



Section 4. Visual art

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THE VALUE OF THE HISTORY OF AVANT-GARDE ART FROM ITS INCEPTION TO THE PRESENT DAY

*Dudareva Darya Alexandrovna*¹

¹ Moscow State University, Russia

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Abstract

The purpose of research: The subject of this work is Avant-garde art. This is a trend in art that arose at the beginning of the 20th century. It rejects traditional and outdated art forms, and strives for innovation and experimentation.

Research methods: distinctive features of avant-garde art have been studied using a historical critical method.

Research results: Avant-garde artists and writers are looking for new ways of self-expression to represent a new reality and the coming era.

Practical application: Familiarization with the origin of avant-garde art and its history

Keywords: neoplasticism, romantic, historical tradition, militaristic interpretation, colorful emotions, fundamental antagonism

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Introduction

Avant-garde art makes a strong impact on society. It provokes discussions, is perceived ambiguously and is criticized.

Avant-gardism (French *avantgardisme* from *avant* – *garde* and *garde* – *détachement*) is a generalized name for experimental trends, schools, concepts, ideas, creativity of individual artists of the 20th century, pursuing the goal of creating a completely new art that has no connection with the old.

Avant-gardism is a tendency to deny historical tradition, continuity, and an exper-

imental search for new forms and paths in art. A concept that is the opposite of academicism. But avant-gardism also has its origins, as it grew out of the Art Nouveau period.

Despite the fundamental antagonism of avant-garde art and the traditions of spirituality of artistic culture, the nihilistic appeals of the participants of this movement, the claims to comprehend “pure essences” and the expression of the “absolute” without the burden of the past and primitive imitation of the forms of the outside world, the ideas of the artistic avant-garde are akin to the

spiritual turmoil of art at the turn of the XIX and XX centuries.

Avant-garde art has its own romantic mythology. Romantic and even religious is the main avant-garde idea of the absolutization of the very act of creativity, which does not involve the creation of an artistic work, its “self-sufficiency”, the justification of a person by creativity, in which the “true reality” is revealed.

This shows the continuity of the most extreme forms of avant-garde art from the symbolism of the Modern period. But the concepts must be recognized as dangerous: “an advanced detachment ready to sacrifice itself in a rapid attack in order to achieve a goal.” Such a militaristic interpretation of the term inevitably leads to the idea that “the avant-garde arose many centuries ago during the transition from one era to another... and it cannot be one of the directions of art of the XX century alone.”

Looking back, it can be confidently stated that avant-gardism has taken its rightful place in the history of fine art. He literally blew up the measured flow of traditional painting, enriched it with new forms, new names.

In the visual arts, the term “avant-garde” (from the French “avant-garde”) is traditionally used to describe any artist, group, or style that is considered to be significantly ahead of the majority in its technique, subject matter, or application. This is a very vague definition, not least because there is no clear consensus on WHO decides whether an artist is ahead of his time, or WHAT is meant by being ahead of time. In other words, avant-garde means exploring new artistic methods or experimenting with new techniques in order to create better art. Here, the emphasis is on design, not on chance, since it is doubtful that an artist or sculptor can accidentally become an avant-garde artist. But what is the “best” art? Does this mean, for example, that painting is more aesthetic? Or is it more meaningful? Or brighter colors? The questions go on and on.

If we assume that avant-garde art “draws its spiritual forces from an inexhaustible source of the past, archaic consciousness” and it represents not a decline, but a “re-thinking of the past”, then the most essential thing is blurred, the irreconcilable, hostile at-

titude of the avant-gardists to the history of culture, which there is a lot of evidence.

If in the art of the XX century there really is a “parting with a person”, then this is an anti-cultural, anti-historical movement. Futurists at the very beginning of the new century called for “taming this world and overthrowing its laws at their own discretion.” This thesis alone denies the basic content of culture: “cultivation of the soul through reverence, worship.”

But this is a verbal masquerade, because in a spiritual sense, the main value in the history of world art has always been the process – the act of Creation, and not a separate work in its material form.

The term was reportedly first applied to visual art in the early 19th century by the French political writer Henri de Saint-Simon, who stated that artists serve as the vanguard in the general movement of social progress, ahead of scientists and other classes.

However, since the beginning of the 20th century, the term has retained a touch of radicalism and implies that in order for artists to be truly avant-garde, they must challenge the artistic status quo – that is, its aesthetics, intellectual or artistic conventions or production methods – to the point of almost subversive activity. Using this interpretation, Dada (1916–24) is probably the definitive example of avant-garde visual art, as it challenged most of the foundations of Western civilization.

The Italian Renaissance was probably the most avant-garde era in the history of painting and sculpture. The figures of the biblical Holy Family were presented in a completely natural manner – a radical departure from Byzantine and even Gothic works of art. In addition, nudity has become not only acceptable, but also the most noble kind of figurative image – as evidenced by Masaccio’s “Exile from the Garden of Eden” (1426, Brancacci Chapel, Florence) and Donatello’s hypermodic bronze sculpture “David” (circa 1440, Bargello Museum, Florence).

Despite the brief heyday of Caravaggio, who revived the humanistic trend in painting with his peasant images of Christ and other members of the Holy Family (and Giuseppe Arcimboldo with his portraits of fruits and vegetables), the hypermodern traditions of the Renaissance were gradually

replaced by repetition, imitation and complete conformity.

The great European Academies of Fine Arts, supported by the Catholic Church, introduced a number of inflexible rules and conventions that artists ignored at their peril – deviants were denied participation in Salons and other official exhibitions. Perhaps only in Holland there was a genuine spirit of artistic search, in particular in the form of intense expressive portraits by Rembrandt and a new type of genre painting exquisitely rendered by Jan Vermeer and others.

It was only when the dust settled after the French Revolution that the artists began experimenting again. It started with landscape painting. Corot and other representatives of the Barbizon school laid the foundation for a new tradition of *plein air*; the German symbolist painter Caspar David Friedrich gave his landscapes a new form of romanticism; and the English genius William Turner raised this genre to an even higher and unusual level. Historical painting has also become *avant-garde* thanks to such works as Goya's "The Third of May 1808" (1814, Prado, Madrid), in which there are no heroes and no uplifting message.

The next truly *avant-garde* school was Impressionism, the first major trend in modern art, which turned the idea of color upside down. Suddenly, the grass could turn red and the haystacks could turn blue, depending on the momentary effect of sunlight perceived by the artist. Today, Impressionism can be considered mainstream, but in the 1870s, the public, as well as the hierarchy of art, were shocked. In their understanding, the grass was green and the haystacks were yellow, and that was it.

The first three decades of twentieth century art generated a wave of revolutionary movements and styles. First came Fauvism (1905–8), whose color schemes were so dramatic and anti-natural that its representatives were nicknamed "wild beasts". Then analytical Cubism (1908–12) – probably the most intellectual of all the *avant-garde* movements – which rejected the traditional idea of linear perspective in favor of a greater emphasis on the two-dimensional picture plane, scandalizing the academies of Arts of Europe – along with visitors to the Paris Salon of Independents and the New York

Armory Exhibition (1913) – in the process. Meanwhile, in Dresden, Munich and Berlin, German expressionism was an advanced style professed by Die Brücke (1905–13) and Der Blaue Reiter (1911–14), and in Milan futurism presented its unique combination of movement and modernity.

Five important dealers of *avant-garde* art in Paris in the period 1900–30 include Solomon Guggenheim (1861–1949), Ambroise Vollard (1866–1939), Daniel-Heinrich Kahnweiler (1884–1979), Paul Guillaume (1891–1934) and Peggy Guggenheim (1898–1979). In Germany, the Walden Sturm Gallery was the great center of the Expressionist *avant-garde*.

But perhaps the most iconoclastic movement of all time is Dada, founded by Tristan Tzara (1896–1963), which broke out in Zurich in 1916 and then spread to Paris, Berlin and New York. The Dadaists rejected most, if not all, of the bourgeois values of fine art, preferring a heady mix of anarchism and hypermodern innovation.

The latter included a number of subversive ideas that are considered relatively mainstream today, for example, the creation of junk art from "found objects" (Duchamp's "readymades") and the introduction of three-dimensional collage (Merzbau Schwitters). It can also be said that Dada artists invented the art of performance and happenings, as well as conceptual art, more than fifty years ahead of their postmodern successors. A less irreconcilable successor to Dada was surrealism, which amused but ultimately failed to sustain the momentum for change.

Postmodern art appeared in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It led to the emergence of completely new forms of contemporary art, most of which were almost by definition *avant-garde*. These new art forms include: feminist art, popularized by Judy Chicago (b. 1939) and Carol Schneemann (b. 1939); art photography, exemplified by Robert Mapplethorpe (1946–1989) and Nan Goldin (b. 1953); and art photography, exemplified by Robert Mapplethorpe (1946–1989) and Nan Goldin (b. 1953.); also installation art, examples of which are Joseph Beuys (1921–1986), Bruce Nauman (b. 1941), Christian Boltanski (b. 1944), Richard Wilson (b. 1953) and Martin Creed (b.1968); video art created by

Bill Viola (b. 1951) and others; Conceptual art typical in the works of Sol LeWitt (b. 1928), Eva Hesse (1937–1970) and Joseph Kosut (b. 1945); The art of performance and the associated style of Happening, an example of which are Allan Kaprow (b. 1927), Yves Klein (1927), etc.), Yves Klein (1928–1962), Wolf Vostell (1932–1998), Gunther Brus (b. 1938), Hermann Nitsch (b. 1938), Gilbert and George, and the Fluxus movement. About the non-commercial form of contemporary art, see: Ice sculpture is perhaps the last word in “found objects”. One of the latest creative fashions is the extreme form of Body Art, an example of which is the risky performances of the Serbian artist Marina Abramovich (b. 1946).

For information about the best venues for avant-garde art around the world, see: *The Best Contemporary Art Galleries*.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, an avant-garde group known as the Young British Artists (YBAs) emerged in the UK, among whose members were Turner Prize winners Mark Wallinger (b. 1959), Rachel Whiteread (b. 1959), etc.), Rachel Whiteread (b. 1963), Gillian Wearing (b. 1963), Damien Hirst (b. 1965), Douglas Gordon (b. 1966), Chris Ofili (b. 1968) and Steve McQueen (b. 1969).

Another controversial member of the group was Tracey Emin (b. 1963). These young postmodern artists caused huge controversy with their defiant, even subversive approach to the subject and use of materials (elephant

droppings, larvae, dead shark, human blood) – which shocked both art critics and the public. Despite this, their avant-garde approach revitalized British art and gained them enormous popularity, including the patronage of Charles Saatchi, Britain’s leading collector of modern art, as well as numerous exhibitions at the famous Saatchi Gallery, and the *Sensation* (1997) exhibition at the Royal Academy in London.

For other exhibitions of postmodern works around the world, see: *The Best Contemporary Art Festivals*.

Conclusion

Who is the most avant-garde artist in the world?

It is impossible to answer this question, so I will just tell you our main candidates. These include: Joseph Mallord Turner (an artist 50 years ahead of his time); Claude Monet (the first revolutionary of modern painting); Ilya Repin (the first artist to convey authentic details of life in Russia); Picasso (for his mastery of figurative and abstract art in almost all media); Marcel Duchamp (pioneer of dada and object art, from which conceptual art arose); the husband-and-wife team of Christo and Jeanne-Claude (empaquetage, or packaging); Andy Warhol (the first and perhaps the greatest postmodernist); Gilbert and George (living sculptures); Damien Hirst (the greatest self-promoter in art) and, of course, the graffiti terrorist Banksy.

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Contact: youblud@yandex.ru