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The nature of the image in the plastic arts of ancient Greece during the Classical period (the 5th century BC)

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Abstract

The article carries out an analysis of the nature of the artistic image in the art of ancient Greece, which gave the highest examples of classical art. The Classical period was the time when the artistic laws of all the art of classical antiquity were developed, which determined the development of the plastic arts of both Greece and Rome, as well as, in many respects, the norms of European aesthetics in general. The author of the article makes an attempt to examine the painting, sculpture, and architecture of that period in order to analyze the nature of the artistic world reflected in the art of the Early and High Classical periods. The images of Greek art show the power of anthropocentric art, which abandons the old pictorial schemes in favor of observation, mimetic accuracy, and harmony. The plastic arts of ancient Greece during the Classical period focused on the image of man comprehensively developed, harmonious, embodying the highest ideals of the universe. The world is considered to be commensurate with man, and man is depicted in the fullness of his existence. This required the visual arts to develop a realistic form, mimetic observation of a person, and knowledge of plastic anatomy.

Introduction

It is not for nothing that the art of ancient Greece remains an example of the aesthetic development of reality in the history of mankind. The impact of Greek art is due to its prominent position in the general history of ancient art. In Greek art, there was a transition from the motor-tactile perception of the world, which reflected the art of more ancient eras, in particular, the art of ancient Egypt, to the optical one. The art of ancient Greece and—more broadly—antiquity reflected the development of man's gnoseological needs and abilities [Andreev, 1981].

The Classical period of the development of ancient Greek art, which occurred in the 5th century BC, reflected the heyday of Greek culture, the center of which was Athens. It was at this time that the philosophers Anaxagoras, Socrates, and Protagoras expressed their ideas; Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides wrote their plays; Herodotus and Thucydides wrote their works; Hippocrates worked; the Olympic Games were held regularly. This was the time of the highest heyday of the Greek polis.

Research results

The plastic arts of Ancient Greece are a product of multifaceted, vibrant, and influential ancient Greek culture. The properties of the art of ancient Greece stem from the properties of this civilization, which are defined differently by researchers. Thus, B.R. Vipers writes that ancient Greek culture, and hence art, is characterized by the following: irrefutable logic; a sense of proportion; the recognition of aesthetic intentions; agonality, i. e., competitiveness and the struggle of opposites, involving personalization and authorship; eideticity, i. e., "the tendency towards clarity, imagery… a plastic, bodily bulge" [Vipers, 1972, 10]. Speaking about the evolution of culture, experts point out the connection between the development of society and art: "The deified oriental despot was replaced in the arena of history by the citizen of the Greek democratic state, with his developed personality, with his rationalism, with his aspiration for order and classification" [Osmankina, 2009, 209].

Greek painting and vase painting have the same artistic principles: vase painting has been preserved better, and it makes it possible to judge monumental painting [Chebotareva, 2019]. Their common task is to decorate the plane with a contour and a silhouette. Their paths began to diverge only in the classical era: vase painting remains silhouetted, and monumental painting went towards plastic images and coloristic diversity. Although the paintings of Polygnotus and Micon, the first artists of the Classical period, were close to graphics, painted drawings—they had only four colours at their disposal (red, yellow, white, and black with a bluish tint), the concept of landscape is alien to them, there is practically no chiaroscuro [Vipers, 1972, 142]. Chiaroscuro began to be used by Apollodorus, who is considered the founder of easel painting, i. e., painting that is independent, not subordinate to architecture. He was called the Skiagraph, i. e., a "shadow painter"; the struggle between his direction and the old contour painting led both to the separation of painting from graphics, and, e. g., to the opposite creative principles of Rembrandt and William Blake as an artist. The depiction of the human environment, background, landscape is associated with the discoveries of the artist Agatharchus, one of the stage designers of Aeschylus.

However, the central perspective remained unknown to the Greeks of the Classical period. As B.R. Vipers notes, "Greek painting was not spatial, but plastic painting. It depicted not space, but only bodies, individual objects in space. That is why Greek classical painting does not know the technique of reducing objects as they move away from the viewer's eye and does not like depicting a shadow" [Ibidem, 148]. The preserved frescoes reflect the artist's look that seems to move along the people,

depicting each of them in detail and on a single plane, and the background remains only partially painted.

Greek art developed in several different ways in different regions, but this development went in a general direction [Bernhard, 1980; Bernhard, 1986]. Representatives of various poleis built their treasuries decorated with sculptures near the famous oracle at Delphi [Michałowski, 1977]. In general, Greek art focused on its main subject—man: "Gradually overcoming the conventionality of the style of archaic art—frontality in the depiction of figures, their solemn immobility, exquisite ornamentation in details, Greek artists are achieving more and more simplicity, naturalness and vitality in artistic images" [Rivkin, 1972, 113-114].

Speaking about the Greek sculpture of the 5th century BC, one should bear in mind that only few sculptures have been preserved; as a rule, we get an idea of it from Roman marble copies, often from bronze originals [Lyubimov, 1980, 192]. However, it is difficult to cover all genres of sculptural creativity; in particular, making ritual masks and herms [Fokeeva, 2019; Kulishova, 2015; Panteleev, 2015], as well as kouroi—the first anthropomorphic sculptures of Greece [Buzunova, 2012]—goes back to antiquity.

The Greek sculpture of the Classical period moved away from the lightness and smiling expressions of the Archaic period; the Blond Boy's head found on the Acropolis of Athens is a characteristic representative of the new, "severe" style (Figure 1).
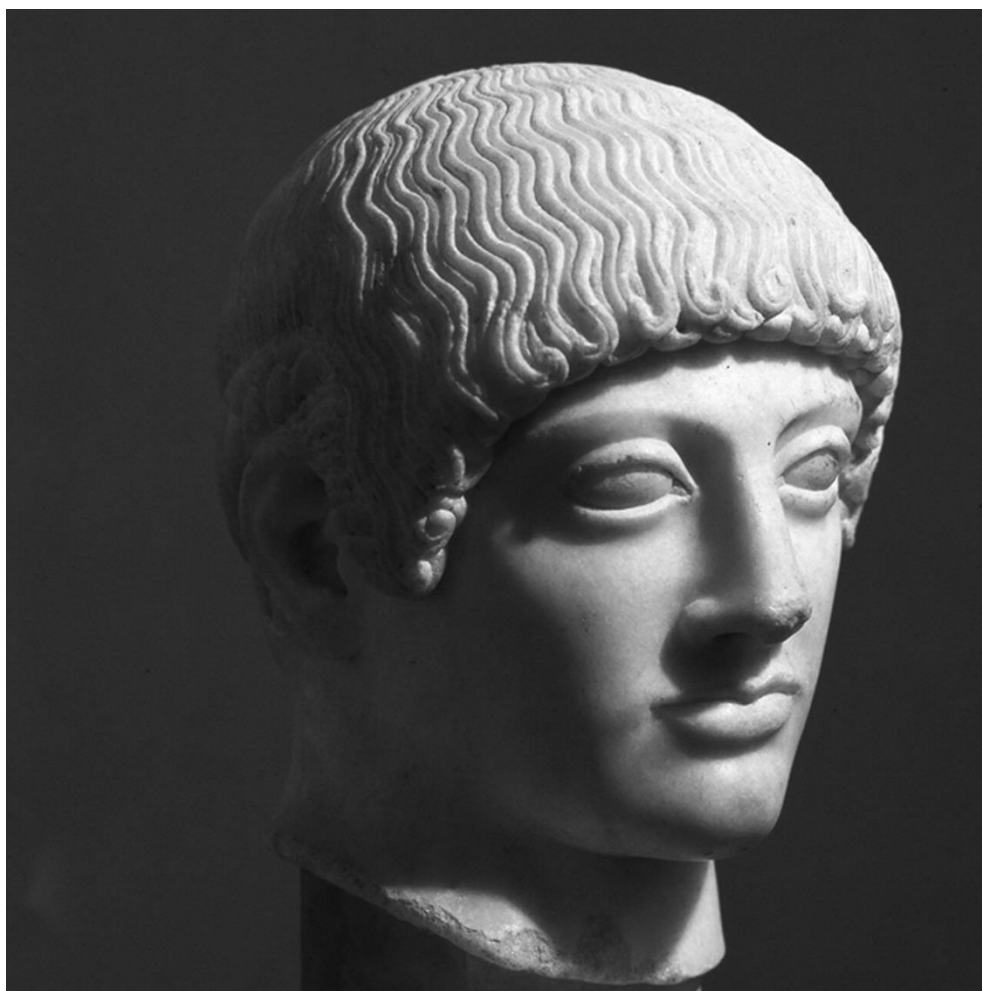
Figure 1 - The Blond Boy's head. Athens. Around 480 BC [Golova…, www]

This work demonstrates the main elements of the new style: the division into the face and scalp, a low forehead covered with hair, a heavy lower part of the face, a serious and seemingly sad expression. There are traces of coloring on the head (yellow hair, brown irises, black pupils, traces of red paint on the lips). The sculptor was much more concerned than before about the inner life of the hero, its spiritual saturation; at the same time, this impression is conveyed with great plastic power, emphasized by material density. A new type of face, replacing the archaic one, is reflected here: "an oblong but rounded oval, a straight nasal bridge, a straight line of the forehead and nose, a smooth arch of eyebrows protruding above almond-shaped eyes, beautiful, rather plump lips, without a smile; the general expression of the face is calm and serious" [Dobrosklonskii, Chubova, 1981, 122].

The Aeginetes, the pediments of the Temple of Aphaia on Aegina, also belong to this period: "The sculptural ensemble of the temple of Athena differs from the compositions of the pediments of archaic monuments primarily in that it is united by the common plot—the victorious battle, which was related to the history of the more ancient Greeks, but was associated with the events of the war with the Persians" [Khabarova, 2017, 137]. Fifteen surviving figures, unfortunately, clumsily restored in the 19th century, nevertheless give an idea of how sculpture develops in the Early Classical period—from rigid angles and rectilinear movements to more powerful proportions, diverse surfaces, vivacious poses, anatomical accuracy [Khodakovskaya, Derevyanchenko, 2017]. "The highest achievement of the master of the east pediment is the figure of a dying man. <…> Not only are the legs modeled with an amazing sense of bones and muscles, not only is their position boldly balanced, but there is also a brave attempt to turn the body of the dying man around its axis" [Vipers, 1972, 151]. As Yu.D. Kolpinskii writes, "the point is not only that the artist abandoned the archaic smile that had become standard, but that the sculptor managed to convey the extinction of vital forces in the plastic in a clear and dramatically harsh form" [Kolpinskii, 1970, 53] (Figure 2).

Figure 2 - The east pediment of the Temple of Aphaia on Aegina. The extreme left sculpture of a defeated warrior. The 5th century BC [The dying warrior…, www]

The Apollo of Piombino—a bronze statuette—is a representative of the sculpture of the beginning of the Classical period (Figure 3).


**Figure 3 - The Apollo of Piombino (a kuros from Piombino), 115 cm high.
Bronze. The late archaic style [The Apollo…, www]**

The statuette is now kept in the Louvre. The young man holds a bow in his left hand and a bowl in his right hand. His head is slightly tilted forward, his neck is free of hair; the transition from the abdomen to the hips is gently and anatomically shown. The signs of a certain age are obvious in Apollo—on the border between a boy and a man. The same balance of grace and angularity, freshness of forms and precision is observed in the Livadhostro Poseidon—the statue of the same era.

Innovations tested in bronze were transferred to marble. Thus, the features of the new style are reflected in the Kritios Boy—the sculpture made around 480 BC (Figure 4).

The boy's arms are lowered, but there is a lot of movement in him: the right leg is slightly extended and bent, and the body is slightly rotated around the axis. The pose is dynamic, but at the same time simple and calm; the pronounced chin, elongated proportions of the face and the new laconic hairstyle also reflect the new style of sculpture.
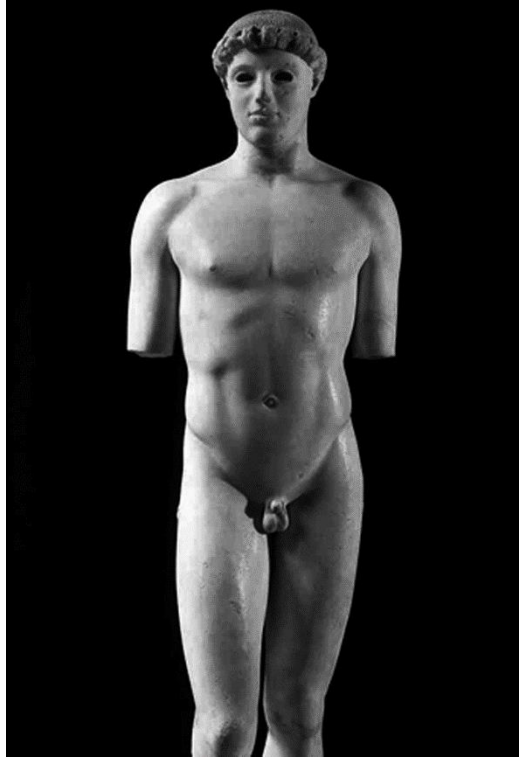
Figure 4 - The Kritios Boy. Marble. Ca. 480 BC.
Athens, the Acropolis Museum [The Kritios Boy, www]

The sculpture of the severe style is no longer as abstract as the archaic one, but the exact facets of the artists' individuality are not yet so precisely distinguishable here. The simplicity and breadth of the severe style paved the way for the sculpture of the High Classical period.

The sculptor Myron was a striking representative of the High Classical period in Attica. His Discobolus and his Athena and Marsyas Group, as well as some other works embodied the main qualities of the Classical period: plasticity, freedom, and depiction accuracy (Figure 5).

Figure 5 - Myron. The Athena and Marsyas Group: bronze reconstruction [Afina…, www]

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Pausanias wrote that this group was located on the Acropolis of Athens; it depicted a version of the Boeotian myth about the invention of the aulos. Two figures are in contrasting poses, moods: "The movement in Marsyas is concentrated exclusively in his limbs—in the light balance of the legs and arms spread wide, while the torso remains motionless. Athena's movement similarly consists of two contradictory impulses—she is going to leave and at the same time is turning back, threatening Marsyas" [Vipers, 1972, 174]. Athena is depicted as still young, angular and graceful, and her face is angry from the side of Marsyas, but it has a soft expression from the viewer's side, in profile. "Even the ugliness of Marsyas has an ideally typical character of some kind of "anti-harmony"… of the bestial silenus" [Kolpinskii, 1970, 56].

Polykleitos became one of the most prominent representatives of the classical style in the Peloponnesian School. His Doryphoros, a spearman, became an example of the classical style and one of the most famous monuments of the era (Figure 6).

Figure 6 - Polykleitos. Doryphoros. 450-420 BC (the later copy) [Doryphoros, www]

Polykleitos embodied his canon, his understanding of exemplary art, and exemplary proportions in his Doriphorus: the head is one-seventh of the height, the face and hand are one-tenth, the foot is one-sixth, etc. [Rivkin, 1969, 9]. Unlike Myron, Polykleitos was interested not so much in the plot (and it

is not so important in this sense who he meant—a pentathlete or Achilles), as in the plastic motif. So, the Doryphoros stands in the step pose, i. e., he embodies movement and peace at the same time; he is immutable and at the same time dynamic: "Behind the plastic perfection of the figure, behind the naturalness and ease of the pose, there is calm recognition of his own strength" [Demchenko, 2018, 10]. The fact that his leg is set back on his toes gives the whole appearance a wide rhythm and precision. The whole statue seems to move because of this pose: the middle axis of the body bends, the right knee is higher than the left one; the spear and the step of the left foot move it forward. It is in the works of Polykleitos that the Greek sculpture finds freedom of movement, escapes from the primacy of frontality.

Phidias was the most important sculptor of his era, and his Zeus at Olympia was eventually recognized as one of the greatest works of antiquity: "Majestic Zeus sits on the throne; his powerful body and thick beard create the image of an experienced and wise man in the prime of his powers. The height of the statue reaches more than three meters without a pedestal, and anyone who approaches the sculpture will certainly be below the all-seeing divine gaze, as if being under the constant supervision and control of the supreme judge" [Boldysheva, 2019, 11].

The large ornate statue was destroyed, and no sufficiently accurate copies have come down to us; there are only descriptions and imprints on the coins of the Hadrian era and on the gem, which is kept in the museum in Berlin. The main impressions that are reflected in the preserved images and then recreated in similar works by other masters (e. g., Zeus kept in Dresden) include the clarity and purity of the form, a soft and benevolent facial expression. This Zeus is characterized by the unfolding of movements more in width than in depth—an echo of the old frontal style. According to the descriptions, the relief both in the figure and clothing of Zeus and those surrounding him played an important role. Other famous statues of Phidias, also not preserved in the original, demonstrate his great attention to the depiction of clothing.

So, the sculpture of the Classical period was not only realistic, mimetic, but also perfectly mimetic, reflecting the noblest proportions of man [Misyurina, 2019], because the statue was a quintessential combination of physical and spiritual virtue: "The statue, which the master was commissioned by the inhabitants of the polis, had to express the society's understanding of the beauty of a courageous and energetic person that was capable of defending their homeland in its hour of need from enemies, the elements, and probably from the wrath of gods" [Osmankina, 2009, 210]. It should be noted that female sculptures were rarer and were spreading more slowly [Evtykh, 2019; Lagutina, 2018].

A sculptural portrait of an individual could be created without taking into account real similarity, but with some exaggeration of individuality: "The resemblance of the sculpture with a real person did not matter—the motifs were borrowed from the art of that time, from ideal characters. <…> Despite the fact that portrait statues implied depicting real people, their features should not be considered individual. The status, age, gender but not resemblance or character traits were important" [Trofimova, 2017, 41-42]. This applies, in particular, to the famous portrait of Socrates made by Lysippos.

Architecture is an important type of the plastic arts of antiquity. Firstly, buildings are more likely to survive through centuries than other genres of art; secondly, architecture can reflect the way of life and thinking of the people: in particular, the development of theater in the 5th century BC resulted in the construction of beautiful theater complexes [Portnova, 2016; Suvorova, 2016]. The Classical period is marked by the restoration and creation of beautiful buildings and complexes, such as temples on the island of Aegina, in Olympia, Delphi and Athens.

The Temple of Hera at Paestum was one of the well-preserved monuments (Figure 7). Its proportions are harmonious; details and patterns are noticeably accurate.

**Figure 7 - The Temple of Hera at Paestum. The end of the first
quarter of the 5th century BC [Khram Gery…, www]**

The Temple of Zeus at Olympia, built in 468-456 BC by Libon, was one of the highest achievements of the period [Voshchinina, 1969, 125-136]. The complete aesthetic, visual balance was achieved between supporting and overlapping architectural elements in the temple. The details are honed with unusual perfection and are characterized by amazing fidelity of patterns" [Dobrosklonskii, Chubova, 1981, 118] (Figure 8).

**Figure 8 - The Temple of Zeus at Olympia. The reconstruction
of the building. 468-456 BC [Khram Zevsa…, www]**

It was a temple designed in the tradition of the Doric order, 6×13 columns, the largest temple in the Peloponnese; it was organically integrated into the surrounding space, most likely overlapping older

places of worship, and was richly decorated both inside and outside with paintings and sculptures [Bernhard, 1980]. Having been destroyed already in modern times, it remains one of the embodiments of the architectural heritage of the Classical period.

In the architectural decoration, along with large forms and ratios, special attention was paid to decoration, in which mythologems and images of certain gods considered common to Indo-European culture were symbolically represented through simple forms (the palmette, the volute, etc.) [Solov'ev, 2019]. In addition, the spatial structure of ancient Greek architecture was closely connected with the mythological explanation of the world and recreated the cosmogonic process: thus, "the sacred (Panathenaic) road carries the ritual meaning of movement connecting two worlds—the earthly (the "city of people") and the heavenly (the acropolis) ones, thanks to which a person gets the opportunity to participate in hierophany. The movement of the festive procession is designed for the possibility of contemplation and "reading" of the Acropolis ensemble, gradually discovering new images" [Malaya et al., 2018, 69].

Speaking about Greek art, the famous German art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann remarked: "As the depth of the sea always remains calm, no matter how much the sea rages on the surface, the images created by the Greeks reveal a great and firm soul among all the agitations of passion" [Lyubimov, 1980, 197]. The images of Greek art show the power of anthropocentric art, which turns away from the old pictorial schemes in favor of observation, mimetic accuracy, and harmony.

At the same time, despite the developed theory of mimesis, i. e., the imitation of nature in art, it was already clear in ancient Greece that art not only imitates, but improves, chooses the best or the most characteristic, vivid: "the artist opposes nature not only as an obedient copyist, but also as its independent rival, correcting its inevitable imperfections with his free creative power" [Panofsky, 2002, 24].

Conclusion

The plastic arts of ancient Greece during the Classical period focused on the image of man comprehensively developed, harmonious, embodying the highest ideals of the universe. It represented harmonic art (Nietzsche later called it Apollonian), where the world was commensurate with man, and man is depicted in the entirety of his existence: "The main task of the art of the 5th century BC consisted in the truthful depiction of man—alive, mobile, strong, energetic and at the same time full of dignity and emotional balance" [Dobrosklonskii, Chubova, 1981, 121]. This required the visual arts to develop a realistic form, mimetic observation of a person, and knowledge of plastic anatomy.

Depicting gods and building temples, ancient people saw man and created some subtle and precise plastic representation, proportionality of features not only in the pictorial and sculptural image of man/god, but also in the image captured in architecture. Plato considered a person whose body and soul are developed unevenly a lame one. And the words of Protagoras that man is the measure of all things are a true epigraph to all the plastic arts of that time.

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Природа образа в пластических искусствах Древней Греции периода классики (V в. до н. э.)

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Аннотация

Статья посвящена анализу природы художественного образа в искусстве Древней Греции того периода, который дал высочайшие примеры классического искусства. Период классики стал временем, когда выработались художественные законы всего искусства классической античности, определившие развитие пластических искусств и Греции, и Рима, а также во многом нормы европейской эстетики в целом. Автор рассматривает живопись, скульптуру и архитектуру данного периода с целью анализа природы художественного мира, отраженного в искусстве эпохи ранней и высокой классики. Образы греческого искусства являют силу антропоцентрического искусства, которое отказывается от старых изобразительных схем в пользу наблюдения, миметической точности и гармонии. Пластические искусства Древней Греции периода классики были сосредоточены на образе человека всесторонне развитого, гармоничного, воплощающего собою высшие идеалы Вселенной. Мир осваивается как соразмерный человеку, а человек изображается во всей полноте своего существования. Это требовало от изобразительных искусств развития реалистической формы, миметического наблюдения за человеком, знания пластической анатомии.

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