

Timur Novikov.

## RESISTANCE AND RENAISSANCE: CLASSICAL TRADITIONS OF ART AND THE HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY

( commentaries to the exhibition in the State Russian Museum, 1994).

Living at the end of the 20-th century and of the 2-nd millenium we can at last have a look at the history of art of this almost coming to an end period. It is quite easy to notice the most prominent event of this newest history - revolution in art. The West-European art has finally lost such important since the Renaissance concept as beauty of the man, the real world, the nature. Revolution against the all-European aesthetics has won a centenarian war in art. But if we remember the development of the prominent patriarch of this revolution Kasimir Malevitch, his last works would be nothing but repentance. The artist "revives" the same renaissance traditions, which he himself desperatly destroyed. And even earlier, at the dawn of this revolution, in the middle of the 19-th century the photography appeared, which became "the Noah's Ark" of the beautiful.

If we remember discussions around the impressionism, than we could discover that one of the arguments of "the revolutionaries" was "being unlike a photograph", the photography was accused of the "callousness", natural beauty easily reproduced "mechanically" was replaced with beauty "non-reproducible" by a photographer, and this process redoubled as the possibilities of the photography developed. At the same time the impressionists exhibited in Nadar's Gallery, Nadar being one of the patriarchs of the world photography, many of the artists began to photograph themselves. Not only they did. Emperor Nicholas II, Leonid Andreev, Emil Zola, Lewis Carroll, Alfred Nobel ( that is an endless list) were engaged in photo, to say nothing about artists! In fact Leonardo da Vinci, Albrecht Durer, Rafaell Santi not only dreamed of such equipment, but also invented it. "The magic lantern", " the camera obscura" were used by artists from time immemorial. When "chemical" technology of fixing the image appeared in 1830s, artists took up the chemicals at once. Since fortieth years "the pictorial" ( picturesque) photography has arisen. Dagger David Octavius Hill, Nadar, A. Denier, Oscar Gustav Rejlander, Henry Pich Robinson, Adam Solomon, L. Plakhov were not only pioneers of photoart, but painters, sculptors, drawers as well; and Ivan Kramskoy and Arkhip Kuindgy worked as retouchers. In 1856 V.V. Stasov, a great lover and collector of photos, undertook the first study of photography as an art. An artist and a founder of Scotland Academy of Art, David Octavius Hill made photo pictures from 1843 till 1848, he came back to painting afterwards. Bernard Show wrote in 1910: " Octavius Hill returned to painting because photo technique appeared to be more difficult to him". Andrew Denier influenced deeply on Russian painting of the 2-nd half of the 19-th century, he took the lead in using photography in Russian fine arts.

Nadar ( Gaspar Felix Tournaschon, 1820-1910 ) was the first one who used artificial lighting in photography in 1858. He was a hero of his friend's Jul Wern novels, flied a baloon, took photos of Sara Bernard, Teofil Gautier, Camil Corot, Edward Manet, Alexander Dumat, Honore Domier and many others ( see "The Portrait of a Lady", 1859).

Oscar Gustav Rejlander since 1857 created complex compositions printed from plenty of negatives. The record was 67 negatives for one photocomposition. A friend of Oscar Rejlander, Henry Pich Robinson was engaged in "mixing" as well, but it was he who started to make staging photos with artificial landscapes and professional models. He was sure that it is necessary "to allay all ordinary and ugly".

France Galfstengle was the first one who applied retouching, which he considered necessary for an idealization of the image.

But the "happy" period of love of art and photography came to an end, and in 1856 Charles Baudelaire has specified its "place" - that is to document. He attacked the photographers, who tried to use classical aesthetics, in his article: "Let it (the photography) keep ruins from oblivion". And the photography went in for the latter. In 1852 three brothers - Romualdo, Giuseppe and Vittorio Alinari - founded an archives, for which they took photos of the works of art, landscapes, historical monuments, documentary pictures. But many pictures of Alinari brothers became selfvaluable, as Apollo showed at the exhibition. In the 2-nd half of the 19-th century great attention was granted to technological search. In this sense two works represented at the exhibition are curious enough, they are the "Micelangelo" by an unknown author, an aquarelle done on paper with the use of potassium dioxide, and the "Palace Interior" by an unknown author, a silver print on black lacquer, which makes it possible to perceive a negative as a positive.

But the 19-th century came to an end, Europe has taken a great interest in archeology, not only Troy was discovered, but also Babylon, Egypt and other cultures of Ancient times, artists were enthusiastic about Japan and Africa. Traditions alien to Antiquity, which was basic for European art, superseded classics. Artists turned to modernism, and photography could develop its love for antiquity, being on the side of the road of art. In 1878 baron Wilhelm von Gloeden comes to Taormine and opens alive "Arcadia" to himself. His photos are beyond time - only his method reminds of the age of technology. This "inconspicuous" photographer could be considered as a symbol of resistance to modernism. A friend of Gabriel d'Annunzio, Oscar Wilde, Zinaide Gippius, Dmitry Merzhkovsky, he for a long time gave no peace to "the enemies of Antiquity": the fascists-futurists destroyed his works, Josef Beyus "drew them all over". ( See the exhibited works of the end of the 19-th century - the beginning of the 20-th century, including the famous copy of the painting by Ippolitus Flandren). Photo by Otto Schmidt "Bacchus and Bacchante", a part of his co-authorship with Ernst Schneider in the work "The Human Image and Its Beauty" (1907) belongs to the same period. Nothing here reminds of "isms" that raged in Europe at the time. Being apart of all the storms, the photography started on one of the most interesting "romances" - it "mixed up" with fashion. Fashion industry originated at the same time with photography and needed it. In fact the "Avignon Girls" by Pablo Picasso did not suit the advertisement. Beautiful models, rejected by artists moved to photographers and designers. Many prominent experts of photography worked for fashion magazines ( Adolf de Meer, George Patt Lines, Cecil Byton ), they also photographed the ballet, which kept love to a human being for long.

The image of the faun from Diaghilev's " The Afternoon Rest of the Faun" is represented twice at the exhibition, that is Nizhinsky by baron Adolf de Meer (1913) and Serge Lifar, photographed by George Patt Lines in 1933. Certainly, Hollywood also needed beautiful

images of idealized heroes. In the portrait of Rudolf Valentino, done by Hollywood portrait classic Donald Bidd Case in 1921, we see the image, which is much closer to Rembrandt's, than to the images of "mainsream" painters or to those of "ism"-painters of all kinds. The portrait of the actress done in Bruno studio in 1931 is more simple, but not less significant. In the years of World War II the portraits of prominent dancer and ballet-master Konstantin Sergeev were made. The authors Mikhail Gershman and E. Lesov, who then worked at the Kirovsky Theatre, reproduced perfectly that romantic aristocratic hero, who had nothing in common with a worker and a collective farmer, and was preserved by miracle in the classical ballet. Cold war began in the post-war Europe. The war in art has cooled also. Finally having won in the West, the modernists have calmed down and considered the classics dead and consequently harmless. The discourse finally changed to "intramodernist" problems. Photography still remained a genre of the second grade, and therefore more independent of criticism. The "romance" with fashion got even stronger at that time. The photographer and the fashion designer grew closer to each other. Their common platform was the beauty of art. The classical heritage "hidden" in photography was longing out. New renaissance was imminent. In this sense the works by a German Herbert List looked prophetic. He photographed antique torsoes as though they have just been dug out of the earth, with stuck sand that gave extraordinary vitality and made you feel as a discoverer of the Antiquity during the Renaissance epoch in Italy. Herbert List was a friend of Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Juan Miraut, Hans Arp, Jean Cocteau, Giorgio Morandi, G. de Kiriko, but his attitude to the world and his purposes in creative work are strikingly different. Similarly to List, Bruce Weber is "Pigmalion-like" at the exhibition. His two "American Youths" seem alive even without arms. Bruce Weber is a star in pop-culture. That was a new stage in the development of the status of a photographer. The classics revival in photography proceeded. Working in the field of fashion, the photographers themselves became fashionable. A lot of authors in the exhibition illustrate this tendency. Besides Weber, the represented Greg Gorman ( Irena and Afrika ) and Skrebnesky ( a torsoe ) are American stars. We can safely relate as "fashionable" the Frenchmen Pierre and Jill. They actually strongly influenced modern culture, using actively and without fear of vulgarity the methods of "pictorialism" - scenes with artificial nature, retouch. The exhibited works from the series "The Saints" - Gertrude The Great, The Saint Peter ( Mark Almond ), Madonna In Tears - show the religious aspect of their creation. Another tendency in the classics revival is the interest to it of "dandies" themselves, they return to classics through photography. A lot of authors at the exhibition illustrate this tendency. Carl Lagerfeld, chief designer at "Chanelle" at present, represented photos in the Gallant Age style, Thierry Murgén is more "modern", his "Mukhina" (1986) reminds of Piranese to me personally, though so subjective point of view can be challenged, for the artist obviously meant to be a futurologist. Janny Versache, a well known Italian designer, is represented by ceramics. Versache's decorative dishes are examples of the other "crack" from which the classics pushes forward. Joseph Beyus was also inspired by the Italian Renaissance, Studio of Young Authors from USA is an example of teamwork of a photographer and a stylist-designer. The work of Robert Mapletorne (1981), who is the classic of the world photography now, deserves special attention. A selfportrait as Gorgon is a composition which is more likely resembles of Caravaggio, than of the artist's friends - Endy Wharhol, Kit

Hering, J.-M. Baskia. Peter and David Mac Dermott and Mac Gug are also bright representatives of resistance to Modernism, who came out from East-Village. Being close to conceptualists, they approached to the resistance in a conceptual way too. Living and working in New York, they try to use things made before World War I, they wear old clothes, write old dates on their works (1912, 1913 at the exhibition), they take photos using antquarian cameras, and make use of aquarelle with potassium dioxide, the technique popular a hundred years ago. A special place in the process of revival takes "The Manipulator", fashion and photo magazine, which became a megaphone of the classics in modern fashion. Russian "dandies" keep up with this growing love to the classics. Sergei Kuryokhin shows a selfportrait in "ancient" style, Sergei Bugaev (Afrika) shows a diptich "Rescuing of the Classics", Georgy Guryanov, known as a member of "Kino" rock group, a St. Petersburg artist, shows his canvas "A Thrower of a Spear", a fashion designer Konstantin Goncharov represents a collection "The Classical Ballet". Decorative art based on the classical photography is represented at the exhibition as well. Panels by T. Novikov " Salomea and Herodiada With The Head Of John The Baptist" (1992) and "The Cupid", the Aphulei's "Golden Ass", a theatrical project by Andrei Medvedev. Moscow school is represented by Topolskie, their photos are based on academic staging of the 18th-19th centuries, Aidan Salakhova shows a photographic still-life, Andrei Bezukladnikov - a portrait "Pharaon", computer photos are by Anatoly Zhuravlev.

Timur Novikov, 1994