

“The Frieze of Life” by Edvard Munch: Philosophical and Art Analysis

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The article presents a philosophical and art analysis of three paintings by the Norwegian artist E. Munch, namely “Melancholy” (1891–1892), “Separation” (1896), “The Dance of Life” (1899–1900), included in the “The Frieze of Life” cycle. The purpose of the analysis was to uncover the artistic ideas of each of the selected works and to identify the general conceptual basis of the artist’s work. As a result of the methodological analysis of the paintings, it was substantiated that the work of E. Munch, firstly, is fundamentally consistent, in the sense that each work should be considered as part of the painter’s holistic art world view; secondly, the dominant compositional features of the works, relating them to the style space of Aeo-romanticism, are highlighted; thirdly, such a characteristic of E. Munch’s creativity as a programmatic approach is revealed, which is expressed in the embodiment of the deep meanings of human life through the sign-symbolic forms of works.

Keywords: Edvard Munch, “The Frieze of Life”, philosophical and art analysis, “Melancholy”, “Separation”, “The Dance of Life”.

Introduction

The creative way of the Norwegian painter and graphic artist Edvard Munch is widely spread in scientific literature. The life path of E. Munch and his biography are studied by R. Stenersen (1972), U. Bischoff (2003), A. Näss (2007), P. Deineka (2009), C.M. Miranda, C.E. Miranda, D.M. Molina (2013), M.S. Ponomareva and V.A. Marchenko (2016), G. Garrels, J.O. Steihaug, S. Wagstaff, K.O. Knausgaard, P.G. Berman, A. Morehead, M. Stein (2017). The analysis of E. Munch’s work, his sketches, individual paintings (the painting “The Scream” (1893) is of particular interest to researchers), the technique of work, are presented in the studies of E.G. Sandbakken, E.S. Tveit (2012), D. Bauer, P. Pierroux, H. Deborah, S. George, J.Y. Hardeberg, A. Ghani Dahlan, P. Young, B.C. Finn (2014), J. La Nasa, M. Zanaboni, D. Uldanck, B. Topalova-Casadiogo, M.P. Colombini (2015), O. Sarvig (2017), N.R. Mamutov, E. N. Alekseeva (2017), M. van Dijk (2017), G.E. Friedlaender, L.K. Friedlaender (2018). The symbolic and philosophical substantiation of E. Munch’s works is presented in the research of S.W. Cordulack (2002), M.V. Maksak (2009), H. Azeem (2015), G.J. Pedersen (2017). The culturological analysis of Edvard Munch’s works is presented by Yu.V.

Arkhangelsk (2016), T.M. Nikolskaya (2017), M. Ya. Danova (2018). There are also studies of the composition of the paint layer of the Norwegian artist's works, the results of which are covered by the articles of Košářová V., Hradil D., Hradilová J., Čermáková Z., Němec I., Schreiner M. (2016), Levin B.D., Nguyen K.X., Holtz M.E., Wiggins M.B., Thomas M.G., Tveit E.S., Muller D.A. (2016, 2017).

In our study, we propose to refer to the three paintings by E. Munch, namely "Melancholy", "Separation" and "The Dance of Life", the philosophical and art analysis of which will allow complementing the available information about the artist's work substantially.

Methodology

The leading method of our research was the philosophical and art analysis, the methodology of which was developed by V.I. Zhukovsky (2011, 2013), N.P. Koptseva (2014, 2015, 2018), D.V. Pivovarov ((Bralkova et al., 2015), while its effective application in the study of works of art is presented in a number of publications, including articles by K.V. Reznikova (2014), N.N. Sereckina (2011), E.A. Sertakova (2014), A.A. Sitnikova (2014).

The primary characteristics of the paintings, namely the time of the paintings' creation and their plots, were significant criteria for the selection of works for the philosophical and art analysis. Each of the paintings represents different periods of the work of E. Munch on "The Frieze of Life" cycle: initial, intermediate and final. Of interest were paintings, visualizing scenes that were different from each other, with different numbers of characters.

The idea of "The Frieze of Life" cycle

"The Frieze of Life" cycle was created by E. Munch from 1886 to 1900. It includes four sections: *Seeds of Love, Flowering and Passing of Love, Anxiety, Death*. Each section consists of a series of works, united by common artistic motives and ideological content. This is how the artist himself describes the idea of the cycle, "*The Frieze of Life is conceived as a cycle of works that create a scene of life in context. The entire cycle is characterized by a wavy line of the seashore. Behind this line there is a wave-like movement of the sea, while behind the trees there is life in its fullness, diversity, joy and sorrow. The Frieze is a poem of life, love and death... The paintings of the shore and the trees, performed in the same color scheme, borrowed their flavor from the summer night. Horizontals of the sea and verticals of trees are repeated in all the paintings, the beach and human figures give rise to a note of rapidly pulsating life, while rich colors make it possible for paintings to harmonize with each other...*" (Bischoff, 2003: 50).

Since 1902, the paintings of the cycle were exhibited in Berlin, Copenhagen, Christiania, Prague. The composition of the canvases was constantly changing; the exposition did not keep to a certain sequence. At the end of 1903, Dr. Linde provided Munch with the first opportunity to set the Frieze with a fixed hanging.

“The Frieze of Life” predetermined the further creative way of E. Munch. The cycle became the ideological base for the creation of subsequent decorative friezes made by the artist to order.

A further philosophical and art analysis of the three representative paintings of the cycle will make it possible to more fully disclose how the artist embodies the view of life in the cycle’s pictorial works of art, which artistic expressive means and sign-symbolic forms he uses.

Philosophical and art analysis of the painting “Melancholy” by E. Munch

In 1891–1892 in the European period of creativity, Edvard Munch created the painting “Melancholy” (Fig. 1). This is one of the earliest versions of paintings with the same name, written in the period from the 1890s to the 1900s. This picture is included in the second section of the series “The Frieze of Life” that is called “Flowering and Passing of Love”.

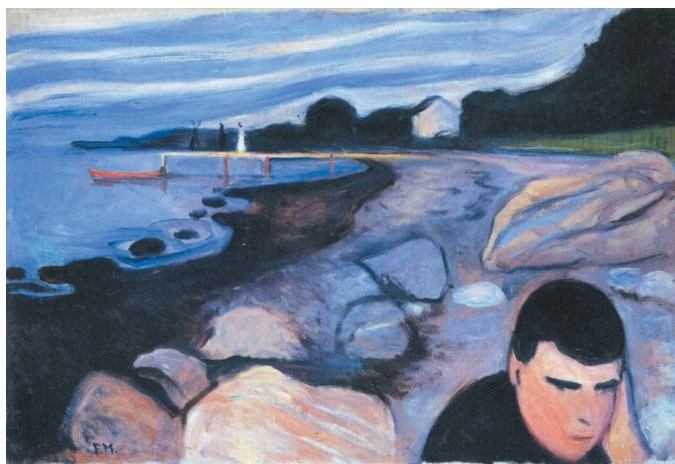


Fig. 1. E. Munch. Melancholy. 1891–1892. Oil on canvas. 64 x 96 cm.
National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo, Norway

The format of the painting “Melancholy” (64 x 96 cm.) defines an intimate value for index signs. The semantic meaning of a visual image thus acquires the status of a certain individual, personal quality.

The material status of the work “Melancholy” is updated thanks to colorful strokes, which determine the primary color and compositional landmarks of the visual image of the painting. The color of the canvas is built in two main shades — light (mostly shades of blue, also white and red colorful strokes) and dark. They form

contrasting color zones, the general contour of which is subject to the rhythm of wavy lines. From the compositional point of view, there are three main color zones: the zone of the upper left corner of the canvas, the zone of the upper right corner and the foreground zone of the painting. The line of demarcation between the foreground area and the background area is the color “road”, made with dark strokes. Compositionally, this wavy line goes deep into the picture, gradually narrowing and connecting with the color zone of the background. The wavy lines, which dominate in the artistic space of the painting, are constrained by a number of vertical elements formed by strokes of red and white colors in the middle ground and background. These colorful signs bring some stability to the composition, despite the fact that the painting constantly takes the viewer beyond the limits of the frame. Each of the color zones selected above is infinitely endless. There are no limits to these art spaces. The space of the painting is fundamentally open and seems to be in motion. The composition is thus based on openness and unstable equilibrium.

The smooth distribution of red strokes on the blue background forms the value of rhythm, phasing. The introduction of these contrasting colors in relation to the general color field of the canvas initially emphasizes their significance.

The analysis of the artistic image on the index status implies consideration of the composition-color whole image from the position of the individual constituent elements-signs.

The method of “observation” allows making out a sitting pensive man on the beach. The main focus is on the upper part of the body, particularly the head, which is the focus of the brain, the most important organ of mental life (Heckel, 1906: 99). The figure of the character is treated conventionally, it is greatly simplified and planar (two-dimensional). There are no attribute elements indicating a particular person, which makes it possible to interpret this character as a person in general. The man is painted physically inactive, unemotional, with a frozen look, indicating the moment of “the character’s peering inside himself”. These characteristics define such visual concepts as “concentration”, “silent immersion in oneself”. Colorful strokes, which become the image of a hand in the dialogue with the audience, add an additional characteristic. The sign of the hand supporting the character’s head indicates his thoughtfulness. The artistic space, in which the man is depicted, is closed on one side with a line of colorful forms shaping the artistic image of stones, on the other side it is limited by the frame of the canvas. This compositional move introduces the viewer into the artistic space. The viewer inevitably makes a stop, a pause, being stopped by a figure immersed inside him. The character’s pose can be characterized as internally closed, adjusting to the appeal inward, removal from the overall process depicted. His

inner world is that world which is different from the rest of the world. The main character of this world is man himself, his feelings, thoughts.

There are general outlines of forms in the background, resembling the image of a house in which the pediment of the roof merges with the general contour of the building body itself. The absence of any attribute qualities of this image characterizes this sign as symbolic, along with other vertical signs of white and red in the background, which are also endowed with a symbolic meaning by their contrast in shape and color. The symbolism of white allows formalizing the corresponding signs as signs of a spiritual abode, a place of holiness. The introduction of colorful red strokes introduces the symbolic meaning of the rhythm of the path. It is a luminous color, personifying both spiritual and physical tension of man. Traditionally, it is associated with such phenomena of human life as love, enmity, revenge, war. The expression of red color, dark shades of blue, winding lines of the composition as a whole forms such a visual concept as “spiritual tension”. Tension is inherent not only in the character, but also in the artistic space itself. Space itself, therefore, becomes a symbol of man’s inner spiritual tension.

The analysis of the material and index marks made it possible to draw the following conclusions.

The composition of the painting is constructed in such a way that the depicted figure of the man is brought to the fore and as close as possible to the viewer. Physical non-doing with internal concentration and tension of the character leads to the concept of a thinking, reflecting, spiritually intense person. The index marks of the middle ground and background are spatial reference points indicating the specificity of the location of the scene presented. Key landmarks are the sky, the sea, the coastline. The presence of these landmarks, as well as the introduction of additional color indices (the mark of the spiritual monastery in the background) defines two different realities opposed to each other: heavenly and earthly. The tortuosity of the coastline introduces the objective meaning of anxiety, movement. Acting as a mark of the border, the coastline encircles the earthly world and separates it from the distance. This is one of the sign symbols developed by E. Munch “for instilling strong and often complex feelings” (quoted after Maksak, 2009, 127).

The summative-iconic status allows combining the key sign indices and identifying their common visual concept. The key sign indices that require summing up consideration are the background space presented by the heavenly and sea distance, and the foreground space, with the figure of a man close to the viewer. The character is turned back to the background. His unseeing glance, directed at himself, indicates his detachment from what is happening around him. The physical non-action of the man is contrasted with a dynamic composition of the background (a

wave-like coastline extending deep into the painting, wave-like colorful strokes forming the image of heavenly space). Through this opposition, the unity of the visual image is achieved. The background scene becomes a visualization of the character's inner state in a summative-iconic status, his spiritual intense self-contemplation. The dynamics of colorful strokes, the wave-like coastline are a visualization of the flow of thoughts and the spiritual throwing of the character. His focused gaze at himself, one hand attached to his ear, and his openness on the other side, indicates intuitive listening to what is happening around him and, consequently, to what is happening inside him.

The symbolic status of the visual concept of the work "Melancholy" is revealed through self-destruction and negation of the values of the index and iconic statuses. The painting ceases to be an image of a scene on the seashore; sign indexes on the symbolic status of their development lose the characteristics of pointers to one or another locality, one or another representative of the human world. In addition, there are no attributes indicating the specific location of the scene, a particular person, which takes the visual image of the painting "Melancholy" beyond the limits of a certain historical and cultural situation. E. Munch refers to a specific technique for performing the work, according to which, on the one hand, realistic details of the image are observed, on the other hand, all the characters in the artistic space of the painting constantly go beyond their graphic boundaries, stepping to the level of the symbol in the process of a dialogue with the viewer. As noted by the researchers of E. Munch's works, the artist created a specific "personal" symbolism, making personal psychological problems and experiences the object of his creativity, which, however, rise to universal significance in their symbolic meaning. A seemingly ordinary life situation, namely, the image of a man on the seashore, rises to the level of a symbol expressing the inner world of a person in general, regardless of the time and place of his life activity. All signs, indices, thus, become a total symbol of the formation of existential emotion that is melancholy, characterized by spiritual exertion of forces. The self-analysis of the artist, which forms the basis of the creation of this visual image, turns into a message to the viewer to analyze one's inner world. Thus, a program of self-observation, peering at the processes occurring within oneself is formed. The visual image adjusts to something personal, intimate, associated with the spiritual dialogue of the person with himself. In this sense, the choice of a small painting format (64 x 96 cm) is not accidental.

**Philosophical and art analysis of the painting "Separation"
by E. Munch**

Four years later after the painting “Melancholy” (1891–1892), in the same European period of creativity, E. Munch began to create the painting “Separation” (1896) (Fig. 2), also included in the second section of the series “The Frieze of Life” that is “Flowering and Passing of Love”.

The artistic image of the material status of the painting “Separation” by E. Munch is distinguished by fundamental clarity in its color scheme. E. Munch writes about the seeming simplicity of his canvases, *“I reproduced the lines and colors that stood before my mind’s eye. I painted from memory without contributing anything, without adding forgotten details. This explains the simplicity of my paintings, their apparent emptiness. I reproduced the impressions of my childhood, the dark colors of the past days.”* (Bischoff, 2003).



Fig. 2. E. Munch. Separation. 1896. Oil on canvas. 96.5 x 127. Munch Museum. Oslo

The color zones of the painting are represented by colorful strokes of white, black, red, green, blue, yellow. With the dominant role of rich dark colorful zones, the luminous function of white and yellow colors is emphasized. In their symbolic meaning, these colors acquire the functions of luminescence and lumen.

A contrast coexistence of the color zones forms not only their borders between themselves, but also builds the composition of the painting as follows:

- the spatial zone of the upper right corner of the painting, formed by colorful strokes of blue. In relation to the position of the viewer, this zone forms the background of the composition of the “Separation” artistic space;
- the spatial area of the middle ground, formed by contrasting lines of colorful strokes of white and black colors;

– the spatial zone of the lower left corner, the most diverse zone in the color scheme. In this space such color shades as green, black, yellow and red are concentrated. The colorful shapes formed by these color shades are closest to the viewer, thus forming the foreground compositional space.

Of particular importance is the space of the middle ground. On the one hand, it plays the role of a boundary that separates the background and the foreground. On the other hand, this color line unites them, setting the rhythm of the overall visual movement into the depth of the painting, from the foreground spatial zone, from a sufficiently



Fig. 2.1. Visualization of the characteristic of “depth” in the composition of the painting “Separation” by E. Munch

planar image to the spatial background area, which has a depth characteristic due to the symbolic value of blue. This motion is visually represented in Fig. 2.1.

Besides, the depth of the composition is supported by the bend of the parabolic line forming the compositional “road” of the middle ground. In addition to the diagonal lines, the method of “observation” allows selecting a number of colorful strokes that have a vertical orientation. These are colorful signs of ocher, black, crimson-red color in the spatial zone of the foreground, a colorful sign of white color in the space of the middle ground. These “verticals” restrain the dynamics of the composition, bring some stability to it.

Thus, the analysis of color marks on the material status allowed us to distinguish such primary characteristics of the visual image as “depth”, “contrast” (color contrast, coexistence of diagonal and vertical composite lines, dynamics and statics rhythm). The characteristic of contrast, the absence of clear contours between colorful strokes, the presence of a compositional “road”, gives rise to such visual concepts as “being at the border”, “tension”.

Consideration of the visual image of the painting “Separation” by E. Munch at the level of the index status constitutes the stage of differentiation of the “background” and “forms” of the painting.

The artistic space of the painting is built mainly by the colorful forms of two colors — green and blue. At the level of the index status, these colorful forms become signs of the artistic space of the painting. The blue color of the “background” is a sign of heavenly and sea space. The black bend of the parabolic line is a coastline fragment in the index space of the artistic image. The colorful “background” of green appears as a sign of a natural area.

The colorful “forms” are concentrated mainly in the spatial zone of the front and middle grounds. In the foreground, close to the viewer, the vertical “form” of a yellow-ocher color in its index value is a tree trunk, the black color “form” is a male figure’s clothing, a purple-red blob of paint becomes a sign of a generalized silhouette of male and female figures in the index space of the painting’s artistic image.

The central foreground figure is the male figure. The man is presented standing, somewhat bent forward and holding his hand on his chest. The color of the hand, other than the earthly complexion, is endowed with the function of luminosity. The hand, along with lowered shoulders, closed eyelids, focuses on the importance of the character’s mental life.

A soaring girl in a white dress with a waving train is represented in profile in the space of the middle ground. The effect of the soaring girl, her impersonality, the generalized character of the image of the face, the silhouette as a whole, the blurriness of the colorful borders gives this sign-index a characteristic of figurativeness that is not related to physicality, but is a reflection of the mental sphere of consciousness.

A further analysis of the artistic image suggests an appeal to summative-iconic and symbolic statuses, allowing us to combine key indexes (tree, male figure, silhouettes of male and female figures, girl, “background”) and to reveal their common visual concept. In its summative quality, the key sign indices are designed to visualize the spiritual essence of human life. The silhouette of male and female figures in its symbolic meaning is a sign of love, the birth of life. It is no coincidence that black lines, resembling tree branches, are painted over the paint layer of a crimson paint form by the artist.

The artistic sign of the generalized silhouette of male and female figures is presented in the foreground of the painting, covering the character’s leg (Fig. 2.2). This



Fig. 2.2. Fragment of the painting “Melancholy”

allows us to characterize this sign as a symbolic support, the basis of human life. Like a pillar, the tree of life, love begets life and supports it in its development.

The connection of the soaring girl, represented in the space of the coastline, with the male figure depicted in the foreground, is achieved through the contrast of colors, namely, the black dress of the man and the luminous white color of the girl's dress. In addition, the color of the man's hand is similar to that of the girl's dress. The waving long hair of the female figure touches the head of the man. Thus, the connection of the characters is obvious. It can be concluded that, according to its characteristics, the female figure is a sign of an image, an object of the man's spiritual contemplation. In addition, the female figure is represented in the space of the coastline, which is a zone of the boundary separating the green zone from the zone of natural distance, the sky zone. Such an arrangement endows this sign with the symbolic value of an intermediary. Thus, the spiritual image, that what is stored in the memory of a person, becomes a link between the world of the earth and the world of heaven, between the present and the past, the past and the future. It should be noted that the depicted female figure is turned back to the figure of the man. She leaves him. Thus, the moment of separation is presented. That is what stated by the name of the painting. Taking into account all the conclusions obtained as a result of the analysis of the painting, it can be concluded that the separation in the artistic space of the painting is understood as a life stage that is difficult for a person to overcome, but necessary for the transition to a new level of his further development. It is the awareness of the foundations of the sensual world, particularly love, birth, development, separation as necessary stages of life that lies at the basis of the artist's artistic intent. This idea is supported by the words of E. Munch. He wrote, *“I heard an inner voice that whispered to me, “Hey, man, you don't need to fight anyone and prove something. Rejoice in the sun, like the plants which expose the leaves to its rays. Love people as much as a person can love. And when your time comes, you will*

reach your goal and with a light heart you will surrender yourself to heaven and you will be happy” (Munch, 1895).

Philosophical and art analysis of the painting “The Dance of Life” by E. Munch

The painting “The Dance of Life” was written by E. Munch in 1899–1900 (Fig. 3). Thematically, it was a continuation of the visual image of “The Three Ages of a Woman” (around 1894), created five years earlier. The painting “The Dance of Life” is



Fig. 3. E. Munch. The Dance of Life 1899–1900. Oil on canvas. 126 x 190.5 cm. National Gallery. Oslo, Norway

included in the central second section “Flowering and Passing of Love” of “The Frieze of Life” cycle. E. Munch has several paintings with this name. In particular, these are canvases of 1921 and 1925. The painting chosen for the philosophical and art analysis is one of the earliest and key pictures in “The Frieze of Life” cycle.

The format of the painting “The Dance of Life” that is 126 x 190.5 cm. brings the value of globality into the artistic image of the canvas. The very name of the painting initially adjusts the viewer to the visual perception of the deep meanings of life. Life appears in the artistic space of the canvas as a dance. What is this dance of life? What is its meaning?

The color scheme of the artistic image of the painting “The Dance of Life” is built up with a number of bright colorful shades that contrast with each other: luminous white, red and black. The alternation of white and red colors adds the effect of rhythm, balance and isolation of the composition within itself to the artistic image of the canvas. None of the colorful forms goes beyond the painting frame. The only

exceptions are colorful strokes of green, black and blue shades that form the spatial zones of the painting. Most of the painting's composition is occupied by the spatial zone of the foreground (green colorful background), the middle spatial zone is represented by a horizontal line of black color, the background is represented by colorful blue strokes, creating a visual effect of the depth of the painting in its symbolic meaning. Thus, the primary color and compositional landmarks are built on the basis of the contrast of the

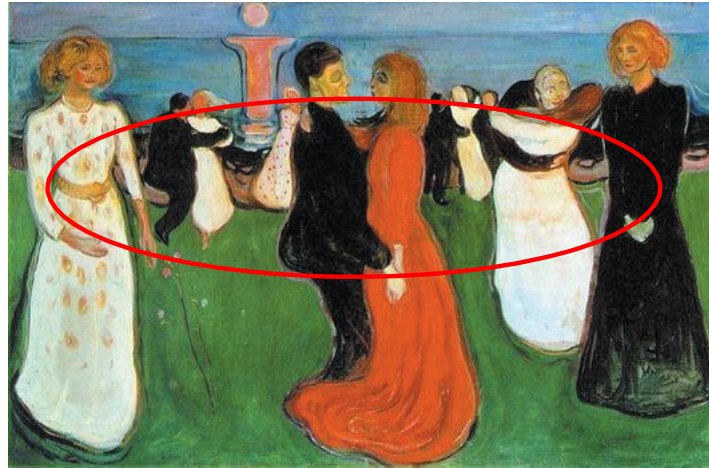


Fig. 3.1. Visualization of the compositional isolation of the painting “The Dance of Life” by E. Munch

bright color forms that make up the compositional landmarks. The rhythmicity of contrasting color forms visually makes up a compositional form of an ellipse (Fig. 3.1.), giving the artistic image a characteristic of cyclicity, infinity, isolation. The dynamics generated by a single rhythm of colorful forms, is constrained by a number of vertical elements that make up the elements of the compositional form of the ellipse. These verticals contribute to the speculative stopping of the viewer's eye in the artistic space of the picture.

At the index status, the material-sign paint blobs of “forms” and “background” are transformed into human characters spending leisure time on the seashore in a dialogue with a viewer-observer. E. Munch himself describes the storyline of the painting “The Dance of Life” as follows, *“In the center of the big painting produced this summer, I dance with my first love; this painting is a memory of her. On the left, a blond girl with a smile of impunity reaches after a flower of love. On the right, a woman in mourning anxiously watches a dancing couple. She is excluded from fun — as well as I was when they danced ...”* (Bischoff, 2003: 47). This quote allows us to highlight several important points: firstly, this picture is in a sense a self-portrait of the artist. He depicts himself in the center of the canvas in the foreground.

Secondly, E. Munch emphasizes the opposition of the two characters, compositionally creating a kind of “frame” that holds back the dynamics of a dancing group of characters. This opposition is carried out at the age and physical activity level: on the left is a *girl reaching* after a flower, which is endowed with the symbolic meaning of love, on the right, there is *a woman of old age*, physically passive, but “watching a dancing couple”, that is, her mental activity is emphasized.

Thus, E. Munch opposes two ages of a person by means of female images: the period of youth, adolescence, with a peculiar craving for movement, activity, knowledge of love, and the period of old age of a person, when physical activity is replaced by mental activity, contemplation, thoughtfulness, understanding the past years, the meanings of life in general. The symbolic meaning of the white dress of a girl forms such visual concepts as purity, luminosity, innocence, serenity. The symbolic meaning of the contrasting black color of the woman’s dress is associated with the concepts of death, mourning, peace, constancy, which is a meaningful content of the old stage of a person’s life.

In the center of the composition is a group of dancing couples in the background of nature. The absence of prescribed facial features in most characters, their facelessness emphasizes the significance of the dance itself, in the rhythm of which they are involved in. Only some characters are individualized: the central couple and the dancer to her right. Each of them expresses a certain emotional state experienced at the moment of dance. The face of a dancer on the right, embracing a woman in white, expresses pleasure. A frozen look, even somewhat devastated, allows us to relate his facial expression to a mask.

The central couple stands out from all the dancing couples. The red dress of the woman, the representation of the couple in the foreground in the center of the composition of the painting emphasize the importance of this group of characters. The red color of the dress in its symbolic meaning correlates with the idea of love, which forms the basis of human life, and therefore the personification of this abstract concept by means of the female image is central in the composition of the picture. The unruffled, thoughtful, concentrated expression of the woman’s face, the man’s closed eyes, the image of figures in profile, indicate the closeness of the depicted scene, in some way its intimacy. On the one hand, the characters, are included in the general rhythm of the dance movement (this is one of the dancing couples), on the other hand, they are in a state of trance different from the other characters, a special psychological immersion into their inner world of sensations, feelings, and memories. The visual concept of “immersion” is formed by means of such indexes as wavy colorful lines that form the silhouette of the woman’s right hand, clasping the partner’s neck, her figure, the hem of the waving dress, which is sweeping the man’s legs like a wave. The characters are immersed in the dance,

which, thanks to the symbolic meaning of the red color of the dress, acquires the meaning of the dance of love.

The visual sign of the moon, the light of which is displayed on the sea surface, is no less significant. Such visual signs as the circle of the moon and the vertical column of moonlight in their unity acquire, in the artistic space of the painting, the symbolic outline of a human figure with outstretched hands, a comprehensive and patronizing gesture that illuminates a person with the light of love. The connection with the celestial space, the natural principle as a whole, gives the moonlight the function of a mediator, the spokesman of the divine light of love. The method of “analogy” allows comparing the circle of the moon and the visual shape of the ellipse formed by the dancing couples. The moon, therefore, in its symbolic meaning, became the exponent of the earthly cycles with stages of birth, growth, aging, death and rebirth. And human life is no exception.

The iconic status in an inseparable connection with the symbolic reading of visual signs allows us to consider the individual characters and background in their unity, namely in the unity of the cyclical nature of human life. Three female figures express different incarnations of a woman, corresponding to different periods of a person’s life, in the artistic space of the painting “The Dance of Life”: youth, maturity and wilt. On the one hand, the stage of wilt on the verge of the end of human life closes the chain of life (closed hands of a woman in black attire), on the other hand, is the starting point of a new round of life. Thus, death and life are connected by hands; this is an endless chain of rebirths connecting the past with the future, those who are no longer here with those who have yet to be born. This is an eternal cycle process that lies at the root of human life. It is not by chance that the characters of the painting “The Dance of Life” are depicted on the border of the earthly and heavenly artistic spaces. Man balances between these worlds, being born and again going into non-being, the space of the high world. The boundary of the coastline the boundary of human life becomes in its symbolic value. Life appears a short time, but it is full of movement and development. The painting “The Dance of Life” is not only one of the last works of the “The Frieze of Life” cycle (1900 is the year of completion of this painting and the year of completion of the whole cycle), but also the final program of the artist’s understanding of life processes. This is what E. Munch went to for several years, working on the works of the series “The Frieze of Life”, analyzing and visualizing various aspects of human life: love in its various stages (birth, flowering, sunset), illness, death, fear, expectation. In the end, these quests in one way or another were embodied in the work “The Dance of Life”, a metaphor for the development of both human life in its physical and spiritual harmony, and the life of all living things, of life in general. In this sense, the format of the painting, which is 126 x 190,5 cm., the largest format of all the paintings in

“The Frieze of Life” cycle, becomes fully justified, supporting the idea of development in its globality.

Conclusion

The philosophical and art analysis of E. Munch’s representative works of art included in “The Frieze of Life” cycle, namely, “Melancholy” (1891–1892), “Separation” (1896) and “The Dance of Life” (1899–1900), allowed us to formulate the following conclusions.

1. E. Munch’s creation is fundamentally consistent, in the sense that each work should be considered as part of the painter’s holistic artistic world view. Such unity is achieved through a series of techniques that permeate E. Munch’s paintings. Firstly, this is the principle of coexistence of seeming simplicity and clarity of the canvases (of both the color solution and the depicted plot) with their deep symbolic content. Secondly, the appeal to the same graphic techniques is characteristic of E. Munch’s works. This is the introduction of the coastline, moonlight, which is a guide line in almost every work of the artist. In addition, in almost all the paintings, artistic natural space is endowed with the possibility of revealing the characteristics of the characters. The characters themselves are depicted without any attribute signs. The image of a human figure outside of time and space is a distinguishing feature. As a rule, this is a character that is depicted as immersed in oneself, indifferent to the events around him. This strategy actualizes the idea of introspection and self- knowledge.

The unity of creativity is also achieved due to the dominance of compositional features in the artistic space of the analyzed paintings, which are inherent in the Areoromantism style space. These are such expressive properties as:

- *depth* (penetration of the composition with diagonal lines, unfolding of the plot from the front planar plane to the rear spatial zone, marked by depth due to the symbolic meaning of blue color; internal character concentration);
- *picturesqueness* (leveling of lines, contours and generally any boundaries, the presence of the dynamics of visual forms, external (stretching coastline, representation of characters in motion), and internal motion (character concentration as a sign of internal spiritual development, self-knowledge);
- *openness* (atheticity of the artistic image, unstable equilibrium of its parts, deviation from the geometric “correct clarity” and symmetry, tension, wearying of characters, the infinity of the artistic space presented in the form of natural being are stressed);
- *unity* (the presence of a “border” in the form of a coastline that unites spatial zones, the contrast of colors, symbolizing different periods of life development and

at the same time connected in a semantic sense into a single whole, revealing the characteristics of individual signs only from the standpoint of their unity, which defined the close connection index, iconic and symbolic statuses in the analysis of the canvases. The main character of the artistic image that is man, for whose disclosure all the other elements work, is distinguished);

– *ambiguity*, *vagueness*
(the presence of elements whose meaning cannot be defined unambiguously in the artistic space, for example, the artistic space of the “Melancholy” painting contains a number of colorful elements that cannot be characterized precisely, thus acquiring the meaning of certain symbols. Parts of the painting intersect with each other, manifesting themselves as something that dynamically forms and changes).

2. A feature of all analyzed paintings is their programmatic nature. Visual sign-symbols of the artistic image of the canvases express the deep meanings of both human life and being in general. For E. Munch himself, art seemed to be a “platform” for understanding and learning about life. He writes, “*Practically, my art is a confession that I made at my will, an attempt to clarify my own knowledge about Life ... in fact, this is a kind of egoism, but I do not cease to hope that with its help I will be able to help people see more clearly*” (E Munch, quoted after Bischoff, 2003: 42). Thus, E. Munch endows his creativity with an enlightening function, giving his pictorial works of art the meaning of a certain “book” revealing “the knowledge of Life” to the viewer. Philosophical and art analysis of the three representative paintings by E. Munch, namely, “Melancholy”, “Separation” and “The Dance of Life”, allowed formulating the following philosophical idea embodied in the sign-symbolic forms of the artist’s paintings.

Human life in its physical and spiritual senses, the natural being as a whole are subject to the rhythm of cyclical development. The psychic life of a person, like his physical formation, passes during “... an individual life through a number of stages of development” (Heckel, 1906: 158). Knowledge of these laws of nature is possible through self-knowledge, self-analysis of the symbolic events of one’s life: birth, aging, love, suffering, old age, death, Separation.

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