

The article analyses the artistic method of the painter Oleksiy Lytvynenko. It presents the ecological perspective of the artist's creativity in the context of Taoist philosophy and European pantheism. The painting system is reviewed as innovative, effectively elaborates traditions of Dutch pictorial arts of the 16th century. It makes the uniqueness of the artist's topics and pictorial forms in the Ukrainian art environment evident (late 20th – early 21st cc.).

Key words: Oleksiy Lytvynenko, mimetic representation, culture of empathy, inner landscape, environmental (animalistic) consciousness, concept of silence.

Sometimes, comes a moment of a kind of commotion:  
You see the world as if for the first time in your life.  
And a usual cloud, grey and autumn-like,  
Suddenly strikes with golden paints.

Lina Kostenko, Uniqueness

Oleksiy Lytvynenko's art is 100 percent in opposition to the modernist idea of "death of culture", "death of arts" and "death of authors". With his triple denial of Death, the artist suggests viewers to plunge in natural images, among which we live and sometimes cannot see. It is the nature that inspires the artist and serves his unchanging and multidimensional source of creativity, inspiration, mood, and rises. Lytvynenko has no single urban canvas, imbued with terrifying noise of machines and continuous commotion of metropolis. He is captured with a sense of both a resident, and a companion of the Mother Land, Water, and the Sky. He acts as a kind of operator of processes taking place in flora and fauna. Divine will happens to interfere in the artist's soul and ecstatic creativity, awakens in gentle landscapes of Ukraine and rustlings of the wings of a butterfly. A Zen contemplation and the principle of harmony where the world is the path that the artist follows. His world like a home of being (by Heidegger) is comprised of the elements – water, land, plants. In this world of his, there is water depth, fire, human consciousness and people's knowledge of the existence of nature. Artistic profession should have nothing to do with philosophical intellectualism, as artists deal with sensory experience and reflection of the world. However, working with basic principles of the natural environment, Lytvynenko reaches the level of philosophical (esthetic and ethical) reflection. He embodies it in his specific manner of utterance – with brush and paints.

Lytvynenko's individual artistic and ethical views were developing in the aura of his family. Both Oleksiy's grandfather and his uncle were artists. His grandmothers were biologists, his mother is a biologist and his father is an ichthyologist. His another uncle was a geologist. The future artist's knowledge of natural science was deepening since his childhood and acquiring fundamentality in his parents' library. Oleksiy's grandfather, who was a graphic artist, was fascinated by the animalistic kind. Images of animals and birds surrounded him in his grandfather's studio, who also experimented with graphic techniques. Very early, the boy learned to reproduce a singing, warbling, running and crawling world. Two areas of family interest – nature and arts – merged in Oleksiy Lytvynenko. On the map of contemporary art of Ukraine he is a distinctive artist with his own artistic style and plastic form. Oleksiy Lytvynenko was born on January 17, 1961. He studied in the Republican Art School and the Kyiv State Art Institute (currently the National Academy of Arts of Ukraine), from which he graduated in 1985. Since 1992, O. Lytvynenko has been a member of the Ukrainian Union of Artists. His artistic portfolio (up to 2014) has eleven personal exhibitions in Ukraine, France and Sweden and numerous group exhibitions both in Ukraine and abroad. Viewers and collectors are attracted by the gentle images of nature and the aristocratic perfection of artistic form of Lytvynenko's canvases. For his impeccable artistic taste, he is indebted to both: his grandfather, a patriarch of the family, and Victor Zaretsky, with whom he took painting lessons. Exquisite "new" successor of his teacher who surprisingly does not deny the power of his teaching skill and creativity. The

Baroque whims of his composed structures, forcing aesthetic and hedonism are characteristics of the maestro's painting and individuality that imprinted the soul of young Lytvynenko. This precious school was supplemented with wise and observant remarks of the great maestro Tetyana Yablonska. Oleksiy recalls that "en plein air" in town of Sedniv during the summer, children and grandchildren of artists worked alongside well-known masters of the brush. Tetyana sometimes came up to Oleksiy's easel. "She stood silent for long, watching the work, and then with one sentence pointed the most significant – Lytvynenko recalls, –the essence of her wise counsel and artistic insight only opened to the full extent with time"<sup>1</sup>.

As a child, in grandfather's studio, Oleksiy closely observed "games" with various techniques, textures and intricacies, which are typical for watercolor painting. Probably, it was then that Oleksiy gained interest and fascination for glazing painting. And also attention to the artistic effects, which appear on the canvas due to layers of thin transparent colored coating. Like glass filters, they allow the streams of light to break through the colored layers. Being reflected by the basic cloth, the light beams through pure colors. This painting system was discovered in the 15th – beginning of the 16th centuries in the Netherlands. Since then, artists of the Northern Renaissance and later Italian and German painters have contributed to secrets of glazing painting. From the Netherlands of the 15th century also comes pantheism, i.e. divinization of all things, which Lytvynenko shares, for, even a drop of dew is a reflection of divine beauty and will. For people living in the 15th – 16th centuries Pantheism, as a branch of the Christian faith, combined belief in the omnipotence of God and a new Renaissance understanding of love to the earthly life. Owing to this compromise, history of arts and museum collections have examples of Renaissance naturalism on canvases of Jan van Eyck, Holbein and Memling.

Oleksiy Lytvynenko, who was taught to respect nature, natural philosophy and history of arts, has accepted the pantheistic perception of the world. Since his childhood, he is fond of drawings by Albrecht Durer and his studies of herbs, flowers, and animals.

In the 1990's the "iron curtain" between the Soviet Union and the rest of the world had fallen; we all received access to the Louvre and other art treasures. As a mature master, Lytvynenko became familiar with masterpieces of Hugo van der Goes, Jan van Eyck, Albrecht Durer, Sandro Botticelli, and others, during his travels.

Lytvynenko's quick eye, knowledge of nature and, ultimately, his own personal temperament and character have quite naturally led him to the art and philosophy of the East (China, India, and Japan). That is where his admiration for Taoism and work of Lao Tzu (the 6th century) Tao Te Ching (Canon of the Way and Grace) comes from. For the artist, who exemplifies a fusion of the individual with nature in his own painting, the idea of the Canon regarding the truth, only opens a person's inner view of intuitive revelation. This is quite a sentimental value. By the way, the same conclusion was made by European philosophers of the 19th century – A. Schopenhauer, S. Freud, and A. Bergson (the 20th century). Shaman type beliefs of ancient China quite naturally correlated with European pantheism in its deification of nature. These two sources largely formed the philosophical principles of Lytvynenko and influenced the content and forms of his further creative way. After the completion of the academic course he took, 1985 to 2000 were years of active work of searching for his own artistic niche. "Time of Water" (2000) determined the author's priorities. Until now the glazing painting system has been dominating. "Time of Water" is a composition, consisting of five parts, represented on an horizontal wall as a single artistic organism. The canvas painted in thick red garnet tones glows from within. The light is sent to the viewer from the depths of the painting space. Paintings of Jan van Eyck, the Virgin's blue dress of the "Portinari Altar" by brush of Hugo van der Goes give constant inspiration for Lytvynenko. While experimenting with classic techniques, Oleksiy supplements them with his own discoveries. Thus, the author adds a layer of water colors to the grounds of "Time of Water" and many other works. Its free spreading on the basic canvas opens possibilities to improvise painting. Polyptych "Time of Water", made with a monochrome range of colors, becomes almost an abstraction and pictorial field, where modulations and nuances of dark red sky merging with brown-garnet bulk of water, generate the feeling of anxiety and the dusky glow in the red glare. As specific feature of this painting and the following canvases is a reproduction of a particular landscape (it is what Levitan, Kuinji and others did). The artistic thinking of Lytvynenko is based on Zen depicting principle. It is not about displaying a fragment of nature, but in-

interpreting what was seen. This is a view of nature as a miracle, a pose of prayerful intercession before it and greatness of its mysteries. That is how the task of communicating with nature was understood by the Se-hee school (the 5th century B.C.), Paul Cezanne, Van Gogh and Henri Matisse in Europe in the 19th – 20th centuries. They intuitively approached the aesthetic principles of Zen Buddhism. Oleksiy Lytvynenko does not paint clouds wither, but their excitement, as it is more important for him to reproduce the flutter of life and its sounds in physical forms of nature. This is a qualitatively different form of approach with what is seen, compared to the traditional European (as well as Ukrainian) landscape painting. Lytvynenko's cycles "Water", "Land", "Dreams", and others always contain visual-philosophical conclusion based on the experience of the observant's attitude to life. Lytvynenko listens to pieces of nature so carefully that he finally recognizes what water, fern, butterfly or land want and expect from him. The artist may impose his own interpretation to nature; however, his way is a careful contemplation and loving dialogue with the eloquent Silence. In this case, a long known plot may suddenly reveal itself. Then begins the work on canvas. The author works in a state of meditative semi-interference and caution with reflection of sacred content of nature. "There, where the path of thought ends, listening starts. There, where words are not uttered, contemplation begins" (from Zen book).

There is a certain incompleteness in each work, which is a gateway left for cooperation and viewer's reading between the lines. Semi-abstract landscapes opening the world of semi-delineation are what Lytvynenko creates. Because as Viktoria Burlaka mentioned, "Nature, which is of interest to the artist, comprises subtle matters, that is why 'realism' means the ability to capture and reproduce the aura of sacred space and what is in it in addition to itself... A different mystical view, manifesting the space with color and light, appears to be effective ... God, Who is Light. From Nothing, pure potentiality, in our eyes He gives birth to the space"<sup>2</sup>.

Culture and the process of peering, careful listening and the author's artistic reflection do not only create "metaphysical reality" on the canvas, but also shape him into a unique personality. "Cognition is an infinite penetration into the depths of things"; – said Serguiy Krymskiy<sup>3</sup>. In the course of this artistic process, "the eyes of the soul turn" (according to Plato) from contemplation of the external world to archetypes as the world's exciting and mysterious basic principles. A moment of reconfiguration of consciousness, heuristic insight, called "a point of Equinox". Lytvynenko's methods of work allow him to experience this happy condition.

"A person is not created by nature; personality is created by himself and his own history". This view of Merab Memardashvili makes sense, when it comes to strong spiritual work of the artist<sup>4</sup>. As to Lytvynenko, it is not only his family genesis, but also a cognitive instinct and thirst for his European and the remote Eastern cultures that have forged his personality. And that makes him capable of reading the productive information in layers of the imaginary and subconscious world. In Lytvynenko's panting practice, conscious and subconscious worlds, like Yin and Yang, supplement each other.

What a silence!  
Only the chirping of cicadas  
Can be heard among rocks.

Bokusay (Chorus), 1720-1783<sup>5</sup>

Leading panting series – 20 canvases "Water", 13 compositions "Earth", 20 compositions "Nature", 7 canvases "Signs", 10 compositions "Dreams", and other series. Constant is the author's loving conversation with nature, which he carries in a whisper and in undertones not to infringe its sovereignty. "The hours, when, having immersed in the grass by the pond, I hear lovingly singing frogs or follow the ant life and touch small duck's feathers are the sweetest for me", says Oleksiy. Needle grass rustles in the wind as the artist hears the voice of grass.

The lake is old  
The frog has jumped, and a splash  
Sounds in silence

Bokusay (Chorus), 1720 – 1783<sup>6</sup>

At a moment, when a splash of water sounds as an event, evanescence of existence and feeling of its transience co-exist with experiencing cosmism of insignificant events. This very junction of moments and eternity, as a special condition of artistic exaltation, was familiar to the Japanese. Since the Middle Ages until nowadays, Eastern poetry has been appreciating the condition of "satori" or insight.

The three-part composition "Frogs" (2010, polyacryl, 225x480) from the series "River" embodies Zen poetics of silence, which allows viewers to focus on small plots and feel their comprehensiveness. Large sizes of canvases, where borders of images are indefinite, serve Lytvynenko's concept of cosmism of each natural unit. "Frogs" is made with ochre and honey colors. Frogs emerge from muddy water. The sand bottom of the pond shines like Rembrandt's gold. And Silence sails above the enchanted world. The artist has found the general figurative structure of the cosmos, and combined the flow of micro- into macro-world. It is not only an artistic technique and the author's innovation, but also the documented ideology of Lytvynenko.

Cultivation of the world of nature and its diversity by Lytvynenko is marked with a special foreshortening. The artist does not look from above or outside of this animal-plant world, but from within as if with eyes of little frogs, placidly jumping in the water, or a grass-snake, rustling in rotten autumn leaves. Once Franz Marc (one of the founders of 1910s avant-garde) aimed at "painting horses in the way they feel themselves". Lytvynenko seems to make this dream come true. He paints fish, grass, algae, water lilies on the lake, butterflies, like a sworn brother, consecrated in the life of wild nature. This is "inner landscape" of both Lytvynenko, and the plant and animal world.

Strands of algae gently float in a stream of greenish water ("Water", 2009; "Current", 2010) and fish pass by and disappear behind the blanket of water like behind a curtain ("Walk", 2009). In "Sign of Evening" (2000) a fidget got frozen on silver-white plane of glass. Water lilies luxuriously stretch over the thick azure of the lake ("Water Lilies", 2012).

Heat. Bells ring in the temple,  
On its edge a moth  
Sleeps sweet.

Buson Taniguchi (Yosa), 1715-1783<sup>7</sup>

Viewers enjoy the luxury of playing painting surfaces, the textures, paints randomly flowing on the water-colored backgrounds and pasty strokes – the upper layer of the composition is painted out with them.

The concept of Zen contemplation, grafted to formal techniques of contemporary painting, blurs boundaries between micro- and macroworlds. Wisdom in garments of naiveté is a main sign of Lytvynenko's artistic technique. The mystery comes to life through the obvious things.

Oddly, but Lytvynenko's simplest plots create viewers' far-reaching associations and awaken sleeping memories of the first impressions. The canvases suggest a walk back to childhood, where every stream of melted snow seemed to be the river, paper boats gliding down along them, and palaces, as genius as A. Gaudí's Sagrada Família, constructed out of wet beach sand.

Lytvynenko's "metaphysical realism" is about bringing transcendental entities of an unpeakably perfect world to viewers. Canvases are kind of "icons" of nature in its divine elements. After completing his work on a canvas, the author disappears and offers the viewer a direct contact with the world of untouched beauty as if with the Absolute. The artist does not even depict plots, but natural conditions, where time seems to be dying out and materializing in happiness of contemplation ("Earth", 6 parts, 2007; "Lake", 2001; "Landscape- I", 2001, and other from series "Earth"). Lytvynenko's philosophy of "transcendental existentialism" is his ideology and model of the cosmos. It was not created in the process of judging as cold reflection, but in a creative excitement. It is existence, which is the essence of the artistic process starting from observation and excitation and finishing with the design of compositions and representation of the latter as an artistic product.

Even K. Malevich believed that the beginning and the reason of life were as the excitement as somewhat unconscious, without numbers of precision, time, space, absolute and relative status. In the "picturesque hearing" (term of Malevich), Lytvynenko stimula-

tes our mind and opens the well of the subconscious. The deeper we enter into the space of the author's canvases, the more of universal and "collective unconscious" (according to C. Jung) we find there. S. Krymskiy wrote, "For our existence water is the way to the well in a desert, it is a creaking of gates, a storm and holy water... These are existential associations ... Land is not only humus, it is Motherland and living topos ... The objective is not separated from the subjective"<sup>8</sup>.

Silence in paintings by Lytvynenko is among the central characters of his world. Silence is not only lack of sounds. In our consciousness, associations link Silence with the silent prayer as a tacit conversation with God and the concept of initial chaos on the eve of the world creation. Prehistory of the creative leap (the eve of work) has the same origin. At the moment of insight Silence starts growing through like a plan of a future work. Silence as Nothing is extremely productive. Our contemporary genius Valentin Silvestrov, who, like no one else, creatively uses Silence in musical compositions, mentions, "Chaos in music is a silence, like a still non-organized cosmos... Then – a strong emotion reaches crescendo, when it is born from silence"<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, in paintings by Lytvynenko, Silence is "heated" up to the level of emotional stress, and then explodes with ecstasy in viewers' souls. Therefore, works of the composer and artists are "staged" in an avant-garde manner, with modernism borrowed from philosophy of Taoism and Zen Buddhism along with other Oriental practices back in 1910s. Thus, in the modern culture the category of Silence acts as an archetype and ontological phenomenon. The phenomenon of existentiality was vividly expressed in literature (A. Camus), music (V. Silvestrov), paintings of P. Mondrian and K. Malevich (supremacism), and later in colors of "pure field" by M. Rotko, and, in our case, in "metaphysical landscape painting" by O. Lytvynenko. Vasyl Kandinsky drew attention to the silence that could speak out loudly, louder than the noise itself, and gain marginal eloquence. In terms of metaphysics, the phenomenon of Silence is a prototype of the world, rooted in many religious and spiritual practices. Silence as the Absolute of everything allows people to reach the omphalos of eidetic proto-language of Spirit that links time with space. The archetype of Silence in a way slows down (psychologically) time and encourages humans to rethink most valuable eternal things in the modern hasty world. Works of Lytvynenko "Spring Carpet" (series "Nature", 2012), every composition of the series "River" (2003-2012), canvases "Kohan" (1998), "Sign of the Evening" (2000), "White Sign" (2000) and many others embody Silence. Lytvynenko's Silence is a chilled thought and emotion, and definitely not apathy. It is a concentration and freezing before a powerful creative jump. By the way, the artist-philosopher does not hide dramatic tensions in nature's life either. The series Portraits represents images of thistles and flowers of chrysanthemum painted in hot orange colors, "Rain Collector" (portrait of a tree, 2003) was made in brown and greenish tones, and all "characters" of this series speak with both energy of growth, as well as ecstasy of short life in the cosmic loop. Optimistic feeling of growth and life is closely intertwined with eschatological categorical imperative and inevitable completion. Along with Lytvynenko, who differentiates music of life and departure in breathless silence, in the contemporary art of Ukraine we can see Oleg Zhyvotkov, and from 1970s – "Quiet images of women" and landscapes by Grygory Havrylenko. The culture of Japanese Wabi-sabi is palpable in art of the three with its restrained sensuality and modest lack of noise. Those intonations, in particular, dominate in Lytvynenko's paintings "Tender Japanese Picture" (2003), "Beach" (2009), "Cold Wind" (2009), "Stream" (2010), "Grass-Snake" (2010) and others. Concentrated ideas of Eastern philosophy were transmitted with the language of refined colors. It is important that the aesthetics of Lytvynenko's art language arise from his ethical and moral principles. For the painter, aesthetics and ethics are inseparable. That is where Oleksiy's art contrasts against pervasive nihilism of artists of the new wave (generation of 1990s – 2000s), and the newly-appeared ignorance as an artistic diminishment. According to Albert Schweitzer, "Becoming moral means becoming really thinking"<sup>10</sup>. The process of thinking is not aggressive to sensitivity and intuitive insights. The author of the book "Reverence for life" said, "Any true perception is transformed into experience... knowledge of the world becomes my experience of the world. Perception that has turned into experience has not made me ... a subject that only perceives, instead, it excites in me a sense of inner connection with the world. It fills me with a feeling of reverence for the mysterious will of life manifested in everything ... I am the life that wants to live; I am a life among the life that wants to live"<sup>11</sup>. We may consider these words

of brilliant humanist of the 20th century Albert Schweitzer (organist, musicologist, theologian, pastor, philosopher, and physician) as a formulated program of aesthetics and ethics for O. Lytvynenko. The modern artist with positive thematic, ethical and painting programs opposes post-apocalyptic moods, trends and features of so-called “contemporary art”, which are popular among the egocentric art community.

Opposition of the artistic and aesthetic program of Lytvynenko’s paintings to the artistic brutality, utter mockery and denial of civility by artists, pose the problem of egocentric personalism and artistic individualism; whose exponent brilliantly works with categories of archetypal “collective subconscious” (psychology of C. Jung). Importantly, when based on ethical grounds the artist sees the archetype as a reward for individual legacy, received from his family. It is about collective beliefs (values), grafted to the personality (psychological creativity) of a contemporary artist. A phenomenon of transpersonal consciousness appears. According to S.Grof’s concept presented in his book “Beyond the Brain”, humans always identify themselves with the objects of nature – trees, stars, water, birds. The idea of trans-personalization has been convincingly embodied – in this personality and art of Oleksiy Lytvynenko.

Attention to the intuitive beginning in the artist’s subconscious and the need to grasp unreal and surprising images of dreams have become a leading trend in the art world of the 20th – 21st centuries. Here Ukrainian artists are not lagging behind. In Lytvynenko’s art images of sub-consciousness are reflected in a series of pictures “Dreams: Whisper of a Dream – I, II, III” (1995 – 1997); “Bridge II” (1998); “Thistle” (2002); “Children room” (1996). The author says that no verbal contents and stories are left after his dreams; there is only a feeling like an emotional trace. Oleksiy says that settings to work and implementation of something very important, that slides away in the day light is an important feature of dreams for him<sup>12</sup>.

More music  
Less thinking  
And no speaking in vain  
The whole life at the level of hardships  
And time is wise,  
And it will cancel fabrications.

Lina Kostenko, “Flying quatrains”.<sup>13</sup>

The series “Dreams” was made with thick color combinations using contrast and somewhat dramatic intonations of mood. The same might be said about some works from the series “Coal”: “Landscape”, 2012; “Geometry of Grass”, 2012; “Fish”, 2012. In dreams suppressed anxieties of real life, its disharmony and destructiveness, which Oleksiy discards to replace with ideal natural scenes, overshadow day light views. Rustling of grass and excitement of clouds concede the “portrayed” pathogen of mundanity. Among the flowers and light in his own studio, Lytvynenko opens the eyes of his soul and mind to prove that harmony exists along with the drama of life; we just have to live by the “ascending of conscience” (quotation by L.Tolstoy).

“Creativity is incredibly dramatic, – the modern Ukrainian philosopher S. Krymskiy used to claim, ...there is nothing more terrifying, than looking at Nothing. Only God can watch Nothing and create the world out of it. However, any creative work begins with Nothing ... To release of its arms, one needs to look inside. It is incredibly difficult and terrifying, though visualization starts from this vision<sup>14</sup>. It is the very secret of the element of authenticity in Oleksiy Lytvynenko’s art.

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