

The Idea of Museum in Contemporary Curatorial Projects

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The assessment of the status of contemporary art is theoretically justified in the context of institutional theory, developed in the works of George Dickie and Arthur C. Danto. Museums are pillars of the institutional theory, as they mainly provide art with an undisputed status. The phenomenon of the museum boom of the present day, as the phenomenon of the emergence of the concept of "imaginary museums" in the second half of the 20th century, is associated with longing for "true" art, which ultimately leads to museums, or to the idea of museum. If in a classical museum a viewer expected to see "authentic", as in "not fake", works of the old masters, in a museum of contemporary art they expect to see at least "true" art, i.e. works "with the status of art." Museums give art the quality of "authenticity", hence the interest in museums and museum projects nowadays, despite the abundance of publicized images of museum artefacts in the media. Instead of these "simulacra", museums offer "real" artworks, and the idea of museum attracts a considerable attention, reflected in numerous curatorial projects dedicated to the image and the idea of museum. Among such projects were, for example, the exhibition Voices of Andre Malraux's Imaginary Museum at the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow and the exhibition The Keeper at the New Museum in New York.

Key words: idea of museum, contemporary art, institutional theory, curatorial projects, exhibition, aesthetics

Introduction

Since Marcel Duchamp, who painted a moustache on a reproduction of the famous museum exhibit *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci, reflection on the transformation of the museum idea in the modern cultural mind was becoming more and more intensive. In the second half of 20th – beginning of 21th century, different curatorial and artistic projects were dedicated to the idea of museum. The tradition of such reflection is obvious in the following art projects: *The Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles* by Marcel Broodhaers (1968), the *Mouse Museum* of Claes Oldenburg (1965-1977), the exhibition section *Museums of Artists* presented by the curator Harald Szeemann at *documenta 5*, and many others. As a certain result of reflections on

the idea of museum in the context of the exhibition paradigm, we may consider the following exhibitions: *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect* (1999) at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, *The Keeper* at the New Museum in New York (2016), exhibition projects of Jan Fabre at the Louvre (2008) and at the State Hermitage Museum (2016-2017).

The institutional approach allows contemporary art to take place in museums. Artefacts of contemporary art in this case are subject to certain requirements: compliance with theoretical views of a curator, conditions of storage, and, to a considerable extent, the financial value of artworks at auctions and art galleries. The whole procedure places art in a certain dependence on institutions, and especially on museums.¹ The unlimited freedom of expression, which is sought by many representatives of the latest trends in art, is unusual in the prim museum space. Too ephemeral became the boundary between art and life, to allow the art's free expression at museums. Such freedom could be guaranteed only in an ideal, utopian museum, taking different forms in a series of imaginary museums that had emerged in the postmodern period. The concepts of hypothetical museums: the Museum of Obsessions by H. Szeemann, the Anti-Museum of J. Cladders and the Imaginary Museum of A. Malraux are similar in the sense of a "living" museum, in the quality of immediate aesthetic judgment, based on the imperative of individual taste.²

The emergence of the phenomenon of imaginary museums in the context of postmodernism was primarily due to the complexity of the definition of art applied to the latest artistic trends, the failure of the evaluation categories, including taste and aesthetic judgment. These problems are being widely discussed in scientific literature.³

The premises of a museum give contemporary art a status of belonging to art. To the traditional meaning of museums as repositories of "authentic" works, in the case of contemporary art is added a connotation with the emphasis on "authenticity", but in a slightly different sense – as a collection of authentic, "true" art, that is, of artifacts that really are art. The museum as a pillar of the institutional art system has the right to peremptory judgment here. Thanks to this authority, perceived in the art world either from negative, or from apologetic position, the image or idea of museum has such intensity in art. The phenomenon of the *museum boom* of our time is associated primarily with the search for a "true art" in museums. The abundance of publicized images of artworks, of "simulacra", only rises interest in authentic things of the "old masters", and in the case of contemporary art a museum exhibition provides the context

¹ YANAL, Robert. J. The Institutional Theory of Art. In: KELLY, Michael (ed). *The Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1998. ISBN-13:9780199747108.

² BATTRO, Antonio M. From Malraux's imaginary museum to virtual museum. In: PARRY Ross (ed) *Museums in a Digital Age*. London and New-York : Routledge, 2010, pp. 136-147. ISBN -13: 978-0415402620; CISNEROS James R. Imaginary of the End, End of the Imaginary. Bazin and Malraux on the Limits of Painting and Photography. In: *New Cinémas: Journal of Film Studies*, 2003, Vol. 13. № 3, pp. 149-157. ISSN 1474-2756; MALRAUX, Andre. *Le musée imaginaire*. Paris : Gallimard, 1997. ISBN 2-07-032948-8; SZEEMANN, Harald. *Museum der Obsessionen von/über/zu/mit Harald Szeemann*. Berlin : Merve, 1981. ISBN 3-88396-020-9.

³ BOURDIEU, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Harvard : Harvard University Press, 1987. ISBN 0674212770; LAMARQUE, Peter — OLSEN, Stein H. (eds). *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition*. Malden, MA : Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2003, ISBN: 978-1-4051-0581-1; CARROLL, Noel. *The Philosophy of Art: a Contemporary Introduction*. London and New York : Routledge, 1999. ISBN-13: 978-0415159647; DAVIES, Stephen. *Definitions of Art*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991. ISBN-13: 978-0-8014-9794-0; MANDELBAUM, Maurice. Family Resemblances and Generalization Concerning the Arts. In: *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1965, Vol. 2, pp. 219-228. ISSN 0003-0481; STECKER, Robert. *Definition of Art*. In: LEVINSOHN, Jerrold. (ed). *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 136-154. ISBN-10: 0199279454.

needed for its understanding, as well as the status of being in the museum, that is, ensures quality of “authenticity” as belonging to the category of art.

The institutional fate of contemporary art

The emergence of the institutional theory was due to the recognition of the inconsistency of criteria of classical aesthetics applied to contemporary art and the lack of adequate methods to assess its artistic merits. As mentioned above, museum is an outpost of the institutional theory, as it mainly provides art with the undisputed status.

The institutional theory was developed in the works of Arthur C. Danto and George Dickie. The institutional conception makes it possible to avoid value approach as applied to contemporary art. The complexity and even the impossibility of the definition of art, “openness” openness of this concept in the present situation was stated in the 1950s by M. Weitz, considering, in his turn, the judgment of L. Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). Wittgenstein suggested to search for “family resemblances” of different phenomena (in particular games) for determination of a certain common notion.⁴ Contrary to M. Weitz, D. Dickie defines art as a specific institutional system that allows objective approach to its analysis.⁵ Dickie believes the artworld to be a cultural construction created by collective efforts of the society. The main concepts of George Dickie are “art circle” and “artworld”. Dickie’s first institutional definition of art included aspects of originality and a possibility of an artwork to be appreciated “by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld)⁶. Later, in 1997, he added that “An artworld system is a framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to an artworld public”⁷.

Previously, the concept of the “artworld” had been developed in the context of the institutional theory by Arthur Danto. Reasoning of Danto was based on the awareness of the necessity of context for understanding art. Arthur Danto first implemented the term of the “artworld”, which provides *theories of art* for all members of the artworld to consider what they believe to be art. Danto’s “art world” means cultural context or “an atmosphere of art theory”.⁸ Its aim is to distinguish art from non-art. The artworld supports, validates and actualizes the category of art and operates through a network of cultural institutions. A civilized society gives to the “art world” the right to such activity, and has no objection to that kind of cultural power, even if its preferences seem absurd or shocking.

The institutional theory of art was later developed by Pierre Bourdieu and Howard Becker. Bourdieu argues that the artworld produces “symbolic capital” as a feature of social class identity, i. e. knowledge, education, professionalism, class values, prestige, which may also have

⁴ WEITZ, Morris. The Role of Theory in Aesthetics. In: *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 1956, № 15, pp. 27-35. ISSN 1540-6245; WITTGENSTEIN, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Transl. by G. E. M. ANSCOMBE. Oxford : Blackwell, 2001. ISBN 9780631231592.

⁵ DICKIE, George. *The Art Circle: a Theory of Art*. Chicago: Spectrum Press, 1997. ISBN-13: 978-1886094703; DICKIE, George. *Art and Value*. Malden, Mass. : Blackwell Publishers, 2001. ISBN 0631229469.

⁶ DICKIE, George. *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis*. Ithaca, NY : Cornell University Press, 1974, p. 464. ISBN 0801408873.

⁷ DICKIE, George, ref. 5, p. 75.

⁸ DANTO, Arthur C. The Artworld. In: *The Journal of Philosophy*, 1964, Vol. 61. №. 19, pp. 571-584. ISSN 0022-362X.

commercial value.⁹

Howard Becker considers *artworlds* as collective activities in “a network of cooperating people”, who dictate conventions, which “regulate the relations between artists and audience, specifying the rights and obligations of both”.¹⁰ Becker’s suggestion is to analyze the artworld system using sociological methodology. Since the beginning of the 2000s a considerable number of studies appeared in relation to economic aspects of institutional theory and institutional critique.¹¹

The phenomenon of hypothetical museums of the second half of the 20th century is a confirmation of importance of the institutional theory and the role of museum in contemporary culture. As the institutional theory in general, the phenomenon of imaginary museums was mainly associated with the problems of aesthetic evaluation of postmodern art.¹² The opposition of real museum and imaginary museum, offering a subjective look at the art of the latest trends, is reflected in the scientific discussion on the topic of insolvency of classical aesthetics in case of contemporary art and priority of personal taste or personal aesthetic judgment as an alternative to institutional assessment in the context of existing museums.¹³

“Museums” of artists

The ideas of imaginary museums and exhibition projects on museum theme, including the Claes Oldenburg’s “Mouse Museum” or the “Museum of Modern At. Department of Eagles” by Marcel Broodthaers, were a response to the uncertainty of aesthetic requirements in the field of contemporary art, which, as argued by Joseph Kosuth, had been “beyond aesthetics”¹⁴.

The aforementioned art projects demonstrate that the role of museum is reflected not only in the “museum” concepts of philosophers and theorists of art, but also in the curatorial practice in real museums and galleries. The projects of Claes Oldenburg and Marcel Broodthaers were

⁹ BOURDIEU, Pierre, ref. 3; BOURDIEU, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. New York : Columbia University Press, 1993. ISBN 023108286X; BOURDIEU, Pierre, *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public*. Cambridge, UK : Polity Press, 1997. ISBN-10: 0745619142; BOURDIEU, Pierre. *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Cambridge, UK; Stanford, CA : Polity Press; Stanford Univ. Press, 1996. ISBN-10: 0804726272.

¹⁰ BECKER, Howard. *Art Worlds*. Berkeley, CA : University of California Press, 1982, p. 29. ISBN 978-0-520-25636-1.

¹¹ BOLTANSKI, Luc – CHIAPELLO, Eve. The Role of criticism in the dynamics of capitalism. In: Max MILLER (ed). *Worlds of Capitalism: Institutions, Economics, Performance and Governance in the Era of Globalization*. London : Routledge, 2005. ISBN-13: 978-0415349000; GRAMPP, William. *Pricing the Priceless: Art, Artists, and Economics*. New York : Basic Books, 1989. ISBN 0-465-06321-7; GRAVES, David. *The New Institutional Theory of Art*. Champaign, IL : Common Ground Publishing, 2010. ISBN 1-86335-721-1; HEILBRUN, James – GRAY, Charles M. *The Economics of Art and Culture*. New York : Cambridge University Press, 2001. ISBN 0-521-63712-0; HUITTER, Michael – THROSBY, David (eds). *Beyond Price: Value in Culture, Economics and the Arts*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2011. ISBN 9780521183000.

¹² See for example DARZINS, John. *Malraux and the Destruction of Aesthetics*. In: *Yale French Studies*, Vol. 18, 1957, pp. 107-113. ISSN 00440078.

¹³ COSTELLO Diarmuid. Greenberg’s Kant and the fate of aesthetics in contemporary art theory. In: *The Journal of aesthetics and art criticism*, 2007, Vol. 65. № 2, pp. 217-228. ISSN 00218529; DANTO Arthur C. – GOEHR, Lisa. *After the end of art: Contemporary art and the pale of history*. Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1997. ISBN-13: 978-0691163895; DANTO Arthur C. *The abuse of beauty: Aesthetics and the concept of art*. Chicago : Open Court Publishing, 2003. ISBN-13: 978-0812695403.

¹⁴ KOSUTH Joseph. *Art After Philosophy and After. Collected Writings 1966-1990*. Cambridge, Mass. : MIT press, 1993. ISBN-13:978-0-262-11157-7.

included in the section “Museums of artists” at *documenta 5* in Kassel (1972) curated by Harald Szeemann.

The “Mouse Museum” of Oldenburg was being created from 1965 to 1977, its “collection” consisted of found objects, ready-mades and objects made by Oldenburg, on display were plastic replicas of food, peculiar utensils, scraps of clothing, cosmetics, gifts, and other items.

The “Mouse Museum” questioned the very principle of museum collections and selection of artifacts and illustrated the situation of redundancy of unnecessary things in the modern consumer society. In addition, the layout of the “Mouse Museum” in the form of simulated head of Mickey Mouse emphasized the comic essence of this project. The symbolic triad of “mouse – museum – mausoleum” offered by the artist as the metaphysical basis of his project gave scope for associations with eternal themes of art: death, memory, museum, muse. The idea of the Oldenburg’s “museum” profanes the traditional essence of museum as a collection of first-class objects, masterpieces.

“Museum of Modern At. Department of Eagles” by the Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers initially had no permanent exposition space. Its “sections” opened from 1968 to 1972 at various contemporary art exhibitions. Broodthaers collected in his “museum” objects associated with eagles or their symbolic images. For the most part, they were kitschy items or household items. In addition of this exposition, Broodthaers filled two memorial lists decorated with a sign of eagle on a gold background. On the left part were the names of the “great artists” from Mantegna and Cranach to Chirico and Duchamp. On the right side were listed tradable consumer goods, from meat and oil to weapons and gold. Comparing the values of the first and the second columns, the artist admits the triumph of the postmodern loss of hierarchy and clear meanings.

Swiss artist Herbert Distel was also present at *documenta 5*. In the period of 1970-1977 he began to collect the “Museum of Drawers” for which he asked artists from around the world to donate miniature copies of their works. Thus, he collected about five hundred miniature works, including a work by Picasso. Some of the objects were donated by collectors, in particular, the work of Piero Manzoni. At exhibitions, including *documenta 5*, the “Museum of Drawers” was usually shown with extended shelves or a few shelves were shown separately on display demonstrating items in the collection.

At *documenta 9* (1992) was presented the project “History of *documenta* — the Wax Museum” by the Belgian artist Guillaume Bijl. The installation consisted of three storefronts, which meant to be an entrance to the “museum”. In the display windows were placed wax figures of famous *documenta* personalities: conceptualist Joseph Beuys, Arnold Bode, founder of *documenta*, with his wife, Jan Hut, curator of *documenta 9*, and others.

Another “museum” project *From the Freud Museum* (1991-1996) – installation of the artist Susan Hiller, representing museum as a product of artistic imagination. The installation consists of fifty cardboard boxes filled with items, collected on the personal whim. One of the boxes contains a photocopy of cave paintings, and soil samples of Australia, pounded into powder and packed in boxes for cosmetics. Another box contained a copy of the Mayan calendar and modern obsidian blades. Symbolic-allegorical series, to which you see objects on archaeological, historical, and political themes reflect personal memories and emotions of the author. Similar to the projects of Oldenburg, Broodthaers and Distel, the installation of Hiller was presented at a large-scale exhibition *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect* (1999), at the Museum of Modern

Art in New York.¹⁵ This exhibition became a specific result of reflections on the museum theme in the context of exhibition paradigm.

“Museum” of a curator: Harald Szeemann’s “Museum of Obsessions”

In the collection of essays *Museum of Obsessions* Harald Szeemann describes his imaginary museum, the main aim of which is to collect “art of intensive intentions”.¹⁶ In this imaginary museum of the famous European curator dominated three personal symbolic images (or, according to Szeemann, three “fundamental obsessions” or metaphors, to which it was necessary to give visual images): the Mother, the Sun and the Bachelor. The last character, for example, was associated with the allegory of “machine idle”, or closed blood circulation in a male head, when almost no energy is lost and the movement is close to eternal. The topic of “bachelors” Szeemann revealed in the conception of the travelling exhibition *Le Macchine Celibi / The Bachelor Machines* in 1975, shown in Bern, Venice, Brussels, Düsseldorf, Paris, Amsterdam and Vienna. The exposition of *documenta 5* the most succeeded in coming close to realizing of the “Museum of Obsessions”, which like the “Anti-Museum” of J. Cladders and the “Imaginary Museum” of A. Malraux, were, in fact, a personal answer to the question “what is art?”, which is so often asked about artifacts of postmodernism.

The concept of H. Szeemann’s imaginary museum was based on a deep conviction that contemporary art operates with certain spiritual universals that are related to basics that had troubled European people for centuries. Szeemann proposed a curatorial project, which content symbolized the collection of his “museum”, to the Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin and for *documenta 7*. But this exhibition, also entitled *Museum of Obsessions*, was never carried out, but Szeemann left a detailed plan of the exhibition and the conception, published in the aforementioned collection of essays in 1981. According to Szeemann, “The exhibition can present only a prototype of the Museum of Obsessions. The involvement of the cultural context for such an enterprise is a compromise, which should be understood as a conscious action”.¹⁷

In his project, Szeemann stressed the importance of inclusion in the contemporary art display works by old masters and modernists, chosen for purely subjective reasons (the curator suggested Leonardo, Poussin, Géricault, Pollock, Malevich and Mondrian). Demonstration of continuity of tradition — not from the standpoint of stylistic or formal unity, but from the point of belonging to the “art history of intensive intentions” was to reveal the full meaning of contemporary artworks, in their interaction with the tradition. The plan of the exhibition included:

“Beauty sustenance and destruction, for example, Desiderio Monsu.

Attempts to return to pure and unencumbered creativity in the 20th century (Breton, Dubuffet).

The difference between primary and secondary (reflected) obsessions: Anton Mueller and Duchamp.

Size obsession as an artistic element (Boltanski).

Obsession of collecting as a basis for art activities.

¹⁵ McSHINE, Kynaston. *The museum as muse: artists reflect*. New-York, NY : The Museum of Modern Art, 1999. ISBN 0-87070-092-8.

¹⁶ SZEEMANN, Harald. *Museum der Obsessionen von ueber/zu/mit Harald Szeemann*. Berlin : Merve, 1981, p. 33. ISBN 3-88396-020-9.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 57.

Obsession of a collector, his identity (a collector of guillotines in Paris, who at the anniversary of the death of Mary Antoinette beheaded himself using “her” guillotine).

Small museum of primary obsessions in their relationship with the basic elements:
Fire — documentation of pyromaniacs.

Water — unusual ship design.

Air — anonymous constructors of flying machines in comparison with fake obsessions, Panamarenko (at *documenta 5*, Panamarenko presented an object in the form of air ship with a giant inflatable ball).

Earth — sexual obsessions.

Public obsessions:

Pursuit of beauty (examples of cosmetic surgery).

Obsession of death and its overcoming (proceedings of the Society for the Prolongation of Life by Freezing).

Obsession of race (anonymous publications of the ghetto in Detroit).

Obsession of power (Genghis Khan).

Obsession of spirit and the sun (St. Francis of Assisi)¹⁸.

The plan of Szeemann demonstrated the current art situation and its participants, as well as everyday cultural and traditional realities, used by the curator as a vast source of ideas and universal symbols for the idea and structure of the exhibition. This project, though not realized, stresses the importance of museum image in the curatorial practice.

Many of Szeemann's exhibitions were a practical approach to his hypothetical museum, but, like any utopia, the “Museum of Obsessions” did not find a full implement, even in the global projects like *documenta 5* or *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk (The Tendency towards the Total Work of Art)* in 1983. In his curatorial practice Szeemann showed the opposition to the institutional approach to the assessment of contemporary art. Creative position of Szeemann could barely fit in the framework of traditional art institutions. But those fragile boundaries that have divided art and non-art in the second half of the 20th century, made the placement of objects in the space of a museum or exhibition one of the key factors in this distinction. The complicated relationship of art and museum was reflected in the Szeemann's concept.

Curatorial “museum” projects

Among the most remarkable curatorial projects on the museum theme, beside the already mentioned exhibition *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect* (1999), there are several projects showing different attitudes of curators to the subject of museums, items, collectors, keepers. An aspect of collection and collectibles was impressively revealed in the project *The Keeper* in 2016 at the New Museum in New York, curated by Massimiliano Gioni. The exhibition was located on four floors of the museum and demonstrated the process of collecting and storage of cultural objects and intentions initiating this process. As announced at the New Museum's website, the exhibition is a “reflection on the impulse to save both the most precious and the apparently valueless. The exhibition will bring together a variety of imaginary museums, personal collections, and unusual assemblages, revealing the devotion with which artists, collectors, scholars, and hoarders have created sanctuaries for endangered images and artifacts.”

One of the highlights of the exhibition was Ydessa Hendeles' project *Partners. The Teddy Bear Project* (2002). Besides of vitrines full of these popular toys, there was an impressive display

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 84.

of over 3,000 family album photographs of children and adults posing with teddy bears. The project shows “the consolatory power,” which reveals our emotional connection to cultural objects and images. Among other “museum collections” there was a collection of string figures of Harry Smith, Hilma af Klint’s abstract paintings, which had been hidden for years after the artist’s death, because she thought that her artworks would be more valuable in the future. There were also studio photo portraits of a person, taken every year for decades and collected by Tong Bingxue, Susan Hiller’s video *The Last Silent Movie* (2007–08) with the voices in twenty-five rare or lost languages. A difficult problem of preservation and protection of museum items was illustrated by artifacts from the National Museum of Beirut, melted together by fire in time of the Lebanese Civil War. All these items seemed to escape the usual fate of unnecessary things and take place in a “museum collection” on a whim or due to volitional effort of curators and artists, who saw in the variety of these things symbolic, cultural or historical value.

Among the earlier curatorial projects, central to which is the idea of museum, the project *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989) at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where the American artist Andrea Fraser led a tour through the museum in the role of a fictional art historian Jane Castleton.

The project ironically reflected the current state of art criticism, engaging in the art sphere initially alien aspects. During her “excursion” the artist pointed to things that were not museum objects, for example, a fountain or a café, which nevertheless, as “belonging to the museum” became the subject for critical reception and interpretation.

Earlier, in 1962, curator Willem Sandberg attempted to “destroy” the idea of a traditional museum using interactive methods in the famous exhibition project *Dylaby – Dynamic Labyrinth* at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam with the works of Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Martial Raysse, Daniel Spoerri, Jean Tinguely and Niki de Saint Phalle and other artists. In this project, Tinguely demonstrated his kinetic sculpture, and Spoerri created the illusion of “inverted space” of the museum, tilting the floor in one of the halls at 90 degrees and placing objects on the floor and the ceiling, so that the viewers supposedly walked on the walls to see them. On the walls, as if on the floor, were placed the sculptures, helping to further strengthen the illusion. The project *Dylaby* demonstrated a different interpretation of museum space, free play with traditional museum characteristics.

Another metamorphosis of museum realities embodied an African-American artist Fred Wilson. This time it was about the transformation of semantic and substantive aspects of a museum’s collection. Wilson manipulated with the meaning of museum items, with the tragic irony considering the theme of the colonial past. For the project *Mining the Museum* at the Maryland Historical Society (1992) he placed artifacts from the collection of the Historical Society so that they formed a logical series, which told about the realities of slavery, accompanying creation of cultural values.

In the project by Ekaterina Degot and Yuri Albert *What Did the Artist Mean?* (2013 – 2014) at the Moscow Museum of Modern Art was illustrated the cultural situation of today, in which critical commentaries, context, interpretation displace in our consciousness the impression of an artist’s work, making it redundant and irrelevant. At the opening of the exhibition only comments and captions to objects were present, not the works themselves. Artifacts took place gradually, during the time of exhibition, until its closing date. If an object had “materialized” at the exhibition, then, in turn, disappeared its comment. This exhibition demonstrated a kind of

imaginary museum project, where visual images of exhibits are not necessary, and it is enough for a viewer to comprehend symbolic links to them in the context of extensive interpretation of art.

On the contrary, the exhibition The Imaginary Museum at the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow in (2012) demonstrated the possibility or realizability of an ideal museum in the sense of A. Malraux and its incarnation with real artifacts. The curator Irina Antonova, President of the Pushkin Museum loaned artworks from various museums and private collections, including the Louvre, the Pompidou Centre, the Tate Gallery, the Royal Academy in London, the State Hermitage Museum, and others. Works from these collections were placed in the museum, in the halls appropriate in the time and place of creation and style. The loaned artworks complemented the permanent exposition of the Pushkin Museum, allowing to appreciate its collection in the context of the world history of art and collecting. This approach was even more consistent than the intention of the founder of the museum Ivan V. Tsvetaev, who ordered first class copies of famous artifacts, to give the viewers opportunity to admire significant works, such as *David* by Michelangelo, without leaving Moscow.

Of course, the exhibition project at the Pushkin Museum was just one of the possible incarnations of an imaginary museum or an ideal museum. But the actuality of this project is evidenced by the fact that in 2016, the Pushkin Museum has prepared a similar exhibition entitled *Voices of the Imaginary Museum of Andre Malraux*, the curator of which, again, was Irina Antonova. The exhibition's title is a pun of the title of Malraux's book *The Voices of Silence* and the concept of imaginary museum, which Malraux reveals in this text.

If the previous exhibition had been a perfect example of a curatorial project with an idea to create a perfect exposition with the help of borrowed masterpieces, the exhibition in 2016-2017 was an attempt to illustrate aesthetic ideas of Malraux. The structure of the project focused on his ideas on the evolution of art. More than 200 exhibits from different museums formed an impressive exposition, compiled in accordance with theoretical ideas of Malraux and his views on types and genres of art, names, styles and periods. Symbolically, the exhibition began with a hall dedicated to the biography of Malraux, then the logic of the curatorial project suggested a visit to the hall of antiquities, where one could understand the reasoning of Malraux about the ancient prerequisites for subsequent art styles. Here for comparison were artifacts from different regions of the world, created approximately in one time, for example, Paleolithic figurines from Siberia and Ancient Egypt. For comparison were also Byzantine and Russian icons, ideal and real forms in art, classical art and modernism. This semantic emphasis of the exhibition's conception was reflected in the titles of its sections: *Many Faces of Antiquity, From Ideal to Real, Towards Modernism*. The two main principles of Malraux: metamorphosis and dialogues in art, were engaging the public in a hypothetical discussion on dialectics of past and present, West and East, embodied in the concept of the exhibition.

The virus of contemporary art at classical museum: Jan Fabre at the Hermitage

In contrast to the previously discussed projects, where curators tried to match conceptually relevant artistic forms in the museum context, or show a logical and evolutionary relationship of different periods and styles of art, the exhibition of contemporary Belgian artist Jan Fabre *Knight of Despair / Warrior of Beauty* (2016-2017) formed different attitude to the museum content. The exhibition at the Hermitage, curated by Dmitry Ozerkov, showed an example of quite

arrogant and seemingly illogical penetration of contemporary art in the midst of the traditional museum. It caused severe criticism of supporters of the latter. Contemporary artworks in this case were not just exhibited in the museum in the framework of a separate exhibition, but had been placed in the halls among the works of the old masters. Artifacts of Fabre were located in the halls of the Winter Palace, the second floor of the New Hermitage and in the General Staff building. For example, in the Knights' Hall of the Hermitage with heavy armour of the Middle Ages and Renaissance on display: here Fabre put his own armour, metal ones or made from thousands of colorful shells of insects. Fabre is a grandson of the famous entomologist Jean-Henri Fabre, and he skillfully uses the expressive means of this unusual material.¹⁹ Metal armour of Fabre, reminiscent of space suits or aliens, were demonstrated in showcases near the Hermitage weapons and armour. Here one could witness a metamorphosis of our perception related to the evolution of the tradition of armour, when they were associated with today's movies about terminators or aliens. This demonstration was accompanied by a video installation on multiple screens, where Fabre in armour was fighting with performance artist Marina Abramović. Afterwards Fabre enters into the large halls of the New Hermitage with the Flemish and Dutch Schools of painting. Here, near big still lifes of Frans Snyders with fruit, seafood and poultry, Fabre placed skulls, slightly tinted with phosphorescent paint and holding in the teeth different objects such as artistic brushes and carcasses of small animals and birds: rabbits, ferrets, quails. Demonstration of animal carcasses caused disgust among the part of the public. But, this approach of Fabre certainly fits the Romantic model of *aesthetics of ugliness*, and, on the other hand, correlated with images in the Flemish 17th century pictures. A skull with a dead hare in the teeth corresponds with hunting scenes of Paul de Vos and still lifes with dead game.

If we turn to the semantics of Flemish and Dutch still lifes, the category of death is present in a minimal degree there, they are not *dead nature* (unlike French “nature morte”), but *quiet life* or *still life*. Flemish still life paintings are often enlivened by the presence of a playful animal: a monkey dropping a basket of peaches, or a cat stealing fish. The appearance of Fabre's objects next to these works seemed to emphasize the category of death, its finitude and tragedy, which had avoided Frans Snyders and Paul de Vos. No wonder that the title of the exhibition contains the words “knight of despair”. The themes of *Vanitas vanitatum* and *Memento mori* as relevant to the art of the Flemish old masters, acquire new “life” in the art of Fabre.²⁰

Symbolically finishes the exposition of Fabre in the Flemish halls strange figures made out of skeletons covered in phosphorescent wings of insects. For example, a part of a skeleton, over which is placed a peacock with a bright tail in the work *Vanity is founded on Mortality*, which again refers to the theme of *Vanitas vanitatum*. Another creature in the form of a twisted skeleton holds in the “hands” a big stuffed swan. The work is entitled *Stupidity is founded on Mortality* and the meaning here is obvious: the swan is beautiful, but that beauty is dead, the swan died because of its beauty, which is based on stupidity. But beauty stands over death. The modern world of glamour is no less stupid: trying to attract media its representatives are involved in

¹⁹ SIMONS, Marlise. Bits of Bugs Glow, to Delight of Queen. In: *The New York Times*, 2003, Vol. 4. ISSN 0362-4331.

²⁰ See for instance MAESENEER de, Yves. Un Ange Passe... A Conversation between Theology and Aesthetics: The Case of Jan Fabre. In: *Literature and Theology*, 2003, Vol. 17. № 4, pp. 374-387. ISSN 0269-1205; VOS de, Laurens. Jan Fabre's Crusade Against Shopping Culture. In: *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 2009, Vol. 31. № 3, pp. 65-73. ISSN 1086-3281; STALPAERT, Christel. The Reconfigurative Power of Desire. Jan Fabre's As Long as the World Needs a Warrior's Soul. In: *arcadia*, 2005, Vol. 40. № 1, pp. 177-193. ISSN 1613-0642; WEHLE, Philippa. The Power of Theatrical Madness: Jan Fabre's Orgy of Tolerance. In: *TheatreForum*, 2009. Vol. 36. № 16, pp. 120-129. ISSN 1060-5320.

self-destruction leading to death. Death is final, death is terrible, but stupidity, because it is “over” death and accompanies beauty, is metaphysically complete. This work, which combines a skeleton and a peacock’s tail, is quite aesthetically attractive. It is characteristic for many of the Fabre’s objects, which is quite unusual for contemporary art. The works were alien to the Hermitage context, but this alienation had been implied in the exhibition’s conception. Some visitors criticized the project, believing such unceremonious intrusion of contemporary art in the museum to be inappropriate, others admired the boldness of contrasts of the old and the new.

In the Atrium of the General Staff building gigantic winged insects of Fabre were placed, which seemed to float in the air. In the hall, where there is an installation by Ilia Kabakov, in the showcases were displayed drawings of Fabre: Fabre’s work, thus, was introduced to the “classics” of postmodernism.

The most shocking part of the Fabre’s exhibition – installations *Carnival of Dead Mongrels* (2006) and *Protest of Dead Homeless Cats* (2007) were located in one of the halls of the General Staff. Among twinkling strips of shiny foil hanging from the ceiling numerous stuffed animals were placed, which Fabre had presumably picked up on the streets already dead. The appeal to death here has caused an outcry from animal advocates. Such a sad symbolic “end” of the exhibition project tells about the tragedy of existence and its rational understanding in art. This is the “aesthetics of ugliness” in the today’s context, and Fabre performs as an artist of Romanticism here, shocking the viewers and arousing their emotions in such a radical way. Exposition of Fabre was certainly impressive, there was a rhetoric of death, beauty, creativity, that introduced provocative topics that people tried not to notice sometimes. Rethinking traditional styles, including Romanticism might be one of the tasks of contemporary art. Creativity of Fabre is a phenomenon, which is directly related to Romanticism, and his project speaks about the fate of Romanticism. The idea of Romanticism has probably become obsolete, or, on the contrary, had not become obsolete in the modern culture, because such ambiguous interpretations of the romantic paradigm might occur. The project at the Hermitage continues the development of the Fabre’s idea of introducing contemporary art in the space of classical museum. In 2008, he implemented this concept in the exhibition at the Louvre entitled *Jan Fabre at the Louvre: The Angel of Metamorphosis*. As later at the Hermitage, objects of Fabre were placed next to works of the old masters of Dutch, Flemish and German Schools of painting. “Viral projects” of Fabre at the classical museums have ludic qualities and form unexpected interactions of classical artworks and contemporary artifacts, which encourages the public to rediscover masterpieces in the museum’s collection.

Conclusion. Metamorphosis of museum image in the context of the postmodern paradigm

A traditional institution for the storage and display of art — museum is focused on an object, its intrinsic value. On the one hand, museum guarantees preservation and the status of being “art” to contemporary artworks, but, on the other hand, museum as a traditional institution is fundamentally against the very essence of the post-war art with its “rejection of an object, when the object’s place take visualized ideas, mental itineraries, memories”.²¹ This contradiction of museum as an ideal place for storage and assessment of art and impossible

²¹ SZEEMANN, Harald, ref. 16, p. 34.

place for contemporary art is the reason for creation of hypothetical museums of the second half of the 20th century.²²

In relation to an image of museum in the works of contemporary artists and in curatorial conceptions we should refer to the question of the museum paradigm shifting from modernism to postmodernism. The attitude of modernists to the notion of museum and traditional exhibitions was that of “live” to “dead”, but in the postmodern epoch it changed to considering museum collections as an eternal source of references and visual citations.

The continuity of tradition in the art of the second half of the 20th century was not manifested in artistic forms or methods of their exposure. Curatorial projects, which had been discussed in this article, illustrated this line of continuity between postmodern art and modernism, and indirectly the classical art that nurtured modernism. The role of museum in the postmodern cultural situation became rather problematic. Ceasing to designate a place to show the “dead” culture — because in museums appear more and more works of contemporary art, the museum became a way of statement of the very notion of art as applied to artifacts, whose affiliation to art could be perceived as questionable.

The freely developing contemporary art often shows the opposition to the institutional approach, denies its own possible placement in a museum. The creative position of artists hardly fits into the framework of traditional art institutions. But, due to fragile boundaries that have divided the art of postmodernism and non-art, the placement of artworks in the space of a museum or a museum exhibition was one of the key factors in this distinction. The complicated relationship of the contemporary art and museum continued the tradition of polemics with the classics started by the modernists. The intensity of this discussion is reflected in curatorial projects dedicated to the image and symbolism of museum.

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²² GUILLEN, E. M. Real museum, imaginary museum: reflections on the concept of the museum as a stage for metamorphosis. In: *Espacio, tiempo y forma. Serie VII, Historia del arte*. 2013, Vol. 1, pp. 129-145. ISSN 1130-4715.

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