
GENRE AS AN ACTUAL CATEGORY IN ART HISTORY OF RUSSIA

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(Received 14 December 2016, revised 10 March 2017)

Abstract

The author solves two interconnected problems in the article: 1) informational problem - to give an idea about understandings of 'genre' category in Russian art criticism; 2) scientific and theoretical problem - critical analysis of the genre theory statements from its designation as a category which is organically inherent to painting, to complete denial or introducing new meanings, expanding its boundaries. The technique is based on the principles of historicism and dialectics, which helped to identify the continuity in the approaches of the stated problem's study. The analysis of theoretical concepts and typologies creating, determined the need for using the typological, comparative, system-structural and historiographic methods.

For the international professional community the genre problem is the one of the fundamental problems not only in art theory, but also in art practice, as its solution allows to determine a type of artistic phenomenon and – as a result – specifics of creative method and style. This problem assumes special prominence when changes associated with the emergence of new directions of creative search happen in the art. This is a period that art experienced in the second half of the XX - the beginning of the XXI century. New themes, stories, art solutions actualize the process of interpenetration and mixing genres, and at the same time cause the need for theoretical and methodological reflection. The formation of genre theory in Russian art criticism has made a way from its designation as a category, organically inherent to painting, to complete denial or introducing new meanings expanding its boundaries. At the root of Russian art criticism thought, the understanding of the genre essence is connected to painting. Stable in domestic scientific tradition is a trend of understanding genre as a fundamental category, reflecting the essential properties and connections among phenomena of art world, a complex of formal and content-related characteristics of piece of art. In this approach's context, genre is a style function, a style is a product of genre. Genre analysis is proposed as a theoretical and methodological basis for the study of fine arts, as it allows to reveal hidden qualities of art in genre dispositions. Another position defines genre as a function of painting theme. In present conditions, genre problem is actualized because accepted system of concepts in the contemporary conditions of interpenetration and mixing of genres is not enough.

Keywords: genre genesis, painting theme, image motif, content-formal category, landscape painting

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1. Introduction

In most cases 'art criticism' is described in scientific literature as a set of social sciences studying visual art. It is possible to completely cover the entire subject of art criticism through a set of subject fields that are included in art object. In scientific tradition, definition approaches to the essence of 'art criticism' concept are set to three levels. The first level is a complex of philosophical and theoretical concepts that reveal social and aesthetic art nature, the specifics of its kinds and genres. The second level is a complex of art-historical approaches, observing the emergence, formation and evolution, generic, specific, genre and stylistic diversity of art. The third level provides methods of art analysis and evaluation of art works, new phenomena and trends in art. Based on the foregoing, under art criticism we understand the complex scientific knowledge, aimed at the study of the social and aesthetic nature of art, its origin, formation and evolution, generic, specific, genre and stylistic diversity based on art analysis and evaluation of art works, new phenomena and trends in art [1].

Genre study was carried out in Russian pre-revolutionary art criticism (I. F. Urvanov, A.I. Galich), studies were also conducted in the XX century (A.G. Gabrichevsky, B.R. Whipper, A.A. Fedorov-Davydov, I.I. Tsyrlin, P.K. Suzdalev, G.K. Wagner, M.S. Kagan, V.S. Manin, L.V. Mochalov, V.A. Lenyashin). The interest in the issue does not disappear at the present time (N.A. Yakovleva, T.V. Ilyina, V.G. Vlasov) [2]. Nevertheless, some aspects of the problem are controversial and poorly studied. First of all, it refers to genre definition, its relation with other concepts, the problem of classification and specificity of genre genesis in contemporary art [3].

The objective of the article - is determining the content of main approaches for defining genre as art criticism category in Russia.

2. Methods

The methodology of scientific-research approach has holistic character; it is a complex of the main general and special scientific methods. Using the principles of historicism, we distinguish the stages of 'genre' category formation, we determine sequence and the dialectics of the general and the particular in this process. Comparing the original ideas and statements obtained this way, it can be concluded about the direction, character and regularities in the formation of genre theory.

3. Results and discussion

Genre (French 'genre' - genus, sort) in 'New dictionary of foreign terms' is defined in two ways: 1) historically constituted, stable kind of art work; e.g., in painting - portrait, landscape, etc.; in music - symphony, cantata, song, etc.; in literature - novel, poem, etc.; 2) mundane plot painting [4]. In the first meaning

genre is a common aesthetic concept developed to indicate intraspecific subdivision of art; it points to its interdisciplinary nature, as it is explored in art criticism, Musicology, Philology. In the second meaning genre is a synonym to the term 'genre painting' of art criticism, denoting a specific iconographic type of painting dedicated to the depiction of everyday life.

In Russian pre-revolutionary aesthetics genre problem was among the key ones. Thus, in the XVIII century in Russia art theory was formed with basic principles which defined comprehension of genre problem until the mid XIX century. Concepts, terms, ideas that were developing by the classicism theorists have become the basis and tools for the first experience of systematization of easel painting genres. One of such classifications was created by the theoretician of Russian art I.F. Urvanov (1747-1815). In his treatise 'Quick Guide to the knowledge of drawing and painting of historical kind, based on speculations and experiments' (1793), relying on the painting theme he selects stable motifs in different kinds of painting. For the "landscape" kind such motifs are "trees, mountains, air and buildings"; in "portrait" way - people, as well as "internal architecture with all the household decorations," "trees, visible in the window, or a part of garden"; "private battles" - "people, military weapons and horses with some landscape". The author explains image subject for the simplest painting kinds as "a thing, which the artist wishes to picture, or a thing that he is exasperated to picture by any extraneous reason". For the historical kind image subject is defined as "a variety of human actions relating to sacred or secular history, or to fabulous stories; that is also added to the objects that serve to explain the acts" [5]. In this regard, it is important to note that the concept of 'kind' in the treatise of I.F. Urvanov is used that way the term 'genre' is used now. The basic thesis of the theoretician is validation of image subject as a criterion for classification, correlating with the hierarchy of painting 'kinds' identified in the order from highest to lowest: historic larger, encompassing all the historical deeds, perspective, historical mundane, battle, portrait, landscape, animal with birds and animal stock, floral with fruits and insects. The consequence of this theory adoption was the search for the perfect classification of painting.

Romanticism brought new themes to the art, enriched genres and the means of artistic expression, expanded the idea about the painting. In his treatise 'Experience of the science of the elegant' (1825), A.I. Galich (1783-1848) addresses genre problem through the lens that is specific for aesthetics of romanticism. The idea of 'disinterestedness' of aesthetic feeling and action is developed, the idea that "elegant cannot serve to any third-party types" and "has a purpose in itself" [6]. Three aspects of being are taken as the bases of genre classification: the inorganic and vegetable nature, animal world and a human, both taken in conjunction with the spirit and transformed according to their ideal essence. In fact, the genre triad proposed by A.I. Galich, defines a vector to complicity of the image subject's interpretation. The co-subordination of romantic painting genre from highest to lowest, from general within the meaning to less significant, is determined by the level of spirituality of image subject. As

a result, the classic and romantic traditions established broad, but clear genre boundaries, defining image subject as the basis for classification.

If the 'mixing' of genres, which was started in the first half of the XIX century, took into account the subject of the image as the basis for defining the concept of genre, then in the second half of the XIX century, with the expansion of the circle of themes and motifs, the problem of identifying the boundaries of the genre has been clearly delineated. Changing the picture of the world led to the transformation of the hierarchy of genres of easel painting. This was clearly seen in mundane genre with its problematics that in the context of critical realism aesthetics was aimed at the disclosure of social and historical dependence of life phenomena's artistic reflection. New understanding of image subject in mundane genre was getting beyond the boundaries set by the academic tradition of genre, and it found justification in the writings of the theorists of critical realism (V.G. Belinsky [7], V.V. Stasov [8], A.N. Benois [9]).

In the first half of the XX century genre problem was analysed on the basis of methodological principles of historical, sociological and formal methods in the works of B.R. Whipper (1888-1967), A.G. Gabrichevsky (1891-1968) [10], A.A. Fedorov-Davydov (1900-1969) [11], M.V. Alpatov (1902-1986) [12]. The scientists considered genre as a historical category and associated its variability and transformation with the features of historical conditions and worldview of specific historical period. This fact has defined the criteria for the paintings' genre classification. It is based on: 1) the image subject; 2) the narrative-event principle. The image subject was considered as the historical and social, moral sense, which accompanies every depicted object. In a situation of using narrative-event principle objects were interpreted as a means of narrative action realization.

The beginning of systematic scientific study of genre as a category of art criticism in national science can be attributed to the second half of the XX century. This was facilitated by a significant increase in the development of art criticism methodological problems, the accumulation of experience in the theoretical comprehension of genre problem, the availability of research material about the history of Russian and foreign art and the rapid growth of research on Soviet art history. With the similarity of general theoretical statements art critics are not solidary in the estimates of various aspects of the problem. Art critic I.I. Tsyrlin in the work 'The genres in the visual arts' [13], trying to define the central concept of the study, proposed not image subject as a characteristic for classifying paintings, but the theme or image object. It allowed to determine the boundaries and specificity of the following genres: 1) mundane; 2) historical; 3) portrait; 4) landscape painting (views of nature); 5) animalistic (images of animals); 6) still life (inanimate objects). It is important to emphasize the point that I.I. Tsyrlin connects tasks of painting genres with the ultimate goal of art: "... comprehensive knowledge of a man, his feelings and appearance, his spiritual interests, his relationship to surrounding reality" [2]. He noted that according to changing and complication of issues art faces, the contents of

genres were changing, genres themselves ramified or converged, and their boundaries were getting wider. However, their basic principles remained unchanged. In his work I.I. Tsyrlin considers genre as the core concept of art criticism, claiming the position that a variety of genres, the fullness of their development is the most important principle of art.

In the late 1960s, in the works of literary critics V.V. Vinogradov [14], G.N. Pospelov [15], A.V. Chicherin [16], A.N. Sokolov [17], style theory was developed, where genre was the basic category, performing the function of factor and the medium of style. Thus, A.N. Sokolov in the work 'Theory of Style', considering style as an artistic pattern, said that the importance of genre as a style-forming factor is determined by thoroughness of genre forms [17]. This understanding of genre became the theoretical basis for artistic study of G.K. Wagner 'The problem of genres in Russian Art' [18]. By the definition of the scientist, genre historically developed pictorial structure inherently endowed with a certain sense. In general, G.K. Wagner (1908-1995) develops national scientific tradition of genre understanding as a historical, formal and content category. The originality of researcher's approach was in the selection of Old Russian painting genre structure components: 1) selection of actors and the special nature of action as aspect mouthpiece; 2) special characteristic of actors and their relationships as the aspect carriers; 3) selection of material things (accessories); 4) special inclusion (or exclusion) of actors in space and time. As the criteria for genre classification G.K. Wagner identifies: 1) image subject; 2) functionality of a monument. The researcher reduces the essence of genre problem to setting unity between semantics and morphology. Analysing structure of Old Russian painting genres, G.K. Wagner raises the question about the relationship between genre and style, about style-forming role of genres, and uses the concept of 'genre style' [18]. This trend emerged in publications of V.A. Lenyashin [19], N.A. Yakovleva [20], A.T. Yagodovskaya [21], G.V. Pletneva [22], L.V. Mochalova [23], V.S. Manin [24]. The task of their research is the study of the derivation and functioning of genres in the visual arts.

Analysing genre system, V.A. Lenyashin concluded that genre as a category organically inherent to painting is still undeveloped in the theory of art; only in the process of painting's genre system analysis and some certain genres in it, in the process of identifying their resources, features, characteristics can be demonstrated not only declarative, but real equality of genres, and thereby feasibly contributed in its implementation [19]. In the researcher's conception, modern genre system in practice is a self-regulating system, and it is important to identify the structural leitmotif that determines its development. The characteristics of genre system of Soviet art are harmony and maturity, presence of all genres known in art history. According to the scientist, behind that the fundamental principle can be detected, the objective attribute that is inherent to genre system: the desire for the fullest self-identification, for completeness and integrity. Genre in this approach is considered as fundamental category of art criticism and genre approach as a preferred theoretical and methodological basis of art criticism research.

Art critic N.A. Yakovleva started the discussion and gave an overall assessment of the problem in national art criticism, noting that a significant disadvantage of genre theory was that the technique of genre analysis was not developed enough, the definition of the basic concepts was not given [20]. The researcher defines 'genre' concept as a historical number of similar structures arising in the formation of specific image subject in the public consciousness, and a number of modifications. Conceptual position of N.A. Yakovleva can be reduced to the following statements: 1) the image subject serves as genre groundwork, a substructure that determines the structure of work, being at the same time one of its most important components; 2) the image subject is the criterion for genre differentiation; 3) a change of image subject leads to genre modification; 4) the image subject helps to understand the work's genre essence; 5) genre analysis contributes to the comprehension of different sides of artist's intention; 6) the essence of the author's intention is revealed in a comparative analysis of genre, when the work is considered in the historical genre range; 7) genre analysis of art work contributes to the clarification of its formal and content structure, which is based on image subject. Thus, the essence of genre analysis is establishing synchronous and historical connections of the work with all the other art. Synchronous historical cut-off finds elements of three systems in the art's genre structure: the advanced, the dying and the inwardly emerging. N.A. Yakovleva develops a theoretical model of Russian painting's genre typology on the basis of the historical and theoretical analysis of genre problem that has been held in her Ph.D. thesis 'Russian pictorial historical portrait. Towards the problem of genre formation' [25] and later in the doctoral thesis 'System of genres in Russian realistic painting in the XIX century' [26]. In generalizing form, that model is set out in her works 'Genres of Russian Painting: Fundamentals of theory and methodology of systematic historical analysis' [2], 'Realism in Russian art. Experience of historical genre typology' (2007) [20].

A.T. Yagodovskaya expressed similar point of view in discussion on the pages of 'The Creativity' journal in the article 'Genre form - an object or function?' [21]. Noting the contradiction that has developed in art criticism regarding image subject as the basis for genre formation, art critic put forward 'genre motif as such a criterion'. We are talking about image of things or situations especially outlined and fixed by the traditional genre form, repeated many times with different intonations, embodied in the plot or in subjects that received particular semantic colouring. The idea of 'genre motif' functionality is one of the key elements of A.T. Yagodovskaya's conception. The researcher argues that during the study of genre problem we need to pay attention not so much to the 'subject' of content-constructive form, but more to the role that it plays in the structure of art as cohesiveness. The originality of the approach is in the genre definition as invariant, which plays in piece of art a role of a kind, a standard, cultural memory and tradition that is varied and reinterpreted [21]. Summarizing the research experience of N.A. Yakovleva and A.T.

Yagodovskaya, we note their common methodological line, which understands genre as substantial and formal category of typological kind.

We apply this approach to the definition of landscape painting as genre of easel painting. Landscape painting (French *paysage* - area, country) in art criticism is defined as genre of fine arts, especially easel painting and graphics, devoted to depiction of wildlife or a nature modified by a man. As an independent genre variation, landscape painting exists in European art from the XVII century. It is a historically formed relatively stable type of art structure. Special feature of landscape painting genre is that image subject is object that initially related to certain systems independent of the artist's will, have spatial and semantic organization and aesthetic value, independent from the artist. Conventionally, they are divided into two groups: the natural environment and the second environment created by humans. This coincides to the general classification of genre as 'pure nature' landscape painting and landscape painting of 'second environment'.

The specifics of natural landscape and its vegetation, water systems and sky space define a typology of themes and motifs of 'pure nature' landscape: plains, mountains, forests, lonely growing trees, heaths, deserts, meadows, fields, seas, lakes, rivers, streams, everglades, sky, space, elemental phenomena of nature (wind, storm, fog, sun, rain, lightning, storm, rainbow, snow, volcanic eruption, etc.).

The range of themes and motifs of 'second environment' landscape painting is determined by the specifics of landscape transformed by humans. There is generally accepted division into urban (including *veduta*), architectural, manor, park, industrial types. The intermediate space in this typology between 'pure nature' and 'second environment' landscape painting is taken by village and rural landscapes.

There is a classification of themes and motifs of landscape painting in art criticism according to seasonal principle. This principle works both for 'pure nature' landscape and 'second environment' landscape, created by humans. Depending on the main image subject and character of nature in a particular season, there can be a winter, spring, fall, summer landscape paintings. If the dominant motive is the state of nature at a certain time of a day, then there are: dawn, morning, noon, afternoon, evening, sunset, twilight, night can be identified in the typology of themes and motifs of landscape.

Historic landscape evolves in the XVII century art. For the European landscape painting two of its main types are typical: idyllic and heroic. The main image subject here is a shape of the Earth of distant past, eternal, constant laws of nature. In the art of the XIX and XX centuries within the boundaries of this variety of landscape painting genre military, virgin, memorial types were developed.

A special place in the typology of landscape painting genre occupies fantastic, futuristic and metaphorical landscape. The development of this group is associated with the emergence of the art of new nature - associative and abstract forms of thinking. In landscape painting, as in other genres of easel

painting, another image subject, another topic appears - the attitude of the author. The balance of the actual image meaning and the sense attributed to it by the artist, which is in a certain equilibrium in the traditional art, is disturbed.

In the first half of the XIX century art begins a gradual process of interpenetration and mixing paysage with a plot-thematic painting, portrait, still life, which led to significant changes within the genre forms and the appearance of such structural modifications as a 'landscape painting genre', 'portrait in landscape', 'still life in landscape'. Common thing in the mentioned group of genres is an image of physical life environment of the human, the physical presence of a person in the world, behind which usually lies the spiritual and moral sphere of relations [27].

Classification of themes and motifs of landscape painting leads to the question about its content. In the most general form the sense of landscape painting genre is to show the nature and an attitude of human to it. Through the analysis of a system of relationships 'human-nature' it is clear that landscape in the easel painting is an artistic reflection of human activities for transforming the nature, the way of learning it, the means of expression of aesthetic, moral, social, historical, civic, patriotic, philosophical, religious and fantastic ideas.

Historically, the following types of landscape painting have developed in the art: landscape-portrait, landscape-state, landscape-mood, landscape-contemplation.

The landscape-portrait is a depiction of a landscape with different measure of objectivity. Moreover, this objectivity is expressed mainly through substantive concretization of the landscape and all of its elements, including the state of nature. The masterpieces of landscape-portrait genre are the works of I.I. Shishkin 'Forest' (1886), 'Beegarden' (1884), 'Forest brook' (1880), as they demonstrate the perfect knowledge of nature that the artist used in order to find the fragment he needed, could separate from the variety of forms of forest those that he needed by identifying relations among them in space.

The landscape-state - the image focuses on the state of the morning, afternoon, evening or night in the seasons and in various weather. In such cases, the subjective experience of the artist abstracts, stands aloof, being embodied only in the conscious rational choice of motive and its picturesque embodiment, artistic quality is determined by the level of professional skills, manifested in the composition, the picture, the ability to assemble the various elements into a coherent picturesque shape. Among the most illustrative examples are the landscapes of F.A. Vasilev 'After the Storm' (1868), 'After the Rain' (1869), 'Before the Rain' (1870). In each work can be found the representatively recognizable state of nature - early evening before sunset, dawn, moments before a storm or after rain.

The landscape-mood – through the certain nature theme the human mood is expressed in the image - sadness, joy, exalted state of mind, contemplative dissipation in nature. This type of landscape painting shows subjectivity of the image artistic solution. The Russian painting associates landscape-mood with I.I. Levitan. With a very subjective perception of the natural world the artist's

landscapes are always specific and always contain a sense of beauty of the world. For example, 'Birch Grove' (1885-1889), 'Peaceful Abode' (1890), 'March' (1895).

The landscape-contemplation - through the certain nature theme human thinking is expressed in the image. The highest point in the development of this direction of Russian landscape painting are the works of A.K. Savrasov 'The Rooks have arrived' (1871), 'Grave on Volga' (1874).

The artistic shape of the landscape can be epic, lyric, heroic, ideal, romantic, philosophical, religious and mystical, historical. This classification is relative, because its categories often interact with each other, creating common emotional harmony of the work.

Summarizing all above, we can give the following definition of landscape painting as genre of easel painting: Landscape painting is genre of easel painting, where the main subject of the image is nature, wild or transformed by human. It defines a typology of paysage and the development of its genre form of two basic types: 'pure nature' landscape and 'second environment' landscape created by human. As a way of comprehension of reality, landscape painting genre consists of an organic fusion of sensual and intellectual origins and manifests itself as a unity, on the one hand, of mood and feeling, but on the other hand, of knowledge and experience. Landscape painting is reflected in sketch, sketch-picture, picture, which can be a portrait or a landscape, or to focus on the state of nature according to the time of a day and year, or to express a specific human mood and thinking through the certain nature theme. Landscape painting genre is directly related to the deep human features and reflects the place of the individual in a certain period and eternity of natural being.

4. Conclusions

There is no solidarity of views on the nature and character of the category of 'genre' in modern science. The different points of view can be divided into two general approaches: classical (traditional) and modern (non-traditional). Each of these approaches offers a model of genre, in which there is a certain variation.

In the classic sense genre is considered as a type of a literary text, determined by stable formal and semantic characteristics, having a clear structure. The analysis of sources leads to the conclusion about the possibility of defining a number of common essential features, the presence of which makes it possible to consider 'genre' as a fundamental category. More in detail it is possible to define the following important characteristics: 1) genre is the first level of the typology of the painting; 2) genres are localized according to the type of the artistic image in the unity of its content (the subject of the image) and form (the method of object transformation), the structure and functions; 3) genre is born in response to emerging societal needs and gains independence in case

that a set of works leaning towards it creates a special and integral artistic image; 4) every genre has a special place in the system of genres.

At the end of the XX century Russian art criticism formed the view, which is reduced to a denial of genre's special role as a category of art criticism. Thus, summing up the discussion at the pages of 'The Creativity', V.S. Manin in the article 'Once again about genres' [24] impugns the increased interest in this issue, arguing that the role of genres in the art system is not very big. It has tertiary significance and will soon cease to excite the researchers, as it does not define any creative practice or theory of art. The art critic proposes to shift the focus of art evolution study from the genre forms evolution to the exposure of changing principles of art, systems of imagery, artistic consciousness and thinking on genres and genre scheme. V.S. Manin denies the objectivity of genre definition as a historical and formal-content category, genre classification criteria in connection with the analysis of contemporary fine art. He notes that the art with 'the implied' imaginative nature with an associative form of artistic thinking needs the other, not genre typology. The fundamental thesis of his conception is: 1) genres do not define styles, directions, trends and image-bearing system as they have an impact on genres and modify them; 2) genre is image subject function and its specificity depends on style and direction [28]. These statements are open for questioning and require a special study. Their relevance articles of modern researchers T.M. Stepankaya [27, 28], K.A. Melekhova [29], E.Y. Lichman [30] and others convince. Despite the controversial nature of certain aspects of this approach generally we should agree with the existence of terminological problems caused by dramatic changes of genre structure in contemporary art. The terms 'genre' and 'genre system' are not enough with regard to the painting of the XX – the beginning of the XXI century.

From our point of view, the methodology of classical genre theory is very promising for the theoretical understanding of the features of the artistic image and we hope that it will make a definite contribution to the Humanities and the integration of Russia into the international scientific and educational space in the sphere of culture and art.

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