

## **Ethnic Art Studies as an Up-To-Date Methodology for the Study of Art Ethnicity**

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**Abstract:** The subject matter of studies of the ethnicity problem is presented in different disciplines. In recent decades, it is possible to notice a new wave of interest to this problem, when highly specialized scientific discourses continue to develop simultaneously with the formation of interdisciplinary branches of knowledge. The phenomenon of interconnection of the art and ethnicity can be considered as one of vectors of this search. The integration of ethnography and art studies presents the interdisciplinary research area - ethnic art studies, orienting the researcher at the consideration of ethnic factor in the art. The theoretic precondition of ethnic art studies is the concept, considering ethnicity as a combination of features, differing one really existing ethnos from the other. The object of study in ethnic art studies is the art of ethnos; the subject is the ethnic peculiarities of the art. In conditions of globalization, such approach provides an opportunity to show the dialectics of individual and universal, ethnic and national.

**Key words:** Art • Ethnicity • Ethnic Art Studies • Ethnocultural Tradition • Creative Constructive Method  
• Art Style

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The method of ethnicity study in the fine art stays a disputable and complex problem in art studies. The complexity is in the fact, that the science still lacks the methodology, providing an opportunity to substantiate theoretically ethnic peculiarities of art. That is why it is necessary to specify the possibilities and importance of ways and devices, used in the art studies, and to determine the peculiarities of ethnic art studies as a method.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

We proceed from the assumption that the main task of the scientific method comes down to regulation of cognitive process, ordered sequence of operations in comply with definite requirements, rules and recommendations. By definition of V.A. Elchaninov, "... a method presents a specially organized and subordinated system of prescriptions, rules and recommendations, which, in case of right usage, shall provide the researcher with the solution of a definite cognitive task in any sphere of practical or theoretical activity" [1].

**Main Part:** The clarification of specificity of ethnic art studies as a method is connected with the philosophical concept of G. Hegel (1770–1831) about system-level consideration of studied phenomena, which allows distinguishing the levels in methodology of ethnic art studies, based on the notions "universal-particular-singular". The content of these levels is revealed through their correlation with the levels of methodology (philosophical, general scientific, particular scientific) and with the pair of artistic categories "content-form". In composition, the dialectic connection of "content" and "form" appears as an integral word picture. In terminological dictionary, the artistic content is determined as an aesthetic category, expressing ideological-emotional, sensationally-imaginative sphere of meaning and essence. The artistic form is understood as a consubstantiated combination of artistic devices in a separate piece of work. Such approach allows distinguishing the following levels of methodology of ethnic art study.

Firstly, philosophical, presented by philosophical and culturological concepts, revealing the phenomenon of ethnicity in the art; the analysis is aimed as revelation of stable mental structures mainly of the composition

content. Secondly, general scientific, represented by the system, historical, comparative, typological and biographical approaches; the composition is considered from the viewpoint of unity of content and form in the context of impact of natural and ethnocultural factors. Thirdly, particular scientific, represented by ethnographic and art studies approaches; at this level the composition is considered mainly from the viewpoint of form, rather than content.

At the philosophical layer, the phenomenology and hermeneutics act as a methodological basis for ethnic art studies to reveal the interrelations between the existence and essence of compositions. The phenomenological technique provides an opportunity to record the mental intentions of artistic content. The result of their projection becomes a cultural code—a phenomenon, forming the semantics of composition. In this context, a central notion of phenomenology "life world" as a basis of ethnos acts as a factor of ethnocultural peculiarity of motives, themes and plots of the fine art. These are the main image-bearing dominants, revealed taking into consideration the archetypal meaning. A true artist, in accordance with K. Jung (1875-1961), tends to think with archetypes and then the singular and transient he raises up to the universal and everlasting [2]. The Jung's concept influenced on the formation of the methodology of composition interpretation through myths, archetypes, signs and symbols. In the myths, there are studied: firstly, the expression of collective unconscious and archetypes, which are turned into the instrument of analysis and interpretation of compositions; secondly, myths are considered as the bearers of allegorical meaning, which can be revealed only in subconscious mind. It was established in the science, that the important properties of archetype are the abilities to metamorphose, at that, keeping its meaning and functions unchanged at different historical stages, priority and abstractedness from the specific material.

In modern art studies, there are made the attempts to reconsider the traditional interpretation of the "archetype" by introducing the additional terms and notions: "archetypal images", "archetypal motives", "archetypal plots". The artistic way of thinking is formed at the same archetypal basis and it is penetrated with images, produced from basic binary symbols. In the concept of Y.M. Lotman (1922–1993), a symbol in cultural tradition is implemented in its invariant essence: "...a symbol will act as something heterogeneous to the surrounding text space, as an embassy of another cultural epochs, as a prompt about ancient bases of culture" [3]. At the same time, a symbol is in active keeping with the

cultural context, it is being transformed under its impact. The symbol is connected with historical-inherited memory of ethnos.

The hermeneutics, as a method of interpretation of meanings of archetypes and symbols, is aimed at revelation of peculiarities of mental content in the composition. The task of interpretation of the composition is to extract a variety of meanings from the word picture or to reduce possible variants to common, single meaning.

The ethnographical approach in ethnic art studies is of particular importance; it is aimed at revelation of typical traits of traditional everyday routine of ethnos culture, *i.e.* customs, ceremonies, folk art, as well as settlements, dwellings, clothes, tools, trading in their ethnic specificity. In ethnic art studies, it is a method of study, how the ethnic factor influences on national uniqueness of art. Such approach presupposes the stage of historical-geographical and historical-ethnographical description, the study of traditions of folk art and their role in forming of composition [4].

A stylistic analysis in ethnic art studies is aimed at revelation of stable traits in formal and content structure of compositions, typical of the specific historical period, school and master.

As the main unit of ethnic art analysis is the composition, it shall be in comply with terminology in the system context. As per scientific tradition, the term is defined as a special notion, artificial sign, used in one or another branch of knowledge, way of thinking, practical activity. The terminological analysis results in definitions and explications, as well as denominations of revealed scientific approaches to interpretation and definition of corresponding notions. In the art studies, the definitions with relative and probabilistic character are used: the definitions-descriptions (emerging as a result of enumeration of feature complex), the definitions-directions (referring the described phenomenon to the specific group of phenomena). The nature of art studies term comes from the research subject and is subject to dynamic changes as far as it is interpreted. It is one of peculiarities of logics of art studies development.

The definition problem of the composition is connected with the definition problem of art. The space of the variety of notions is heterogeneous; in different points the differential features are expressed with different strength. The statement, that the art is the artistic-image-bearing reaction (reflection, acquisition, evaluation) of a man (artist) to the surrounding world, stays stable in them. The concept of art, as an expression, is reduced to representation, understood as a presentation of the surrounding world in the art.

In order for us to use the data of ethnography in the art studies analysis, let us introduce the ethnocultural tradition as an initial category, applied to definite phenomena of the art history. If to summarize the discussions and to sum up the main viewpoints of art critics on the notion "ethnocultural tradition" in the fine art, we will get the following opinions: 1) the mechanism of formation, storage and communication of stereotypes, archetypical images and motives; 2) artistic-aesthetic principles of reflection of worldview in the art; 3) descriptive-expressive means, showing symbolically the forms of art of the ethnos. The diversity of interpretations is conditioned by the fact, that the ethnocultural tradition acts as a binding notion in relation to the art studies and characterizes the inheritance of ethnos artistic-aesthetic achievements, descriptive-expressive means, typical of the art genres of the specific ethnos.

The problem of ethnocultural peculiarity of art in ethnic art studies is connected with the category of art style. To reveal the style of compositions is the way of extraction of ethnic features and coming to definite boundaries of one or another ethnos. It is the style, that is to be considered as an instrument to understand the ethnic artistic phenomena, as this category is universal [5]. The universalism of the notion "art style" manifests itself through the relation to different levels of art: in relation to composition; to characterize the creative method of the artist; to denote the peculiarities of artistic movement; as applied to the whole historical epoch.

Classical art studies considered the style as a definite way of thinking, speaking about personality or epoch more, than "the content" of this thinking. Thus, G. Velflin interpreted the style as a complete, stable and invariable structure of formal elements, subject to definite forming principles [6]. In modern art studies the evolution of the notion "style" shows the tendency of meaning expansion. The style is determined, firstly, by the system of internal links between the basic components of the composition-form and content [7].

In modern humanitarian knowledge, the notion art style is considered as a way of formation and expression of meanings, as a form of self-consciousness of the culture. Developing the principles of hermeneutical understanding of style, the cultural specialist A.A. Pelipenko writes, "... the style, as a principle of multilayered meaning formation, modeling the

integral worldview, certainly has the archetypical complex of pre-conventional semantic constants in its basis..." and then, "...the clearer the stylistic form provides the concept about primary preconventional initial meanings, forming the integral worldview in this cultural tradition, the larger and historically more durable is the style, the more spheres and types of art it covers" [8].

Behind the structure of artistic image, protruding in the style, there are the principles of its creative implementation, to denote which the notion "creative method" is used. M.S. Kagan, defining the creative method as a system of principles of artistic learning of the world, approves this category as a style-forming factor. A method is formed from the interaction of gnoseological, axiological, modeling and semiotic sides [9]. The history of world artistic culture proves, that the individual peculiarities, typical of the creative method of each artist, depend not only on the character of his talent, but also on assimilation of definite social interests and cultural ideals by his consciousness.

A complex of artists' works, connected by common principles of creative method and style, form a definite-historical art movement. Historical specificity lies in connection with the definite period of the art history. National (local) specificity of art movement is conditioned by the character of ethnocultural traditions.

Based on typical analysis of artistic phenomena, it is possible to denote the following connection: a separate piece of art; a complex of pieces, created by the artist within the limits of stable method and style; the unity of compositions within the national (local) school. The transition is carried out from singular through particular to general. At that, general is presented by international (in consists of ethnic, interethnic and inoethnic), the peculiar is presented by national (it can be both mono- and polyethnic), the particular is presented by ethnoregional [10].

**Summary:** A method of ethnic art studies is based on integration of facts, notions, principles of ethnography and art studies to determine the ethnocultural specificity of art. This method provides an opportunity to comprehend the ethnocultural tradition as a notion of ethnic art studies and its impact on the peculiarities of the artist's creative method, shown in ethnocultural identity of motives, themes, plots and means of artistic expression.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The investigation, aimed at study of ethnicity phenomenon in the fine art, tends to the following structure: 1) the historical-ethnographical characteristic of the region; 2) the revelation of origins and factors of ethnocultural peculiarity of artistic traditions; 3) the description of tendencies in the fine art of the region in the context of ethnocultural specificity; 4) the ethnic art analysis of manifestation of ethnocultural traditions in formal-content and image-bearing structure of compositions.

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