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Oko, obraz a farba

Eye, Picture and Color

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Abstract

The paper gives priority to the painter's point of view regarding the issue of vision, color and the essence of colorisms. It brings forward the message of a unique work of art that analyzes the issue of color throughout the history of European art, penned by the Polish art historian Maria Rzepińska. The text also tackles the issue of color in contemporary visual art.

Keywords: Painting. Picture. Colour. Colourism. Visual arts.

The picture, as a visual phenomenon, became a dominant feature of the 20th century. That is why it is said that the 20th century was the century of the picture. The picture was later joined by images created by other media. The second half of the 20th century belonged to the images created by new technical means. Moving images improved over time, static photography in the classic black-and-white version advanced to a technically more perfect form of color photography capable of competing with painting. Digitization has taken the world of visual media by storm. The image has become a truly everyday part of our visual consciousness, and its urgency seems to be increasing. Thanks to the image, light and color, we are able to express our feelings more accurately, we perceive natural changes, changes in the atmosphere, but also psychological states and moods. *Properties do not live in objects, they only form bridges between them* (Rovelli, 2022, p. 88-89).

Color is a living agent that awakens our feelings and ideas, it is an open gate to the world of visuality, the eye is an apparatus that conveys our perceptions to the brain. It is the brain that brings us the answers we are looking for. It would certainly be interesting to find out how scientists - experts in the fields - would respond to questions related to vision (some opinions would certainly be contradictory). We are thinking of the world of optics, physics, we are thinking of ophthalmologists, psychologists, astronomers, and naturally also painters, architects, photographers, or cameraman. It is likely that their answers would be the same in their essence, just expressed in a different language. Since we are mainly focused on painting, we will highlight different civilizational stages and important characteristics of painting to

indicate their richly intertwined range of phenomena and transformations. We will try to find connections with time periods as well as the characteristics of individuals. Visuality and color will be a decisive aspect in this regard. The dynamics and changes in painting will be seen through the transformations of the relationship between the painting and the painter. We will attempt at indicating how color brings about (more or less) conscious lessons and inspirations (whether transformed or not, hidden or free). A lesson on the paintings of ancient Egypt and Crete is hidden in the captivating exterior of the Orient. Delacroix and the romantics of the 19th century were strongly attracted by the symbiosis of the natural and the artificial, the old and the new, the distant and the near. These lessons are visible in Gaudi, or in fragile Klee, “rich” Matisse, and also in many works of German expressionists and Russian avantgardes (Bergerová, 2013). *It is our own short-sightedness that makes us see the world as unchanged* (Rovelli, 2022, p. 108).

The search for finest nuances can become a dominant feature of, even an obsession, for some painters. A truly exceptional example in the history of painting, foreshadowing the future of painting, is the series of paintings of the cathedral in Rouen, as well as the Haystacks, or the later series of Lekien by Claude Monet. The scales of chromatic colors were newly conceived at that time, truly nuanced and vibrating. Monet admits in one of the letters that, while watching over a dying woman, he caught himself observing the slight contrasts and changes of color on her motionless face. The painter's mind reacted automatically. Maria Rzepińska, the author of the exceptional work *History of Color in European Painting (Historia koloru w dziejach malarstwa europejskiego)*, considers such confessions of the painter to be the most authentic. According to the author, it is Monet's extreme prudence and readiness of the eye to register a color tone that is the most authentic feature of a painter. Rzepińska notes that the course of color, as a primary phenomenon in the construction of pictorial space, is different compared to classical painting. In classical painting the perception comes directly from the viewer's eye to the depth of the picture surface. The author's stunning work is the first attempt at grasping the topic of color and colorism in the literature. *The world is falling apart into a plethora of viewpoints that does not allow for a single global view* (Rovelli, 2022, p. 88).

The work of the Polish art historian, with its precision of research and persistence in “searching”, the complexity and span of the contexts are the priorities of the author's journey in the thicket of difficult-to-grasp web-like constructions offered by the nature of art and the times. The vastness of the issue and the variety of aspects help the reader to uncover the essence of the painting itself. The author opens the way for the reader to discover the truth of painting. It draws our attention to connections with scientific fields of today (that began to be studied in the 19th century). Without them, the world of color and vision would still not be united. Her work also fundamentally helps

the development of the terminology necessary for research and reflection on the painting, as well as the process of creation. Her scientific knowledge was significantly aided by her artistic sensibility and artistic intuition, which is also reflected in Rzepińska's verbal-literary domain. Rzepińska brought fitting literary equivalents for artistic phenomena. Ad illustrandum: “Bonnard continues to amaze us with harmony that we have not encountered before, with a milky iridescence that reminds us of Murano glass, with some perverse valer, or with the distribution of dominants ... He also rejects the classic Cézanne scheme of warm light and cool shadow. In his nudes, the lights are usually white and the shadows are orange (Rzepińska, 2009). Why study the work of an unknown art historian of the 20th century is an important question to ask. Before I got to know Rzepińska's work, I began to wonder more intensively about the topics she refers to during my studies at the Academy of Sztuk Pięknych (ASP) in Krakow. The color was her go-to topic throughout her life, she herself noted the openness of the work with the promise of its further additions. The phenomenon of color and colorism are present in the individual artistic programs of painters and movements of the 20th century and is also an important chapter of Polish painting in the 20th century (Rzepińska, 2009).

In the arts, the phenomenon of color lives its life even behind the “enclosure” of visual arts. For example, color is often talked about in music, of course in a metaphorical way. The color of a human voice, a musical instrument, or an orchestra ... No kind of visual art can do without color, both optical and material, and can be perceived even in black and white graphics and drawing (Ševčovič, 2021; Ševčovič, 2022). Color is also present in different forms of poetry and literature. We talk about color in its absolutely pure form, as is present in nature, when light is broken down into a spectrum - in the laboratory, in Gothic cathedrals, where the effect of stained glass creates an exceptional coloristic climate.

Color is an essential component of a painting, it is very often a decisive part of its organism. The color decides on the degree and form of expression, as well as the character and the degree of originality of the work. The color creates the illusion of space and compositional division of the painting, can help the feeling of dynamism and rhythm, often creates important contradictions - contrasts. The material used for a painting and a method chosen have their own impact, because they are often the determining basis of the painting, the materiality is built up by the layers of the painting. This was usually the case in the classical periods, while in the more recent periods, starting with Impressionism, the immediacy, the choice of a color tone at the direct command of the eye came to the forefront. With regard to the “sinusoid” of the history of painting, the mimetic function of art makes its comeback over and over again. The means and methods of its implementation correspond to the level of visibility and perception of the time. The perception and character of the transposition of three-dimensional space into a surface depends on color immensely, as it lies in complex internal and

external relationships, its concept reveals the integrity of the painting (Bergerová, 2022). *The world is a play of perspectives, much like mirrors that exist only in the reflection of one in the other* (Rovelli, 2022, p. 89).

The mimetic possibilities of painting appeared quite naturally in the peak stylistic periods of art. There are lot of examples in the final period of Roman culture, leading to naturalism. A very fine example is the period of the Renaissance. After the climax, when the Renaissance painters had all the tools for the “perfect depiction” at their disposal, almost simultaneously, Mannerism begins. Mannerism subjectivizes artistic expressions in general, renounces repeating the significant achievements of Renaissance realism, and gives preference to the artist's imagination, changes and dramatizes proportionality and color. Under this new direction, the art detaches itself from the “truth” of the eye, color dramatizes the motif of the painting. Centuries later the same thing manifests itself in the works of surrealists (Dali) as well as in postmodernism. Photorealism develops from the imitative possibility brought about photos. Concepts of color - coloration do not always have to reflect the aesthetic, psychological, or even philosophical-theological point of view. Its essence is probably deeply rooted in our human visuality. In painting, there are countless fascinating examples in which the size of the painting's reference almost overlaps with the meaning and effect of the color.

In the second half of the 20th century and also today, the concept of process is becoming more and more relevant, not only in painting, but also in other visual, spatial, movement manifestations of art e.g. land art (Biarincová, 2022) and action art (Valachová, Muchová 2022; Kováčová 2022).

The present does not create unequivocal stylistic prerequisites for prioritizing color, which in the past led to the formation of contemporary collective opinion - style, direction, trend ... Today, we could talk about open spaces with no boundaries, directly calling for subjectivism and various excesses. “The world we live in is a continuous interaction - it is a mess of interaction” (Rovelli, 2022, p. 78).

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