

# SibFU researchers reveal the secret of three paintings by Alphonse Mucha

Researchers of Siberian Federal University have revealed the general artistic idea of three works by the famous Czech artist Alphonse Mucha, painted in different periods of his creative career. According to the researchers, the works “Madonna of the Lilies”, “The Lottery of the Union of Southwestern Moravia” and “The Slav Epic” consistently reveal the themes of divine patronage of the Motherland, the revival of the Pan-Slavic world and the readiness of man to fight for the well-being of his native land.



*“Alphonse Maria Mucha is one of the most prominent representatives of Art Nouveau, the artistic style of the modern era. His advertising, commercial and theatrical posters are widely known. However, until today, little attention has been paid to the series of monumental paintings “The Slav Epic”, although the artist devoted a third of his creative career to it. We conducted a methodical analysis of these works and identified a single semantic pattern in them. All three paintings are programmatic for the artist. Step by step, he expressed the idea of divine patronage of the motherland and faith in this help from the person. It is also about hope, which should not be lost even in times of disaster and disunity — hope saves, and death and destruction are sooner or later left behind. This idea is all the more important for the modern world in which wars continue and crises affect entire nations,”* said **Yulia Zamarayeva**, co-author of the study, associate professor of the Department of Cultural Studies and Art History.

The researchers emphasize that twenty monumental canvases of the “The Slav Epic” show turning points in the history of the Slavs. The ideas of Pan-Slavism, patriotism and national identity are attributed to this collection. The Slavic Czech Mucha actually constructed the image of the rebirth of the Czech Republic at the beginning of the XX century.

*“It is interesting that during the creating of “The Slavic Epic”, Alphonse Mucha visited Russia. Some art critics note that a number of his paintings show similarities with the paintings of Vasily Surikov. In particular, the work “The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia” echoes “The Morning of the Streltsy Execution” with its monumentality and masterful use of multi-figure composition. Most viewers know Mucha as the creator of memorable images of beautiful women with fancifully fluttering hair, but he was a really serious master who embodied a number of philosophical ideas, particularly in the works we reviewed,”* explained **Natalia Seredkina**, associate professor of the Department of Cultural Studies and Art History.

According to the researches, all three studied works repeatedly echo each other. In all of them, teenage girls are depicted in the foreground, and the divine powers, whether it is Madonna with Christ or a Slavic idol, become the background for them. This means that at the level of each individual work we can find the patronage of some divine powers depicted, but this patronage is still different.

*“In the first work “Madonna of the Lilies” we see patronage in the initial moment as a promise of help and protection. No wonder the artist uses the composition of the Annunciation with the traditional attributes (angel figure on the right, a scattering of lily flowers, flower of the Saint Mary in the space of the picture). The picture shows the viewer that one should believe in patronage, even if it is not obvious. A gigantic wreath on the lap of a*



*red-haired girl in a national costume — it is not for a person. It indicates transition, a turning point in the present historical stage for the native land.*

*In the lottery poster, the divine patronage is called into question: the idol representing the deity is in the farthest background, it is mourned by the mature woman. But the girl does not give in to despair, she boldly looks forward and becomes a new twig of the tree of life instead of the withered lime tree left behind in the past.*

*The last picture “The Slav Epic” confirms the idea that the rebirth will come, and death, desiccation, fossilization are only temporary phenomena. The idol that is mourned in the lottery poster comes to life. A sword appears in the hands of the statue, ready to fall on those who dare to offend the girl playing a musical instrument. The girl is treated as the native land, motherly principle, source and musical harmony of everything that exists,” said **Ksenia Reznikova**, professor of the Department of Cultural Studies and Art History.*

Summing up, the researchers pointed to the universality of the main idea that united the three paintings of Alphonse Mucha: divine patronage of the motherland is invariable, even when it seems that providence has left the people and their native lands, when the grief of people is inevitable and inexhaustible. Endurance, fearlessness, and a willingness to fight will surely lead to prosperity and dawn. Patronage and protection remain with the people, even when it seems that dark times have come — you just need keep believing, be fearless and ready to fight in times of crises and failures.

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