CONCEPTUAL TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY GLASS ART: SUMMARIZING THE STUDIO MOVEMENT

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The young generation of artists with intention to follow the pioneers of the studio movement, supporting the revolutionary spirit of the phenomenon, goes often to controversial solutions, where basic features of a traditional work of art – form, colour, technology, decorativeness and aesthetics play the least role or are absent at all. Analysing the work of contemporary artists, a change of the direction of the world glass art development is clearly observed as well. The decorative approach to the compositional solution in the 1980’s – 1990’s transmitted smoothly into figurative loading, appearance of installation at the turn of the Millennium. The latest trends, however, demonstrate an active function of conceptual and multimedia solutions on the verge of absence of technique and often basic material as well, or project with expressive social context in the creative work of the next generation of the participants in the studio movement. The basic issue arisen: whether it is time to summarize a half-century era of the international studio movement and diagnose its gradual ending.

One of the largest and definitely most influential institutions in the world of glass is American Glass Art Society, a non-profit international organization founded in 1971 to promote the development of glass art and support the global community of artists working with this material. On January 21, 2021, the jury of the GAS competition for beginner artists announced the winners of the Saxe Emerging Artists Award. In truth, we will be able to evaluate the visualization of the works of the three winners only during the international conference VIRTUAL 2021 on May 20-22, but from the summary of the selected authors we can make a clear conclusion about the conceptual character of the works. One of the three members of the jury of the competition is a regular participant in International Blown Glass Symposiums in Lviv, Japanese artist Kazushi Nakada. Commenting on the results of the jury’s selection, K. Nakada states: "I would describe the early period (of the international studio glass movement, ed.) as "Association". Educational platforms were developed, new technologies were introduced, and numerous exhibitions were opened all over the world. As a result, a community of artists was formed who became interested in glass as a new material for creative realization. But times have changed, and I would describe the current situation as "diversity." Some people want to study glass
throughout their life, others for just one project or study. Despite everything, the traditional glass craft must be preserved, and the training of future generations must be continued. At the same time, it is necessary to encourage a creative experiment that no one knows how it will end. It is a kind of cultural (or creative) pluralism, in which we are all participants”.

K. Nakada raised an issue of great importance, which at first glance may seem unnoticed. One of the key precepts of the studio movement, and at least its American school, obliges the artist to perform creative work on his own. Now we are talking first of all about works made in hot glass furnace technique, where the skill depends on long and intensive training, and the implementation involves significant material costs and the appropriate conditions. In the United States at the beginning of the third millennium, there are dozens of schools of various levels, where glass blowers are trained. The culmination of this wave of glass blowing promotion is the release into the popular world of the Canadian series “Blown Away”, distributed on the Netflix platform, which involves specialists from leading American institutions, including the Corning Museum of Glass, Pilchuk Glass School and others. Therefore, it is objective to say that it is the studio movement that has become the determining stimulus not only for the preservation, but also for the progressive development and spread of the craft to masses. So the question arises: will the age-old skill of a craftsman and glass blower, which has been assimilated with the profession of an artist in the avalanche of studio development of the last half century, be threatened with decline and find itself in the ooze of oblivion? To what extent will this process be affected by the aggressive dissemination of conceptual initiatives, especially in light of two societal factors - the economic recession and the decline of the glass industry and global restrictions as a result of the worldwide pandemic and the intensification of virtual exchanges?

The author’s works of the pioneers of the studio movement have generated the main criteria of artistic value of fine glass art for half a century and become the basis of the most significant collections all round the world. The “revolution” of the studio movement at the end of the XX century is considered to be a key event in the history of culture and art. Will the gradual displacement of technological innovations, figurative fillings, formal search and as a result the material itself be present at the next stage? Or should the striving for conceptualization and continuous imitation of fashion trends be seen as another round aimed at reorienting the values put in the idea of bringing glass art to a figurative level of artistic perception? Only several years ago, we continued to consider that the studio movement had become a new phenomenon in the world decorative art. Undoubtedly, the next decade of scientific studies will be devoted to entirely new phenomenon of artistic glassmaking that is out of the frames of classical understanding of the principles of studio and will be formed as an independent concept of art discourse in the nearest future.