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The body as a source of beauty: on the problem of perception of a work of art

Abstract: The study is devoted to the topic of the human body beauty, which is relevant at all times. Human beauty is an eternal and favorite topic – art, aesthetics, and psychology. It is presented in sciences as a limitless field, accommodating the entire rich history of thinking about beauty as a complex phenomenon combining physics and metaphysics, logical and irrational, conscious and subconscious, including the unconscious. Today, turning to the topic of physicality is a natural reaction to the events taking place, and the changes caused by them in our attitude to the body. Our body loses the necessary connection with the living natural environment, which has always been healing for it. The author presents an individual experience of the works of art based on the recipient’s internal resources: cognitive, perceptual, intellectual. The study purpose was to apply this experience in existential psychotherapy. The study object was fine art, represented by the works of artists of different eras and trends. The study subject was the image of the human body in the artists’ works, presented explicitly or indirectly. To achieve the purpose and solve the tasks, formal-logical, hermeneutical, axiological, phenomenological, semiotic, religious-philosophical, and psychological methods were used. The author used the works of thinkers of different eras, which consider the topic of corporeality: representatives of religious philosophy and the Russian art studies school. As a result of the study, the author concludes that fine art is a full-fledged source of aesthetic knowledge, and can offer us in artistic, often symbolic forms the most important information about human nature. This information is contained in the picture as a unity of the conscious, subconscious and unconscious.

Keywords: human body, beauty of the body, aesthetics of perception, old age in art, existential psychology, nude.

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Тело как источник прекрасного: к проблеме восприятия художественного произведения

Аннотация: Данное исследование посвящено актуальной во все времена теме красоты человеческого тела. Красота человека – извечная и излюбленная тема: искусства, эстетики, психологии. Она представлена в науках как безграничное поле, которое вмещает в себя всю богатую историю размышлений о красоте как явлении сложном, сочетающем в себе физику и

метафизику, логическое и иррациональное, сознательное и подсознательное, в том числе, бессознательное. Сегодня обращение к теме телесности – это естественная реакция на происходящие события, и вызванные ими перемены в нашем отношении к телу. Наше тело теряет необходимую связь с живой природной средой, которая всегда была для него целительной. Автором представлен индивидуальный опыт прочтения художественных произведений с опорой на внутренние ресурсы реципиента: когнитивные, перцептивные, интеллектуальные. Целью исследования являлось применение данного опыта в экзистенциальной психотерапии. Объектом исследования являлось изобразительное искусство, представленное работами художников разных эпох и направлений. Предметом исследования явилось изображение человеческого тела в работах художников, представленное явно или опосредованно. Для достижения поставленной цели и решения задач исследования были применены формально-логические, герменевтические, аксиологические, феноменологические, семиотические, религиозно-философские и психологические методы. В работе были использованы в качестве источников труды мыслителей разных эпох, в которых рассматривается тема телесности: представителей религиозной философии и русской школы искусствознания. В результате исследования автор приходит к выводу о том, что изобразительное искусство является полноценным источником эстетического знания, и может предлагать нам в художественных, часто символических формах важнейшую информацию о человеческой природе. Данная информация содержится в картине как единство сознательного, подсознательного и бессознательного.

Ключевые слова: человеческое тело, красота телесного, эстетика восприятия, старость в искусстве, экзистенциальная психология, ню.

Introduction

Human beauty is an eternal and favorite topic – art, aesthetics, psychology. It is presented in these sciences as a limitless field accommodating the entire rich history of thinking about beauty as a complex phenomenon combining physics and metaphysics, logical and irrational, conscious and subconscious (including the unconscious). In this article, the continuation of the conversation about beauty is presented as an attempt to combine all three scientific fields in one process – the perception of an artwork. The relevance of the presented experience lies in its novelty and freedom, as well as in the appeal to the fundamentals. There is an artistic analysis of paintings, which has some significant differences from the usual ways of presenting material and perception. It is an attempt to individually read an artwork based on the recipient's internal resources: cognitive, perceptual, intellectual.

In present days, turning to the topic of physicality is a natural reaction to the events taking place, and the changes caused by them in our attitude to the body. This is also due to the pandemic when everyone felt how vulnerable our body can be in the face of unexplained danger, hence the increased existential discomfort. Of course, this is an increasingly exciting virtual environment for a person in which, in general, our physicality is not really required. Our body loses the necessary connection with the living natural environment, which has always been healing for it. It turns to be deprived of such a natural and sensual connection with the world of objects that the Internet world replaces today. There is another reason, influenced a person's attitude to his body. This is the dominance of false information about gender, disorienting a person, confusing his consciousness. All these events affect both the physical and mental life of a person. Art therapy is becoming increasingly popular in the modern world.

The study object was fine art, represented by the works of artists of different eras and trends.

The study subject was the human body's image in the artists' works, presented explicitly or indirectly.

The study purpose was to present an original experience of reasoning about the beauty of the human body, referring to its images in paintings of different eras. The purpose is set relating to existential psychology.

Based on the study purpose, the following tasks were formulated:

- present the body beauty as an objective property of a person, manifested in the universe in its harmony and expediency;
- analyze artistic works and present the beauty of the female body as close in essence to the beauty of nature, to show the varieties of manifestations of beauty in painting, how the substitution of genuine beauty with prettiness takes place;
- show beauty as a manifestation of love not only human, but also divine on the scale of the universe;
- present the fading beauty as a natural process in which a qualitative transformation of visible beauty takes place, using the example of different genres of painting.

To achieve the study purpose and solve the tasks, various methods related to the above-mentioned scientific disciplines were applied. Among them is dialectical one, including the principle of consistency. Analyzing an art work, researchers turn to a multifaceted world, involving consideration of various aspects of the phenomena under study, their interaction, identification of the essential and accidental.

The author used the works of thinkers of different eras, which consider the topic of corporeality: representatives of religious philosophy and the Russian art studies school.

The beauty of man in the representation of thinkers

An artwork is presented as a world harmoniously arranged and, at the same time, full of contradictions. It is a reflection of life in all the dialectical complexity of the presented plots and author's reflections. In general, the entire spectrum of the most common methods in science can be involved in this study. Perceiving an art work as an object given to a person in sensations and experiences, and its visible artistic forms, the researcher relies on a variety of methods, including formal-logical, hermeneutic, axiological, phenomenological, semiotic, religious-philosophical. It is impossible to do without the inclusion of such methods as methods of in-feeling, gestalt, existential psychology, aimed at increasing self-understanding and self-knowledge.

A painting as an art work is a kind of aesthetic space in which various worldviews and worldviews of individuals are combined. The interrelation of aesthetic and artistic is expressed, on the one hand, as scientific logical knowledge, and, on the other, as sensory, built on the human experience of the symbol and such psychological states as emotion, empathy, catharsis, expression. In general, this synthesis is the basis for the experience of perception of an art work presented in this article.

The study has researched and used material, examining the notion of the human body beauty in art history, including philosophical and religious thought. Although the notion of the human body beauty has varied through the ages, something common, indisputable, something,

uniting us all as universal knowledge, remains there. With this knowledge, a person has wealth, because the world appears in all its diversity of beauty, and man appears as the crown of creation. “Man is the measure of all things,” said Protagoras. Antiquity admired the human body and the idea of beauty was expressed in Greek thought by Plato, Aristotle, and Polycletus.

Christian apologists wrote about the human body beauty as an expediency and a harmonious arrangement. So, Gregory of Nyssa wrote about a perfectly arranged body, comparing it with a musical instrument. Everything in it is reasonable and conditioned by God’s plan. In the treatise “On the Constitution of Man”, he wrote about the main purpose of human hands and their connection with the human ability to speak. “After all, if a person were deprived of hands, then, undoubtedly, in the likeness of quadrupeds, his parts of the face would be accordingly arranged with the need to eat: the face would be elongated and thinned to the nostrils, the lips would protrude forward, calloused, hard and rough, as it is necessary to pinch grass, a tongue would be inserted between the teeth, not the same as now, but fleshy, hard and bumpy, helping the teeth chew what got into the teeth, or moist and soft at the edges, like dogs and other predators...Therefore, if the body did not have hands, then how would it form an articulate voice when the structure of the larynx would not be adapted to the needs of pronunciation” ([Nyssky, 1995, p. 25](#)). Human hands took care of food, freeing our mouths to serve the word. Man is perfect in his dispensation as long as he is like the prototype, but any deviation from it immediately reveals human ugliness.

“The body is an integral element of the personality” and “The body is the soul’s home, its garment, its instrument” can be read in John Chrysostom’s works ([John Chrysostom, 2010](#)). These statements testify to the relationship of external and internal beauty. This duality of beauty reflects the duality of man himself, with his material and spiritual essences, which are interconnected and interdependent. And this duality of human nature will never allow us to say the last word about man.

Russian religious philosophy represents beauty as God’s plan, potency in a person whose purpose is to strive for perfection. The theme of beauty is presented in Russian thinkers’ works as eschatological. The beauty mystery can never be fully solved. S. Frank wrote: “The beautiful is always an “image”, a “picture”, an unanalysed whole – an object of pure sensual contemplation, and not an analysing, fragmented thought” ([Frank, 1990, p. 424](#)). At V. Solovyov’s “aesthetic value” concept is not just a synonym for beauty, but a designation of a complex relationship of aesthetically “positive” and “negative” value existence principles with the dominance of “positive”, while preserving the trinity of Truth, Goodness and Beauty. Beauty in the mind of a thinker is a manifestation of a spiritual, good beginning in a person ([Soloviev, 1991](#)). “From a religious and metaphysical point of view,” N. Berdyaev wrote, “the path of beauty is no worse than the path of goodness, it also leads to God, and even more correctly, even more directly” ([Berdyaev, 1994, pp. 234-244](#)). Explaining this, he writes: “Beauty is a characteristic of the highest qualitative state, the highest achievement of existence, and not a separate side of existence... Beauty is the ultimate goal of world and human life...”

Attempts to explore beauty have occurred at all times. The theory of the proportions of the human body was developed: Vitruvius, Cennini, Bonaventure. Beauty became the subject of research. All these ancient ideas about beauty, as proportionality and harmony are still alive in our minds. Who today will argue with the statement of St. Augustine, who defined beauty as the

proportionality of body parts combined with a pleasant skin color? Asymmetry has always been associated with the concept of the right, beautiful. It “is the idea through which man has been trying for centuries to comprehend and create order, beauty and perfection” (Weil, 1986).

A person arranged as a whole has always been looking for the whole and could find it in art. Beauty, as the basis of any art, of course, is contained in the artist’s mind. However, it is impossible to teach her how to teach the basics of painting or sculpture. As an entity, as a living energy, it is contained in the universe itself. The beautiful body has been celebrated in art since antiquity. It is art that is able to convey beauty to us in its sublime sense. “Fine arts capture and capture a particular moment of human life in which everything internal – experiences, thoughts, memories and dreams – can be revealed only in its external, bodily expression, as mute as in dance, but motionless” (Kagan, 2001, p. 439). In the depiction of bodily beauty, fine arts have advantages over other types.

The topic of physicality is relevant at all times, and this is understandable – a person has always been interested in himself first of all. However, every epoch leaves its mark on the idea of beauty, we know about it, turning to the world of art. And this is completely understandable, a person is changeable, he cannot remain the same, he is given freedom. In this study, the topic of physicality is considered as a topic that combines the methods of two very close scientific fields: aesthetics and psychology. Here, both of these areas have united on the basis of art, or rather, in the process of perceiving an artistic work.

In general, what is presented here is an analysis of artistic works, but this analysis is an exclusively individual aesthetic process in which both our intellectual and perceptual capabilities are involved. A work of art is considered as an object directed by all its material and spiritual components to human sensations. The end result in this case is the birth of new meanings, which are exclusively the product of an individual mind and feeling.

Reflections on beauty, in relation to one’s own ideas, experiences, likes and dislikes, personal complexes – self-reflection. The ability to think independently about important things for yourself, including those related to mental problems, is the most natural way to overcome existential confusion, anxiety. Through the prism of an artwork, this study examines such important questions for a person: about the essence of beauty, about the difference between beauty and prettiness, about inner beauty. Special attention is paid to the topic of aging, bodily withering, which is particularly exciting for a person.

Thus, the beauty of man has always been presented by thinkers in unity with the beauty of the universe, as something harmoniously and expediently arranged. For most of human history, this phenomenon has been inseparable from the religious context. Divine providence was felt throughout the harmoniously and beautifully arranged world, including man. It was the arts that were able to express the inexpressible – revealing the beauty of the spiritual behind the bodily perfection. In this duality, presented to us in painting works, we find the foundations that help a person not to lose himself in such a rapidly changing world.

The beauty of the female body: a variety of contexts

What do we generally mean by the “beauty” concept when we say about a person that he is beautiful? It must be said that in art in this category, mostly women predominate. Even female artists preferred to paint their own kind. It is female beauty that has been the subject of

admiration for centuries. Why? In the ancient world there was admiring the male body, but it was mostly gods or heroes. This is a completely different beauty, detached.

The female body beauty has always been perceived as sensual. Since ancient times, it has been associated with a cult, endowing women with special properties. Over time, this idea disappeared, but it remained in the subconscious, in the feeling of a woman as a being close to the natural world. Our ancient ancestress knew about the properties of herbs and other plants. With the help of numerous conspiracies, she exorcised evil spirits, treated diseases, knew the plants and minerals secrets, and the healing properties of water. It is logical to assume that the references in fairy tales about Living and Dead Water have a real basis. These abilities of a woman, as a being endowed with special knowledge, were reflected in ancient mythology. The Slavic pantheon has more than a dozen different goddesses: Makosh, Rozhanitsa, Lada, etc. Moreover, a large number of all kinds of mythical creatures are also feminine: mermaids, Sirin and Alkonost birds, all kinds of witches, etc. The revival of the female myth is a return to female wisdom, her natural elemental beauty. The loss of the feminine essence is the loss of the masculine essence within the boundaries of the entire human society. The weakening of the natural position of a woman is a loss for all mankind, as it is directly related to male strength. The state of general harmony is lost.

The understanding of this unity of woman and nature is reflected in a special poetic form, the so-called flower metaphor. The comparison of a woman with a flower is quite common in literature. However, here we need to pay attention to how the emotional, sensual life of a man is reflected in this metaphor, e.g., in the poem dedicated to K. Balmont's orchid, everything breathes eroticism. And the flower is not a simple association with a desirable woman, but a sensual admiration for physicality.

I was in the rainforest,
I was waiting to see orchids.
Oh, those stalks are definitely snakes
The seal of sin on the petals...
...In the intertwining of trunks,
Each other strangling plants
Among the intoxicating fumes
I tore up the love color of sins.
Leaning over the kissing bowl,
In the rolling roar of cicadas
I inhaled a thin sweet poison,
Lily-shaky, multi-jet,
Like someone's tender mouth,
More tender than the ravings of a fairy in love,
This is the smell of an orchid
He gets drunk, he gets drunk, and he drinks will.

The flower is perceived by the poet as a kind of living, beautiful and at the same time mysterious entity. In this personification of a woman with a flower, there is not only a tribute to

her beauty, but also a certain philosophy of unity, where every creature on earth has its own role and at the same time, everyone is included in a single whole. Such an attitude to the surrounding reality is a man's worldview of the pagan world, where: he himself, and his dwelling with all the inhabitants, and the natural world and the cosmos represent such unity. This Unity is very well reflected in the visual and traditional art in a number of stable symbols.

Interesting Russian philosophers' thoughts about the world of plants. In E. Trubetskoy and V. Soloviev, you can read that the life of a flower is as if shackled by sleep, the flower gives its beauty without realising it. There is no feeling in him, but only the power of the elements. "The beauty of his poetic dreams about light is disturbed by the hard struggle for light" (*Trubetskoy, 1998, p. 204*). It is this elemental, strong, often dark, hidden that the sensual beauty of a woman also keeps in itself. Poets, like artists, especially acutely aware of it, find suitable metaphors from the world of plants for this. The beauty of a woman in the visual arts is always filled with mythical content (*Figure 1*).

Art here is just trying to bring back to us the knowledge of beauty as an archetype, as a collective unconscious. Jung said that the collective unconscious contains the entire spiritual heritage of human evolution, revived in the structure of the brain of each individual (*Jung, n.d.*). This is something that affects us as if unconsciously. Beauty is something given to humanity once and for all, but subject to change and at the same time, basically unchanged. You can call it an idea. At VI. We read Soloviev's "beauty is an idea really realized, embodied in the world before the human spirit, and this embodiment of it is no less real and much more significant than those material elements in which it is embodied." "Beauty, or the embodied idea, is the best half of our world" (*Soloviev, 1991, p. 41*). It is impossible not to agree with this, although Soloviev writes here about the beauty of nature.

The image of the female body in art has always been given a significant place. This is due, of course, to the stable idea of him as a beauty object. It is the woman who is the most plastic and colourful. This is a beauty akin to the beauty of nature, hence the image of numerous sleeping beauties against the landscape. Where nature often merges with a naked beautiful body through lines and colour (*Figure 2*).

It is the plasticity of a woman, the smooth curves of her body, soft movements that so appealed to the artists of the Art Nouveau era. In the work of Alphonse Mucha, we see a continuation of the myth of a woman as a natural being. The artist presented his numerous beauties in images: seasons, times of day, constellations or minerals. Modernity, having preserved this ancient knowledge about the beauty of a woman as a being of the natural world, left her only this content. Over time, this depth also goes away, and only external beauty is left to female beauty. Such beauties, who, in fact, are only a sign, something that attracts the eye, can be seen on advertisements, or magazine covers, i.e., where it is necessary to attract the attention of a potential client.

Prettiness and beauty (in the sense of beauty) are not the same thing. And this understanding is very important for a person, since it is quite easy to be deceived. G.S. Pomerants writes "Genuine beauty helps to reveal the depth of life, and beauty distracts from the depth. Beauty, as a rule, is associated with what one wants to possess" (*Pomerants, 2013, p. 65*). Nikolai Gumilev in the poem "The Sixth Sense" has very precise words that characterize real beauty – "Neither to eat, nor to drink, nor to kiss." Here there is a fine line between real beauty, which

elevates, and that which causes only animal instincts in a person. “Art, marked by the seal of beauty, tends to be young, blooming, bright, delicious. Whereas deep art does not disdain the fact that outwardly it is not so exciting” (*Pomerants, 2013, p. 68*). In connection with this problem, it is very important to introduce a person to the great art that reveals the depths. It is possible that he needs help in this, to introduce him into this world, even if it is not a bright, eye-catching art that requires from the recipient, first of all, attention and desire for this depth.

Thus, the appeal to world art informs us about the basics, the knowledge of which is already being lost in the modern world. This is the idea of the human body beauty (in painting, it is mainly a female body) as perfection. We see how in different epochs, the woman beauty was perceived differently, but the prevailing view of her is as a perfect creation of nature. Her closeness to nature is especially noticeable in paganism, where a woman was part of the natural world with its spontaneous and sensual beauty. Christianity adds to this the idea of female beauty as a receptacle of tenderness and devotion. The body beauty in art reflects different ideas about it, including such varieties of it as dark beauty associated with the pagan, demonic world. The deprivation of this phenomenon of internal content leads to the image of bodily beauty as a simple sign, a signal.

Beauty is a manifestation of love

The feeling of beauty in us is not always caused by a beautiful appearance, there is something else that makes us perceive a person as beautiful. To express exactly what attracted us to a particular person, sometimes words are not enough. And yet, it is possible to convey this with the help of a special language – symbolic. This is the language of art, where the artist of the word, or brush, tries to say about this untold by means of expression close to him. Ideas about beauty are different, but they all tell us about a living feeling. Behind the pictorial form, human history opens up to us. And, as a rule, this is a love story. It is these plots that are most often beautiful, as, indeed, youth itself is beautiful. The theme of love is a kind of manifestation of beauty. We can say that love and beauty are always side by side. This is confirmed by the well-known story “Venus and Cupid” in the world of art. Lovers see beauty in the object of their love, which others may not see at the same time.

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks,
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go –
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare

As any she belied with false compare.

(*Rollins, 1944, Sonnet 130*)

Love makes a person beautiful. But in general, everyone should remember that he was created beautiful. He should have known about it since childhood. Beauty is a very broad concept, it accommodates different meanings, and each really has one or another beauty. If a person does not feel attractive, then there are a number of reasons for this. A lot comes from childhood, the complex of appearance is associated with self-doubt, in general, with the inability to enjoy life. A joyful, smiling person is always attractive. Love is the companion of beauty, perhaps the most important. After all, our whole world is the result of love – the greatest love of the Creator and the people themselves, experiencing this love individually for each other. Love adorns a person, internally enriching his world with the beauty of feelings, the richness of emotions. And our spiritual, and accordingly the soul body, makes itself felt, illuminating the flesh with the inner light of the great feeling fullness. We love the object of adoration with all our essence. “Beauty cannot be limited to any one sense, for example, vision. All our senses have their own ability to sense beauty: not only sight, but also hearing, and smell, and taste, and touch, and there is absolutely no reason to exclude any of the existing and possible senses from here, because the beauty field is accessible to all of them” (*Bulgakov, 1994, p. 220*). It is impossible to treat the body as only a receptacle of vice, only through it does the great miracle of the beauty of the universe open to us.

Thus, it is the state of love represented in the plot of the picture that reveals to us another secret of bodily beauty – the ability to transform in the rays of love.

The beauty of withering as a revelation

It is the beauty of depth that is so unusual sometimes to our eyes, because depth is known by depth. It requires stopping and contemplation, it requires inner work. And what is depth in a person? This is his personality: unique, creative, inexpressible. It is not easy, e.g., to see beauty in an aging body. When it comes to the vegetable world, the beauty of withering is a rather aesthetically attractive plot. We can see it in landscapes and still-lives, where fading is beautifully defined by graphics and a mood of subtle sadness (*Figure 3*).

And again, plants appear in art as expressions of our emotions and reflections, now about the transience of all earthly things. In the still-lives of the *vanitas* style, a human skull was used for a reason. Here again there is a motif of unity, but already, as one for all earthly inhabitants, the end. On the one hand, it is an obvious symbol of death, the last thing that remains of a person who was once alive. On the other hand, Adam’s head is a symbol of resurrection and eternal life, depicted at the foot of the Crucifixion. The inexorable passage of time is imprinted in symbols: hourglass, solar and mechanical clocks, statues damaged by time, ruins; everything is battered, touched by decay, withering and crumbling. The transience of all sensual pleasures. Returning to the analogy of female beauty with a flower, it is worth paying attention to what a flower becomes at the end of its flowering. He turns into a fruit. Behind the withered sepals hides the seed, which is nothing but a new life. We do not see these seeds, but we see a withered plant. In the same way, in man, the fading beauty informs us that it passes into another state –

the inner beauty, spiritual – immortal. That is how it should be. And whether this happens to us depends only on ourselves.

The beauty of withering, or destruction, is also in the landscape. This love for the image of the old, decaying, can be explained by a special attitude to such subjects as to the images of our memories. Here we can also enjoy the beauty of the texture, e.g., the cracked wood of old buildings. We admire the beauty of historical ruins, admire ancient buildings, a sagging hedge overgrown with Ivan tea. In the old days there is a special charm of the outgoing, as something whole. It has already been completed and filled up. It is full of its own history, internal content (*Figure 4*).

There is a myth-making in this antiquity, which is connected with our personal memories, and with those childhood stories that acquire a special charm with age, e.g., about abandoned haunted houses. The old in the picture is sometimes used for a specific purpose – to emphasise something, to give it expressiveness. How beautiful it looks, e.g., in the landscape of an old log cabin against the background of white snow, or dazzling blue puddles, or surrounded by blooming lilacs.

The situation is more complicated with the beauty of human decay. After all, the art world has left us a lot of portraits and genre paintings depicting old age. Where is the beauty here? It turns out that she is here. In depicting the fading of human beauty, the skill and depth of feeling that are inherent in the artist are very important. After all, old age is natural, and like everything natural, it should not be ugly. Unless she's ugly on the inside.

On the eve of his 90th birthday, the famous Italian screenwriter, poet, artist, and writer Tonino Guerra wrote about old age: "... Until the age of seventy, I worshiped the grandiose works of art, the masterpieces that humanity has created. I had a lot of energy for adoration... Now I am fascinated only by natural things, only by what is created by nature. Rain or snow is always a performance. And you are no longer a spectator, not an admirer. You are a part of the universe. I learned that in old age you can experience great pleasures simply because you touch the depth of what you see. I once explained the difference between two words – look and see. Youth looks, and old age sees. When you are young, you are blinded by the world, you see the color, the material. You often look, but you do not see?

Now the world around us scares us with its attitude to old age. People are so afraid of her that they seek to destroy the traces of wrinkles from their faces. There are quite a lot of images of old age in art, especially in portraiture. It differs in its tasks, according to a certain era. For example, in Rembrandt we see a masterful image of old people, brilliantly written traces of old age. We can admire the craftsmanship here, but the old people in the paintings are of little interest to us. If there is one character on the canvas, an old man or an old woman, then you pay attention to whether the artist managed to notice, emphasise, show the age characteristics of a person, his individuality. Very expressive are the hands, the presence of senile changes on the part of the musculature, the position of the hands, poses, gestures, gaze. This is an old age that cannot inspire us, it is akin to those still-lives like vanitas.

If the canvas shows a genre scene with a wife, children and grandchildren, even with pets, then you already pay attention to what is depicted, what is shown, what these characters are doing, their relationships. The plot always brings the movement of life into the picture, gives some characteristics, calls for participation (*Figure 5*).

In addition, here we see the beauty of old age, which is reflected in human relationships. This is the beauty seen through the eyes, or rather, the heart of a loved one. Therefore, artists so often depict old people surrounded by children, or grandchildren, or elderly spouses who have preserved the beauty of their feelings until old age.

Among such works there are numerous portraits of the artist's relatives. These are fathers, or mothers, whose beauty is always felt by us when we look at the picture. It is contained in that careful attitude to the depicted, and in that tonality, in that entourage, which certainly reflect the sympathy of the master (*Figure 6*).

It seems to me that the special beauty of old age lies precisely in what this person possesses due to his age – this is: wisdom, and the ability to look down on the little things of life; these are the gifts of the years lived in the form of grandchildren. In general, the old man has always been treated with respect in many cultures. And art should serve this task to represent old age as a certain kind of wealth.

Everyone knows the tender attachment of A.S. Pushkin to his nanny. This simple woman who played a huge role in the formation of his poetic genius. The artist dedicated lines full of tender feelings to her.

A confidante of magical antiquity,
A friend of playful and sad fictions,
I knew you in the days of my spring,
In the days of joys and dreams of the original.
I've been waiting for you; in the evening silence
You were a cheerful old lady,
And she was sitting above me in a shushun,
In big glasses and with a frisky rattle... [1]

In these lines, the old nurse and the divine Muse appear as two incarnations of the same person. This beauty of the old man, of course, was perceived by the poet in a special way, through the prism of spiritual attachment. And although it is not known for certain what Arina Rodionovna looked like, but the feeling that permeates Pushkin's poems and memories of her draws only pleasant features in our imagination. In the painting by the artist Yuri Neprintsev, the light falling on the nanny's face seems to come not from the lamp, but from her very heart (*Figure 7*).

How to correlate the concepts of "old age" and "beauty"? This opportunity is given to us by life itself, in which everyone will have their own old people. Art, only emphasises this, snatches out of life these plots in which we do not see an ugly old age. Frequently encountered portraits of artists, people of the world of science, art, are, as a rule, images of beautiful people. They are beautiful with their inner world, which is always interesting to the artist, they are beautiful with their individuality (*Figure 8*).

Why is individuality, uniqueness of a person (including external) not a sign of beauty? If we see an old man in front of us, but extremely interesting in communication, beautifully and interestingly telling, beautifully presenting himself, open and friendly, we no longer notice his

age. And we do not even remember about it, because the charm of his inner world captures us and switches our gaze.

There is another ability to relate to the world and to oneself, including, which makes a person attractive, is humour. A person who knows how to joke beautifully and acutely is always interesting and charming. He is lively, dynamic, and does not feel old at all. In D. Likhachev and M. Bakhtin, you can read about laughter, as a person's ability to get out of any difficult state, albeit in a short, but free space. Laughter gives a person a sense of dynamism. This is a kind of defensive reaction, a form that helps in overcoming fear and uncertainty. And of course, laughter unites people. Hence the special appeal of people who know how to make a joke, including on themselves. In Russian culture, laughter is a common phenomenon. The laughing culture existed in Ancient Russia, and included: ritual and spectacular forms, verbal, etc.

You can also laugh at old age as a condition that should not be taken too seriously. Old age is as natural as youth, as any period of a person's life – it contains both joys and sorrows. It depends on our attitude to it, in what colours we will paint it. In the art world, you can also see a similar view of old age, through a joke and laughter (*Figure 9*).

In numerous works by the artist Leonid Baranov on the theme of old age, there is just this laughter, but the laughter is kind. This special attitude to this age is felt not only in the fact that its main characters are charming and have good feelings for each other. There are several paintings where the artist depicts an old man on an enlarged scale in relation to the rest of the world. There is an obvious mythmaking here, and old age takes on a new context – as something towering over everyone, something very significant.

Thus, in the art of painting, a deep secret of the inexhaustible beauty of man is revealed to us. Belonging to the corporeal world of nature, we preserve our beauty in our descendants, realise it in our deeds, and our conversion of our spiritual component to Eternity is manifested in a feeling of love, in those beautiful inner states that shine through our bodily shell.

Discussion

This topic was presented at the festival on the psychology of physicality, held by the Institute of Practical Psychology "IMATON". The author's purpose is to present a variant of a very natural in its simplicity, therapeutic action – viewing works of fine art, in which, one way or another, the beauty of the human body is reflected. A similar trend in psychotherapy, which is based on the process of aesthetic perception of art, refers to existential psychology. Turning to one's own mental and emotional resources is an individual creative process, and art at the same time serves as the harmonious environment in which this process unfolds. The importance of art therapy is increasing in the modern world. The experience presented in this article is one of the variants of this psychotherapeutic influence. Existential psychology is based on a philosophical approach and is a process of searching for the value and meaning of life. Art opens up new opportunities here, turning to the internal resources of a person. This study is a possible vector for the development of the presented experience.

The problems requiring further development lie both in aesthetics and existential psychology. They are put before a person by reality itself. Consequently, the following areas require further development:

- 1) individual perception of a work of art as an effective technique for use in existential psychotherapy;
- 2) “beauty” in the variety of aspects of its manifestation: ontological, axiological, eschatological, art criticism, etc. – as an object of perception.

Conclusion

Thus, the human beauty has always been understood by thinkers of all times and peoples indivisibly with the beauty of the universe, as something harmoniously and expediently arranged. Art turned out to be able to express the inexpressible – behind the bodily perfection, it reveals to us the beauty of the spiritual. In this duality, represented in the works of painting, we find those foundations that help a person not to lose himself in such a rapidly changing world, the knowledge of which is gradually being lost. The world of art reveals to us the beauty of the human body (and in painting, it is mainly a female body), as perfection. We see how in different epochs, the beauty of a woman was perceived differently, but the prevailing view was as a perfect creation of nature. Beauty, as an essential phenomenon, is considered in painting as a kind of beautiful and non-disappearing quality of a person. It is love that reveals the secret of the imperishable beauty of man.

A world without beauty is impossible. So, she has her own purpose in the universe. And this goal is connected with our inner world. The view of beauty, especially of the human body, is changeable, but beauty does not disappear from this, does not disintegrate into the smallest atoms of individual preferences. It is and will be until the end of the world. And this once again informs us about her involvement in the Eternal. It is this property of beauty that can elevate us, as owners of not only physicality, but also spirituality. There is a beauty of the flesh – it is in everything; it is addressed to our sensuality and makes us related to the world of the plant and animal world. However, the duality of human nature gives him a sense of another beauty – High! This High in beauty cannot be expressed by any verbal and visual means, but we can feel it with our spiritual senses and enjoy it, and strengthen ourselves, and even improve. Art gives us this opportunity – to see the beauty of others, and our own, to learn to find it everywhere and enjoy this simple natural joy. In fact, in art we have to double the beauty, and we have the opportunity to triple it.

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Notes:

- [1] The author's translation of the A.S. Pushkin's rhyme "A Confidante of Magical Antiquity".

Appendix



Figure 1. Oleg Gurenkov. Water Lily



Figure 2. A. Mylnikov. Morning



Figure 3. K. Klein. An untitled postcard



Figure 4. V. Brzhezovsky. Village idyll



Figure 5. To. Makovsky. They cook jam



Figure 6. D. Zhilinsky. Under the old apple tree



Figure 7. Yuri Neprintsev. Pushkin in the village of Mikhailovsky



Figure 8. I. Repin. Portrait of Stasov



Figure 9. L. Baranov. Once upon a time there was a gaffer and grandma