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ARCHETYPES IN ALEXANDER ARCHIPENKO'S ART**

ABSTRACT: This paper examines Alexander Archipenko's use of archetypes in his creative work. Alexander Archipenko (1887–1964), an internationally renowned sculptor and a respected teacher, was an important innovator of the twentieth century. Archetypes based on ethnocultural concepts fundamentally influenced his aesthetic views and shaped his ideas of the plastic arts. Archipenko's art was his conceptual synthesis of diverse visual archetypes and symbols using innovative forms and materials. He considered archetypes to be universal structural elements of the universe. His creative explorations were integrated with his analyses and philosophy of form. His work can be considered within universal, multicultural, and anthropological contexts.

KEYWORDS: Alexander Archipenko, art, sculptor, 20th century, archetypes, universe.

The search for new artistic expressions thrived in the early twentieth century alongside significant scientific and technical developments. These circumstances gave new perspectives to build new views of the world. With the appearance of photography in the 19th century, producing mimetic imagery made no sense. Recreation of objective reality was replaced by a wide spectrum of visual art. There was a need to be free of academic restrictions, an ongoing movement from the time of impressionism and post-impressionism. The dynamic development of avant-garde ideas was rooted in anthropological views of ancient world cultures. One of the first artists to embark on this cosmological thinking was Alexander Archipenko. In his individual and distinct creative practice, he combined different materials and techniques with a metaphysical view of space, motion, and time. The formal design of Archipenko combines traditional knowledge of the archaic with experimental form-making. Introducing kinesis and spatial synergy into his sculpture, he created a metaphysical representation of shape and form. His formulated system of aesthetic ideas

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has continued to be relevant in modern times. The semantic resources and principles of design are the aesthetic bases for current discourse among the sculptor's followers. Is there stagnation in the vector of development in the world of plastic arts? Is it a chaotic process in the modern state of the art? According to many art historians, Archipenko expressed seemingly disparate and wide-ranging art-making strategies and theories. This phenomenon remains alive; it needs a new current interpretation of old ideas and terms.

In Archipenko's art exploration a line can be drawn from the origin of early symbolism to his innovative experiments. Archipenko's philosophical position includes a broad range of figuration. At the beginning of his practice, Archipenko used wood, plaster, ceramics, and later polychrome, bronze, Formica, Bakelite, and illuminated Plexiglas that conveyed the artist's figurative and plastic concepts. Archipenko experimented with modern artificial, as well as natural materials. In his exploration of form, the sculptor strived to produce objects that captured the absolute. The artist created negative space, using in his forms concave and convex shapes, as well as the void. He added polychrome and kinetic movement into his constructions and illuminated some objects to instill a metaphysical essence. The synergy of his art practices creates visual images.

In her essay *Counter-Volume in Sculpture and Art History Approaches* (DIKOVITSKAYA 2003: 535), Margaret Dikovitskaya wrote about Martin Heidegger's concept of space – space exists in the world, but the world does not exist “in space” (HEIDEGGER 1962). This invisible matter of Archipenko's sculptures creates the metaphysical essence. In his art, the duality of void and mass unifies into form. It brings to mind Henri Bergson's *L'Évolution créatrice* (BERGSON 1939) and his ideas about space. Robert Calhoun's study *Dynamism, Creativeness, and Evolutionary Progress in the Work of Alexander Archipenko* (CALHOUN 2016) focuses on the parallels between the philosophies of Archipenko and Bergson.

The dynamic of sizes and lines, monolithic and laconic forms are the main bases of Archipenko's creative process. A harmony of shape, line, and color is integral in connecting the spirit and content and reveals Archipenko's concept of combining the spiritual and the formal. “The uniqueness of his expressiveness can be seen in numerous visual devices, as in the decisiveness of his lines and his preference of the asymmetric, which is particularly convincing because of the element of suspense” (OLENSKA-PETRYSHYN 1973: 5) This is an observation made by artist Arcadia Olenska-Petryshyn in her text in the *Archipenko* exhibition catalog of the Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art in Chicago. Archipenko's concept of plastic art was developed while he was in the process of exploring his materials and themes. The artist's characteristic mode of working was to continually move forward. While the sculptor absorbed the sacred visuals of the archaic cultures he experienced and adapted them to his philosophy and, subsequently, devised new forms. “Or, si l'intelligence d'Archipenko est pénétrée des plus sûrs enseignements de la tradition, son cœur bat à l'unisson de son âge”. (However, if Archipenko's intelligence is imbued with the safest teachings of tradition, his heartbeats in unison with his age) (RAYNAL 1919: 3).

Archipenko's concepts are valuable resources for artistic aspirations. The evolution of his figurative and plastic concepts developed from the influences of ancient cultures and

became a constant creative search for innovative experimentation and combination of different materials and processes, with the ultimate goal to create an absolute form.

The concept of the universal mind was integrated into Archipenko's worldview. The artist's theoretical thoughts were the source of new variations of form. "We must admit that the idea supposedly born in one's mind does not, in reality, belong exclusively to one individual, because all ideas exist forever in the universe at all times, in the earth, air, and water, and simultaneously belong to all that exists, has existed or may exist in the future, and they may serve any purpose" (ARCHIPENKO 1960: 18). While creating, Archipenko was drawing out from the deep well of the universe. Archaic prototypes influenced the formation of the conceptual basis of Archipenko's art. Ancient and primitive cultures had been the deep sources for cubism. Picasso, for example, used the visual motifs of African and Iberian art (JÁNSZKY MICHAELSEN 1986: 20). The initial source of modernism was the cultural experiences of Africa, the Near and the Far East, and pre-conquest South America and Oceania (SCULPTURE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY 1952: 3). The sculptor's phenomenon, his distinctive approach to image and form, was a product of his study and absorption of world cultures.

An analysis of archetype necessitates its definition: "Archetype (Greek, first pattern) is the original model whose nature determines how things are formed. According to Plato, visual forms are sometimes archetypes. For many seventeenth-century philosophers, including Descartes and Locke, archetypes are the patterns or properties of things of which resemblances are formed in the mind, either by perception or by thought. Berkeley and Malebranche maintain that archetypes become the original ideas in the mind of God, replicated in our own minds" (BLACKBURN 2005: 21). Archipenko's philosophical concept had some similarities with Jung's. It could be explained by the belief that native universal content was laid in the nucleus of a cell and inherited at a genetic level. "*Archetype* is an explanatory paraphrase of the Platonic εἶδος. This term is apposite and helpful, because it tells us that as far as collective subconscious contents are concerned we are dealing with archaic or – I would say – with primordial universal images that have existed from the beginning of time. The term *représentation collective*, used by Lévy-Bruhl to denote the symbolic figures in the primitive view of the world, could easily be applied to subconscious contents as well since it means practically the same thing" (JUNG 1980: 4–5). Archipenko's thoughts were close to Plato's as well. It seems that all ideas exist in the world everywhere, at different times. We only need to take the ideas and put them in a defined place. Only the combination of these ideas could be a creative process. Archipenko argued for the existence of the universal mind (ARCHIPENKO 1960: 18–19).

Systematization of Archipenko's archetypes necessitates a formation of typology groups: Woman, Child, World Tree, Adam and Eve, Hero, Family, Light, and Spirit. These archetype groups, all interrelated, appeared in the sculptor's creative work.

The archetype of Woman belongs to the first group. The sculptor carried the semantic image of a Woman throughout his life. The Universal Woman image appears as Mother Earth who creates life. "The concept of the Great Mother belongs to the field of comparative religion and embraces widely varying types of mother-goddess" (STAUB DE LASZLO 1959: 327).

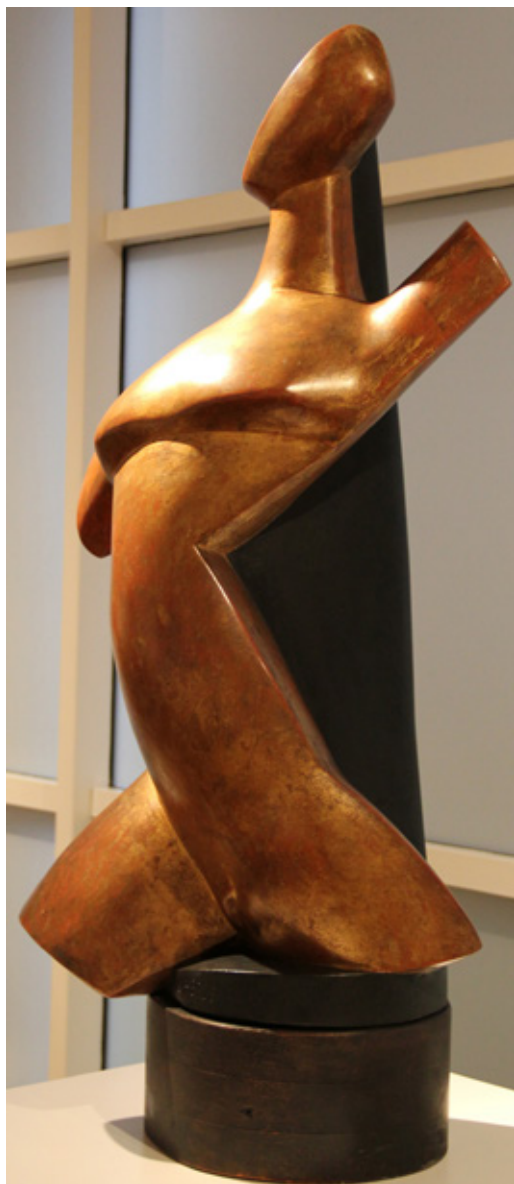


Fig. 1. Alexander Archipenko, *L'Héros (Heros)*, 1910 (1935), Pl 57:10, bronze, 93,5 × 85 × 72 cm. Collection Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt, Germany. © 2020 Estate of Alexander Archipenko/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York). Photo: Mariya Klymenko.

The archetype of Child is present in Archipenko's early works, such as *Baby* (1909), *Woman and Child* (1909–1910), *Mother and Child* (1910), and *Madonna of the Rocks* (1911–1912). His sculptural objects evoke the spiritual and ancestral genetic connection with the artist's native land. According to Jungian theory, the archetype of a Child is the symbol of the future (JUNG 1995). Archipenko's life creed was to move forward. The sculptural composition *Adam and Eve* (1909) reflects the eternal values of life: World Tree, Adam and Eve. The tree symbolizes the knowledge and freedom of choice with two biblical figures of Adam and Eve.

The archetype of Hero is associated with the composition of the same name (fig. 1). The dynamism of movement is captured by the bend of the torso. Stylistically, the oval head resembles a Giorgio de Chirico. The limbs, creating a diagonal with the raised arm and leg, are all visual motifs associated with victory.

The archetype of Family was embodied in Archipenko's early work *Family Life* (1912). Figures are closely interwoven with each other, forming the compositional core. The sculptor reflects on the archetype of Spirit with these words: "I use abstractness of spirit to make a concrete form which sequentially projects back the spirit" (ARCHIPENKO 1960: 27). "However, the essence of art remains in this very liberation of the spirit from matter and simultaneously in the stylistic materialization of the spirit" (ARCHIPENKO 1960: 35).

The archetype of Light is closely connected with the sacredness of nature. Archipenko's voids made in hard material mass could be viewed as dialectics of dark and light, material and non-material. The famous sculpture *Woman Combing Her Hair* (1915) belongs

to his early works with voids. "Light is the critical player between form and absence of form. In a daring gesture, Archipenko places the opening of the head on a concave neck and envelops the right side of the head with a concave arm" (LESHKO 2005: 76). Archipenko began to use light in sculpture during his American period. He illuminated the transparent plexiglas. The transcendent space of *Ascension* (1950) strengthened the perception of a sacred image. Frederick S. Wight, American artist and art writer, wrote in the exhibition catalog *Archipenko: The American Years, 1923–1963* (WIGHT 1970), comparing the sculpture *King Solomon* (1963), the key core of Archipenko's art, with the rays of Michelangelo's *Moses* (WIGHT 1970: 7): "The Prophet had appeared before us". At the beginning of the twentieth century, Archipenko was the foremost sculptor innovator, the first to seek new experiments in art, among other artists like Henry Moore, Pablo Gargallo (BARRER 1992: 120), Naum Gabo, Antoine Pevsner (WARNOD 1988: 119), Katarzyna Kobro, and Vadim Sidur. Aesthetic ideas accumulate and many remain relevant in contemporary art. The light in the sculpture *King Solomon*, created by Archipenko and used throughout his life, significantly influenced future art tendencies.

Studying Archipenko's creative output, his ideological and aesthetic views, will hopefully shed light on his artistic process. The ever-changing circumstances in the sculptor's life were reflected in the breadth of his views. Archipenko was at the forefront of a new artistic manifest at the beginning of the twentieth century. Difficult events in his life did not deter him from listening to the call of his art material and re-inventing sculpture.

After analyzing the thematic and artistic aspects of the sculptor's works, it can be concluded that aesthetics was the artist's conceptual lineage. A genuine appreciation of ancient native cultures and anthropological studies influenced the development of the artist's individuality and his creative life. The paradigm of his art evolved from his experimentation, his studio practices, his use of archetypes, all synthesized at a subconscious level, a unity of form and content. Further research into Archipenko's metaphysical impact on the art of Henry Moore, Alexander Calder, William Zorach, Naum Gabo, Robert Laurent, Jacques Lipchitz, Elie Nadelman, Barbara Hepworth, and David Smith would be valuable in documenting and underscoring the importance of Archipenko's art in the world.

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АРХЕТИПОВИ У УМЕТНОСТИ АЛЕКСАНДРА АРХИПЕНКА

Сажетак

Овај рад бави се употребом архетипова у креативном стваралаштву Александра Архипенка. Александар Архипенко (1887–1964), међународно признати вајар и угледни учитељ, био је важан иноватор двадесетог века. Архетипови засновани на етнокултуролошким концептима фундаментално су утицали на његове естетске погледе и обликовали његове идеје о моделарској уметности. Архипенкова уметност била је његова концептуална синтеза различитих визуелних архетипова и симбола уз употребу иновативне форме и материјала. Сматрао је да су архетипови универзални структурни елементи универзума. Његова креативна истраживања интегрисана су у његове анализе и филозофију форме. Његов рад може се разматрати у универзалном, мултикултуралном и антрополошком контексту.

Кључне речи: Александар Архипенко, уметност, вајар, XX век, архетипови, универзум.