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Ruslana MANKOVSKA

PhD hab. (History), Leading Researcher of the Institute of History of Ukraine of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 4 M. Hrushevskoho Street, Kyiv, Ukraine, postal code 01001 (ruslana_man@ukr.net)

ORCID: 0000-0003-4581-2128

ResearcherID: 4348028

Svitlana BABUSHKO

PhD hab. (Education), Professor, Head of the Department of Tourism of the National University of Ukraine on Physical Education and Sport, 1 Fizkultury Street, Kyiv, Ukraine, postal code 02000 (babushko64sr@gmail.com)

ORCID: 0000-0001-8348-5936

ResearcherID: F-9475-2019

Scopus-Author ID: 57190132851

Руслана МАНЬКОВСЬКА

докторка історичних наук, провідна наукова співробітниця Інституту історії України НАН України, вул. М. Грушевського, 4, м. Київ, Україна, індекс 01001 (ruslana_man@ukr.net)

Світлана БАБУШКО

докторка педагогічних наук, професорка, завідувачка кафедри туризму Національного університету фізичного виховання і спорту України, вул. Фізкультури, 1, м. Київ, Україна, індекс 02000 (babushko64sr@gmail.com)

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VISUAL CONSTRUCT IN MUSEUM PRACTICES

Abstract. Based on modern visual discourse, in the article there has been analyzed the visual construct as the main form of museum visualization, museum practice and visual technologies in the Ukrainian museology, and attention has been paid to the museum modelling peculiarities and vital tasks of the visual construction interpretation, sociocultural possibilities of visual construct and its influence on the visitor have been outlined. The researched visual construct is a separate museum object/museum complex (fragment of a museum exposition), modelled owing to museum practices in order to visualize particular meanings in the museum space. **The purpose of the research** is to highlight the specifics of visibility in museology, which is due to the development of modern interdisciplinary direction of visual studios (visual studio), in the context of which modelling museum space through a visual construct acquires new features and deepens its understanding significantly. **The methodology of the research** is based on the interdisciplinary, hermeneutic, culturological, semantic, semiotic, social and psychoanalytic scientific approaches, which allowed carrying out a comprehensive analysis of museum visibility, gave the opportunity to form a set of principles in order to study the visual construct as the basis of museum

practices, to delve into the spiritual phenomena of a human being. Along with general scientific methods of analysis, synthesis, comparative studies and explanation, the following methods have been used: methods of observation, modelling and interpretation, which contributed to the study of decoding the visual information and constructing new meanings, features of verbal reflection through the visual construct of spiritual models of mentality, consciousness and ideas. **The scientific novelty:** owing to the culturological concept of the synergy of visuality and museology the relevant meanings have been presented. For the first time, the segment of visual culture has been singled out – the museum visuality, its key element has been analyzed – the visual construct as a simulated system of visually reflected meanings for perception in the museum space. **The Conclusions.** Theoretical principles and interdisciplinary nature of visual studies expanded the scientific and practical possibilities of museology significantly. Visual technologies, applied in museum practices stimulated a new look at the visual construct, which was transformed into a prominent segment of visual culture with its own specifics of figurative representation, interpretation of symbols and emotional and mental reception of a human being.

Key words: visual culture, museum visuality, visual construct, visual technologies, museum practices, interpretation.

ВІЗУАЛЬНИЙ КОНСТРУКТ У МУЗЕЙНИХ ПРАКТИКАХ

Анотація. У статті на основі сучасного візуального дискурсу розглядається візуальний конструкт як головна форма музейної візуалізації, проаналізовано музейні практики й візуальні технології в українському музейництві, приділено увагу особливостям музейного моделювання та важливим завданням інтерпретації візуальних конструкцій, окреслено соціокультурні можливості візуального конструкту, його вплив на відвідувача. Досліджуваний візуальний конструкт – це окремий музейний предмет / музейний комплекс (фрагмент музейної експозиції), змодельований через музейні практики для візуалізації певних смислів у музейному просторі. **Мета дослідження** – з'ясування специфіки візуальності в музейництві та зумовлена розвитком сучасного міждисциплінарного напрямку візуальних студій (visual studio), у контексті яких моделювання музейного простору через візуальний конструкт набуває нових ознак і значно поглиблює його осмислення. **Методологію дослідження** склали міждисциплінарний, герменевтичний, культурологічний, семантичний, семіотичний, соціальний та психоаналітичний наукові підходи, які дали можливість здійснити комплексну аналітику музейної візуальності, сформуванню сукупності принципів для дослідження візуального конструкту як основи музейних практик, заглибитися в духовні феномени людини. Одночасно із загальнонауковими методами аналізу, синтезу, компаративістики, пояснення застосовувалися методи спостереження, моделювання, інтерпретації, які сприяли вивченню процесу декодування візуальної інформації та конструювання нових смислів, особливостей вербального відображення через візуальний конструкт духовних моделей ментальності, свідомості й ідей людини. **Наукова новизна** полягає у представленні актуальних смислів через культурологічну концепцію синергії візуальності та музейництва. Вперше, виокремлюючи з візуальної культури сегмент – музейну візуальність, розглядається її ключовий елемент – візуальний конструкт як змодельована система візуально відображених сенсів для сприйняття у музейному просторі. **Висновки.** Теоретичні засади та міждисциплінарний характер візуальних студій значно розширили науково-практичні можливості музейництва. Візуальні технології, застосовані в музейних практиках, змусили по-новому подивитися на візуальний конструкт, який трансформувався у помітний сегмент візуальної культури з власною специфікою образної репрезентації, інтерпретацією символів та емоційно-ментальним сприйняттям його людиною.

Ключові слова: візуальна культура, музейна візуальність, візуальний конструкт, візуальні технології, музейні практики, інтерпретація.

The Problem Statement. Modern transformational processes, which take place in science and a rapid development of information society form up the latest research paradigms. There have been noticeable changes in visual studios since the second half of the XXth century in the interdisciplinary field of socio-humanities. The “pictorial turn” in science led to a

rethinking of the place and meaning of visual senses, and the study of visuality covers more and more areas of scientific knowledge and practice gradually.

Museology formed its own specifics of the visual space, which combines the historical documentation and figurative extrapolation organically, and the museum practitioners develop innovative technologies for modelling the visual construct. Conceptually, the museum visuality, which is based on a visual construct of documents, photographs, audio, video recordings, objects, as the part of visual culture, is aimed at the synergy of cognitive and sensory. The museum construct, with the help of the museum practices, while reproducing images of renowned figures, the atmosphere of a certain historical epoch, intellectual or an everyday life of different social groups, first of all, is supposed to interest the visitor visually and evoke emotions at the level of sensory perception.

The Analysis of Recent Researches. The historiographical base of visual studies consists of works written by foreign and Ukrainian scholars. The visual discourse was covered by foreign studies of M. Sturken (Sturken, 2001), B. Sandywell (Sandywell, 2011), D. Levin (Levin, 1999), M. Yampolsky (Yampolskiy, 2007), A. Usmanova (Usmanova, 2017), in which the focus was on theoretical issues of visuality formation, visual rotation, visual culture, interaction of an object and observer with the help of the visual technologies. French existentialist-writer J.-P. Sartre (Sartre, 2000) raised the issue concerning a human being's attitude to things, the visual anthropology features were highlighted by a researcher S. Pink (Pink, 2006). L. de Caro put emphasis on the bodily and sensory influences on a visitor used in museum practices through interactive technologies, immersion and dynamic architectural forms (DeCaro, 2015) and M. Shehade, T. Stylianou-Lambert emphasized the same things (Shehade & Stylianou-Lambert, 2020). In particular, L. de Caro stated that due to the holistic connection of visual, interactive in the perception of the museum object, museum visits enriched the visitor with a truly multi-sensory experience (DeCaro, 2015).

Art critic A. Boylen depicted technologies and strategies of the visual, as well as the interaction of the visual with a human being in her book "Visual Culture" (Boilen, 2021). M. Bal', Director of the Amsterdam Institute for Cultural Studies, considered the visual image, with its hidden meanings, as a separate semiotic system (Bal, 2012). I. Malkovskaya focused on a human self-preservation issue in the visual and virtual space (Malkovskaya, 2008).

Among the Ukrainian researchers, the following scholars could be mentioned O. Kovalevska (Kovalevska, 2016; Kovalevska, 2018), H. Ilyina (Ilyina, 2018), who analyzed the visual studios genesis, development and main problems. Doctors of Philosophy (PhD) O. Malanchuk-Rybak (Malanchuk-Rybak, 2013), L. Verbytska (Verbytska, 2016) and scholars V. Kremen, V. Ilyin (Kremen & Ilyin, 2020) focused on visual culture, culture of thinking, visual perception of image, its deconstruction of meanings, the ratio of verbal and visual.

The museum segment emerged in the field of visual research gradually. The museum workers, involving theoretical and practical developments of visual studios actively, conducted professional discussions at scientific meetings. In particular, museum workers of Cherkasy Regional Museum of Local Lore, Cherkasy Regional Art Museum joined the all-Ukrainian scientific conferences "Visuality in Ukrainian Culture: Status, Dynamics, Contexts" (Lychkovakh, 2013), "Museum as Visual Text of Culture" (Lychkovakh, 2017), at which the innovative approaches to museum visuals were discussed. Museum visuality has become recently the subject of dissertations recently. In their research works applicants for the degree of Doctor of Arts I. Yakovets (Yakovets, 2018) and Candidates of Culturology H. Novikova (Novikova, 2019) covered visual practices in the museum space. In spite of the fact that

visual studios are widely represented in modern scientific discourse, but the peculiarities of the synergy of museum space and visibility, museum visibility, visual construct have not been the subject of scientific research. Hence, **the purpose of the research** is the drastic need to consider the features of the visual construct as a vital element of the museum visibility, modelled owing to museum practices in the context of visual studios.

The Results of the Research. It is important to single out specifics of the visual construct formation, interpretation and perception, while considering the visual construct in the context of the visual research, within which the visual construct is a separate museum object/museum complex (fragment of a museum exposition), modelled owing to museum practices to visualize certain meanings in the museum space. The basis of the visual construct is a museum object, the general characteristics of which are authenticity, credibility, clarity, syncretism, informativeness, emotionality, axiology aspects (Mankovska, 2016, p. 41). It should be stated that one more feature of the museum object is also the “legend of the exponat” – the history and circumstances of entering the museum collection. In general, the museum practice keeps to the following course of action: the exponat, in order to become a museum object, on the way to the museum collection undergoes a special selection procedure, which takes into account its historical value, uniqueness and state of preservation. The assessment of the museum visibility of the exponat includes its content, features and exposition possibilities for the reconstruction of events and facts. It should be mentioned that museum practices provide a special technique for the museum funds formation. The fund commission of the institution, which consists of the representatives of all departments of the museum, is responsible for the selection of exponats to the museum collection. The specialists evaluate, analyze, juxtapose all the characteristics of the exponat, which allows ensuring objectivity in the selection of objects that will undergo the museification procedure and, once in the museum exhibition, will receive the signs of visual constructs.

It is absolutely essential for the exhibitor to present the relic and visualize the embedded but hidden information in it, to model a new reality, to excite the visitor. The museum exposition, which with the help of the visual constructs reproduces the historical past, modern realities, spiritual phenomena, forms a peculiar segment of the visual culture. In the process of creating an exhibition, it is crucial for the museum workers to keep in mind that a modern visitor, who enters the world of museum visibility, must decode the meanings of seen museum constructs and, according to researcher Ye. Batayeva, penetrate/dive “into their visual flesh” (Batayeva, 2013, p. 50). The museum practices of exposition are of utmost importance in this situation, as they allow ensuring the objectivity of the historical reconstructions. According to A. Usmanova, a researcher, the visual composition in the museum includes ontological (origin and implementation of the concept), epistemological (knowledge of historical reality) and sociological (socio-cultural impact on society) aspects of information (Usmanova, 2013).

The visual construct, reconstructing historical reality, has a significant potential to document the course of events and facts of public life and its individual representatives. Undoubtedly, not only the variety of unique museum rarities but also museum practices that combine the research experience of museum exhibitors and a creative approach of artists and designers are especially valuable in forming a reliable image of the historical epoch or worldview of a human being, or museum visibility in general. The museum construct is supposed not only to model a certain historical fact but also to have influence on the emotional feelings of the visitor, instigating the visitor to intellectual pondering over and reflections.

As it was mentioned above, entering the museum environment, the visitor is immersed in the visual space of the museum. This method in museology is called submersible (immersion method). The museum practices apply such types of the visual constructs modelling as transposition with fixation of all details and relationships and stylization with modelling of phenomena without authentic museum exhibits (Novikova, 2019, p. 23). The renowned museum worker from Russia T. Poliakov, among the promising methods of museum practices for the exhibitions creation, highlighted the image-plot method and art-mythological method (Polyakov, 2003, c. 22), which could enhance the visitor's sensory perception.

In National Museum of the History of Ukraine in World War II, the eminent in Ukraine and abroad People's Artist of Ukraine Anatolii Haidamaka depicted the symbolic "Doroha Viyny" ("Road of War") with the help of the image and relic method. In particular, the multifaceted composition "Vidvoyuvavsia" is considered to be the embodiment of the enemy image modelling idea as it was visually reproduced, among the broken German equipment could be found a famous photo of a front-line cameraman Semen Stoyanovsky depicting a killed young Wehrmacht soldier. Nearby there were letters from German women and children to their husbands and parents at the front, which included despair and the curse of war (Fomina, 2013, pp. 35–36). The visual construct is modelled in such a way that it evokes emotions and humanistic feelings in a viewer, draws attention to universal values. The authors lead the visitor to think that violence and killing of people, whoever becomes the victims of a murderous war, are unacceptable.

The viewer's perception of the visual construct not only activates the flow of consciousness but also activates the sensory perception of the museum visual space. In psychology there is a term "perceptual" (Usmanova, 2013), which reflects the connection between the inner and outer world of a human being through the reactions of senses. The task of the museum visualization authors is to draw the visitor's attention to the museum construct with the help of such artistic means as metaphor, symbol, sign. The vivid example of metaphor use in a visual construct is the exposition of M. Bulgakov Literary Memorial Museum in Kyiv, built on the contrast of colours – white, which symbolizes the work of the writer, and the colours of authentic things – about his life.

While establishing perceptual contact between the visitor and the visual construct, the process of vision becomes relevant, when the expressiveness of the visual construct evokes certain associations, analogies or allegories in the viewer. In this context, the original concept was implemented at Chornobyl National Museum in Kyiv, where the Ukrainian embroidered towels represented towns and villages from the exclusion zone. Their inhabitants were forced to leave their socio-cultural space and move to new places of residence. The embroidered towels symbolized the great tragedy of every person in the polluted area. The purpose of such a visual construct is to promote the sensory development of the visitor and the ability to empathize with the presented events and facts.

The visual technologies are aimed at a human sensory perception of a visual space. At the same time, the museum practices of creating a visual construct, in addition to a sensory factor, take into account the age, social, professional, and nowadays inclusive characteristics of the audience.

Nowadays special focus is on the inclusive characteristics of society, and museums in Ukraine do everything possible to turn the institution into an open space for each of its citizens. It is not only about free admission to museums, but also about creating an environment in which the disabled visitor could feel free and comfortable among the museum exhibits. For

instance, visually impaired visitors in numerous museums around the world are offered the so-called “touch tours” (from the English to touch) by prior arrangement or at a certain time (Graven, et al, 2020). Therefore, the literary memorial house museum of T. H. Shevchenko’s “Khata na Priortsi” in Kyiv, using the above-mentioned technique, expands access to information about the visual construct owing to Braille cards and by touching the museum exhibit. A visitor with special needs could discover the functionality of the museum object with the help of a guide.

The Museum of Darkness in Kyiv is considered to be another example of inclusion. It is common knowledge that 80% of all information a person gets through the eyes. Due to the concept of “inability to see”, the museum helps to develop other senses: a touch, taste, smell, sense of balance and proprioception (feeling your own body in space). But the paramount thing is that the museum space helps everyone else to understand the world of blind people. The visual construct is invisible, but, as a result of this approach, it evokes empathy, compassion, complicity and other feelings. Museums use imagery, meaning, and emotion, but scholars actively debate concerning the extent to which the visual information or interpretation is used for visually impaired audiences (Hutchinson & Eardley, 2020).

In contrast to a rapid increase in modern visual and virtual world of diverse spectacles, which, according to scholar I. Malkovskaya, can destroy a person’s personal identity (Malkovskaya, 2008), the museum visuality develops artistic thinking of a person, forms the worldview, influences and changes his/her inner world.

Deciphering the museum construct, the visitor interprets, comprehends the meanings embedded in it. The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur considered the potential abilities and productivity of interpretation as a means of identifying the process of interpretation (Riker, 2002, p. 44). To the museologist interpretation performs the work of decoding the content and meanings and forms the basis of the visual construct, which serves as a means of forming new knowledge. Historical representation plays an important role in the process of interpreting the visual construct. Considering the category of historical representation as a tool in the construction of images of the past and an instrument of public perception of reality, the Polish researcher Marek Wozniak in his book “The Past as Subject of Construction. On the Role of Representation in Historical Research” put emphasis on the fact that the construction of images that structure reality, and the attempt to understand them in modern realities, are inherent in the local, not universal cultural community (Troian, 2012, p. 221). The visual construct is also a work of imagination, which in the process of vision and interpretation is transformed into a means of enriching the spiritual world of the individual. The ability to decode a visual construct through images and ideas develops creative thinking in the visitor, which contributes to the growth of his/her visual selectivity and perception.

The subject area of the museum, according to a theorist and practitioner of museum affairs from Canada D. Cameron, should be clear to the visitor (Ilyina, 2018, c. 318). It can be stated that the visual construct in museology strengthens the human-creative function of the museum (Verbytska, 2016, p. 22). It is important to strike the right balance between verbal and visual material in the museum space, so that the viewer understands the language of objects, sees and deciphers the information encoded in museum constructs. The perception of museum visuality also occurs through verbal communication of museum workers (guides) with the audience. According to D. Cameron, it should be a museum psychologist, a museum sociologist, whose task is “not to translate visual expressions into a verbal form but to teach visitors the language of objects, regardless of their age” (Verbytska, 2016, p. 22).

Professor from Lviv L. Verbytska, speaking about the non-verbal language of objects in the museum exposition, puts emphasis on the human senses involvement in communication with the museum objects and the advantages of non-verbal language over acoustic and tactile in the museum. Owing to vision, cognition, visual perception, empathy a variety of intellectual, emotional and sensory channels are activated when the visitor stays in the museum environment. At the same time, the researcher focused on new challenges for museums, when their attractiveness could be achieved not so much by the content of the exhibition, but by its successful visual presentation (Verbytska, 2016, pp. 23–24). In order to achieve this purpose new ideas, original plot-image symbolism, means of emotional display and animation of museum expositions, technical means are introduced. Modern museum practices are closely linked to the use of information technology. The technical innovations give opportunity to expand the content of exhibition, through audio and video effects to enhance its emotional perception of the visitor. Creative combination of museum construct with modern multimedia technologies not only expands the audience of visitors, including a large number of young people, but increases the effectiveness of communication with the audience significantly, has a positive effect on its intellectual and emotional development (Truels & Fisher, 2021).

The Conclusions. Theoretical principles and interdisciplinary nature of visual studios expanded the scientific and practical possibilities of museology significantly. The museum, as a crucial socio-cultural institution, enriched its own research tools with original methods and means of visualizing the museum space. Museum visuality, as a special form of visual culture, received a new impetus to the disclosure of its artistic and cognitive potential. Visual technologies applied in museum practices stimulated a new look at the visual construct, which was transformed into a prominent segment of visual culture with its own specifics of figurative representation, interpretation of symbols and emotional and mental perception of a human being. Due to the changes in approaches to the visual construct, as a communicative element of the interaction between the visitor and the museum, strengthened its impact on the socio-cultural space.

The Prospects for Further Research. The museum construct in the system of visual culture received new perspectives of theoretical and practical improvement. In the context of the development of visual studios and integration processes in scientific knowledge, an important task is to develop an interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological framework of the modern direction, which will open new horizons for museology and museum visuality. In particular, under the conditions of continuous development of innovative technologies, visual technologies in museology need to be improved in order to reveal the potential of the visual construct, with its source, monumental, cognitive, aesthetic and communicative content. It is essential to develop educational programmes for the younger generation on cultural visual thinking, decoding and interpretation of the museum construct.

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