

PhD Thesis

Made in China. The relationship between imitation, expression and representation, reflected in contemporary art.

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ABSTRACT

The following work, entitled “MADE IN CHINA. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IMITATION, EXPRESSION AND REPRESENTATION REFLECTED IN CONTEMPORARY ART.”, underlines the research results regarding contemporary art, created, advertised and absorbed in a globalized world.

Starting with analysis and the relationship between terms, continuing with socio-political observation throughout the XX century and correlating the results with the impact which the last five decades had, a starting point will be created from which art, in the context of globalization will be observed, with its positive and negative aspects. The effects globalization had upon society and eventually contemporary art, our point of interest, will be highlighted.

We will be researching the influences and the effects globalization had upon contemporary art, as well as the issues it creates. The investigation led to further analysis of the individual related to globalism, raising questions about identity loss, culture mix, as well as the exact opposite, particularity empowerment.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first point began with the description, definition and relationship between the key terms used in this research. The continuous rise of consumerism and materialism are mandatory in the analysis of today’s world and globalization, and are associated with increased population demands but, in the same time, low quality products. This is the context in which the notions of unique, original and artist identity were

analyzed. In the XIX-th century a new concept was developed which emphasized not only an artist's talent but also his personality. Originality could also be seen as a feeling, an event or an artist's personality. Therefore research further moves from the concept analysis of unique and original to imitation and mimesis. Multi thematic concept is now used in contemporary art and is associated with the post-modern man which can simultaneously experience different times in different moments of his existence. All of these aspects have an impact on the materials and methods used by contemporary artists and further influence theme and concept selection. This trend seen in contemporary art in which traditionally set boundaries have been broken led to the analysis of globalization which in turn encouraged information exchange at a worldwide level having an important effect upon art.

Another important aspect highlighted was the historical background and the socio-political atmosphere of the second half of the XX-th century and art created in that time. A short historical description of the XX-th century is presented including the political, military, social and economical aspects and how they influenced the evolution of culture and, most importantly, art.

For a better understanding of the artistic phenomena observed within certain society, one must understand the entire sum of events that shape society as a whole. Art as we see it today is the result of trends set in the second half of the XX-th century. Therefore, in order to have a complete and exact picture regarding contemporary art in is mandatory to look into works created in the past decades. The so called post-modern art can be fully understood only if it is related to the social, political, military and economical backgrounds of the time in which it was created. Therefore a glimpse of world history starting with the end of World War II until today will be presented.

The next focus point will be art in the last seven decades, from modernism until today, concentrating the research on artistic trends emerged in the second half of the XX-th century. The main artistic trends and their relationship with the past and future are presented. Modern art has foretold many aspects of what would be later called as postmodern art, in fact, many modern art trends can be included in both modernism and postmodernism, such as pop-art.

Postmodern art is strongly based on irony, parody and generally humor; modern art has in fact developed a more ironical approach, which would further expand in the postmodern context. Postmodern art brings forth the fusion between high class works and commercial art but modernism was the first to experiment with such mixing. Apart from fusion, postmodernism also increased the relationship with past artists, in fact this is one major difference between the two trends; the strong connection with past artist seen in postmodernism compared to modernism, which focuses more on its own values. This aspect gave birth to a new perspective, relative and accompanied by irony with a disregard towards values. Another effect was the increase of mainstream and celebrity.

Postmodern art questioned rules and directions which decide what “high art” actually is and blended this concept with mainstream up to the point in which these two were indistinguishable. Before postmodernism art was described as having a unique quality, elegance, finesse and intellectual stimulation which were sought by and appreciated by the well educated upper classes. These aspects set high class art apart from the mainstream which, in turn was viewed as low quality, easy to create, without any value and low-brow for the masses. Postmodern art merged these two aspects creating a strong new element entitled kitch. What we now see as fine arts may have been very well seen as mainstream, before postmodernism.

Therefore, art, in the context of globalization is the main theme of this research. The globalization trend is presented in relationship with cultural, economical and social levels, which started several decades ago and continues to expand and mature up until today, followed by focusing on national and cultural identity in relationship with a continuously uniform world. The center piece is the description of all these terms and concepts interact with contemporary art, followed by a highlight of the most representative works regarding this matter.

The entire process of globalization created an entire network due to the rapid spread of ideas and free borders, in which culture is no longer related to a specific place or country. This in turn raised a new challenge for artists to rethink their methods, approaches and ideas. A new set of terms was also established in order to describe the new and complex definition of image. All of these aspects contribute to art complexity as well as intellectual potential. Art is now strongly influenced by social context, location, political and social values, spiritualism as well as the

artist's inner side, personality and subconscious (H. Read). All of these elements are interconnected and contribute to the creation of art and its expressiveness.

Identity was also closely observed. Questions regarding who we are as individuals, as a nation and as a civilization emerged. Following this path led to the analysis of stereotypes, culture and civilization. A nation's culture is composed, among others, of different types of politics, music, technology and fine arts and it can be interpreted by the way that nation expresses itself and its perception. Furthermore, we can add the factors and conditions in which an individual is born as well as ethnic group in order to define identity. An important notice is the continuous change in different aspects of one's identity throughout life. Past experiences can change the perception of an individual towards oneself, others or the way one is being viewed by society. Identity also influences decision making. Belonging to a group, fashion style and political views are also based on identity. We can conclude that socio-political aspects, specific for each location contribute to cultural identity.

Artists continuously explore different aspects of identity and the way it's characteristics relate to our personal and social identity. New questions emerge regarding who are we, as individuals, as a society or as a nation.

This aspect of identity has begun emerging in different areas with the increase in information exchange, open borders and ease of travel became of the ordinary with globalization intensifying. This was compared to homogenization, loss of the unique, of identity and values.

In the last part of the thesis, directly related to the main subject, personal works will be presented along with the concept behind them. The concept of each work is strongly related to today's artistic trend. Use of common objects available anywhere which are included into works of art is a consequence of global culture. This period is characterized by an increase in expendable items and objects as well as inclusion of new forms, ignored and overlooked in the past. Adding new elements in an already stable environment further contributes to the dissolution of any difference between production and consumption, creation and copy. Using products already available on the market suggests stronger increase in the will to include art into a network of signs and meanings, to include plastic art in production flows, a universe of products for sale. Using a commonly available product in art can create a connection between

these two, as Marcel Duchamp stated, consumerism is also a mean of production. To conclude, the difference between a common object and a work of art is set by the context in which that particular object is being used and by its purpose. This creates a bond between form, sign and image.

The motivation of this research, art in the context of globalization started with the close observation and awareness of the way cultural transformations manifested during this time and how it influenced and guided contemporary art. Actually, contemporary art stands out through its lack of uniformity and pattern. Contemporary artists' activity comprises of a palette of different materials, methods, concepts and themes, which push traditionally set boundaries. Artists are influenced as well by globalization, culture diversity and try to include identity, value, beliefs exchanges within their works.

A new challenge is created due to experiences and local data which are related to universal. By interacting with different areas, contemporary art makes use of new digital technology and unconventional materials. This way artistic representation becomes more complex, it is able to evolve in time, it can be performed, can be experimental or interactive, with social implications. Often associated with states of mind, past experiences, art has been criticizing traditional models as well as using them in order to approach new themes and ideas. Correct understanding of historical preceding was an important aspect throughout the thesis, for complete understanding of the context and influences it had on plastic arts. Art in the context of globalization which emerged at the end of the XX-th century opposed modernism, taking upon itself a new meaning, art production began following world politics and trade and eventually spreading worldwide.

The result of this expansion led to new challenges. Art included in globalism is contemporary not only chronologically speaking but also ideologically and symbolistically. Influenced by globalization which becomes a new theme, artists try to represent the vast cultural landscape. Therefore, local experiences, have to align with universal, resulting in multiple worlds, present in today's art.