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## ПРОРОЧІ ОБРАЗИ ХУДОЖНЬОГО ФІЛОСОФУВАННЯ ПІТЕРА БРЕЙГЕЛЯ СТАРШОГО

**Анотація.** Головною метою статті є осмислення тенденцій сучасної цивілізації та ситуації людини через художньо-образне філософування Пітера Брейгеля Старшого. Ми продовжуємо розмірковувати про сучасну духовну кризу: антропологічну, моральну, релігійну. **Методологія.** Головним для такого типу дослідження став методологічний потенціал феноменології та екзистенціалізму. Зокрема мова йде про значимість для нас ситуації, яку пропонує Брейгель. Важливим є не стільки історичне узагальнення певної події, а передовсім перебування у ній. Ми також використовували історичний, критичний (оцінний) та інтерпретаційний методи. **Наукова новизна.** Творчість Пітера Брейгеля Старшого – це філософське мислення, яке набагато століть випередило свій час і дає поштовх до самопізнання і усвідомлення головної ідеї історії – Ідеї Людини. Пітер Брейгель сформулював ідею апокаліптичності світу: трагізм і абсурдність земного життя, неможливість у ньому стабільності та благополуччя. На

жаль, як показує нам Брейгель, людство продовжує залишатися сліпим стосовно вищих Божественних Істин, тільки на основі яких можна залишатися Людиною і перебувати в гармонії з собою і Всесвітом. **Висновки.** В екзистенційній причетності живопису нідерландського художника ми побачили загальне між його епохою і сучасною – кризовий духовний стан, антропологічну катастрофу. По-друге, в розумінні Брейгелем світобудови та людини присутня ідея Божественного провидіння. Трагізм творів Пітера Брейгеля Старшого не пригнічує своєю безвихіддю, а «очищує» і «просвітлює» глядача. Це – невидима енергія, яка пробуджує духовно-релігійне почуття людини. І навіть якщо історія в своїй іронічно-трагічній іпостасі повертається, цілком зрозуміло, що єдиним рішенням може бути тільки прагнення «не годувати» її людськими життями.

**Ключові слова:** апокаліпсис, антропологічна криза, духовність, насильство, людина, Пітер Брейгель Старший, релігійність, юрба (маса).

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## THE PROPHETIC IMAGES OF PETER BRUEGEL'S ARTISTIC PHILOSOPHY

**Summary.** The purpose of the article is to apprehend the trends of modern civilization and the man's place through the artistic and

*figurative philosophy of Peter Bruegel the Elder. Thus, we reflect on the modern spiritual crisis: anthropological, moral, religious. **Methodology.** The main method for this type of research was the methodological potential of phenomenology and existentialism. In particular, we are talking about the significance for us of the situation that Bruegel offers. What matters is not so much a historical generalization of a particular event, but primarily being wrapped up in it. We have also used historical, critical (estimating) and interpretive methods. **Scientific novelty.** Creativity of Peter Bruegel the Elder is first and foremost translated in philosophical thinking that was ahead of time for many centuries and gives impetus to self-knowledge and comprehension of the main idea of history – the Idea of Man. Peter Bruegel formulated the idea of apocalyptic world: the tragedy and absurdity of earthly life, the impossibility of stability and prosperity in it. Unfortunately, as Bruegel showed us, humanity continues to remain blind in relation to the higher Divine Truths, only on the basis of which it is possible to remain a Man and to be in harmony with oneself and the Universe. **Conclusions.** In the existential involvement of the painting of the Dutch artist, we saw common features between his era and modern age – the crisis of spiritual order, anthropological catastrophe. Secondly, in the sense of Bruegel's understanding of the universe and man, there is the idea of Divine Providence. His egregious works do not suppress with hopelessness but «purify» and «enlighten» the viewer. It is invisible energy that awakens the spiritual and religious feeling of the man. And even though history returns in its ironically-tragic hypostasis, it is quite clear that the only aspiration can be the desire «not to feed» it with human lives.*

**Key words:** *apocalypse, anthropological crisis, spirituality, violence, man, Peter Bruegel the Elder, religiosity, crowd (mass).*

**Formulation of the problem.** The idea of this article arose for several reasons: firstly, we continue to reflect on the spiritual crisis in the modern world; secondly, under the impression of the sensational exhibition of works by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, presented by the Vienna Museum of Art History (October 2018 – January 2019).

We had a unique opportunity to look at the life of Bruegel's contemporaries who indeed look very similar to us and at the same time to see ourselves through a grotesque-satirical way. Bruegel gave the impetus to subjective self-knowledge attempting to wake up, stir up a person in a state of sleep. After all, only by changing consciousness in favor of understanding what is happening with us and within us, we shall be able to change ourselves and transform everything around.

Bruegel's paintings are text that must be opened and read (Volkova, 2015, p. 68). And by and large, it is necessary for a modern man himself in order to try to understand the main idea of history – the Idea of Man. We always want to change for the better, do not we? But alas, as history shows, mankind cannot get rid of violence, categorical and blind to bigotry fanatical division into friends and foes, wrath, self-centered individualism, etc.

Furthermore, the modern man is constantly losing touch with the Absolute, the Divine. And then, who is this person? Is the project called «The Man» ending in tragedy? What does the history of European culture want to tell us through Bruegel's works?

Does Bruegel give answers at all? Yes. As an artist-philosopher, Bruegel tells us about the imperfections of human nature, tells us about blind humanity, which is a true reflection of contemporary reality.

**The purpose of the article** is to comprehend the modern world and the situation of a person through the artistic philosophizing of Peter Bruegel.

Peter Bruegel was one of the greatest artists of the 16<sup>th</sup> century North-western Europe. The influence of his works, especially his allegories and landscapes was widespread and long-lasting. The art of Bruegel combines religion, folklore, humanism and, according to experts, can be placed between the latest elements of Bosch's medieval mysticism and Rubens' baroque abundance.

There is no consensus on the meaning of the paintings and almost no documents that could help the researcher. Some scholars<sup>1</sup> believe that Bruegel's paintings contain secret messages that only the initiates can understand. Noting that the paintings of Bruegel the Elder must be continuously looked at in the light of the ideas of the Eternal Philosophy<sup>2</sup> Temple R.C.C. writes:

His method being to present to the onlooker a narrative situation in all its myriad human diversity, letting the sym-

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<sup>1</sup> Stein-Schneider H. Stein-Schneider, «Les Familistes Unesectenéo-cathare du 16e siècle et leur peintre Pieter Brueghel Ancien» in Cahier d'Etudes Cathares, XXXVI, Printemps 1985, 11e Serie No. 105.

<sup>2</sup> «Perennial Philosophy – what Renaissance thinkers regarded as the body of truth drawn by the ancients from their knowledge of the cosmos and which, like the universe, has no external boundary» (Temple R.C.C.).

bolism of the imagery resonates in the viewer's subconscious associations. Such impressions, falling on a person's inner world, originating from the mind and hand of a master, can be considered a kind of energy, or psychological nourishment – perhaps even theurgy. (Temple, 2006)

Bruegel knew how to create works with a very relevant meaning, hidden under the traditional plot motifs.

It is important to conceive the fact that Bruegel was an artist of a dramatic historical period; the epoch of Protestant and Catholic confrontation marked by a national liberation component in the Netherlands – the painter's motherland. Bruegel sees the century fraught with a rupture of values, full of terror and drama. He sees how the leaders cause to collide the blind masses of people (crowd), how the local Protestants smash temples because their preachers said that the images were idolatrous; he sees the Spanish troops come killing local residents. And in essence, the war never stopped tormenting the body of Europe – it was a war of all against all, the struggle for capital and markets and *always against the people* (Kosolobova, n.d.)

Pieter Bruegel the Elder has an engraving «The Big Fish Eat the Little Fish», which relates to the theme of a senseless world in which the powerful instinctively and consistently prey on the weak. All the fish are dumped on the shore dying with the giants still trying to swallow those who are smaller – this is exactly what is happening today. We will talk about physical violence later, but now we would like to focus on the man's attitude to the world and the question: who really runs the world? First, the idea of the New Age continues to dominate, according to which the all-powerful mind should make the most of nature for the benefit of humanity. The peak of such a «devouring» is the twentieth century, which marks the final assertion of Homo consumens. And if we talk about the Latin origin of «consumo», then it is not just consumption, but literally – devouring, destruction, exhaustion. That is, not just a «man of consumption», but a «man of destruction». Such a mentality – irresponsibility, disrespect for nature as a value, lack of understanding of the unity of man and nature – prevails at all levels of the social hierarchy. Bruegel does not let us forget about this, offering a world view based on the idea of the unity of man and nature. In the painting «Landscape with the Fall of Icarus»,

the Dutch artist shows that only in agreement with nature, comprehending its powerful world rhythm, can a person succeed – otherwise his efforts are doomed, like the efforts of conceited Icarus.

The plot depicted in the «Big Fish Eat the Little Fish» engraving is a distinctive feature of the modern global world in which the states of the world and citizens of the states lose control over money. The world is ruled by world bankers, who only in the twentieth century alone prepared and unleashed two world wars. The banking oligarchy organizes economic and financial crises resulting in a large number of people being robbed. The enslavement of entire states and nations takes place.

In Bruegel's works, we also see the modern problem of alienation and dehumanization in the sphere of inter-personal and intercultural communication. A «multicultural society» in Antwerp and Brussels, where Bruegel resided, was facing serious communication problems, especially on the religious grounds. Catholics, Protestants, Lutherans, Anabaptists were united neither by faith, nor by the church, and a general feeling of insecurity and anxiety grew among the inhabitants. And today, irresponsible false prophets strive to create for themselves communities of blind followers. It is the very topic of Bruegel's works as well as the ongoing communal animosities, mortification of the Church, politicians' attempts to make religion their hostage.

Bruegel's works – is a hidden warning about the future crisis of religion and religiosity. Indeed, a modern person loses the integrity of his faith, and the Church loses the mysteries of the next century (Shmeman, n.d.). Everyone believes in God but worships the golden calf. Double morality serves as the natural form and the norm of public conscience. This is especially relevant today, when we see the heightened desire of many countries to finally eliminate Christianity from public life, the reluctance to focus on the Christian foundations of Europe, which further pushes civilization towards decay.

In the «Tower of Babel» the builders erect a unique structure not noticing that the tower has tilted and is gradually collapsing. The tower is too big and people cannot determine the scale of a future catastrophe because they are not able to heed the voice of reason. This was brilliantly seen by the ingenious Paola Volkova:

When you look at the tower, you see the center of the Universe open up on all sides, where people live together,

where they understand each other. But then they fall apart in tongues. What does «in tongues» mean? It means mutual misunderstanding. The lack of understanding. The lack of hearing. We do not hear each other, so we will never erect anything, even if we want. How does Bruegel depict the Tower of Babel? Like a piece of universum architecture, some kind of ideal structure. But this is impossible! All the same, there will be pandemonium and inaudibility, and the building will crumble and crumble. This is a general idea. (Volkova, 2015, p. 64)

In the years 1561–1568, Bruegel created paintings combined with a premonition and reflection of historical cataclysms: «The Triumph of Death», «The Fall of the Rebel Angels», «Dull Gret», «The Suicide of Saul», «Massacre of the Innocents», «The Magpie on the Gallows», etc.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century, experienced by mankind, was a period of wars, terror and mass destruction of people under various pretexts. We seemingly live in the middle ages, where we split up into parts, where every year, according to UNICEF, because of senseless and merciless wars and terrorist acts more than 200 thousand children die worldwide and hundreds of thousands are completely unable to receive humanitarian aid. And we are talking only about dying and suffering children!

Who does this? The man himself – by perfecting the weapons continues to destroy himself. Reflecting on the end of the project called «the European man», in one of his lectures Akhutin recalls the arrival of Pope John Paul II in Poland in late 1970's where he visited Auschwitz. Pope, pondering about how such a thing could have happened said that it was enough for people to plant a certain ideology, it is enough to clad them in a certain form, and most importantly, just tell them: this is allowed, it is possible (Akhutin, n.d.). And it turns out that the fragile and subtle measure of humanity (wisdom, morality, religiousity) disappears.

Is our human existence really based on habit or simply on fear? And you just have to tell people: this is possible<sup>3</sup>, I know how to do it and everyone starts doing it as they have just been told?

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<sup>3</sup> Let us recall the famous Hitler's phrase: «I release you from this chimera – conscience».

It is striking an anthropological paradox: a person is a single being able to devote himself to higher goals with inspiration and exaltation, but at the same time to kill himself like himself, convinced it seems to be necessary in order to achieve these higher goals.

Looking at the painting «The Parable of the Blind», it was thought that humanity is doomed – the blind continue to lead the blind and people do not listen to the wisest, but the one who speaks the loudest. In his drawings and paintings, Bruegel completely deprives the figures of any individuality. For example, in the drawing called «Elck» we do not see separate people anymore, but some kind of a transparent solution in which a person dissolves and stops seeing himself. The same character deprives us of our vision, makes us blind for ourselves and for others like us that are indistinguishable from others. Also, in the painting «Beekeepers» Bruegel depicts people without faces, without features and signs.

Unfortunately, a western man gradually turns into an indifferent mass that has lost its cultural content which thinkers paid attention to at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Akhtun, n.d.). The «Beekeepers» in Bruegel's painting – who are they, what creatures are hidden under their identical appearance? One can recall the «Masks» by V. Vysotsky:

I laugh like mad – like at distorting mirrors I've been, –  
Someone must have played a deftly hoax on me:  
Hooks of the noses and up to the ears grin –  
Like at carnival in Venice!

And we, like the author of these lines, get scared and restless: what if someone likes the executioner's mask and he will not take it off?

Before us is the image of a crowd – an unstable and deceptive mass (Iaspers, 1991). The condition is «*schizophrenic and therefore clinical. Always on the verge of madness and self-destruction...*» (Shmeman, n.d.). At one time, this reminded M. Mamardashvili<sup>4</sup> of those whom F. Nietzsche called «the last people»:

Indeed (this is exactly the cry of his sick Christian conscience), either we will be «superhumans» to be humans (... transcendence of the man to the human in himself), or

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<sup>4</sup> A special state of mass consciousness in the works of M. Mamardashvili was called «anthropological catastrophe».



we will be «the last people». The people of the organized happiness, who cannot even despise themselves, for they live in a situation of shattered consciousness and shattered human matter. (Mamardashvili, 1992, p. 119)

At the individual level, the peculiarity of such a state of consciousness is commonness. There is no desire in a person (for various reasons), or he *does not wish* to overcome his vulgarity<sup>5</sup>. Being part of the crowd, a person becomes irresponsible, aggressive and mediocre. He does not realize the absurdity of his actions and what is happening around. Such people are easy to manipulate and they are ready to trample everything in their fanatical blindness. And when a blind man leads the blind, a catastrophe is inevitable<sup>6</sup>.

This is a level of consciousness that global mass culture uses and its influence is very difficult to resist. A person «not like everyone else» who independently thinks, asks, desires, imagines and feels is *not needed* by modern civilization.

**Conclusions.** Bruegel's creative work is a true philosophical consciousness, which was a head of its time for many centuries to come. In the existential involvement of the works of Pieter Bruegel, we saw a common point between his epoch and the modern times – recessionary spiritual state, an anthropological catastrophe. The existential questions of the past centuries, inspired by such «dehumanizing» phenomena as mass consciousness (crowd phenomenon) and the improvement of ways of manipulating people, authoritarianism, humiliation of human dignity, loneliness, inequality, wars (interstate, international, interreligious), etc., are still relevant today. One of the poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, experiencing the common pain of mankind, wrote:

I am tired of XX century,  
Of its blooded rivers.  
And I do not need human rights,  
For I have long ceased to be a man.

Many artists leave a will. What testament did Bruegel leave? First, he formulated the basic formula for the apocalyptic nature of the universe: the tragedy and absurdity of life in this world, the impo-

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<sup>5</sup> «Vulgarity of the average-minded person», «such as everyone» – O. Pyatigorskiy.

<sup>6</sup> The postscript on Bruegel's painting «The Parable of the Blind».

ssibility of its final dispensation, tranquility and well-being. Unfortunately, as Bruegel shows us, humanity continues to remain blind in relation to the higher Divine Truths, only on the basis of which one can remain a Man and be in harmony with oneself and the universe.

Secondly, and this is the main thing, in Bruegel's understanding of the universe, man, social relations, the idea of Divine Providence is clearly seen. The tragic nature of the works of Peter Bruegel the Elder does not suppress with hopelessness, but purifies and enlightens the viewer. It is an invisible energy that awakens the spiritual-religious feeling of the man.

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