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STREET PHOTOGRAPHY AS A PHENOMENON OF VISUAL ART OF THE 20TH–21ST CENTURIES

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The article examines street photography as a dynamic phenomenon of 20th–21st century visual art, focusing on its intermedial nature at the intersection of documentary, street art, and performance. This reflects contemporary art discourse, where genre boundaries are fluid. The study highlights street photography as a flexible visual code that captures urban reality through public artistic events. A site-specific case is analyzed through the performance K.K. (KLOWN KONZEPT) by the French theatre company Les Éléments DISPOnibles, illustrating how photography and street theatre converge into a unified form of artistic expression within the context of the urban environment.

Key words: *Street photography, visual art, intermediality, site-specific, street performance, documentary photography.*

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary cultural context, where visual imagery saturates not only the media landscape but also the urban public space, street photography emerges as a vital tool for capturing social, aesthetic, and cultural transformations. Its intermedial nature – combining documentary elements, performativity, and spatial interaction – aligns with the demands of contemporary art for mobility, spontaneity, and contextuality. The relevance of this study stems from the need to reconsider street photography not merely as a genre, but as a phenomenon that reflects public life within the complex field of visual culture in the 20th and 21st centuries.

PURPOSE

The aim of this study is to identify the artistic, cultural, and communicative characteristics of street photography as a phenomenon of visual art in the 20th and 21st centuries, and to substantiate its role in reflecting social dynamics, urban environments, and human interaction within public space.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Street photography has evolved over the 20th and 21st centuries from a genre focused on documenting urban life into a complex phenomenon of visual art. Its uniqueness lies in the ability to capture social, spatial, and aesthetic transformations through the documentation of fleeting moments in public space.



The origins of street photography date back to the late 19th century, when photographic technology became mobile enough for outdoor use. One of the first to experiment with capturing street life was the French photographer Eugène Atget, whose systematic documentation of old Paris holds significant artistic and historical value. His work served as a prologue to the further development of the genre.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the emergence of the portable Leica camera enabled fast and discreet shooting. Henri Cartier-Bresson, one of the most influential photographers of the 20th century, took full advantage of this, introducing the concept of the decisive moment as a cornerstone of street photography aesthetics.

The ideological and aesthetic foundation of street photography is closely tied to European avant-garde movements of the early 20th century. Futurism – with its celebration of speed, movement, and urban life – created a new visual language reflected in representations of the modern city [1]. Futurist artists such as Giacomo Balla and Umberto Boccioni sought to express urban dynamism, which later became central to photography itself [2]. Artists like Man Ray and László Moholy-Nagy, through photomontage, light-shadow effects, and formal experimentation, introduced a new visual aesthetic closely related to artistic street photography.

In the second half of the 20th century, street photography in the United States developed not only as a form of observation but also as a medium of critical expression. The works of Diane Arbus, Garry Winogrand, and Lee Friedlander explored the boundaries of the social, personal, and abnormal. Meanwhile, in Europe, Martin Parr introduced an ironic and colorful approach to street photography, critically analyzing consumer society and everyday visual culture [3].

In the 21st century, street photography increasingly interacts with other art forms, particularly street theatre and urban performance.



Fig.1. Life on Display



Fig.2. Scene 12: The City of Happiness



Fig.3. A Move Like Life



Fig.4. The Final Chord

Figures 1-4. Photography series by Andrii Prokopchuk,
part of the «KLOWN KONZEPT» project

Although the series, particularly the project KLOWN KONZEPT, records a staged act, it retains key features of street photography: public space, interaction with random viewers, and an uncontrived atmosphere

These images can be interpreted through a hybrid lens, as they exist on the boundary between genres – street photography within the context of site-specific art, where the work is inextricably linked to a particular public space. As Susan Sontag argues, the meaning of a photograph always depends on the context in which it is created and perceived [4]. David Company, in *The Open Road*, further elaborates on «transitional genres» in contemporary photography, particularly performance photography, which often operates at the intersection of street documentation and artistic gesture [5].

Prokopchuk's photographs preserve the authenticity of the genre: taken in open public space, they are not the result of staged setups and do not involve directed interaction with the viewer. Instead, they capture the spontaneity of the urban environment, unexpected reactions, and organic compositions. All of this supports their classification as site-specific works, where the meaning and artistic value of each image depend on a specific time, place, and event.

CONCLUSIONS

Over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries, street photography has evolved from a method of documenting urban life into a complex, cross-genre



phenomenon of visual art. Its capacity to capture social, aesthetic, and spatial transformations in real time makes it highly relevant within the context of contemporary culture. While its origins lie in documentary practice, its modern form has been shaped by the influences of the avant-garde, street art, and performative strategies.

The case study of the KLOWN KONZEPT photo series illustrates how street photography can operate at the intersection of genres, capturing the interaction between performer, cityscape, and the accidental viewer. This hybridity opens new avenues for artistic expression in public space. The concept of site-specific street photography aptly defines the expanded boundaries of the genre, where context is not merely a backdrop but an active element of the visual narrative.

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ПРОКОПЧУК І., ПРИСЯЖНЕНКО О., ЛОГАЧОВА Б., ПРОКОПЧУК А. СТРЕЕТ-ФОТОГРАФІЯ ЯК ФЕНОМЕН ВІЗУАЛЬНОГО МИСТЕЦТВА XX–XXI СТОЛІТЬ

У дослідженні розглянуто стріт-фотографію як динамічний феномен візуального мистецтва XX–XXI століть. Акцентовано на міжжанровій природі стріт-фото, що виникає на перетині документалістики, стріт-арту та перформансу. Такий підхід відповідає сучасним мистецтвознавчим практикам, де жанрові межі стають умовними. Наукова овизна дослідження полягає в аналізі стріт-фотографії як гнучкого візуального коду, здатного відображати урбаністичну реальність через призму публічних мистецьких подій. Ілюструється приклад «site-specific» фотографії на матеріалі вуличного перформансу французької театральної компанії Les Éléments DISPOnibles – «К.К. (KLOWN KONZEPT)», що демонструє злиття вуличного театру та фотографії в єдине мистецьке висловлювання.

Ключові слова: стріт-фотографія, візуальне мистецтво, міжжанровість, «site-specific», вуличний перформанс, документальна фотографія.