

Elena Nikolaevna Kuzmina

THE INFLUENCE OF ANCIENT DEMOCRACY IDEAS ON THE CREATIONS OF THE MOSCOW BORN PAINTER ANDREY PASHKEVICH (1945-2011)

Assistant to the Consul General of Belgium in St.Peterburg
elena.n.kuzmina@gmail.com

Ancient subjects, themes, forms, searching for ancient canons of beauty have been the corner stone, the foundation in the creative process of developing Russian art up till the beginning of the 21st century. The relation to the ancient world, to its political structure, its culture and art is in at one stage or another more closely related to the contemporary world and is an essential part of the newest ideology. The immanent consideration of the great ideas of antiquity makes it a very important component in the creations of nearly every significant artist, as it is an identical concept of the creative process as a whole.

The interpretation of antiquity in the context of the newest pictorial art as a means of confirmation, standing the test of times, of social humanism is an important component in the development of contemporary culture. Appealing to ancient ideals, to the heritage of Greek and Roman heroes, reflecting about creation of myths are processes in fine art which generally increase in periods of historical, political and social reformations. Andrey Pashkevich (1945-2011), a Moscow born painter and film producer, author of the famous series of paintings called "Politecology", which was exhibited in 2013 in the I. Brodsky museum-apartment - Russian Academy of Fine Arts Museum -, traces back the link between ancient democratic ideas and the contemporary society in the perestroika period. Andrey Pashkevich, a pupil and in many ways a disciple of Y. Pimenov, started, as any master of an academic school, by drawing antiquities, by copying, thus acquiring the skills of academic drawing. Thanks to academic etudes and apprentice understanding of antiquity as the most important basis of mastering realistic painting at the highlight of his creativity, in his series "Politecology", including 50 canvasses of different genres, Andrey Pashkevich has been able to become a documentary painter, author of a chronicle of Perestroika. In his works in the series "Politecology" A. Pashkevich has been creating forms, which have something in common with the concepts and ideas of ancient democracy. The ancient Greek and contemporary philosophical concept EON (Greek, Aion), which in ancient times meant "age", "course of life", time in the course of life of man is present. In a particularly expressive way this eon can be felt in A. Pashkevich's self-portrait (oil on canvas, 2008, private collection).



Self-portrait
2008, oil on canvas, 100 x 120

On this canvas of not very big dimensions, but monumental in the depth of its meaning, the painter is describing his scriptum vitae, the course of his life. Between the two forms of a muscular, athletic youngster and an ill, infirm elder, the space of the length of life is stretched out, as some kind of substance of Chronos, which is changing forms cyclically and is gradually reincarnating itself into something without body, independent of any material. In the "Self-portrait" of the hand of A. Pashkevich, the ancient physical beauty of youth communicates with the great tragedy of life that is sliding away, that is freeing itself from the bodily content of the present. To a great extent the self-portrait of Pashkevich is in consonance with Homer. When looking at this canvas, the intellectual onlooker will remember the horror of the old Priam, bemoaning his dreadful and infamous death in advance. The author's position is in some ways very close to that of the Zeus of Homer, speaking solemnly from the heights of heaven:

"From all creatures breathing and creeping in dust
In the whole universe there truly is nothing less happy than humans"
(transl. B. Pasternak) [3, p. 12]

The conception of the world by Homer and the conception of the world by Andrey Pashkevich are very much alike, in spite of the historical epochs, which are separating them. The great poet of ancient Hellas and the Moscow artist at the turn of the XX-th and the XXI-st century try to give a memorable description of the highest tranquility and enlightenment of the soul, experiencing an unrestrained enthusiasm as well as an unrestrained despair and elevating itself higher than both – above the naivety of optimism and above the bitterness of pessimism.

A. Pashkevich has been able to express in his painting the phenomenon of Plato, the "atom", meaning that what is deprived of place in space. Pashkevich's painting "Cheated Russia" (1992, oil on canvas), a coat and a poverty-stricken still life with a glass generate an awful "effect of reality" (expression of Roland Barthes), while a physical hero is absent.

The novelty in Andrey Pashkevich's paintings of the series "Politecology" lies in the fact that the artist-film producer describes the eventfulness of our era, an extremely important historical moment when Russian democracy was born. The paintings of Andrey Pashkevich are a distinctive arena, on which sense and logos are being formed, an "historical energy of essence" (expression by A.F. Losev). The most antique and at the same time the most semantic work of Andrey Pashkevich is undoubtedly the painting entitled "The morning of our fatherland" (2004, oil on canvas, 100 x 80), a painting based on metaphors, a work "without a hero", an allegoric work. The pictorial composition, created by Pashkevich, is an interpretation of the myth about the state power and about people-toys in the hands of fate. The figure of the lion, dominating in sense and composition, is undoubtedly the prototype of the state power, sleeping peacefully and satisfied, after having won the elections. By using an allegoric language, the painter compels the viewer to consider, how free a man can be and whether he really has a free choice or is constrained by higher power. The sculpture of the sleeping, antique lion, symbol of power and authority, dominates the children's soft toys, symbol of the electorate. The lion-guardian is a form above history. Such a harmonious blending of symbols of the ancient and the contemporary world could only be achieved by an artist, who feels ancient art, philosophy and the tragedy of Socrates just as well as the contemporary world and its utterly complicated moral and political lack of equilibrium, synthesizing it into a new mentality, signs from the past, becoming at the same time a coded message for the future.



The morning of our fatherland
2008, oil on canvas, 100 x 80

In the difficult perestroika period of the XX-th century 90-ies, in his paintings, Andrey Pashkevich not only keeps to the tradition of eventfulness (which makes the painting related to ancient thinkers) but also very clearly marks in his works the problems of the demos (the people) and the problems of the authorities. His artistic heritage is in many ways in consonance with the ideas of Plato, laid out in his eighth book "Republic". Pashkevich enters in discussion with Plato and this structure of dialogue is expressed in the exchange of ideas of the great Greek philosopher and the postulates of an artist of the second half of the XX-th century. The identity of ideas of ancient philosophers and those of Andrey Pashkevich lies in the disclosure of themes about the state and the individual. Like the great thinkers Socrates and Plato, in his creations, Pashkevich chooses a form of dialogue in his statements, directing the onlooker in the direction of personal research and reflection. His creations do not have a ready scheme in its different parts such as in the compositions of Aristotle, but they present a gradual penetration into the subject, they contain a form of conversation with the viewer. In his "Republic", "Timaeus", "Laws", Plato is elaborating different sciences from the point of view of a doctrine about ideas and then bringing them together: physics, ethics, politics. The works of Pashkevich also have a syncretic character. In his series Politecology, the master combines painting, politics, history, morality and democratic ideas. This artist-philosopher did not so much put in the first place the question about good and evil, but rather the question about the true reality, since the meaning of truth and good coincide with the meaning of the objective reality (history or State). The identity of the ideas of ancient philosophers and Andrey Pashkevich lies in disclosing the theme of the State and the individual. Pashkevich passes on Plato's ideas about the well-being (justice) of a state, depending on the moral well-being (virtue) of its inhabitants. Characteristic for Pashkevich is a type of "society coming into birth" as well as "governance of the best". The neo-, neoplatonism of Pashkevich lies in the continuous search of virtue. In his composition "Jean-Jacques", as a specific homage to his friend, this ideal is found and appears here more radiantly. The portrait is made in an original way as a sculptural bas-relief in the style of an old Roman fountain-vase. In his portrait the friend is presented by three masks of Janus, out of whose mouth are running vivifying flows of water. On the foreground of this composition are the wife and daughter of Jean-Jacques. Pashkevich talks in the language of allegories about the highest achievements of the State – about human and family happiness. Not by mere coincidence the person on the portrait is presented as Janus, who in Roman mythology was the god of the beginning and the end, the income and outcome, the gate to every beginning. Its "double-face" was explained in the sense that a gate leads to the interior, but to the exterior of a house as well (Ovid, Fasti 135) and also that he knows the past and the future. In a hymn of the Salii, Janus was called the "god of gods" and the "good creator". Consequently he was considered as the "world" – mundus [4, p. 659]. Such an ancient, idealistic relation to men, as priests of the world, triumphing over chaos, such an idyll, imbued with the warmth of Platonic love (water as the symbol of a link to a beginning) – this is the ideal of happiness found by the artist and the crown on life-confirming dialectics. In mythology Janus is the god of unions and agreements. The most wanted union is the re-union in family love. In Jean-Jacques' portrait the allegory is based on the philosophical study of the Ionic philosopher Thales (around 640 till around 545 BC), who called the water "arche" (the origin of the world). Out of the godly fountain of Janus (Jean-Jacques) not just water is flowing, but something vital, original "arche". Jean-Jacques' little daughter is shown holding in her hands an aquarium with a goldfish. This fatherly "arche", the daughter will have to keep for all her life.



Jean-Jacques with wife and daughter
1994, oil on canvas, 100 x 90

The wife of Jean-Jacques and their child are presented against a background of a fragmented building with columns, a niche with a sculpture of Jeanne d'Arc, striking a sculpture of a lion (symbol of power) with a lance. Above this allegoric scene one reads the famous expression of Horace in the Odes (I, XX) "Carpe diem" – (pluck the day). Thanks to this aphorism, the motive of the opposition between the demos and the state, which is so often expressed in A. Pashkevich's paintings, acquires a completely new sense in the composition "Jean-Jacques". The author's position in this work is very close to the concept of Protagoras "a human being is the measure of all things", therefore the scene of the girl of Orleans with the Lion is only a background (somewhat like a Plato "anamnesis" (recollection). The beautiful realistic female figures, that is the ideal, that is the "measure of all things", which is worshipped by the artist.



Alyona
1991, oil on canvas, 60 x 50

In Pashkevich's work there is no striving for formal mystification, as is the case, for example, in the works of artists of the New Academy, headed by Timur Novikov. The ancient forms in Pashkevich's interpretation are no copies of the ancient, but socialized symbols, telling in the first place about the ideas of Russian statehood and democracy. Inherent to the works is a publicistic essence. In Pashkevich's works the ideas of ancient democracy are closely linked to the principles of the critical realism of the 19th century. Tatyana Nazarenko very rightly says: "I see the allegory in Andrey Pashkevich's works, but in fact everything is closely linked to reality, everything is recognizable and therefore terribly painful" [1, p. 8]. For A. Pashkevich, appealing to classicism comes as a personal call in order to solve the most painful political and social problems of the contemporary world.



The artist and society
1998, oil on canvas, 70 x 60

Bibliography

1. Andrey Pashkevich. Politecology.-M.: Gallery "Dom Nashokina", 2011.- 136 p.
2. Aristotle. Politics. Athenion politeia. / Aristotle.-M.: Thoughts, 1997.- 495 p.
3. Homer. Illiad. Odyssea.-M.: "Art Literature", 1967.- 763 p.
4. Mythological Dictionary.-M.: Lada-Makom", 1992.-776 p.
5. Plato. Politics. The science of government. / Plato. Aristotle.-M.: Eksmo; SPb.: Terra Fantastica, 2003, - 860 p.
6. www.politecology.ru