

## RECYCLING. PLAY, ART AND LIFE

*Термин актуального искусства, мало знакомый классическому искусствоведению, рассматривается в «игровом пространстве» современной культуры. При этом затрагивается определяемый этим термином круг явлений в экономике, бытовой культуре и в детской игре.*

**Ключевые слова:**

*Африка, игрушка, отходы, художественный ресайклинг, трэш, утильсырьё, индустриальная цивилизация, ready made.*

The waste products of our civilization had got into the field of vision of art as early as in the first half of the 20th century; they started to be used as means for creating pieces of art. Since 1980 an English term «recycling» has become somewhat typical for the articles dedicated to Post-Modernism ready-made items. Nowadays recycling is a popular artistic method of actual art, making it possible to extend infinitely its range of means of expression. Its sources lie not only in the experiments of artists from the previous century, but also in artistic and everyday life of the Third World countries, where the low living standards in the second half of the 20th century provoked an accelerated development of utilization of previously unknown materials: old cans, wire, bright-colored plastic and paper wrapping.

Even before the 1970s some domestic items in African families were made from the waste-products of industrial civilization, they were meant for personal use in everyday life. Fabrication of toys using waste materials became an ordinary occupation for local boys. Nowadays the handcrafted articles of this kind are perceived by the whole world as traditional African toys. Eventually this trend opened the way to a real branch of economy playing a significant part in the African export since 1980s [1, p. 14–19].

This is referred to a spontaneous culture-oriented initiative born within these countries merging together traditions and modern life, new forms of local arts and crafts; it emerged as a result of the last century forceful «cultural expansion» of the West. Driven by the low living standards the craftsmen's usage of new, previously unknown materials, namely the waste-products of European civilization, resulted in apparition of new original domestic items and children toys.

The country considered to have given a start to the ideas of recycling is Senegal. The occasion for the phenomenon appearance was the International Art Festival which took place in Dakar in 1966: that's where recycling

pieces of art were presented to the wide audience for the first time.

A real challenge for developing the new trend into a trade was the famous Paris-Dakar motor rally. Apart from the fact that large influx of Europeans coming for the event were leaving behind a great number of new free materials for recycling (mostly plastic and tin cans as well as empty cigarette boxes), local boys got the chance to see different modern vehicles: not being able to obtain copies of such automobiles as factory-produced toys, they started to make toy copies from various metal scrap and plastic waste materials. Rich Europeans as well as journalists who came to see the rally raid were buying these toys as souvenirs with great pleasure. That's how the toys got into Europe and since that time they could be frequently found even in many respectable bourgeois houses.

Gradually transforming into souvenirs for tourists, the recycling toys were extending their sphere of existence. The success of this business in Dakar gave a start to its nascent in other regions. Not only children, but also adults in Madagascar, Angola, Benin, Mali, Burkina Faso, Togo, Ghana and other countries began to make toys. A recycling toy became an indispensable attribute of African markets and a popular export commodity, while the idea of African recycling began to be widely used not only in the African, but also American and European art. The recycling exquisite chef-d'oeuvres and unsophisticated souvenirs, attracting the collectors in the first place, nowadays can be seen both in numerous galleries, museum shops and in major Western trading houses such as «Fair Trade» or «Eine Welt». Nowadays this sector is supported by various private charity organizations rendering assistance to African countries, some of them have included the recycling toy manufacture into the teaching program in African schools. If in the first years of their getting to Europe these hand-made articles were accepted as primitive art

liken with hand-carved African sculpture, masks and ceramics of Magrib, bronze plastic arts of Benin, nowadays they are commercially produced as souvenirs at the small family manufactories. It's not that easy anymore to find among them an item made by a kid or a teen-ager for their personal use.

The production process itself has become more technically sophisticated and specialized. Today the toy producers don't bother themselves with hand-collecting of the materials, but buy them in special utility refuse shops where the waste materials get cleaned and sorted out. Lots of locals are eager to collect the waste in rich suburbs, since for many Africans this is the only opportunity to make their bread.

Every serial recycling toy manufacturer has a set of patterns for producing models which he keeps as a personal business secret. Toy components cut by patterns from tins and beer-cans get knitted or wired together by means of soldering or clipping, sometimes they get a touch of quick painting followed by decoration with pieces of fabric chips or bottle-lids. The souvenir items are often coated with lacquer which gives them more attractive marketable style. Modern recycling toy ceased being a spawn of poverty of African lower social classes, now it is a full-scale branch of economy and successful business for many African families.

Local artists fell in love with recycling, seeing it as an opportunity to create a new branch of national art integrated into modern European art culture. A good example of such integration is the art of Dakpogan brothers from Benin. Their abstract art compositions and statues made from metal packing materials, used car details, pipes, and framework of bicycles and motorcycles inspire wonder in the European museum and exhibition exhibitions. The advanced opportunities of self-expression opened for the artists-recuperators (recupération, Fr. = recycling, Eng.) of the Third World countries and new aesthetics of their work have attracted representatives of the "initiated" Ivy League, who were followed by the middle-class and rich public. Highlighting the national color of their craftwork by including local traditional materials, the African artists immediately aggravated attractiveness of their art for the European market.

Unlike the anonymous craftsmen-recuperators of Africa and Latin America, professional artists not only use old things for their pieces of art, but also accentuate and aestheticize their texture.

Alexander Calder is one of the brightest innovators in the 20-th century art. As a

young man Calder showed a special interest for movement and forms full of humor and playfulness, he was experimenting with various, sometimes totally «inartistic» materials. Such are, for example, his wire portraits that significantly enriched understanding of plastic arts by representatives of Futurism and Cubism.

In the 1920s, in his first Paris period, the beginning artist created a whole series of little animals and other toys made from curtain rings and wire. Those sculpture experiments provided the basis for his first major work: «The Calder Circus» (1926–1930). The idea of this piece of work was suggested by the «Humpty-Dumpty Circus» children toy, which was extremely popular in the beginning of the 20th century. The moving figurines were created from various locally available materials: cigar boxes, spools, corks, paper cuts and fabric chips. Easy to manipulate clowns, ropedancers, gymnasts, musicians and animals could also make unexpected sounds caused by ingenious bellows, rubber pear-pushes and squeakers. The Circus performances, previously accompanied by the popular song Ramona, quickly gained popularity in modernistic intellectual and artistic circles that had accepted and enthusiastically supported the experiments of the beginning artist [4, p. 12].

Later on Calder started using the ideas of recycling in his work on moving and stationary sculptures, such as «Ash-tray with a mobile for S. Steinberg» (1951). His roosters created from cans and wire in 1960-1970-ies, are amazingly similar to African recycling-toys which at that time were only beginning to be introduced to Europe. Were they a source of inspiration for the American artist as African sculpture had once been for Pablo Picasso? Or the roosters of Calder came as a natural result of his inexhaustible interest for toys, play and new materials?

The brightest and the most indigenous successor of Alexander Calder was Jean Tinguely, a Swiss artist. Most of his «toy-like» creations are considered to be the ones of the baluba-period of 1960-1980-ies which is believed to be the most extravagant period of his work marked with experiments with various materials, sometimes unexpectedly fragile and paradoxically-looking in the entire composition. Such is the composition «Pop, Hop, Op & Co» (1962), containing funny balancing abstract figures made of feathers, wire and technical construction components [5].

Perhaps thanks to Calder's good graces, recycling-toy became one of the most popular area of interest of Post Modernism artists. Unlike the ready-made articles of Dada group or

pop-art the recuperators of today are rarely willing to achieve any substitution of sense or axiomatic meanings, while recoding an object, placing it into an unusual environment using the principle «qui pro quo» (that is one instead another). They are apparently following the tradition of the «New Realists» of the 1950s who had used ready-made details and things as brushes, paints and sculptural materials.

Play spirit is manifested here in the choice and unexpected combination of materials, potentiality of which is often revealed only in the process of work. This kind of playing ensures an unlimited diversity of born images – from technical «fetishes» of Reinhard Mukha, an artist from Dusseldorf, to the funny animals by Orlando Wazau from Switzerland.

In the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this trend became noticeable in Russian art as well, at the start it was brightly manifested by the exhibition pieces of art of scene-designers.

Old superannated things were the subject of close interest for Victor Grigoriev, an artist from Saint-Petersburg, since his very childhood. The pockets of the future maestro of artistic kinethism (kinetic movement) were always full of rack-wheels, pieces of wire, little springs and multicolored buttons. He used all these objects to make fantastic toys looking totally unlike standard articles of popular consumption offered in the Soviet stores at that time.

Profession of an artist-technologist of theater and cinema definitely explains the posed character of his early works resembling theatrical maquettes (mock-up) combined of various miniature things and details often unrecognizable under the layers of paint, like in «Temptation» and «Manipulator» of the 1990s. Later on he started to make toy objects representing Pegasus, centaurs, fish and weird zoomorphic wheelbarrows containing glass spaces filled with water included into the whole composition. The artist's works are often turned into little theaters – sort of microcosms in glass boxes and heavy frames. They remind an antique item in the modern interior that looks fallen out of its time, a little alien, weird, but extremely loved and very special. Used as an element of artistically designed media with ever increasing frequency these things are not eager to merge with the surroundings making the stylistic unity, but feel well being enclosed in their own inner world.

There is no sense in asking the author about the shape-generating ideas or semantic codes. Being a dedicated empiricist, he seldom polishes up the form in his sketches and maquettes, modeling and adjusting it all in process. Symbolism of his early works is the result of his long-

time interest in medieval philosophy, occultism and astrology. Once exuberantly literature-oriented, in due course it became more attainable and easy to understand, while somewhat overloaded form of the work has acquired laconism and wholeness. The variety and extravagance of the used materials compensate over and above some modesty of the color-grade. Even the plain unvarnished industrial trash was often used: junk jewelry, cuts of metallic nets, curved aluminum forks were brought to life by means of old clock mechanisms huddled on the shelves of his studio. The recycling by Grigoriev is not a tribute to fashion, but a retained childish vision of the world when the «treasures from garbage-can» familiar to every little boy could become the means for playing and creativity. Emphasized texture expressiveness of the used objects and unlimited fantasy of the artist bringing the whole thing to life with only one movement determine the visual appeal and peculiar decorativeness of the maestro's pieces of art [2, p. 175–176].

Contrary to the automated devices of Victor Grigoriev the mechanic mobility of recycling mechanisms created by young artists Olga Ardovskaya and Tatyana Shubina is reduced to a minimum. In return they offer a great deal of designer's playing with form and materials turning a water valve into a beak of a predatory bird, a tee-pot into an elephant, a gas-tank – into a body of a malicious winged dog and helping literary to sculpture their machine-like constructions from plastic waste and wire camouflaging them with metal-colored paint. It is this playing that softens what at first sight seems to be an alarming formal «malicious rigidity» of their works.

Tatyana Zhurkova, a Russian-American artist, prefers transparent and semi-transparent glass and plastic details: tubes, balls, bracelets, buttons, chandelier pendants etc. They can be brightly painted or be colorless, however in a complex, thoroughly elaborate connection with each other they unexpectedly obtain qualities of glittering precious material.

Tatyana Zhurkova's pieces of work belonging to the late 1990s – 2000 from the «Larvae», «Different Galaxies», and «Sex-Funk-Constructivism» series are obviously appealing to toys. The artist insistently, almost in every object, uses parts of factory-made porcelain dolls. Meanwhile, the doll heads don't fulfill any function of an allegory or allusion; they become components of chimerical artificial organisms, providing them with features of some unique anthropopathy. Thus their bodies are weird constructions reminding larvae, where one can find various items



*Богомол, игрушка. Мали, 2002.  
Санкт-Петербургский музей игрушки.*

of children's everyday life, mostly simple plastic toys: rattles, bricks, fish and tiny little kewpie dolls. Those primary elements are referred to another metaphoric level connected with childhood and playing. United together with transparent plastic tubes, rings, pieces of glass rod and other non-doll stuff they make an original and very expressive modular spinal construction which seems to be alive and mobile. Unexpectedness of this intermixture combination and, most important, the effect caused by it, evoke cheerful surprise as well as a desire to touch and watch. Zhurkova's toys open for very diverse interpretations allow us to find very different sign oriented system in them – from hidden eroticism connected with the fertility cult and Eternal Mother up to nature powers, elements and other worlds [3].

Pieces of art by Russian artists-recuperators first were presented by full scale in series of museum expositions and personal exhibitions taking place in St.Petersburg in 2005–2007. One of the first exhibitions was «Play-recycling» displayed in St.Petersburg Museum of Toys, it demonstrated dramatically a powerful actable potential of this proved trend of modern art.

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*Ардовская Ольга, Шубина Татьяна.  
Россия. Из серии «Смеханизмы», 2007.  
Частная коллекция.*



*Журкова Татьяна. Россия/США  
Новорожденная гусеница, 1998.  
Частная коллекция.*

Recycling today, having become a popular artistic method in the contemporary art of Western Europe, the USA and Japan is now obtaining the most unexpected and extravagant forms. Repeating the story of Cinderella, the recycling-objects have quickly turned from «toys for the poor» into challenging artifacts – «artistic toys for the rich» smoothly integrating with the play mainstream of the 20th century art.