

UDC 656.7.260

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**THE COMPOSITION PRINCIPLES OF FINE ARTS EDUCATION:
PEDAGOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH. THE CASE OF LITHUANIAN
UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES**

The article discusses the importance of teaching composition in future fine arts teachers' education. The artistic competence of a fine arts teacher, of future educator is perceived not merely as a qualification, but also as the psychological ability of a unified fine arts perception, revealing the significance of fine arts composition, which in turn is marked by the integrative spiritual first, technical skills as well as the features of theoretical and historical conception.

Key words: *fine arts composition, competence, art education, psychological perception of art.*

The problem and its topicality. In analyzing the importance of composition teaching and educating the competence of future fine arts teachers, such a problem does not arise. However, the problem exists firstly because of the lack of a unified theory of composition itself – "composition theory as a system of artistic cognition, <...> remains the object of disputes" (Burneika, 2002, p. 11); i.e. the topic of composition appears to be one of the most outstanding problems in both art theory and art pedagogy including teaching techniques of painting, graphics, sculpture, design and other art disciplines. The significance of the problem is grounded by the fact that composition is the analogue of creation in its broadest sense; these two terms are rightly called synonymous. Therefore, the fine arts teacher is unable to achieve the standards of artistic education, which is the chief aim of their work at school, without mastering the fundamentals of composition. The above-mentioned aim can surely be achieved only by a specialist with vocational competence, which in turn can be achieved just after understanding and mastering the fundamentals of composition. Thus the problem of artistic education quality and composition teaching as well as fine arts teachers' competence is a topical research subject not only for Lithuanian art educators. Its topicality was revealed in the worldwide conference on artistic education *The Interface of Art and Education*, organized by UNESCO in 2006 in Lisbon. The topics on the quality of artistic education became the center all participants' considerations: what the teacher of fine arts should be, which teaching disciplines educate his/her competence and, as the title of the conference suggests, how to achieve the realization of the interface between art and education in detail. On the basis of the conference resolutions, the Seimas Committee of Education, Science and Culture decided to propose to the Government to regard artistic education as one of the top priorities of cultural and educational policy, and beside other suggestion to draw attention to the fine arts teacher's competence, which provides possibilities to implement the relation between art itself and its teaching.

The above-mentioned problem is solved in various ways in the practice of education. However, even after surveying the variety of composition teaching methods, it is obvious that it refers to different authors' conceptions of composition. Valuable theoretical knowledge about composition is provided by works of the Renaissance theoreticians and artists. These are *Major*

Laws by Leon Battista Alberti (1406 – 1472), *The Divine Proportion* by Luca Pacioli (1445 – 1514/17), *About Painting* by Leonardo da Vinci (1452 – 1519) and other theoretical insights by subsequent artists. Among them are: *The Daybook* by Eugene Delacroix (1798 – 1863), *The Analysis of Beauty* by English painter William Hogarth (1697 – 1764), and Vasilij Kandinskij's book *The Analysis of Spirituality in Art* (Василий Кандинский (1866 – 1914)). (We are undoubtedly no less concerned with Lithuanian authorities of composition – V. Kairiūkštis, J. Adomonis, J. Burneika, A. Mačiulis, A. Visockis, K. Dereškevičius, G. Šiukščius, A. Uogintas). The enumerated authors and their works form just a minor part of potential reference points for fine arts teachers. However, they have been mentioned here not accidentally: in analogy with fine arts history and the development of its theoretical reflections we envisage an effective importance of composition teaching, as a prerequisite of competence acquisition, for future fine arts teachers.

Hence, the **aim** of this article is to reveal composition being the basis for artistic competence education of future fine arts teachers.

The conception of artistic competence comprises the ability of composition, historical, theoretical and interpretative cognition of fine arts, in other words, the entire perception of a fine arts work. In the fine arts teachers' training programmes the courses on practical art subjects (drawing, painting, composition) and the history of fine arts are scheduled in order to educate these abilities. However, both the history of fine arts and the teaching practice reveal that "pure" artists are mostly concerned with the creation, i.e. composition itself. Therefore, in training a future fine arts teacher it receives special attention. The underlying place of composition in the process of fine arts teachers' training from the first sight can seem unhelpful for the spread of theoretical, interpretative and historical abilities. Though the data collected from future fine arts teachers' questionnaires at VPU in 2006 prove the opposite – the teaching of composition has real prerequisites for achieving theoretical subject and even professional pedagogical aims.

According to J. Baltrušaitis, the artist finds his/her art by searching for pure metrical and geometrical order, thus starting the complicated way of composition in the art history (Baltrušaitis 1992, p. 13). The first testimonies about the creative human activity date back the Age of Paleolith: the basis on which rests the whole development of fine arts forms is nothing short of simple rhythmical structures, many-directional dashes, dots and lines as well as various other scratches on animal bones and cave walls. However, these "primitive" forms – dot, line, quadrangle, triangle and circle – collectively are the signs, with the help of which not only ornamental – rhythmic, but also any composition on plane or spread is created. On one hand, simple and regular forms of plastic composition are easily perceived. On the other, even in the most complicated works they enhance and intensify the purity of expression and the emotionality of the work, presupposing its verbal interpretations. The perfectly mastered tune of proportional relations allows treating even K. Malevich's (К. Малевич (1878 – 1935) supremative works marked by the highest level of abstraction as "night photography" (Steiner, 1998, p.190).

The fluctuation of the forms in art history builds prerequisites to start composition teaching from these simple forms and their interface indirectly but creatively, as if recalling the starting section of the entire way of fine arts development: from dot to line, from line to blot, from static to dynamic, from shading to contrasting, and from simple to complicated. These are the goals determining students' creativity, stimulating them to search for compositional tune of these elements, which, depending on the task can be oriented towards calm or tense structure. "The opposites exist together in a composition, and by complementing each other they form unity and express certain meaning" (Matijkienė, 2004, p. 126). Searching for compositional harmony, which is the main and most general requirement for composition, the students plunge into the process of composing forms and signs. It uncloses the plane of new creational searching and active empathy to them, which is justified by students' discussions and debates during the lectures arising without any special encouragement. This in turn freshens up emotional germ, which, shortly speaking, " <...> provides a human being with more qualities that help to become more humane" (Goleman, 2003, p. 66). Formal and emotional variety of compositional structures in students' works evolves from

simple, and sometimes at first accidental consonance of colours, forms, lines and the spread to deeper and richer structures by gradually setting more complicated creative tasks. In the teaching process the students start understanding that "in abstract art the compositional element acquires a full-fledged and emancipated tune. And the small dot can become an indisputable proof" (Кандинский, 2004, p.107).

It is obvious that "the elements of composition determine each other, i.e. the application of some elements in a painting as if causes the necessity to apply certain other elements" (Kairiūkštis, 1989, p. 217). The consistency of compositional logics each time requires mastering a more complex structure, which allows gradual passing from two-dimensional compositions to the artistic "conquering" of the spread. Passing from two-dimensional composition to the solution of tasks set for mastering the third dimension, the students apply the same compositional laws and principles, which help them to create two-dimensional compositions. The consistent accomplishment of didactic conditions determines the quality and originality of the produce. To solve the tasks of spread composition, not only the skills of matching various abstract forms mastered in the plane are needed, but also the conception of spread geometry itself is necessary. In this sense the composition teaching again interacts with art history and its theory. By analyzing and clarifying the peculiarities of the composition of spread structures, the students confront with the necessity of theoretical research. They find the postulates on theoretical perception of spread and perspective of the above-mentioned Renaissance and other masters of subsequent stylistic ages helpful, enabling to deeper understand the knowledge acquired during the course of fine arts history and apply it in their personal compositional decisions. After surveying the future fine arts teachers, it occurred that despite their listening to the course on the Renaissance arts, just a few could describe the contents of the works mentioned in the beginning of the article. However, the students of senior courses, who had already worked in the sphere of spread composition, described one or another aspect of theoretical statements of the above mentioned authors quite comprehensively and ingeniously, thus confirming that theoretical insights of famous authors as well as "all classical works, including buildings, have oratorical tone, <...> directed towards creative communication" (Minor, 2001, p. 39) and indicating that composition teaching is marked by a certain creative gravitation, incorporating a personal mark as well as theoretical and historical facts.

Therefore, in order to seek for the education of future fine arts teachers' skills of mastering composition, the compositional principles of abstract art could be reasonably applied in teaching the composition of fine arts. Being clear and comparatively simple, these principles help to have a deeper look at the problem of composition, provide with impromptu freedom, relax students' imagination and substantially broaden their perception of the factography of art history. By completing concrete compositional tasks, a student perceives the first graphical Paleolithic signs and Neolithic ornamentation better, learns about the ethnical artistic culture spread enriched with sign geometry, and is able to envisage the harmony of formal structures in figurative compositions.

Studying composition students themselves make various unexpected compositional suggestions. One of them is an innovative element of composition. Novelty is not always easily receivable and understandable. According to S. M. Daniel (С. М. Даниель), "the system of representation, the core of which is composed of the established traditional compositional form, always collects new elements in its periphery. Initially they exist and are treated as more or less accidental means, deforming compositional norm. Meanwhile, these peripheral elements become proliferate. They supersede the core element of the figurative system and constitute compositional quality and a new form of entirety" (Dereškevičius, 1987, p. 37). Therefore, it happens that students' creative compositions reveal abilities unfamiliar to themselves, thus causing their feeling of astonishment and creative self-confidence as well as stimulating them to grasp the difficulties of the establishment of new art trends on the scene of art history. It should be emphasized that the fine arts students' open answers to the questionnaire compiled by Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences about the relation between novelties and traditions in art totally corresponded to the students' artistic discoveries in the sphere of composition. By way of generalizing, the contents of

the students' answers marked by high innovative level in the sphere of composition was the following: «Just now have I understood what it meant to be an impressionist among the advocates of academism».

The teaching of composition principles is imminent in such fine arts teachers' educational forms like summer practice of fine arts students. They influence the formation of students' skills of spirituality and technical creation by way of mastering esthetical and practical principles of the subject of composition and applying them for creative and impromptu objectives that determine the creative abilities of a fine arts teacher, thus forming his/her artistic competence in this sphere. The students' questionnaire has revealed that composition is one of the most important subjects for the future fine arts teachers in educating their artistic competences.

Most students participating in the survey claimed that the perception of compositional rules is the fundamental for creation, which opens ways for the future fine arts teacher to the deeper and broader cognition of art, its history and theory. It was ascertained that the mastering of compositional structure, relating theoretical knowledge to practice and its analyzing train not only creative, but also pedagogical abilities. By arguing the idea of their works or innovations, the students claimed that their abilities to explain became stronger, their empathy grew and the principles of tolerance were realized. Therefore, the knowledge of the principles and laws of fine arts composition, their application train both artistic and professional competence of future fine arts teachers. It is noteworthy that consistent, systemic and purposeful conveyance of the fundamentals of composition help the students to better orient themselves in studying other fine arts teaching works, grasp not only the tasks set by the teachers, but also clear out their creative power.

Conclusions:

1. The interface between artistic practice and educational goals in educating future fine arts teachers can be achieved by teaching composition.

2. The teaching of composition is closely related to the cognition of the development of fine arts theoretical and historical components.

3. In teaching composition rests the prerequisite of the formation of the entire fine arts perception as the future fine arts teachers' artistic competence.

4. The process of teaching composition forms real conditions of general pedagogical competence acquisition.

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***Abstract.** The article is based on the experience of the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences in preparing future art teachers. The article discusses the importance of teaching composition in future fine arts teachers' education. It deals with a very different facts from applied arts and fine art history as well as with the artistic achievements of art education in the past starting from Renaissance period. The artistic competence of a fine arts teacher, of future educator is perceived not merely as a qualification, but also as the psychological ability of a unified fine arts perception, revealing the significance of fine arts composition, which in turn is marked by the integrative spiritual first, technical skills as well as the features of theoretical and historical conception. The knowledge of the main rules and principles of composition allows students to integrate the art history heritage into contemporary art processes and it also lets to understand the importance of this heritage. The statements of the article are based on idea that the perception of compositional rules is the fundamental for creation and for creative society. That is why it is recommended to know the bases of composition principles for future teachers of different specialities including art teachers. Special attention should paid to the principles of abstract composition, as being clear and comparatively simple, these principles help to have a deeper look at the problem of composition and to the aesthetical side of all visual aspects of our contemporary life.*

***Key words:** fine arts composition, competence, art education, psychological perception of art.*

*Одержано редакцією: 21.02.2018 р.
Прийнято до публікації: 28.02.2018 р.*