

Rock art as a source for contemporary cultural identity: Siberian-Canadian comparative study

The project is about rethinking rock art, which is commonly associated with the past and archaeology. Not negating its importance for archaeological investigations, the project tends to demonstrate the significance of ancient rock art in current culture, particularly its role in ongoing processes of construing cultural identities. The research will be focused on modern re/uses of prehistoric rock art by contemporary Indigenous artists, and this will be analyzed on two different geographical and cultural examples. The first one is contemporary art in southern Siberia, the second one concerns Indigenous modern art of western Canadian (British Columbia, Alberta) artists. In both cases we deal with phenomenon, which share some common features: the art flourished in the second half of twentieth century, and both Canadian and Siberian artists share common efforts to re-establish links with forgotten or suppressed (in the result of colonial pressure) Indigenous tradition. In Siberia these are artists grouped in the movement known as Nearchaika or Archeoart, who explore their Indigenous culture and antiquity to a large extent by making prehistoric Siberian rock art an inspiration for their artworks. Rock art appears to be important source of inspiration also for some Indigenous artists in Canada. In the latter case the problem will be analyzed first of all through the prism of the art of Marianne Nicolson, a First Nation artist, who in 1998 painted a large-scale contemporary rock painting on the rocky cliff at coastal mainland of British Columbia. In both contexts the tradition of rock art has gained new life, and new stage of rock art tradition has been opened up. Prehistoric rock art has become either an inspiration for new forms of art or even a new form of art itself. Rock art ceased to be exclusively the domain of archaeology.

The juxtaposition of Siberian and Canadian arts (situated in similar socio-historical contexts of colonial appropriation of indigenous culture) will allow to reflect on the various forms of reception of rock art in the present. Preliminary research suggests that the comparison will oscillate around the tension between aesthetics and politics. For Asian artists, for example, more important appear to be to develop a new language of aesthetics to evoke the richness of indigenous cultural codes and thus create an artistic medium to unite past with present. On the contrary, Canadian artists seem to be more concerned by political issues, namely contestation of historical and still ongoing appropriations of their culture and land (including its economic exploration). An attempt to determine to what extent each of the contexts is shaped by political issues, and to what extent by aesthetics is one of the goals of the project. The project also seek to answer further questions: To what extent do contemporary artists aptly (from the perspective of archaeological knowledge) utilize particular themes of rock art as elements to support and justify their artistic messages? Do they make such efforts or do they rely on their own interpretations of the past? Is the idea of restoring Indigenous cultural codes a realistic project? What is the origin of these art 'movements' in each region (Asia and Canada) and to what extent they are similar? Do (and if so to what extent and how) artists want their art to affect the cultural consciousness and identity of the society? To find answers to these questions the project assume meetings and interviews with artists in Canada, Kazakhstan and Siberia as well as analysis of the reception of their works. Artists' views on art and culture as well as their artworks will be documented and analyzed. Finally the results of research in Asia with the Canadian research results will be compared.

The project, on the one hand, touches almost entirely unknown issue (Asian context is particularly unexplored), and on the other hand, it falls into really just opening stage of rock art research from the perspective of its contemporary use. This trend is becoming more and more present in the contemporary 'anthropology of the past', as witnessed by the most recent book *Relating to Rock Art in the Contemporary World: Navigating Symbolism, Meaning and Significance* (L.M. Brady, P.S. Taçon, University Press of Colorado 2016). The project is thus situated in global issues currently discussed, extends the knowledge of rock art and introduces it into a new sphere of anthropology and the current. Project will stimulate a change of perspective in the perception of rock art - not only in terms of the archaeological source, but will introduce rock art into truly interdisciplinary discourse linking knowledge of the past with knowledge of the present. The comparative Asian-Canadian perspective will additionally situate the project within cross-regional perspective, opening up a global platform for its presentation and a wide range of topics for discussion.