Picasso, Dali, Chagall, and Picabia in the *Salon of the Rejected* – a 1968 audience survey, analyzed on the pages of the press

Пикасо, Дали, Шагал и Пикабиа в *Салона на отхвърлените* – проучване на публиката от 1968 г., анализирано на страниците на печата

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Abstract: In 1968, a sociological survey on the topic of *The contemporary Bulgarian on literature and art* was conducted among the audiences, invented as a supreme "jury". The reasons for authorizing the selected "jury" on art works reproductions to accept some art works for the "Official salon" and to send others to the "Salon of the rejected" are far from the interest in the artistic and critical practices, and even in the audiences (always diverse). These reasons lie in the effort to ideologically model the look to the West held by a socialist/communist cultural community.

Keywords: a sociological survey on art audiences, art sociology during the Iron Curtain, the 1960's, French artists in Bulgaria, reproductions of art works

Ключови думи: социологическо изследване на художествените публики, социология на изкуството по време на Желязната завеса, 1960-те години, френски художници в България, репродукции на художествени произведения

At the end of the 1960s, sociological studies of art audiences became topical in the East of the Iron Curtain, including in Bulgaria[2]. In 1968, a survey on the topic of *The contemporary Bulgarian on literature and art* was conducted among the audiences. The research was field-tested by the Esthetics Department of the Institute of Philosophy at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in collaboration with a researcher from the Institute of Art Studies at the Academy. The team included representatives from committees of the Communist Party in Sofia and the Kremikovtsi Plant (where the research was carried out), the chair of the Sociological studies group at the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, and an editor of the *Narodna kultura* [National Culture] newspaper. The outcomes of the survey were published

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[2] The fact that the Institute of Sociology and *Sociological Issues* journal were founded in 1968 is very indicative of the growing significance of sociological studies in Bulgaria.

in the *Narodna kultura* newspaper on May 11, 1968 (Atanasov, Kavaldzhiev 1968: 1-3) and were republished, with a few changes and additions, in a collection of articles by Alexander Atanasov in 1972 (Atanasov 1972: 90-110)[3]. The review of the article in the Soviet periodical *Inostrannaya literatura* [Foreign Literature], issue 8 from 1968 (Inostrannaya literatura 1968: 251-253), recognized the ideological significance of the publication as well as the whole event at that moment.

The time of the launch of the survey coincided with the Prague Spring. In the republished variant from 1972, the events in Prague were the main point in the concluding part of the article: "The events in Czechoslovakia in 1968 showed once again that, among other things, in the field of art and esthetics ideological compromises ultimately serve the strategy of anti-communism… " (Atanasov 1972: 110).

The aims of the survey were to model and, at the same time, simulate an evaluative/judgmental view of art phenomena both east and west of the Iron Curtain. Those were determined by the political context – the significance of 1968 in the period of the Cold War. The authorities had previously resorted to the promotion and simulation of an evaluative/judgmental view of phenomena in art "of citizens of different enterprises and institutions". Such was the case with the discussion of contemporary Bulgarian works in the *Joint Art Exhibition'59*, which took place in December 1959 – February 1960. A record of it was published in three consecutive issues of the *Narodna kultura* [National Culture] newspaper (*Narodna kultura*, 1960: January, № 3, 4, 5)[4]. Eight years later, the situation was different. The impact of 20th century art and literature, especially the foreign one, whose potential exceeded the territorial borders and military fencing, seemed ideologically threatening to the state authorities. The tone of the article is polemical – it includes arguments of the possible opponents in the dispute. At prima facie, it reiterates the discourse of the early 1950s: the terminology includes "anti-communism", "ideological diversion", "decadent art", etc. However, there is something new – "realism" is used together with "humanism", and in the title of another article by the same author we come across the collocation "modern realism" (the title of the quoted collection acknowledges the importance given to it).

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The survey *The contemporary Bulgarian on literature and art* in 1968, according to the description in the article, included "every tenth of 4000 people from all major strata of the population" (Atanasov 1972: 93). Thus, at the end of the one-month research, the interviewers collected 400 completed questionnaires. The main social strata described were: factory and agricultural workers, engineers, employees of a foreign trade enterprise, teachers, university and high school students, pensioners

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[3] In a footnote, the author has specified: "Co-authored with L. Kavaldzhiev", without referencing the earlier publication.

[4] This episode is the subject of special attention by Dimitar Avramov (Avramov 1994: 239-255).

and housewives. The survey indicated specific enterprises, factories, schools, etc., among which were the *Metallurgical Plant* in *Kremikovtsi*, *Vitosha* sewing enterprise, *Georgi Dimitrov* State Printing House, *Energoproekt*, *Bulgarplod*, the *Higher Medical Institute* and others. As for the approach taken in the research, the authors referred to the method of the sociologist Zhivko Oshavkov, but the representativeness of the sample had not been proven. The main problem of the sociological research, however, lies elsewhere. "The participants in the survey had to evaluate works of different types: some, chosen as blatantly decadent, others – vividly humanistic and realistic, and a third group of ideologically and artistically contradictory and harder to evaluate works" (Atanasov, Kavaldzhiev 1968: 2). How the survey team had chosen those three types and selected the works of art that go with them remains unclear in the article. The preconditions of the authorities' ideology are clear, and they discredit the scientific nature of the survey. The manipulative suggestion to readers that the adequate communication with works of art depends on the qualities of the works themselves (or the lack of such) is problematic. The issue of the formation, experience and attitude of the public was displaced by the untenable statement that the most correct is the critical assessment of "the intellectually developed strata and the representatives of the most progressive classes, and in our time – of the revolutionary working class, of its ideologists and artists" (Atanasov 1972: 92). All respondents were presumably in this framework, so they were seamlessly made equal, reduced to numbers and percentages. In addition, they were tasked with evaluating art (whatever that means).

I will briefly comment only on the results, shown in the article, which refer to the so-called fine arts and to 'the look at the West'. In this section, the grounds of the survey and its conclusions are further compromised by the fact that the number of those interested in this artistic field is the lowest (19%) compared to other fields (cinema, popular music, fiction, etc.). All the respondents were shown reproductions of paintings by Bulgarian, Soviet and Western artists, mostly French.

The reproductions, replacing the original art works, in their turn discredit this section of the survey. Presumably, the respondents were familiar with the works themselves when it comes to the cinema, fiction, and music although foreign fiction was translated in Bulgarian, the musical pieces were mediated by sound recordings of concerts and films – by a specially organized film screening (running the risk of some of the films being censored). Paintings and sculptures, however, were to be evaluated only through reproductions: "… fine art works were shown via slides or printed reproductions" (Atanasov, Kavaldzhiev 1968: 2). Reproductions are a means of recalling an encounter with a work of art or of creating expectations of such an encounter. The evaluation made on impressions from reproductions ignores the difficulties with the missing context of the works of art – place, time, the surrounding environment of the time of their creation and of their perception today; with the ignorance of the critical reception in this context; with the misunderstandings and the mistakes in the foreign names and in the titles translated in Bulgarian; with the respondents' lack of experience in big art museums with worldwide collections.

What is indicative is the moment when the article from the collection mentions a suggestion by the respondents "to show original works exemplifying the decadent Western art" in Bulgaria (Atanasov 1972: 108). We can assume that such a challenging proposal comes, not without a dose of irony, from the artistic circles. The author's answer is symptomatic – it is possible "to display some original decadent works in specially designated places and the cost of such "pleasure" is to be entirely at the expense of the curious" (Atanasov 1972: 108). The whole idea is a threatening reminder of other practices of the didactic presentation of "decadent works" under the totalitarian regimes in the 1930s[5].

Among the examples of evaluation based on western art reproductions in the article are: Pablo Picasso's *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* (renamed *Girls of Avignon*), *Guernica* (transliterated inaccurately in Bulgarian) and *La repasseuse* [*Woman Ironing*]; Salvador Dalí's *Prémonition de la Guerre Civile* [*Premonition of Civil War*] (renamed with the vague title of *The responsibilities for the Civil War*); Marc Chagall's *Moi et le village* [*I and the Village*]; Francis Picabia's *Composition*. The publication does not mention either the year of their creation or their location at the time. To sum up, they are all from the first four decades of the 20th century, from the time prior to World War II. The earliest one is *La repasseuse*/*Woman Ironing* (1904) by Picasso, and the latest one – *Guernica* (1937) by the same author. As for Picabia's *Composition* there is no sure signposting due to the artist's multitude of works bearing the same name. They are all located in museums in the USA and Western Europe, which makes them hard for the respondents to access.

Most of the reproductions, included in the survey, were published on the pages of the specialized editions in Bulgaria. Picasso's *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* was printed in black and white in Atanas Stoykov's book *Critique of abstract art and its theories* from 1963[6] (Stoykov 1963: 85). The author sparingly mentions "the mastery and refinement of the Cezanne method" and "the growing interest in African sculpture". The book contains a black and white reproduction of *I and the Village* by Marc Chagall (Stoykov 1963: 103). There is a whole paragraph dedicated to the artist in the chapter *Dadaism and Surrealism*. Regarding this specific work as well as other works on a related topic, Stoykov summarizes: "The symbolic-fairy tale principle dominates in all of Chagall's works. […] And everything is depicted with some intrinsic innocence, close to a child's one. This is what attributes some charm to Chagall's paintings and what surrealists' (works, AN) lack. And yet, we can liken his work to a child's party held for its own sake…" (Stoykov 1963: 102). The negation, predetermined by the ideological stand of the critic, prevails over the expression of his attraction to Chagall's works. The first chapter of the same book, in the section *On the notion of "abstract art*, mentions Picasso's *Guernica*, yet there is no printed reproduction: "… fine art, even when not realistic, is still able to serve, though not fully, the great ideals of human progress (a clear example of

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[5] A well-known example is the exhibition *Degenerate Art* in 1937 in National Socialist Germany.

[6] The text was defended as a dissertation in Академия общественных наук (АОН) [Academy of Social Sciences] in Moscow in 1962.

this is Picasso's *Guernica*)…)" (Stoykov 1963: 14). The ideological preconditions are still powerful, but Stoykov's brief statement is rather affirmative. Regarding all reproductions in "Critique of abstract art …" we should mention that the annotations to them indicate the year of the creation of the works and their current location.

Picasso's *Woman Ironing* and *Guernica* are part of the article by the artist Ivan Nenov on Pablo Picasso in the *Izkustvo* [*Art*] magazine in 1967 (Nenov 1967). Thirty years earlier, in 1937, Nenov visited the World Exposition in Paris, where *Guernica* was shown for the first time. Although this is not mentioned in the article, the artist discusses the work from the position of a connoisseur and concludes: "… this work remains unsurpassed with its irresistibly impressive impact" (Nenov 1967: 18). The same article shows a reproduction of a preparatory drawing for the *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*. Nenov finds qualities in both the painting and the drawing, but the attention to the weaknesses prevails. The interpretation of *Woman Ironing* and other paintings by the early Picasso is definitely positive.

Reproductions similar to those in the survey had been in circulation among the intellectual milieus in our country via other media too. A brief mention of the response to the great retrospective *Hommage à Picasso*, organized on the initiative of Andre Malraux on the occasion of the 85th anniversary of the artist in Paris[7], can be found in the published diaries of Petar Dinekov, a literary critic and folklorist, in an entry from 6 August 1967: "We were looking at slides of Picasso's painting s together with Blaga[8]. She pointed out: "How different each of Picasso's paintings is from the rest; he keeps transforming, always contradicting himself. The whole twentieth century is in his art. And this is the best about any artist – their latest transformations, their constant contradictions. This is the richness of both their life and personality". And, sadly, we agree – how narrow is the position of our contemporary esthetics and culture policy" (Dinekov 2016: 108). Such reflections, free of ideological prejudices, were possible only in the personal space.

The reproductions of Picabia, Dali and Chagall, according to the article dedicated to the survey, were rejected by the bigger part of the respondents, who described them as incomprehensible and meaningless (colloquial disqualifying epithets are quoted too). The three reproductions of Picasso predictably provoked a different response: *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* provoked a definite disapproval, *Guernica* was "incomprehensible", but *Woman Ironing*, which according to the article showed "Picasso the realist", was well accepted by the majority. The ambiguous attitude to Picasso is common in critique from the position of the authorities east of the Iron Curtain. The perception of Picasso in the communist period in Bulgaria as well as in other countries east of the Iron Curtain deserves special attention in another text.

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[7] The retrospective *Hommage à Picasso* happened consecutively in the halls of Grand Palais, la Bibliothèque nationale and Petit Palais for the duration of a year, from 18 February 1966 to 12 February 1967.

[8] Blaga Dimitrova (1922–2003), a writer and a poet.

As for Picasso's evaluation, according to the published outcomes of the survey, one detail draws the attention: "Almost all the responses "in favour" belong either to students under age, who (the observation clearly showed) wanted to play a joke, or to production workers with lower than secondary education… " (Atanasov 1972: 100). We already know, from the list of the institutions which participated in the survey, that the students come from 9th High School in Sofia, which, since 1961, has been specializing in French language learning. Did the students really play a joke, or did they react positively to an artist whose name was familiar thanks to their teachers in French language and civilization?

Along with the task of "evaluation through reproductions", there were also open questions: "name artists in the field of literature and art that you most appreciate". The list of artists mentioned in the article includes names from different epochs, cultures, and countries. The alphabetical listing levels both the artists themselves and the possible response to their works, similar to the standardization of the images in reproductions. We find out that the most appreciated among foreign artists are: Leonardo, Michelangelo, Veronese, Titian, Raphael, Velazquez, Rembrandt, Goya, Delacroix, Cezanne, Rodin, and Picasso, and among the Russian and Soviet ones – Vereshchagin, Aivazovsky, Shishkin, Levitan, Surikov, and Mukhina. In the absence of world art collections in Bulgaria, in this case too – the open questions, the respondents' evaluation and choice are mostly based on impressions of reproductions.

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The results of the conducted sociological survey among the audiences on the topic of *The contemporary Bulgarian on literature and art* were pre-set. To get the expected/ desired responses the research team relied on the fact that the respondents did not have minimum reference points to apply a knowledgeable criticism. The grounds for authorizing the selected "jury" to critique art reproductions and send some art works to the "Official salon" and others to the "Salon of the rejected"[9] are neither driven by interest in the artistic and critical practices, nor by interest in the very audiences (always diverse). It was grounded in the effort to ideologically model 'the look at the West' held by a socialist/communist cultural community.

Translated in English by Albena Vitanova

[9] The allusion refers to the *Salon des Refusés* – an art exhibition of works rejected by the jury of the official Paris Salon in 1863. The *Salon des Refusés* was organized by order of Napoleon III. Larousse "Dictionnaire de la peinture" [online].



11 май 1968 г.
Седмичник за изкуство, култура, наука и публицистика

НАРОДНА

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СЪВРЕМЕННИЯТ БЪЛГАРИН ЗА ЛИТЕРАТУРАТА И ИЗКУСТВОТО

РЕЗУЛТАТИ ОТ ЕДНО СОЦИАЛНО-ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКО ПРОУЧВАНЕ

1. On the survey *The contemporary Bulgarian on literature and art* in *Народна култура* [Narodna kultura] 1968, № 19



КУЛЬТУРА И СОВРЕМЕННОСТЬ

ЗАМЕТКИ НА ПОЛЯХ ЗАРУБЕЖНЫХ ГАЗЕТ И ЖУРНАЛОВ

СОВРЕМЕННЫЙ БОЛГАРИН О ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ И ИСКУССТВЕ

Одно из излюбленных измышлений буржуазной печати, «ниспровергающей» социалистический реализм, состоит в том, что реалистические и гуманистические традиции в искусстве якобы безнадежно устарели, что художники, развивающие эти традиции, движимы конформизмом, а широкой публике их произведения навязываются государственной и партийной культурной политикой вопреки «современным» запросам и вкусам читателей и зрителей. Если бы этот лживый тезис еще нуждался в опровержении, то таким опровержением в ряду множества других могло бы послужить изучение литературно-эстетических взглядов современного болгарина, которое взяла на себя секция эстетики Института философии Болгарской Академии наук. Но этим не исчерпывается значение проведенного опроса. Оно свидетельствует и о том, насколько поднялся средний культурный уровень современного болгарина.

Болгарский еженедельник «Народна култура» по этому поводу пишет:

2. On the survey *The contemporary Bulgarian on literature and art* in *Иностранная литература* [Inostrannaya literatura] 1968, № 8



углъбени, като че ли навътре в себе си. Средата е някаква сирачена празна дълбочина. Но погрешно е да се мисли, че такава една характеристика ще представи правдиво и пълно този етап, наречен син период. И въобще твърде неточно и условно е да се разделя така схематично на периоди творчеството на Пикасо. До творбите, споменати по-горе, има други, със съвсем различен рисунък, с други състояния и израз, като: «Челестина», «Две сестри» и др.

В решителната промяна, изразена в синия период, се проявява една от най-съществените черти на неговия творчески характер. Пикасо никога не се задържа в това, което го привлича. Неговата изнервена чувствителност, безкрайното му любопитство към всичко, което съществува в живота, в природата, към всички човешки проявя, поддържат неговата жадност да проникне във всичко, да възприеме всичко, което му разкрива животът, да усвои всичко, което може да му послужи да изразява най-въздействуващо и най-пълно чрез своя пластически говор с нови изразни възможности, годни да следват и предават отношението му към живота, чувствата, виденията и концепциите, които се пораждат от досега с този живот.

Отсега нататък неговият пластически говор ще се променя с всяка промяна на творческите му стимули. Пикасо мисли, че няма рисунък, който да служи за всички случаи, че рисунъкът се променя според това, което трябва да изрази.

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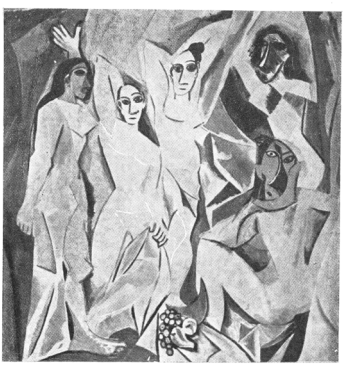
До измъчените същества от синия период се явяват арлекините и акробатите. Хората от цирка и скитащите актьори, образи на крехки същества, внушени от едно лирично вживяване в съдбата на този обществен слой, с който той се опознава, като посещава цирк Медрано и се сближава чрез топлотата на своята младежка чувствителност. «Акробатката върху топката», «Момчето с кучето» и др.

В синята тоналност сега проблясват леки светли розови, жълти и други нюанси. Чертата, която бележи формите, става по-изтънчена, с по-прочувствени колебания и артикулации, годна да предаде строежа, движението и състоянията на тези крехки, измъчени и все пак грациозни фигури. Пространството се прояснява и насища с елементите на една конкретизирана обстановка. Понякога в тези композиции просветват леки лирични цветни тоналности, като озарени от меланхолична усмивка. Едно чувство към чисто пластичната хубост се проявява в някои картини. Голото тяло придобива нов израз: «Семейство на арлекини», «Тоалет», «Момче с кон» и други. То е третирано с ново чувство, твърде различно от чувството, с което са изградени «Голо тяло в гръб» и «Две сестри». След толкова напрегнатия израз на страданието на онези като че ли обречени същества от синия период Пикасо сякаш с облекчение се спира на тези затворени в спокойното си жизнеусещане образи. Общата атмосфера преминава в топла тоналност, клонища към монохромие в розови или земночервени тонове. Рисунъкът е гъвкав, но на места чертата изчезва, фигурите са изградени обемно в леко нюансирани тонове, без да се нарушава цялостното въздействие на формите като обобщено цветно петно. Отделните елементи в тези композиции действуват като едри, леко моделирани цветни форми. Бялото, синьото, сивото и други цветове се появяват като цветни петна, участвуващи в цветовото изграждане на композицията. Засилената експресия на страданието, характерна за синия период, както и синята тоналност, създаващи един нереален символичен характер на композициите от този период, се явяват като израз на субективното състояние на младия Пикасо по онова време — несигурен, борещ се в чуждата страна с мизерията и неразбирането.

Още с акробатите Пикасо започва да преодолява това си състояние. Той открива нова, по-реална среда. Променя се и неговото отношение. То става по-спокойно, по-обективно, такъв е неговият пластически израз. Това е начало на дълбока и решителна промяна, която се изявява вече съвсем определено след едно пътуване в Холандия в 1905 г. Той е повлиян от светоусещането, изразено в изкуството на тази страна. Променя се и средата, в която той живее. Животът му е вече по-спокоен. Пикасо има материалната подкрепа на приятели и ценители на изкуството му, които купуват неговя творби. Между тях са руският търговец Сергей Шчукин и американската писателка Гертруда Щайн. Значително влияние върху формирането на неговите концепции и творческото му развитие по онова време е оказвал поетът Гийом Аполинер.

Една композиция кънещи се младежи и коне заедно с цяла серия подготвителни етюди към нея изразява най-чувствително промяната. Група кънещи се момчета с коне, здрави младежки тела до конете, спокойни, но волни движения изразяват една бликаща жизненост. Крайморски пейзаж. Телата са предадени в светла топла розова тоналност, в много обобщени форми, стегнати в гъвкава, подчертаваща енергично стрежа на фигурите черта. Цялата творба изразява спокойна



Пабло Пикасо. **Девойките от Авиньон.** *Масло, 1907. Ню Йорк, Музей на съвременното изкуство*

чеството на Пикасо, както сполучливо забелязва Кристофер Грей[1], застава вече не човекът, не човешката фигура, а проблемите за организацията на пейзажа и натюрморта.

В този период художниците-кубисти все още се стремят преди всичко към предаване на външния свят. Те са развили по-нататък конструктивните принципи на Сезан, но още не са създали своя собствена конструктивна система. Това те извършват във втория, така наречения аналитичен период (1910—1913). С него собствено и започва кубизмът. Човек никога не може да обхване изведнъж със своето зрение всички страни на един или друг предмет. Художниците-кубисти се стремят да превъзмогнат тази необходима ограниченост на зрителното възприятие у човека, да покажат в своите платна и ония страни на вещите, които не виждаме. Ето защо у тях може да се срещне изображение на човешко лице в профил с изрисувано и другото око, и другата част на носа и т. н., като че ли гледаме това лице едновременно и в

[1] Christopher Gray, Cubist aesthetic theories, Baltimore, 1956.

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Марк Шагал. **Аз и селото.** *Масло, 1911. Ню Йорк, Музей на съвременното изкуство*

реалистически възгледи и илюзии, да тръгнат по пътя на новия реализъм, да служат на делото на социалистическата революция. Андре Бретон, макар и да е член на комунистическата партия още от 1927 г., в същност само спекулира с марксистката терминология, като продължава да разпространява вредните фройдистки и сюрреалистични разбирания. Затова през следната 1928 г. той изпада вън от редовете на партията. Сюрреалистите наново стягат своите редици, към тях се присъединяват художници като Ив Танги, Салвадор Дали и други — все открити реакционери. Самият сюрреализъм окончателно се превръща в най-реакционно художествено течение.

Реакционността на сюрреалистите се изразява преди всичко в това, че те се стремят да освободят човека от всички негови семейни, отечествени и

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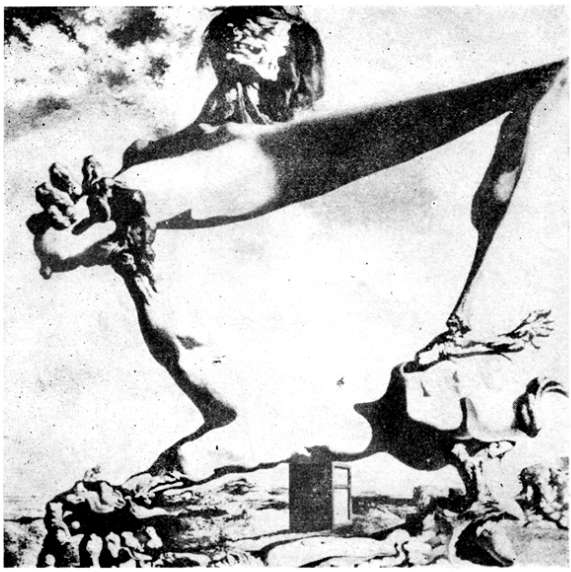
3. Reproduction of *La repasseuse [Woman Ironing]* by Pablo Picasso in Ivan Nenov's article *Pablo Picasso at the age of 85* (Nenov 1967: 7)

4. Reproduction of *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* by Pablo Picasso in Atanas Stoykov's book *Critique of abstract art and its theories* (Stoykov 1963: 85)

5. Reproduction of *Moi et le village [I and the Village]* by Marc Chagall in Atanas Stoykov's book *Critique of abstract art and its theories* (Stoykov 1963: 103)



31. САЛВАДОР ДАЛИ — Мека конструкция с варени кости, 1936

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6. Reproduction of *Prémonition de la Guerre Civile [Premonition of Civil War]* by Salvador Dalí in Atanas Stoykov's book *After the Decline of Abstractionism* (Stoykov 1970: 119)

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Резюме

В края на 1960-те години социологическите занимания с артистичните публики стават особено актуални на изток от Желязната завеса, включително и в България. През 1968 г. е проведена анкета с публиката на тема *Съвременният българин за литературата и изкуството*. Целите на анкетата са моделиране и същевременно симулация на оценяващ/осъждащ поглед към явления в изкуството на изток и на запад от Желязната завеса. Те се определят от политическия контекст – значимостта на 1968 г. във времето на Студената война.

В проведеното социологическо проучване на публиката резултатите са предварително заложени. За очакваните/желаните отговори екипът на изследването разчита на обстоятелството, че анкетираните нямат дори и минимални опори за разбиращо гледане. Основанията за овластяване на избраното „жури“ по репродукции да приема в „Официалния салон“ едни произведения, а други да отправя към „Салона на отхвърлените“, са далеч от интереса към художествените и критическите практики и дори към самите публики (винаги разнородни). Тези основания са в усилието за идеологическо моделиране на погледа към Запада на една социалистическа/комунистическа културна общност.