

SATENIK VARDANYAN*

Candidate of Arts, YSU

Associate Professor

sate08@rambler.ru

OVSANNA KARAMYAN

art critic, YSU, lecturer

melosya@yahoo.com

THE ABSTRACT ART OF HOVHANNES MINASYAN OF THE 1960S: THE PHENOMENON OF MOSAICS AT YEREVAN COMPUTER RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

Key words: Hovhannes Minasyan, Florentine mosaic, abstract art, Armenian tuff, value, three-dimensional, science.

Introduction

Hovhannes Minasyan (1928–1972) is one of the outstanding figures of the Armenian art of the XX century, whose legacy is not only of national, but also universal value. An artist who has really enriched Armenian painting with a unique way of thinking, new painting themes, monumental painting, mosaics, numerous machine paintings, graphics and theatrical design. Unfortunately, only a small part of his many works available in museums is exhibited, some works have not been preserved or are on the verge of extinction. This article provides with an opportunity to highlight his art once again and to give him a worthy place in the field of science.

Minasyan's mosaics "Closed Curves" and "Geometric Space" (1967–1970) on the fourth floor of the building of Yerevan Computer Research and Development Institute (1967–1970) are listed among his exceptional works, inspired by mathematics, solved with geometric abstract shapes and symmetrical rhythms.

* Հոդվածը ներկայացվել է 20.09.20, գրախոսվել է 25.09.20, ընդունվել է տպագրության 04.12.20:

These Florentine-style¹ **mosaics still stand out today with their beautiful “velvet”** polished tuff surface, decorative brown, yellow and red, dark brick and purple tones. Here, owing to the use of color and plastic equivalent language, the artist has **managed to give a unique artistic “formula”²** of mathematical abstract thought. The author was interested in the possibilities of colors, how they are connected with the form or separated from it, leaving the plane, emitting light from the inside, quietly filling the created three-dimensional space. [picture 1] What were the preconditions, technical and artistic features of creating these mosaics?

About the Institute

Yerevan Computer Research and Development Institute, founded in 1956, was one of the leading institutes in the Soviet Union, where high-tech computers and computing complexes were produced. This center for strategic studies was an important structure that was visited annually by many guests – scientists, industry experts, state officials and others. This was due right to this fact, that the interior and exterior of the institute building were given special attention. Everything was done to provide the staff with an aesthetic environment and to receive the guests in the very proper way. The exhibition halls and foyers were built, which had to have appropriate layout and decoration. Various halls of the building were decorated with works by famous sculptors and painters. An exhibition hall was opened on the fourth floor of one of the buildings, which was to be a showroom for new machines. This period coincides with an episode, when Yura Petrosyan, a researcher at the institute, meets Minasyan, who was working on the mosaic of the summer hall of the Moscow Cinema. Having highly assessed the talent of Minasyan, **understanding the artist’s unique style, he offered to undertake the design of the newly created hall of the institute.**

¹ Ֆլորենտական տեխնոլոգիան առաջացել է Վերաձննդի դարաշրջանում, որտեղ օգտագործվում էին հիմնականում արժեքավոր քարերի տարբեր տեսակներ: Քարի ընտրության մեջ կարևոր էր քարի գույնի և քարի միջի երանգի համապատասխանեցումը՝ խճանկարի էսքիզին: Քարի սալիկների հղկված մակերեսը գեղարվեստական գորգի մեջ պետք է լինի այնպես, որ քարերի դասավորությունը լինի՝ սահուն և պիրկ՝ առանց ցայտուն կտրվածքների և կարերի:

² Տե՛ս Աղասյան 2009, 156:

Minasyan's New Technologies

Minasyan immediately starts to work. The artist has long studied books on mathematics to find a decorative idea among the variety of geometric figures. He tried to depict the inner world of the scientists, to understand, to decorate it with rhythmic images, plot line, color harmony. The material of the work was Armenian tuff. Minasyan himself chose appropriate shades for his composition from 15 quarries, from light yellow, from brick to purple, from brown to white. The stones were taken to the exhibition hall of the institute on the fourth floor, a masonry machine was assembled right there and Minasyan polished the stones himself. His son Martin remembers that there was quite much dust in the area; his father lived in that very dusty environment for days. The mosaics are 3 meters high and 12 meters wide [picture 1]. The author adjusted the stone pieces of the mosaics to millimeter accuracy. He used ordinary plaster to fix the stones. His son states that mosaics were finally covered with oil, which gave the stones a bright and luxurious color.

The first commission which had come to see the work done gave an ordinary assessment, but the second commission assessed it as a unique, exceptional work.

Description and Analysis

The mosaics with their closed curves make an unexpected impression. These are intersecting curves that join the infinity and then seem to get closer with a three-dimensional effect. The musical rhythm of the abstract mosaic, the natural **color of the stones, make Minasyan's ideas more differentiated and actual, in full** accordance with the ideas of the scientists of that time, whose task was to create **"thinking machines"**. **The artist had chosen a very strong metaphorical series,** rather risky-associative - to bring science and art closer together. There were few such creators in those days.

The most impressive parts of the mosaic are the harmonization of the Armenian stone, tuff, with which the author received a triple layer permeability, i.e. the image in the foreground, passing through the background, is reflected in the background, while the three layers have three different color schemes, i.e. we can say that the author created a three-dimensional model during the Soviet years. The founder of this style, however, is the sculptor Ye. Kochar, who created a three-dimensional image with the help of cardboard and paint. The mosaics on

both front sides of Minasyan's work give a more spatial perception, which is not due to the size of the space. The composition is first perceived as an aesthetic environment and then gives a sense of movement of the walls. The impression is that you can move or penetrate inside the walls. It is noteworthy that the mosaic, although consisting of many geometrically precise bodies, is considered a complete velvet panel. It is not ordinary that the author, with a subtle sense of light, found the way to illuminate the mosaic without artificial lighting: the stones got colored lighting due to the geometric placement of the shades. A penetrating glance clearly conveys **the idea about the author's inner world. Geometric bodies** dissolve inside, they are not protruding outwards, and they converge from the root, return to the depth. They are often even perceived as bodies with cubist outlines - fish, eyes, bird, bear, flower, dog. In terms of the imagination it is a mosaic with a wide range of possibilities that allows you to dream. The mosaic is an invention that creates aesthetic pleasure, environment, mood, which can serve as a microcosm of new ideas.

The 1950s and 1970s were marked by a number of political, social, and cultural changes in the Soviet Union. At the XX Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, Nikita Khrushchev, for the first time in his report on **the cult of personality and its consequences, spoke openly about Stalin's** dictatorship. This report was the reason for the start of the slow democratic process in Soviet society³. Minasyan created two works of abstract art. Such works are rare in the Armenian art. These two works of Minasyan can be compared with the world fine arts works of the beginning of the 20th century, when such giants of the Cubist direction as Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Fernand Lejeune, as well as the Russian abstractionists and constructivists of the 1910-1920s Kazimir Malevich, Lyubov Popova, El Lissitzky and Alexander Rodchenko developed their activities. These epoch-making artists deliberately denied figurative art, declaring that modern reality requires a new ideology of art, a new content. As a result, new works were created that aimed to penetrate into the depths of the human inner world, the secrets of the universe. It was aimed at recognizing the nature of the beings and objects around a person. It should be taken into consideration that Minasyan spent his student years at Leningrad Institute of Fine Arts in the 1950s and had direct contacts with Russian artists of senior generation. That was a

³ Рябцев 2004, 45.

generation, representatives of which were engaged in the Russian avant-garde of the beginning of the century. It should be noted that the works created during his student years were modest, without unnecessary pathos. However, the very first paintings created in Armenia differed in their color. They were smooth and masterfully created, or in some ways it was a gratitude to other masters for depicting Armenia. And suddenly we see an unexpected turn - sharpness and abstraction. There was a clash between two principles in which the artist had not yet found himself. But as a result of that clash, a new world was born, the world of the monumentalist⁴. The 1950s were a period in Soviet art when artists could create freely and focus on the modernism of the beginning of the century. There was no coincidence with what Minasyan deeply knew in these new trends in art. He was interested in the possibilities of colors, how they were connected to the form or separated from it, leaving the plane, emitting light from inside, quietly filling the created space. The artist used colors, as, for example, Lyubov Popova and Alexander Rodchenko did⁵. **Lyubov Popova's latest work is a series of "Spatial Force Structures", in which the composition is based on horizontal, vertically bent lines, penetrating one another as if floating in abstract space.** We can say that Minasyan also tried to penetrate into the cosmic infinity with his style, creating his three-dimensional space.

Minasyan's mosaics are made with extraordinary lightness, delicacy, accuracy in recognizing the stone; the impression is that he has been dealing with them for quite a long time. Meanwhile, Minasyan approached the case with inner conviction; his responsible temperament allowed him to master all the nuances of the case in a short time.

Angaladian has said the following: "H. Minasyan managed to understand and penetrate the complex-associative inner world of the intellectual man of the second half of the XX century. And if the scientists had chosen the way of "making machines breathable, giving life to digits", the artist needed to deprive the real world of life, to create an internal construction, an emotional outburst, a wave of modern man. Such a thing could be done by a purely caring person and a brilliant master who gently feels the world. The "Mergelyan Institute" mosaic - the pearl of the twentieth century art, can be described with these words."⁶

⁴ Ст'я Татикян 1975, 88–91.

⁵ Ст'я Рычкова 2002, 142.

⁶ Angaladian 2006, Minassian p. 62–63.

Conclusion

It is obvious that monumental-decorative art developed in the Soviet Union in the mid-1940s, although the conditions for its development were not ideal. The development was conditioned by the need to reconstruct the buildings destroyed by the war and to have a chance to make something new. Buildings of public importance were especially in the center of attention. Thus, a rather interesting era began in the Soviet Union, conditioned by the necessity. Artists begin to work in a variety of ways: murals, mosaics, stained glass. These directions, of course, are developing with unequal opportunities in the republics of the Soviet Union: Ukraine, the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) and the Caucasus.⁷

Outside the country, he was known as a “stankovist” – a representative of machine painting (many people worked in that genre). He created thematic canvases, portraits, still life paintings, landscapes, but then focused on another branch. Everyone in Armenia is familiar with another manifestation of Minasyan’s creative talent – monumental art. The transition to monumentality was logical. The tendency to create large-scale images with allegorical content was already felt in his early works. Painters from Yerevan still remember how David Siqueiros, seeing Minasyan’s paintings at the exhibition of Armenian painters, exclaimed: “Tell this painter to focus only on monumental art.”⁸

The monumental art of Minasyan was accurately described by the art critic Henrik Igityan: “He never considered the artist’s work to be something aesthetically abstract; he always showed the same attitude towards art as a farmer or a mason treats their work. With a special passion of the curious researcher, he studied the properties of each stone with which he worked, he saw in the variety of Armenian stones not only a building material, but also a huge endless palette full of rich color nuances. Each stone was developed by him with great love and all was done personally. In creating his works, he thought of himself as a monumentalist; it did not come from the fact that he did not understand or distinguish different fields of painting, on the contrary, all served one purpose - experiments, quests, which helped to solve the problems of monumental art.”⁹

⁷ Советское изобразительное искусство. 1981, 88–93.

⁸ Воронова 1976, 23.

⁹ Игитян 1974, 5.

Thus, H. Minasyan became the author of the first abstract mosaics in Yerevan. The artist, imbued with the ideology of the art, required for modern reality, used new forms and content, colors and their values. Minasyan was trying to penetrate the depths of the human inner world with his style, to create his three-dimensional space in cosmic infinity. In the best, most significant monumental works of Hovhannes Minasyan, every stone and line has preserved **the strength and warmth of the artist's hands. Creating his frescoes and mosaics,** he thought of himself as a monumentalist. Everything served one purpose: to solve the problems of monumental art through experiments, searches, using **different artistic styles and materials. The success of Hovhannes Minasyan's** monumental works was in many cases conditioned by a clear vision and perception of the functions of the structures. The basis of synthesis is when the artist thinks simultaneously with the architect. That is why in different places monumental works created by Minasyan are not similar in appearance, but bear the stamp of a creative personality.



Picture 1. Hovhannes Minasyan, “Closed Curves” mosaic, 1968–1970, Yerevan Computer Research and Development Institute, fourth floor, 300x1200.

BIBLOGHRAPHY

- Aghasyan A. 2009, Ways of Development of the Armenian Fine Arts in XIX–XX Centuries, Yerevan, “Voskan Yerevantsy”, 292 p.
- Igityan H. Master of Monumental palettes // Communist, 16.11.1974.

- Ryabtsev Yu. 2004, Chrestomathy of the History of Russian Culture of the XX Century / volume 2, Moscow, "Vlados", 288 p.
- Rychkova Yu. 2002, Encyclopedia of Modernism. Moscow, "EKSMO-Press", 224 p.
- Soviet Fine Arts. 1941–1960. (under the editorship of B. Weimarn, O. Sapotsinsky) Moscow, "Iskusstvo", 1981, 581 p.
- Tatikyan V. The Experience of a Monumentalist. // Literary Armenia, 4. 1975.
- The Armenian Avant-Garde of the 1960s. 2006, Seventeen Fates. / text and compilation by Ruben Angaladian, design by Yevgeny Bolshakov, 295 pages
- Voronova O. "Monumental Painting" // "Tvorchestvo", 1976, № 4.

**ՀՈՎՀԱՆՆԵՍ ՄԻՆԱՍՅԱՆԻ 1960-ԱԿԱՆՆԵՐԻ
ՎԵՐԱՑԱԿԱՆ ԱՐՎԵՍՏԸ. ԵՐԵՎԱՆԻ ՄԱԹԵՄԱՏԻԿԱԿԱՆ
ՄԵՔԵՆԱՆԵՐԻ ԳԻՏԱՀԵՏԱԶՈՏԱԿԱՆ ԻՆՍՏԻՏՈՒՏԻ
ԽՃԱՆԿԱՐՆԵՐԻ ՖԵՆՈՄԵՆԸ**

ՎԱՐԴԱՆՅԱՆ Ս., ՔԱՐԱՄՅԱՆ Օ.

Ամփոփում

Քանալի բառեր՝ Հովհաննես Մինասյան, ֆլորենտական խճանկար, վերացական արվեստ, հայկական տուֆ, արժեք, եռաչափ, գիտություն:

Երևանի Մաթեմատիկական մեքենաների գիտահետազոտական ինստիտուտի շենքի չորրորդ հարկում գտնվող «Ներփակ Կորեր» և «Երկրաչափական տարածություն» խճանկարները (1967–1970) Հովհաննես Մինասյանի՝ մաթեմատիկայով ոգեշնչված երկրաչափական արքայական ձևերով, համաչափ ուղիղությամբ լուծված բացառիկ աշխատանքներ են: Ֆլորենտական ոճով արված այս խճանկարները այսօր էլ աչքի են ընկնում հղկված տուֆի «թավշյա» գեղեցիկ մակերևույթով, սև և դարչնագույն, դեղին ու կարմիր, մուգ աղյուսագույն ու մանուշակագույն տոների դեկորատիվ դասավորությամբ: Այստեղ գունագծային ու պլաստիկական համարժեք լեզվի կիրառման միջոցով նկարչին հաջողվել է ստեղծել մաթեմատիկական վերացական մտքի գեղարվեստական ուրույն բանաձև: Վարպետին հետաքրքրում էին գույնի հնարավորությունները, ինչպես են դրանք միահյուսված ձևին կամ առանձնանում դրանից, հեռանալով հարթությունից՝ լույս արձակում միջից և լցվում ստեղծված եռաչափ տարածության մեջ:

АБСТРАКТНОЕ ИСКУССТВО ОВАНЕСА МИНАСЯНА 1960-Х ГОДОВ: ФЕНОМЕН МОЗАИКИ В ЕРЕВАНСКОМ НИИ МАТЕМАТИЧЕСКИХ МАШИН

ВАРДАНЯН С., КАРАМЯН О.

Резюме

Ключевые слова: Ованес Минасян, флорентийская мозаика, абстрактное искусство, армянский туф, ценность, трехмерный, наука.

Мозаики Ованеса Минасяна «Замкнутые кривые» и «Геометрическое пространство», (1967–1970), украшающие четвертый этаж здания Ереванского научно-исследовательского института математических машин (1967–1970), навеяны автору абстрактными геометрическими формами математики и являются эксклюзивными работами с гармоничными ритмами. Эти флорентийские мозаики и сегодня выделяются своей красивой полированной туфовой «бархатной» поверхностью, декоративными коричневыми, желто-красными, темно-кирпичными и пурпурными тонами. Благодаря использованию цвета и линий, а также посредством эквивалентного пластического языка художнику удалось достичь уникальной художественной «формулы» математической абстрактной мысли. Мастера интересовали возможности цвета и то, как цветовая гамма «вплетается» в форму или «отделяется» от нее, выходя за пределы плоскости, излучая свет и заполняя созданное трехмерное пространство.