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## The existential meaning of traditional Russian art

*Abstract:* The appeal to tradition has recently been particularly noticeable in art, pedagogy, and psychology. All these three areas of human activity are related to our perception of the world. Modern reality is faced with the existential problem of identifying a person, understanding their place and purpose in this world. The relevance of the study is primarily related to this problem. The study object is Russian art in general. The study subject is its existential content. The study aims to show the importance of preserving the Russian tradition in the 20th and 21st centuries art, as an existential task set by the artist. A systematic approach was applied in this study. The basic methods of aesthetic analysis and synthesis are used. Along with philosophical and aesthetic methodology, methods of other sciences are applied: hermeneutical, axiological, existential-phenomenological, semiotic, psychological. The works of folk art researchers were studied in order to write the work: B.A. Rybakov, A.A. Potebni, V.Ya. Propp, E.N. Trubetskoy; books by the existentialist philosopher N.A. Berdyaev; studies on Russian art by V.V. Kandinsky, I.V. Klyun, V.I. Markov, A.N. Benois. The author refers to traditional Russian art in its mythical content in this work. The article examines the connection between the pagan worldview and the subsequent Christian one, and how this was reflected in Russian culture. The peculiarities of Russian existentialism are considered in connection with human religiosity, which is the basis where the mythical worldview of our ancestor and the existentialism of our contemporary converge. What are the similarities between these two ways of thinking, and why is this closeness so noticeable, especially in art? The author concludes that the appeal to tradition in the art of our contemporaries is performed, of course, primarily to solve their own existential issues. However, the most important thing here is that thanks to this conversion, the spiritual bond of generations is not interrupted. And this is already gaining national significance. After all, to morally decompose society and contribute to the collapse of the state, it is enough to destroy the ideology expressed in a particular mythology, which appeals to shared values.

*Keywords:* existentialism, traditional Russian art, symbol, myth, archetype, fairy tale, folklore, paganism, mentality.

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### Introduction

The appeal to tradition has recently been particularly noticeable in art, pedagogy, and psychology. All these three areas of human activity are related to our perception of the world. Modern reality is faced with the existential problem of identifying a person and understanding their place and purpose in this world. The relevance of the study is primarily related to this problem. The modern world is very saturated with information that surrounds us everywhere, the flows of which contribute to the disruption of the integrity of perception of the surrounding reality. Feeling this problem at the level of their existence, artists are increasingly beginning to

turn to tradition. This appeal is performed not so much to find original plots but rather in the desire to find some kind of unshakable foundation, to feel native soil. What do they have in common with traditional Russian art, and why does the mythical worldview of our ancient ancestor turn out to be so close precisely at crucial, existentially difficult times? These observations of modern art and reflections on its ways led to the formation of the following goal – to show the importance of preserving the Russian tradition in the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, as an existential task set by the artist. This personal interest of the artist, which, of course, is related to his individual creative style, is relevant throughout the country. A person must comprehend himself in his native space and have a spiritual relationship with his family.

The study object is Russian art in general.

The study subject is its existential content.

The study aims to show the importance of preserving the Russian tradition in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries art, as an existential task that the artist sets for himself.

Based on the task set, the following tasks were developed:

- understand how existentialism developed on Russian soil and how this may be related to the human worldview of the pagan world;
- trace the life of the archetype in culture, the connection of the symbol with religious consciousness;
- imagine how the symbol is connected with mentality;
- present the life of tradition in modern art in the context of the artist's search for his own path using the example of a study of the works of Silver Age artists;
- present the life of tradition in contemporary art as an existential task the artist sets for himself.

This study applied a systematic approach. It used the basic methods of aesthetic analysis and synthesis. Along with philosophical and aesthetic methodology, methods of other sciences were applied: hermeneutical, axiological, existential-phenomenological, semiotic, and psychological.

Russian existentialism has developed in its own ways, and these paths are connected with the religious consciousness of the Russian people. One way or another, it leaves its mark on the world's perception, even if the person is an atheist. By denying God, he still acknowledges his existence. However, the main thing is still in the inner knowledge that connects the ego with other personalities, and in the unconscious that connects it with its kind. Russian existentialists N.A. Berdyaev (1993; 1994) and F.M. Dostoevsky (2010) wrote about the independence of Russian existentialism.

The unconscious area in a person is connected not only with the generic but also with a sense of freedom, as an elemental principle in a person. The spontaneous, archetypal is something that cannot be expressed, something that is given to a person as a kind of protection and guidance. But it was precisely these inexpressible feelings of fear of the unknown, fear of death in the first place, that found a visible form in the pagan ritual. B.A. Rybakov (2013) devoted his works to the study of paganism of the ancient Slavs. The understanding of the symbol as a cultural archetype is contained in the works of modern authors: T.A. Sherkova (2019), L.A. Voloshina (2023), V.G. Artemov and Y.V. Filippova (2008).

This feeling of freedom in conveying one's own feelings from the world gripped the artists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The desire for novelty and the search for new forms in art is not the only reason. A new aesthetic could not have been born only as a result of an experiment, even a very competent one. There was a sense of extraordinary uplift, going beyond the limits of his time, associated with a comprehensive interest in traditional art. It could also be a search for foundations, when a person lacks something stable to rely on, when the whole world around him is unstable and unpredictable. Several studies embodying these arguments about the new aesthetics, as a reflection of their worldview, were left by the artists and thinkers of this period: N.S. Goncharova and M.F. Larionov (2001), I.I. Kandinsky (1918; 2001), I.V. Klyun (1999), V.I. Markov (1912), by A.N. Benois (1998).

The experience of the archetype is filled with the oral folk art of Russia. This is incredibly close to us in a fairy tale that preserves unsolved information about our pagan ancestors. But even in this unsolved content, the fairy tale affects us with its mysterious power, which embodies the idea of our ancient relatives about the world, nature, and that magical side of reality that we almost forgot about in the 21<sup>st</sup> man-made century. A lot has been written about the Russian fairy tale, and the works of famous folklore scientists were used in this work: A.A. Potebnya (2016), V.Y. Propp (2023), E.N. Trubetskoy (1998). Some modern artists reveal this magic with exceptional flair in their works today.

## Results

### Existentialism in Russian Culture as a Problem of Choosing a Path

Existentialism as a worldview is not only a philosophical topic. This is a very important issue of culture in general, which is considered in the context of various reflections. How can a person best express the feelings of himself in being? It is precisely the arts and literature that provide such an opportunity to express the inexpressible. Existentialism as a philosophical trend appeared in Russia relatively recently, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its appearance can be attributed to the fact that people began to increasingly turn to their inner mental and spiritual world in search of answers to eternal questions. This is also due to the weakening of faith, when the Holy Scriptures and church preaching have lost their full-fledged and indisputable character in human minds. The spread of Western enlightenment ideas in Russia and the appearance of the first philosophical teachings contributed to the fact that human thought began to rely more and more on reason and science. All these phenomena of cultural life played an essential role in the life of literature, which gained a new meaning in existentialism. Literature and philosophy have taken the leading positions about religion for the preaching of new knowledge. The main question remained the same – “what is the meaning of human life,” but the lines of thought were divided. One path was connected with the search for truth in God, the other was to distance man from God. “The optics of faith and trust, on the one hand, and the optics of disbelief, skepticism, doubt, and suspicion, on the other, either opened up the resources of the Biblical-Christian spiritual experience to a creative person or blocked access to them.” (Bachinin, 2012)

It is in this division that the two lines that are connected with the Russian idea originate. This article is about how this was reflected in Russian culture, as it manifested in its spiritual body. Russian literature lovers can see how this separation took place in the Russian

consciousness, when a part of the intelligentsia, believing in the ideals of Enlightenment, broke away from God, and, consequently, from the Russian soil, in a speech by F.M. Dostoevsky, delivered on June 8, 1880, at the Society of Lovers of Russian Literature. In Pushkin's works, Dostoevsky saw this clearly defined image of a "Russian Wanderer" in his native land. "These Russian homeless wanderers continue their wanderings to this day and it seems they will not disappear for a long time. And if they do not go to gypsy camps in our time to seek their world ideals from Gypsies in their wild, peculiar way of life and to calm down in the bosom of nature from the confusing and ridiculous life of our Russian-intelligent society, they still fall into socialism, which did not exist under Aleko, they go with a new faith to another field. and they work on it zealously, believing, like Aleko, that in their fantastic efforts they will achieve their goals and happiness for themselves and the world." (*Dostoevsky, 2010*) And in their search for the truth, they cannot understand that the truth must be sought within themselves. "For behold, the kingdom of God is within you." [Gospel of Luke, Acts 17:20-21]

Pushkin started this gallery of artistic images of unfortunate wanderers who had broken away from their roots: Aleko, Onegin, Pechorin, Rudin, Raskolnikov, Ivan Karamazov. In the literature of the Silver Age, the theme of a wanderer in his native land sounds especially acute in the works of A. Blok, S. Yesenin, M. Tsvetaeva and others. When the feeling of the elements engulfing Russia was unusually strong, people of art and literature felt how lacking this solid ground was under their feet. This ground is connected with such a concept as conciliarity, which at first glance opposes individual consciousness. However, this is only a superficial view. For some artists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, this concept was associated with theurgy.

In modern culture, this existential-anthropological type is found in the books of Viktor Pelevin, Venedikt Yerofeyev, Sergey Dovlatov. In the lyrics of modern rock musicians, this man lives, and he has lost the feeling of belonging to his land and his family. There is another story about the unwillingness to belong to this community, but simultaneously, the image of a wanderer remains. The image of the so-called prodigal son is very common in Russian culture. It can be repeated several times, being revived in modern plots. "The story of the prodigal son remains of lasting importance for all times and peoples. In its light, any kind of spiritual wandering, spiritual restlessness and unchastity look like punishment for lack of faith, God-defying behaviour, and God-fighting activities." (*Bachinin, 2012*).

Speaking about the uniqueness of Russian existentialism, first of all, they mean its religious character, fusion with Orthodox consciousness, and appeal to the divine. In Russian existentialism, God always exists. How is it possible to combine tangible reality and the invisible divine world in one's worldview? This is a combination of two contradictory types of consciousness in the thinking of a Russian person: existential and mythological. This is possible with the ability to see through the thickness of existence. The world is a transparency through which the higher reality shines, which is reflected in art. This is due to eschatological thinking. It is a mindset that unites everyone in God's Kingdom while preserving the value of each individual. Such a view of human life in society is associated with the concept of "conciliarity." A person does not feel lonely, feeling spiritual unity with the entire Christian world. This eliminates the contradiction that presents the idea of conciliarity as a danger to individuality at first glance. We see, in fact, the exact coincidence with the unity of people in existence, which is revealed to us in existence. "The unity and value of personality does not exist without a spiritual

principle.” (*Berdyayev, 1993, p. 64*) “I” presupposes other personalities and communication between them. The isolation of a personality in itself leads to its demise. A person is connected with society and his family, but simultaneously, he is individual and free.

“The generic is not conciliar. Everything related to gender is also related to the collective unconscious. Christianity will give a person freedom from this dependence. However, the unconscious area in a person turns out to be just as important as the light, conscious one. This is the eternal struggle between Apollonian and Dionysian. Berdyayev correlates this elemental essence in man with meonic freedom. There will always be a human attraction to the cosmic primordial, to the sources of creative energy.” (*Berdyayev, 1993, p. 69*) It is the unity of the spontaneous and the rational, male and female in a man split by original sin. “The archaic violent sexual element, male and female, rages in man, it is not defeated by civilisation, but is only driven into the unconscious.” (*Berdyayev, 1993, p. 71*) The energy of sex can pass from generative to creative. There is a lot of unconsciousness in a person. Each of us lives not only as a man of modern civilisation, but also as an archaic man.

Existentialism on Russian soil has its own peculiarities, expressed in its bifurcation into two vectors: one is associated with the search for truth in God, the other, on the contrary, with distance from God. Russian thought lies in this division of the main question, which has remained relevant in our time – about the independent path of Russia, which in the history of Russian thought is considered a Russian idea. The theme of wandering in the native land is clearly visible in Russian culture. The wanderer, as a being torn from his native soil, always dissatisfied with neither the surrounding reality nor himself, received an expressive appearance in Russian literature. What is happening here is what can be called distrust of the generic. In the light of Christianity, the connection with the clan received a different meaning, in which the people united in the spiritual space of a single faith. Everything related to gender is related to the collective unconscious. This is how the history of mankind began, and this connection originates in the depths of history.

### **Archetypes and the Theme of Experiencing Fear in Traditional Russian Culture**

The conscious area in a person belongs to the personality; it helps one relate to others. The life of the unconscious finds its expression in symbols, which are nothing but creations of myth. The unconscious is associated with the dark side of a person, with lower instincts, but at the same time, it is also a source of creative energy. “Creative intent and inspiration, creative intuition always has its primary basis in the unconscious or superconscious.” (*Berdyayev, 1993, p. 78*) The superconscious in man is connected with God, with his ability to experience the world eschatologically. Creativity arises from the depths of freedom given to man, from the realm of the unconscious, to find imagery in the real world. At the same time, the unconscious is suppressed by consciousness, because it is impossible to bring the rational into the unconscious.

A person’s experience of an unconscious fear is associated with the area of the unconscious. Christianity provides an opportunity to rid human consciousness of fear. However, there is an archetypal fear, its presence in a person is a kind of form of protection. Archetypes are complexes of experiences that fall on us like fate. Their influence is felt in the most intimate part of our lives. Obviously, the Slavs embodied everything they feared and disliked in harmful mythical creatures. Myths were not only a reflection of the worldview of the ancient Slavs but also an

attempt to protect yourself and give an explanation for the incomprehensible. Having received a verbal, and even more so a visual appearance, something frightening and inexplicable was already losing its novelty and intimidation, and it did not seem so scary. We can talk about mythical creatures as rather persistent images of consciousness of Slavs and modern man. As for the creatures unfriendly to humans, it turns out they embody everything contrary to human nature. The instinct of fear is embedded in us almost at the genetic level, since the fear of death or sexual taboos existed in prehistoric times and were necessary for human survival. The confrontation of the Russian hero with the evil mythical creature manifests the struggle of natural viable human instincts with fear, death, and everything that leads to it. This type of creature is quite detailed in fairy tales. The description of the unpleasant details of the creature contained all the unnaturalness of their appearance, which combined the incompatible, representing something repulsive.

The worldview of the ancient Slavs included two opposite poles: forces of evil and forces of good. The third component was the person himself, making sacrifices and producing spells. The source of information about the world of evil is the preserved monuments of ancient Russian literature, in particular, the “Word about Idols.” Associated with the fear of death was the fear of people from the world of the dead. The so-called navyas are creatures, which are hostile to man, not just dead, but those who died unbaptised. The most archaic stage corresponds to the sacrifice of vampires and goddesses and nature’s evil and good spirits. Zelenin very clearly divided the ancient Russian ideas about the dead into two polar, opposing categories: on the one hand, the deceased generations of their ancestors (grandfathers, dziady) are the patrons and defenders of the living, and on the other, the “dead,” the “mortgaged dead,” ghouls who harm living people. The concept of “malicious undead” is probably very close to the ancient Russian “navyas,” the evil dead flying in the night winds and killing people; a real sacrifice to the harmful dead, about which the author of the “Words about Idols” of the 12<sup>th</sup> century said that in ancient times the Slavs “trebs laid for ghouls...” (*Rybakov, 2013*).

Evil lurked everywhere for our ancient ancestor; the whole of nature was filled with it. The accumulator of evil could be not only the forest as a whole, a particular tree, and even a part of it. Therefore, the plot is quite detailed and provides information on eradicating evil in the tree and its parts. “Evil can threaten from anywhere, the source of malignity can be any object, any person, any “dashing look” from the window, from behind the back, from under the gate or through a crack in the hut. The carriers of evil are the winds of all directions, all the “seventy-seven winds,” noon and midnight. The power of ghouls is devoid of anthropomorphism. The emanation of evil comes from ghouls, but the evil force itself, carried by the winds, is formless, incorporeal and invisible” (*Rybakov B.A., 2013, p. 152*). Many traces of these views are preserved in rituals, in folk costume (headdresses: horns, magpie, kichka, kokoshnik), in round dances and games. Incantations reflected archaic animistic ideas about the ubiquity, complete dissolution in nature of dangerous, hostile forces for humans. In folk folklore, these images of evil have developed into a kind of bestiary. Over time, they acquired visual features. We can see images of these creatures on household utensils and jewelry in the form of small sculptural images (*Figure 1*), but not only in the home environment. It is enough to recall the Dmitrievsky Cathedral in Vladimir, an architectural monument of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, whose facades are decorated with images of mythical creatures in addition to plant and animal ornaments. Griffins and kitovrases

can be seen on the walls (*Figure 2*). Of course, the decoration here correlates with the biblical story, but the monsters are presented precisely as they can be seen in more ancient monuments of Slavic culture.

Human consciousness is designed so that it always tries to resist chaos as something frightening, spontaneous and unclear. First religious, then cultural. This is how cultural archetypes appear, the symbolic content of artistic images. The inexplicable, frightening spontaneity of chaos was initially opposed by ritual. He was called upon to pacify the elements and restore world order through magical actions and images (*Sberkova, 2019*). For mythological consciousness, any act of creation requires overcoming some kind of chaos. This chaos in the ideas of ancient man should have taken the visible form of some kind of Chthonic monster. In ancient mythology, the dragon must be defeated as the embodiment of darkness, darkness, and death. He appears in different cultures as a universal archetype associated with the concept of chaos.

The Old Testament mentions the dragon itself in a negative context (Book of Deuteronomy, 32:33; Book of Nehemiah, 2:13; Book of Psalms, 43:20 and 90:13; Book of Jeremiah, 51:34). In the New Testament tradition, there is a complete identification of the dragon with the devil, which is clearly seen in the text of the Apocalypse (Book of Revelation, 12:3,4,7,9,13,16,17; Book of Revelation, 13:2,3,11; Book of Revelation, 16:13; 20:2). The dragon is an ontological evil that must be destroyed so that the time for “a new heaven and a new earth” will come. St. George became the most recognisable victor over the dragon in Christian culture. At the same time, it is important to emphasise that the universal image of the dragon is important not in itself, but as an element of a cosmogonic myth, the purpose of which is to transform chaos into space. For the mythological consciousness, the theme of the destruction of the darkness of the world – hydra, dragon, darkness – is an integral part of the process of cosmogony. The foundations of the universe are born and created from the destroyed chaos dragon. In other words, the described plot of “victory over chaos” can be characterised as follows: the creation of a new thing occurs through overcoming, sacrificing a particular entity, which often (but not necessarily) has hostile properties towards the subject and object of creation (*Sberkova, 2019*).

The symbol of the World Tree is also associated with the archetype of chaos. The image of the World Tree is an attempt to bring order to chaos, to find a place for each layer of the universe. At the same time, this image represents a unity in which a person and his culture are given a place. It is known about the existence of a guide between the worlds and the mythology associated with this representation. The crown of the World Tree reaches the heavens, and the roots reach the underworld. Deities live in the crown, and demonic and chthonic creatures live at the tree's roots.

Thus, culture initially represented the main harmonising force. The first rituals were aimed at harmonising chaos, the desire to bring stability, reliability, and security to the world around them. To harmonise the chaos in the images of culture, a person created the most important meanings for himself then. Many of them are lost today, and symbols associated with the archetype of chaos still live in art. They no longer possess the power they were initially endowed with, but their effect is undeniable. Otherwise, how can they explain their persistence in culture and the unflinching attention from artists, who often unknowingly fill their works with these images? For example, the vertical system of the world order is found in the paintings of Russian

spinning wheels, which are very stable and correspond to specific ideas about a three-level universe. Here we also find a rich symbolism associated with solar signs, signs of earth and water, which have always occupied a stable place in the paintings. Man correlated his worldview with what he saw, and the world stood before him as a tremendous divine dispensation. It was a world both frightening in its unknowability and awe-inspiring. A person of a pagan worldview felt himself in this world, albeit a minor component, but included in this cosmos.

The appearance of the ornament reflected a peculiar form of communication with the world of deities. The appearance of the ornament has its own prerequisites. And they are connected with a person's worldview of a particular time and place. The ornaments were associated with incantatory rituals and reveal to us through their drawings the magical, incantatory essence of objects. Firstly, they give us a reasonably complete list of requests: large and small cattle, sown fields, birds, and, secondly, they repeatedly turn to archaic women of childbirth, whose ideograms, like yeast in dough, are involved in the core of these requests, expressed in lines framing the central mythological scene. It was not enough to embroider horses, sheep horns, birds and sprouts of crops on a towel. It was necessary to give this detailed enumeration a dynamic, as if to communicate, in the imperative mood: "So be it!" The ideographs in labour, often used in ornaments, expressed this incantatory imperative: "Let everything be born!" (Rybakov, 2013) With its orderliness and ritual symbolism, the ornament also resists the chaos of the surrounding natural world, filled with obscure, inexplicable and often dangerous phenomena. This ordering value is related to the law of rhythm. The most straightforward ornamental system, the rhombic ornament, has been known since Paleolithic antiquity. It reflected man's desire to separate himself from the natural world with the help of order, which opposed chaos. An ornament is a visual representation of the biological and natural rhythms in which a person lives. Like music, ornament is a carrier of rhythm, its visual expression through graphics. In the ornament, we can see how the task of organising and reflecting the worldview of a person of a particular era was solved.

Ornament is considered a phenomenon of culture and art and a natural consequence of human observation. Nature is filled with rhythms revealed to our ancestors like a book they constantly read. The first ornamental motifs were undoubtedly seen in nature itself. Their lines and shapes refer us to the images visible to all. The ornament, in its varieties, can be finite (circle) or infinite (meander). However, any of its variations has one property also noticed in ancient times – the effect on the human psyche.

The archetypal in man is connected with the incomprehensible, with the experience of something inexpressible. This is often expressed in a feeling of inexplicable fear, precisely what scares you because it cannot be logically justified. The realm of the unconscious is a whole of mysteries. In traditional art, this chaotic fear is countered by the primary forms of culture, which include the entire system of pagan worship, as a kind of mixture of fetishism and totemism. The system of ancient rituals and rituals contained this attempt to appease and persuade deities not to harm humans. Visually, these magical actions performed by man are expressed in a system of ancient symbols. The ornament represented pictorial forms of harmonisation of unconscious chaos. These were the first human attempts to cope with the frightening reality through culture.



## **A Symbol in Traditional Art, Its Connection with Mentality**

“A people’s mentality is the deep structures of its consciousness, which are basically permanent, stable, uniting different historical epochs. The basic universal values common to all peoples in different cultures have different meanings and accents related to the mentality of these peoples. The mentality of a nation is manifested in its culture, giving it a national identity.” (*Artemov & Filippova, 2008*) Speaking of national character, we are talking about a set of “socially, historically and geographically determined psychological traits characteristic of the majority of representatives of a particular nation and to some extent manifested in the character of each representative of a given nation.”

Communality and conciliarity are precisely determined by the mentality of Russian culture, which has its characteristic integrity of worldview, eschatology. In traditional art, this motif sounds like “Unity.” The world of pagan Russia was one. This unity included, in addition to the person himself, his entire environment: family, clan, nature, and the gods. The dwelling of our ancient ancestor, with all its architectonics and aesthetics, meant inclusion in the unity of the universe, where man was at least a small particle, but consisting of this fabulous Unity. The feeling of belonging to the One is the natural way of life of a person of that time, where faith, rituals, holidays, and worldview were common. Hence, such important values of the Russian people: family, home – as a receptacle of the family and necessarily representatives of the animal world.

The theme of family, which is especially common in traditional art, reflects a particular archetype. This is precisely how it should be perceived, as an archetype of unity, which has found its expression in a particular symbol (*Figure 3*). Unity is mutual aid and strength against the enemy. The pathos of unity permeates all ancient Russian literature. In traditional art forms, the idea of unity has spread to the theme of numerous battles, where the Russian army is represented as a monolith, something merged into a single dense group. Banners with images of the Savior, the Virgin Mary, and St. George the Victorious always rise above this monolith (*Figure 4*).

The collective consciousness found its expression in a special relationship to nature, from which our forefathers did not separate. The natural world has always been alive, spiritual, and anthropomorphic. He was a part of being human. A single circle of human activity, the life of nature, and a single rhythm of life has found expression in a cycle of recurring holidays filled with deep meaning.

Unity with the natural world was also realised at the household level, when nature was perceived as a wealth that gives a person everything from food and clothing to housing and necessary household items. This love of nature, attention to it, and careful attitude have found expression in folk folklore and traditional art. This unity of nature and man was reflected not only in the subjects but also in the ancient artist’s special love for the natural texture, for the material with which he worked.

Collective consciousness, a feature of the Russian mentality, is the soul of traditional art. Without a collective, a school, as keepers of tradition, the existence of this species is impossible. Here, the collective is like parts of a single body, each necessary and individual as part of unity.

With the advent of Christianity, the pagan world receives Light, and the collective consciousness discovers individuality in its depths. Christianity is communal, but there is a place for individual consciousness. A distinctive feature of the Russian mentality is its antinomianism.

The duality of the Russian soul is most likely a consequence of this religious dualism. Russian paganism as a worldview has not been completely eliminated, it persists in the attitude of the Russian person to nature, in its spiritualisation, anthropomorphising; in beliefs and omens, Russian fairy tales and other folklore. Christianity appeals to human dignity and informs us about moral law. N.O. Lossky named, in connection with this duality, the main properties of the Russian soul: religiosity – militant atheism, the ability to higher forms of experience – rebellion; passionate willpower and maximalism – passivity; the search for higher values – nihilism, primordial kindness – unbridled cruelty, talent, tendency to self-irony – lack of self-discipline, lack of sense of proportion (*Artemov & Filippova, 2008*). This dual consciousness makes the Russian people mysterious and incomprehensible. All classical literature and art are permeated with this psychological contradiction.

The mythologised stereotypes of any nationality are significantly influenced by the initial geographical location, forming the so-called cultural landscape. “Geographical images,” says D.N. Zamyatin, “are nothing more than a unique language, the language of spatial culture, which, as it were, modifies itself depending on the place, country, region. In the visual arts of the Russian people, some symbols reflect our mentality. These are symbols of space and time associated with geographical features – length, openness, and associated with them: freedom, will, and movement. These are common ones: a road, a bird, a horse. A distinctive feature of the Russian mentality is its unique attitude to time. For Russians, the past is more important than the future. The appeal to history, the memory of historical events, is characteristic of both public and individual consciousness. Perhaps this is because our history contains many vivid emotional events that vividly resonate in the individual consciousness. This attitude to the past is also a reflection of the spirit of Christianity, when the living memory of deceased ancestors is preserved, and those whom we do not even know, who ended their lives in the past centuries. Nostalgia is typical for a Russian person (for his native places and dear childhood and youth memories). This is the merit of our entire culture, which often turns to historical subjects, emotionally enriching them. This feature indicates the presence of a living connection between a modern person and his family, that is, the importance of the collective (us) as a stable archetype. This is the merit of our entire culture, which often turns to historical subjects, emotionally enriching them. This feature indicates the presence of a living connection between a modern person and his family, that is, the importance of the collective (us) as a stable archetype.

All Russian art is humanistic in its respectful attitude towards man, its constant interest in him as an object of image, and the feeling of his presence in those genres where he is not directly depicted. A realistic manner consists of a reliable representation of reality and the fact that reality is precisely the value that inspires the artist. Even in the works of the avant-gardists, this reality, though not always visible, is nevertheless visible and guessed upon careful examination. Thus, in the art of the avant-gardists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, their attitude to form and color is connected to traditional art. This attitude to reality also shows how vivid the conciliar feeling is in the artist’s individual consciousness. The world around us is understood as a value, as that typical habitat that inspires and excites. Nature in ancient Russian literature is always involved in human life and not only as a habitat. This is an animated world of unknown forces that a person turns to and constantly interacts with. The metaphorical imagery of literary language reflects the

ability to spiritualise nature. This anthropomorphism fills any historical work with fabulousness (*Teplitskaya & Voloshina*).

In this regard, art reflects a certain mentality, of how this interpenetration of the individual and the collective occurs. The techniques of artistic thinking are related to the surrounding human being, his worldview. The environment shapes art as a cultural product, created by a person of a particular era. It is created in this way, both from the outside and from the inside, being a reflection of the psychology of the team. The mentality reflected in art is a spiritual space in which this combination of the individual and the collective, as two streams of creative energy, takes place. It is a living, changing space with which our spiritual and mental life is connected. That is why there is so much talk about mental health and its relationship with the socio-cultural environment. People create culture, and it also affects people. It reflects the psychology of the groups and strata of its time. And in fact, it reports on the state of mental health of society.

On the other hand, art can influence our mental life and preserve and reflect the basic, archetypal that lives in the recesses of our psyche. The archetype, manifesting itself in the symbol, lives in art as a kind of stability, a given. It is difficult to express, its symbolic designation cannot reflect its full depth, it can affect us subconsciously. These symbols are most often found in traditional applied art. They have changed over time, transformed with the advent of Christianity. What is invariably present in them is what is connected with man's relationship with being spiritual. This religious content of the symbol tells us how seriously and reverently our ancient ancestor treated his environment, everything that gave him life and filled it with meaning.

Thus, all the symbols filled with traditional Russian art, which continue to live in the art of our time, were not something borrowed from the outside. Their depth, connected with the collective unconscious, eventually acquired an external form, which reflected everything close and understandable to the Russian people. They reflect those features of the worldview, which are explained by the totality of social, historical, and geographical psychological features characteristic of the majority of representatives of the Russian people.

### **The Silver Age and Russian Traditional Culture (in Search of New Meanings)**

The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of an artist's heightened sense of himself as a unique, free individual. The element of freedom, the sense of impending renewal, was experienced with particular acuteness by people of art. The search for new styles, trends, and techniques was directed outside and towards oneself. It was a period of extraordinary creative intensity. That is when you begin to understand what this "meonic freedom" is, which Nikolai Berdyaev wrote about as something spontaneous, uncontrollable and at the same time very energetically saturated. According to Berdyaev, the question of freedom "is not a question of freedom in a naturalistic-psychological and pedagogical-moralistic formulation. This is a question about the fundamental basis of existence, about the fundamental basis of life." (*Berdyaev, 1994, p. 884*) This freedom can be called irrational or Dionysian, it precedes good and evil and determines the choice between them. This is freedom, "as the dark source of life, as the primary experience, the abyss that lies deeper than existence itself, and from which existence is determined." (*Berdyaev, 1994, p. 92*). According to Berdyaev, "there are three principles at work in the world – Providence, i.e., a super-worldly God, freedom, etc., i.e., the human spirit, Fate, i.e., nature, settled, hardened from meonic, dark freedom." (*Berdyaev, 1993, p. 28*). The interaction

of these three principles generates all the world's diversity and human life. The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was fanned by this wind of the elements, which permeated the work of poets and artists. It was an undoubted flowering of Russian culture in all the existential diversity of its creators. And during this period, the search for a new aesthetic, a new form, was carried out. Accordingly, the search for new grounds.

“New form” became the slogan of avant-garde art. New feelings conveyed in new art forms are the task of the supporters of this trend. From here, it can be seen that the main focus is on this new, hitherto unknown. New forms that did not exist in painting before, new feelings – feelings more refined than ordinary human ones, they do not even have a name in our language; only the artist himself knows about them with secret knowledge. The artist was faced with the task of growing up and educating himself. “An artist must have something to say to him, because his task is not to master the form, but to adapt this form to the content.” (*Kandinsky, 2001*)

In an artist, the inner voice of the important soul will tell you at the right moment what to do and how to do it. He is a priest of the “Beautiful,” and he discovers the beautiful only by having a living reference point within himself. What is beautiful is what is beautiful internally. The artist deduces this concentration on his Self from the discrepancy between the artist’s inner world and his outer life. “At a time when religion, science, and morality are shaken and when external supports threaten to collapse, a person turns his gaze away from the outside and turns it inward.” (*Kandinsky, 2001*)

The question of form has always been the main one for the artist. What is meant here is not just some updated forms, but pure forms, an object taken by itself as a first principle. To see the Divine in an object is the goal of the new art, the means to achieve the goal are the same as before – paint and form. The external, the superficial, and things in plain sight, also deserve attention, but this is not the depth. Kandinsky calls it the depth of the swamp. The inner voice of the artist thus becomes the measure of expedient creativity. The artist’s eyes “are worth turning towards his inner life, and his ear should incline towards the mouth of inner necessity.” (*Kandinsky, 2001*)

Vladimir Markov saw the source of beauty not only in form and material, but most importantly “in the recesses of the human soul itself, in the unconscious movements of the artist’s hand and thought.” (*Scales, 1905, p. 105*) Such a worldview is similar to that of a child. Markov likens the artist’s work to a child’s play, and urges him to play selflessly, ignoring the conventions of society, “all established principles, to play with the world of things, and the world of shapes, lines, colors and light.” (*Markov, 1912, p. 5*) As a result of such a game, a work should be born.

Artists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century often refer to the “childhood of the world” – primitive art. The artist’s appeal to the ancient world was not only unconscious, indicating that he was endowed with an open and direct perception of the world, like a child. This, moreover, testified to the craving that creative individuality feels for the eternal. For example, turning to primitive art in his work, Mikhail Larionov “tried to highlight the basic, immanently characteristic content of art, which does not change in it with the change of epoch, country, and artistic style.” (*Goncharova & Larionov, 2001, p. 17*)

Vasily Kandinsky wrote about the eternal in art as the main and indestructible. What the artist wanted to express as an individual worldview, and what he wanted to say as a child of the

epoch, will eventually fade and change in his work. This eternally artistic thing will sound to everyone in the work. Avant-garde art is looking for such a universal style.

In connection with universality in art, Vladimir Markov writes about the three “I” of the artist. The first Self is hidden, subconscious, individual. The second Self is also hidden but already mature, conscious, and transmitted to him atavistically. The third Self is the one interested in free creativity and represents the manifestation of the first two hidden selves. Here Markov raises the question of the collective unconscious of art and the individual Self of the artist. This is the relationship between the artist’s Self and the so-called folk soul. Each artist, being an individual, simultaneously forms a link in a single cultural chain with his work. The meaning of his work is revealed only in comparison with the art of the past. Therefore, even the most modern trends correlate with the previous world experience of art development. We see this in the increased interest of abstractionists in color and light and the Russian icon.

The avant-garde cannot be considered as a self-sufficient phenomenon that grew up on a bare spot. As time has shown, those who understood the need for continuity in art turned out to be correct. Our contemporary A.V. Rapoport writes that “the attempt of the European avant-gardists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to revive the plurality of perspective viewpoints did not lead to the revival of art but rather to anarchy, since it did not have the idea of God behind it.” (*Rapoport, 2003, p. 98*) In the vanguard, it is not the new in itself that is important, but development. An artist cannot exist without traditions. The ideas of the Russian avant-garde at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century turned out to be, for some reasons, not fully realised. Clearly, they outlined, thanks to the research of Kazimir Malevich, Vasily Kandinsky, Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, and others. artists. Modern avant-gardists must understand the need to preserve these connections within art. The study of the pictorial culture of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, visual media, allows the artist to express himself more fully. This creates an additional element in art.

In search of a new visual language, the artist of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century turns to the past. Often, this is not such a distant time. The same Vladimir Markov, for example, reflecting on texture, wrote that it is “an infinitely subtle existential quality of the shell of a created form, which allows us to consider this quality both as belonging to the world of spiritual entities and as part of a concrete, material-plastic reality.” (*Libra, 1905, p. 143*) Vladimir Markov associates this idea of texture as a part of an art form where “two worlds” converge – the real and the unreal – with the Russian icon.

The most obvious connection with the folk soul, understood precisely as the Russian soul, is felt in the work of landscape painters of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Alexander Benoit wrote about Levitan that he was a Russian artist “but Levitan is not Russian because he painted Russian motifs out of any patriotic principles, but because he understood the secret charm of Russian nature, its secret meaning, he understood only this, but in a way like no one else.” (*Benoit, 1998, p. 350*) The integrity of his painting was achieved by the ability to express the commonality in which all the small things drown. However, this commonality was so genuine and fully characterised all the components that every detail was superfluous. His realism is far from being copied from nature, he sought it out within himself, as if wanting to find a correspondence between the visible and the felt. These searches sometimes lasted for years. It is known that Isaac Levitan rewrote some of his paintings up to five times if it seemed to him that his “poetic or pictorial thought was not sufficiently purified.” (*Benoit, 1998, p. 354*)

This implies a special kind of realism, which combines artistic individuality with the Creator himself in moments of creativity. Mikhail Nesterov can also be called a realist poet. He is an artist who “not only discovers in reality the eternal beginnings of beauty and poetry, but with his whole nature breaks away from this reality, he is completely devoted to deep questions of a supernatural and supernatural order.” (*Benoit, 1998, p. 367*) Mikhail Nesterov wrote about the truth of art, saying that he likes only the truth that embodies the inner meaning of man, nature, or animals. A true artist is an individual; consequently, the artistic truth is individual. Nesterov writes that he has nothing to do with any Western movements, but sings “his own songs,” which are composed in his soul of the peculiarities of his personal life (*Benoit, 1998, p. 264*). The individuality that the artist is writing about here is precisely the one that does not think of itself in isolation from conciliarity.

Russian nature’s gut feeling is entirely at odds with what is called the “Russian style.” Alexander Benois believed this was a complete misunderstanding of the tasks of authentic art, in its own way – academicism. Such imitation was akin to barbarism due to a complete misunderstanding of his people, a rupture in the bond between the artist and the people. Only by preserving this connection within oneself can one find the language of art and make it truly a national treasure. Western and purely Russian are intricately intertwined in the modern artist. Alexander Benois explained the way out of the current difficult situation in maintaining independence, namely, freedom of expression. Russian must come from the depths of the artist’s soul (*Benoit, 1998*).

The depth of the soul is not a biological concept, but if we talk about Russian, which is stored in depth, then this implies a connection with the Christian worldview, where God is above everything. St. Ephraim the Syrian wrote that when God creates a person, he puts the whole Kingdom of Heaven into his depth. A person’s task is to strive all his life to discover him in himself. For the artist, this path of self-awareness is associated with hard work and self-overcoming.

Has realism been completely abandoned behind all these searches for new ways? Of course not, because realism can also change and evolve according to a change in a person’s view of the world around them. At that moment in the history of Russian art, realism gained a new angle of view, thanks to the subjectivism that was emerging at that time, which realist artists did not attach importance to. Igor Grabar writes that this was a viewpoint that allowed us to see that there is another way of drawing, one that conveys impressions not because all the details of the painting are processed to the smallest detail, but because in places the work is unfinished, unsaid. The artists realised that completeness takes something away from the work, namely, freedom of expression, which can disregard conventions and allow looking at nature more simply and naturally. Claude Manet showed then that there is not only the truth of reality, but also the subjective truth, the only basis of which is the artist’s inner world, the truth of his feelings (*Matz & Yavorskaya, 1969, p. 35*).

An illustrative example is Pavel Filonov, whose work some of our contemporaries call classicism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (because of its special solemnity). All of Filonov’s teaching was reduced to introspection, aimed at self-awareness of the hidden, deep. With a brush in his hands, he analysed Existence, revealing its tragic background. In his opinion, a realist could only be

called someone who does not look away. The picture reflects the state of a person comprehending the world.

In the life of art, there finally comes a moment when the artist's inner world begins to overshadow the outer world, and he transmits not so much from nature as from himself. We observe this eclipse in full measure among the artists of non-objective art. After Futurism crushed and mixed the world of things in search of expression and movement, the field of art was cleared of obsolete poses, faces, objects and "other plot rubbish." (*Klyun, 1999, p. 253*) Then art became itself, an end in itself. It recognised its own form and beauty, which follows only from the properties of the elements appropriate to it, in painting these are the properties of color. Art began to be understood as the creative principle of the artist. It has nothing to do with the personal emotional experiences of the artist, which he tried to embody in the painting until recently. The master practically does not devote any space to the elements of reason, meaning, and feeling. There is no longer a "language of art" in which the artist talks about his impressions; instead, there is an independent art of sound, colour, and volume.

If in the work of realist artists, individuality, striving for the highest, still did not completely break ties with the material world. In the work of the avant-gardists, we see an attempt to dissolve into art. This is an attempt to find such pictorial forms that would no longer serve as a means of reflecting the artist's personal feelings and experiences, but would represent this very individuality in a single cycle of the universe, so to speak, individuality in its purest form. It was a search for the first principles, an appeal to his unconscious. The rejection of imagery was an attempt to convey this unconscious, inexpressible through the properties of painting.

During the period under review, it was natural to turn to tradition. The world around them was unstable and undefined, the old art could not reflect the artists' existential experiences, and what was happening was what should happen at such a moment – an appeal to one's own depth. And this depth was understood by many as the source, the beginning of art. Therefore, there was interest not only in traditional Russian art but also in the cultures of other nations. The important thing here is that the way out in a critical situation was found in this way, in an appeal to one's unconscious, in an appeal to the universal. The artists and poets of the Silver Age solved their artistic tasks here; they relied on their experience and developed their style, but at the same time, they wanted to put something solid and stable in time. For those who relied on their own religious experience, a way out was found and a creative path was formed.

The artist of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was close to the symbolism of ancient Russian art. Many of them resorted to the subjects of the Holy Scriptures, correlating them with the present day, giving them new outlines and deepening their meanings. This required an excellent knowledge not only of the Scriptures themselves, but also of ancient Russian painting. It was interesting and peculiar that Natalia Goncharova had this appeal. In search of decorativeness and monumentality, she turns to evangelical characters. Her images of the evangelists and the Virgin Mary preserve little of the iconographic tradition. Here we see deliberately coarsened, stylised iconographic images. The evangelists, with their rough faces and big feet planted firmly on the ground, resemble ordinary peasants in their appearance. The artist used this coarseness of primitive art as a logically chosen technique to communicate the monumentality and inner significance of images (*Figure 5*). Similar reworkings of the experience of ancient icon painters are found in the works of Vladimir Tatlin, in which he proceeds from

the principle of the internal construction of the image, through the “iconicity” of the face, which Tatlin chose as an expressive means to convey the significance of the human image.

Pavel Filonov, a master of analytical art, also used gospel themes in his works. They are given in relation to modernity and compositionally resemble their iconographic patterns. The artist combined modernity and eternity in his works. His images are characters from an ancient myth. At the same time, Filonov himself creates a new myth, resorting to image analysis, filling it with an existential feeling. Decomposing the world into its component elements, he creates new images of the world filled with tragedy and symbolism. The mystery of the archetype on his canvases unfolds before our eyes.

The symbolism of ancient Russian art was revealed to artists through images and subjects and through color and light, which were deeply symbolic. Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin is building a new painting system, turning to the ancient Russian iconographic tradition in search of new painting solutions. Serious work with nature, which preceded the creation of a particular painting, included studying traditional Russian painting. The artist focused his attention on the search for an intense colour scheme, on the generalisation of lines, referring to the most ancient iconographic patterns. He was interested in colour and shape – in their complementarity and consistency.

We see in his works this brightness, this aesthetic admiration of colour in its entirety. The bright local colors, the flatness, and the completeness of the composition are all reminiscent of an ancient Russian icon. In his works such as “Mother,” “St. Petersburg Madonna,” and “Bathing the Red Horse,” this influence of the icon is felt directly. To this feeling, we must add a special feeling that these works of the artist share with the icon – a feeling of silence, detachment. This feeling is significantly intensified in the faces of Petrov-Vodkin’s characters, whose gaze is turned inward. The artist’s individuality, in search of inspiration and a new artistic language, turning to traditional art, seeks to enrich his painting with it, give depth to modern subjects, and fill them with new content.

Nicholas Roerich believed that the Russian icon with its sonorous colors, generalisation of images, and decorative art was very in tune with modern art and aesthetics of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The paintings of ancient Russian temples aroused in him this admiration for the aesthetics of colour, light, and ornaments. Roerich was fascinated by the decorative nature of church art in synthesis with monumentality, which was reflected in the frescoes and mosaics he created. Here his deep knowledge of the principles of compositional construction of icons was revealed. However, in search of a synthesis that would meet Roerich’s needs as an artist and individual, he resorted to using symbols similar in spirit to medieval ones. Often, in iconographic works, the artist defeated the philosopher, so fascinated were his coloristic tasks. Decorativeness prevailed over canonicity in his works on religious subjects.

Not only was the ancient Russian icon a source of inspiration for many artists of the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but also folk art. It was attractive for its shapes, color, decorativeness and, of course, the freedom not in professional art. This is the freedom of compositional solutions in conveying scales and plans. In this art, it is possible to stop time in its course, showing simultaneously different time scales, such as in a hagiographic icon. This art, which is not constrained by the rules of perspective, proceeds from the concept of the entire universe, which is reflected in miniature on the plane of the painting. This freedom from



conventions, decorativism, the mood of fairy tales, fantasies – everything was attractive to artists in search of new non-academic forms in art. They were interested in the primitive as an aesthetic form.

The primitive, metaphor, brutality, fabulousness, mythologism, and grotesqueness, became a source of new aesthetics in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The primitive played an important role in the works of Marc Chagall, Mikhail Larionov, Natalia Goncharova, Ilya Mashkov, Pyotr Konchalovsky. Mikhail Larionov defined primitive culture as a splint in the broadest sense of the word. Art was like an exciting game. The game is a feeling of childhood when it is attractive for its naturalness and freedom of self-expression. This, of course, is also the fabulousness that is so noticeable in the work of Aristarchus Lentulov. For him, the artist's self-determination was connected with the saturation of his works with the national spirit. His interest was Russian architecture, which he interpreted in a new cubo-futurist manner. He was brought closer to Russian traditional art by his individual perception of the world “exclusively through color and light.” The expressiveness of the writing corresponds to the very character of the artist. Lentulov's work is a search that reflects various influences, reinterpreted, driven by personal interest, individual worldview. The artist combined elements of Cubism, the colorful riot of Fauvism and expressionism of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the polychrome of traditional Russian art.

The completion of Aristarchus Lentulov's creative quest was the works “Moscow” and “Basil the Blessed,” presented at the exhibition in 1914. Here the artist focuses on the national pre-Petrine folklore and lubok. Architecture for him represents the image of the universe. A new world is being born, new imaginative associations are being added. The songfulness and fabulousness of folk art are contained in the composition of the work itself. In the painting “Ringing,” the composition is built in the form of semicircles of colored waves, similar to sound waves (*Figure 6*). The “Firmament” and the “Towers of the New Jerusalem Monastery” are like a fairy tale that arose from colorful buildings. The artist was inspired by the ancient Russian icons of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and frescoes with their festive finery.

The aestheticism and decorativism of traditional art reflected the aesthetic views of avant-garde artists. Imperfection, roughness of form, locality of colour, flatness of image – they successfully used folk art elements in their works. The artist's creative personality undoubtedly felt this spirit of tradition, its powerful, emotional beauty, and poetics. But was this process of learning traditional art so deep as to understand the true meaning of folk art, the soul of the people contained in these objects of their life and at the same time aesthetic environment? The national artist, creating his uncomplicated work, expressed himself as a particle of Unity. This Unity was the world around them, alive, breathing, full of mysteries and myths. It was the worldview of a man whose worldview was paganism. Every shape, element of ornament, colour was subordinated to a single harmony, everything followed from this mutual connection of man and nature, man and faith. It was not art for art's sake, but an environment that would become art only years and centuries later.

Aesthetic generalisation, the expression of line and color, and the flatness of composition were discovered by artists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as new painting tools. These techniques were successfully found and later used for the tasks of the new art. The creative personality undoubtedly felt this spirit of tradition, its powerful emotional elemental beauty, and its poetics,

and was inspired by them. In search of perfection, she intuitively found the best, high-quality, something beyond time's control. This best was found in traditional art.

Of course, the artists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century did not set themselves the task of comprehending the full depth of traditional Russian art. Their research was in the direction of searching for new artistic forms and new aesthetics. The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of unprecedented emotional uplift. Interest in tradition encompassed all cultural spheres: theater, painting, graphics, architecture. Entire historical complexes were created to recreate the picture of life in old Russia.

For example, this purely artistic approach is noticeable in its appeal to iconographic heritage. The icon could be interesting for its colour, decorativeness, content, or mood. But these qualities, taken separately, could not fully reflect her true spirit – otherworldliness, asceticism, silence. It was not an interest in the Russian icon itself as a phenomenon. It was important for the artist to put meaning into the icon, correlated with his worldview and individual creative manner. This is understandable; the creative personality of the artist of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was different from that of the icon painter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, we see, even in the iconographic works of such artists as Mikhail Vrubel, Mikhail Nesterov, Nicholas Roerich, who seriously studied ancient Russian art, a departure from the canon, or rather, a reflection of their inner understanding of the image.

The same can be said about the attitude towards folk art, when the artist admired this antique thing, its aesthetics, but did not perceive it, of course, as an ancient master. This attitude toward traditional art was not a study in the complete sense of the word; it was not a science. The artists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century did not set goals for themselves that would later be set by the theorists of Russian traditional art. But it was the painters who started these studies, many of whom were seriously engaged in the study of traditional Russian culture, among them were the first collectors (Alexander Bilibin, Alexander Benois, Natalia Goncharova, Mikhail Larionov).

However, it is safe to say that the avant-gardism of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is not only evidence of a creative upsurge but a search for ways to improve artists' individuality. This is a testament to their skill, inexhaustible hard work, even dedication. Their research on Russian art was profound and meaningful. Otherwise, there would not have been that inspired, fruitful process, which resulted in their numerous works. It was the acquisition of new knowledge that helped him to look at his purpose as an artist. Kandinsky wrote in his book "Steps" about one of his trips to Vologda province: "... It was in these extraordinary huts that I first encountered the miracle that later became one of the elements of my work. Here, I learned not to look at the painting from the outside but to rotate in the painting myself and live in it. Since then, this feeling has lived in me unconsciously, although I experienced it in Moscow churches, especially in the Assumption Cathedral and St. Basil's Cathedral." (*Kandinsky, 1918*)

Thus, the artists of the Russian avant-garde of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century found a new synthesis in their appeal to traditional art, which corresponded to their inner searches. European Cubism, Impressionism, and modernism, along with their new aesthetics, proved insufficient for the creative individuality of the Russian artist to express itself. They lacked their own, primordial, to revive their canvases, namely – the Russian spirit.

## **The Life of Tradition in the Art of Contemporary Artists (in the Context of Existential Experiences)**

Traditional art, including ancient monuments and works by modern masters, is a separate world containing countless precious meanings that still nourish our entire Russian culture. And these meanings are especially valuable because they have passed the test of time. They are valuable for the healing content that our contemporaries lack in their existence. These are the eternal values that each person needs to focus on in their individual lives in order to preserve the life of all mankind. It is traditional folk art that preserves its foundations and preserves this necessary knowledge for us. In general, this knowledge can be attributed to the field of moral life. However, man still creates moral law, caused by social necessity. It can be misunderstood, forgotten, distorted, or rejected if it is not internalised until it becomes the content of your Self. This law must be learned at the genetic level, passed from grandfather to father, from father to son, without interruption. And where can we find such continuity now? Only in the field of human spiritual life. This area of human activity is related to its religious and cultural spheres. Unfortunately, religious faith is not open to everyone as a living feeling. Different people create culture and do not always contain true spirituality, contributing to human growth.

The crafts that preserve the most important foundations, not only of craftsmanship, but also of spirituality, are still alive in traditional art. Preserving tradition only in its visible forms, without understanding the essence of the most important idea, leads to such a phenomenon in art as kitsch. It can be said that Russian traditional culture is based on such “pillars” as love for native nature, a deep connection with it, and commitment to school, since it is school that helps preserve one or another craft. And of course, the religious basis is important in traditional art. Here we are talking not only about the Christian religion, but also about that pagan echo that always lives in the recesses of our unconscious. In traditional art, this is clearly expressed through pagan symbols, attraction to myth, fairy tale, allegory. In this work, the task of describing folk crafts is not set. The emphasis is on showing how this tradition lives in the world of art, including modern art, and its connection with existentialism. After all, art is not only an artist’s field of activity, it also implies the recipient’s activity. In both cases, this is due to the impact on a person’s personality and intention.

Perceiving works of traditional art, a person unconsciously receives in them something that, in general, has very important information for him. This is primarily aesthetic information. Folk art is valuable to us for its purity and integrity, which the individual does not dominate. In this sense, it does not suppress us or force us to reflect intensely, but enters our consciousness in the purity of its form and content, naturally, as in children’s perception. This influence is exerted on us not only by the product’s shape, which constantly strives for naturalness and expediency in folk art, but also by the color in its bright natural purity. This ornament brings us closer to nature and its rhythms, and the beauty of a symbol that has lived in art for centuries and has been familiar to us since childhood. This is also a natural material, lovingly and competently designed by the artist. And this is what concerns the aesthetics of handicrafts. However, there is also humanistic content, as it is not evil, harmful, or immoral. It contains all the charm of the magical, which is necessary for any person, both child and adult.

Fine art has always reflected the spirit of its time. We can use it to judge our history and the life of our people. However, the work has always reflected the artist’s inner life at the same time.

And this story, which is not so open to the eye, can sometimes tell more than the first one, which is the representative side of the picture. It contains the actual experiences, worldviews and preferences of a person of a particular era, where one reads what is impossible to read in textbooks through his individual story. This implicit, meanwhile, is of great importance for posterity because it contains something alive, familiar, important, something that all our generations have in common.

There have been many troubled times in the history of Russia when people felt their environment as dangerous, unstable, and incomprehensible. His existence sought the foundations one always wants to rely on in times of danger. We can feel and even see such a search in works of art when we carefully examine them. Painting speaks to us in a unique language: colors and shapes, compositions, artistic images. It contains something close to our soul, because it is sensual. And through the soul, an artistic image can, thanks to symbols, unfold in our spiritual body. These opportunities to influence our spirit through feelings are valuable things we acquire through art. The Gospel myth is not as remote from us as the myths of the ancient Slavs, but it also contains what we can call the collective unconscious. In this case, it would be correct to say that it is not the unconscious but the superconscious. This feeling of the divine presence always lives in a person. It was only in pagan times that this was connected with the natural world, and with the advent of Christianity, with the sense of God as one's own inner content.

The Virgin Mary theme is quite common in 21<sup>st</sup> century art and is interpreted in the context of the artist's modern worldview. The vitality of the Virgin plots fills the modern world of painting with a religious feeling. The appeal to the Virgin in the painting reflects the artist's peculiar perception of Her: as an earthly woman who feels and suffers on an equal basis with us and as the Virgin (in her iconographic interpretation). Nikolai Kolupaev's painting "Luka" does not immediately reveal the plot's connection with the gospel story, as the characters presented here do not look like the Virgin and Child (*Figure 7*). A young peasant woman with rough features and overworked hands holds a chubby, snub-nosed baby in her arms. The mother's gaze is drawn to the icon, which the artist holds in monastic attire – Luke. Someone may not know that the Evangelist Luke painted the first icons of the Virgin. However, even ignorance of this story does not deprive the picture of special solemnity. Everything in it is concise, clear, thoughtful and expressive, like the baby's gaze directed at the viewer.

For example, in the painting "House" by the young artist Natalia Bobrova, we see an appeal to the theme of Christmas (*Figure 8*). This is narrated by the central part of the triptych, which depicts a young mother with a baby in her arms. This theme is immediately read in the familiar color of her clothes and the solemn stillness of the figures surrounding her. The interesting thing about the painting is that Natalia Bobrova has transferred the traditional plot to our days, and the surrounding people depicted on the sides of the triptych are apparently residents of a particular village, possibly familiar to the artist herself. This attempt to understand and feel the atmosphere of the mystery of the gospel story, combining it with the realities of our time, informs about the importance of this ancient, mythological event. Most importantly, it informs us about its significance for the artist himself.

In some works, some symbols also awaken the viewer the feeling of something more profound and more significant than it might seem at first glance. Among such symbols is the

cross, which is sometimes presented not explicitly, but as if veiled. Oleg Ildyukov's work "The Soul Is Wide Open" is made in gray gradations (*Figure 9*). The main character here is a scarecrow in a wasteland in a lifeless, windswept space. The wind tears at his old clothes, exposing the skeleton on which they are worn. It is a cross. And despite the rather frivolous name, the work makes a strong impression. And this, of course, is due to the action of the symbol. A cross rising in an open field, on either side of which, at some distance, there are two poles with broken wires, resembles a famous gospel scene. The scarecrow itself always correlates with our understanding of a person, so to speak, it is used for this purpose.

And in Alexey Kupreichenko's work "Glass/Vessel," the cross is the crosspiece of the window (*Figure 10*). Thanks to this symbol, the painting goes beyond the boundaries of an acute social context into the space of the history of all mankind, where a sacrifice was made for each of us on the cross. However, as before, vice takes over the world and boxes of empty bottles gradually block the window. And the window itself, which still shows residential areas, is not as simple as it seems at first glance. From the upper right corner, where the glass is broken, blackness is already creeping into this illusory world, blocked by a lattice (*Voloshina, 2023*).

The symbol's life continues. It can take on new meanings, combine old and new readings. This may be due to the emergence of a new religion, such as what happened to some pagan symbols with the advent of Christianity. They can change in the mind of an individual artist, gaining a new meaning concerning his existentiality. Many famous symbols have been read in a new way by some artists and have taken root in their work precisely in this new interpretation. In modern artists' works, symbols are often important for individual and collective consciousness. These symbols, associated with the feeling of "native" in us: home, family, native nature, have a value coloring.

A house with all the attributes of comfort, a stove, a samovar, a patchwork quilt, children, toys, and pets are often found in modern painting. It is wrong to perceive such topics as some kind of frivolous plots. All these are symbols of that stable, beloved world, which becomes especially desirable and beautiful for us in those moments when something threatens it. In general, the house itself, as a rule, is a village hut, and it often acts in the picture as such a symbol. A unique attitude towards such subjects as images of our memories can explain this love for the depiction of ancient buildings. Here, we can also enjoy the beauty of the texture, such as the cracked wood of old buildings. We admire the beauty of the historical ruins, ancient buildings, the sagging hedge overgrown with willow tea. In the old days, there was a unique charm of passing away as something whole. It has already ended and filled up. It is full of its own history and inner content. It is also full of the archetypal content that the word "home" evokes in each of us. This is a concept that contains a lot more than what can be called. This is the environment that nurtures a person from the cradle. In it, he comprehends life and fills it with himself and his loved ones. In the old days, houses had a long history. More than one generation could have been born and died on the same bed. And grandfathers and great-grandfathers gathered at the standard table. The house is a small existential environment, the closest and most understandable. And this is also the point of such frequent depictions of old houses in painting (*Figure 11*).

The predominance of motives for a peaceful, generally serene life in modern art seems to be a kind of search for some kind of foundations, which you always look for in moments of

insecurity, existential discomfort. Numerous references to natural motifs and native symbols attest to this. In the landscape, these are usually favorite places that the artist invites us to admire. But there are special landscapes with a tangible tradition associated with the desire to present the native landscape as an image of a great, boundless, spiritual space. This is due to the peculiarities of perspective construction, for example, in the Russian landscape, a high point of view was often used, which made it possible to cover a large area with a glance. This desire to show extent is connected with the task of giving the image not a momentary concrete character, but to endow it with some kind of planetarity. Such a desire of the artist is connected with a sense of the importance of the depicted, even if it is an ordinary plot, as in the painting by the modern artist Alexei Shanin “The Expanse” (*Figure 12*).

Anatoly Rybkin’s painting “Snow on the Head. A Russian Man” is one of the works that stop our running and set us up for a unique rhythm (*Figure 13*). In the work, not only the plot sounds symbolically, but also the color. The door is always associated with some kind of passage. It symbolises the connection between two worlds: the one I currently belong to and the one that opens to me outside the door. In Rybkin’s painting, a man opens a door into a space of blinding white light. One can only speculate whether the painting represents the change of seasons or whether it is a transition to another level. The man is still on the threshold, he has not stepped out the door, and we see this world in which the signs of everything physical are still visible: the texture of the wooden door itself, covered with moss and rare plants. The guy is still here, but he is already halfway into the space that opens behind the door, like something blindingly white. His head is also covered with this whiteness. The painting gives two readings. For some, it is just the snow of a sudden winter. However, for someone, this is a character’s experience of a state of transition, or a premonition of a transition to another world. This reading is connected with a certain symbolism and, in general, with the feeling of something mysterious, unclear, some kind of solemn silence in the painting.

Everything that fills these artistic worlds is nothing more than a solution, first of all, to the most important questions for oneself: about life, death, love, and the meaning of being. All inner anxieties are expressed in visual art, not always at the expense of a dramatic plot or an expressive manner. Most often, this appeal to your deepest feelings does not always occur consciously, intuitively. Accustomed to stereotypes, our mind cannot always answer something that defies any logic. Art allows us to perceive freely and creatively, involving not only our consciousness, but even the subconscious and unconscious areas in us.

Some artists turn to traditional art in order to vent their unconscious. The element of fabulousness is very common in modern art. And this is not only because the artist is predisposed to such a worldview. The mythical consciousness is very much alive in us. This is manifested in art and literature in the form of figurative, metaphorical language, in the form of rich symbolism, which is sometimes not always consciously used. The desire to see a different story behind the real is connected not only with a rich fiction. This is also due to the spontaneous unconscious, which is looking for its way out. And the artist is looking for a form and means of expressing this elemental principle. This is how works often related to pagan themes appear. There are many of them, but not all of them are related to the deep content implied here. These are not the artists who are attracted to the pagan theme as an expressive plot, and not those who turn to the historical theme.

In fact, here we are talking about the feeling of oneself in one's own being. Apparently, the artist needs this appeal to the traditional to understand himself, and, consequently, to find his way in art. This happened with the artists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when individuality conceptualised its existence as a dynamic process related to the search. The search was carried out not so much by external signs as by internal correspondence. A circle of artists deliberately seeks their themes in paganism, as a distant, obscure time, but very attractive inwardly. For example, the works of the modern painter Oleg Gurenkov can be cited. The artist consciously turns to the theme of paganism. He studies literature and artifacts. Talking about paganism should not be frivolous. If there is an apparent historical error in the painting, or the artist's misunderstanding of the chosen subject, it turns out not to be a deep canvas, but kitsch. Gurenkov does not have this. His impressive paintings in rough-hewn carved frames represent a real world filled with those fears, creatures, and symbols that do not at all seem harmless fairy-tale characters. Here the artist managed to capture the essence, the feeling of our ancient ancestor, whose world was a whole of mythical content. Everything in the painting: the bright dense color, the symbolism, the abundance of ornaments and some mysterious creatures that are included directly in the environment of people, create this strange feeling of something surreal. The image created by the artist captivates and does not let go. However, at the same time, meanings are born only at the level of children's perception of something magical, a scary fairy tale.

Nevertheless, there is a meaning in the paintings, and at the initial stage it is present at the level of sensations. Only when you look closely do you discover its visual presence. It is about feeling extraordinarily stiff and cramped. Like it happens in a dream, when it seems to you that you are running with all your might, but at the same time something invisible holds you back and does not allow you to move. All the characters in the artist's paintings are actually very constrained. This is not only the result of a tightly constructed composition and the lack of space in the picture, where everything happens in the foreground, but also because they are really held. They are held by countless hands of fabulous creatures, monsters, or just some kind of plants wrapped around their arms and legs (*Figure 14*). In one of his works, the artist himself explains this feeling. This work is called "Angel." Gurenkov presents two worlds: one crystal-thin, shining with unearthly but not vivid colors in the image of a creature next to a boy. This character may have served as the title of the painting (*Figure 15*). However, this angel is not the messenger of God who brought the good news to people. And in the foreground, under a stole, stands a boy, all in the warm glow from burning Easter candles. It is kind of hidden, closed off from the chilling ghostly creature. He is freed from this fear. In this work, whether intentionally or not, the artist presented us with two faiths at once. And at the same time, the feeling comes from a being sparkling with cosmic radiance and from the warm calm face of a boy who, most likely, is an absolute angel. The unity of the pagan and Christian worldview is not evidence of the split consciousness of the Russian people. This is evidence of how two opposite principles get along in a person: spontaneous and harmonising, or in other words, Dionysian and Apollonian. However, this is also evidence that in the Russian consciousness paganism was able to assimilate into Christianity.

A person is very complicated, he accommodates a multitude, and if you imagine this multitude as a chaotic principle, his desire for integrity and unity becomes clear. A person is

always looking for integrity. We see this in the Christian tradition, where the connection with the whole family is preserved. We need a connection with the ancestors for whom the Church offers prayers and a meeting with whom we are promised at the Second Coming. The Canon of Repentance to the Lord says, “for come to judge the living and the dead, and all will stand in their order.” And here again the concept of “conciliarity” arises, as a single spiritual space. Of course, in the pagan worldview, the idea of unity was different, but there was unity; otherwise, our ancestors simply would not have survived alone in a world full of dangers.

Pagan consciousness can be compared to a child’s, in that it was naïve, phenomenological. The world in it is going to be a given. The “I” in him is realised as an integral part (albeit insignificant). The “I” in the modern world can resist it, question it. The human consciousness has become thinner, but simultaneously the person has distanced himself from the world, sometimes withdrawing into himself. He had lost the awe that was inherent in the pagan ancestor. The time has come when man has distinguished himself from the natural world as an individual. This is the time of Christianity. Christian consciousness will gradually take over a person, but it is impossible to destroy in him what is connected with his childhood. And if we understand paganism as the childhood of the Russian people, then, as in an individual, childhood remains in them forever in the form of memories or dreams, sometimes unclear, but very close. And this is clearly seen in Russian culture, which has preserved for the most part the images and symbols inherent in pagan culture. They have received a new interpretation, but their original, archetypal essence still affects our consciousness, even if not with the same force as before.

Turning to the work of the artist Konstantin Vasiliev, you immediately notice the presence of these two lines in it: pagan and Christian. Pagan lies on the surface. It is given in a unique figurative language: colorful, filled with pagan symbols, archaic text. The characters of his paintings emerge from the depths of the forest, like giants, resembling magi or sorcerers. However, if we consider the artist’s work as a whole, you begin to feel a unique mood of serious reflection, double meaning. This is Vasiliev’s painting “The Man with the Owl.” (*Figure 16*) In the narrow vertical format of the painting, a majestic and stern old man is placed, towering against the background of a cold sky above the forest expanses stretching beyond the horizon. His figure is interesting, resembling a tree, on top of which sits an owl with outstretched wings. The comparison with a tree comes to mind, perhaps, because from the feet of the elder, a young, thin-stemmed tree grows from where the fire is burning. However, not only does this lead to a similar analogy. In ancient symbolism, man interpreted the world order in the form of a tree. The world tree had three parts corresponding to: the underworld – the Chthonic world, the earthly – the human world, and the heavenly – the abode of the gods. In the figure of the elder, these three parts are visible. But Vasiliev places a burning candle in the place that corresponds to the human environment. This image in his works always acts as a Christian symbol, and the painting begins to acquire an additional meaning, including pagan and Christian content. However, do not forget about the cult of fire among the ancient Slavs, which has survived almost to this day. The artist, creating a visually saturated image, tries to put into it his complicated feelings of himself in being, in which these two worldviews are intertwined for him.

Pagan culture is also fascinating to a modern artist for its mysterious, mythical spirit. The time when a person saw a world full of secrets in the surrounding nature has not entirely passed, and this is seen as a confirmation of the duality of the worldview of modern man. Of course,



this is observed mainly in the artistic environment, between people who tend to endow reality with their romantic meanings. This can be seen in the abundant subjects of fine art, which appeal not only to pagan symbols but also directly create new myths. For example, in Frol Ivanov's work "The Shroud," the beauty of the winter landscape reveals to us the mysterious life of animated trees that captured the human dwelling (*Figure 17*).

The life of tradition in the works of our contemporaries comes in different versions. However, they are united by the desire to comprehend their worldview, referring to the religious worldview of their ancestors. And this is not only a Christian worldview, but also a pagan one. The artist is interested in letting the myth into the space of his artistic image. He considers the myth as something valuable and necessary for the fullness of self-expression.

### **The Theme of the Magical in Modern Art, in Connection with the Existential Predisposition of Man to the Miraculous**

Ancient myths, which once expressed the worldview of primitive people, eventually (if there were no poets who immortalised them) turned into fairy tales or laconic prose legends. Folklore is based on the oral word of the people. It is necessary to imagine the spoken word in a person's life in medieval Russia. There was a cult of the word. "Our ancestors equated the word with life itself. The word generated and explained life, for the peasant, a memory keeper and a pledge of the infinity of the future. Along with this (and maybe that is why) it comforted, helped, motivated, interceded, healed, inspired." (*Belov, 1985, p. 227*)

Russian folklore is a multigenre education. This includes, in addition to fairy tales: epics, ritual poetry, riddles, proverbs and sayings, heroic and lyrical songs, etc. Some forms of ancient Russian poetry are things of the past, such as folklore, such as lamentations. And for a medieval man, this rite was obligatory and important. Mourners, like storytellers, were often professional. Lamenting about a dead person was a kind of form of bringing grief to people so that others could share the severity of the loss. It was not so much a physical action as a spiritual one. An oral work is influenced by the general worldview inherent in the environment in which it exists. It is traditional, in that it retains the distinctive features given to it in time and in its native environment. These may be the only varieties of oral folklore in the world that are unique to this area. It is also traditional in its unique way of existence – orally, passed down from generation to generation. This is also a kind of collective work; once started by the ancestors, a work of folklore continues to live on in the mouths of grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Talking about magic is impossible without referring to a fairy tale. And you need to start here with a fairy tale as an oral expressive form. Oral literary forms appeared before writing, and we need to look for the direct mythical content inherent in the worldview of our distant ancestor. The word precedes all other types of human activity. This stage of oral folk art prepared ancient Russian literature. The word served man in order to objectify thought. It is necessary, first of all, for the speaker himself. Researcher of Russian folklore A.N. Afanasyev writes that the primordial word is the seed from which the myth grows. However, Afanasyev's myth correlated with a poetic form, which nevertheless cannot fully give an idea of a person's true worldview. Myth is not a metaphorical expression. It is a word associated with a direct understanding of being. "The metaphorical nature of expression, understood in a narrow sense, begins simultaneously with a person's ability to recognize and distinguish between the subjective

beginning of cognitive thought and its course, which we call (inaccurately) reality, the world, and the object. And we, like ancient man, can call small white clouds sheep, other kinds of clouds cloth, soul and life are steam. However, these are only comparisons for us, and for a person in the mythical period of consciousness, these are complete truths, as long as he recognises only insignificant differences between the objects being compared..." (*Potebnya, 2016, p. 256*)

For modern consciousness, the ancient myth can be revealed precisely as a metaphor because we now have a completely different knowledge, and do not know the original meaning of many words. "In the oldest dictionary of the Vedas, there were 15 synonyms for a ray of sunlight, 23 for night, 16 for dawn, 30 for clouds, and 100 for water." (*Potebnya, 2016, p. 256*)

A fairy tale and a myth can sometimes completely coincide with each other. "Both myth and ritual are the product of some kind of thinking. It can sometimes be very difficult to explain and define these forms of thinking. However, a folklorist must consider this and understand which ideas underlie some motifs. Primitive thinking knows no abstractions. It manifests itself in actions, forms of social organisation, folklore, and language. Sometimes, a fairy tale motif is inexplicable by any of the above premises. For example, some motifs are based on a different understanding of space, time, and set than what we are used to." (*Propp, 2023*) It is easy to mistake mental reality for everyday reality and vice versa. So, for example, if Baba Yaga threatens to eat the hero, this does not mean that here we certainly have a remnant of cannibalism. The image of the cannibal Yaga could have arisen in another way, as a reflection of some kind of mental (and in this sense also historical), rather than real everyday images (to the fact that everything in fairy tales cannot be taken literally).

Propp describes the structure of the tale to explore its genesis. He considers every phenomenon to which a fairy tale refers as a process. For example, the idea of death in a fairy tale is considered as outlined in its development. The researcher studied many fairy tales to see how the most ancient ideas of people about the world, as a place where reality and imagination combined, are revealed behind the magical plot.

For example, we can identify which basic prohibitions were established in society and what they were related to. The coincidence between the fairy tale and the historical past is so complete that we can claim that the fairy tale here reflects the historical reality of the ban on cutting hair. Hair was considered the location of the soul or magical power. Losing your hair meant losing your strength. Another story about Samson and Delilah confirms this. The character Rapunzel, known to us since childhood, is trapped in a forest tower at puberty's onset. It was into the forest that the girls were taken. The theme of kidnapping girls is usually associated with the snake and marriage. Sometimes a girl gets pregnant from the wind, or unknown forces. However, these forces, the spirits surrounding a person, do not seem to be unknown to the peoples themselves – they know them well and imagine them, and name them quite specifically. And the fear in fairy tales is connected precisely with this abduction of children, who, apparently, were hidden from everyone and there was a strict prohibition to leave the shelter. Related to this is the artistic motivation for the disaster that follows the violation of the ban. "Of all the kinds of prohibitions that they tried to protect themselves from the demons that appear in the fairy tale in the form of snakes, ravens, goats, devils, spirits, whirlwinds, Koshchei, Yaga, and abducting women, girls, and children – of all these types of prohibitions, the prohibition to leave home is best reflected in the fairy tale. Other types of catharsis (fasting, darkness, prohibition of glances and touches,

etc.) are less reflected.” (Propp, 2023) The oldest religious content of this motif is the fear of invisible forces surrounding a person.

The main character's theme also reveals the peculiarities of a person's worldview in Ancient Russia. The main character of many Russian fairy tales is Ivan the Fool, a character whose way of life, thoughts and actions are incomprehensible to others who live by generally accepted norms. Consequently, he is a “fool” for his environment, for people who prioritise practical common sense and the existing order of the world. Folklore researcher Evgeny Trubetskoy sees in this sympathy for the “mad” hero, the exaltation of the fool over the powerful and rich of this world. Wisdom comes to him from outside, often from animals. And this is the endowment of the natural world, including the animal world, with the properties of something that preserves the original wisdom, and not the one associated with social laws, the reverence of our ancestor for nature is palpable. In a fairy tale, it cannot be understood only as a forest, frightening with its mystery and invisible inhabitants. For pagan man, nature was full of both dangerous and kind inhabitants. And in the fairy tale, we see exactly how the natural world, in all its variety of magical powers, helps a person. This also reveals man's connection with the natural world, as a source of vital elements. Hence, this feeling in traditional art, in particular, preserves the idea of the forest as a place where there is a world of its own and which a person also enters, but not as his own home. Hence, the love for natural texture is now perceived as a material for the artist's work. In its long history, every natural material has been endowed with special properties in connection with the mythological consciousness of man.

Russian culture found common points of contact between pagan and Christian principles, and over time they harmoniously combined. E.N. Trubetskoy wrote about this synthesis using the example of a Russian folk tale, arguing that it is in the fairy tale that there is much akin to Christianity. “It is difficult to say what explains this, whether it is the natural predisposition to Christianity of the folk genius who created the fairy tale, or, conversely, the centuries-old influence of Christianity on the national soul, and through it on fairy tales.” (Trubetskoy, 1998, p. 198) Russian fairy-tale images perceived the Christian meaning very well. For example, it is easy and natural to turn the main character of a fairy tale, who is in trouble, to God. There is common humility in all religions before the situation, an appeal to higher powers. Ivan the fool has features remind us of a fool – kindness, selflessness. And what is “living water” but a dream of universal resurrection? In the Russian fairy tale, the theme of a “miracle” in the Christian sense of the word can be seen behind the fantastic plot. In Vasilisa the Wise, who combined beauty and power over every creature, one can guess the face of Sophia the Wisdom of God. The fairy tale “contains a rich mystical revelation, its rise from the mundane to the miraculous, its search for the “other kingdom” represents the great value of spiritual life...” (Trubetskoy, 1998, p. 201) The search for an unknown kingdom, which can be observed as a very common plot in a fairy tale, opens up for some researchers to the Christian paradise. The Third Kingdom is never explicitly described. It looks like ours. A king rules this kingdom, people do not always inhabit it. The abductors – an eagle, a falcon, a raven, etc. – take the girls there. His antagonist is here, and the object of his quest is here, and the hero will have to fight. The most striking form of this battle is snake fighting. The snake fighting motif is international, but the Russian fairy tale contains it in a vivid and rather detailed form. The snake will appear here in two guises: specifically as a villain who kidnaps girls, and as the personification of evil in general. The natural and animal

world's forces help the hero win again. To reach the thirtieth kingdom, you must walk for a long time, overcome obstacles, and demolish several pairs of shoes. Baba Yaga often acts as an assistant for the hero on this path. This image and her hut on chicken legs are associated with the transition in the pagan view. It is possible that it was with the transition to another kingdom, the kingdom of the dead. Numerous representatives of the pagan bestiary contain ideas about incomprehensible phenomena in the natural world. They are associated with certain taboos that had to be observed to avoid danger. We can still see them in traditional applied art, which preserves the memory of pagan symbols. His aesthetics are based on this close relationship of the conscious, subconscious and unconscious. The best examples of modern art, which appeal to the Russian fairy tale, preserve this spirit of tradition. In general, a person's predisposition to magic manifests in various aspects of his being. This is also the love of a fairy tale, of everything fantastic. This is the expectation of a miracle, faith in it, and not only in religious life. A person always hopes that help will come unexpectedly and everything will get better in his life. This, of course, is the ability to have a religious worldview, which also, for a non-believer, looks like a mythical one. In creativity, this belief in the miraculous manifests itself most expressively. A person is given an imagination, which he uses to enrich his feelings, figuratively expressing the inexpressible. In creativity, no one forbids showing fiction or fantasy to give your subconscious free rein. His love of metaphor and symbols is reflected in his work.

For the artist of traditional art, a fairy tale has always been a source of plots and, in general, of a unique feeling of something native. The perception of reality as a world of mysteries and mysteries, some magical creatures and phenomena, is close to fairy tales and folk art. Once upon a time, a fairy tale accompanied a folk craftsman and was a part of his life. What we call traditional artworks today were initially created as household items. These were kitchen utensils, furniture, toys for children, tools of peasant labor, etc. Since these items belonged to the most ancient artist and his family, they were made with a certain feeling. Their aesthetics stemmed from the thing's purpose and considering who it was intended for. Spinning wheels were made for the daughter or wife and undoubtedly decorated. It could be a painting, or a carving. The content of the decoration, which contained ancient ornaments filled with symbols, remained unchanged. All this ornamentation was designed to wish for good, wealth, and protection from the evil influences of the surrounding world. Over time, these products become objects that scientists are beginning to be interested in, and the utilitarian principle fades into the background, giving way to aesthetic content. The schools of traditional crafts preserve all this knowledge of ancient symbolism to one degree or another. They preserve and continue to live the folk tradition, expressed not only by observing all the subtleties of craftsmanship but also by conveying the inner content we call the people's soul. Of course, all this is inherent only to those masters for whom this content is open. The process of the birth of a new work of traditional art is performed by combining the collective unconscious, expressed in symbols, and the individual conscious, which is expressed in an artistic form.

All traditional applied art is closely connected with folklore. The most common subject, especially in lacquer miniature paintings, is a Russian fairy tale and epic. In general, the works of any craft, such as Fedoskino, Palekh, and Mstera, are illustrations of a fairy tale, executed in the picturesque manner inherent in this center. However, Palekh is most attracted to the fairy tale. His composition, which came out of the iconographic tradition, is a narrative visually presented

in development. We can see both the beginning of the action and its completion simultaneously. Time has no power here, just as it does in a fairy tale. The deep black background gives additional depth to the plot, as if transporting us to another realm where everything is not like that, everything is magical. The writing style is subtle and ornate, filling the drawing with movement. The presence of fairy-tale characters makes the plot recognisable (*Figure 18*). However, the feeling of magic remains even when the plot is not connected with a fairy tale, for example, in numerous scenes of holidays, or riding a troika. This feeling persists not only because the drawing follows the traditional writing style but also because of the individual feeling of the artist himself. Sincerity and interest in a topic are important in traditional art and other creativity.

Artistic illustration is the closest to a fairy tale among modern art forms. Interest, of course, may be limited by an external imitation of antiquity. It is not enough to know the antique setting and costumes well enough for the plot to convey to the viewer the feeling of something close, dear, especially regarding children's illustrations. How can you convey to a child the feeling that a predatory animal can serve a person or even be an assistant (gray wolf, bear, mouse, etc.)? For example, the artist Evgeny Rachev dressed all his animals in human clothes (*Figure 19*). This anthropomorphism entirely correlates with our Slavic ancestor's idea, endowing the world of plants and animals with human properties. At the same time, it is appropriate in a fairy tale, where all the animals talk and have human qualities. Alternatively, like the artist Gennady Spirin, you can fill the world of fabulous illustration with an extraordinary wealth of textures, color, costume details and everyday life. It is possible that these are unnecessary details for a small child, but who said that only children should read fairy tales? Spirin's drawings combine the skill of an artist and the inquisitive mind of a scientist who enjoys this ethnographic wealth (*Figure 20*).

The most important feeling a person has at any time is the feeling of his home, as the closest cozy world with his native inhabitants. How can you explain to a child in simple words this feeling of home, where people and their small pets live nearby? It is possible to give a feeling of this single space only by uniting everyone with some kind of one feeling. This is a love and mutual help feeling in children's fairy tales. The love between loved ones is often incomplete, for example, in the plot with the stepmother and stepdaughter. However, there are substitutes, these magical animals that help a person and feel sorry for him. In the drawings for the fairy tale "The Silver Hoof" by Olga Ionaitis, this warmth between people and animals is represented in images of a poor but cozy home space, where next to each other: a girl with a cat, a girl with a grandfather. Moreover, the animals here are endowed with very expressive facial expressions.

In any illustration of a Russian fairy tale, the artist understands the importance of depicting a forest as a special place full of secrets and dangers. We remember Ivan Bilibin's or Viktor Vasnetsov's depictions of forests. Modern artists also understand this. Viktor Britvin's illustration of the fairy tale Vasilisa the Beautiful depicts a forest through which three horsemen move: morning, day and night. The artist depicted them in a subtle manner of writing, translucent, freely penetrating through the dense forest. Their simultaneous presence indicates a unique idea of time, which may differ when a person enters another realm.

The image of day and night simultaneously is often found in traditional subjects. This also suggests a connection with the worldview of our ancient ancestor. For him, the present was always connected with the past, and day and night were a single circle that the sun made across

the day and night (underground) sky. In modern art, this pagan idea, like many myths, has undergone assimilation. One can regard the image of two luminaries simultaneously as the duality of Russian consciousness. However, one can look a little deeper at this unity, which explains the presence of spontaneous and rational principles in man. It is possible that the poetry of Fyodor Tyutchev, who lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, does not really relate to the topic of this study, but some of his poems just talk about this remarkable unity.

*The holy night has risen into the sky,  
And a pleasant day, a kind day,  
Like a golden veil, she wrapped,  
A veil thrown over the abyss.  
And, like a vision, the outside world is gone...*

This simultaneous presence in the painting of day and night can be seen in the works of our contemporary Sergei Rudnev. The works of this artist are distinguished at first glance by an appeal to tradition in the form of numerous symbols that he uses in an individual reading, to his own plot. At the same time, their presence is very appropriate. These are, of course, birds, which are permanently endowed with an ancient meaning in traditional art. Rudnev's depiction of them is tentative, but their presence is ubiquitous, and it is clear how they participate in the plot unfolding. Angels also fly next to birds. They sit on the roofs, near the monastery gates, and walk in the fields among fabulous flowers. Christian and pagan symbols are intertwined in the paintings, which suggests that the artist does not particularly think about the depth of these symbols, they arise from his subconscious at the time of the origin of the fairy tale. The series of works is called "A Fairy Tale in Colours." And there is really a lot of fairy-tale in them. My favorite character is a cat. Cats appear in the artist's works, as well as in folk tales and jokes. They can fly among the same angels, walk on roofs and monastery courtyards, sail on a ship and even on a fish, ride a horse, and serve as a horse themselves (*Figure 21*). What is interesting about Rudnev's works is how they combine the accurate picture of the world with the fantasy that originates in Russian fairy tales. The artist creates his own world, in which there is a place for images from the surrounding reality (native Pskov), traditional characters from a Russian fairy tale and that individual fantasy, which creates an entirely new plot on this basis. Sergei Rudnev supplements his works with small texts in which the fairy tale continues in verbal form. All these descriptions are filled with a unique admiration for this world, where there is a place for a fairy tale. "There is always a fairy tale in everything. You have to notice it. Walking along the Golden Embankment late in the evening, I noticed the beautiful reflection of the Kremlin in the river... Clouds were floating in the sky... The stars were beginning to appear. And I thought ... and why not make it a fairy tale? ...to look at it differently... And now it is a blooming meadow before the fortress ... and the rooks came ... and the Kremlin has become airy, shining like a precious stone! At the same time, his power remained, but only in the river's memory. Such an unusual evening plein-air happened. Let it warm someone's house!" (*Figure 22*) Indeed, the works retain an interest in fairy tales, native nature, the world of animals and plants, but all this is already permeated with a mood of love. There is no place for archaic fear here. Mystical content appears in plots related to the theme of the night. The echoes of the pagan world, full of mysteries and unconscious sensations, are more audible here. In Rudnev's paintings, these sensations can be associated with the element of the sensual, and a woman often appears in the image of night as

a symbol of this natural element (*Figure 23*). The magical, fabulous in the works of modern artists is undoubtedly a consequence of their individual worldviews. This shows a predisposition to the fairy tale not only in its traditional form, but also as a whole, as a special type of thinking. This kind of thinking can be observed in children. This is phenomenological thinking, open to both the real and the miraculous. The ability to see the world in all its layers indicates that a person has developed the ability to build not one picture of the world, but several. This is due not only to age-related changes, but also to the opportunities that art gives a person as a source of new meanings. The world of fairy tales, open to a child from early childhood, gives him this opportunity even before he learns to comprehend cultural riches on his own. Turning to folklore with its fairy tale, which contains the collective unconscious, is the first experience of familiarisation with native culture and roots.

Thus, for an artist of traditional art, a fairy tale has always been a source not only of plots, but in general, of a special mood, very close inwardly. The feeling of reality, a world of mysteries and riddles, some magical creatures and phenomena, is close to fairy tales and folk art. Once upon a time, a fairy tale accompanied a folk craftsman, it was a part of his life. However, even now, her spirit, magical atmosphere, and simplicity are close to the artist, and not only to traditional crafts. The undying love for the Russian fairy tale and faith in its educational properties speak about the love and significance of folklore, such as using proverbs and sayings, riddles, games, songs, and jokes in our lives. We may not notice this, but if we remove ancient Russian folklore from our reality, even in the truncated form in which it has been preserved, our lives will lose that childish, magical, lively and joyful beginning that it preserves (*Teplitskaya & Voloshina, 2022*).

### **Discussion**

In the future, the author suggests the following directions for continuing study on the topic:

1. The problem of attitudes towards tradition in modern Russian culture, where kitsch is gaining a strong position. Innovation and tradition in art.
2. The pagan theme is very attractive to the artist, but little is known about it in the sense that here, we interact with a mythical consciousness. It can sometimes be very difficult to explain and define these forms of thinking.
3. Turning to tradition as an existential task.

### **Conclusion**

It would be wrong to consider the theme of existentialism in traditional Russian art only in the past tense. This kind of art is still alive today, and its principal value lies in the fact that it unites the past of the people with their present. We can say that this art is always relevant in its deep content. Existentialism as a worldview developed on Russian soil in two directions, one of which is connected with Orthodoxy, the search for God, and the other with distance from God. Understanding oneself in this world to the Divine idea of man is correlated not only with the Christian religion. Turning to the culture of the Russian people as an expression of a particular worldview, it is not difficult to notice how Christianity and paganism coexist side by side. With the advent of Christianity in Russia, the pagan religion assimilated, first taking on the external side of the new religion, and then the substantive one. There was a restructuring of the

consciousness of the Russian people, which was reflected in the culture. It is culture that allows us to draw such conclusions.

The vitality of paganism in culture is noticeable primarily in art, which preserves all the ancient symbols transferred to Christian soil and gives them additional meanings. However, these meanings were not artificially introduced, their content correlated with the ancient history that they already had. Symbols such as a horse, a bird, and a fish, having received Christian content, remained the same positive symbols; and the serpent, representing the evil of the world, remained the personification of this evil, but already in the Christian story “The Miracle of George about the Serpent.” And all this suggests that the symbol in the tradition is associated with something very ancient, profound. This deep thing is nothing more than an archetype. Of course, our distant ancestors’ worldview differed from ours; it was not existential in the sense that we attach to this word now. It was a mythical worldview based not so much on logic as on feeling or direct sensation, which was often unconscious and somewhat reminiscent of childhood. It has not yet been based on scientific knowledge and self-reflection. The depth of the symbol is related to the collective unconscious. The symbols reflect those features of the worldview, which are explained by the totality of social, historical, and geographical psychological features characteristic of the majority of representatives of the Russian people. Traditional art contains the axiological content that reflects a person’s attitude to nature, his family, and his kind. These features of the worldview are valuable precisely for their enduring value.

Artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries often turn to traditional Russian art in their work. And this is not just a desire to make your painting more colorful and original. This is where the rethinking of one’s own worldview takes place in the general space of one’s native culture. The period of the Silver Age in the history of Russian art was marked by an unprecedented rise in interest in the traditional. This was due, of course, not only to the search for a new aesthetic, but also to the search for my own Self, which at that moment needed solid support. And this support was found in the Russian icon, splint, folk ornament, and folklore.

The connection with folklore in modern art should be considered not so much as direct contact with well-known fairy-tale plots, but rather as a particular worldview, when another world opens up for the artist behind the visible reality. The “Other Kingdom” is not only found in Russian fairy tales but also reported by the Christian religion. The ability to see the magical behind the mundane is inherent in many contemporary artists. This can be observed in successful illustrations of fairy tales, in the use of allegories and symbols, and the unique feeling of something inexpressible and extraordinary.

Modern art often refers to the traditional heritage, maybe not always explicitly, but quite palpably. The life of tradition in the works of our contemporaries appears in different variations. However, they are united by the desire to comprehend their worldview, referring to the religious worldview of their ancestors. When talking about the most important problems of our time, the artist often turns to myth, pagan or Christian, as if in search of something unshakable. He considers the myth as something valuable and necessary for the fullness of self-expression.

The appeal to tradition in the art of our contemporaries is carried out, of course, primarily to solve their own existential issues for themselves. But the most important thing here is that thanks to this conversion, the spiritual bond of generations is not interrupted. And this is already



gaining national significance. After all, to morally decompose society and contribute to the collapse of the state, it is enough to destroy the ideology expressed in a particular mythology, which appeals to shared values.

### Conflict of interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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## Appendix



Figure 1. Buckles of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries



Figure 2. Kitovras. Relief of Dmitrievsky Cathedral. 12<sup>th</sup> century



Figure 3. Tatiana Kamanina. Rest



Figure 4. V. Semenov. The Tale of Igor's Campaign



Figure 5. Natalia Goncharova. The Evangelists



Figure 6. Aristarchus Lentulov. The ringing



Figure 7. Nikolai Kolupaev. Luke



Figure 8. Natalia Bobrova. House



Figure 9. Oleg Ildyukov. The Soul Is Wide Open



Figure 10. Alexey Kupreichenko. The composition of civilization. Glass/The vessel



Figure 11. Vladimir Brzezovsky



Figure 12. Alexey Shanin. Space



Figure 13. Anatoly Rybkin. Out of the Blue. The Russian Man



Figure 14. Oleg Gurenkov. God Forest



Figure 15. Oleg Gurenkov. Angel



Figure 16. Konstantin Vasiliev. The Man with the Owl



Figure 17. Ivanov Frol. The Shroud



Figure 18. Suvorov. The Tale of Peter and Fevronia

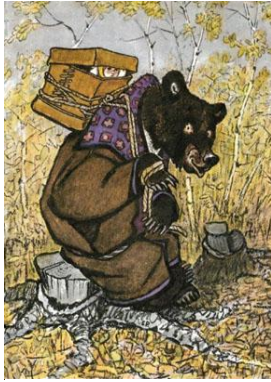


Figure 19. Evgeny Rachev. Masha and the Bear



Figure 20. Gennady Spirin. Sadko

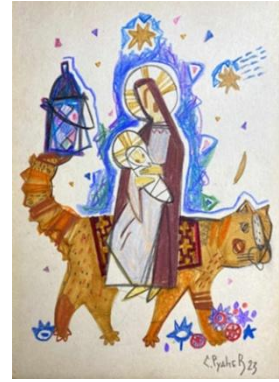


Figure 21. Sergey Rudnev. Escape



Figure 22. Sergey Rudnev. Golden Embankment in Pskov



Figure 23. Sergey Rudnev. Night