



The theme of ruins in contemporary art

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ABSTRACT:

The article analyzes various interpretations of the concept of “ruin” in the history of culture. It is shown that the ruin, as a “symbolic form”, on the one hand, is a link connecting fragments of various historical eras and cultural pictures of the world with each other, and on the other hand, it embodies the virtual reality of being, a possible global culture and/or catastrophe. The authors singled out such artistic interpretations of the ruins in contemporary fine arts as: a historical ruin; the ruin of the present and/or the “lost future”; semantic construction; object (architectural fragment) as a sign of place and time.

KEYWORDS:

ruin; space-time; architectural heritage; visual arts; virtual reality

1. Introduction

The modern processes of cultural universalization and globalization, the penetration of information technologies into all spheres of life, the acceleration of the pace of life, social and territorial mobility, the multiplicity of communication opportunities change a person’s perception and experience of reality, including space and time. The connection with the past, historical roots, cultural traditions, places is lost or changed, leading to the transformation of identity, feelings of instability of the present and uncertainty in the future.

It can be argued that modern culture is a “culture of real virtuality” when the boundaries of physical reality are made conditional, and “the fictional world becomes a defining life experience” [1, p. 601]. In this regard, the image of the ruins acquires new meaning and content, expressing the loss and return of the past to the present, the preservation of the diversity of world pictures and national characteristics, on the one hand, and the creation of possible (virtual) realities of universal culture, on the other. This is reflected in cinema, literature, and fine art.

The purpose of the article is to analyze the theoretical foundations and identify approaches to the artistic interpretation of ruins in modern visual art.

2. Discussion

A ruin is a part of an architectural object that collapsed “from time or by the evil will of a person” [2, p. 307].

Even the theorists of the Romantic era (D. Diderot, E. Burke, F.R. de Chateaubriand, etc.) noted the multilayered perception and experience of the ruins as an object of contemplation, highlighting the individual characteristics of the place, and attributed it to the aesthetic category of the

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sublime. G.V.F. Hegel rejected the romantic interpretation of the ruins, understanding destruction as a necessary component of the dialectical development of being.

A. Breton presented the "ruin" as "miraculous", "a symbol capable of exciting the human soul in one era or another" [3]. R. Macaulay, studying the aesthetic perception of ruins in the history of European culture on the basis of travel notes, letters and diaries, introduced the concept of "Ruinenlust". She compared the ruins with "preserved fragments" of a lost narrative, through which a person can interact with the past, changing it, and shaping the future [4, PR, XVIII].

A. Ukhnaev believes that the main thing in the aesthetics of ruins is materialized time. D. Trigg notes that ruins are "not just twisted matter – it is also confused time. ... The question is not where the ruins are, the question is when... Not in the present, but not in the past either" [5]. Ruins exist "in time, which they themselves ... tear apart" [5].

Exploring the ruin in the avant-garde culture, S. Boym notes that "ruins make us think about the past that could have been, and about the future that never was, teasing us with utopian dreams of avoiding the irreversibility of time" [6].

She connects the attitude to the ruin in the twentieth century with the concept of "nostalgia", which "inevitably appears as a defense mechanism in times of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals", making "possible the division into "local" and "universal"" [7]. A. Huyssen in the article "Nostalgia for ruins" interprets the ruin as the semantic construction of time and space, which is the central topos of modernity.

In the context of the work of R. Krauss, I. A. Bois "Formlessness. A user's Guide", where the authors explore the category of "formless" by J. Bataille, the ruin can be interpreted as an accident of meaning.

In the works of postmodern theorists, a ruin is an image of a mosaic of space and time broken into fragments of reality ("deconstruction" by J. Derrida; "simulacrum" by J. Baudrillard, etc.).

V. Fedorov writes that in "modern culture ruins ... are the image of virtual reality ..." [8, p. 85]. He distinguishes the ruins of "historical" and "modern", which differ in the time interval between the moments of their occurrence and perception.

As an incomplete integrity, which the observer's imagination allows to fill, the ruin has two forms of existence: "perceived" and "imaginary" (S. Lishaev).

In modern visual art, the following interpretations of ruins can be distinguished:

1. A historical ruin is a fragment of the "past" that is present in the "present" and has historical and cultural value and aesthetic potential. It "carries a double semantic load ... about the loss and about the preservation of the past," causing pleasure and horror [9, pp. 24-25]. These are "monuments of the victory of time over man and at the same time of man over time" [10, p. 51].

1.1. Ruin as a form of preserving the past

Being a documentary evidence of the past, the ruin marks belonging to a certain cultural tradition, place and time. As a material object, it combines the unstable balance of culture and nature, which creates a new integrity and marks the completeness of the past.

Realistic depiction of the modern remains of the stone walls of the ancient Franciscan monastery of the XIII century is the "visible past in the present" (S. Lishaev), a symbol of authenticity and continuity of cultural memory, the unity of human history and nature (Fig. 1). The ruins have no purpose, they are a continuation of the surrounding landscape, involving the viewer "in their game of presence and absence, ... whole and incomplete, majestic and pathetic" [11, p. 84]. The portal of the preserved pointed arch in the darkened foreground reveals the depth of the space behind it, attracting the observer's gaze, stopping the moment and connecting the past and the present. At the same time, the artist emphasizes the autonomy of the past, closing the perspective of the inner "labyrinth" of the abbey. The master pays attention to details – the texture of masonry, cracks, reminding that everything is subject to aging and destruction.

1.2. Ruin as the basis for the reconstruction of the lost past

According to A. Schenle, ruins "refer not to the original point of existence of a whole object, but to the variety of forms and functions that the object acquires throughout its existence. They declare the intersection of the past and the present, the multilayered nature of history,

the existence of alternative historical series, the return of the past" [9, pp. 24-25]. To recreate the ruins in its original or new integrity, the very stratification of the "traces" of bygone centuries, the "patina of time", becomes important. A lost tradition is being invented, creating new multiple connections between the past and the present.

The medieval castle on the left bank of the Loire, badly damaged during the bombing and shelling of World War II, was subsequently restored. The artist returns the past to the present, combining in one graphic image two moments from the life of the castle, separated by centuries (Fig. 2). Broken wooden rafters covered with ivy shoots frame a model of an old castle illuminated by the sun with a garden parterre and figures of people walking. Using the difference in scale and elaboration of details, the artist "creates in the present the form of a past life ... The past with its destinies and changes is concentrated at this point of the aesthetically contemplated present" [12, p. 233]. Historical ruins, as a palimpsest of the events of the past and their modern readings, make it possible to find the past "in a complete form that may never have really existed" [13, p. 54].

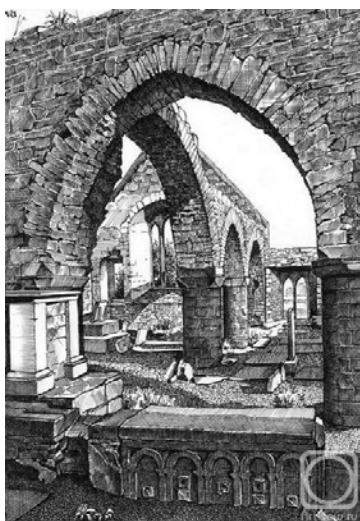


Fig. 1. V. Udaltsov
Irish. Timoleague Abbey. Celtic treasures.
Paper/pen, ink 30 x 21cm, 2009
<https://artnow.ru/kartina-Irlandiya-Abbatstvo-Timolig-Timoleague-Keltskie-sokrovischahudozhnik-Udaltsov-Vladimir-254904.html>



Fig. 2. G. Trignac. Sully on the Loire, castle.
Etching, chisel, dry needle
17.5 x 21.5 cm, 1995
http://www.trignac-gerard.com/spip.php?page=document&id_document=77&id_article=4

2. The ruins of the present are abandoned buildings falling into decay, destroyed architectural objects that have arisen as a result of military operations, natural and environmental disasters, etc.

2.1. *Ruin as the destruction of everyday reality*

The ruin destroys everyday reality, thereby changing a person's perception of reality and revealing its other sides, leveling the concepts of "inside and outside the walls" (I. Danilova). A familiar place in an instant becomes unrecognizable, dangerous. Houses reveal what was previously hidden: Its skeleton and internal content: "sections ... of rooms with a surviving ... stove, ... door ... thin layers of floor and ceiling. ... There are houses through, with a preserved facade, translucent with a torn darkness and depth. And in the empty window potholes of the upper floors, the sky is visible" [14]. Penetrating through gaps in the roof and broken windows, strips of sunlight open the interior of the building, snatching out the silhouette of a man standing on the border with the shadow (Fig. 3). It's like he's "... getting ready to part with something

he's staring at... His face is turned to the past ...", which is still present in its remains, in memories, but is no longer accessible [15, IX]. Lost space turns into lost time.

2.2. Ruin as a "lost future"

The history of human civilization has always been accompanied by wars and destruction. Art of all eras found "beauty in darkness and cruel forces, physical and spiritual, one of the symbols of which is" ruin [4, PR, XX]. The urban world, dying without hope, from which all the colors of life have gone, swaying at its very core – the silent world of the "lost future", from which the traces of human presence disappear, causing a feeling of horror (Fig. 4). The realistic depiction of the skeletons of similar "inanimate" and "motionless" buildings, which are eroded by erosion, going into a hazy perspective, nevertheless leaves doubt about their reality. In the artist's interpretation, the apocalyptic dystopia of the modern world is a nightmare from which it is impossible to wake up.



Fig. 3. D. Danger "Take your time, try not to forget, we will never"
Color printing 24 x 36", 2015
<https://danieldanger.storenvy.com/products/14775624-take-your-time-try-not-to-forget-green>



Fig. 4. A. Semenov. Sin City 1
<https://darkermagazine.ru/page/anton-semenov-ottalkiva-jushhaja-storona-moih-rabot-kak-pugalo-na-kukuruznom-pole>

3. Ruin as a semantic construction erases the boundary between reality and illusion, forcing "matter to obey the logic of the unreal" (a dream with open eyes) ... [6]. It creates a special structure of space-time, existing "between", more precisely, "both there and here" (S. Lishaev). It preserves the memory of history and culture, generating their new meanings and becomes the basis for creating possible realities. The main property of the ruins is the "unity of space, time and meaning", as a reflection of the dualism of the material and ideal, the physical body of a person and his consciousness, which can be in different temporal and spatial dimensions ("In the circle of ruins" by H.L. Borges, "Experiment with Time" by J. U. Dan) [16, p. 162].

3.1. Ruin as a myth

The modern perception and experience of time and space as longing for "another ... time of our childhood, slower rhythms of our dreams" generates "a desire to turn history into a private or collective mythology, to reconsider time as space, refusing to submit" to its "irreversibility" [17].

The lost and reassembled Tower of Babylon (ruin), repeated on the canvas in different forms, creates an endless spatial myth (Fig. 5). The artist created a new narrative, rethinking the image that has passed through the entire human history, and turning it into "the brightest and most authentic reality" – the city of towers in the river valley [18, p. 36].

3.2. The ruin as the basis of a possible reality (the "meeting place" of "cultural worlds and historical epochs") [19].

The existence of modern man is connected with the endless reproduction of images of reality, which, eliminating the boundaries between the original and the copy, form the space of virtual reality. Fragments of authentic architectural objects of different epochs and peoples become the basis connecting the past and the present "into various existential topographies of cultural forms" [7]. In modern visual art, this trend is expressed in the depiction of fantastic cities, places where "modern technologies" are mixed "with other times, ... spaces, ... paradigms" going back centuries (Fig. 6) [20].

The artist creates a new architectonics of familiar forms of architecture, combining elements of medieval European Gothic and traditional Arabic architecture into a single urban space-spolia. The realism and elaboration of details emphasizes the uniqueness of the whole. The city-spolia embodies the possibility of the existence of a global culture. This is a vision that has a real basis – the holy city of Medina for Muslims in Saudi Arabia.



Fig. 5. S. Rimashevsky. Eternal aspiration.
Oil on canvas, 2001

<https://nevsepic.com.ua/art-i-risovanaya-grafika/3817-hudozhnik-sergey-rimashevskiy-58-rabot.html>

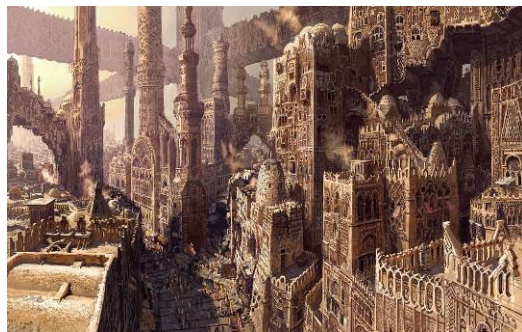


Fig. 6. L. Gapaillard. A look at the Medina, 2011
<http://laurentgapaillard.blogspot.com/>

4. Objects and architectural fragments as signs of ruins

In fine art, architectural objects, their fragments and everyday objects that have lost their original appearance, meaning and purpose, as if lost in space and time, turn into signs of time, place and non-place. Ruin, as a process and consequence of destruction, erases "the line between the whole and the fragmentary, external and internal", "is in a borderline state between the existence of a thing and the trace, shadow of this thing, this being-on-the-verge-of-non-existence" [3, pp. 84, 86]. The very presence of a thing is significant.

4.1. Ruin as a sign of time

An empty, cracked wooden window frame leaning against an old brick wall, hidden by fluffy snow and thin stalks of withered grass, becomes an expression of "the impermanence of matter in the face of eternity" (Fig. 7) [2, p. 307]. Playing with the contrasts of sunlight and the shadows of tree branches, the artist emphasizes the passage of time and life around. The invoice and texture of dilapidated materials become a sufficient basis for creating an image of time. The artist does not interpret reality, but presents it as a given. It is a narrative about the life of a thing. The old frame is a sign of the forever lost past, an object on the basis of whose existence it is impossible to recreate the whole.

4.2. Ruin as a sign of a place-event

"Space becomes a place when it is highlighted by any object or event" – real and/or imaginary, connecting it with the human world [21, p. 59]. A ruin, as a place that exists and disappears, reflects lost images and thoughts, something that is different from its objective characteristics as a physical reality.

Two space-time – the everyday and the sacred – are in one place (Fig. 8). The artist connects them with each other through a thing: wooden benches standing in the middle of a field and separated by a dirt road that goes far beyond the horizon, from where the sun should rise. Above them, high in the sky, occupying almost the entire surface of the canvas, the ghostly outlines of the central nave of the Gothic cathedral appear, seemingly a vision. The reality of an ordinary place changes, acquiring the qualities of a different being, becoming tangible. A thing (bench), extracted from a familiar context, and placed in a place alien to it, gives it a double semantic meaning and shifts ideas about the signified and the signifier.



Fig. 7. D. Chernov

A window near the wall. Paper, pencil 47 x 47cm, 2011
<https://artnow.ru/kartina-Okno-vozle-steny-hudozhnik-Chernov-Denis-482050.html>



Fig. 8. M. Kolpanowich

Cathedra. Oil on canvas, 100 x 80 cm, 2010
<https://issuu.com/asiura/docs/marcin-kolpanowicz>

4.3. *Ruin as a sign of no-place*

Traditionally, a "non-place" is a space-time of transition, uncertainty and entropy, devoid of history, tradition, myth (M. Auger) or an "abstract place" (A. Lefebvre). The artist's imagination fills the "non-place" with meaning, turning it into a "place-on-the-border" of "contact ... and interpenetration of contiguously coexisting" fragments of being in its discontinuity and continuity [22, p. 144]. This space is the time of choice for a person, "life in its constant birth and destruction", the search for the meaning of human existence [23, p. 13].



Fig. 9. M. Levandovsky

The time of heroes. Oil on canvas, 50 x 70 cm, 2015
https://www.liveinternet.ru/users/lara_rimmer/post452008103/

The arched limit (as the archetype of mother-earth, water), combining parts of two static (conscious) and dynamic (unconscious) worlds, is an ambivalent place–no-place, "the beginning or the end of any definite being", a path, a pilgrimage [22, p. 144]. A small human figure on the bow of a boat with a smoking torch-cloth at the foot of a giant collapsing portal blurs, losing its clear outlines, becomes shapeless, as if absorbed by space (Fig. 9). Crossing the border becomes an act of sacred action – the transformation of the ultimate into the infinite. In the artist's interpretation, the non-place of the arched portal reveals an important quality of breaking the sequence of events, turning into a place of loss of old and the acquisition of new stories, traditions, identities.

3. Conclusion

The accelerating processes of cultural universalization and globalization are changing the human perception and experience of space-time. The connection with the past places, cultural traditions, etc. disappears or changes, which causes the ruin to acquire a new meaning and content in modern visual art. As a "symbolic form", reflecting the dialectical unity of death and life, chaos and order, destruction and continuity of history and culture, the ruin, on the one hand, is a link connecting fragments of various historical epochs and cultural pictures of the world with each other, and on the other, embodies the virtual reality of being, a possible global culture and/or a catastrophe.

There are four main interpretations of ruins by modern artists:

- historical ruin (part of the unity of history, culture and nature, a modern interpretation of tradition and the basis for the creation of a new tradition);
- the ruin of the present and/or "lost future" (disappearance of traces of human presence, dystopia);
- semantic construction of myth and/or possible reality;
- thing (fragment) like time, place and non-place.

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Temat ruin w sztuce współczesnej

STRESZCZENIE:

Artykuł analizuje różne interpretacje pojęcia „ruina” w historii kultury. Pokazano, że ruina, jako „forma symboliczna” z jednej strony jest ogniwem łączącym ze sobą fragmenty różnych epok historycznych i kulturowych obrazów świata, a z drugiej strony ucieleśnia wirtualną rzeczywistość, globalną kulturę i/lub katastrofę. Autorki wyróżniły artystyczne interpretacje ruin we współczesnej sztuce plastycznej, takie jak: ruina historyczna; ruina teraźniejszości i/lub „utraconej przyszłości”; konstrukcja semantyczna; obiekt (fragment architektoniczny) jako znak miejsca i czasu.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:

ruina; czasoprzestrzeń; dziedzictwo architektoniczne; sztuki wizualne; rzeczywistość wirtualna