

## YUROZ: THE TRINITY OF SYMBOLS

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Like many other artists, Yuroz, too, has used symbols to convey his ideas through the aesthetic and communicative impact of his paintings. Yuroz' primary symbols are fused into a dialectic bond and form a trinity. They are the *Light* – as the symbol of spiritual birth, born of the subconscious, the *Pomegranate* – as the earthen incarnation of ethnic memory, and the *Blue Rose* – as the conception of mental-spiritual talents. Yuroz' art is not limited to the narrow meaning of the word *symbol*. His symbols are endowed with outward beauty and imbued with inner sentimentality, expressed instinctively. His symbols spring from inner necessity and suggestion, which help and move the art-lovers and heal the souls of the humankind.

**Key words:** Symbolism, Light, Pomegranate, Blue Rose, mysticism, Miher, harmony.

### Introduction

It is not about Symbolism, which started in the 1880s as a literature and art movement and later spread worldwide. Rather, it is about symbols that are used as a means for artistic expression in fine arts. The use of symbols comes from the ancient times, when man tried to communicate with his fellowmen.

Prehistoric stone carvings and cave drawings are actually nothing but symbols. We can infer that hieroglyphics, as well as ritual languages, have sprung from prehistoric carvings. Conveying a message through a picture or symbol was, and still is, both practical and communicative. That is why many artists, such as Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee used them, and so do many contemporary artists up to the present day.

Had the tradition of expressing oneself through symbols not been permeated with the vital meaning in visual arts, it would not have spanned throughout millennia, overcome the crucible of the 20<sup>th</sup> century art and reached our days, reached Yuroz, whose major symbols are fused by a dialectic bond and form a trinity. Those symbols are the *Light* – as a spiritual birth, born of the subconscious, the *Pomegranate* – as the earthen incarnation of ethnic memory, and the *Blue Rose* – as the conception of mental-spiritual talent. These and other related symbols of Yuroz (*Woman's Breast*, *Book*, *Wine*, *Window*, *Dove...*) are attractive by their outer vitality, on the one hand, and contain artistic messages within themselves, on the other. Their interpretations are set out below.

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Still Life with Pomegranates #2,  
121x92cm, oil on canvas



Light of Compassion, 300x200cm,  
oil on canvas, 2009



Music between Lovers, 152x122cm,  
oil on canvas, 2009



Protected by Love, 121x92cm,  
oil on canvas, 2006



Source of Life, 41x51cm, oil on panel, 1998

### A. The Light

We know that in the cultures of the ancient world, the worship of the sun as the source of Light, giving life to everything, was widespread.

However, older mythologies insist on the opposite. The ancient Greeks believed that there was a goddess, Theia, from whom all the light-giving bodies were born – the Sun (Helios), the Moon (Selene), and the Morning Star (Eos). Even before the Greeks, the worship of light was practiced in many Eastern cultures, like the Mitanni, Indian, Iranian, Armenian, etc.

Mithra, Mithras or Mitra, *is the God of Light, whose cult spread from India in the east to as far west as Spain, Great Britain and Germany*". [1] In the Iranian mythology Mehr is the "*deity of covenant, light, oath, justice and the sun*". [2]

The god of light in the Armenian mythology was Miher, the forerunner of the Iranian god Mithra. In the old Armenian calendar, the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the month and the 7<sup>th</sup> month of the year were named *Mihr* and *Mehekan*, and the holy places were called *mehyans* as a tribute to the god Miher. The god of light was given such importance because in the Armenian mythology, light was not only the physical existence, opposing the dark, but also the mental-spiritual light, confronting narrow-mindedness and dark-mindedness. When the Armenian people adopted Christianity as their state religion, the believers addressed God as "*Light, creator of Light, the first Light...*" (3). Indeed, for a believer, the source of both physical and divine light is God who spreads his spiritual rays to our dark hearts and illuminates us internally.

Yuroz' paintings, which are in the cubist style, are mostly flooded with such rays pouring from heaven. Even dispersed into light colors on the forms, they are unattainable and have no beginnings...

For Yuroz, light is the symbol of the shining grace, wisdom and spirit.

Created thousands of years before Christ, the Sumerian epic of *Gilgamesh* depicts how Utnapishtim (the forerunner of Noah), on seeing light after the flood had subsided, shouted: "*And then I opened the roof, and light hit my face!*" (4).

Imagine how, after living ten long days because of the flood in darkness and uncertainty, you open the window and are hit by light in your face. Here is when the light gains a divine meaning and value for man. Here is when the vital importance of the light is felt... Here is when the patriarch Noah lived the joy of welcoming the light when he first saw it.

Yuroz, in his creative and stressful moments, not only provides artistic joy to those who had lost and found the light, but also cleanses and vivifies it in his paintings to thereby convey it to the viewer, like, for instance, in his "Source of Life", "Protected with Love" or "Light of Compassion".

Some Renaissance painters depict light as rays coming through the windows and flooding the main character or the surroundings. This can be seen in the works by Leonardo da Vinci and Vermeer. In other cases, light springs right from the character (especially when the character is Child Jesus), such as in Caravaggio's and Rembrandt's artworks.

In certain instances, Yuroz also paints vaulted windows, like in “Inspiration Amongst Us”. However, the source of light for him does not focus on the character or an item, because for Yuroz, light is everlasting and everywhere and remains a divine existence. It is the dark that is now here and may be somewhere else in a short while. That is why light is also a source of life and hope for Yuroz: it is there, in the light, through self-cleansing that one’s soul is made gentle and pure again.

### **B. The Pomegranate:**

The symbol of the pomegranate dates back to the ancient times and is widespread in different cultures. Some scholars believe that the Tree of Life must have been the pomegranate tree. Almost all ancient civilizations worshipped a tree as a source of life. The Chinese worshipped the ginseng plant, Indians – the mango tree, Babylonians and Jews worshipped the palm tree, ancient Egyptians – the sycamore tree, and Armenians – the pomegranate tree.

The pomegranate, besides its pleasing taste, is beautiful and attractive outwardly. When cut crosswise, its blood-red semi-transparent seeds, their beehive-like arrangement and rhythm amaze us. In Hinduism, the pomegranate symbolizes prosperity and fertility and is directly linked to the fertility goddess Bhumi Devi and to Ganesh, who was believed to have granted seeds to fruits. Because of its quality, flavor and beauty, many beautiful fables and myths are created around the pomegranate. In Minoan, a pre-Greek dialect, the name of the goddess Rhea means pomegranate (derived from “Rhoa”). The pomegranate as a fruit with the qualities of life and death, as well as of success and divinity, is oftentimes mentioned and revered in the Greek mythology. In current times, the pomegranate remains a symbol of success and fertility in rural areas. Not only in the Indian and Greek mythologies, but also in many eastern cultures, the pomegranate is associated to healing, fertilizing and youth-giving qualities. In the sacred texts of Judaism, the pomegranate is mentioned as holy fruit and a symbol of truthfulness. According to a Hebrew tradition, the number of pomegranate seeds in a single fruit is 613, which is also the number of the Torah commandments. King Solomon’s royal crown, like the Armenian and Sassanid crowns, are presumably inspired by the pomegranate flower. Further on, one of the Semitic goddesses is called *Remman*, which literally means pomegranate; in modern Arabic and Hebrew it is *Rimmonim*.

We come across the pomegranate tree as the tree of life in the most ancient frescoes of the kingdom of Urartu. For Armenians, the pomegranate is part of their lifestyle and to date is considered the symbol of love, fertility, immortality. According to a local tradition, until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, in rural areas, when a woman became pregnant, being shy to directly tell her husband, she would present him with a pomegranate. And if it was not in season, a red apple would do. Armenians in pre-Christian times used to make pomegranate wine, which they believed was nectar of immortality. Incidentally, the tradition has survived to this day. The pomegranate is widely used in Armenian spiritual culture – in literature, in miniature art and in high

relief sculptures as a symbol of Christ and the fruit of immortality. Well known are the works “*Madonna of the Pomegranate*” and “*Madonna and Child with a Pomegranate*” by the famous Renaissance artists Sandro Botticelli and Leonardo da Vinci. In these icons, the cracked-open pomegranate seeds symbolize the future sufferings and torture of Baby Jesus and ultimately announce the mysteries of resurrection and immortality. Even in the Quran, the pomegranate is mentioned as the creation of God and a heavenly fruit.

All of the above evidence points to the fact that in the ancient world, the pomegranate had a vital meaning and carried divine mysteries. Therefore, it is not accidental that Armenian (and not only Armenian) painters are instinctively attracted to the appearance of the pomegranate and paint it as a symbol.

In Yuroz’ case, painting pomegranates draws on a memory from his teenage years. So, on one of his visits to the Zangezur region of Armenia, a pomegranate orchard came into his view. The light autumn breeze swayed the trees, and the colorful leaves gave the impression of a field ablaze, while the red pomegranates, like shiny flames, added life and vitality to nature.

Imagine, how irresistibly attracted to the fruits was this tired, hungry, thirsty and passionate teenager. He ran up and picked the first he could lay his hands on and began sucking its juice like a baby would take in his mother’s milk in the desert. Imagine the tremendous satisfaction the juicy pomegranate brought to this sensitive teenage boy. It certainly implied some eroticism, too.

This event has left its imprint in young Yuroz’ memory. The pomegranate remains as a delicious, beautiful, yet mysterious and divine fruit for the painter; sucking its juice has become a ritual and a sexually attractive act...

This is why the loving couples in Yuroz’ paintings, even in the heated moments of their intimacy, would hold in their hands either a pomegranate or a Blue Rose. But why would they hold the latter?

### C. The Blue Rose

It is said that during the Middle Ages, they knew how to grow blue roses, and that the color was a real azure blue. In 2004, through the joint efforts of two flower companies (the Japanese *Suntory* and the Australian *Florigene*) a kind of blue rose was produced, which gained widespread popularity not only for its beauty and uniqueness, but also for its symbolic connotation. It symbolizes “*mystery or achieving the impossible*” (6).

In some European traditions, the blue rose symbolizes the mystery of achieving the impossible dream. The blue rose is a mystery in itself, and those who solve the mystery, can realize their greatest ambitions, they can discover the secret of how to stay young, how to attract a person and inspire love into that person. This concept of the blue rose was mostly popular in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the Victorian era.

At the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Russian Symbolism arose as a predominant intellectual and artistic movement, “*separate from European Symbolism, emphasizing mysticism...*” (7). In March of 1907, a group of sixteen young Russian artists organized an exhibition under the name of “Blue Rose” in Moscow. Among them were such eminent artists as V. Tatlin, A. Arapov, P. Kuznetsov, M. Saryan, N. Sabunov and others. “The “*Blue Rose*” movement marked the final phase of naturalism and the initial phase of abstractionism in Russian art” (8).

Opinions differ as to the unusual name “Blue Rose”. A.A. Rusakova expounded on them in her book “Pavel Kuznetsov” (9).

One of the explications comes from early German romanticism and symbolism. The 18<sup>th</sup> century poet and philosopher Novalis introduced the blue flower into a story of his as the symbol of mystic love. According to him, “the blue flower is the watchword and the sacred symbol of the German Romantic school” and “symbolizes hope and beauty of things” (10).

In Chinese folklore, and this belief is alive up until now, the blue rose symbolizes the key to the unattainable love. Having once taken hold of the blue rose, one could win the love of the person who used to decline it.

Furthermore, some believe that the blue color per se possesses healing and refreshing qualities. High up in the Zangezur mountains (3300 m.) of Armenia, there is a lake called “Blue Lake”. Even today, the inhabitants of the area believe that the waters of the lake heal. They say that when people immerse in the lake with “*a pure heart and thoughts*”, their diseases heal.

Blue is the color of both Lord Vishnu and Lord Krishna in Hindu religion. Their bodies are blue because, according to Hindus, that color is capable of absorbing all kinds of evil, poisons including. At the same time, the blue color symbolizes bravery and determination, through which the gods abolish all evil. For this reason, the Hindu believers pray to Lord Vishnu and Lord Krishna for their sufferings and diseases. Yuroz, too, has a set of portrayals of suffering figures. They are naked and are presented in the different hues of blue.

According to metaphysicians, “*The color blue represents both the sky and the sea, and is associated with open spaces, freedom, intuition, imagination, inspiration, and sensitivity. Blue also represents meanings of depth, trust, loyalty, sincerity, faith and intelligence*” (11). For Kandinsky, each color has its own meaning. He says: “*Blue is peaceful, supernatural, deep, typical heavenly color, pure and boundless; it provides outer peace*” (12).

There is no blue rose in nature. In spite of this, Yuroz has chosen the blue color to paint symbols of pure love. And this is not accidental, because humanity needs mental and spiritual healing and rehabilitation concurrently with and no less than physical and physiological therapy. However, when Yuroz applies this refreshing and healing color as a symbol of pure love, he does not reproduce a habitual rose; the content and form of his roses are different. He ‘corrects’ the concept and renders the flower in his own way. Roses should have thorns by nature.

When troubadours (such as Omar Khayyam and Sayat Nova) sang about love, they did not forget the thorny and prickly nature of roses, because love hurts, too. Yet Yuroz' blue roses are not thorny, they do not hurt. On the contrary, they calm and heal. Nowadays, human relationships, based on pure love, are vanishing. As a consequence, materialism and greed sometimes reach their extremes and pollute man's surrounding as well as his innermost world. Even the most basic human rights are trampled. Witnessing all this, the sensitive artist suffers, endures adversities and labors through his unique concepts and ideas for the sake of freedom of the human mind and soul, for the sake of healing the humankind.

This is why in Yuroz' paintings we often find representations of the blue rose in the hands of a loving couple, in the vases with flower bouquets, in the adornments of women's headdresses. The blue rose is found even in the hands of saints (St. Archangelo Tadini), where it replaces the cross as the symbol of humanity (in this case, Christianity). Through the blue rose, he projects the message: "*Love one another*", which speaks of tolerance, harmony and peace. Thus, the Blue Rose of Yuroz is not only the most important symbol, but also the ideological axis of his artistic thinking, because he aims at the good, the noble and the beautiful in their literal meanings.

### Conclusion

The art of Yuroz is narrative, but not limited to the meaning of the word. His symbols are beautiful in appearance and imbued with intrinsic sentimentality. In Yuroz' art, this inner ethos is expressed instinctively, because his symbols spring from inner necessity, inner suggestion, which not only motivate the imagination and the world of emotions, but also help and move art lovers. Picasso, too, did not hesitate to use symbols in order to add vigor to his creations and make them more forceful. Thus, the bull in *Guernica* is a symbol of brutality and backwardness, whereas the horse symbolizes the tortured but fighting human beings. He says: "*We must fight against anything which threatens the freedom of imagination.*" (13) In fact, Picasso did not tolerate the dictatorship of his time (especially the Spanish dictatorship), and he fought it with his art, for the sake of the freedom of mind and soul. In another quote, he makes himself clearer: "*The purpose of art is washing the daily life dust off our souls*" (14). He sought to make us understand that fine art can **wash the dust out of our souls**. Yuroz with his art, his colors and symbols, does the same.

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## ՅՈՒՐՈՋ. ԽՈՐՀՐԴԱՆԻՇԵՐԻ ԵՌԱՄԻԱՍՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ

ՄՈՎՍԵՍ ՀԵՐԿԵԼԵԱՆ\* (Լիբանան, Բեյրութ)

**Հղման համար.** Հերկելեան, Մովսես: «Յուրոզ. խորհրդանիշերի եռամիասնությունը»: Արվեստագիտական հանդես, N 2 (2022): 215-223. DOI: 10.54503/2579-2830-2022.2(8)-215

Շատ նկարիչների նման, Յուրոզը նույնպես դիմել է խորհրդանիշերի, որպեսզի իր մտահղացումները հաղորդի նկարների գեղագիտական և հաղորդակցական որակի միջոցով: Յուրոզի հիմնական խորհրդանիշերը միաձուլվում են, կազմելով եռամիասնություն: Դրանք են. *Լույսը*՝ որպես ենթագիտակցականից բխող հոգևոր ծնունդ, *Նուռը*՝ որպես էթնիկ հիշողության երկրային մարմնացում, և *Կապույտ վարդը*՝ որպես մտավոր և հոգևոր տաղանդի գաղափար: Յուրոզի արվեստը չի սահմանափակվում *խորհրդանիշ* բառի նեղ իմաստով: Նրա խորհրդանիշերը, արտաքին գեղեցկության հետ մեկտեղ, համակված են բնագրաբար արտահայտված ներքին գերզգայնությամբ: Յուրոզի խորհրդանիշերը գոյանում են անհրաժեշտությունից և հուզականությունից, որոնք օգնում և հուզում են արվեստասերին և դարմանում մարդկության հոգիները:

**Բանալի բառեր՝** Սիմվոլիզմ, Լույս, Նուռ, Երկնագույն վարդ, խորհրդամոլություն, Միեր, ներդաշնակություն:

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\* Արվեստագիտության թեկնածու, <mailto:m.herkelian@gmail.com>, հոդվածը ներկայացնելու օրը՝ 22.11.2022, գրախոսելու օրը՝ 07.12.2022, տպագրության ընդունելու օրը՝ 15.12.2022:



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## ЮРОЗ: ТРИЕДИНСТВО СИМВОЛОВ

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Как многие художники, Юроз также прибегал к символам с целью передачи своих идей посредством эстетического и коммуникативного воздействия картин. Основные символы Юроза срастаются, образуя триединство. Это *Свет* – как духовное рождение от подсознательного, *Гранат* – как земная инкарнация этнической памяти, и *Голубая роза* – как концепция умственного и духовного таланта. Искусство Юроза не ограничивается узким значением слова *символ*. Его символы одновременно красивы внешне и пронизаны инстинктивно выраженной внутренней сентиментальностью. Символы Юроза возникают из необходимости и чувствований, помогающих и трогающих любителей искусства и излечивающих души рода человеческого.

**Ключевые слова:** символизм, Свет, Гранат, Голубая роза, мистицизм, Мгер, гармония.

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