

Technique, Thematic, Symbolism and Semiotics - Authentic Synthesis in Adem Kastrati's Creativity

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Abstract

The choice to bring this topic consists in choosing the creative vocation of the inventive painter Adem Kastrati, who articulates the artistic work with a unique technique, the usage of brown soil color, as a pictorial material and tool without artificial mixture, stressing also the application of the specific pictorial structure, which is considered unique up to now. Main objective of this paper is the analysis of the technical, thematic, symbolic and semiotic authenticity, in Adem Kastrati's works, which is based on the Albanian traditional history.

The artist's tendency to create a form of art apprehensible to all, through the articulation of a clear figurative language which occupies a specific considered space in the paper, shows the artist's message transmission to receptive level in reference to psychological-spiritual condition. This paper is based on primary and secondary sources, direct analysis of the artist's activity, as well as different materials and publishing. As for the idea, technique, theme, variety of signs and symbols reflected, it is important to notice that the artist's skill is very original in the universe of inventive values of pictorial art that is why he occupies an important position in the Albanian culture. Consequently, this paper reflects a unique panorama of the authentic synthesis of specifications that characterize this artist's activity. Therefore through this exposition, we are trying not only to highlight his creativity, but we are also trying to highlight his works to all the competent institutions nationwide, whose art was presented in 50 individual and collective exhibitions in different countries of the world.

Keywords: Kastrati, authenticity, symbolism, semiotics, message.

Introduction

The truth about ethno genesis that, "*Illyrians stay on top of the history of the Albanian people*" and that "*their culture has defined cultural and historical heritage of Albanians today*" (Buda, 1978, 9) as a result of our science (linguistics and archaeology), motivates the painter Adem Kastrati to bring the essence of our ethnos and culture through invented artistic style, unique technique, in reference to the universal awareness on the values and the autochthony of the Albanian nation.

Hence, the whole creative opus of Adem Kastrati articulated in fragmentary form comes in narrating the traces of past, with elements and phenomena of prehistoric Illyrian particles, in demonstrating the identity characteristics of survival, resistance and development of our being, with an emphasis on ethno-cultural realm.

The transfiguration of vital truth, within the truth of pictorial art, as a result of experiencing and perception of the sublime spirit, along the outlining of the artist's creativity marks the multi – dimensional values.

The skilful compositional treatment and the concrete artistic formation, consists of each moment incarnation that has traced his memory. As a result, the image of the relevant time, the motifs of identity, the environmental description of the artist, remained a boundless exploratory and descriptive source of inspiration.

Soil color, peculiarity, style, unique technique

The painter's expressive language and the ideological thematic outline derive from the extraordinary spiritual strength. Hence, reflecting all the creative potential in style, technique and theme, where each one of them is realized in detail bears the Albanian stamp and gives a unique creation. Its authenticity prevails particularly in the use of colors of soil, as a tool and material without artificial mixture, but moreover in the application of detailed pictorial structure. In search of beauty, Adem Kastrati accurately selected the motherland's coloration, thus outlining the inevitable link to the past and present, such a relation that coexisted and was immortalized because of the application of special art forms. Since he found creativity in the soil of Kosovo, he always remained his own expression. This expression is not only his peculiarity, but also Albania's peculiarity in general (Aliu, 2014, 34).

In the context of the individual and collective peculiarity, ethno emotional description distinguishes the expressive force that promotes the artist to explore the national truth, so that the greatness of autochthony might be represented as a peculiarity and value in common, of Albania's ethnic being. Hence, the artist's spiritual bond with anything that is Albanian is not coincidentally, because Kastrati requires in his creative work everything to be authentic.

While the Kosovo painter Zeni Ballazhi, says in relation to the demonstrative creative style and the unique technique of Kastrati, that: *"To grind ground (stones) and to paint with soil colors so that the painting shows a reality, a profound drama, it is not easy; this marks a technical and unique evolution, a sophistication of expressive tools and an attempt towards philosophy"* (Ballazhi, 2014, 4).

However, despite the difficulties of finding a unique technique, the artist created a style and creative individuality, as the brand of its original expression. Another way to assign the artistic originality of Adem Kastrati is the treatment of color range. Non-expansive colors of soil, somewhat withdrawn or concluded in itself make us feel the presence of the past and identify essential features of our national existence (Sylejmani, 2005, 17).

The set of colors and shades in compositional achievements enable a necessarily essential perception of the deepness of Kosovo and Albania, as the outline of the warmth of the ground – by using soil color, which is very peculiar, with no artificial mixture which delights the eye by bringing high quality. Indeed the colors of Kastrati show the simplicity of man related to the land as its symbolism (Goqi, 1988, 18).

Ideo-thematic retrospective on ethnic truth

Exploring popular memory that encompasses the whole of ethnic physiognomy; rites, ceremonies, habits, customs, traditional costumes, traditions, legendary epos, dances,

games, myth legends from pagan sources, remains a widely chronic commitment of Kastrati's mentality of creativity; it explicitly reveals his universe of knowledge in the folk-culture, ethnography, ethnology, philosophy, sociology and life of Albanian people. Life sequences of his homeland, which are stratified in the consciousness of the author, bring the atmosphere of time along with the expression of psychological traits.

Even the tragic, dramatic, pain and cry permeate Kastrati's artistic works inexorably, resulting as such an explosion of the troubled soul artist. Through the visual expression, the artist puts across the revolt of circumstances repressive for the nation, the same as it reacts to turmoil, crossroads, or fear of existential dilemmas.

He puts an emphasis on the exodus topics; that is a consequence of the pain experienced. Embodied figures confess, accuse and cry, through form, color and rhythm. Thus the artist strongly expresses the outburst of the revolt against the tragedy of Kosovo people. The conception of Kastrati's revolting art matches up with the philosophical saying of Albert Kamy, which goes like this "*Art is a revolt, harassment of existence, and in any revolt it develops the demand for another world*".

Range of authentic symbols and signs in the artistic creativity

The art of Kastrati is characterized by the diversity of signs, symbols, aesthetics, content, message and communication, which are interactive factors that outline the style, features and his artistic authenticity. His creativity is generally highlighted by the transformation of aesthetic phenomenon in symbols, clear articulation, suggestive demarcation of the signs, affinity to synthesize the human and space, form and content, mind and spirit in a harmonious balance.

The compositional range that encompasses the terrestrial life, land, human, material and spiritual heritage of the country of origin, is stratified on the subconsciousness of the painter (Mukarovsky & Çapaliku, 2014, 162). The rich gallery of characters and the portrayal of various psychological conditions, distinguishes the conventional character of merging the mental image with the visual one. It deals carefully with the form and content, creating a whole system of signs and symbols, since the distinct functions of Jacobson are not missing, whether referential, expressive (emotive), aesthetic or even convincing (connotative) function.

Maxims of Goethe accompanies Kastrati throughout his artwork (Sulejmani, 1971, 164). Therefore, by creating the image in his imagination he created art and the untold in art. Through the character of lines, features, rhythm and aesthetic formal reports, he marked the inside, the spirit of time and space.

Kastrati aimed to raise in a higher scale the art, the images from earth and heaven, whether mythical, from the daily life, or national and folkloric tradition. He also glorifies symbols and metaphors, personification and signs. While analyzing the creativity of Kastrati it is assumed that the painter stays loyal to the quote of Auguste Rodin, who said, that: "Art is the most sublime mission of man, since it is the exercise of thought which seeks to understand the world and make others understand it" (Sulejmani, 1971, 164).

The semiotic tracing in the art of Kastrati, began from the first painting technique, which is decoded as the vocation of over structured evidence of the ancient autochthony of

Albania. The technique itself also contains other special codes because the soil symbolizes the earth. And the earth symbol is strongly associated with human existence. The Earth is a living organism as of Stipčević (2014), he also explains that “the Opinion on earth as a living organism is found in Antiquities, where Plato and other authors gave to “Mother Earth” the name of the Goddess Gaia (Stipčević, 2014, 505). The notion of land often exists as the personification of mother and the central figure in the creativity of Kastrati remains exactly the character of the woman mother. The mother manages to express an entirety of meanings, thus it plays a multiple semiotic role. Kastrati has managed to structure the emotional sensitivity as spiritual value that exactly derives from the notion of “maternal feeling”. In this context he encompassed all substantial components which sublimate the entirety of the accented notion; love, devotion, joy, feeling, delicacy, happiness, pain, up to self-sacrifice. The figure of the mother generally represents reproduction, continuity, beauty and feminine symbols. The almost analogous description in the semiotic viewpoint also typifies other female figures that come as compositional part of artworks. We find them committed at home, on the field, in familiar ceremonies and wherever required. The disproportion of extremities marks the reflection of the worst and arduous life of the Albanian woman. We also interpret the semiotics of female figure that characterizes the Albanian women with vigilance, greatness, pride, dignity and scarifies. The woman is not just a symbol of reproduction and prosperity; it is also a symbol of beauty, connected with aesthetic hedonism.

In general, Kastrati distinguished poetics and features of the Albanian woman. She appears as a beautiful and healthy creature with all the physical attributes that dignify her. Therefore while the Kastrati penetrates deeper into the semantic structure of the figure, he neatly articulates the clarity of direct expression in figures, symbols, signs and other components. In addition he also presents the features of Albanian men, slightly bent and stately, as the backbone of the family.

It is well known that the basic theme of Kastrati’s creativity remains the livestock, farming, traditional costumes, rituals, family ceremonies, entertainment activities, songs, dances, games, national forms of architecture, interiors with furniture - as an inherited treasure of material and spiritual culture. The synthesis of the past outlined in fragmentary form, contains many signs returned into symbols which have special meanings to the artist. The rituals dealing with life cycle, birth, marriage and death, are a form of the semiotic. Quite interesting in his paintings are the rituals of marriage with dowry, widely practiced among the Albanians. The origins of this ritual seem to derive from Illyrians (Lici, 2014, 3). However, the ritual of death has its own uniqueness, especially in the semiotic interpretation of mourning, as a reflection of the tragic act, where it is reflected as a human disaster, as a ritual with prehistoric times.

Folk costumes are without doubt one of the most powerful manifestations of traditional culture. They are broadcasters of many elements that come from antiquity and the middle ages (Gjergji, 2010, 6).

Characteristic traditional dresses have their symbolism in the pantheon of clothing, which have passed a long way from the Illyrians (Lici, 2014, 3). Therefore, being a prominent cognitive of tradition Kastrati reveals with love the typical folk dresses for all genders and ages, which necessarily synthesize symbolic-semiotic peculiarities. An important element

known as the Albanian stamp of antiquity is “White Sod”. Illyrians placed it down the helmets, whereas in peacetime it was placed to protect against rain and cold. The sod other than being a symbol of freedom, clarity and spiritual purity of the Albanian nation (Anastasi, 2013, 22) is also an important element of national clothing for men. Often, in the works of Kastrati we encounter “Sun” as the central cult, which was preserved without interruption in the Illyrian and Albanian history. The cult of the sun is related to the cult of fire as a source of light and warmth (Gjergji, 2010, 4).

On the other hand, the complete gallery of symbols and preservation of the internal parts of the mosaic, the stones of the tower walls, and other elements, reflect a synthesized organization, which fluently corresponds both in form and reference.

The author brings the symbolism of the “Tower” which other than a residential structure remains a symbol of the Albanian resistance. An important element of the stratified tradition, and which is identified with the tower, is “The stone” that stands out as a symbol of strength and stability. In addition it symbolizes immutability. Material objects generally dominate the interior of the towers. Artistic treatment of “the hearth” (fireplace) is reflected as a symbol of family community and a synonym of the house (Dajaka, 1962, 110). Another important element obviously remains “The low round table” - which besides being used for eating it has the symbolism of Albanian virtues – such as that of generosity (Dajaka, 1962, 120). An important role in the life cycle plays “The Cradle” which is mostly found in artistic paintings. The Cradle other than used as a bed for young children, it is used as a means of transport (Dajaka, 1963, 74) but it also signs the symbolism of growth, new life, lullabies, etc.

During the interpretation of symbols and codes of narration in the creativity of Kastrati we define that all paintings with figural composition, gamma and structural elements are signs, which are transformed into symbols with significant base. Consequently, since the artwork is thought to be an intermediate between the creator and community (Mukarovsky, 2014, 162), we get to a psycho-emotional state and philosophical mindset that conveys interpretation in signs and symbols, giving Kastrati’s art a multilateral meaning. Therefore, we come to the conclusion that the pictorial compositions of Kastrati re-encourage us to experience the events and moments generated during the historical national past.

Conclusions

Thanks to the tendency, invention, work, dedication, technical and thematic authenticity, the painter Adam Kastrati holds a special place in the history of the Albanian art. Throughout Kastrati’s creativity we found a promotion of the Albanian values (Sylejmani, 2005, 17). His art breathes and speaks Albanian. He brought individuality to the Albanian art, which made him an extremely visionary character in autochthonous expression (Aliu, 2014, 34). It is important to emphasize that Kastrati was never concerned about the trends of vanguard styles. Since the painter’s artistic vocation was authentic, his pictorial activity was often criticized, especially in connection to the painter’s artistic expression without intermediaries and directly, as the application of light naive elements such as lining in drawing and decoration. However, Kastrati proved with his artwork, that he actively

lived all great pictorial movements of our century, symbolism, fauvism, cubism, dadaism, surrealism and abstractionism (Ballazhi, 2014, 4). The fact that Kastrati was individual and used all artistic trends and directions is argued by the painter himself in an interview in the early eighties:

“It is very bad for somebody to follow any trend or movement blindly and become slave of form or style. Perhaps in my paintings, not only realistic elements are part of them, but also the psychological profound dimension. My paintings have an emphasized indigenous character with particular symbolic significance. Therefore I am right when I say that I do not belong to naive art (Konushevc, 1983, 25)“

Even in subsequent interviews, aware of his individual shaped style, Kastrati has stated:

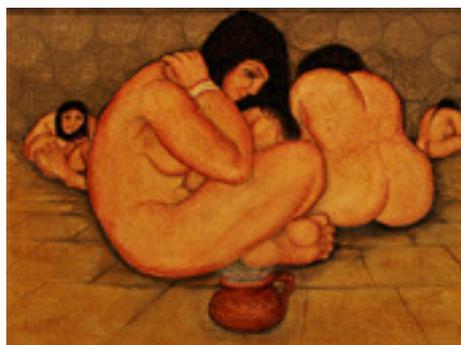
“I do not fully belong to neither direction (movement), I do not care about styles, therefore I paint my way (Sylejmani, 2005, 17)“

Generally taken, in the absence of a final defined notion, we determine his creativity in style, technique, and subject as “Kastratian”. Thus, we have an established style which can be called “The style of Kastrati”. Therefore, we are confident that in the history of Albanian pictorial art, there will be a technique named Kastrati (Ndoci, 1973, 16). He remains a Creator whose originality and unrepeatable style made era in the field of pictorial art (Sylejmani, 2005,7).

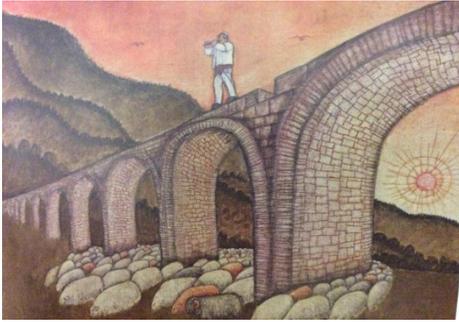
Adem KASTRATI was born in 1930 in Karaçeva e Epërme, near Kamenica-Kosovo. He graduated from Academy of Fine Arts in Skopje in 1965. Since 1958 was a Member of the Association of Visual Artists of Kosovo. Since 1968 was a Member of figurative artists of Macedonia. Since 1977 he was a member of the International Art League. He was a teacher of fine arts throughout his life. He had dozens of personal and collective exhibitions in many countries of Europe. Over 800 paintings are scattered around the world in many private collections. He died in 2000 in Skopje – Macedonia, where he spent most of his life.



Dinners (1974)
67 x 70 cm, earth color on canvas 46 x 38 cm,



Nude 5 (1984)
earth color on canvas



Shepherd and Antiques (1988)
81x100cm, earth color on canvas 81x100cm,



The winter (1999)
earth color on canvas



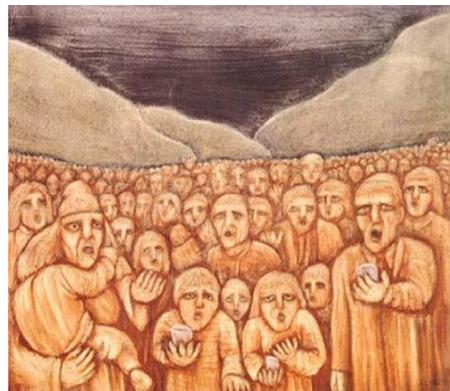
Lamenting of Rexha (1978)
67 x 70 cm, earth color on canvas



Albanian interior (1979)
earth color on canvas



Mother breastfeeding child (1998)
65 x 81 cm, earth color on canvas 102cm x 92cm,



Apotheosis of Water on Ground 1999)
earth color on canvas

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