

**DOI: 10.7596/taksad.v7i4.1816**

**Citation:** Mukhametzyanov, R., Martynova, Y., Martynov, D., & Mingalieva, L. (2018). Cultural and Historical Roots of Performance Art. *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*, 7(4), 62-68. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v7i4.1816>

## Cultural and Historical Roots of Performance Art

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### Abstract

The 20th century is marked by colossal progress not only in science and technology, but also in art. Since the first half of 20th century there has been a gap observed between traditional and modern art. Modern art includes a variety of forums, biennale, museums of contemporary art, art space, etc. To date, performance is called all sorts of shows taking part in front of viewers. This can include the newfangled music shows, and various installations in museums, DJs sets in clubs and music festivals. Today, this art does not lag behind the rapidly developing communication industry, and at the same time resists the impact of technologies that help to distance people from each other. Performance, in spite of insufficient knowledge, is a popular type of contemporary art. Thus, the performance is introduced into the modern society, leaving behind itself food for reflection. The paper is of interest to researchers of contemporary art and the evolution of cultural phenomena in the 20th century. The work is based on a combination of historical methods, including historical-genetic and historical-comparative.

**Keywords:** Cultural history, Contemporary art, Performance art, Happening, Ready-made.

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## 1. Introduction

Performance as a means of expression was recognized in the 60-70's of 20th century in America. Its "invention" is attributed to these years, mentioning that the origins come from representatives of Dada, who organized scandalous and shocking exhibitions, as well as from futurists, who were characterized by publicly stating manifestos and organizing futuristic evenings. Dadaists are the forerunners of happenings and environmental events, as their actions were unplanned for the majority of cases, designed to stun the viewer, involving him/her in the co-creation process.

The French philosopher and critic J. Deleuze writes that the first person who carried out the deconstruction of the text to the materials of his own consciousness and his own art was A. Rimbaud [5]. The French poet and one of the founders of symbolism strove to learn new things, to go beyond what is permissible, and also expressed complete freedom of search.

## 2. Methods

The research is based on general scientific principles:

Historism, which, within the framework of the system approach, makes it possible to use source research, chronological and art research methods of conducting research.

The research also used historical and genetic and biographical methods. The method of analysis and synthesis was used to study the subject literature, sources.

## 3. Results

An important element for the appearance of the performance was the aesthetics of the ready-made things. This term is associated with the artist M. Duchamp, who demonstrated his works as objects of utilitarian use, exposing them at an art exhibition as works of art. The subject, stopping to perform its utilitarian functions and included in the context of the art space, began to reveal some new meanings unknown to either traditional art or the routinely utilitarian sphere of being. One of the main avant-garde works of M. Duchamp is the urinal. The artist did not appear in the appearance of the work, so he committed a zero creative act. Art became an action, after which a thing or gesture began to exist in a different capacity. In addition, for the first time there was a protest against art as an "art thing for storage". For Dada, art is the next step towards the destruction of the boundaries of art, the liberation from norms.

A futuristic performance-opera by Aleksei Kruchenykh and Mikhail Matiushin "Victory over the Sun" became a provocative and epoch-making work in the first half of the 20th century. The idea of the performance consisted in the victory of advanced technology and science over nature, as well as in the fall of the old "world", old traditions. K. Malevich was the creator of costumes and scenery [2].

"The Manifesto of Surrealism" can be considered a starting point in the creation of a new trend in art – surrealism [10]. The author of the manifesto is the poet and writer A. Breton. The manifesto explained that the basis of surrealism is "a belief in the higher reality of certain associative forms that were neglected before, the belief in the omnipotence of dreams, in the disinterested play of thought". Surrealism became a way of life and thought, the meaning of which was in blurring the boundaries between sleep and reality. Thanks to these definitions, it became possible to understand the interpretation of the performances, which carried an attempt by their words and actions to completely immerse themselves in the image of their fantasies. "The Manifesto of Surrealism" is an instruction to impart a form of eternity, intended to be, first of all, a creative word. A. Breton offers a new method -

"The Automatic Message". It resembled the teachings by Freud on the unconscious behavior of man. Freudism was the basis of surrealism.

Among the Z. Freud's admirers was the artist Salvador Dali. Dali saw in surrealism no intima, politics, aesthetics and everything else. There was only creativity, thanks to which something new appears. Dali said about the prohibition of the realistic method and perfection of a plot: "If you understand your picture - you better not write it. You must do your work as if in a half-sleep, lulled by the light breezes of memories ..." [9]. These recommendations correspond to the notion that the work created by the surrealist artist "is between reality and consciousness", i.e., is neither a true reflection of reality, nor a reproduction of its image. Almost all the artist expressed something wild, something outrageous for sensible people. He compromises religion and atheism, and Nazism and antifascism, and the worship of art traditions, and avant-garde rebellion against them, and faith and disbelief in man. Outrageousness, shock, unthinkable things - all this was the goal of surrealism.

In the 1970s, an era of pop art aroused, founded by E. Warhol. The famous Andy Warhol's "Factory", who was considered his creative corner, collected the entire bohemian get-together. For artists, musicians, poets and actors, Warhol's factory was a place of permissiveness. Guests called it "Silver Factory" because of its peculiar design. The rooms were completely painted in silver, there were foil wraps, as well as silver balloons that adorned the ceiling [11]. This was a kind of creation of a new modern art.

Despite this, the Factory was a commercial enterprise where the paintings were made using silk screen printing technology, or as it is also called, screen printing. It was thanks to this technique that E. Warhol could produce dozens of images in a short time. In 1960, the master produced a series of paintings depicting a can of Campbell Soup, which wasn't duly appreciated [8]. Warhol made an attempt to combine high art with a commodity of mass consumption. The method of screen printing put art on a commercial basis. It became available to all [8]. Warhol identified the relationship of economic and cultural mechanisms in art. The value of a work of art is determined by its cost, as well as the prestige of the author.

Happening is the most common artistic form in contemporary art. In English, "happening" means what is happening at the moment. Happening is a certain form of acts, actions, when artists are trying to attract viewers to the action, although the script is unknown to virtually anyone. Happening is based on unpredictability, which allows you to remove the boundary between the artist and the viewer. It is a theatrical performance which goal is an event and an action. Happening can occur on various sites. This kind of art requires no necessary presence of communications, walls or ceiling. Its implementation can occur both in the halls of galleries and museums, and in the urban environment, in nature; it involves the public, reacting to what is happening. For the artists the reaction of the audience, the onset of their creative origin is important.

The poet, music expert and composer John Cage in 1952 created one of his famous works "4.33", which means the duration of silence [2; 3]. Cage has several times expressed different interpretations of his composition, including that he wants to hear (and listen) all the other sounds of the world around them during these four minutes thirty-three seconds of silence, and that this will be music in the composition. There is an opinion that Cage put the true meaning of this composition in one sentence: "I have nothing to say [as a composer], and I say this" [3, p.109].

A. Kaprow is considered to be the creator of happenings. In 1959, in the gallery "Ruben" in New York, Kaprow arranged a show called "Eighteen happenings in six parts". Viewers could interpret happening as they like [2, p.169]. It is worth noting that Kaprow himself called his presentation "a live art" [12, p.24].

The development of performance in the second half of 20th century is associated with the name of the artist I. Klein. I. Klein put forward a claim to create art from nothing. In 1958, at the opening of Klein's exhibition in Paris, the artist "sold" what he labeled the words "zones of non-material picturesque sensitivity" - that is, empty walls. He asked only for gold for his "goods," since, according to him, the highest quality of the non-material must be paid for by the qualitative material [7]. This was the first performative act in art (that is, a zero artistic action giving complete information). The interest of this act is that here the artist "dressed himself in the toga of the seller of "great intangible values", while remaining the creator, and at the same time, demonstrating the highest pilotage" not to allow mass culture to absorb the achievements of great art, creating no works of art. This action has become a powerful impetus for the emergence of performance art. And in conceptualism, performance acts specifically as an art form, and the term is fixed firmly in the artistic process.

In 1960 in the Gallery of Modern Art in Paris, the famous "anthropometric" performance took place. The essence of this performance was that three nude models, applied a blue paint on their bodies and leaned their bodies against clean canvas. During the performance, the string orchestra played "Monotone Symphony", which lasted 20 minutes and consisted of one continuous tone. The artist was in a black tuxedo, and the invited spectators – in the evening dresses. Impressions on canvas, obtained as a result of Klein's "anthropometric" actions, compiled his famous series of pictures ANT, some of which are exhibited today in many museums of the world [4].

In the 1960s, the performance was gaining popularity, its form of performance-action was developing, where the performance was part of the process of creating a work of art. These were the projects of many artists, among which were Cage and Cunningham, "neodadists", "new realists", members of "E.A.T." (Experiments in Art and Technology) [6].

Environment is one of the types of art practices of the last third of the 20th century. It is a fully organized by the artist, a holistic non-utilitarian art space or composition that encompasses the viewer like a real environment. Thus, the environment organizes the advent of non-utilitarian art into "real" space. The founders of the environment in the second half of the 20th century are J. Sigal and E. Kinholz - American sculptors who created compositions of a naturalistic type. Their works looked like stage spaces, filled with things and figures of people, where elements of grotesque and delirious fantasies were brought in. Special attention in the field of environmental design deserves the work of J. Cunellis. He is the creator and main representative of the Italian direction of "poor art" (Arte povera), which programmatically built its objects and installations from the things of "poor people", old household materials: old and ragged clothes, pieces of furniture, ropes, etc. [12, p.25].

It is worth noting the feature of the environment as an artistic practice, consisting in the desire to "survive" an environment created on the basis of "manual" or industrial creativity. Creating an effect of actualization of space, which is regarded as an artificial environment, with the help of a collage of things and people, artists try to maximize the scene, finally destroy the boundary between life and reality [1, p.5].

Fluxus is an artistic movement that emerged in Germany in the 1960s. The name means "flow" in Latin. Fluxus includes elements of performance and happening. The main principle of fluxus is madness, elevated to the extreme degree of hoax, spontaneity, the rejection of any restrictions. The main thing in the fluxus was to create using your own body, space, a paradoxical situation defying logical explanation. "It was the situational nature of the fluxus that influenced the further degeneration of a simple experiment" in the style of the fluxus "into performance" [2, p.190]. The first pure, or "classical", performances belonged to conceptualists. This was the direction that formed the form-building principles, the basic "genres" of the performance.

A fluxus flow consisted of actions, close to happening of objects, but filled with "shock provocation" [8]. The basic principle is insanity, spontaneity, rejection of any restrictions. The main thing was to create a paradoxical situation when using your own body, space, things, not motivated by the logic of everyday existence. It was the situational nature of the fluxus that influenced the further degeneration of the simple "Fluxus-style" experiment into performance [7].

A prominent representative of fluxus is Joseph Beuys. The German artist Joseph Beuys believed that art must change the way people live. He said that "it is necessary to bring about a revolution in human thinking". The artist tried to merge with nature, using natural objects and materials in his performances [2, pp.170-185].

Conceptual performance initially exists between the idea and the construction of a visual object (which was called the "concept"). The art act is to name/show this object at the right time, place and situation [7].

#### **4. Discussion**

Such a complex and multidimensional phenomenon as a performance in the context of contemporary art has repeatedly aroused the interest of Western researchers [4; 6; 8]. Actually, the work of R. Goldberg [7] was the first study of performances. In Russia, after the 1990s, not only the performance practices have spread, but also theoretical works have appeared studying various performance practices [1; 2; 12].

#### **5. Summary**

In the West, the conceptual performance ends in 1980, when conceptualism itself begins to interact with semantics. Performance begins to strive for a new relationship with the audience and art. This happened through irony, the transformation of performance in auto-parody, both in the direction of art, and in social and political reality, through violent breaches of social norms, through the transgression of individual personal boundaries.

The key thing for the classical performance of 1970-1980 was to get rid of all the temporary. In 1980-1990, the performances put the viewer in conditions of introspection, departure from the stormy emotions that are brought up by mass culture. While art gestures that violate the artistic norm should cause healthy laughter - that is, a healthy reaction to their own violent emotions, a return to the real, actual world, with the help of a mad artist.

Thus, the performance for a Western artist becomes an extravagance, an artificial game he/she can start and stop at any moment.

#### **6. Conclusions**

The art of performance is a little studied and controversial phenomenon. Nevertheless, knowing the history of the performance, it is possible to single out 3 directions, as a result of which the product took the form of a performance:

1. Dadaism (1910-1920), aesthetics of the "ready-made" by Marcel Duchamp. It is the time when the artist had the right not to create a new work, but to use a ready-made thing as a work of art.
2. Pop art (1950 - late 1970s). Pop art implies the expansion of the boundaries of art. The artist understands that he/she can use gestures and actions to broaden the boundaries of his/her work, as well as perceive the creative process as a game, in order to convey his thoughts to the public.

3. Conceptual art (classical performance) - fluxus (existential performance). The main idea of the existential performance is the refusal of various constraints, as well as the creation of an illogical in everyday life, strange situation, with the help of one's body and the surrounding space. All this should create a sense of madness.

## 7. Acknowledgements

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

## Footnotes

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