

## ART AMIDST PANDEMIC: HOW THE CORONAVIRUS AFFECTED THE ART WORLD

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The current article is a scholarly attempt to analyse, categorise, classify changes and challenges related to the cultural aspect in times of coronavirus outbreak, quarantine and social distancing, marking the big picture of the phenomenal processes occurring in the art spheres of the entire world. Through analysing prominent examples of the art mirroring the new reality, depicting atmosphere, environment, circumstances, positive and negative sides of pandemic time, employing different artistic signatures, manners, abstract and naturalistic approaches, sophisticated and simplified compositions, we uncovered the increasing role and function of the art in general, the high demand of cartoons, illustrations and rapid growth of digital art, attempts of nationalising the new dominating subject matter – idealised images of healthcare workers confronting the disease. The latter was visually represented by allegories, metaphors, symbols and embodiments, reaching the audience by its expressiveness. However, considering the fact, that the end of pandemic period remains unclear yet, our research has the notable perspective of continuity.

**Key words** – coronavirus, art world, recreation, general image, allegory, audience, propaganda

### Introduction

The new coronavirus (COVID-19)<sup>1</sup> has spread to nearly every country in the world since the beginning of the year. About 6 million people are known to have been infected and more than 300,000 deaths have been recorded. Art with its all-possible forms and disciplines (visual and performing arts, ancient and contemporary) and without supportive intermediaries (museums, galleries, exhibition and concert halls) has leading positions in everyone's life in lockdown, as if carrying on its shoulders a mission of enlightenment, evoking humanism, sense of equality, keeping human beings spiritually and mentally healthy in these difficult times.

What happened with the art world in times of coronavirus?

- Museums are closed and seeking ways to stay on board, mostly arranging

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The article has been delivered on 07.12.2020, reviewed on 15.01.2021, accepted for publication on 01.02.2021.

<sup>1</sup> **Lauren M. Sauer**, M.S., What is coronavirus, John Hopkins Medicine, <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus>

online exhibitions, virtual tours, auctions, online courses, challenges<sup>2</sup> and contests for their followers.

- It is hard to say whether the communication between an artwork and a viewer has become closer (museums and artists opened the access of the high-resolution photos of artworks) or, the opposite, further (the artwork could be admired only through the computer screen). Nevertheless, “digitalised art” and “art of network”, also the forms of art which could be more or less easily displayed through internet, and artists with a great number of web followers, celebrate their temporary victory.
- Artists, challenging the new reality and unwilling to communicate with the audience through virtual platforms, launched “Drive-By-Art” initiative, representing their creations along the roadsides throughout Los Angeles<sup>3</sup>. Meanwhile, some galleries adopted a new approach of exhibiting artworks by simply re-designing their shows to be clearly seen from the street<sup>4</sup>.
- The “online-audience” is broader, as every sort, branch or kind of art is created, photographed and displayed or broadcast in the social media and social networks, being absolutely accessible for every user. Furthermore, the reaction of the audience is prompter, more direct, laid-back, opening a horizon for the hot debates and discussions on their way to public opinion.
- People all over the world are enthusiastic in digging deeply in global art history, finding, then posting, sharing, discussing the artworks which were not well-known before, but are quite suitable and penetrating by either their form or content, either their context or historical background to express their own negative and positive feelings, their expectations in the current specific situation. Thus they feel need in rather imagery than script to proclaim and demonstrate their mixed emotional background and unrest. Among the mentioned are the still lifes with toilet paper, oil canvas with the symbolic image of a wounded angel (“The Wounded Angel”, Hugo Simberg, 1903) with the hope of recovery amounting to the thought “Mother Earth is taking a break from humans and rehabilitating amid pandemic”, Edward Munch’s “Self portrait with the Spanish flu” (1919), and, lastly, allegories of plague, diseases and death depicted long before coronavirus occurred. Johannes Vermeer’s (1632-1675) and Vincent Van Gogh’s (1853-1890) canvases seem to change their context fitting the interests and spiritual needs of isolated masses, nonetheless, the foremost recently revived artist is confirmed to be the American realist painter and printmaker Edward Hopper, whose late-career

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<sup>2</sup> A UK Museum Challenged Bored Curators Worldwide to Share the Creepiest Objects in Their Collections, April 20, 2020, <http://www.artnet.com>

<sup>3</sup> **Natalie Haddad**, “120 Artists Create a “Drive-by-Art” Exhibition Throughout Los Angeles, 27 May 2020, [www.hyperallergic.com](http://www.hyperallergic.com)

<sup>4</sup> Half Gallery in New York has organised a show called “Under Glass,” which took advantage of the gallery’s floor-to-ceiling windows to present a window display, “Do you miss seeing art but are unable (or unwilling) to go into the gallery: These Shows are Redesigned to be seen From the Street”, 20 May, 2020, [www.artnet.com](http://www.artnet.com)

artworks featuring isolation, melancholy, empty cityscapes, brought forth the movement “We are all Edward Hopper paintings now” (Picture 1)<sup>5</sup>.

- Arts have new predominating subject matters which could be grouped in the following way:

A. Negative representation of the situation and its effects, embodying non-acquaintance and embarrassment concerning the unknown and unseen enemy – a virus, which is keeping everyone locked at home, regardless of their status and occupation. Various characters and presentations of the anxiety, fear, despair, lack of social life, thoughts on death and meaninglessness of human life, loneliness in quarantine, compulsion of mask-wearing, call for help. The theme of the ironic and sarcastic depictions of the human greed of consuming the toilet paper<sup>6</sup> is the subject matter art history perhaps have never seen before.

B. Positive side of self-isolation, at least staying safe and healthy, having fun with family members, spending time on personal growth and self-education, reading books, watching films, getting used to the new reality.

C. Artworks accentuating idealised images of medical workers and employees of other spheres who are fighting in the frontline for the sake of people’s life and health. The implication of this subject matter either feeds the sense of general human triumph over death and evil, or unwraps the professional and personal challenges healthcare workers experience, notwithstanding winning the war due to their high-humanistic characteristics.

D. Yet there are artists who seemed to escape or ignore the current global changing, as they keep on creating artworks in their studios with the same themes and inspirational sources, as they used to make before the COVID-19 outbreak, as if the virus didn’t even exist.

- Several contemporary works of art with the coronavirus theme is considered as “controversial”<sup>7</sup>, as they contain elements of xenophobia, discrimination and racism, messaging worthless attempts to mark “guilty” of the virus spread among particular race, country and its inhabitants.
- In global pandemic people need more hope and faith, they want to be sure on the future, that is why the art with propagandistic function (posters, street art, animations, cartoons, illustrations, children’s drawings) is of demand and spread, highlighted much more than usual. On a par with these encouraging art, one can find a variety of artworks (mostly graffiti) with the emphasis on dissatisfaction with the measures and steps taken by the government and politicians against the spread of the disease.

By reason of the restrictions of gatherings in the streets, graffiti artists soon had to hunt for new routes of their artistic expression. UK-based Banksy

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<sup>5</sup> **Jonathan Jones**, “We are all Edward Hopper paintings now”: Is he the artist of the coronavirus age?, “The Guardian”, 27 March, 2020, [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)

<sup>6</sup> Chicago Potholes Are Filled with Pandemic Essentials in Humorous New Mosaics by Jim Bachor, 29 April 2020, [www.thisiscolossal.com](http://www.thisiscolossal.com)

<sup>7</sup> China angry over coronavirus cartoon in Danish newspaper, 28 January, 2020, [www.dw.com](http://www.dw.com)

used the walls of his own bathroom as a material for comical creations<sup>8</sup> and presented another artwork with the touching content for display at the hospital. It depicts a boy playing with his superhero doll in the form of the medical worker, while Batman and Spiderman are resting in recycle bin<sup>9</sup>. (Picture 2)

- Street photography is suffering losses, instead new themes like “isolated people at home and people looking from their windows”, “still life with household objects”, “drone/ photography of empty cities and historical sites” (ghost cities) are getting more and more required.
- Balconies<sup>10</sup>, windows<sup>11</sup> and doorways<sup>12</sup> were both objectively and symbolically engaged in art compositions as the “entrance to the outer world”, “the only reasonable way of human communication” and at the same time forced a dividing line between “inner and outer world” and between “an isolated individual and the world”.
- So-called “new art” is being created on the basis of already existed works of art – “old art” by using diversity of web programmes and applications. The masterpieces such as “The Last Supper” by Da Vinci and the “The Birth of Venus” of Botticelli (Picture 3) are transformed into abandoned compositions<sup>13</sup> with no humans and even anthropomorphic gods, as if manifestos to the prevailing sense of emptiness, disadvantages of isolation and social-distancing. Some of the users anyway prefer keeping the protagonists of the world-known canvases in their positions, such as “Mona Lisa”, but closing her face with the medical mask, the item, which, beyond dispute, has become an emblem of coronavirus period. There is another group of art lovers transmuting the chef-d’oeuvres of art history by making the space between protagonists farther, alluding the social-distancing mode covering almost every society in the world. A few art amateurs are detected with the principle of changing the subject matter of pop-art masterworks, such as Andy Warhol’s “The Marilyn Diptych” (1962), from the queen Monroe into the cult of pandemic period – multiplied medical masks on bright-coloured background.
- Users of different social networks are employing the artworks they know or of their favourite to make posters on the specific atmosphere, messages, main

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<sup>8</sup> **Caroline Goldstein**, Even Banksy, the Elusive Street Artist, Is Stuck Working From Home. See How He Was Reduced to Doing Street Art in His Bathroom, 15 April 2020, [www.news.artnet.com](http://www.news.artnet.com)

<sup>9</sup> New Banksy piece celebrates superhero health workers, The Guardian, 6 May 2020, [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com)

<sup>10</sup> **Kate Brown**, With Museums Locked Across Europe, Bored Artists in Berlin Turned Their Balconies Into Mini Art Galleries to Combat Isolation, April 14 2020, [www.news.artnet.com](http://www.news.artnet.com)

<sup>11</sup> Pejac Launches Movement to Transform Home Windows into Imaginative Silhouette Art, April 10, 2020, [www.thisiscolossal.com](http://www.thisiscolossal.com)

<sup>12</sup> Through Windows and Doorways, This Photographer Has Been Capturing Poignant Images of Isolated New Yorkers, April 23, 2020, <https://news.artnet.com>

<sup>13</sup> 14 Classic Painting Recreations By German Artist Show How Characters Practice Social Distancing, March 2020, [www.boredpanda.com](http://www.boredpanda.com)

ideas and measures of quarantine regime, by firstly selecting an artwork, then writing down the message on or next to the latter, and, ultimately, creating a poster to share in online platforms, which is aimed to function as a kind of placard for informing and preventing the spread of the virus. For instance, the red-figure fragment of the Ancient Greek pottery with an athlete washing his hands could logically become a poster for claiming “Wash your hands”, and the “Chairman Mao on en route to Anyuan” (Picture 4) is accepted by the pandemic audience as “Walking outside for the first time after the end of quarantine”. It is notable to mention that the art of posters, following the phases of global history, used to come to light amid wartime. Anchoring on our reality with the COVID-19 as an enemy of mankind, the fight against this disease is quite identical to a war, for this reason the revival of poster-art is more than predictable.

- The most visible change in art is that the word and term “artist” now has broader meaning. Indeed every person who is able to recreate or reenact the compositions of the famous art pieces using daily objects, household stuff, clothes, laundry, food, fruits, vegetables, toys, pets, even family members and impress the audience in social networks, could be called an “artist”. The current statement raised more questions than answers. Nonetheless, the fact that it already caused the debate, let us avoid calling this new reality in art world “just a flash of copying artworks as a joke or a meme”. Yet the COVID-19 epidemic’s end is hard to foreshadow, we strongly believe it’s too early to make weighty conclusions from the perspective of the art history and theory, but we’re keen to the idea that all these “reconstructions” of artworks<sup>14</sup> by amateurs, art lovers, professional artists or just bored people in isolation should be studied, explored, discussed as a fact, a phenomenon, a direct and pure reflection of the specific times we’re living in, having a starting point categorising or sorting the issues this process raised:
- Issue 1. First of all the problem of the definition and the usage of terms is standing, how one should call these recreations of paintings and sculptures by human forms or household objects: “rearrangements of artworks”, “network art”, “digital recreations”, “living tableau”, “tableau vivant”, “three-dimensional paintings”, “living works of art”, “reenacts”, “performing of famous paintings”, “remade artworks”, “reimagined artworks”, whether they should be classified as “interpretations”, not “imitations” and “emulations” and not “parody” or perhaps the term “performance” is the most common and essentially expose the characteristic features of these recreations? The choice of the term “performance art” is consistent as well, regarding the latter’s analogy in qualities such as being acted, the random or carefully orchestrated, spontaneous or otherwise carefully planned with or without audience participation. Considering this remaking of existed artworks a branch of

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<sup>14</sup> People Recreate Works of Art With Objects Found at Home During Self-Quarantine, April 17, 2020, <https://mymodernmet.com>

photography also makes sense, because they reach the auditory through taken photos (both in good and in bad quality) or broadcasting.

- Issue 2. Whether we need new approaches, standards, concepts and criteria to estimate and scientifically qualify these “creations”, whence the motifs and structural elements of the compositions are three-dimensional, real people, breathing organisms and real objects themselves, thereby conceivably the adopted formal, visual and contextual analysis are not responsive enough for the thorough unfoldment of the task.
- Issue 3. Considering the argument that these recreations maintain the component of “game”, “fun”, “amusement”, are made not always by professional artists with the artistic educational and practical background, which is on one hand an obstacle on the way of classifying them as an “artwork” or the samples of “professional” or “academic” or “high art” (though starting at least from the 19th century onwards the line between the “high” and “low” art is extremely fragile), one can compare this modern tendency with the “Dada” movement<sup>15</sup> of the 20th century. The latter started as the game very soon becoming the turning point for evolution and artistic growth of surrealism. Moreover, as the evidence that this “movement of living artworks” are in the spotlight of nowadays artists and art critics the BBC article<sup>16</sup>, the New York-Times’s<sup>17</sup> and the Washington Post’s<sup>18</sup> review could be successfully brought into play as cornerstones, and the Leonardo Da Vinci’s “Last Supper” recreation by the titans of cinematography<sup>19</sup> could add the required portion of professionalism to this tendency.
- Issue 4. Whether the criteria of considering the recreations as “artworks” is the high level of resemblance to the original work<sup>20</sup> (Picture 5) or only the recreations with the individual accent or intended and properly-done changes as focal points<sup>21</sup> (Picture 6) could be categorised as “new artworks” partly

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<sup>15</sup> Dada was an artistic and literary movement that arose as a reaction to World War I and the nationalism that many thought had led to the war, its output was wildly diverse, ranging from performance art to poetry, photography, sculpture, painting, and collage.

<sup>16</sup> “Не имитация, а интерпретация”. “Изоизоляция” глазами искусствоведа, 10 April 2020, [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com)

<sup>17</sup> **Anton Troianovski**, Bored Russians Posted Silly Art Parodies. The World Has Joined In., April 25, 2020, [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

<sup>18</sup> People are re-creating famous artworks with their pets and whatever else is lying around, Natalie B. Compton, 3 April, 2020, [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

<sup>19</sup> Amazing! Leonardo da Vinci’s “Last Supper” in the flesh, 10 April, 2020, [www.aleteia.org](http://www.aleteia.org)

<sup>20</sup> Some people used their own or their family members’ resemblance in physical appearance or facial expression to the protagonists of masterpieces, the others stressed the similarities in arrangement of figures or objects of the composition, imitating works of art detail by detail.

<sup>21</sup> There is a group of internet users who joined the initiative but preferred not to imitate, but to interpret the masterpieces using the objects instead of figures or the

based on the transformation of the old masters' canvases. If we turn our gaze to the past, it'd be no need to make efforts to draw parallels with Botero<sup>22</sup>, Duchamp, Dali or Picasso who created some of their works at least visually relied on the Renaissance and Baroque masterpieces.

- Issue 5. Who was the very first initiator of this movement?: whether a Facebook group set by Russians and named "Izoizolyacia"<sup>23</sup> with more than 500, 000 users or maybe the challenges started by the museums in Twitter<sup>24</sup> and Instagram or probably an Instagram initiative named "tussenkunsten-quarantaine"<sup>25</sup>? Our investigation led us to "The Remake Project"<sup>26</sup> run in 2011 by the Booooooom creator Jeff Hamada, a competition that challenged professional and amateur artists to recreate their favourite old master paintings as contemporary photographs, the same process occurred in the year 2015<sup>27</sup>, 2014<sup>28</sup> and 2017<sup>29</sup>, but it was not surely so popular among art society and internet users, as it is nowadays, when people turned to be stuck at home self-isolated.

### The analysis of some prominent works of art created amidst pandemic

The complementary comparison of the freshly-created illustrations on both objective and allegorical images of COVID-19 and the confronting force – the general representations of heroic medical workers to the ancient artefacts with mythological and religious themes (sculptures, reliefs, icons, oil paintings with the two-figure compositions of the battle between "good" and "evil") and close proximity in content-related structure, shed light on the common features in subject, at the same time stress the clue idea of continuity and development of the artistic tradition in the mankind art history.

The conflict between the dominant or major figure of the composition – the protagonist-hero-doctor and her antagonist – hostile character, rendered by

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figures instead of objects, some people even adding their own motifs to the recreated works, intentionally avoiding the copy of the artwork composition.

<sup>22</sup> Fernando Botero is an outstanding Colombian painter and sculptor known for his volumetric stylisation of figures and objects. His oeuvre ranges in subject matter, including daily life in Colombia, art historical references like the *Mona Lisa*, and abuses of power—all unified by Botero's exaggeratedly rotund figures.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/izoizolyacia/>

<sup>24</sup> **Sangeeta Singh-Kurtz**, If You Miss Museums, Dress Up As Your Favourite Artwork, 13 April, 2020, [www.thecut.com](http://www.thecut.com)

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/tussenkunstenquarantaine/?hl=en>

<sup>26</sup> Pinar Noorata, Classic Works of Art Re-Imagined, 27 October, 2020, [www.mymodernmet.com](http://www.mymodernmet.com)

<sup>27</sup> **Sara Barnes**, Photographers Cleverly Remake Old Master Paintings, 28 July, 2020, [www.mymodernmet.com](http://www.mymodernmet.com)

<sup>28</sup> **Jenny Zhang**, Coworkers Recreate Famous Works of Art Using Objects Found Around the Office, 17 December, 2014, [www.mymodernmet.com](http://www.mymodernmet.com)

<sup>29</sup> **Jessica Stewart**, Gustav Klimt's Famous Paintings Get Recreated with Live Models, 6 September, 2017, [www.mymodernmet.com](http://www.mymodernmet.com)

allegories and personifications is reflecting the struggle between the positive and negative spirits. The theme could also be interpreted as the endeavour battle between a human hero with supernatural abilities and a powerful substance, inhuman evil creature – embodiment of foe of mankind, and considered as the focal point of these artworks. In addition, the confrontation of the positive and negative forces might be philosophically elucidated as the eternal balance and motion of life, nature, time being.

Coming to the particular illustration of the Instagram artist MJ. Hiblen (Picture 7) with the “general image” of the brave doctor, its differentiated peculiarity lies in the encapsulation the cluster of the horrible traits of the unknown virus in a personification with its wild and predatory characteristics ready to swallow the human figure. As the only indisputable fact relating the coronavirus is that it can cause death, representing it in visual forms as the allegory of death or destructive force, is quite foreseeable. This scheme was broadly used by the predecessors of the contemporary artist (see “The Plague” by Arnold Böcklin (1827–1901) embodying the threatening essence of the lethal diseases taking millions of human lives, through the allegorical visualisations of death.

One may ask: why the artist betook the method of allegorically stressed and detailed depiction of the disease, with carefully drawn texture, its anthropomorphic face and facial expression? The clue, most likely, lies on the purpose to picture the unseen and untouchable, make the invisible visible, highly impressive and memorable for the audience accentuating the ruthless nature of the disease and, which is more significant, to contrapose its essence to the calm, confident and fearless character of the doctor whose triumph over the eerie evil substance is inevitable. With the usage of the non-personified and non-allegorical, objective image of the virus the illustration would firmly lose its expressiveness and the doctor’s figure won’t be perceived as the super-heroic.

Iranian illustrator Alireza Pakdel<sup>30</sup> (Picture 8) prefers the language of symbols and metaphors portraying the doctors in various conditions but with the best human qualities: fighting the imaginary evil, day-and-night devotedly caring after the patients, working hard to find the cure for the unknown disease. In comparison with the above discussed illustrations, the works of the Iranian artist, full of rays of hope and positiveness, focus rather on revealing the qualities and characteristics of doctors and nurses in general, rather spotlighting the process than on pointing the tense struggle between positive force-doctor and negative force-virus, that is why there is no exaggerated, expressive personification of the COVID-19 in his works. Instead the very hub of his compositions takes the idealised and highlighted image of medical staff. Despite the fact that his hero-doctors carry certain facial expressions, differ from each other in visual appearance, they still remain within the framework of the “general

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<sup>30</sup> Cartoonist Alireza Pakdel’s new collection healing harms from coronavirus, 11 April 2020, [www.tehrantimes.com](http://www.tehrantimes.com)

representation”, as they are not vivid individuals and they are not even distinguished with the ethnic features. Moreover, the aim of the artist was not to underline one particular doctor, but to pay a tribute to the doctors on the whole for desperately fighting in the frontline for the lives of others. Observing the Iranian artist’s compositions from the perspective of the comparative analysis reveals likenesses in his winged figures of medical workers to the angelized images of Red Cross nurses from the posters of the World War II. In both cases the helplessness, deaths, crisis and despair made the audience feel the need of heroic images, guiding the artists of the past and our present to furnish the characters of physicians and nurses with the tangible traits of saints, angels and even saviour.

As for the colourful and enthusiastic illustrations of the Italian artist Chiara Belmonte<sup>31</sup> (Picture 9) with the theme of human interactions amidst coronavirus outbreak, here one can see the medical-mask-wearing anonymous and simplified male and female figures in balconies with no facial features and individuality. They could be determined as the “general images of self-isolated people coping with coronavirus”, carrying some hints of typically Italian mentality and style of staying at home and keeping social distancing (there is a significant number of video material in social networks showing Italian ordinary people singing and dancing in their balconies during their quarantine regime).

Another illustration from an Egyptian magazine<sup>32</sup> (Picture 10) caught our attention with the hidden message of criticising discrimination towards Asian people in general and Chinese residents in Western countries in particular, the anti-humanistic accusation of every Chinese being infected and intentionally spreading the virus. These ideas are profoundly expressed by properly selected and arranged motifs of composition, postures and gestures of the figures- the angry and frightened representatives of faceless and impersonal crowd (women, men, a child) all of them pointing or staring at the central female figure. And only with the existence of cleverly selected attribute on the latter’s hand- the pot/bowl with the chopsticks and noodles, which itself is the connotational and compositional centre of this illustration, one can easily guess that this unknown girl, the innocent victim of the crowd, is a Chinese or an Asian, though the artist didn’t endow her with individual characteristics. Thus the interpretation of the content as “the individual against the crowd”, has the right to exist.

### Chinese perspective

The first known infected patients were recorded in 2019, in Wuhan city, Hubei province, so Chinese art world was the first to react to the total lockdown, mobilisation of the medical personnel, temporary closure of factories, schools, stores, museums. The cultural institutions instantly launched online campaigns with the images of their emblematic artefacts wearing medical masks, however,

<sup>31</sup> **Erick Aroldo**, This Italian-Illustrator is Sharing Her “Balcony-Life” Stories Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic, 3 April 2020, [www.designculturenow.co](http://www.designculturenow.co)

<sup>32</sup> PixelStory (Kayee Au) for Egyptian Streets, 15 April 2020, [www.egyptianstreets.com](http://www.egyptianstreets.com)

the laurel belongs to the impressive number of poster-art production with the stressed images of healthcare workers and employees of the social sector. The majority of the works carries the hidden message of the idea that China would or has already overcome the coronavirus outbreak by its own efforts, highly-prepared and organised work of its people.

As most of the protagonists are depicted in protective clothing, glasses, gloves, on one hand pointing the high level of the Chinese authorities and institutions' readiness on responding the disaster, there's no way to speak on individual characteristics and identified personages, merely general representations, symbols, metaphors and allegories to form the collective image of the virus-confronting force – heroic medical personnel. The specific difference from contemporary art of Europe and the United States with the pandemic subject matters, is the extensive engagement of Chinese cultural and folk elements (food, architecture, garments, masterpieces of Chinese traditional art, Chinese calligraphy). The motifs based on the images of tractors and cranes with the workers indicate the occasion of building a hospital in Wuhan in only 10 days. The theme with the doctor kissing her child or her husband through the protective glass highlights the sacrifice and the high price medical staff is paying for prevailing the pandemic, at the same time hinting the case that they are not supernatural beings with special attributes, but humans with all the best human characteristics such as devotion, deep knowledge and experience, bravery and patience. Even if they are comprised in compositions with metaphoric structure they are still portrayed with highly humanistic features, emitting the concept that real heroes of pandemic period are not imaginary almighty beings (one can see in European and American nowadays cartoon production), similar to the personages of computer games or fantasies, but real, ordinary, recognisable “next-door people”, confronting the real threat with the strength of their heart and mind to fight till the very end.

The illustration with the rows of medical workers forming the burning candle (Picture 11) is noteworthy for the peculiar arrangement of details in centralised composition with the best traditions of symbolism which could provide a number of contextual interpretations.

1. A tribute to the medical staff who sacrificed their lives- burned as a candle, for the sake of people's health and safety.
2. Medical workers forming the “living fortification” in front of the virus, and the fire as the symbol of desperate fight, the extreme level of pressure and tension.
3. The burning candle as the symbol of life on the Earth, based on the shoulders of healthcare workers.

The watercolours on paper by Zhang Mu (Picture 12) vary with their apply of principles of surrealism, symbolism and metaphysical art, having withal his peculiar signature, for the first glance weird creatures in weird actions, as weird as the unknown disease. With a ration of irony he repels the dark side and malaise of the pandemic times with his gloomy palette of cold greys, black and

white and impression of dynamism due to the floating strokes. Some of his characters are wearing not the recognisable medical mask of our times, but the beaked-mask of the 14th century bubonic plague<sup>33</sup>, drawing the analogical lines between the past and the present. Some figures are dancing on the background of generalised industrial landscape (echoing “Dance Macabre” – medieval tale of the “dance with the death”) or taking part in bizarre processions and mystical ceremonies, as if the virus has already been defeated, while others are in hysteria and discomfiture, such as the weary beaked-masked figure fishing in the bathroom or the melancholic masked male accompanied by “Doctor Schnabel”, dying rather from tedium of isolation than from the infection itself. Though one may notice the same approach in general images of the isolated people we explored before, but they are in strong contrast with the aforementioned Italian enjoyable pastime in balconies.

Another interpretation of coronavirus outbreak by Liu Xiu Lin (柳秀林) (Picture 13) with the close-up view, physical distortions done on purpose, feeling of incompleteness, emotionally drawn lines and strokes of expressive faces and radiating eyes on us profoundly affect the audience with the mixture of feelings: we do not know them, and perhaps we won’t ever recognise them, but the pain, confusion, strength in their eyes and facial features are apparently catharsis for us-the viewers. They are indelible from the memory for long, as insignia of the humans going through coronavirus pandemic.

Effectively using the social media platforms of WeChat, Weibo, TikTok, QQ, Chinese cartoonists are spreading their own vision of the pandemic, some of them have an exciting narrative behind. The crowded compositions of Chen Xiao-Tao (Picture 14) tell the story of the start of the outbreak, cure and victory over the virus with the detailed allegorical figurines in the form of Chinese cuisine most representative dishes of different provinces, missioned to support Wuhan city with the idea that all the corners of this vast country jointly fought the disease with no despair. Among the crowd one can notice the general images of medics, military figures, workers side by side showing their care to the infected patient. There is also a petite but significant detail, uncovering typical Chinese manner: the small figure of the doctor is intendedly depicted from the back, so that the eyes of the audience could catch the flowers on her protective cloth. It is the reflection of the real story, when in one of Wuhan hospitals an elderly patient expressed her gratitude to her doctor by painting floral ornaments on the latter’s medical uniform.

### **The reaction of the American art world**

The fact that the United States leads in coronavirus cases, was shocking not only for the American people, but for the whole international society as well. The art being created in the U.S. nowadays has all the above-noted grouped

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<sup>33</sup> See Copper engraving of Doctor Schnabel (i.e., Dr. Beak), a plague doctor in seventeenth-century Rome, circa 1656, Johannes Ebert and others, *Europas Sprung in die Neuzeit*, Die große Chronik-Weltgeschichte, 10 (Gütersloh: Wissen Media, 2008), p. 197

subject matters (see Introduction), expressed by variety of media, contemporary methods, techniques, tools and approaches.

An anonymous illustration (Picture 15) posted and shared in social network, has the power to speak for millions of Americans, mirroring the critical situation in the country and marking the “ray of hope”: It is a two-figure allegorical composition with the neutral background and monumentality of figures, where the Statue of Liberty – the symbol of American and universal freedom, embodiment of the origin, history and might of the superpower America is portrayed sick, barely walking with the help of the healthcare female, mask-wearing worker – generalised image of the devoted people saving lives in these uncertain times. Liberty is able to hold only her tablet, the torch- sign of enlightenment and faith, is carried by the medical worker, symbolically and objectively flagging her considerable role as “helping hand for the United States”. It is remarkable that the the Statue of Liberty is not the first time at all involved as a compositional motif for propaganda campaigns<sup>34</sup>: the posters of world wars such as “For Liberty’s sake” and “You buy a Liberty bond” serve as vivid examples, besides, artworks of 1960s with the emblem of America were widely used as a manifest for protests against American interference in Vietnam (See, Tomi Ungerer, “Eat”, 1967)<sup>35</sup>. Nonetheless, the statue has rare depictions in the current form: despaired, exhausted and in need of support herself.

However, a number of American artists preferred to mark the leading role of the medics in the fight against virus paying homage to them through individual representations and portraiture aiming the target audience to remember and honour them by names. Among them “Honor heroes” is worthy of attention. Shepard Fairey, the artist behind former U.S. President Barack Obama’s iconic 2008 campaign, comments on his artworks, “I want the portrait to emanate the comforting warmth and empathy healthcare workers provide in the midst of anxiety and crisis”.<sup>36</sup> There are artists who went even far, such as Aya Brown, depicting nurses flamboyantly in non-idealised physical forms, funny t-shirt, with tattoos, modern boots, blending the pandemic image of the medical worker with her personal memories from the hospital she went for emergency treatment<sup>37</sup>. (Picture 16)

## Conclusion

Regardless of its comparatively short-time existence, the COVID-19 has solidly influenced the world of arts shaping it with the new sophisticated themes, directions, styles, manners, function and context, accordingly creating a vast range of materials for art historians, which is beyond the bounds of possibility to

<sup>34</sup> The Statue of Liberty in Recruitment and War Bonds Posters, [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)

<sup>35</sup> **Tomi Ungerer**, [www.artspace.com](http://www.artspace.com)

<sup>36</sup> Kept in Quarantine, KAWS, Banksy, and Other Top Artists Are Responding with Standout Art Projects, 20 April, 2020, [www.artnews.com](http://www.artnews.com)

<sup>37</sup> **Brooke Bobb**, Aya Brown’s Portraits of Essential Workers Give Thanks Through Art, 21 May, 2020, [www.vogue.com](http://www.vogue.com)

include and analyse in one single article. Taking this statement into account, the current survey on the pandemic art could be considered as fresh and of great flexibility, but still only “a drop in the ocean”. The overall picture is specified with the notable perspective of continuity and we do not except even the radical alterations in our further studies.

Anchoring on the materials analysed and categorised in the current article, we witnessed the fact that a part of the artworks of coronavirus pandemic made people closer to it, its impact and circumstances, the others led the eyes of the audience to the positive effects or made them forget the reality at all. Some artists amidst pandemic do not stash their peculiar feature – devotion to the roots, using the rich materials from their past, creating artworks entirely corresponding to the coronavirus outbreak, at the same time emphasising the specificity of their traditional culture capable to serve as a source for inspiration even in the period of the global disaster, others remained in the framework of global tendencies of poster-production with propagandistic and encouraging function. The majority of the artists chose the artistic language of symbols and metaphors, variety of general images and embodiments of poignant ideas.

In coronavirus pandemic time the art seems to be a “life-buoy”, creating the ground for human interaction and communication through culture, bringing the strong ideas of humanism, tolerance, care, unity, individual taste, point of view, selection, the natural human right and instinct of creation and recreation, and, finally, the vital faith in that “after the plague, comes the Renaissance”...

## **ԱՐՎԵՍՏԸ ՀԱՄԱՃԱՐԱԿԻ ԺԱՄԱՆԱԿ. ԻՆՉ ԱԶԴԵՑՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ ՈՒՆԵՑԱՎ ԿՈՐՈՆԱՎԻՐՈՒՍԸ ԱՐՎԵՍՏԻ ԱՇԽԱՐՀԻ ՎՐԱ**

ԱՆԻ ՄԱՐԳԱՐՅԱՆ (ԶԻՆԱՍՏԱՆ)

Սույն հոդվածը գիտական փորձ է՝ վերլուծելու և դասակարգելու մշակութային փոփոխությունները և խնդիրները կորոնավիրուսի բռնկման, կարանտինի և սոցիալական հեռավորության պայմաններում՝ նշելով ամբողջ աշխարհում արվեստի բնագավառներում տեղի ունեցող ֆենոմենալ գործընթացների ընդհանուր պատկերը: Վերլուծելով նոր իրականությունն արտացոլող ակնառու օրինակները, որոնք պատկերում են համաճարակի ժամանակի մթնոլորտը, միջավայրը, հանգամանքները, դրական և բացասական կողմերը, օգտագործելով գեղարվեստական զանազան ձևեր, վերացական և նատուրալիստական մոտեցումներ, բարդ և պարզեցված կոմպոզիցիաներ, մենք փորձում ենք բացահայտել արվեստի աճող դերն ու գործառույթը, նկարագարողների և թվային արվեստի սրընթաց աճը, նոր գերիշխող առարկայի կամ թեմայի ազգայնացման փորձերը, այն է՝ առողջապահության բնագավառի աշխատողների իդեալականացված կերպարներ, որոնք դիմադրում են համաճարակին: Վերջինս ներկայացված է վիզուալ այլաբանություններով, խորհրդանիշներով և մարմնացումներով՝ աչքի ընկնելով իր արտա-

հայտնությամբ: Այնուամենայնիվ, հաշվի առնելով, որ համաճարակի շրջանի ավարտը դեռ պարզ չէ, մեր ուսումնասիրությունը շարունակականության նկատելի հեռանկար ունի:

**Բանալի բաներ** – կորոնավիրուս, վերստեղծում, ընդհանուր պատկեր, այլաբանություն, հանդիսատես, քարոզչություն:

## ИСКУССТВО В УСЛОВИЯХ ПАНДЕМИИ: КАК КОРОНАВИРУС ПОВЛИЯЛ НА МИР ИСКУССТВА

АНИ МАРГАРЯН (КИТАЙ)

Данная статья представляет собой научную попытку проанализировать и классифицировать изменения и проблемы, относящиеся к культурному аспекту во времена вспышки коронавируса, карантина и социального дистанцирования, отмечая общую картину феноменальных процессов, происходящих в сферах искусства всего мира. Анализируя более выделяющиеся примеры, отражающие новую реальность, изображающие атмосферу, среду, обстоятельства, положительные и отрицательные стороны пандемического времени, используя различные художественные манеры, абстрактные и натуралистические подходы, сложные и упрощенные композиции, мы раскрыли обстоятельство возрастающей роли и функции искусства в целом, высокий спрос на карикатуры, иллюстрации и быстрый рост цифрового искусства, попытки национализации нового доминирующего предмета или темы – идеализированных образов работников здравоохранения, противостоящих болезни. Последний представлен визуальными аллегориями, метафорами, символами и воплощениями, воздействуя на аудиторию своей выразительностью. Однако, учитывая тот факт, что окончание пандемического периода еще неясно, у нашего исследования есть заметная перспектива.

**Ключевые слова** – коронавирус, воссоздание, общий образ, аллегория, аудитория, пропаганда.



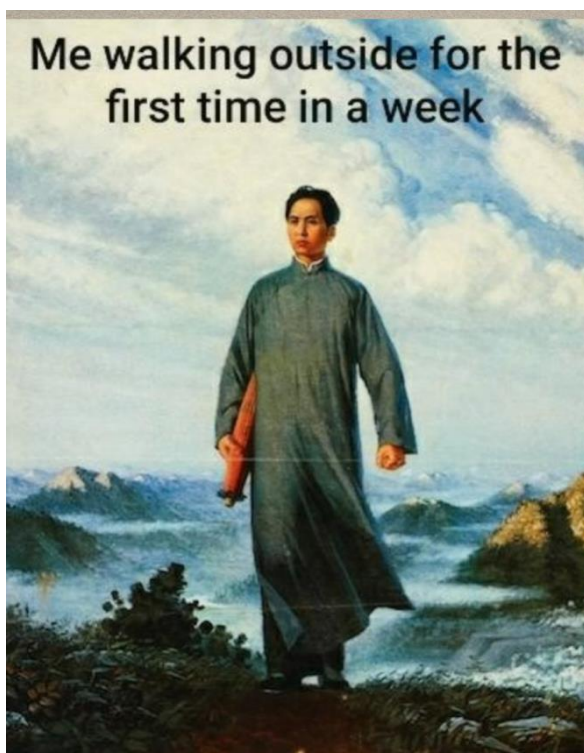
Picture 1. Edward Hopper, "Morning Sun" (1952), oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Picture 2. Banksy, "The Game Changer", 2020, Courtesy of Banksy



Picture 3. José Manuel Ballester, Hidden Spaces, Transformation of “The Birth of Venus” of Sandro Botticelli, 2020, Courtesy: José Manuel Ballester



Picture 4. Liu Chunhua, “Chairman Mao en route to Anyuan”, 1967, oil painting transformed into a poster in 2020, courtesy of Facebook



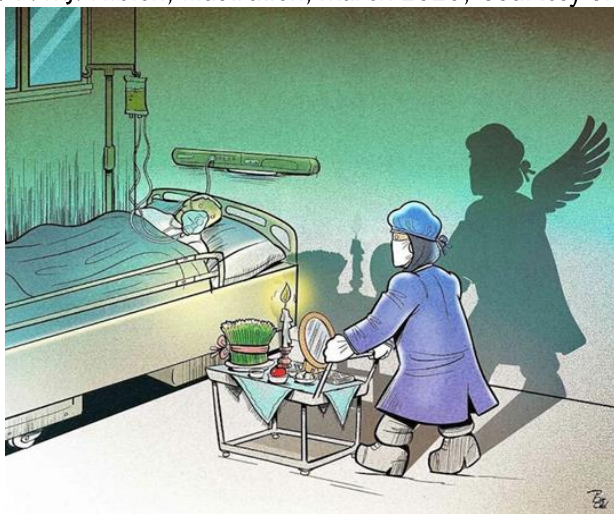
Picture 5. Guillaume Seignac (1879-1924), Young Woman of Pompeii on a Terrace, oil on canvas, recreated image by Oksana Selivanova, 2020.  
Courtesy of Facebook



Picture 6. Pablo Picasso, "Girl on a Ball", 1905, oil on canvas, Pushkin Museum, recreated image by Aleksandr Chelpanov, 2020, Courtesy of Facebook



Picture 7. MJ. Hiblen, illustration, March 2020, Courtesy of Twitter



Picture 8. Alireza Pakdel, Illustration, March 2020, Courtesy of Alireza Pakdel



Picture 9. Chiara Belmonte, “Balcony-life stories”, 2020,  
Courtesy of Chiara Belmonte



Picture 10. PixelStory (Kayee Au) for Egyptian Streets, 15 April 2020,  
Courtesy of the “Egyptian Streets”



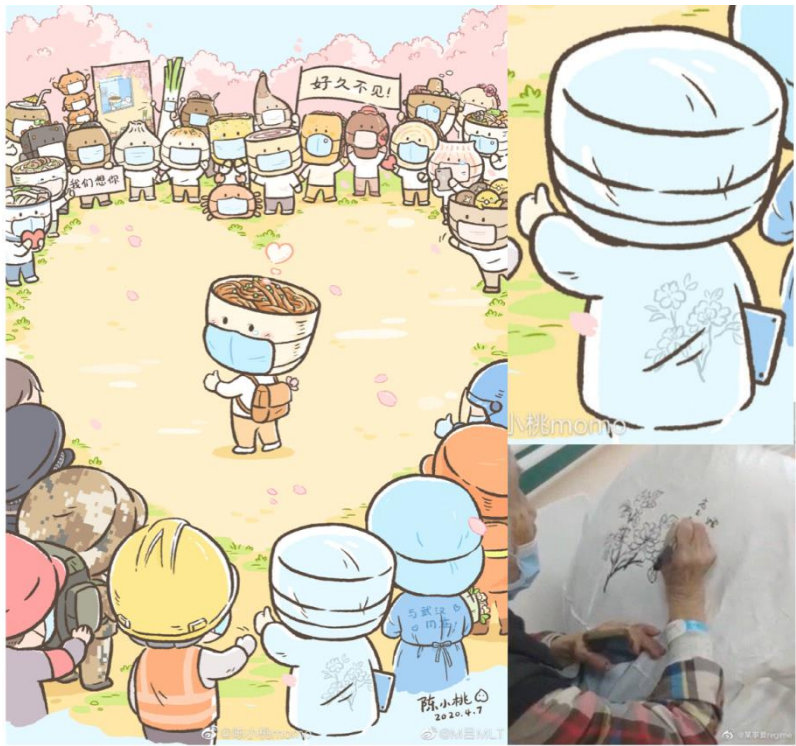
Picture 11. "The Candle", illustration, China, 2020, Courtesy of Weibo



Picture 12. Zhang Mu, "The Fishing Day", watercolour on paper, 2020, 50X35, Courtesy of Zhang Mu



Picture 13. Liu Diu Lin, “The Diary Face”, 2020, Courtesy of Liu Xiu Lin



Picture 14. Chen Xiao Tao, Illustration, 2020, Courtesy of Weibo



Picture 15. Anonymous artist, “The Liberty with the healthcare worker”, April 2020, Courtesy of Twitter



Picture 16. Aya Brown, NURSE 1, COVID-19, 2020, Brown Kraft paper, color pencil. Courtesy of the artist