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## THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE DIALECTICAL STRUCTURE IN THE MACEDONIAN ART-MODERNIST DISCOURSE

### **Abstract:**

*Through a summarized insight into the historical developmental stages in art and culture, this paper anticipates the hypothesis of the existence of a dialectical structure in the Macedonian art-modernist discourse, generated by the positions of the artist/art in relation to the complex social reality in Macedonia.*

*Since the pre-war period, the subject of analysis has been art as a social practice and the artist as a social actor (the founders of modern art, Ličenoski, Martinoski) who, through the theme of labor and the worker, provides an engaged response addressing the question of class consciousness. From the post-war period (the division of the world into blocs, the clash of East and West) as a turning point, the paper explores the potential of public speech (by Miroslav Krleža) as a call for freedom of artistic creation and as resistance to imposed dogmas (socialist realism). The step towards a decisive dialectization of art and culture is examined through the activities of the group "Denes" (a promising step), the democratization of art, and the "aesthetic pluralism" of its creators (Lazeski, Grabuloski). Post-war monumental art is analyzed through the aspect of man-society, that is, through the role of individual artistic impulses (Mazev, Čemerski) in the construction of a new social system.*

*In a continuity of crisis historical situations, the foundation of art is guided by the need for participation in the construction of a new society, based on and constituted by the dialectical attitudes and individual decisions of modernist artists.*

**Keywords:** *Macedonian art, sociology of art, dialectics, artist-society, aesthetic pluralism.*

## Introduction

The period between the two world wars in Macedonia is recorded as constitutive for art, in a phase of national disenfranchisement and denial by the neighboring Balkan countries in the so-called "first" Yugoslavia. This is the period recorded in Macedonian historiography as the period of "regime forces," which, through their policies of "denationalization of the Macedonian people," tried to turn Macedonia into a "semi-colonial area," a social situation that certainly was reflected in the art and culture (Петковски, 1989:86). After the Second World War, the new historical conditions create a logical dialectical connection with the characteristics of the contemporary epoch within the framework of the "Yugoslav artistic space" (Denegri 2005). A special cultural and artistic identity is constituted within the framework of the so-called "second" Yugoslavia with characteristics of socialist and artistic community (Величковски, 2013:11).

The state of art in the pre-war period is consistently conveyed through the definition: "The creativity of the Macedonian people appeared as a full compensation for all their real deprivations of a material and spiritual nature during the five centuries of Turkish captivity" (Петковски, 1989:15). The slow paths of Macedonian artistic modernism from the beginning of the twentieth century (1920–1930) are the result of complex social and historical processes that took place on a (geo)political and territorial level in our region, apart from the impossibility of reaching the intensity of the development in the larger centers, which served, among other things, for the education of the intellectual and creative capacities of Macedonians. The culture of art that was being built in our country reached out to the imperative values brought by learned artists who adapted their practice of art by drawing from tradition and local relations between works of art, the applicability of the skills learned from original craft and art workshops, and from the process of exteriorization—the specialization of artists in art studios in the then center of art in Europe—Paris (Петковски, 1989:15,18). The active involvement of several artists in the agitprop of the People's Liberation Army of Macedonia, after the First Session of ASNOM (2nd August 1944), also meant a stronger engagement in laying the foundation for the development of fine arts and institutions in the field of fine arts (Петковски, 1989:39–40).

The Macedonian post-war artistic creation (1945–1951) drew its creative tension from the idea of the return of man "to his essential sociality," to "correspondence with the community within the framework of tradition, national and pre-national," bearing in mind the existing "culture of socialism" (Петковски, 1989: 17). The period of the 1950s marks a turning point, a *threshold* to in-depth interventions in society, currents of democratization that did not omit culture and art (Малески, 1983: 11–16). At the same time, it also meant an autochthonous response to the process of dogmatization and then socialist realism (1945–1950) in art, which was delegated (Величковски, 1982) by the government in most socialist states (especially in the states under the Federal People's Republic

of Yugoslavia [FNRR]) as an official code of visual syntagma and the construction of narratives in the arts.<sup>1</sup>

Interpreting the 1950s in culture, the socio-political worker and writer Vlado Maleski will state that the acceleration of the creative act was encouraged by the “anti-Stalinist fractures in us,” but possible only through the activation of “real creative forces” (Малески, 1983: 13). The rejection of socialist realism (resolution of the Information Bureau in 1948, with the breakup of Yugoslavia with both Stalin and the USSR) meant “refusal to introduce a foreign body from the East into our organism, but also non-acceptance of foreign bodies from the West, from the North, or from the South” (Малески, 1983: 15). If 1948 for Yugoslavia meant “a change in the political course of the state,” the broader picture shows that “a new artistic geography is emerging after the Second World War,” and that “in the conditions of the Cold War and the division of the world into two blocks, the attitude toward modern art has a role of an ideological weapon” (Denegri, 2005a: 22). In that sense, guided by the so-called *spiritus movens*, the artists in Macedonia in the fifties followed the path of maturation and “self-discovery,” defined as “the most difficult undertaking for the then Yugoslav and Macedonian movements” (Малески, 1983: 15). Starting from the imperatives for own autonomy within a young culture, and an old people, similarly to other environments in the world, a *cultural pattern* of accelerated or shortened development was established (Величковски, 2013: 11–12). Instead of blindly following the socialist doctrine and so-called “Zhdanovism” in fine arts, a tendency toward social, revolutionary and proletarian contexts (anticipated individually) developed.

### **Labor and Class Consciousness in Macedonian Pre-war Modernism: Art as a Social Practice**

Lazar Ličenoski (1901–1964) and Nikola Martinoski (1903–1973) most evidently strove to reexamine engaged creativity in the pre-war period. Immediately after the First World War, Ličenoski participates in the actions of the Tetovo youth, accepting revolutionary ideas (Конески, 1979: 9).<sup>2</sup> In 1929–1931, he uses form-color relationships by painting landscapes, still life, fishermen, artisans, portraits, landscapes with houses, and neglected suburban or rural settings. In 1933, a confrontation of the two traditions was noted on his canvases: “East and West” clashed in the artist’s palette (Конески, 1979: 11–12).

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<sup>1</sup> At the Congress of Yugoslav Writers in Ljubljana on 5th October 1952, socialist realism as an artistic doctrine was formally declared invalid in Yugoslavia.

<sup>2</sup> Then he went to study in Belgrade (1921–1925), and continued as a scholar in Paris (1927–1929), specializing in mosaic techniques under Paul Baudouin, fresco techniques under Marcel Lenoir, and transformed the influences of the Parisian school into an original artistic manuscript (Николовски, 1958:14–20).

Later, a phase occurs in which Ličenoski who, traveling across Macedonia (1930–1934), inspired by the sights and the rustic materiality of nature and objects, embarks on the study of color, experimenting with layering, intensification, and emphasis of the subject matter of the painting material (e.g. *The poppy fields* [Афионските полиња], see Протиќ, 1965). Listening to the pure and sonorous colors of his climate, he created landscapes with a “double value,” to depict “the eternal and the extra-historic absence of his country” (Слјепчевић in Личеноска, 1979: 16).

The period of socialist realism, for Ličenoski, is a moment to give an autochthonous answer, i.e. a continuation of the earlier stage of social realism – understood as a personal effort to find oneself in thematic preoccupation, and not an imposed ideology. Two important works, *Dolap* [Долан] (1937)<sup>3</sup> and *Apotheosis of Labor* [Апотеоза на трудот] (1962/63),<sup>4</sup> show the author’s imagination and the authentic representation of the worker and labor. Ličenoski symbolically conveys the theme of labor, not subtly but directly, placing the title—displaced from the subject—man (the worker) towards the great structure, perhaps a *superstructure* such as the “economic structure of society” (according to Karl Marx). Man is objectified, not portrayed, but abstracted (from individual distinction) and subjected to the process of *reification* [Versachlichung] (Marx, 1976: 1054; Lukács, 1971: 84). In this representation, Ličenoski seems to underline Marx’s hypothesis of “reification of persons,” about the conversion of persons into things according to the evident logic of commodity exchange, i.e. the differences between private labor manifested as social labor and labor as abstract universal labor. He painted his own country, but not externally, descriptively, but from within, he painted the work of the Macedonians (Коцо, 1968).

Nikola Martinoski (1903–1973), the first director of the Art School and the Art Gallery in Skopje and one of the bards of Macedonian modernism, authored art as a *social practice*, transforming the aesthetic dimension of the work of art into a field for active reception of needs for social change. Martinoski represented everyday people, from his surroundings, observing their anthropological and existential situation with full empathy, strongly penetrating their current psychological state. Many portraits of girls from different social backgrounds—the Roma ethnic group, which he nurtured until his death in 1973—speak for this approach (e.g. *Little Gypsy girls* [Циганкици], *Gypsies* [Циганки], *Gypsy Princess*

<sup>3</sup>In the *Dolap* painting, the central human figure is shown from the background, in proportion to a quarter of the great business he is handling, working for the income of the harvest, of agriculture, for himself or for someone, perhaps for all men, for mankind.

<sup>4</sup>The monumental wall mosaic frieze *Apotheosis of Labor* (1962/63), laid on the facade of his studio, sublimates Ličenoski’s life credo, inscribed at the beginning of the mosaic: “Honest labor throughout the ages has created cultures and civilizations and the dignity of a true man.” Developed in seven fields, and seven separate narratives, the mosaic work performed in emphasized contours and subdued coloristic intensity covers the theme of labor as an edifying and rewarding factor of man.

[*Циганска принцеза*] from the fourth decade).<sup>5</sup> Martinoski was undoubtedly inspired and motivated by the love for his own tradition, for the customs and folklore (folk dance) that most strongly underline the sense of nationality and integrity of our tradition (the departure of labor workers) when he created works of national value – *Teškoto* [*Тешкото*] (1952/53).<sup>6</sup> These works are a time signature of an unyielding historical effort, continuity of the feeling of nationality, and the focus of the traditional mark, having it in the center—folklore as part of the history of this nation.

### Speech as a Social Act: “On Freedom of Culture” by Miroslav Krleža

The impact on progressive contemporary thought in the Macedonian cultural-artistic context will be exerted by the speech/paper “On Freedom of Culture” [“О слободи културе”] at the Congress of Writers in Ljubljana in 1952 by the greatest Croatian writer of the 20th century and the driving force of the communist ideology—Miroslav Krleža (1893–1981). The general cultural and political situation in Yugoslavia represented a logical and real incentive for offering a responsible answer to the personal creativity of the Macedonian artist (Петковски, 1989:20). Krleža publicly elaborated the intellectual and moral crisis of the international proletarian movement under the so-called Yugoslav “surrogate” of the Third International (Krleža, 1952:205).

Krleža locates the collapse of civil Yugoslavia in 1941, pointing to the conservative policies that would lead to the dissolution of European socialism, as well as the insufficient support from Western civil Europe in relation to our own struggles for the principles of democracy (1918–1941). As a result, the moral and economic inferiority of our peoples is manifested, and then after the formation of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia in 1945 as a socialist federation, the passive subordination of intellectuals in relation to the revolutionary imperative in the social stage of the so-called “apparent harmonious and passive silence—quasi-solidarity.” Krleža recognizes the “success of European fascism” in the “ideological weakness of Western European Marxism” (Krleža, 1952: 210, 234).

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<sup>5</sup>It is said that he felt his own debt, passion, and love for the subjects that Martinoski chose (Николовски, 1959:604-608).

<sup>6</sup>According to Boris Petkovski, “the national-regional affiliation of Martinoski, the connection with the classical art heritage is included. [...] the artist uses his artistic tradition in an engaging way” (Петковски, 2001:142). A study by Nikos Čausidis, “The drum and the ‘heavy dance’ - an analysis of the mythic-symbolic and ritual meaning” presents a more engaged insight into the shamanistic context of the use of the Macedonian or Central Balkan drum as a musical instrument, and its mythic-religious and ritual character (Чаусидис, 2009:68–79). Superior in terms of drawing, Martinoski gives precedence to figuration, immortalizing ‘the Macedonian man—his feelings, the Macedonian song, dance, and rhythm’ (Николовски, 1997:27).

The great division between East and West, between the Balkans and Western Europe, results in ripples between left and right extremes, with skepticism towards historical materialism, with anti-dialecticism, attitudes driven by right-wing policies. On the other hand, Krleža also criticizes socialist realism and the Stalinist aberration of taste, and in the same vein, fine art from Western Europe (a decadent conception of “art for art’s sake”), which he considered shamelessly capitulating due to its own lack of ideas—a project of mercantile proportions, “counter-revolutionary perpetuum mobile,” and “capitalist antibiotic,” which “injected into the class-conscious arteries can deaden the aesthetic and moral vigilance of the proletarians” (Krleža, 1952: 211–221).

Determining the inevitable relationship of the fate of European generations, the conditionality of the existential, national, state and social level among the Yugoslav peoples, he perceives the passivity of art, the non-formativeness of our perspective. According to Krleža, the search for our reality and the artistic creation related to the temperament of individual creators cannot become *authentic* by adopting the Western model (seemingly neutral Western European decadent aestheticism) or through morphological-aesthetic imitations (Krleža, 1952: 208). The search for the authentic was interwoven with a developed attitude towards the developments on the “ground of the great past,” as “combining the old with the new, the national with the general.” According to Protić, the movement from the general national to the general in art received an individual note through the creative act, through the peculiarities of individual authors-creators that allowed to feel the flare of a specific environment and culture (Протиќ 1965).

Krleža’s call meant a call to fight for the freedom of artistic creation, for free expression of thought according to independent moral and political conviction, for preaching peace. He constantly repeated the call for “ours,” for “our cultural consciousness,” for *fractionation* and *separation* from general attitudes, for the formativeness of *individual* expression in accordance with the plural concept of historical-materialist conceptions, in accordance with the largest movement that revolutionism is based on the principles of socialism, perceives the necessity of an active approach to literary and artistic interpretation, which owes more to the so-called “our anatomy of civil society” (Krleža, 1952: 239). Creative existence was conditioned by the complex structure of social conditions according to Marx’s understanding of the concept “superstructure”—the basis upon which the overall superstructure, economic, legal, political, intellectual and finally cultural, is built, as a process of correspondence with certain forms of social consciousness (Marx, 1976: 175). Krleža’s voice also reached Macedonian dialectically oriented artists. At the foot of the idea that our art “should not be an imitation of Western European,” the message spread that it should “speak with its own voice” (Krleža, 1952: 241).

“That moment, when artists will appear among us, who with their talent, knowledge, and taste will be able to ‘objective mo-

tives of our left reality – subjectively reflect it’ – then our own Art will be born” (Krleža, 1952: 243).

At the dawn of this thought, in the Macedonian context, the need arises for the formation of its own fundamental conception of artistic creation, anticipated at that time as a “promising step.”

***A Promising Step: Conceived on the Threshold of the Time of “Dependency” – Macedonia within Yugoslavia (Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia [FNRJ])***

The “Denes” group, formed in 1953 by architects, painters, and sculptors, conceptualizes its program of action based on the principles of “freedom of personal expression” and “using contemporary art achievements from the world to create our contemporary art.”<sup>7</sup> At the Third Union of Visual Artists of Yugoslavia (Congress, May 1953, Ohrid), the group proposed approaching the tendencies of the more developed art centers from the Yugoslav areas, with the aim of a more visible “affirmation of individuals,” a clearer articulation of the “different artistic currents” and “active a struggle of different views” (Протугер, 1983: 8). In addition to the need to group similar author views, what significantly moves the discourse of art from the passive domain is the call for the creation of a contemporary art audience, and the concept of everyone’s participation in the field of cultural and social activity. Their commitments are based on the synthesis of the three branches of the creative fields (architecture, sculpture and painting), counting on their overlapping aesthetic and social reciprocity.

In their *Manifesto*, the artists were named as “art workers,” whose living in a socialist society was not a prerequisite for creating “socialist art.” (Петковски, 1983: 32). The critical attitude expressed about the types of “struggle” through art essentially underlines the necessity of different opinions, different aesthetic views, the articulation of which would take place simultaneously with the socialist construction of the Republic (Протугер во Петковски 1989: 227).<sup>8</sup> One

<sup>7</sup>The group “Denes” was formed on September 1, 1953 by the painters Dimche Protugjer, Borko Lazeski, Ljubomir Belogaski, Risto Lozanoski and Dadid Bafeti; the architects: Slavko Brezovski, Risto Šećerinski and Janko Konstantinovski and the sculptor: Jordan Grabuloski (Протугер, 1953). According to some indications, the formation took place on September 1, 1953 in the atelier of Šećerinski, Brezovski and Pecoski - a small work room at the former Forestry Administration where the three gathered for discussions and planning (Петковски, 1983: 27–28). The architects took examples from the international style, from individual solutions of V. Gropius, Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe, as well as by the Brazilian architects Lucio de Costa and O. Niemeyer etc. (Величковски, 2013: 13). In some critical texts, the sameness of the program goals with the EHAT 51 group, from Zagreb, is mentioned. This relationship is indicated in the schooling of one of the members of the Denes Group, B. Krsteski, at the same time when the Zagreb group was founded (Петковски, 1989: 227).

<sup>8</sup>Аноним, „Разговор со Димче Протугер,“ *Нова македонија*, 14.09.1952 quoted in

of the founders of the Group – Borko Lazeski, clarifies that “our motifs” should not be taken “as a guarantee for the content of the artwork,” but as “painting from which Macedonia radiates in its essence” (Лазески, 1954). Advocating for non-figurative art (a term preferred to abstraction), Lazeski traces the authority of art as a problematic category waiting to be (individually) worked out.

The theoretical-polemical and practical activity of the “Denes” group (1953–1955), the open and sharp questioning of democratization and freedom of thought, the radical critical attitudes about the position of art in society, created “engaged polemical thought,” about the contexts for the possibilities of the “revolution in the social sphere” to be “touched and fertilized by the revolution in the sphere of art” (Ѓурчинов, 1983: 18–20). The short activity of the group, its ephemerality, also had its advantages in the later independent construction of the individual artistic syntagms of the individual authors who avoided the so-called “sclerotic challenge of ‘academicism’ and the prescription of group exclusivity.” The authors of the “Denes” group were the builders of “aesthetic pluralism” (Ѓурчинов, 1983: 17–23; Величковски, 2013: 16).

### Aesthetic pluralism in the works of Borko Lazeski and Jordan Grabuloski

In the hotbed of great ideological confrontations in Yugoslavia, at the time of deciding “for or against Krleža,” Lazeski felt close to Krleža’s ideas about free creative expression. In the conceptual program of the Belgrade group “Life” [“Život”] Lazeski participates in the production of small-format graphics with a social sign and motifs taken from the everyday and modest life of workers, reinterpreted through the prism of a restless, revolted and young artist (Ibid., 1979: 8-9). In the drawings from the fourth decade: *Third Class* (1936), *Workers Have Lunch* (1936), in their title sub-layers we perceive the author’s pre-occupation with class differences and the question of *class consciousness*.

The concept of class consciousness originates from the hypotheses of Karl Marx, who believed that if the proletariat – the working class saw the potential of association, the group with common interests could undertake revolutionary feats and contribute to the overthrow of the dominant capitalist class (Borland, 2008: 134; Lukács, 1971: 46–47). According to post-Marxist theories and neo-philosophy, collective consciousness can only be achieved through individual consciousness and free individual action (Gurbuz, 2008: 142–143). Consciousness and visual language could find the common thread as a “transparent cage” only if they are fully contained in the world they enclose, the very exterior from which one cannot escape (Meillassoux, 2008: 14–15). Then, art depicts reality which at the same time condemns it (Marcuse, 1978: 55).

As a pedagogue and theorist, Lazeski interprets the relationship between art, society and social classes from an extremely *dialectical* perspective. In his lecture on “Art and Society” from 1937, he talks about art that has the right



to speak about social reality and people's lives, but art that unites members of the working class (in Marx's sense of class consciousness), art that preaches faith and great humanity.<sup>9</sup>In Lazeski, the urge and the need to depict a scene of mass and collective action can be seen in the small-format drawings: *Demonstrations in Belgrade* (1935/37) and *House and Hoe* (1936/37). Both examples show the potential for compositionally constructing mass scenes of monumental proportions, later manifested in the large frescoes of 1950 and 1951–56. Undoubtedly, Lazeski's early drawings show the evolution of his artistic expression, set as a problematic category, as an "artistic dialectic" and as an "ideological political maturation" that translates the thematic preoccupation into a representational construction (Абаџиева-Димитрова, 1979: 10).

This approach is not far from the concepts of Marcuse who, discussing the political potential of art, claims that it is found in art itself, in the aesthetic form as such. Lazeski locates the search for a new autonomy of expression, in Marcuse's sense, in the revolutionary transformation, in the radical change of the style or in the technique, in the juxtaposition of the prevailing freedom and the rebelliousness of the subversive potential (Marcuse, 1978: ix-xi). According to Abadziewa-Dimitrova, "revolutionary from the earliest youth, Lazeski fights with the forces of fate, with the exploiters before the war, with the fascists during the war, with the misconceptions and perceptions of the environment, with the natural element" (1979: 5).

Immediately after returning from Paris, Lazeski creates the monumental mural *Fresco for NOV* (1951–1956). We see his initiatory attempts to *socialize* and *democratize* art in the effort to expand the aesthetic dimension of the work of art in the field of *social practices*, saying that: "The mural is my address to the people. It is common property, a kind of mass media" (Мирчевски in Абаџиева-Димитрова, 1979: 25). Made in the fresco buono technique, as a horizontal compositional panorama and a semantic chronograph, the fresco meant "a model for a new art: public, monumental, with a new social function" (Петковски, 1983: 35). In addition to the essential pretext for transposing the engaged content – the historical awareness of the meaning of NOV, the motives for the realization of the *Fresco for NOV* are guided by six fundamental principles<sup>10</sup>, and the complete narrative is a structural fusion of the *content* with the *form* (Marcuse, 1978: 8, 19) in a studious, energetic and poignant portrayal of the collective dimension of suffering, resistance and victory, the incarnation of

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<sup>9</sup> A fragment of the text is quoted in his monograph, and the original text is not typed, but exists as a manuscript and is the property of his daughter. See (Абаџиева-Димитрова, 1979: 10).

<sup>10</sup> The six principles: a legacy for the cultural-historical heritage of our country; the primacy of monumental painting in socialist society; revival of our medieval painting traditions; mastered craft prerequisites for monumental techniques; emancipatory aspirations for the contemporary transfer of the engaged contents of the past in the present existence; a general tendency to clear the roads to freedom of creativity (Абаџиева-Димитрова, 1979: 24).

victory (Абаџиева-Димитрова, 1979: 25–29). For Lazeski, the installation of this fresco meant a search for his artistic truth, a testimony to the historical events of this area and of this country, a document from the time of our revolution (Николовски 1957: 10–11; Абаџиева-Димитрова 1979: 36). This achievement gave “a significant contribution to the breakthrough of new artistic endeavors in contemporary Macedonian painting, which at the end of the decade was stimulated precisely by the characteristics of this fresco”. It became “a model for public, monumental art, which had more than an aesthetic function, its purpose was to realize the social function of art” (Петковски, 1984: 28).

The work of the Macedonian sculptor Jordan Grabuloski (1925–1986) perhaps most consistently embodies the ideological program of the “Denes” group. The monument *Ilinden* (or *Macedonium*) (1972–1974), near Kruševo (collaboration with Iskra Grabul), is an example of the realization of the expected *synthesis* of creative disciplines (sculpture, architecture, painting)<sup>11</sup> with a clear aspiration towards the purification of modern art a language and concept that communicates through public, monumental art. Plastically rendered as a spatial structure, a functional spatial unity, as a “radiating ambience,” the shape itself is the bearer of a narrative (Петковски, 1977: 35; 1989: 253). The purpose of the monument is “the spread of modern art” through the efforts of political thought (Ibid., 1989: 253-254).

### Man – Society: On Post-war Monumental Art

A more studious insight into the phenomenon of revolution in fine art, taking place a decade after liberation, is imbued with the idea of maintaining a living and continuously woven thread with our past. History inspires artists to achieve continuity with the great social movements and transformations in our country, especially with the period of socialism when the transformation of humanity takes place, its development in the domain of the humane, the humane vis-à-vis the ideals of the revolution. Man is at the center of fine art. He is “the main participant and factor, bearer of the action, motive and theme, allegory and legend”. Man is taken as “an ideological leader, fighter, progressive, and opponent of injustice, exploitation, defender and builder of the new society or its victim” (Николовски, 1966: 7–9).

According to Petkovski, “monumental art” which unites the plastic arts, implies “the immediate connection of all disciplines in an organized space, their participation in the formation of nature and the social environment in an aesthetically arranged and humanly shaped environment”. The synthesis is realized in objects that have pronounced specifics of plastic, surface and spatial val-

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<sup>11</sup>The painter Petar Mazev complements the dimension of plasticity with ceramic sculpture, geometrically and in relief, in the basic color scheme. The cylindrical structure contains twelve openings, aesthetic reshaping with the stained glass (geometric, polychromatic) realization of Borko Lazeski.

ues. Monumentality evolves with the change of the philosophical and aesthetic views of a given epoch, during which its immediate formal-shaping features also change historically (Петковски, 1984: 5). Turning to the future meant finding support in an already developed medieval culture, transposing and adapting the canons of Byzantine art to modern art, preserving the roots in the depth of its time, in its landscapes, where it was born. Setting the so-called "bridges of dreams," the key to the development modern art sought "in the fragments" and in the "graves" (Binalji – Merin, 1957).

One of the artists with unbridled creative energy, the expressionist Petar Mazev (1927-1993), is undoubtedly one of the most important founders of the contemporary Macedonian art scene. With a strong emotional relationship to his own country, Mazev develops a "supranational painting" (Абаџиева, 2005: 7) with a special plastic relationship to tradition, forming a powerful, explosive, "cruel and contrasting drama," breaking "the geographical structure of the country, on the walls of the monasteries together their patina, in painting matter" (Петковски, 1989: 31–32). Driven by the restlessness of the turbulent artistic spirit, Mazev works through paint, drawing a picture in dense and tachystic layers, configuring matter on "the edge of birth or the edge of death" (Абаџиева, 2005: 7). After the first figurative phase, Mazev works abstract, informal paintings that speak of the "primordial state" of being, life, emergence and love, declaring: "the only war in which something is born and doesn't die is the war I declare on the white, still untouched canvas" (Абаџиева-Димитрова, 1990: 15). Treating matter as a "superstructure," it becomes "the cause of the informally treated figuration" (Ibid.).

Despite the fact that the 1980s are taken as the beginning of our post-modern art, Mazev anticipated this phenomenon at the same time as the development of world artistic postmodernism in the second half of the 1960s. The seventh decade is the period when the "new poetics of space" is hinted at (1963–1971), the decade when significant changes occur in the entire social life (Петковски, 1984: 30). In the transitional social stage (harbinger of 1968), from "white to the new expressionist phase, Mazev, together with his collaborator Simon Šemov, created the work *Man, fire and iron* (1967), symbolically depicting the theme of "labour" in the Iron factory in Skopje.

By combining abstraction, figuration, and expressionism, he creates a composition depicting "man's struggle with the heated material," seen from a vertical perspective, like the restless surface of an apocalyptic scene. If the specifics of socialist realism were "glorification of work," "idealization," "emancipation of the proletariat," "the beauty of people's life," "solidity of character," here the worker is faced with the real fire, the fire of capitalism. Interweaving the informal and the abstract naturalism, Mazev uses non-pictorial materials ("real" uphill tree) to communicate the theme of the construction of society through individual labour. Using compositional foreshortening, diagonal coordinates on the invisible axis of which the figures and objects are placed, Mazev

dramatically conveys the symbolism of the eternal struggle, man against and for the society that binds him in difficult, precariat and often underpaid work.

The monumental creation in the Ossuary Memorial at Veles (at that time Titov Veles) is an example of a complex *synthesis* between the architectural object (symbolic, organic-associatively resolved building), the parterre surface, and the interior of the monument with the sculptural work of the object's designer – Ljubomir Denković (together with S. Subotin) and the large mosaic complex of Petar Mazev (1979). The conceptual concept for the realization of the art program is highlighting the key moments of Macedonian history, resolved in episodes.<sup>12</sup> Mazev artistically transposes the complex thematic task in an epic-dramatic way, combining visual and poetic artistic speech in one expressive articulation, possible through the medium of the mosaic (natural Macedonian stone and Venetian mosaic).

The monumental achievement *The man and the light* (1975/76) by Gligor Čemerski, made in collaboration with the architect R. Ragjenović at HEC "Vrutok" near Gostivar, is specifically related to the theme of the revolution, understood and presented as a "flowing vision" of the continuous process of historical transformations (Петковски, 1984: 44). At the center of the plot is human labour and the man-worker who participates in the construction of a new social system and the labour victory in construction (of a hydropower system), the victory directed by human action.

## Conclusion

The dialectical structure in the visual discourse of Macedonian modernist artists was autochthonous, embodied through free and authentic visual expression. The pre-war period in Macedonian culture and art is marked by the active engagement of individuals (Ličenoski, Martinoski) who are determined to form the collective social consciousness through art as a social practice. Mirslav Krleža's speech (1952) as an active social actor will contribute to stronger resistance to dogmatic orders (socialist realism), for more radical changes in the domain of culture and art.

Advocating for creative freedom<sup>13</sup> and socialization, the "Denes" group anticipated solving the fundamental problems in the art development of that time, standing against the canons, as a "directed challenge to the whole mass of cultural and social public" (Петковски, 1983: 29; Протугер, 1983: 7). The

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<sup>12</sup>The mosaic program develops in several episodes: The frieze with a representation of Turkish slavery and the Ilinden Uprising, the social turmoil between the two world wars, the fascist occupation and the resistance expressed through the popular uprising; the victory frieze as a central scene – apotheosis of NOV and the revolution; the frieze of socialist construction, and the frieze of peace (Петковски, 1984: 38).

<sup>13</sup>According to Vlado Maleski, "freedom of creativity" meant a break with cultural isolationism and the search for new paths for humanity. See (Малески, 1983: 12).

key activities of the Group during the period of active activity are the author's interest in developing the public debate around art and society, establishing a synthesis between creative disciplines, democratization of art, realization of the social function of art.

In the post-war period, the tradition is involved in the creation of the so-called 'national formulation' of the monumental creation in Macedonia, as an expressed search for essential spiritual and aesthetic-artistic continuity of the eras. On the one hand, monumental creativity in our country meant shaping that will be demonstrative in relation to the *collective* realization (as a *synthesis*) of our social system, and on the other, an indicator of the existence of the *individually* engaged response to the creative impulse. The idea of monumental achievements was not suppressed by the pure ideological matrix, but on the contrary, it meant expanding "the horizons of the philosophical-artistic generalization of life, bringing closer to the people the general-human, collective and personal interests and perspectives of the essence of the relationship between man and society" (Петковски, 1984: 7). Engagement within the framework of visual art meant an aesthetic response to the war, a creative and thought-practical response-as-resistance to fascism, under the motto 'revolutionary' impulse in the shaping of social reality.

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