumentally sized works have a certain storyline, speak the “human language”.

The philosophy of everyday joy is woven into her every artwork. Her characters don’t look the viewer in the eye, they remain introverted, listening to themselves, to their own hearts. So, it is not a co-incidence that in many of her works Olga Oreshko marks the “place of the soul” using a figure of an angel pressed closely to the heart (*The World for You*, 2018), or hands embracing the grass (*High Grass. Autumn*, 2011), images of birds as a symbol of open and free heart, small baking enamels as an image of “baked warmth” (*Reflection*, 2016) and a triangular-shaped letter from the frontlines pressed closely to the heart (*Victory. Father’s Portrait*, 2016). Sometimes the “place of the soul” remains open with bare threads of the foundation as an open heart to the viewer or on open window that invites to immerse into the artist’s world (*Melancholy*, left side of *Perfection* triptych, 2016).

At the first glance, her works seem to be silent, but the turned heads of her characters, the flowing motion of their arms, the rhythm of figures, the movement of rhythmic lines in the wind, the twigs in the hands of a girl, the skyline floating as is a milk river and the movement of the cows (*A procession with the Cows*, 2005) invite the viewer into a quiet conversation.

In the end of 2000 Olga Oreshko due to different circumstances chose a new format for her works including the pre-established 50x50 cm tapestry for the Decorative and Applied Arts Section of Sverdlovsk Regional Branch of the Union of Russian Artists (2013). The small size of tapestries inspired a whole series of textile portraits that represent the generalized image of the mood: triptych *The Beautiful Summer* (2014), *Perfections* (2014–2016).

Portrait tapestries came from the enamels made by Olga Oreshko in the end of 1990s as a complete series. The portrait cycle features new and more picturesque modelling of different images, introduces modern materials, accentuates attention on decor and accessories. The composition of her artworks is laconic, the images are well-expressed through the signs and symbols of its characters. The period is characterized by a broad colour palette of beautiful faces and bright realistically graphic fundamental foundations of composition [4]. However, this approach doesn’t erase the spatial and environmental solutions of Olga Oreshko’s weaving techniques.

There is one more theme that is present in all her significant works and series of artworks – a theme of flight. Connecting her characters to the sky or sending them into a big flight, Olga Oreshko is trying to establish an endless connection between the men and the universe. The world around us has one beginning [5]. Is it a blue bird depicted as a girl with an angel pressed against her chest or a touch to the sky with fingers – touching the surface means the beginning or the end of interaction with the world around us? [7] The textile language of her tapestries attempts to draw closer to the art of painting, while stylistically Olga Oreshko remains faithful to the technological identity of weaving [4].

4. Conclusions

Visual and symbolic language of the artist is filled with a unique style that includes a three-quarter depiction of the face as if turned to the sun, rain and wind, a slight angle to the figures who seem to be opening themselves up to the viewer and waiting for something; self-portrait and the portraits of faces and figures, and a truly expansive surface of backgrounds that can be figurative, as well as the present (highly relativized) landscape compositions.

The wide variety of characters encompasses many spheres, from philosophical meditations and insights into the history of arts to the images of nature and natural phenomena, observations on feelings and expressions of emotions. Most of her artworks are characterized by a visible depiction of an object imbued with deep inner meanings. The phenomenon of her art is in the seemingly realistic approach to the world around her permeated with images-symbols and images-signs of a special spirituality, all woven together into an authentic textile magic.

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