The Picture of the World of the Northern Artist

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Abstract. This article explores the work of the contemporary artist Gennady Stepanovich Raishev and shows the features of the formation of that picture of the world that the artist broadcasts in his original works filled with vivid images of the Russian North. An analysis of the origins of Raishev’s creative project points to many factors of life that are important for his becoming an artist: family, unique northern nature, Russian culture, in which the spiritual energy of the “genius of the place” is combined with Russian collective culture. Particular attention is drawn to the great cultural significance for the spiritual life of the peoples of Russia of the unique project of the Soviet government to create a new, socialist type of culture, involving the numerous peoples of the North with powerful traditions in united cultural space and a very special world outlook and way of life. It led to the creation of the Institute of the Peoples of the North, among the graduates of which were outstanding scientists, teachers, writers, artists which were representatives of the northern peoples of Russia. Among them was G. Raishev. The characteristic features of the foundations of the artistic expression of G. Raishev are highlighted and described. First of all, this is about the mythology, expressed in building a special relationship between artistic images and surrounding reality, which by no means involves reflection or copying. Raishev’s images are primary, they are born there and now thanks to artistic intuition and intellectual foresight. Another characteristic feature is the philosophical understanding of space embodied in artistic reality. A feature of the artist’s worldview is also the construction of cosmological images that go back to archaic representations of the Khanty people and give rise to a special sense of unity of man and the world.

1. Introduction

The picture of the artist’s world is determined by many factors, of which the place of origin is almost decisive. Especially if it is a place of extreme conditions of existence, when the artist was born and formed in the North. The space of the Russian North consists of many territories belonging to different ethnic groups, coexisting with the Russian population, mingling with it or remaining in its ethnocultural identity.

The artist Gennady Raishev comes from a family in which the Russified Khanty father and Chaldon mother (Chaldon means descendant from the family of Russian Siberians who mastered the Northern Subpolar region from the late 17th century) equally belonged to the northern geocultural original tradition. Here, in the Arctic region of the country, “for centuries, indigenous ethnic groups have coexisted, preserving the traditional culture and conquerors of the Arctic territories” [1, p. 209]. Gennady Raishev was born in 1933. The history of the Raishev family is similar to many other tribal stories determined by the policy of Soviet public administration. Father was repressed, and mother withdrew from her home and moved from the hinterland to Surgut to give children the opportunity to get a school education. It was at school that the boy’s main talent was manifested, he began to draw. After her graduation, G. Raishev entered the Leningrad
Pedagogical Institute named after A.I. Herzen to the separation of the peoples of the North, also played a huge role in his formation as an artist.

2. Institute of the peoples of the North

In 1930, the Institute of the Peoples of the North was established in Leningrad, which was the first step in implementing a unique socio-cultural educational project that has no analogues in world practice. Its main task was the formation and dissemination of a socialist lifestyle with new value orientations throughout the Soviet Union through the accession of small northern peoples to a single multinational social community called “Soviet people”, their adaptation to political, economic and cultural life in the country while preserving the features of national development and distinctive culture.

The activities of the new educational institution involved solving a wide range of problems. This is not only the need to develop the North which was not perceived as a current problem by the Russian government [2], the fight against illiteracy and the formation of intelligentsia in regions remote from the country's cultural centers, it is also the creation of new conditions for the spiritual revival and development of ethnic groups. The training at the Institute was organised in such a way that the knowledge gained by students could be successfully used in practice in the future, as well as distributed among representatives of northern peoples.

The importance of the Institute of the Peoples of the North for the national, economic and cultural life of the northern peoples is difficult to overestimate. Graduates of the institute became the vehicles of a new worldview among the indigenous population of the Far North. They taught northerners to think in the interests of the country, broadened their horizons and contributed to the acquisition of new knowledge by them.

Much attention was paid at the Institute to the development of students' artistic creativity. Back in 1926, at the Northern branch of the working faculty at Leningrad State University, because of a number of reorganizations of which the Institute of the Peoples of the North was created and the drawing studio appeared. Its first director was a famous theater artist, illustrator, graphic artist, student of the S. Petrov-Vodkin workshop Peter Ivanovich Sokolov (1892–1937), a graduate of the Petrograd Higher Artistic and Technical Workshops. Since 1934, the studio was led by Aleksey Aleksandrovich Uspensky (1892–1941), who graduated in 1917 from the Central School of Technical Drawing (now the St Petersburg Art and Industry Academy named after A.L. Stieglitz) and is considered one of the founders of the Leningrad School of Painting.

Among the artists whose life and work have been associated with the Institute of the Peoples of the North for many years, the famous master of the monumental genre Leonid Abramovich Mess (1907–1993) stands out, who first taught painting at this educational institution (1928–1931), and then led the experimental sculpture workshop (1934–1941). Thanks to the teaching activities of the Mess, a new stage in the development of the studio begins in 1934. Northerners began to work in professional techniques – painting and sculpture on folk material and in the genre of folk art. In addition to clay, Mess introduced into the process of training and artistic creation of the northernners the materials more familiar to northern masters – wood and bone.

Artists-northerners, graduates of the art workshop of the Institute, participated in various exhibitions both in Russia (Moscow, Leningrad) and abroad. The first exhibition “The Art of the Peoples of Siberia” was opened at the Russian Museum in Leningrad in 1929.

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During the Great Patriotic War, the Leningrad Institute of the Peoples of the North was closed. In October 1941, the main contingent of students was disbanded, and in February 1942 the remaining few students and teachers were evacuated to Tobolsk, after which the Northern Faculty operated at the Omsk Pedagogical Institute for two more years. The re-creation of the faculty of the peoples of the North at Leningrad State University took place after the war, in 1948. The main areas of specialist training at the faculty at that time were the Russian language and literature, the languages of the peoples of the North, historical-ethnographic, and economic-geographical. In 1953, the faculty of the peoples of the Far North became a unit of the Leningrad State Pedagogical Institute, and in 2001 acquired the status of the Institute of the Peoples of the North, Russian State Pedagogical University.

Among the graduates of the Institute there were many bright and talented people who provided a major breakthrough in the development of the economy and culture of the northern peoples, including G. Raishev. He enters the faculty of Russian language and literature and at the same time studies at the evening department of the graphic arts faculty. The Institute forms unique for the artist features of his artistic creativity: the ability to use a word to express the meaning and content of his pictorial talent.

3. Artistic picture of the world

The Russian North has long been the subject of artistic interest of Russian painters. As a vivid example, magnificent panels by K.A. Korovin (1861–1939), who adorned the “Northern Pavilion” of the World Exhibition in 1900 in Paris [3]; unique paintings of the artist Pankov K.L. (1910–1942) may be noted. It reflects the peculiarities of the folk culture of the northern population of the country, a graduate of the Institute of the Peoples of the North, a participant in the Paris Exhibition of 1937. In this series the contemporary northern artist G.S. Raishev, on the example of whose work we consider the problem of the formation of an artistic picture of the world, inspired by the harsh and attractive nature of the Russian North can be called.

What is the basis of G. Raishev's artistic expression? Talking about the worldview of a northern person, M.E. Nikolaev writes that it is formed in extreme climatic conditions and in immense space. And this provides an opportunity for solitude, which allows one to “reflect, understand oneself, restore order in one’s inner world, which regulates life in the outside world” [4]. Despite the fact that the work of G. Raishev fell under the auspices of professional art historians (Natalya Fedorova, Irina Uvarova, Galina Golynets), his own thoughts on art and creativity make it possible to “read” and “see” his works as they are understood by the artist himself. Gennady Raishev has not only the ability to complement the understanding of his painting, but “discover” another way to express “the same thing, strengthen it, give it a second wind”. We can say that the picture of the world is duplicated in two root ways of artistic expression – pictorial and verbal.

What do G. Raishev’s self-comments give to his work? The art form allows the world to materialise in a visible way. But this world still “could be, could not be”. Raishev clarifies this form as nonrandom, confirms it in a verbal way. The memory of the genus here fulfills the function of a mythological given repetition of the necessary order of things, of some absolute significance of the repeating course of events.

Mythology is the determining axis of the content of G. Raishev’s artistic expression. It correlates relations with “external reality”. If for an artist oriented to the world of “finished” objects, “external reality” pre-exists, the world depicted is the world of its reflection. Realistic tradition presupposes an image of the objective world (things, nature, people), in other words, the originally material existence of objects, organised by our visual perception, is “packaged” into an artistic image. But Raishev’s realism is of a more complex nature. If the subject of the image is “Woodpecker Trill”, “Deer Run Rhythm”, “Evening Shaitan”, “Morning Shaitan”, “Sounds of My Forest”, “Mechanical Aspens”, “Poetry of Love”, “Languor”, “Way to Peace”, “Three Gods”, “Echo”, “Chastooshka”, “Vision”, “Fantasy”, “Woman Cuckoo”, “Woman-winter”, “Man-bump”? The names of the works of Raishev are listed. Can this be embodied in painting? “Sounds of nature: a cuckoo, an echo, music sounds, woodpecker trills, peals of thunder – these are all quite pictorial paintings, although the artists warned me that it was impossible to paint and did not need to go to this area” [5, p. 20]. Quasi-objects of the artistic world of Raishev and his programmatic anti-naturalism did not turn him into an abstract artist. The semi-mythological characters of his work are not illustrations of plots of the ancient Khanty epic. A female cuckoo is not just a woman remotely resembling a bird. This is something denoted by the letters X, as if for the first time in our life we heard the word, but never saw it, and yet, it
somehow echoed in our perception-fantasy, premonition and suddenly became “obvious”, “visible to the inner "Smart" vision”. This is what is defined by the word “intuition”, directly the essence of the subject, which allows you to instantly pull the subject from absolute “nothing” into a vaguely understood “something”. E. Husserl worked with such structures in the theory of descriptive analytics. He could show how the temporary manifestation of an object in the stream of consciousness is structured. Raishev as an artist deals with the same entities. He is not afraid of “transcendental” objects and works to overcome their initial ontological transcendence to understanding. Things, nature, the world are on the other side of consciousness, “in reality”, but without consciousness they do not appear. This discovery for the artist is not so paradoxical: any reality is achievable through its constitution, there is no other reality than the reality of consciousness. “To be is to be represented in the mind”. This maxim of phenomenological philosophy is more obvious to the artist than to a person with hypertrophied everyday consciousness: the artist creates his own special objective world, without it, he would not have been possible. Moreover, this is obvious. In everyday consciousness, we miss the act of realising the world in which consciousness is the universal basis for its implementation. For Gennady Raishev, it was this “act of creation” of the world in consciousness that became the basis of theoretical reflection.

The realist program has been implemented by the art community since the Renaissance, peaked in the 17th century in the works of Rembrandt, Velazquez, Rubens, small Dutch, and then began to dwindle in naturalist imitation and crowded out in avant-garde alternative ways of expressing reality and finding the appropriate artistic language. It became possible to depict the world not only in accordance with its “visible” representation, but also through various creative experiments with the original perceived form. Professional artists embarked on such experiments, but they were supported by non-European traditional art, which was not subject to the rules of realistic visual shaping. The opportunity has opened up by other “naive” means to achieve the truth of art. Primitive, naive, amateur art in the 20th century found its adherents both among creators and mediums of art, and among its connoisseurs.

For any artist, a technical test is to overcome the two-dimensionality of the canvas and the inclusion in it of the volumes of the three-dimensional world of things. The ingenuity in the image of objects and spaces of G. Raishev is noted by many researchers [6], [7], [8], [9].

The artist himself has repeatedly expressed his understanding of space [10], [11]: “I am a man born in a large space. And I thought a lot about how to make it in the picture. I had thoughts that space is many times to the horizon. Here is the first horizon in the picture, then you go, as it were, on the second horizon, then to the third... And so a picture arises from many space-paintings, it moves as if from the bottom up – I’m going, I’m moving” (about the picture “Above the Ob”, 1978) [5].

The program of his “smart vision” Raishev outlined in the article “The picture must be a secret”. G. Raishev’s experimenting with space is not only artistic and practical, he seeks to master space as a metaphysical problem. “Landscape: houses, people, trees in the background gave, and if you change the distance, fly above the earth into space: the subject will be the globe. In each case, there will be different pictorial tasks: still life, landscape, space. A man is born and assimilates the world...” [5]. But in the pictorial dimension, space is a matter of concrete certainty, dasein of things: the distance between objects, the scale of spatial relations, the spatial perspective of the image. This is an applied artistic experimentally changing optics: “Every year the artist... rethinks, that is, looks at the world from different distances, not from positions, namely, distances” [5]. “The North is boundless... There will always be delight from space” [12]. The theory of Raishev space reveals a new quality of his work; it is no longer a world of nativist creativity, in which the artist intuitively masters certain inborn technologies, in which reflection only complements his artistic experience. In this regard, we can recall the story of Raishev about his maternal grandfather, who invented, without knowing the letters, the “patterned alphabet” that allowed him to express his thoughts about the world [13]. This is an example of a kind of “smart vision of the world”, a way of transmitting unique experiences broadcast by others in the image of Plato’s eidos. In a certain sense, Raishev’s comments on his works complete the cosmology of artistic reality on the principle of “augmented reality”: “The task is how we see it and how the artist presents this world: at different times – in different ways... First, he studies the subject color world, then other categories come forward: time, space, to space. Visualisation undergoes significant changes... But no matter what the artist does, he sets himself almost impossible tasks, so there is no way to stop” [5]. Raishev set these tasks in a series of etchings “Space” (1984), in the pictorial cycles
“The Original” (1989), “Seasons” (1990), the polytype “Color Toy” (1990), the triptych “Children's Dream” (1990), in the series “I Write Pictures” and “Russian Songs” (1991), in the diptych “The March Sun”, “Siberian Spring” (1991), in the compositions of “Small Pictures” (1992), in the series “Nude” (1993), in triptych “Horses, horses...” (1995).

Raishev formulates his artistic task as a gradual and independent advance towards modest discoveries: “...my task is simpler and more independent of any judgments, the task is discoveries – albeit small ones” [5]. However, these discoveries add up to a complete statement about space as a way to streamline the flow of impressions from the unfolding life in a continuously continuing work. The space of the visible world is a metaphor for the course of life in its turns from the supervisor position as the center of order for the artist. The cosmogonic myth of the Khanty is based on the archaic tale of a loon that plunged into the abyss of water behind a pinch of earth. This is the bump from which people came out. The painting “Peasant Man” shows the ancestor of all Khanty people. In addition, in the work “On the Seven Hills” in 1989, the optics change, and seven pillars-faces of the Khanty world, seven original creators of the Khanty culture Shestalov, Aipin, Tarkhanov, Shulgin, Voldin, Sheshkin and Raishev become distinguishable. In Ugra Legend, the “initial” world of a hillock hill is inhabited by people and modeled as a sequence of generations “one + one + one + ...” [9].

4. Mythology: a cosmological view

The cosmological basis of G. Raishev’s creativity is mainly manifested in the allocation of “modules” of the image: it is earth, water, light, the life of a person involved in the cosmological order. Archaic nature-morphic inspiration, an appeal to the ancient meanings of life are the hallmarks of the artist’s worldview. Let us consider here the main mythologems of the Khanty worldview, which will play a leading role in the formation of plot lines and images of the works of G. Raishev.

According to the Khanty’s ideas [14], [15], [16], the cosmos includes three spheres, which are gradually forming, separating from each other. Air and water elements merge in the primary state of space. A loon waterfowl takes out a lump of silt from the bottom of the ocean, which begins to grow and becomes land. The established earth occupies a middle position between air and water and completes the structure of cosmos.

In the heavenly world lives the supreme god Numi-Torum – a gray-haired old man called the Golden Light. By the will of Torum, the earth is created, and all the creatures that inhabit it: people, animals, and spirits. Thunder, Torum's brother, his father and grandfather, as well as the female sun and the male moon, were located in different tiers of the Upper World.

In the middle world, the life of people is ruled by Mir-susne-hum (a person who is viewing the world or the World is a contemplative person), the youngest son of Torum. He won the equestrian contest, defeating his brothers and receiving as a reward the care of all living on earth. Still on earth lives the unfaithful wife of Torum, as well as the goddess of fire.

The evil spirit Kul or Kyn, the implacable opponent of Torum, leads the lower world. He is surrounded by his assistants, cylas – the spirits of disease.

Ethnographers V.M. Kulemzin and N.V. Lukin noted that the slender vertical model of the cosmos was preceded by its horizontal structure, according to which the upper, life-giving world correlated with the mouths of the rivers located in the south, and the cold lower world was in the north [17]. The word “world” in the languages of the Ob Ugrians has the meaning of “people”, therefore it can be assumed that people living on earth occupy a central position in the structure of the cosmos created by the archaic tradition of the Khanty and Mansi. However, this center was not dominant, since man was equated with both natural and supernatural beings. The essence of the world and the person living in it was determined in folk mythology through the search for various ways of interacting with nature, which manifests a desire, if not dialogue, then compromise. The unity of the world and man can awaken a sense of trust and closeness to harsh nature.

Man endows the natural creatures that share one single world with him with such properties and traits that he discovers in himself. The moose, which people figuratively call the “thing with long legs”, symbolizes prosperity and well-being, the frog (“living woman between the bumps”) is able to bestow conjugal happiness and determine the number of children in the family. The tree was a staircase connecting the three worlds of a single cosmos, and a couple of large trees growing nearby were grandfather and grandmother.
The fire of the hearth (“a woman in a red coat”) with its click and crack could warn against unpleasant events, it can purify and protect from evil spirits. The bear was one of the sons of Torum and could not harm people, and if the fair order was violated, he could be killed by hunters, and then a ritual holiday was held in honor of the heavenly beast, in which people sought to reconcile the bear’s soul with the hunters who killed him.

A close relationship was established between people and patron spirits who acted as guardians of human life and were endowed with a wide range of possibilities. People built relationships with household spirits on the principle of mutual services, expressed in the scheme “give, and it will be given to you”. Access to perfumes was strictly limited, therefore only the head of the family treated, brought gifts and asked for a successful hunt or family well-being, and each sacrifice transferred to the spirit brought him closer to a person. Public spirits lived in reserved places and were strictly protected from strangers.

As I.P. Gemuev writes, the human home was an image of the cosmos in miniature [18]. The house was divided into three spheres – vertically and horizontally. The upper part of the house was a clean place intended for gods and spirits, and the floor of the house became the boundary of the middle and lower worlds, while the south side of the house was a “holy” wall situated in front of the entrance. Thus, the horizon of ordinary everyday life of people opened into outer space.

Living space had color symbolism. White color expressed health and abundance, black color meant hunger and disease, red color was ambivalent, combining the qualities of white and black colors and yellow color symbolised a rebirth or transition from one state to another. In the upper world, a birch forest grows, and gods and spirits live forever, in the middle world of people and animals alternate good and evil, life and death, and the lower world was black from evil.

Life is manifested in motion, in change, understood as the transformation of one into another. A bear-shaped stone becomes alive, falling snow is also alive, and melting snow comes to life, turning into water. Water flowing in the river lives, but dies when it turns into ice. Living ice cracks and dies, turning into water. An invisible spirit enlivens any object when it dwells in it. Man is active thanks to two life forces inextricably linked with each other – shadow and soul.

The person’s meeting with the death of a loved one does not cause him concern for loss. The deceased passes to another world in which, like a mirror image, everything shifts the other way around: day – night, dead – living. When dying, a person leaves some relatives for others, but he can return to life due to the fact that time in the underworld flows in the opposite direction. Souls wander between the worlds of a single cosmos and do not lose touch with their home.

In the archaic ornament, the structural element of the cosmos is rhythm; in Raishev's painting, rhythm has become a substructure, hidden, implicit, but retaining the visible picture in the order of the image. The naivety of the graphic series, the apparent primitivisation of images are deceiving. The subject world is inhabited by objects visible and thoughtful. An artist can convey everything with graphic means: a piece of land, the origin of the world, man, space, sound, holiday.

Generic myths of the Khanty people provoke the picturesque energy of embodiment. The world of Raishev’s images is not accidental, rooted in these ancient mythical images. The mythological source nourishes the figurative system, and spatial intuition and the “educated eye” streamlines their structure.

5. Conclusion
Raishev's works contain a complex organisation of world-image unity, subordinated to a powerful philosophical program and a certain system of mythological meanings, and therefore need a detailed and thorough understanding and theoretical interpretation. Moreover, in any interpretation of the artist’s work, it is important to take into account the most significant factors in the formation of the original picture of the artist’s world. Among them there are the deep transcendental axis of his art, which determines the birth of objects with an initially fuzzy ontological status, ambiguous and only partially accessible for understanding and interpretation; unique spatial thinking and cosmological worldview of the ancient northern peoples which organically fit into the figurative series of artistic work of G. Raishev. The genius of the place where Raishev was born, the Russian North, his dual ethnicity, his gift to see and describe – all this affects the power of his artistic expression as a whole.
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