

THE IMPACTS OF NEW TECHNICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL POSSIBILITIES ON CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS AND FORMS OF PAINTING

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Abstract: This paper explores the most current forms and artists working within the medium of painting, examining how the vision and perception of visuality have evolved over recent decades under the significant influence of new technological and technical advancements. It draws heavily on the so-called new or digital media. The analysis primarily focuses on artists, works, and developments within Slovakia and the Czech Republic, while engaging with and critically reflecting on the perspectives and studies of contemporary art theorists.

Keywords: education, conceptualism, iconoclasm, medium, painting, technology, visual art.

1 Introduction

Freedom? I fear that true freedom exists only as a metaphor—essentially, only within the realm of art. All other activities are constrained and provide only a limited sense of freedom, reduced to a utilitarian form. It's not just politicians and religions that make promises about this. As experimental psychologist, cognitive scientist, and linguist Steven Pinker poses the question: "How much art can the brain take?" (Pinker, 1999, p. 105). The question posed certainly doesn't come from an engineer, astronomer, or painter. Pinker briefly explores the landscape of American universities, noting that the arts faculties often serve a more ornamental purpose, primarily aimed at influencing the public. In this context, they appear to engage not only with the psychology of aesthetics but also with the psychology of status, much like how opera once fulfilled a similar role. So-called high art, as well as avant-garde art, tends to appeal to more sophisticated individuals. The crossing of boundaries and displays of virtuosity often overshadow the previously mentioned psychology of aesthetics. In today's reality, it's widely accepted that a work of art—be it a painting or a sculpture—primarily captivates us through its external features and inherent originality, with new media and technological advancements playing a crucial role. "Artistic language reflects the state of a particular historical period, as well as the mindset and attitude of society" (Valachová, 2024, p. 146).

2 The question of the resurgence of painting in the technological age

Every medium involves a specific technical procedure or process that shapes the final artistic product, influencing its expression, form, appearance, and overall character. Therefore, each technical process is inherently linked to its medium (Biarincová, 2024, p. 35). We are now in an era marked by the highly problematic and contradictory concept of the resurgence of painting, following a series of even more challenging attempts at new iconoclasm, accompanied by clear signs of significant dissonance. Somewhere within this situation lies the root of various negative dynamics—elements of predation or arrogance, along with the stresses and rampant insecurities experienced by both creators and viewers, regardless of generational differences. As we might say, this "forgiven" painting is repaying several historical debts—not only to itself but also to those who, during its unwelcomed yet misleading absence, attempted to fill, replace, or even occupy the space traditionally held by painting.

Art theorists and historians, through their research and long-term observations, often view the state of painting in a way that resonates with Fila's assertion. There will probably never be an end to rehabilitation in art, which is why the idea of rehabilitation as the main agent of tradition seems heretical to

me. Unless we view art as a reflection of the human spirit—encompassing both aesthetic and ethical values—we risk allowing certain cultures or individuals to languish on the margins, seen as exotic, outsider, or incomprehensible. For me, painting embodies this interplay between matter and spirit more than any other medium. It occupies a unique position, situated between the spiritual heights of poetry and music (Fila, 2003, p. 17, 18).

Research in contemporary painting indicates that the medium is reclaiming its prominence and gaining momentum, to the point where one might say it is proliferating. However, the question of quality remains paramount. Art inherently retains an element of mystery, and it appears that the time has arrived for discussions about the effects of the cultural pandemic that has acted as a catalyst for this resurgence. This discussion addresses the attitudes and perspectives of artists, theorists, critics, and art historians regarding the impact of negative thinking and the prevalence of problematic experiments in the art world. It highlights the phenomenon of theoretical superiority, which often overlooks the practice and presence of the artist as a sensitive human being. These individuals may struggle to engage in the games of words that dominate theoretical discourse, particularly when it comes to the perception and state of visuality.

In October 2010, a Czech-Slovak symposium titled "Painting in Contexts, Contexts of Painting" was organized by the Research Centre at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bratislava. In the introduction to the published anthology, the art theorist Jana Geržová highlights that painting has garnered significant interest over the past decade, encompassing a wide range of approaches. This includes a return to classical hanging paintings, which Geržová describes as a renaissance of traditional genres, as well as manifestations of postmodern pluralism, eclecticism, and hybrid combinations (Geržová, 2012, p. 8).

To address the themes of the announced anthology, it is essential to outline what has transpired in our cultural and artistic community over the past twenty years, particularly within the artistic and academic spheres. During this period, a predominantly young generation of artists emerged. The post-revolutionary art education program at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design (AFAD), established in Slovakia in 1949, underwent a fundamental transformation, adopting entirely new contours in every respect. The most significant change that soon exposed the essence of the transformations, along with their shortcomings, was the abolition of the relatively comprehensive two-year training program for students. This was replaced by short-term and often fleeting courses intended to provide a more versatile artistic foundation. As stated, "Where else but on campus can there be the appropriate time and space to build a reservoir of material from which the personal world of the painter is gradually constructed and shaped?" The aim is to occasionally be surprised by the spontaneous emergence of one's own illusions and contradictions. I realized that a contemporary recommendation from so-called opinion experts and outsiders was the insistence on transcending boundaries at all costs. However, no one specified how to achieve this transcendence or what it should entail, leaving us in a state of uncertainty about what would truly be beneficial... (Berger, 2017, p. 98). Similar vague and imprecise recommendations can be found in the scientific proceedings of the aforementioned symposium. Consequently, we are often taken aback by certain problematic formulations at first glance. For instance, in T. Pospiszyl's lecture titled *The End of Painting*, the introductory abstract cites R. Krauss's perspective on painting's futile attempts to achieve hegemony. Although Pospiszyl defends painting by asserting that there are still great painters and remarkable works, he acknowledges that the situation has changed and that painting no longer holds the monopoly it once did before the rise of technical art. Authors of reflections, lectures, and discussion

papers, like Pospiszyl, emphasize the significance of photography's invention, noting that it "highlights not just the miraculous qualities of this medium but also the crisis that painting faced at that time" (Pospiszyl, 2012, p. 25).

The question arises: are we not currently experiencing a crisis, not only in painting but in the broader artistic landscape? The theorist's statement seems to significantly understate this reality: "Painters of the past did not have to grapple with defining painting or its function. They simply painted, and everything they created was considered painting. In contrast, during the modernist era, the painter not only creates a work but also reflects on the medium of painting itself." Painting evolved beyond a mere artistic technique; it became a universal language through which new interpretations and understandings were developed. Modernism was often viewed as a destructive process that ultimately led to a dead end. This truncated discourse reveals a noticeable limitation in theoretical reasoning, as participants often conflate the historically defined significance of painting as a medium with a universal attribution that applies to all techniques. This type of simplistic theoretical conflation occasionally resembles political discussions. It involves speculating on the relevance or searching for the nuanced value of an ever-expanding array of other media, particularly those dominated by technical elements. In his lecture, Pospiszyl lists the still incomplete range of these "other" media... In the ongoing struggle against painting, photography remains favored, a trend that the author believes has diminished painting's authenticity, reducing it to a mere aesthetic phenomenon. Pospiszyl argues that conceptual artists have supplanted the pictorial codes of painting with a photographic message that lacks a definitive code (Pospiszyl, 2012, p. 26).

3 Vitality and metamorphosis of painting

Fila (2003) notes that what captivates him about painting is its phoenix-like ability to renew itself. Despite being buried many times, it consistently demonstrates that it has not yet run out of vitality. It seems that iconoclasm has merely washed over it. The strength of this atavism is remarkable, as it can not only overcome modern adversaries but also absorb them. New evidence continually emerges that anything can indeed be painted. Only disoriented individuals believe that everything has already been painted. They fail to recognize a crucial detail: painting is merely a medium. While humanity has expressed much through it in the past, the constant evolution of both people and the world means that not everything will ever be painted. Any new medium that does not acknowledge this truth is destined to merely embellish the world without capturing its essence.

In the past, art was closely linked to everyday life and the activities necessary to fulfill people's needs (Kováčová, 2023, p. 13). Humanity has shifted from merely meeting basic needs to recognizing and appreciating talent (Valachová, Benčíč, Kováčová, 2019). Now, as we advance further into the digital age, even the concept of talent is starting to waver in its significance.

What about Dali, Mantegna, Turner, Seurat, El Greco, Dürer, Piero della Francesca, or Ernst, Ensor, Delacroix, and Renoir? And what about the colorists like Bonnard, Matisse, and even Rothko? What about Kiefer or Gerhard Richter? What of the depths of Leonardo's caves? There's a mystery in these images, an intuition that leads us to ponder the question of beauty, yet it seems there is no definitive answer. Alongside the concepts mentioned above, the elements of beauty certainly encompass the rare quality of captivation. An exceptional work of art stands out because it is created in moments of rapture, and this sense of rapture is often experienced by those who perceive it (Bergerová, 2022, p. 28). Thus, its exceptional nature extends to the way it is perceived as well. Repiská contends that perceiving a work of art is a multifaceted process shaped by numerous factors. Beyond information about the artist, the context in which the artwork is displayed, as well as the viewer's personal experiences, emotional state, and current mood, can significantly

impact perception (Repiská, 2024, p. 267). Collectively, these elements influence how viewers interpret the artwork, ultimately shaping their overall aesthetic experience.

Arnheim (2022), a psychologist specializing in vision and visual art, suggests that in a mature work of art, all elements appear to share a fundamental similarity. The sky, the sea, the land, the trees, and even human figures seem to be crafted from the same material. There is nothing false; instead, everything is transformed through the unifying vision of the great artist. Each great artist begins anew, creating a world where familiar objects appear as if they have never been seen before. This fresh perspective is neither a distortion nor a betrayal; it reinterprets age-old truths in a dazzling and exciting manner.

4 The medium of painting and its specificity

Fila's (2006) Apologetics suggests that the discussions and lectures often resemble a futile struggle. This approach tends to sidestep the truth of reality, neglecting the living artist with their unique talents, mental capabilities, manual skills, imagination, and the diverse range of possibilities that enable them to think continuously, both now and into the future. An individual becomes a painter, sculptor, musician, composer, or instrumentalist through an inner calling. Since ancient times, painting has served as a medium—a language crafted for our personal expression, not merely for depicting the visible world. Thus, even today, a painter is not required to embrace alternative methods or approaches; this has always been the case. Painting is inherently adventurous; each stroke and every touch of the canvas carries its own unique significance, as it is a handmade process. It demands a long-term commitment and comes without guarantees. This, perhaps, highlights a fundamental difference between contemporary media and painting. Traditional media like painting do not offer the quick, often less labor-intensive, and more visually striking options found in digital processes. Instead, they rely on practical skills that demand dedicated practice to achieve mastery. Concentration and time, both of which are increasingly valuable today, are essential in this process (Bergerová, 2022; Bergerová, Ševčovič 2022).

The diversity and complexity of contemporary artistic directions, particularly in the visual realm, are on the rise and becoming increasingly dynamic, largely due to the vast array of communication options available. Some creative approaches evolve naturally, with individual phases of the artistic process responding to technological challenges in painting, sometimes even resulting in a form of destruction. Additionally, there are foundational strategies that may involve speculative or manipulative techniques.

5 Painting versus digital image

A century ago, in the 1920s, the philosopher Ortega y Gasset cautioned about the risks associated with the unrestricted flow and transmission of information. As a perceptive observer, he identified various unconventional developments in art and culture as forms of extremism. He expressed concerns about dehumanization, suggesting that art was becoming merely a product of 'art for art's sake'—a form of entertainment that, in his view, was ultimately losing its significance. A century later, it can be said that Gasset's intuition about art being on the edge has been validated. In our discussion, we refer to Arnheim, the noted connoisseur and psychologist of vision and visual art, whose early work is associated with the moving image of film. He expresses his enthusiasm and fascination for something that often becomes largely inaccessible or incomprehensible to adults: the imagination of a child. Visual imagination likely shares a significant trait with children: their inherent mobility. Arnheim (2022) held a strongly critical view of modern art, arguing that it distorts perception and undermines the foundational axes of the image, as seen in cubism, while also disrupting local color. He points out that the stark differentiation between the external and internal worlds, as well as between consciousness and the unconscious, is fundamentally unnatural. A deeply insightful expert on the human psyche, as well as on

vision and visual arts, would likely have significant reservations about many of the methods and often superficial experiments present in art pedagogy and didactics today. In numerous instances of contemporary art education, we can observe contradictions and attempts to align with current trends, such as the shift towards digital imagery. Art educator and artist Sládek (2018) poses intriguing questions regarding this topic: "Is it possible to cultivate pictorial language and creativity without students having developed skills in traditional manual techniques of image production?" Additionally, she asks, "Can artistic talent be recognized based solely on the ability to create images using new aesthetic forms of contemporary art? Will traditional imaging techniques continue to dominate art education, or will new subjects focused on digital outputs take their place?" (Sládek, 2018). Sládek also points out that there is a lack of discussion regarding the concept and role of the digital image in education.

The past can seem boundless, partly due to the separation of profane and sacred art. What captivates us in art—the sublime and the mysterious—gradually transitions into a discourse that forms the foundation of art history and aesthetics. Among the numerous quotations, renowned names, and various facts and impressions, the unique reflections of Adorno (2004) stand out. Adorno asserts that all works of art, as well as art itself, embody a mystery that challenges art theory. This notion is echoed in our partially annotated texts within the collection *Painting in Contexts - Contexts of Painting*. Furthermore, the lack of a harmonious atmosphere among communities of artists, theorists, and critics can be traced to differing vocabularies, which we find inadequate and unconvincing. Today's painting is increasingly liberated from traditional ideas and constraints, with its malleability and reliance on contemporary trends becoming more evident. Initially, various influences intertwine in ways that are difficult to define, leaving us uncertain whether this is a subliminal process or a market-driven phenomenon. Amidst this, schemes, analogies, interpretations, and reinterpretations emerge with enthusiasm, often embraced out of a desire to conform to societal expectations. In dynamic processes, cultural boundaries are often transcended, as was the case during the era of the French Cubists. Even before that time, artistic designs from different parts of the world were sources of admiration and imitation. The notion of artistic direction can be seen as an emanation, yet it remains elusive and difficult to capture.

It is not the first time we have sifted through the aforementioned collection on the contexts of painting, seeking essential insights and ideas. However, at times, the relentless pursuit of scholarship or curiosity feels almost hurtful, if not somewhat perfidious. Many authors of lectures and papers in the discussion appear to be competing with one another, somewhat neglecting the essence of living creation and the artwork itself. They compete for the most perfect form of expression, often prioritizing performance over the artistic artifact itself. Unintentionally, we are reminded of the so-called post-revolutionary period, a time when freedom and absolute pluralism were emphasized daily. During this era, many essential terms, such as tradition, fell out of the contemporary vocabulary.

Our perception and interpretation of a work of art are influenced by our personal experiences. In this context, I would like to mention our trip to Prague to visit the exhibition of the world-renowned artist Gerhard Richter. The exhibition at the Kinsky Palace was undeniably beautiful, showcasing a clarity built on two pillars: one featuring monochromatic abstractions and the other a series of small still lifes in a vibrant chromatic palette. However, this seemingly meticulously calculated contrast failed to leave a lasting impression. A short time later, we found ourselves immersed in an unpredictable experience at the Waldstein Riding School that eclipsed the classic two-faced painting. At first glance, we were enveloped by a serene variety of artifacts—impressive ensembles, meaningful objects, and thematically rich materializations that exuded a sense of logical museum quality. This exhibition showcased the work of the significant Czech artist and pilgrim, František Skála (born 1956). His natural versatility and liberated artistic sensibility overlap

with contemporary art's terminological notions. Despite the clear present, Skála does not succumb to trends; he rarely confines himself to his findings and experiences, which he narrates. Why Skála - the Pilgrim? This artist, truly deserving of the title, walked the 45th Biennale in Venice (1993), carrying in his backpack many treasures he found along the way, perhaps even re-created. Skála moves silently, imbuing his indescribable art with the delicate weight of a dragonfly (Skála, 2012; Bergerová, 2023).

Slovakia also boasts parallel figures in its art scene, such as the painter Peter Bartoš (born 1938), a student of the classical painting school led by Professor Mudroch. "If we want to invent something truly great, it is the happiness of man" (Gažovičová, 2018, p. 9). According to his contemporary, the painter Vladimír Popovič, Bartoš is a central figure in domestic art: "He is a living legend of the Czechoslovak neo-avant-garde, one of the last eyewitnesses to the key events of visual culture in the last century". Nina Gažovičová, curator of the Petr Bartoš 80th anniversary exhibition, observes: "Bartoš's endeavors can seem absurd in some ways, almost reminiscent of Sisyphus's fate. It's as if he believes that a repeated gesture might one day overturn the impossibility of the task. For him, this task represents an informational experiment with the system of communication—a prolonged and fragmented effort toward reproducibility, contrasted with a resolute refusal to display his work. This lifelong task appears to exist at the intersection of the profane—serving as an active instrument of criticism with an instructional subtext—and the sacred, where actions aim to resonate in the viewer's consciousness. In some respects, it occupies the threshold between the iconoclastic movement and the Catholic desire for opulence" (Gažovičová, 2018, p. 17).

6 Conclusion

The French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty 'conjured up' the idea of the eye as a kind of seeing body. According to the author, our vision is 'infected' by thought. He suggests that painting embodies a magical theory of seeing, where the painter transforms the world into a painting. In this sense, seeing becomes a convergence of all aspects of Being. What are we to make of this? Perhaps it represents a reversal of roles, where objects observe the painter, and the painter, in turn, observes what is seen through the lens of his own experience. Every visible element carries its layer of the invisible—a kind of nothingness. This aligns with Ingarden's clear notion that the abstract image is embedded within the painting, highlighting the polarity between the definite and the indefinite. (Bergerová, 2024).

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