

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPRESENTATION COSTUME IN PICTORIAL ART - BAROQUE STYLE -

URDEA Olimpia

University of Oradea, Romania, Department Visual Arts, Faculty of Arts, Universitatii str. 1, 410087 Oradea, Romania, E-mail: oli.urdea@gmail.com

Corresponding author: Urdea, Olimpia, E-mail: oli.urdea@gmail.com

Abstract: Throughout the social history of human civilization and art history, the human body was and still is a challenging field to explore in various representations, a material for various manners of cultural interventions. The way of artistically representing the body, the clothed body, has followed the path of various artistic movements that marked art history. In the act of interpersonal perception, the costume establishes itself as a particular field of non-verbal communication, one based on image. The present paper refers to the costume, as a particular vector of non-verbal communication in social space, as it was depicted and perceived in the painting of the 17th century and early 18th century, a time marked by the Baroque style. From this point of view, garment received the value of an intermediary in the communication between bodily space and the social one. In Baroque formal portrait, the garment completes by scale and the rendering technique of the texture and chromatics emphasizes the position of the pictorially represented person. Thus, the garment interferes with the gesture and mimics as forms of interpersonal knowledge. The transmitter – the clothed character represented through the eyes of the painter – is exposed to the perceptions of the others, providing a comprehensive matrix of information integrated in the social context. Pictorial representations are included in the matrix of the means by which the body is exposed by the costume in order to communicate with the social environment.

Key words: Velasquez, van Dyck, formal portrait, commissioner, formal costume

1. INTRODUCTION

The image of a garment is a specific aesthetic sign, a code that allows the society to be read in its dynamics. Over the centuries, “fashion has become a powerful transmitter... able to produce and manipulate the signs.”[1] The garment, as an object and sign easily spotted in the social micro-universe, becomes a significant interface of the wearer’s ego. It decorates the body and completes human personality according to the society in which the individual wishes to present himself, a society he wants “to amaze and convince” [2]. By garment, the individual – the wearer – seeks to enrol his body in the social space; a body language in which the human body becomes experimental space. Between the body and social space, as a need to reinvent, the garment asserts itself as a notable material bodily self, looking for identity space.

2. GARMENT AS A SOCIAL SIGN

The clothing systems have shown, over time, particular forms, specific from one civilization to another, from one era to another. Throughout history, the garment played a major part in the social construction of individual identity, being the most visible marker of social status, the easiest means of tracking the individual in public space [3]. It gained its attribute of expressing the social body, a device of social individual. What is shown by garment is the concern for self representation and staging. Thus, garment becomes an engine and anticipation of social becoming, a projection of the individual in the social environment [4]. Attire, by its material, constructive and chromatic attributes, is meant to artistically shape the body, thus becoming a personal visual statement.

In the history of universal painting, the human body was represented either nude, thus

becoming experimental space, to highlight the morphological-constructive harmony of the body, or clothed to outline a certain state, usually a social one, a social environment. From a morphological point of view, the dressing signs are articulated by juxtaposing or overlapping some elements, by the association of colours and lines, by adding decorative elements in a three-dimensional concert. From a semantic standpoint, it is about an articulation of signifiers. The rules of signification are the ones that determine the meaning of clothing signs; the costume has become such a complex semiotic system with remarkable informational content.

3. BAROQUE COSTUME

3.1 Characteristics of the Baroque movement

The 17th century is marked by Baroque style in all the arts, from the pure to decorative arts, costume, architecture, being associated with the rule and personality of Louis XIV. By what they are providing in this period, the arts are intended to amaze the viewer who is surprised by the greatness and materiality chosen by the artist, by “the dramatic scenes represented and the illusionist use of detail and perspective”[5].

3.2 Characteristics of the Baroque costume

In Baroque painting the characters are represented luxuriously clothed, placed in spectacular backgrounds, richly ornamented, and the shapes of the costume are lavish. The dress code is rigid, formal, the curvilinear constructions being the result of the influence of decorative arts in the Baroque period [6]. The commissioners of the portraits want to amaze with the attitude outlined by the heavy, ample garment. The sophisticated decoration of the Baroque costume is completed by the bold colours of the brocades and silk laces of the best quality. The representation costume, gains powerful meanings and largely dominates the Baroque painting. Whether profane or religious portraits, the emphasized representation of the garment becomes an element that emphasizes personality and social role of the person portrayed.

3.3 Highlights of the representation costume in Baroque painting.

Diego Velasquez was one of the prominent representatives of Baroque portrait representations. In the portrait of the Infanta Margarita Teresa exhibited at the Museum of Art History in Vienna, the composition is dominated by the blue dress. The Infanta's imposing posture is accentuated by the volume of the dress, outlined by the play of lights and shadows. The entire emphasis is laid on the loaded attire, accessorised with a fur muff. The painter shows the same attention for clothing details in the portrait of Prince Felice Prospero. Although the prince was only two years old at the time of painting the portrait, his attire is carefully described by the painter, with fine strokes in order to render the elegance of his clothes, with silver inserts on red garment.

The costume ensemble makes its mark in the formal portrait of Baroque art, creates show, generates admiration and gains an indisputable aesthetic status. It is enough to watch the portrait of Infanta Maria Teresa at 14 years old, painted in 1653 by the same Velasquez or the portrait of King Philip IV created a few years later. While the first portrait is dominated by the volume of the dress, in the second one, the ornamental richness of the costume is surprised by the play of lights and shadows. Being considered a court painter by King Philip IV of Spain, Velasquez renders the social register represented in *Las Meninas*, a painting in which the sumptuous interior is completed and somehow overshadowed by the outfits worn by the represented characters.

“The work of art is an image whose centre is loaded by the visual energy emanating to the viewer”[7]. The viewer's emotion arises from the understanding of the symbol and the perception of general expressiveness. Such a portrait emerges from a refined living environment which is intended to be of high culture and “high civilization”. In the Baroque formal painting, the garment rigidly defines the character getting to the point that it redefines him; this redefinition depends on the image desired to be projected. As part of the court ritual, painting was a composition of the subject through his garment and the gallery of paintings by Velásquez fully proves it.

In the portrait of Pope Innocent X, the materiality of the garment is loaded with a strong force of visual expression by the fluent technique of the painter. The artistic experience of creating shapes, of suggesting the lights and shadows in the garment, by the silk materiality, complete the constitutive elements of human representation.



Fig. 1 *King Philip IV*

Source:

<http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/diego-velazquez-philip-iv-of-spain-in-brown-and-silver>



Fig. 2: *Queen Isabel*

Source:

<http://www.diegovelazquez.org/Queen-Isabel,-Standing-1631-32.html>



Fig. 3: *Pope Innocent X*

Source:

<http://www.doriapamphilj.it/ukinnocenzox.asp>

At Fashion Museum in Bath, England, one can admire Sir Thomas Kirkpatrick's costume, consisting of a robe embroidered with silver, in a rich decorative registry, the rigidity of the garment being a feature of the late Baroque period. The collarless knee-length coat, tight at the waist, ample on the end line, is completed by a waistcoat and knee-length trousers. The whole outfit is considered the predecessor of the current three-piece suits for men.

This social segregation, imposed by those at the top of the social hierarchy, had to be immortalized for the same reason of self-confirming power in a Europe where social prejudices had manifested themselves, above all, through garment. In such a situation, the formal portrait becomes a self-standing art that imposes itself as a necessity to validate the status of the powerful ones. In this context, the works of art – portraits, embroideries – provide precious information on the costume, on the peculiarities of that age, thus becoming a mirror of the society. The function of the garment changes according to social frameworks. Thus, the formal portrait encompasses a range of artistic and social attitudes and behaviours alike, composing the decorative grammar of representation. The portrait, which in the interest in representation gained a wide momentum in the easel painting at one time, can be considered historical document, loaded with demonstrative intentions. Made to order, they belong to the social history of representations. Thus, the identity of the individual becomes an identity of the garment. The portrait, more social than physical or psychological, is narrative, devoid of liveliness and vibrations, getting closer to the still life genre.

In the Flamand Baroque, Antoon van Dyck becomes famous by his representation portraits created at the court of Charles I of England. His portraits reveal the same sense of grandeur, highlighted by the luxury of the clothing. The silk, the privilege of bourgeoisie and royal court, is perceived visually in the heavy velvet of the garments, in the gloss of the satin shown by the play of lights and shadows. The garment creates the predominance of the character's image. It is the one that governs the interpersonal perception in visual communication [8].

In the gallery of representation portraits, the painter aims to create an imposing image in which the accent lays on the rich and sumptuous clothing, as well as on the attitude for the psychological purpose of artistic and social rendering. The main goal of the decorative grammar of the portrait was to enhance representation.

The formal Baroque portraitist uses the body of the person portrayed as a support of ordering axes on which he encompasses his precious fabrics. He wraps the body in the garment and integrates it in the painting ensemble, amplifying its power. The portraitist “describes the costume”, he endows it with force lines in accordance with the body it covers.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The costume has seen, in the course of its history, a continuous metamorphosis, becoming a mirror of the history of society. Baroque, as an artistic style, has left its mark on clothing style in an original way in which the outline of the social status found its expressiveness. Portrait representations of the commissioners offer essential sources for history both from constructive-architectural and material texture standpoint. The position of the person portrayed is essential, less his physiognomy. The image of the person portrayed is invented through the garment. Thus, the representation garment becomes the interest point of the portrait; it has the role of changing attitudes, it puts them in order and amplifies them in accordance to the conditions imposed to the body, shoulders, and arms [9]. The entire composition of the portrait gives an image of the model in order to mould the viewer's psychology.

REFERENCES

- [1] R. Berger, *Mutația semnelor*, Editura Meridiane, București, 1978, p. 439
- [2] Al. Husar, *Izvoarele artei*, Editura Meridiane, București, 1988, p. 40
- [3] D. Crane, *Fashion and its social agendas: class, gender, and identity in clothing*, University of Chicago, Chicago, 2000, p. 1
- [4] F. Chenoune, (2012, september 26), *Espace Mode Méditerranée*, [Online]. Available from: www.crdp-aix-marseille.fr/sites/crdp-aix-marseille.fr/IMG/pdf/Actes-colloque-mode2004.pdf
- [5] M. Hollingsworth, *Arta în istoria umanității*, RAO International Publishing Company, București, 1997, p. 301
- [6] M. Mackenzie, *...Isme- să înțelegem moda*, Grupul editorial Rao, București, 2010, p. 12
- [7] R. Arnheim, *Forța centrului vizual*, Editura Meridiane, București, 1995, p. 68
- [8] A. Hollander, *Seeing through clothes*, London, 1993, p. 314
- [9] E. C. Alain, *Un sistem al artelor frumoase*, Editura Meridiane, București, 1969, p. 54