

The study of visual and art literacy from the semiotic and communicative points of view

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INTRODUCTION

Art literacy implies several skills and knowledge that allow people to understand art and correctly interact with it. It is aimed at the ability to interpret and analyze the author's point of view, and the meaning of the artwork, to distinguish between the sociocultural and historical contexts in which it was created. Moreover, art literacy involves understanding the visual elements used in the various pieces of art, for instance, shapes, colours, textures, symbols and signs with which the author conveys the message to the viewers. The lack of art and visual literacy among the general audience has led to the problem of misunderstanding and misinterpretation of works of contemporary art. In one case, people believe that it is simple and superficial, carries mainly an entertainment function and does not compare with the works of classical authors of the past. On the other hand, those who talk about contemporary artworks as something too conceptual blame the author for neglecting the aesthetic part of the work.

This research has investigated the problem of insufficient attention to the level of artistic literacy among people not only in the context of understanding contemporary art but also in the way of interaction with mass visual culture in general. UNESCO stated:

The school and the family share the responsibility of preparing the young person for living in a world of powerful images, words and sounds. Children and adults need to be literate in all three of these symbolic systems, and this will require some reassessment of educational priorities. ("GRUNWALD DECLARATION ON MEDIA EDUCATION," 1982)

This announcement emphasizes the importance of the symbolic approach that was widely explored from the semiotic point of view.

This study aims to analyze the symbolic-oriented approach to teaching art literacy and identify its advantages. The general purpose of the research predetermined the following tasks:

- to define the frameworks of the concept of art literacy,
- to analyze the methods of expressing the idea of the author in works of contemporary art;
- to identify the causes of a negative attitude or misunderstanding of contemporary art;
- to consider works of art in the context of their perception by the viewers;
- to explore the transformation of the forms of pieces of art, the emergence of a digital format;
- explore the connection between contemporary and classical art;

- to identify the vector and analyze the theoretical basis for the development of the concept of artistic literacy based on a symbolic approach.

Visitors of the exhibitions would be able to learn the messages of the paintings by recognizing the signs and symbols on them. From the Middle Ages painters left hidden messages in their works by filling the various objects of the painting with symbolic meaning. Nowadays this process is also actual.

The symbolic approach has been widely studied through a semiotics and communication lens. As art literacy is an interdisciplinary concept, it will be examined comprehensively in connection with visual and cultural literacy. This approach is justified because, the basic definition of visual literacy is the capacity to read, write, and create visual images and the main component of cultural literacy is cultural memory, which impacts the perception of art.

In particular, this paper has explored the connection between classical and contemporary art through symbols and plots. The dominance of symbolism in contemporary art is related to the visual perception of information that has become a significant part of modern life. It is still developing due to technological progress.

In the course of this investigation, it has been explored not only the theoretical part but also practical examples of the application symbolic-oriented approach to determine the vector of development and teaching of artistic literacy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this investigation is to show the importance and advantages of using the symbolic approach for contemporary art education. This thesis seeks to clarify by an analysis of numerous academic and research articles, and books that are related to the symbolic communication between the author and the viewer in art.

Since art literacy in the context of the symbolic approach is directly related to the visual perception of information, it has been considered in connection with visual literacy, which has been studied by such scientists as Avgerinou (1997), Debes (1969), Elkins (2010), Vovk (2022). The concept of visual language was described by Flory (1978). The visualization process was generally considered by Simbirtseva (2019). Visual learning was studied by Lindner (2009).

To understand the influence of cultural memory (Assmann, 2011) on the perception of contemporary art, it was explored the concept of cultural literacy (Hirsch, 1989). It is a significant component of understanding contemporary artworks because of the cultural aspects (Wyatt, 2014). The ability of our brain to search for familiar symbols in visual communication has been explored by Suyundikova (2021). Barths (2013) described the intuitive action of seeking already-known symbols. Kristeva (1980) continued to examine this issue interpreting familiar symbols in a new way, giving them modern connotations. She explained this aspect as intertextuality (ibid.). It is important to understand intertextuality as a means of communication between two or more artworks (Alfaro, 1996). Rose (2016) investigated the appearance of classical symbols in contemporary art paintings as well.

The question of art literacy is extensively explored from the semiotic point of view because semiotics is a science that studies signs and symbols in the process of communication (Lotman, 2004). There are a lot of practical examples of using images to decode the message of the artwork. For instance, the semiotic approach was applied in the Albertina Museum in Vienna, at the Jean-Michel Basquiat's exhibition. Here teenagers were given a task to find certain signs in the pictures and then tutors explained the meanings of the artworks through these findings. Painters of the Middle Ages encoded their messages in the artworks giving meanings to the objects (Ozgenc Erdogan, 2018).

In this paper, various ways of expressing the author's idea were studied. They were divided into figurative, lexical, textual, abstract and digital. Then, it has been briefly analyzed the artworks of the artist as Kandinsky (1977), Mark Rothko (Kulik, 2024), Jackson Pollock

(Rosewood, 2022), and Magritte (Foucault, 1983).

In order to determine the vector of development of the concept of cultural literacy, the causes of the misunderstanding of art and the problems of its perception were studied. It was revealed that viewers were spending little time watching the painting (Rotondi, 2021). Such passive perception leads to the consumption of the culture (Toffler, 2004). Stolyarova (2016) claims that modern culture suffers from a 'popcorn policy' that means no effort in the intellectual perception of art. In this regard, in order to satisfy the audience, artists began to use mass and understandable symbols in their works (Veilhan, n.d.). As a modern solution to such a problem, the indirect transfer of pieces of art to a video format was considered. This approach simultaneously increases the time of interaction with the artwork and meets the requirements of visual perception of information. As an examples it has was cited the works of Bill Viola, Peter Greenaway, Milorad Krstic and Saskia Boddecke.

This study of the literature aims to summarize the most significant academic sources related to the symbolic-oriented approach to art literacy and indicate the vector of developing the idea.

I LITERACY AS A KEY COMPONENT IN UNDERSTANDING ART

1.1 Visual literacy

Art literacy is closely related to the concepts of visual literacy because the ability to read, write, and create visual images is the fundamental definition of visual literacy. Language, interaction, and communication are all aspects of visual literacy. People use visual media as a language tool to exchange ideas, communicate, and navigate in the complicated world. However, since different disciplines such as art history and criticism, rhetoric, semiotics, philosophy, information design, and graphic design use the term visual literacy, the development of a common definition has been disputed since the first appearance of the term in professional publications. The visual literacy concept is based on the statement that visual languages exist. This announcement has been claimed by numerous scholars (Avgerinou & Ericson, 1997). The term visual literacy is attributed to Debes, cofounder of the International Visual Literacy Association. He proposed its first definition as:

Visual Literacy refers to a group of vision competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences. The development of these competencies is fundamental to normal human learning. When developed, they enable a visually literate person to discriminate and interpret the visible actions, objects, and symbols, natural or man-made, that he encounters in his environment. Through the creative use of these competencies, he is able to communicate with others. Through the appreciative use of these competencies, he is able to comprehend and enjoy the masterworks of visual communication. (Debes, 1969, p.26)

This research is more related to the denotation of James Elkins. According to him `visual literacy means, understanding how people perceive objects, interpret what they see, and what they learn from them` (Elkins, 2010, p. 21). It includes not only the ability to see and observe images but also to analyze and understand the messages they convey.

There are several conceptual components of visual literacy. These are visual thinking, visual communication, visual language, visual learning, visual perception (Avgerinou & Pettersson, 2011). It is important to investigate them attentively in order to build the conception of the development of art literacy.

Visual communication is storytelling. It is how men communicate messages and create experiences across several visual mediums (Falmouth University, n.d.). It is connected to the

question of how visual images are used to convey messages, ideas, and emotions. It involves understanding how elements such as colour, composition, and visual techniques impact the interpretation and meaning of images.

Visual language is another important component of visual literacy. Flory (1978) claims that a visual language exists, people can think, learn and express themselves. Visual language as a system of communication that uses non-verbal elements. Visual perception is another important component of visual literacy. A person realizes 90% of information through the visual channel, and the brain processes 80% of the information in a figurative form and 20% in a verbal form (Suyundikova et al., 2021). Verbal and written texts are actively translated by graphic code systems, which is indicated as a visualization process (Simbirtseva, 2019).

The visual perception of art requires clear and easy-to-read symbols from the artists that are familiar and easy-to-read to the audience. Two more components of visual literacy should be indicated specifically in this research.

Visual thinking concerns a way of nonverbal thinking. This process has been actively studied by psychologists who believe that the main feature of visual thinking is the ability to combine different connotations of images into one picture. Visual thinking also provides people with the opportunity to recognize the results of abstract verbal thinking. Thus, the abstract objects become visible (Vovk et al., 2022). This ability could help viewers to perceive expressive art. A person could develop visual thinking with the help of different techniques. Some of them can also be applied in art education. Roam (2009) described the tools of visual thinking and the mechanism for finding, developing and transmitting new ideas to viewers using visual images. According to Roam (ibid.), visual thinking is connected with the ability of people to see not only by their eyes but also with their mind. This competence provides people to notice, develop and spread fast invisible ideas among the audience. The advantage of images over words lies in the speed of their processing. The brain is more familiar with the figurative form of distribution of information.

Visual learning is one of the most significant components of visual literacy for this research, because its methods could be applied in teaching art literacy. Visual learning refers to a method of learning based on graphic elements to remember and learn material. This way of teaching not only helps in perceiving and processing information but also makes learning more enjoyable for the students. Studies about the impact of visual learning on recall of a memory test

have confirmed the theory that visual learning can lead to a better recollection of memories, unlike other learning styles. Moreover, visual learning is the most effective style of holding information (Lindner et al., 2009).

To sum up, these findings suggest that the works of contemporary art can be understood through an exploration of the visual elements that they contain. Scientific research about the concepts of visual literacy may be also applied in art education.

1.2 Cultural literacy

It is necessary to develop an art literacy approach in a broader context, because of the fast development of media channels and the increasing process of symbolic representation in modern society. Thus the term cultural literacy will be introduced in this research. Its comprehensive explanation was suggested by Hirsch. The starting point in his theory was the thesis that people in each of the national communities were united not only by political institutions and laws but also by shared values and a common language (Hirsch, 1988). At the same time, it is fundamentally important for Hirsch that a language contains not only common lexical and grammatical elements but also a variety of cultural associations. Early investigations of cultural literacy frequently understood it as gaining knowledge of official cultural and historical narratives and facts (Hirsch, 1988). Later cultural literacy had been connected to the process of art creation and creativity. Creativity is not a characteristic of a person but a dynamic process that encourages cultural literacy learning through curiosity and openness to something new or imaginative (Lähdesmäki et al., 2021).

Cultural memory is one of the basic components of cultural literacy. With the help of knowledge embedded in cultural memory, a person can explain the works of art of the past, or, for example, build a logical connection between the past and the modern interpretation of the same piece of art. It exists inside the culture and uses the language of symbols in literature, music, paintings, and sculpture. Due to cultural memory, people are never exclusively contemporaries of their times (Assmann, 2014). Artists interpret familiar images in a new way, giving them new meanings. Cultural memory is aimed at fixing certain moments in the past through stable symbolic encodings, texts, dances, images and rituals. In fact, for cultural memory, myths and stories recreated in memory are more important than the facts. A myth is a validating story that is told to explain the present from its origin (Assmann, 2011, p.54). Thus, cultural memory is understood not as a memory of the historical past, but as its symbolic representation.

People subconsciously use the knowledge embedded in cultural memory to interpret various visual objects, including works of art. This fact should be taken into account by the artists who want to express their thoughts and ideas to the viewers. Since in the age of global communication, the audience of contemporary authors is spread all over the world, the pieces of art can be perceived through the prism of different cultural and historical backgrounds. Perception through the prism of cultural memory is also relevant for curators who want to build communication between artworks and visitors of exhibitions.

Therefore, during the development of the concept of artistic literacy, it is also necessary to rely on the knowledge, based on the exploration of cultural literacy and cultural memory, since it affects the symbolic perception of works of art. Symbols and signs in art are understood through the prism of context and time.

1.3 Art literacy

In some cases, people described art as a universal language, crossing national borders. Therefore, art could be considered as a form of communication (Camnitzer, 2009). Art literacy is a valuable skill in an increasingly visual world (Zindler, n.d.). It was defined by the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards as ``the knowledge and understanding required to participate authentically in the arts`` (Robelen, 2020). Besides, this framework identifies four core practices for the arts: imagination, investigation, construction, and reflection (Robelen, 2020). This paper is focused on the investigation and reflection. These two components of art literacy are studied with the help of a symbolic-oriented approach because it has a number of advantages compared to the traditional ways of teaching. It provides a positive impact on the understanding of artworks because it is related to the visual perception of information. With the help of decoding signs and symbols in the painting people can understand the message of its author. There are numerous effective practical examples of explaining pieces of art using visual practices based on a symbolic approach. For instance, vanitas was a popular genre of art during the Baroque times. These are numerous still-life paintings where each object has a certain meaning (Ozgenc Erdogan, 2018). Such artworks could be compared with the texts that could be easy to read by educational people of that time. Modern researchers often apply the visual approach to decode the meaning of classical paintings. This method is called iconography. It is based on the interpretation of visual signs and is widely used during the analysis of classical paintings (Rose, 2016). Artists interpret familiar images in a new way, giving them new meanings. This process is described as

intertextuality. This term was first used by Kristeva (1980). It is the act of creating a novel sign system by imbuing multiple sign systems with new meanings (Kirill, 2015). Intertextuality should be understood as a way of exchanging between two or more texts (Alfaro, 1996).

To summarize, when creating the concept of artistic literacy, it is important to recognize that it is a complex and interdisciplinary issue. This includes knowledge and experience in art criticism, art history, and other related branches of knowledge. The chapter has identified the benefits of the symbolic approach to teaching artistic literacy and indicates the vector of development. It is also important to consider the knowledge gained from studying cultural literacy and cultural memory, as time and context significantly influence the perception of symbols in art. This aspect will be discussed in more detail further in this paper. Additionally, it is necessary to incorporate knowledge in the field of visual literacy, which is especially relevant for research on visual information perception and learning methods.

II LEXICAL AND FIGURATIVE LANGUAGES IN ART

2.1 Images and inscriptions in the works of art

The artistic language is diverse. It contains both figurative and lexical forms of expression. This chapter examines the relationships between the textual and graphic components of a piece of art. This is an important aspect, since over time, inscriptions and textual elements become increasingly important in the understanding of the meaning of the artwork. Textual elements have become full participants in the plot of the painting, significantly influencing its content.

In the book *'The Order of Things'* Foucault (2018) has shown the importance of the relationship between words and objects. Building his theory, he has identified three main epistemes. These are the Renaissance episteme (XVI century), the Classical episteme, which is related to rationalism (XVII–XVIII centuries), and the Contemporary episteme (from the end of the XVIII till the beginning of the XIX century, to our time). By episteme, he understood a way of ordering things in words (Foucault, 2018). For example, in the Renaissance episteme, words and things were identical to each other, the word was a symbol. During the times of rationalism, words and things became similar, and their relationship became more complicated. Thinking serves as an intermediary in this pair. During the classical episteme, a word becomes an image and is transformed into a sign. Language was becoming more and more self-contained, moving away from things. The Renaissance episteme assumes that words and things are a single text, which, in turn, is in harmony with nature. The system of knowledge in the classical episteme is not connected with nature but with the laws of thought. The natural signs of the Renaissance period turn into a system of artificial signs. In the Contemporary episteme, where there used to be a scientific fundamental idea, a philosophical one arises, and vice versa. Language becomes an object of cognition from an intermediary (Foucault, 2018).

Another view on the history of the development of images in artistic culture is presented by W.J.T. Mitchell. He focuses on the functioning of images in the modern world, not only in the context of art but in the context of culture. The history of culture is partly a story of a protracted struggle for dominance between pictorial and linguistic signs (Mitchell, 1995). In *'Picture Theory'* Mitchell has explored the interaction of image, text and representation. According to him, all media are mixed media, and all representations are heterogeneous; there are no purely visual or verbal arts (Mitchell, 1995). Mitchell's article *'What do Pictures Really Want?'* (1996)

represents a completely new, non-traditional look at modern visual images. Here pictures have been described as things that were marked with all the stigmata of personhood. They speak to the viewer in literal and figurative ways. Mitchell (1996) claims that images have a kind of social or psychological power in contemporary visual culture. He shifts the focus of reflection from the question of the power of the image to its meaning.

Pictures want equal rights with language, not to be turned into language. They want neither to be leveled into a "history of images" nor elevated into a "history of art" but to be seen as complex individuals occupying multiple subject positions and identities. What pictures want, then, is not to be interpreted, decoded, worshiped, smashed, exposed, demystified, or to enthrall their beholders. They may not even want to be granted subjectivity or personhood by well-meaning commentators who think that humanness is the greatest compliment they could pay to pictures. (Mitchell, 1996, p.82)

Michel Foucault in his essay 'This is not a Pipe' (1983) describes an example of the interaction of the world and the image by analysing a famous painting by René Magritte 'The Treachery of Images' (1929). Magritte explores the fact that interaction between objects and people occurs through language. The inscription on the painting is part of the work, it has become an image itself. Moreover, it is the key component of the composition. The lettering is false from the natural point of view and true from the artistic side, because pipe on the painting is an image of the pipe. The separation between linguistic signs and images was one of the bases of classical art (Foucault, 1973). Classical painting spoke to the viewer, building itself completely outside the language. Magritte reconnects verbal signs and images, making them equivalent.

Text and graphic elements have always been important elements of a work of art. Throughout the history of mankind, I have rethought their relationship and meaning. They actively participate in the plot of the painting and have a great influence on its content. Therefore, when interpreting a work of art from the point of view of a symbolic approach, it is necessary to decipher not only its graphic elements, but also textual ones, taking into consideration the historical time of their creation.

2.2 Non-objective types of expression in art

As a medium to convey a message to the viewer, the artist can use not only figurative and textual elements but also symbols that cannot be recognized as objects. Nevertheless, they can be described and seen, for instance, brush marks and colours. These are important elements for the

audience's interaction with abstract paintings, evoking emotions, and challenging the viewer's perceptions. According to Mitchell (1996, p. 80), 'abstract paintings are pictures that want not to be pictures'. In this part of the research, the idea of giving the leading role in the paintings to abstract components will be explored.

One of the examples of the usage of abstract symbolism are the works of American artist Jackson Pollock. His symbols do not have specific meanings, but they are used to convey certain ideas. For instance, his artworks contain many drops of paint that can be interpreted as symbols of life and movement. Researchers interpret Pollock's paintings as an expression of his personal battles and emotions related to life and death. Others see in his works a reflection of the general theme of meaninglessness and chaos in the world through various symbols and metaphors that convey deep meaning and cause the viewer to reflect (Rosewood, 2022).

Another artist, Mark Rothko, realized that he could no longer depict human figures. According to him, they were powerless to express their fear of the very fact of mortality (Kulik, 2024). At the same time, he did not consider himself an abstractionist. He said,

I am not interested in the ratio of colour and shape or anything else. I am interested in expressing basic human emotions - tragedy, ecstasy, rock, and so on. The fact that many people suddenly lose themselves and burst into tears in front of the paintings means that I can communicate with these basic human emotions. (Why Are Mark Rothko's Paintings Considered Art?, 2019)

Kandinsky used colour as a medium to communicate with the viewers. He expressed his thoughts and emotions through it. Kandinsky believed that colours could directly influence the soul. But at the same time, he claimed that colour could not exist outside of a geometric shape and did not allow unlimited propagation (Kandinsky, 1997).

Together with the figurative and textual elements, colour, brush strokes, and lines can also become the mediums between the viewer and the painting. In the context of a semiotic approach to teaching artistic literacy, researchers should also take into account these forms of expression of the authors' ideas.

2.3 The peculiarity of symbols in virtual art

An important aspect that has influenced contemporary art is the COVID-19 pandemic. It has changed the form and representation of the artworks, because of lockdowns, restrictions in the work of museums and reorientation of people to the online format. Auctions are turning into

digital marketplaces, exhibitions are changing the traditional format to electronic, and collectors are competing with people of crypto. On one hand, digital art could be considered as a new stage of the development of art history. It does not matter whether it was created with the help of artificial intelligence or with human participation. On the other hand, this process is considered through the prism of the emergence of a new tool for expressing the author's ideas. In both ways, signs and symbols will remain the same in the new format.

Authors continue to broadcast classic plots also in their digital artworks, because stereotypes or already familiar objects play an important role in the process of cognition and, more broadly, in the process of transmitting information (Lotman, 1970). Moreover, the search for familiar symbols and clues for understanding art in digital format is popular among the audience. This manifests in Easter egg hunting - an example of how our brain tries to find meaning in everything and form connections (Simbirtseva, 2019). Our subconscious intuitively tries to recognize familiar symbols and decipher the message (Barthes, 2013). Changing cultures in our case presented by the transition from offline to digital format is accompanied by increased semiotics (Lotman, 2004, p. 485).

A combination of programming and art explores new forms of expression. As a language of expression, the author uses computer code to create patterns, images and other electronic objects. For example, open-source art offers the active participation of viewers in the process of creating works by modifying some parts of the computer code of the artwork. Thus, museums could become a space for collective creativity. Open-source art, according to the curators, helps the audience get closer to technology and democratizes access to digital art.

With the development of blockchain technologies NFT artworks became an important part of the art market. The focus on economic effect dictates the creation and performance of NFT works that will be perceived by the widest possible public, that is, to be popular and massive. From here, it becomes difficult to identify the features of this genre and highlight what is art and what is not. The boundary between art and non-art is drawn by the artist (Makhlina, 2013). Obviously, today it is difficult to identify all the semiotic patterns used in the new artistic format. They will be fully revealed in the future.

III SYMBOLISM IN CONTEMPORARY ART

3.1 The problem of interaction between viewer and artwork

Attentive viewing and interaction with an artwork helps the viewer to understand its meaning more deeply. A quick look can form a false idea about the piece of art and its author as a whole. Retention the attention of visitors to cultural spaces has become a real challenge for curators around the world.

Due to this fact, the team of the Istituzione Bologna Musei decided to introduce a new technology to understand which exhibits the guests looked at the longest and most often. Based on these data, the researchers are going to change the layout of the halls so that visitors spend as much time as possible near popular paintings and sculptures, get more pleasure from viewing them, and return to them again. A group of researchers from the National Agency for Modern Technologies (ENEA) has developed a ShareArt device system that calculates how long and how closely visitors to museums and galleries watch a particular work of art. Cameras located next to a painting or sculpture collect data on the number of observers and their behaviour while they look at the exhibit. The system also analyzes each user's previous reaction and the distance to the object. ENEA researchers believe that it would help determine the «value and attractiveness» of specific works of art. The study revealed that very few works hold museum visitors for no more than 15 seconds, and the average observation time was only 4–5 seconds (Rotondi, 2021).

The results of this experiment have shown that viewers need easy-to-read, understandable symbols to interact with works of art and understand their meanings. Authors have lack of time to communicate with the audience. In this case, a symbolic-oriented approach could be used in building fast communication.

The interaction of the work of art and the viewer was explored by Michael Fried from a different side. He introduces the concept of the `Medusa effect`. Its essence lies in the fact that the painting tends to switch places with the viewer, pierce or paralyze him, turning him into an image for a closer look (Fried, 1988).

In this case, research in the field of signs and symbols takes on a special, if not key, importance. Using experimental methods such as tracking the movement of the viewer's gaze, it is possible to identify and analyze the objects on which he focuses his attention. This will help to build an effective semiotic map, convenient for viewers, artists and curators, with which they will build a constructive dialogue.

3.2 The reasons for the misunderstanding of contemporary art

Besides the minimum of time that viewers used to spend in front of the artwork there are some other reasons of the misunderstanding of contemporary art. Authors raise different topics in their works, and use different places of exposure: from the street to the museum, from the material art to the digital one, the symbolic aspect in their work will be dominating. The dominance of symbolism in contemporary art is because the visual perception of information has become a significant part of modern life in the global world and it is still developing due to technological progress. Pictures provide a universal language. Visual art could speak to people all over the world. Total visualization and passive perception affect the formation of a modern person who becomes an active creator and consumer of the culture (Toffler, 2004). The rapid development of mass media and the emergence of new channels of information transmission contradicts the traditional idea about art as the property of the elite (Rykov, 2003). Nowadays, most artworks are designed for a mass audience, which does not often have the special educational background to decode them. Thus, artists often focus on the interpretation of stereotypical images of pop culture. French contemporary artist Xavier Veilhan believes that the audience does not need any special knowledge to understand his references he uses (Xavier Veilhan, n.d.). Street artist Banksy creates his graffiti in such a way that any person passing by, regardless of the level of education, religion, nationality, age, etc., could understand the meaning of his work in a matter of seconds. That leads to the following paradox: artists strive to fill their works with understandable images, mostly from the mass culture, to make them as close as possible to the audience, but viewers are not ready to perceive this in the context of art. Some researchers believe that modern culture suffers from a 'popcorn policy' in which a person makes no effort in intellectual consumption (Stolyarova, 2016).

There is another point of view on the problem of misunderstanding modern art. Opacity for understanding, the tightness of a work of contemporary art, is one of its most important qualities. To a large extent, current Russian artists perceive misunderstanding as one of the positive properties of the work. This is the effect of positive misunderstanding, which should be inherent in any good work of modern art (Lebedeva, 2013). If the viewer is ready for something new, ready to reflect something alien, and unfamiliar, then there is a chance to reach a higher level of understanding of visual reality as a whole, not only art.

Contemporary art is not created for admiring. It wants to use as many human resources as

possible, not only visual but also sensory. Its purpose is to make the viewer think. For the viewer, interacting with art is no less a job than for an artist. Symbols help visitors to the exhibition to stand in interaction with paintings, whether they are easy-to-read works of art or complex, multi-level compositions.

3.3 Changing representation as a way to reconsideration art

We will consider the transformation of symbols and signs that already exist in human memory and were used earlier in classical art. Now they could acquire a new form. More and more artists interpreted, reproduced, re-exhibited, or used works made by others. This process could be called postproduction. It is a reaction to the information age, which is characterized by the multiplication of the number of works, the destruction of the traditional distinction between production and consumption, and the creation and copying of finished and original works. The material that artists use is no longer primary. Terms such as originality and even the creation process itself are gradually being eroded in this new cultural landscape. We are witnessing the figure of an artist who must select cultural objects and insert them into new contexts. Changing the representation is one of the most effective ways to present the symbolism and the work of art in a way that is understandable to the modern viewer while increasing the time of interaction with the painting.

Below are some examples of films whose plots are based on the interpretations of different paintings. For this study, it was chosen such reinterpretations of the paintings, as the video sequence plays a dominant role in the narrative structure of the film, which corresponds to our goals of constructing a theory of art literacy based on visual media.

A good example that illustrates this process is the video investigation of Rembrandt's painting 'The Night Watch' (1642), made by Peter Greenaway. He carefully analyzed the images of the heroes, their surroundings, poses, gestures, and facial expressions. Based on this review, Greenaway built his theory about the plot of the painting. The result of such exploration became the movie 'Rembrandt's J'Accuse...!' (2008). It perfectly reflects the colour palette, light, and mood of the original painting, while being a self-sufficient work of art. Greenaway also shot the documentary movie, in which he explains his research.

Speaking of Peter Greenaway, we should also mention the film 'The Greenaway Alphabet', shot by his wife Saskia Boddeke (2017). This movie is interesting to us from the point of view of conducting the plot. Each letter of the alphabet corresponds to a certain concept. For

instance, `F` is a frame, `L` is for life, `Q` is a question, `D` is a death. This technique is used here for a reason since the main character is an encyclopedist. Sorting information in alphabetical order can be used in building the concept of artistic literacy, as it is easily perceived by the audience because since childhood we have been accustomed to identifying objects with different letters of the alphabet. This contributes to quick memorization. Boddeke also uses the alphabet concept in one of their projects `H is for Horse, H is for Hope` (H Is for Horse — Saskia Boddeke & Peter Greenaway Projects, 2017).

To show the connection between classical and contemporary art, I will give an example of a work of video art by Bill Viola. This author often uses classical plots in his artworks. He is inspired by the works of masters of the past, rethinks their content, and puts them in a new form. His meanings are supported by recognizable visual images and aesthetics. Symbolic associations construct the connection to the original artwork. For this reason, it is important to refer to him in this investigation.

The artist works with slow-motion technology. This can be considered a kind of embodiment of the idea of retention a visitor in front of the art. The action is being done very slowly. Therefore, to understand exactly what Viola wanted to say, people have to spend a few minutes looking at the video art. By slowing down time, he shows a person's emotion that cannot be seen or felt at an accelerated pace. Such a look promotes more attentive viewing and empathy. The video polyptych `Catherine's Room` (2001), referring to the genre of the lives of saints, shows the daily repetitive rituals of a woman at different times of the day. During the pandemic, when half the world was locked in their homes and left alone by themselves, this work acquired a more relevant sound than ever. One of his first works, directly inspired by classical masters, is `The Greeting` (1995). For ten minutes, two pregnant women cheerfully greet each other, and a third arises between them. The composition and plot of the video refer to the altar painting by Jacopo da Pontormo `The Meeting of Mary and Elizabeth` (1528). Pontormo also slows down the action, the main characters are depicted in his image a moment before they hug. But Viola takes the gospel scene back to his own time, his women are real, and Pontormo's are perfect, absolutely beautiful. In `Emergence` (2002) Viola animates the `Pietà` (1424) by Masolino da Panicale.

All the examples described above can be attributed to a more traditional representation and reinterpretation of paintings, which largely correspond to the style of the original artworks. However, there are other, more unusual and sophisticated ways of embodying classical

masterpieces of art in a video sequence, which should be mentioned in this study. The advantage of contemporary mass interpretations is that they are designed for a wider audience, taking into account the commercial and entertainment aspects of the project. Nevertheless, this interpretation is based on a symbolic approach. For example, in the film `Robin Brand the Collector (2018) directed by Milorad Krstic there are numerous direct and indirect references to different paintings. They can be recognized immediately or through the placement of frames character dialogues, and colours. This movie is a Hungarian animated film for adults, which was shown in cinemas around the world. It is shot in a unique artistic style and tells the story of a successful psychoanalyst who decides to steal paintings from one of the most heavily guarded museums to get rid of his nightmares. The film contains many references and quotations from various works of art, which makes it a fascinating collection of characters that every viewer can get to know. After watching the film, one may wonder if art is capable of healing the human soul or if it can traumatize a person who takes it too personally. However, one thing remains clear: art surrounds us everywhere, even in everyday situations, and people can interpret it with symbols. The phenomenon of films like Ruben Brandt is that viewers want to return to them to solve riddles and find hidden meanings. This not only leads to an increase in the time spent studying works of art but also encourages a rethink and a more thorough approach to viewing.

Thus, it turns out that most museum visitors spend less time watching classical paintings and more time perceiving art as video. This leads to the conclusion that one of the most effective ways to keep the viewer's attention is to use modern and understandable forms of representation. For example, use video art instead of a classic painting. This approach is supported by trends in the development of mass communication media and social networks. According to statistics, video content consumption is increasing every year (Marinelli, 2023). Artists interpret familiar images in a new way of representation, giving them new meanings. Viewers will be able to understand their ideas and message by developing their artistic literacy based on understanding symbolic images.

3.4 Symbolic approach in art in the context of place and time

It can be said that the principles of constructing an artistic code as a natural language are more convenient for the audience but opposite for the author. The reader is interested in getting information with the least effort (Lotman, 1970). The viewer can decode the message of artwork using an intermediate code (Lotman, 1992). This code appeals to various stereotypes that are

already familiar to a person. In the XX century, we were witnessing a transition from the aesthetic ideal in art to the conceptual one (Dempsey, 2002). The complication of the transmitted information leads to the complication of the semiotic system used for its transmission (Lotman, 1970), which necessitates the obtaining of certain competencies that allow adequate perception and interpretation of visual images. A similar issue has also been explored by scientists in the field of visual literacy, which is understood as the ability to understand (read) and use (write) images, as well as to think and learn in terms of images (Braden, Hortin, 1982).

A actual example of using semiotics in an educational program was a task for teenagers at the Albertina Museum in Vienna, during the Basquiat exhibition in 2022 (BASQUIAT the Retrospective, 2022). The assignment for young people was to find artworks matching a set of symbols and signs which Basquiat used. The symbols were: crown, skull, fist, halo (of a saint), cap of a police officer, foot, bone, ©, house/skyscraper and crocodile. Through their interpretation, curators explained to the teenagers the meanings of the artworks. Thus, it is possible to understand the message of the piece of art by developing artistic literacy based on an understanding of symbols.

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For a more detailed illustration of this approach, it has been investigated the meaning of the mouse and rat as symbolic images. The examples below have shown the importance of perceiving symbols in the context of a particular situation and time. Images of mice can be found in a wide variety of cultures around the world. However, the symbolic meanings of these creatures could be very different. In China, mice symbolize vitality and intelligence. Ancient

Chinese tribes considered mice as a symbol of success and prosperity. They also believed in the ability of these creatures to communicate with the gods. In Hindu mythology, the rat is the riding animal of the god of wisdom Ganesha. According to one legend, Ganesha turned a giant into a rat during the battle (Sidelnikova, 2020). However, the reputation of mice and rats was changed in the Middle Ages. They began to be associated with witchcraft and branded as carriers of plague and other dangerous diseases. Later, these animals began to appear in the vanitas art, as an additional reminder of the transience of earthly life and the shortage of all living beings. Mice can symbolize the devil, as they live underground (Bagdasarova, 2020).

The mouse symbol is one of the most popular in pop culture. Mostly it is represented by Walt Disney's Mickey Mouse. It has been usually associated with childhood and entertainment and symbolizes magic and joy. It is recognizable all over the world. This has made him a popular hero of many contemporary artists. Damien Hirst claimed that Mickey Mouse has become an international powerful icon because it is recognizable (Wyatt, 2014). In this case, Mickey Mouse could become an eye-stopper in art. So, the viewer would stop the gaze on the artwork, even in the presence of strong information noise. For instance, in the Hirst's exhibition 'The Treasures of the Wreck of Unbelievable,' there were several coral-covered sculptures of Mickey Mouse (Damien Hirst – Treasures From the Wreck of the Unbelievable – Venice Biennale, 2022). It was shown together with the heroes of ancient Greek mythology. It could be considered that this image has already become a classic and could be perceived by the audience together with the old mythological plots. During the same show, Hirst used the image of a mouse in the sculpture 'The Remains of Apollo' as an antipode of the sculpture of Apollo stepping on a mouse by the ancient Greek sculptor Skopas. In Hirst's artwork, on the contrary, we see the remains of Apollo with a mouse sitting on his foot.

Murakami represents the mouse by the colourful, fictional character Mr. Dob. Murakami drew inspiration from both traditional Japanese art and Western popular culture. The character's large, round eyes and bold colours represent the influence of manga and anime. Through Mr. DOB, Murakami combined elements of consumer culture, cartoons, and graphic design to create a distinct image that resonates with a wide audience (Estiler, 2019). Mr. DOB's accessibility and commercial potential, through merchandise and collaborations, make it relatable to a broader audience compared to exclusive pieces found solely within the boundaries of established art institutions. Murakami uses this character to reflect on the impact of consumerism, capitalism,

and the desire for instant gratification in contemporary society. Mr. DOB represents the complexities and contradictions of our consumer-driven world, pushing viewers to question their relationship with materialism and popular culture. Mr. Dob could be considered as a Japanese–style Mickey Mouse. Big ears are used as an eye stopper since subconsciously people around the world are already accustomed to the image of Mickey Mouse`s big ears and pay attention to it.

Nevertheless, since its popularity, the image of Mickey Mouse began to be associated with mass culture and consumption. Therefore, from a symbol of innocence, it has turned into a symbol of capitalism, profit and senseless entertainment. Banksy's artwork `Napalm` illustrates this approach. Mickey Mouse has been shown from the negative side by holding the girl running from an explosion (Laboureau, 2022).

To sum up, the symbolic meaning of the mouse image has changed over the centuries. These examples have shown that symbols need to be perceived in the context of a particular culture and time. In addition, it can be said that the explanation and reinterpretation of classical artworks with the help of a symbolic method has already had a positive application in the creation of new pieces of art. Through the formation and popularization of the concept of art literacy through the prism of a symbolic approach, it is possible to gradually reduce the negative attitude of people towards contemporary art, and teach the audience to understand it.

CONCLUSION

This paper claims to demonstrate the advantages of teaching art literacy using symbolic-oriented methods. It was determined that such an approach has a positive impact because of several significant reasons. Firstly, symbolic understanding of information is focused on the visual perception of the people. In view of the fact, that the visual channel is dominating it has significant perspectives in using for the education of contemporary art. Furthermore, the importance of understanding modern signs and symbols is underlined in the UN convention. Due to this reason, it is actual to use the investigations in the field of semiotics since this science focuses on the study of signs and symbols in the process of communication, including in the cultural sphere.

The existing problems in people's perception of contemporary art were described and appropriate solutions were proposed. For instance, the process of converting a painting into a video format and how such an approach affects perception was investigated. In this instance, the works of Bill Viola, Peter Greenaway and Milorad Krstic were analyzed. It was revealed that this method could increase the time of interaction between the viewer and the artwork, which means it can positively affect its understanding.

An example of Saskia Boddeke's art was given as an illustration of the easy-to-understand layout of information for the viewer.

Moreover, this essay provides several practical examples of the use of symbols in works of art. The genre of `vanitas` was mentioned as an example of communication between the author and the viewer of a work of art through the language of signs. Jean-Michel Basquiat`s exhibition in Vienna was cited as a modern model of this process. The choice of these examples was justified by the mention of academic research in the field of cultural memory and iconography. From a theoretical point of view, they illustrate the importance of identifying symbols and signs in art.

Another important aspect of this study is the ability to implement a symbolic approach in the education of deaf students. Investigations in the field of teaching people with hearing loss show that they can more easily perceive visual symbols and images than the textual information that is generally used in art education. Since hearing impaired readers rely on images while reading (Thakur et al., 2023). According to United Nations statistics, more than 70 million of the population around the world are deaf (International Day of Sign Languages | United Nations,

n.d.). These statistics suggest that this study has high prospects. Using a symbolic approach can help make cultural spaces more accessible to different groups of people.

In the course of the study, theoretical articles and books related to visual and cultural literacy were analyzed, as these branches of knowledge are significantly developed. This information can become the basis for the development of the concept of art literacy focused on the symbolic method.

To better understand the application of these results, future studies could address the detailed explanation of contemporary art symbols and build a specific dictionary of them to improve their perception of contemporary art. The illustration for this statement could be an exploration of a mouse symbol that was done in this study.

In summary, this paper argued that the symbolic-oriented approach in the teaching of contemporary art has numerous advantages. Among them, we will indicate the dominance of visual perception, and positive implementation in practice that is supported by theoretical investigations.

To sum up, we can say that the main role of art education should be to guide students to a deeper and more thoughtful analysis of contemporary art. Instead of the classical study from a textbook, students should acquire competencies corresponding to the requirements of modern visual literacy. Because in many ways, people are now more committed to the visual type of thinking. It is easier for them to perceive pictures rather than text. Due to the development of mass media and the simplification of ways of transmitting information, any artwork can be shown in any corner of the globe. It must be clear to everyone interested in seeing it.

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