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Monumental Painting of the Artist-Iconographer Nikolay Shushalykov: Specificity of Artistic Decision

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Abstract. Currently, monumental church painting is developing in a variety of creative searches based on a wide range of traditions. Particularly noteworthy are the artists who embarked on the path of the revival church art at the end of the 80s the last century. The article examines a complex monumental paintings by the leading Yekaterinburg artist-iconographer Nicolay Shushalykov. The main monumental works of the artist, created over the past three decades are introduced into scientific circulation. The specificity of artistic performance is revealed depending on the peculiarities of architecture, historical context, local cultural traditions (Russia, Greece, Thailand, Uzbekistan). Thus, creating an individual concept of monumental paintings, the artist uses a variety of artistic solutions, depending on a specific temple and a specific situation, while maintaining the canonical principle of the hierarchy of the spatial-pictorial complex.

Keywords: iconographers of the Urals region, N.N. Shushalykov, contemporary church art, monumental paintings, church painting, iconographic program of the temple.

Research area: Theory and History of Culture and Art; Church Art; Monumental Art; Contemporary Temple Art.

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Монументальные росписи художника-иконописца Николая Шушалыкова: специфика художественного решения

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Аннотация. В настоящее время монументальная церковная живопись развивается в многообразии творческих поисков, основанных на широком круге традиций. Особого внимания заслуживают художники, вставшие на путь возрождения церковного искусства в конце 80-х годов прошлого столетия. В статье рассматривается комплекс монументальных росписей ведущего екатеринбургского художника-иконописца Н. Н. Шушалыкова. Вводятся в научный оборот основные монументальные работы художника, созданные на протяжении последних трех десятилетий. Раскрывается специфика художественного исполнения в зависимости от особенности архитектуры, исторического контекста, местных культурных традиций (Россия, Греция, Тайланд, Узбекистан). Таким образом, создавая индивидуальную концепцию монументальных росписей, художник использует многообразие художественных решений в зависимости от конкретного храма и конкретной ситуации, сохраняя при этом канонический принцип иерархии пространственно-изобразительного комплекса.

Ключевые слова: иконописцы Уральского региона, Н. Н. Шушалыков, современное церковное искусство, монументальные росписи, церковная живопись, иконографическая программа храма.

Научная специальность: 5.10.1. Теория и история культуры, искусства; 5.10.3. Виды искусства (Изобразительное, декоративно-прикладное искусство и архитектура).

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Introduction

Each temple, as a living organism, is unique, and the concept of an artistic solution is necessary for the organization of its internal space. A professional artist does not think in stereotypes, does not use templates, a creative approach is very important here, in which “mystical freedo” implements the artist within the canon. Practice shows that the creation of monumental church painting requires not only professional art education, but also some experience, the revival of a number of forgotten

techniques and technologies, knowledge in the application of new ones.

Eclectic forms of modern architecture create great difficulties for the church artist when monumental paintings. Moreover, the influence on the monumental paintings, as well as on the decoration of the temple in general, lies “in the desire to bring religion closer to the social and spiritual demands of modern society. The space of the church structure is now treated not only as a place of worship, but also as a kind of social center” (Levchenko, 2015).

Sometimes, using the example of one artist, we can observe the dynamics of styles, approaches in the design of temple interiors, problems and trends in the development of art. Special attention should be paid to the artists who took responsibility for the restoration and revival of church art in the late 80s of the last century. Today, many of them can be described as highly qualified masters and mentors in the transmission of the iconographic tradition.

It is no coincidence that the formation of scientific interest in the church art of the Urals is connected, first of all, with the work of the leading masters and workshops of Yekaterinburg, who have a high artistic level of works created not only in Russia, but also in the countries of the near and far abroad. A number of articles by E.N. Nikolaeva are devoted to the icon painting workshop of T.F. Vodicheva (Nikolaeva, 2016, 2017), the work of the iconographer O.G. Vostretsov is covered in articles by N.N. Van'chugova (Van'chugova, 2019), J.L. Kosjakina (Kosjakina, 2021), in the works of N.S. Karimova (Karimova, 2011), E.N. Nikolaeva (Nikolaeva, 2016), Y.L. Kosjakina (Kosjakina, 2018) reveals the theme of the creation by iconography newly-glorified saints by the iconographers of the Urals. A unique publication is the author's album of the Yekaterinburg iconographer N. Shushalykov, in which, in addition to biographical information, the universality of the artist's talent is revealed, achievements in the field of church art are presented (Nikolaj Shushalykov: Monumental'naja religioznaja zhivopis'. Ikona. Stankovaja zhivopis, 2013).

Temple fine art has been actively developing for more than three decades in the major centers of the Urals region (Perm, Yekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk), however, the work of many masters and workshops remains unexplored. A comprehensive study of the works of leading iconographers and icon-painting workshops of the Urals will allow to give an objective assessment of the processes of development of church art by identifying, fixing and systematizing, to determine trends and prospects for development.

The purpose of the article is to analyze the monumental paintings created by the Yekaterinburg iconographer Nikolai Shushalykov for

churches in Russia and abroad, to identify a variety of artistic solutions depending on the features of architecture, historical context, local cultural traditions.

The name of the Yekaterinburg iconographer Nikolai Nikolaevich Shushalykov is known not only in Russia, but also abroad. Member of the Union of Artists of Russia since 1998, chairman of the section of church art (1999–2020), participant of more than twenty art exhibitions, has awards of the Russian Orthodox Church for the establishment of Orthodoxy in the Urals and educational activities, winner of the award “Imperial Culture” for the preservation and development of the Russian icon-painting tradition (2022). The versatility of N. Shushalykov's artistic talent is difficult to overestimate: an interesting easel painter, muralist, iconographer, restorer, master of interior design and creation, an experienced mentor. Love for the Orthodox tradition in childhood formed the artist's interest in ancient Russian art, he begins to study it in depth in his student years. After graduating from the Sverdlovsk Art College named after I.D. Shadr in 1986 with the qualification of “painter-teacher” actively participates in the artistic life of the city, engaged in pedagogical activities.

For the first time as an iconographer Shushalykov established himself at the first exhibition dedicated to a contemporary icon in 1993 in Yekaterinburg, presenting his first iconographic works together with a group of like-minded artists (Kosjakina, 2021). Since that time, he has been actively working for the benefit of the Church, an interest in the artist's work is being formed: biographical articles (Minakova, 2020), Panchenko, 2020), exhibition catalogs, a number of videos. The artist's excellent knowledge of the technique and technology of icon painting is revealed on the pages of the “Platinum” magazine (Shustova, 2014–2015).

Methods

The subject of the study is to identify the factors that influenced the specifics of the artistic solution (style, color, iconographic program of the temple, etc.) when creating monumental church paintings created by the leading iconog-

rapher N. Shushalykov. To identify the factors that influenced the specifics of the artistic solution, it was necessary to include in the study the main monumental projects created by the artist over three decades (the entire creative path) both in Russia and abroad: Church of St. reverend Maxim the Confessor (Yekaterinburg), Church of St. John the Warrior (Yekaterinburg), educational center “Patriarchal compound” (Yekaterinburg), chapel of St. Dimitri Solunsky (Yekaterinburg), chapel of St. Catherine (Holy Trinity St. Nicholas Monastery, Tashkent, Uzbekistan), Church of St. Nicholas (Athos, Greece), Church of the Holy Prince Alexander Nevsky (Tashkent, Uzbekistan), Church of St. reverends Zosima and Savvatiya Solovetsky (Yekaterinburg).

The monumental projects included in the analytical study revealed a number of factors that influenced the specifics of the artistic solution, in particular, the style, color, iconographic program of the temple, etc.

Discussion and results

The restoration of the picturesque decoration of the church of Saints Zosima and Savvati Solovetsky in the village of Kungurka, Sverdlovsk region, was the first experience of monumental works by Nikolai Shushalykov as the main artist and project manager (1998–2002). An unusually difficult task was to restore the lost scenic areas (the volume amounted to almost 70 % of the total area of 500 sq.m.), in the absence of any preserved sources. By selecting the color and stylistics, the artist managed to find not only a general stylistic solution, but also a general harmonious structure of the temple decoration. Restoration work required careful study of the preserved paintings: the paint layer, soil analysis, composition and quality of the plaster layer. Unlike the old oil paintings of the late XIX century, the artist performs works in the technique of cold encaustic, believing that this technique is more durable and resistant to temperature changes and is able to preserve the paintings for a long time. Restoration and conservation of the lost images has been carried out. The painting of new paintings was also carried out in the technique of cold encaustic with a wax varnish coating. The ornamentation

delicately entered into the overall design of the interior, linking picturesque images into a single space, creating a sense of solemnity.

Attention is drawn to the area of the painting of the refectory ceiling (20 sq.m.), the original painting has not been preserved. Creative imagination allowed the artist to create a complex panoramic composition, its central part includes a cross with the inscription “This will win” surrounded by soaring angels, at the bottom are Tsar Constantine and Tsarina Elena, prayerfully approaching the mystically revealed cross surrounded by Roman soldiers looking with fear at what is happening (Fig. 1).

The next major monumental project is connected with the wall painting of the church in honor of St. Maxim the Confessor in Krasnoturinsk, Sverdlovsk region, built in 1851 on the site of a burnt-out wooden church of



Fig. 1. Painting of the ceiling of the refectory of the Church of the Holy Saints. Zosima and Savvati Solovetsky. Kungurka village, Sverdlovsk region. Russia. 2000

the XVIII century. For a year and a half, the interior of the church was painted under the direction of N. Shushalykov with a group of professional artists (2004–2005). The iconographic program perfectly organizes the space divided by pillars into three naves. The images are large-scale and concise, commensurate with the architecture, made in the style of the Moscow school of the XV–XVI centuries. The three-part depiction of the hagiographic scenes of the Holy Prince Alexander Nevsky above the northern doorway of the interior convinces us of the mastery of performing group compositions, hagiographic narratives (Fig. 2).

One of N. Shushalykov's major projects deserves a separate topic – the decoration of the spiritual and educational center «Patriarchal Compound» in Yekaterinburg. The scale of the work is impressive, the area of the monumental paintings was more than 3000 sq.m: the grand staircase, the dome, the refectory, the ceiling of the foyer of the first floor, the museum of the Royal Family. The complex of works also included the design and decoration of the residence of the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia in the Urals, halls of official ceremonies and receptions, meetings of the Synod, reception and office of the Patriarch, conference hall, exhibition hall, concert hall and other premis-

es. The paintings are made in the technique of egg tempera, decorative plaster was used in the decorative design.

The main link of the whole complex of works is, of course, the grand staircase. The verticalization of the compositional structure formed the basis of the artist's conceptual solution. Narrative elements, hagiographic evidence, historical moments allowed us to build the plots chronologically from the bottom up – from the first Rurikovichi until Russia of the New time. Each floor of the staircase reveals the historical stage, the spiritual experience of the Russian people. Based on the historical realities of our Fatherland, its spiritual history, the plot reading of the entire program is clearly and logically structured (Fig. 3).

The first floor of the grand staircase opens the theme «The Baptism of Rus» with the central image of Saints Vladimir and Olga Equal to the Apostles. The key idea here is the idea of the unity of the Russian people. The middle floor is symbolically connected with the middle of the thousand-year Christian history of the Russian state, with the era of St. Sergius Radonezh. The main historical event of this period is the Battle of Kulikovo – one of the large-scale group compositions with the central figure of the Holy Prince Dimitri Donskoy on

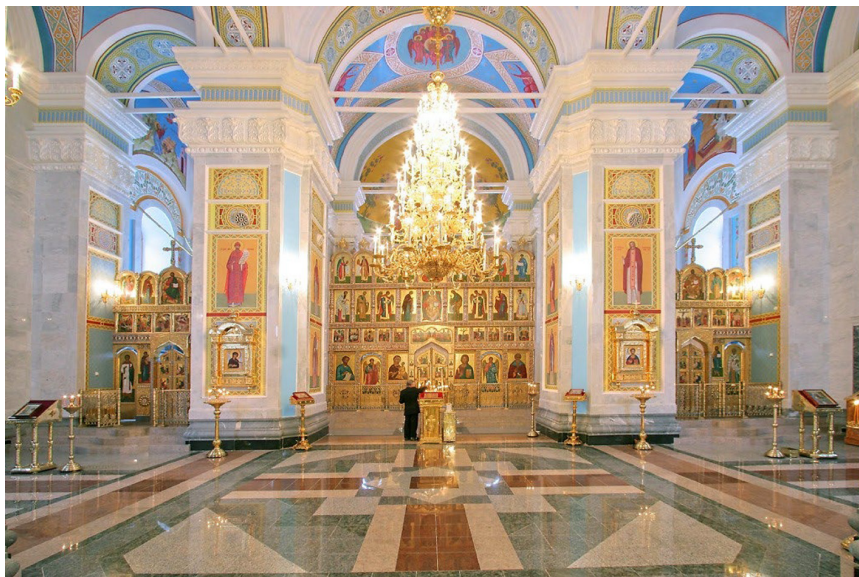


Fig. 2. The Church of St. Maximus the Confessor. Krasnoturinsk, Sverdlovsk region. 2004–2005



Fig. 3. The grand staircase of the spiritual and educational complex «Patriarchal Compound». Yekaterinburg. Russia. 2005–2010

a white horse with a sword in his hands. This image is consonant with the Holy Great Martyr George the Victorious, embodies power in the struggle against the forces of evil, the triumph of Orthodoxy.

The historical tape continues the spiritual feat of St. Seraphim Sarovsky. The artist takes as a basis the famous hagiographical narratives of the saint, but interprets them in his own way. Next, a theme dedicated to the especially revered Ural saints – the Venerable Simeon Verkhotursky and Stefan Permsky unfolds, and again the artist masterfully builds complex multifaceted compositions. The paintings on the third floor reveal the theme of the reign of the Romanov family. It is impossible not to notice the mastery in the performance of group scenes and a special attitude to details. In the composition “Worship of the People on the Red Porch”, Nicholas II and Empress Alexandra Feodorovna are depicted standing against the background of the Faceted Chamber, the Assumption Cathedral, the walls of the Moscow Kremlin over an architectural arch, the coat of arms of the Romanov family is included in the lunette, thereby visually elevating the royal personages even more. And the whole circu-

lar structure is completed by the composition “Heavenly Church”, in which four images of the Theotokos, especially revered by the Russian people, are inscribed. In the center of the composition is an equi-pointed cross in the radiance of eight rays with a crown of thorns, like the light of the star of Bethlehem against the starry sky.

Hagiographic narration, the ability to think in historical images, mastery of drawing and composition, harmony of color contributed to the realization of the idea. The work on the design of the Patriarchal Compound complex was fruitful and in many ways was crucial for the formation of the artist’s personality.

The theme of the «Heavenly and earthly host» becomes decisive in the overall design of the monumental paintings in the church of the Holy Martyr John the Warrior. The dome space in the form of four segments with expanding blades includes compositions of the Virgin images, symbolically forming the cross – Order of the Holy Great Martyr George the Victorious. The color of the celestial sphere, in which the images of the Virgin are revealed, unites the entire iconographic program, thereby reducing the intensity of color. The artist moves the se-

mantic load of the middle register to the box vault of the large dome space, while preserving the ensemble of the iconographic program (fig. 4). The composition of the Archangel Michael Cathedral in the upper part of the archway above the altar unites the images of the holy warriors of Christ – Dimitri Donskoy, George the Victorious, Alexander Nevsky and others into a single visual circular space. Enhances the perception of equal-figure images of saints with a common blue background. The artistic language of monumental paintings chosen by the author has the continuity of the tradition of academic painting late XIX – early XX centuries. With the general impression of the academic direction of the painting program, the features of modernity are clearly traced, expressed in the fluidity of the lines of the folds of clothes, the wings of angels, the celestial sphere, which gives a floreal direction of ornamentation, consonant with the general idea.

For the first time, N. Shushalykov’s creative work abroad begins immediately with a «high bar». In 2012, he creates sketches and begins to paint the Church of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker in the monastery of Karakal (Athos, Greece) on his own. E.N. Nikolaeva rightly notes that «today many Russian icon painters are actively in demand on Mount Athos – in the “heart of the Orthodox world”, <...> Ural masters are no exception” [10, p.23]. The work at the monastery took place in several stages, the artist had to come repeatedly to continue his work in 2015 and 2018. To date, the temple is almost painted. The complexity of the task was to create a monumental painting in the Athos style, as is known, having a slightly different “intonation” in contrast to the Byzantine one. For the realization of the artistic idea, the inspiration was, first of all, the art of the Greek icon painters Theophanes of Crete and Manuel Panselin, whose work the artist



Fig. 4. The Church of the Holy Martyr John the Warrior. View of the eastern part of the interior. Novoberezovsky village, Sverdlovsk region. Russia. 2010–2012

studied while traveling through the monasteries of Mount Athos. Some of the images and plots of these masters became prototypes in the implementation of the artistic idea. At the first stage of the work, the dome was painted with the image of Christ Pantocrator surrounded by the Cathedral of the Archangel Michael and the image of the Mother of God «The Sign» in medallions. The method chosen by the artist to copy the frescoes of the XII century. The Church of Panagia Asinu in Nikitari (Cyprus), with its compositional, coloristic and stylistic solutions, shows a high level of skill and careful attitude to the original. Egg tempera was used in the painting, the artist made a preparatory drawing immediately on the surface of the wall with sienna on egg emulsion in the grisaille technique (Fig. 5).

Iconographic subjects and images of the monumental painting in the Church of

St. Nicholas the Wonderworker are built into a single composition, represented by tiers, each of which serves as the basis for the next. At the same time, an important feature of the Greek tradition is the rigor of a clear linear pattern that firmly covers the figures on a common color background. The author's reading of the life scenes of St. Nicholas in the second tier above the window openings are in tune with the general painting program of the temple. In general, the artist managed to get as close to stylistics as possible, first of all, in the beauty and spirituality of images, in different angles, expressiveness of lines, the transfer of some realism in details, inner spiritual tension.

A series of monumental projects was carried out by N. Shushalykov in Tashkent. In particular, paintings of refectory rooms and the chapel of the Holy Great Martyr Catherine were made in the Holy Trinity St. Nicho-



Fig. 5. The Church of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker. Karakal Monastery (Athos, Greece). 2012–2018

las Convent. All these works are united by the embodiment of the individual manner of the master. The originality of the chapel's paintings is determined not only by the choice of subjects, but also by the consistency of the images placed, the integrity of the composition, which allows expressing the general idea. The dynamism of compositions in the hagiographic scenes of St. The Great Martyrs of Catherine, the expressiveness of silhouettes, the rhythmicity of color spots reveal the idea of architecture in a single ensemble (Fig. 6).

The creation of monumental paintings for the Church of the Holy Prince Alexander Nevsky in Tashkent, built in 1902, set the artist a number of tasks related to the synthesis of architecture and painting. The blue color of Art Nouveau architecture gives lightness, conviviality, integrity of the composition, the decor also serves as an addition to this. The beauty of the exterior of the temple is less consistent with the architectural forms of the interior: the dismemberment of space, modern decoration with

different materials, some of the windows are artificially blocked – all this creates an imbalance and violates the architectural design. The interior of the church was not decorated with paintings after construction, before the revolution, but apparently it was planned. The artist's view of the problem of the interaction of monumental painting and architecture in search of style leads to the decision to create paintings in the Old Russian traditions.

The inclusion of a niche with a dedicated arch in the central part of the altar created certain difficulties. According to the canonical principles of the hierarchical system, the icon painter includes the image of the Mother of God «The Sign» in the upper tier of the niche, the artistic expression of the form is presented here with a focus on Byzantium, at the same time, in writing personal, it is impossible not to notice the individual manner of the artist. In the lower part of the niche, the composition “Descent into Hell” was borrowed by the artist from the fresco of the monastery of High Dech-



Fig. 6. Chapel of the Holy Great Martyr Catherine. Holy Trinity St. Nicholas Convent. Tashkent. Uzbekistan. 2019



Fig. 7. Chapel of the Holy Great Martyr Demetrius of Thessalonica. Degtyarsk, Sverdlovsk region. Russia. 2021

any in Kosovo (Serbia, XIV century), but stylistically he departs from the original, resorting to improvisation, embodying the features of Art Nouveau.

One of the last realized projects of N. Shushalykov is the monumental paintings of the chapel Holy Great Martyr Demetrius of Thessalonica in Degtyarsk, Sverdlovsk region. A significant role in wall painting is played by the compositional structure and its interaction with architectural forms, as well as linear and color rhythm. Thanks to the mastery of the compositional solution, sections of walls with images of rocks are perceived as an essential element of the constructive solution of the temple painting ensemble, the tops of which serve as visual support for powerful overlaps of space or their imitation. Such an example is the scene of the “Resurrection” with the image of the Resurrected Christ in a mandorla against the backdrop of a cave-shaped slides in the central part of the altar. The interpretation of the scene “The Descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles” on the northern wall of the interior is very indicative in this sense, here the window opening visually serves as a perspective portal (Fig. 7).

Conclusions

A number of monumental works have shown that the artist is not tied to one style, uses a variety of artistic solutions depending on a particular temple, the wishes of the customer, the deadline for the work. The last monumental projects of N. Shushalykov are distinguished by a pronounced individuality, the developed artistic language is mainly based on the traditions of the Moscow school of the XV–XVI centuries.

Spiritual experience, Christian worldview and worldview are certainly the basis for his creativity. These examples of monumental paintings testify to the diversity of the artist’s talent as a person who thinks deeply and carefully studies the sources. Preparatory work is always associated with historical and artistic research in the creation of iconographic catalogs, force sketches, layouts. Each program of paintings created by N. Shushalykov is original, and at the same time subordinated to the canonical principle of the hierarchy of the temple space. When developing a coloristic solution, N. Shushalykov takes into account not only the features of architectural structures, but also the geographical, ethnic features of the area in which he works – tonality, light inten-

sity, air density, etc. For example, the color activity of painting was deliberately enhanced by the master in creating icons for the iconostasis in the church of St. Nicholas in Bangkok (Thailand). On the contrary, a number of monumental projects in Uzbekistan are dominated by pastel colors, which indicates the artist's sensitive and attentive attitude to local traditions. The desire to always take into account the «cathedral decision», often defending their point of view in matters of placement, the presence of certain subjects in the interior of the temple, are important for the artist. Working with large creative teams speaks about the organizational abilities of N. Shushalykov.

Having mastered the ancient traditions, the artist allows organically correlating the aesthetic experience of his predecessors with his own understanding of divine beauty. "The iconographer must constantly draw, as from a well, all the best that is in the Christian tradition, otherwise the well will dry up, and the iconographer

must be the very «well» that feeds (transmits skill)" – these words of N. Shushalykov accurately characterize his creative credo. The constant search for the artist in creating new iconography, original iconographic schemes, convinces us that the canon does not restrict the freedom of creativity, it serves as a vector that helps the development of the iconographic tradition, this way of iconographer develops the artistic language and artistic means himself. Thus, each epoch develops tradition through new forms, striving to embody the triad of values – goodness, truth and beauty.

Confession

I would like to express my gratitude to the iconographer Nikolai Shushalykov for the opportunity to get acquainted with his work, which makes a significant contribution to the development of Orthodox culture not only in Russia but also abroad, as well as for the photographic materials provided.

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