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Phirosmani Through the Eyes of Picasso

Thanks to Pablo Picasso the world has discovered Anri Russo as one of the outstanding primitive painters. The next marvelous discovery for the Europeans was the works of Niko Phirosmani that were exhibited in the Louvre in Paris in 1969. Right from the start they have won the recognition of experts. The connoisseurs compared his paintings to the great canvases of Jotto.

Three years after the exhibition, the poet Ilia Zdanevich published an album "Phirosmanishvili" in Paris. It consisted of a single compositional engraving of Phirosmani by Picasso. The portrait was accompanied with Zdanevich's article, which had been published earlier in 1914, in a Tiflis Newspaper "Vostok".

The creation of this portrait had its history. It was made at Zdanevich's request, who was a close friend of Picasso. Zdanevich had worked with Picasso on matters concerning the publication of rare engravings. Being fascinated by Phirosmani's work, Zdanevich asked Picasso to paint his portrait.

The book, printed on Japanese paper, was published in a very small edition and has ended up in the collection of amateurs. The portrait of Phirosmani, 15.8 x 9.8 sm. by size was etched out on a copper plate with the "dry needle" technique. All of the seventy-eight copies were signed by Picasso, so each of the paintings could be rightfully considered an original. The unusually large format of the etching, yet small edition of the book can be explained by the fact that it contained only a page and a half of printed text and only one painting with two clean sheets in-between them. Accordingly, the price was very high.

We are familiar with the motif "a painter and his model" in Picasso's graphic portraits, such as "Woman and Rembrandt with the Palette" and "Rembrandt and a Young Woman".

Some of the techniques used by Picasso in these paintings were utilized in his work "Phirosmani". Having constantly worked on the theme "a painter and his model" Picasso created a series of graphic paintings, in which he conveyed his attitude towards the works of different painters. It is obvious that in Phirosmani he felt a new original artistic thinking, which was reflected in the unusual compositional form of the painting.

The portrait of Phirosmani drastically differs from any other graphic work by Picasso, where he tried to be comprehensible to all. In his graphics the painter mainly used the contour line, outlining the objects. Howev-

er, in this case the contour line of the figure crosses the surrounding objects. This trick disrupts the perception of their unity.

The figure of Phirosmani standing with a brush is a “geometrical” one; it is outlined with a large amount of dots, beams and straight lines of different lengths. The painter is standing before an easel with a clean canvas on a stretcher in front of him. On the left, near his head, a second clean canvas is hanging on the wall. The image of Phirosmani is not that easily discernible at first glance. After looking at the portrait for a while, we can see a figure in a national Georgian costume with a wide-brimmed hat on, in a felt cloak, and shod in “kalamani” (peasants’ shoes). The features are easily recognizable, we can clearly see Phirosmani with a moustache, a beard, and deep-set eyes. In one hand he is holding a brush, in the other he has a palette with different color paints. The artist is at work. On a palette he has three blots of color: red, yellow and blue. These are the very combination of colors that Phirosmani frequently used so masterfully.

The portrait can be perceived in two perspectives - half face and full face, depending on the angle one is looking at it. Thus, the picture conveys an illusion of a dynamical movement as if the figure is in constant motion. It perhaps symbolizes the painter being constantly in thoughts, without which there would be no art.

Picasso’s artistic achievement in this work is remarkable. The 90 year-old painter was told about Phirosmani’s works, but only later did he have a chance to have a look at his paintings at an exhibition in Paris. Not by accident did Picasso choose a specific technique for this portrait. He thought that the traditional method of engraving should be enhanced with color and lineal composition so that internal rhythms of the silhouettes and their beauty would have strong emotional impact on the viewer. Picasso created a very complex and at the same time very recognizable image of the original, that of his fellow-painter. Probably for many viewers this work may seem difficult to understand partly due to the technique, namely, acupuncture that the painter used to create it.

Picasso showed Phirosmani during his creative work. The lines which make up the portrait usually cross each other in the area of the head and the breast; in other words in foci of thoughts and feelings. And the dots on the portrait are associated with the biologically active points of the body, which is well known from the folk medicine of ancient East. These spots were identified by man during two thousand years of practice. The vital significance of these biologically active spots of the organism have been acknowledged in Europe starting from the beginning of the 20th century, as practice of acupuncture treatment became common in the West. These biologically active points, also called “vital” and “Chinese”, are connected with nervous system and internal organs.

Physicians of the East while studying the function of the organism have discovered specific connection between various organs, in accordance with it they created a system of lines, called channels or meridians. The concept “meridian” is defined as a functional path connecting certain points in human body. They are distributed along twelve basic meridians. There are also two groups: a distal and a proximal ones. The distal group contains the dots located below the elbow and knee joints, the proximal one include the spots on the remaining meridians. Altogether 309 points are marked out.

The study about meridians are the main part of acupuncture, even though they do not precisely correspond to nervous and vascular systems. It was accepted by many Soviet and foreign specialists. Modern researchers have found a bio-energetic potential in these biologically active points as well as in the difference between their potentials. It was determined, that these spots affected changes in human organism from functional state of the nervous system (sleep, wake) as well as during the emotional stress.

With the combination of lines and points Picasso reveals the process of apprehension of reality (with the eyes), its comprehension (by the brains), the emotional experience and explosive action of ideas (in brains and heart), through nervous impulses, prompting active creativity. So, the signal is received, the idea is formed, the decision is made, a sure hand is ready to make the first stroke...

In the beginning of 1990's, in one of the clinics of Tbilisi, there was a doctor from Moscow,-Professor Moshiasvili. He was providing free medical assistance to the youth, poisoned with chemicals used by the military forces against peaceful demonstrators on April 9th of 1989. As a favor to the author of this article, an interesting experiment was conducted in collaboration with a well-known physicist, who was suffering from leukemia.

During the experiment, a patient was put into trance by the professor. The result was similar to what is depicted in Picasso's work “Phirosmani” and to the charts of acupuncture as it is known in Chinese, Japanese, European medicine, or rather the charts of ancient-oriental methods of acupuncture that are applied to the “vital” points.

“The patient” would receive thermal energy through the meridians, the energy would be applied to his body, and then the patient would describe his sensations along the acupuncture charts that corresponded precisely to the ones depicted in Picasso's portrait of Pirosmeni!..

The result of the experiment proved that Picasso indeed used an acupuncture chart while working on his painting; the image on the painting with all its crisscrossing lines mainly coincided with the charts of meridians and acupuncture points. We can assume that Picasso must have tried

to copy onto the engraving the entire atlas of acupunctural points, which he undoubtedly knew since the XIV World Acupuncture Congress had taken place in 1967 in Paris. Another interesting point supporting our assumption is the fact that two years after the Congress, in 1969 the exhibition of Phirosmani's paintings opened in Louvre, and already in 1971 Picasso was painting his portrait.

It seems, that Picasso intended to reconstruct the creative process of Phirosmani something akin to a "dialogue" between his brains and heart by reproducing the acupuncture chart on the painting (the crisscrossed lines in the areas of the forehead and heart). In that way he caught the moment, when a painter transferred his idea onto his canvass. In the same time his own depiction of Pirosmeni mirrors the creative process of his subject. Indeed the very acupuncture diagrams gave Picasso understanding of the mental path of the creative energy. Thus, his conscious choice of the acupuncture technique reveals subconscious workings of his mind.

Picasso, having found in Phirosmani a kindred soul and having penetrated the innermost layers of his subconscious mind came upon an original way for demonstrating the workings of his and his subject's unconscious mechanisms of their concealed thoughts. That was illustrated by the movements of lines and dots adopted from the meridian charts.

The creative process of the artist's mind is invisible: it's the nuances of thoughts and feelings, contradictory experience of emotions and moods. The magic impact of the painting, the intensity of the rhythm of lines create an unexpected illusion of infinite movement. It is a reflection of the creator's mind, the dialogue between his head and heart. As if in a mirror, the artist shows the concealed driving force that directs the interaction between his mind and soul.

The method of penetrating into the very essence of nature, the ability to depict the complexities of his contradictory character, to reveal the creative process itself this very approach of Picasso is unique in the world of art.

Picasso's interest in folk art, in negro sculptures, in the works of French primitive artist Anri Roussou and in Phirosmani was not accidental. He was the first to understand, that in our time we need freshness, ingenuity, strength. (I.Erenburg. "Graphics of Picasso". Published by "Iskusstvo", Moscow, 1968, c.12.) The artist has revealed in Phirosmani that very ingenuity, purity, and beauty he was striving after in his own dreams about the world without murders, dirt and violence. For him Phirosmani appeared to be a bearer of commandments *of Christ*.

The great artist, Picasso, has shown in a brilliant way his philosophical attitude to another great master. And the portrait created by him celebrates Phirosmani's art as it was acknowledged in the world.

А. С. Чхеидзе

Пиросмани глазами Пикассо

Резюме

Талантливые работы Пиросмани, выставленные в Парижском Лувре в 1969 году, завоевали единое признание экспертов. Они также вызвали большой интерес и у Пабло Пикассо.

В этой статье исследуется одна из графических работ Пикассо «Пиросмани» из серии «художник и его модель». (портрет - гравюра создан на медной пластинке техникой «сухая игла»).

Творческая манера создания портрета редкостна, широк ее эмоциональный диапазон. Пикассо, создавая эту работу, использовал оригинальный метод демонстрации восточных схем «жизненных» точек акупунктуры. Художник предлагает новый уникальный метод осмысления идеи диалога ума и сердца, передачи информации проводимой через жизненные точки и меридианы. Главной целью Пикассо было показать Пиросмани в процессе творческой работы.

Эта статья еще одна дополнительная страница о творчестве Пикассо, повествующая о его беспредельной фантазии и необычном творческом мышлении.

ალექსანდრე ჩხეიძე

ფიროსმანი პიკასოს თვალით

რეზიუმე

ნიკო ფიროსმანის ღრმანიჭიერად შესრულებულმა ნამუშევრებმა, რომელნიც პარიზში, ლუვრში 1969 წელს იქნა გამოფენილი, ექსპერტთა დიდი შეფასება დაიმსახურა. ასევე დიდი ინტერესი გამოიწვია მისმა ქმნილებებმა პიკასოშიც.

წინამდებარე სტატიაში გამოკვლეულია პიკასოს ერთ-ერთი გრაფიკული ნამუშევარი „ფიროსმანი“ სერიიდან „მხატვარი და მისი მოდელი“ (პორტრეტი-გრაფიურა შექმნილია სპილენძის ფირფიტაზე „მშრალი ნემსის“ ტექნიკის გამოყენებით).

ღირსსაცნობია, რომ შემოქმედითი მანერა პორტრეტის შექმნისა იშვიათი მოვლენაა მისთვის ნიშნეული ფართო ემოციური დიაპაზონით. პიკასომ ამ ნამუშევრის შექმნისას გამოიყენა ორიგინალური მეთოდი, რომელიც ემყარება აღმოსავლურ 'ცხოვრებისეულ' სქემას – წერტილოვან აკუპუნქტურას. მხატვარი გთავაზობს ახალ უნიკალურ მეთოდს – იდეის გააზრებას: გულისა და

გონების დიალოგს. ეს არის ერთგვარი ნიმუში, ანუ ვარიანტი იმისა, თუ როგორი და რა სახის პორტრეტი (ფიროსმანის) უნდა შეექმნა მხატვარს. პიკასოს მთავარი მიზანი იყო ფიროსმანის წარმოსახვა-წარმოჩენა შემოქმედებით პროცესში.

ჩვენელი სტატია კიდევ ერთი დამატებითი ფურცელია პიკასოს შემოქმედების შესახებ, რომელშიც გამჟღავნებულია მისეული უსაზღვრო ფანტაზია და შემოქმედებითი აზროვნების განსაკუთრებულობა.