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The Wall of Memory

Стіна пам'яті

Abstract. The article raises the point of fate of a work of art in a totalitarian society. It deals with compositional and artistic qualities of the unique architectural ensemble—the Park of Memory in Kyiv—that was constructed in 1968–1982, and the significance of its main element—the Wall of Memory with its relief sculptures created by the artists A. Rybachuk and V. Melnychenko. The article substantiates the author's point of view, concerning the fact that monumental stylistic uniqueness of the Wall of Memory in the context of the Park of Memory complex in Kyiv was that the Wall symbolized the commitment to freedom, tried to proclaim the value of each personality, which was a rebellious thought in the society, where it was normal to conform to the rules, whatever it takes. The author emphasizes the artistic characteristic features of the work by Ada Rybachuk and Volodymyr Melnychenko during the construction of the relief sculptures of the Wall of Memory.

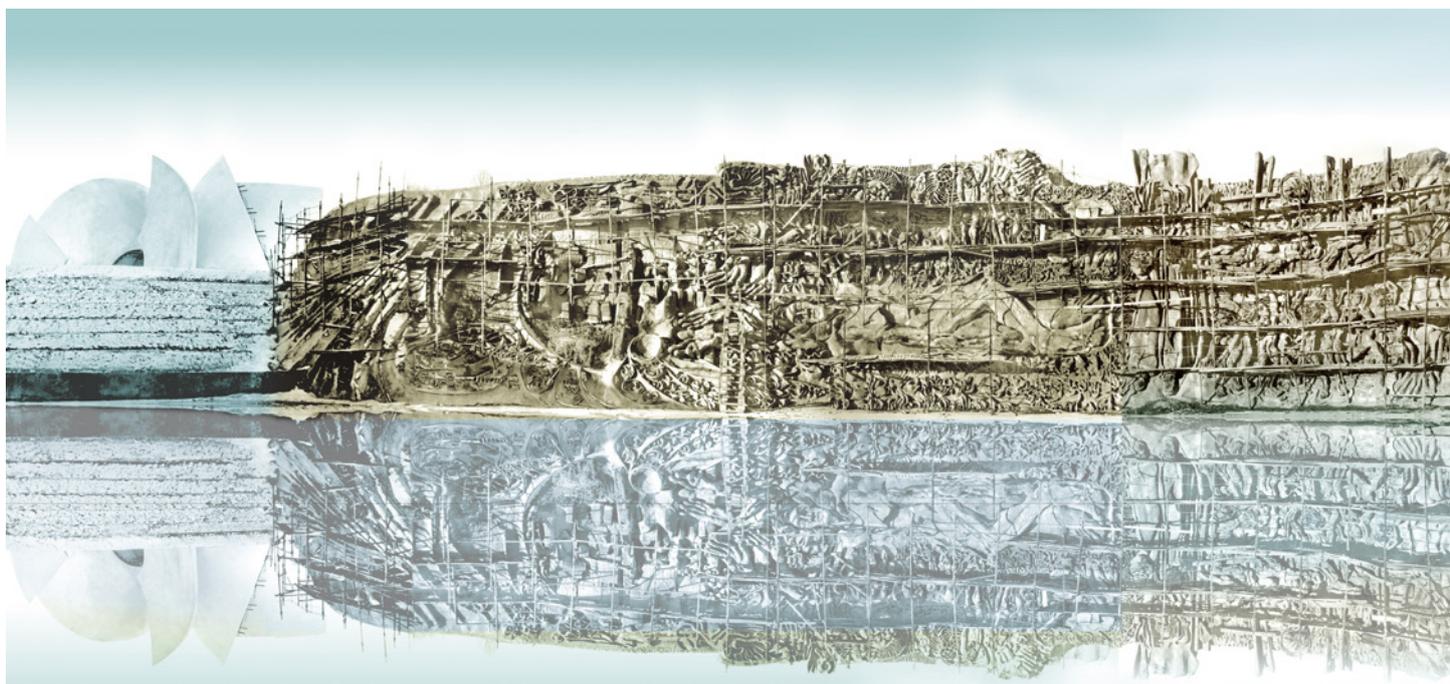
Keywords: monumental art, Wall of Memory, Ada Rybachuk, Volodymyr Melnychenko.

Problem statement. Monumental art possesses the ability to organize the environment and to subconsciously influence the feelings of the spectators. It is characteristic for the monumental art to achieve its figurative perfection only in the interplay with architecture and nature. In no other situation does this cooperation work more balanced and effective. Besides, monumental works of art serve as a bright emotional feature that animates the whole architectural ensemble. It is specific for monumental art to always have independent sounding in the ensemble it is a part of, although it interworks with the whole architectural solution. In a monumental work of art the laws of cohesiveness, contrasting effects, perspective, storyline gain increased expressiveness, because the artist is aware of the fact, that the artwork should, as a rule, be executed of expensive materials and will be on view of many generations. This is the field of power and responsibility of a monumental artist. Perception of a monumental work of art is influenced by its size, as it should be seen from a distance.

Each valuable work of art contains the features of innovativeness, uniqueness, and freshness of viewpoint. Monumental figurative pattern is always explicitly connected with constructive idea and solution of an architectural ensemble. The dominant feature and the most essential condition of monumental art is its deliberate penetration into a certain setting. The main rules of composition work here with due regard to specific character of this art form, its tasks, and con-

ditions of existence. Monumental works of art can only open up in full in the interplay with architectural and natural environment. Being displayed outside such space, they lose their main quality: monumentality. The term “monumental art” originates from the Latin word “remind”. This is an art form, designed for perception in interaction with architecture and nature, bringing to light the main idea of a construction and often becoming its conceptual core. The power of influence of monumental art secured its development all over the world, although remaining a controversial issue at the same time. The reorganization of the environment is always commissioned by society and government, which causes their intense interest to the ideological orientation of the commissioned works of art.

Presentation of the main research material. The Wall of Memory is a 214 m long monumental object, along which the funeral corteges move. The height of the wall varies from 4 to 14 m, depending on the landscape. Conceptually the Wall was a kind of a ribbon, gradually unfolding the world history of art and mythology, beginning with the myth about Prometheus and ending with the events of the World War II and postwar period. In the center of the Park of Memory was the building of Crematorium, designed by the architect A. Myletskiy. It was performed of several portals in form of petals that were opening into the depth, reflecting the high energetic level of monumental concept.



The project of Kyiv crematorium is one of the most unconventional and effective phenomena in the architectural life not only of Ukraine, but of the whole former USSR. The writer M. Kantor called the Wall of Memory “the Soviet Sagrada Familia”. History of the Wall begins in 1967, when the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR approved the decision to build Kyiv crematorium. The task was strictly practical: to efficiently use the expensive city land. In 1974 the president of the International Association of Funeral Service Karl Prebstig visited Kyiv. In his review of the article by Ada Rybachuk “Architecture and Ritual: Speculations on Plastic Arts” [1], he wrote that “during the period of over 25 years on his position he has never met a construction that would treat commemoration with such respect” [2, p. 351–352].

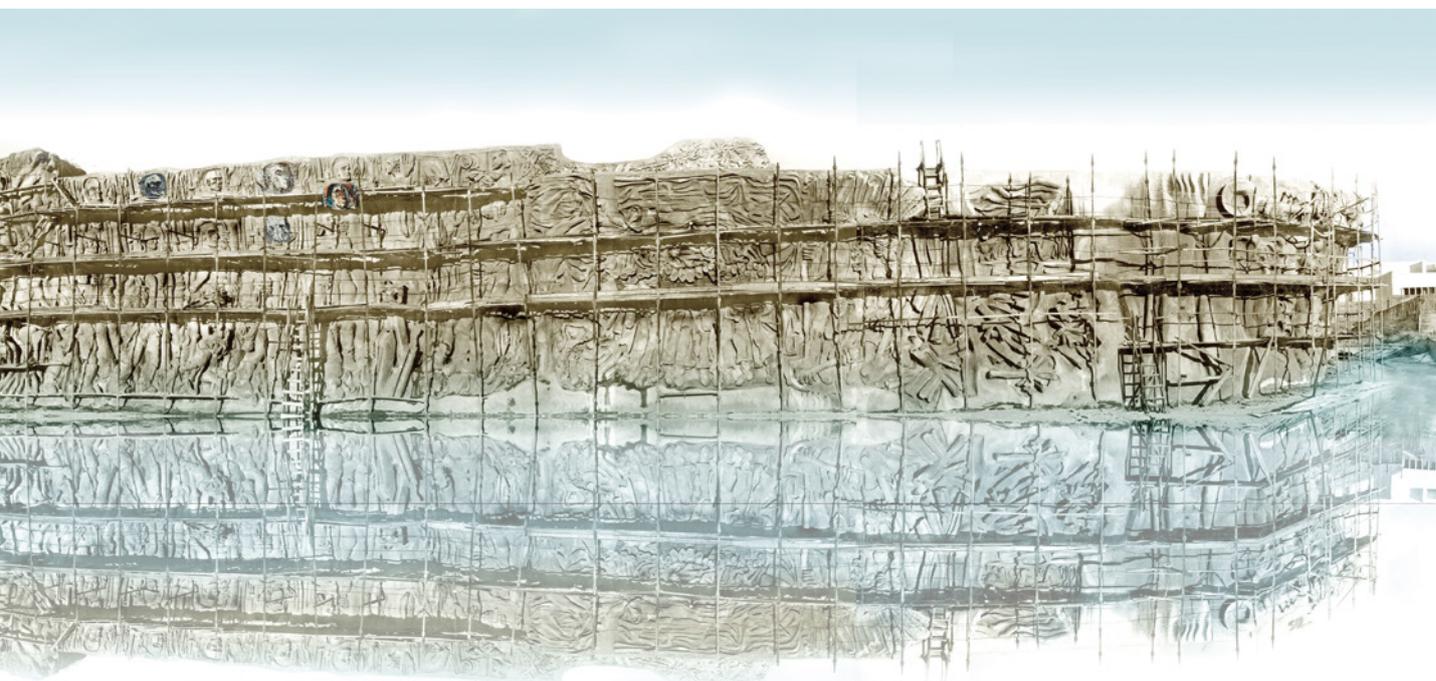
According to the authors’ concept, the ensemble of the Park of Memory should have become the synthesis of architecture, sculpture, painting, and landscape design. In order to explore the Ukrainian funeral tradition, Ada Rybachuk and Volodymyr Melnytchenko have travelled a lot all over Ukraine, paying most attention to Ukrainian villages. “We have experienced the beauty of old traditions. The most exact word would be a kind of ‘celebration’. Celebration of commemoration under the sky. Everywhere, as far as the eye could see, where the landscape allows, on the hills there are long wooden tables and benches... Endless view... We have made places for commemoration on the hills. Round tables, oval tables, with broad openings in the middle... Wild ashes. Red berries on the snow.” All these ideas were not realized. The drafts given to the commissioner disappeared. The terraces are slowly turning to ruins. Their sharp outlines are loosing form. The authors’ idea was to embody in the Park of Memory the model of creation of the world, and of life as the greatest value.

The budget of the project should not have exceeded 3 million karbovantsiv, otherwise the project was

to be approved by Moscow authorities. The costs of construction works amounted 210.94 thousand karbovantsiv in 1968. Monumental works: 64 thousand karbovantsiv, including the costs of the sustaining wall (45 thousand karbovantsiv).

In 1970 it occurred that the sustaining wall was essential, because the level difference was up to sixty-three meters, and in order to preserve the terraces of columbarium from soil creep it was necessary to have a powerful supporting construction. At the beginning of 1974 Kyivproject created the project of sustaining wall. The idea to cover it with the relief sculptures emerged. The concept and the project, carried out by the artists A. Rybatchouk and V. Melnitchenko, were approved by the decision of the board of experts of the Ministry of Culture of the Ukrainian SSR. The important acknowledgement of the successful constructive solutions was the fact that the project as of 1968 corresponded to the air photos made by V. Kostin in 1978.

A number of compositions, created in different periods of time, existed. At the beginning of the Wall there was a huge sandglass made of concrete. It was followed by *The Family* composition. It demonstrated Adam and Eve, a man and a woman, having between them not a child, but the planet. The next composition was titled *The One, Getting Up off his Knees*. The next one was *The Fire*, or the *Green Leaf*, depicted as if seen with the microscope. Aside stand the *Rain* and people, striving to understand what fire is, to perceive the rain, water, earth. Not only to understand what they mean, but to keep them from falling apart. That is why the relief contained the word “to preserve”. The next composition is *To Distinguish*, or *Everything About Animals*. The motto of this composition is “to hear, to understand an animal and nature”. The artists depicted a deer, because they knew that in the tradition of the north peoples deer serves as personification of time.



A. Rybachuk, V. Melnychenko. The Wall of Memory. 1981. General view

The next composition was *Icarus*. The artists depicted Icarus that has fallen down while trying to perceive the unknowable. The reliefs *Astonauts*, *Work* and *Creativity* are devoted to art and work. The artists used the unusual color solutions that were aimed to emphasize the impression. Other compositions: *Rainbow*, *Apple Garden*, *Motherhood* were aimed to proclaim the beauty and continuity of the course of life. Of special importance in philosophical rendering of the reliefs was the theme of defense of motherhood. The following compositions were related to war period: *Anxiety*, *The Battle in Goloseevo Forest*, *Civil War*, *The Soldiers Come*. Here the artists tried to depict the highest strain of people's courage caused by war. The artists treated the images of post-war constructions in a special way. They used the allegoric image of Aztec ball game, the image of harvesters and Prometheus, who had given the fire of his heart to the new generation. At the end of composition chain is the sculpture of a boy with spread arms, who towers over the wall as a symbol of a cross.

Caryatides of the Earth is the integral sculptural relief made of concrete, metal, and the constructive part of the wall. The wall and the sculptural relief should have been executed simultaneously. In order to prove, whether this was possible, Ada Rybachuk and Volodymyr Melnychenko conducted the so-called "Experiment of March 1st–10th". In May 1974 the artists together with the welders S. Kozhevnikov, M. Ilchenko, L. Nyzhnik and engineers of the plant named after Artem and have spent ten days off constructing the figure of Prometheus. They executed more than 100 m² of dimensional framework. On May 11th a track-mounted crane with the crane arm of 18 m mounted the framework to the pylon.

On the 24th of May, 1974 the technical committee of Golovkyivbud (city building contractor) approved the technology of the simultaneous execution of the supporting wall and the reliefs. On the 18th of August, 1974

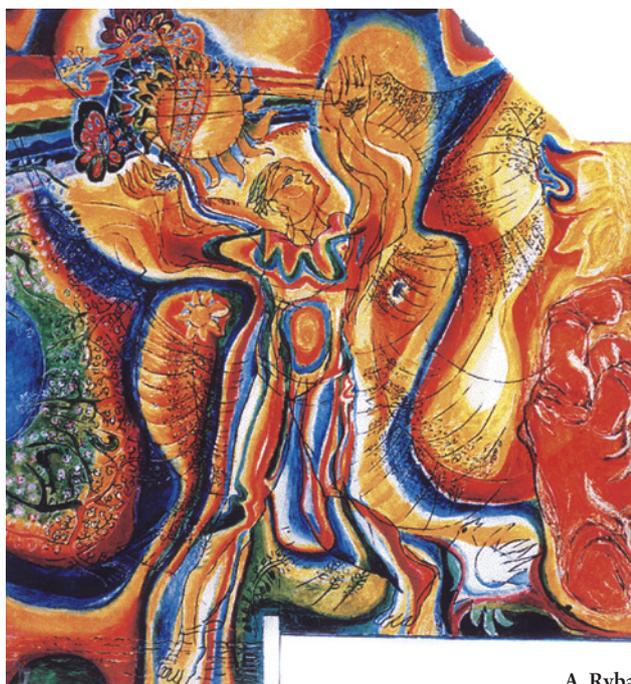
the Council of Derzhbud of the Ukrainian SSR (state building organization) approved the drafts of the reliefs and painting, and the technology of simultaneous execution of engineering construction and a work of art. This was the factual beginning of the work.

In spite of the fact of discharge from work in January 1982 the artists have managed to put in a lot of effort. First of all, they were the authors of the concept of the ensemble. The general layout, including the Wall, terraces, and roads: the ensemble still works according to the authors' concept.

In one of his numerous interviews with ARVM, published in the book *The Architecture of Soviet Kyiv*, the architect B. Yerofalov-Pylypchak asked the artists about their search of such kind of a form. Ada Rybachuk explained that this did not happen accidentally. The term "decorative design" did not satisfy them. The artists cared about the relatives, thought of the ceremony itself. They did their best to create new rituals.

The Wall of Memory was supposed to include the following sculptural compositions: *Caryatides of the Earth*, *Man and Woman*, *Blossomed Garden*, *Rain*, *Rainbow*, *Spring*, *Love*, *Motherhood*, *Creativity*, *Fire*, *Green Leaf*, *Man Raising from his Knees*, *Icarus*, *Woman*, *Scooping Water with her Hands*, *Anxiety*, *Soldiers Playing with the Ball*, *Harvesters*, *Prometheus*, *Drawings on Asphalt*, *Boy Holding the City in his Hands*. There were also the portraits of famous citizens of Kyiv: Mykola Amosov, Victor Nekrasov, Mykola Bazhan, Leonid Pervomaiskiy. The main character of the Wall is the belief that life does not end with death. According to the concept, the reliefs should have been reflected in the artificial lake, creating the effect of a water mirror along the Wall. The work should have been multicoloured. This would have given the composition some optimistic sounding of life, that continued.

The project was conceived as a large-scale monumental composition, praising the eternal themes of life and death,



A. Rybachuk and V. Melnychenko. "Creativity" and "Prometheus". 1974. Sketches

faith and love. Large, almost full size photos and drafts in the artists' studio left no doubt, that this should have become a unique work of art, one-of-a-kind in the world art history. "The Park of Memory was supposed to become an indissoluble synthesis of architecture, sculpture, and painting. As for the artists' work, it is worth mentioning that they had proved themselves to be not only monumental artists, but also gifted architects, for they had integrated the spatial organization of the reliefs, their expressive manner, into the conditions of observation." This is one of rare attempts of the Wall of Memory analysis made by art expert Oleg Shvydkovskiy.

In December 1981 the boards of monumental sculpture and fine art experts of the Ministry of Culture of the Ukrainian SSR and Derzhbud of the Ukrainian SSR declared the reliefs of the Wall of Memory unacceptable from the point of view of artistic expression and ideological principles of the socialist realism. The works on the wall were interrupted.

In order to understand the events involving the Wall of Memory in 1981–82, it is worth considering the historical situation in the Soviet Ukrainian society. In the ancient cultures, the deceased person received a kind of instructions, something like a Book of the Dead, which were supposed to help the soul to go through the labyrinth. In the Soviet society of the last century the lack of such kind of instructions was evident, since the Soviet empire was strictly against paying attention to any sphere outside that of the limits of existence of material bodies. Perhaps, this turned out to be the fatal mistake of the USSR.

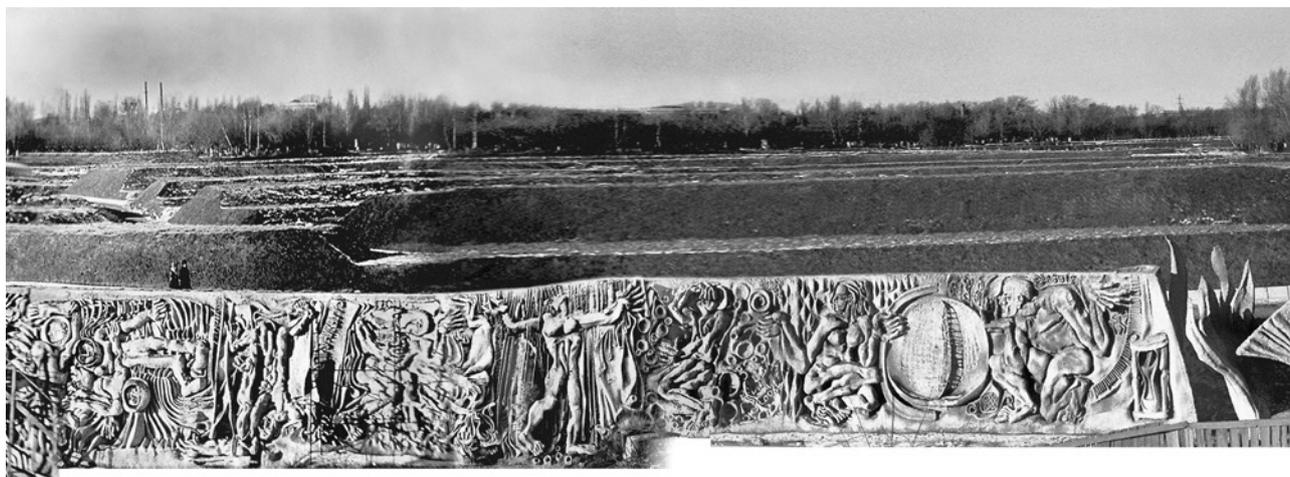
The artists left the part of their souls in their reliefs and in the whole ensemble. That is why the decision to close the Wall in some sense buried the artists as well. They left in the Park forever, dissolved in the lake of the reflected collective memory. They both felt unbreakable bond to the Wall. If you take a walk here, you would probably feel the presence of two shades on the edge of the whirlpool of memory.

"When our reliefs were destroyed," said Ada Rybachuk, "I was not able to feel color for ten years, the world turned black and white for me." Ada Rybachuk died in 2010. Volodymyr Melnychenko continues his work.

During the period of three months the almost ready reliefs were covered with 300 trucks of cement. The burial was commissioned to the same working team that had helped the artists during the construction of the wall.

In 1974 the drafts of the Wall of Memory were approved by the board of experts of the Art Foundation of the Ukrainian SSR and organizations, responsible for the urban development: GolovAPU and Derzhbud of the Ukrainian SSR. The same periodicals started publishing articles by the Wall opponents. Of special interest was the article by V. Kostin "Eccentricity of the Sad Image" (*Stroitel'naya Gazeta*, 1975, May 28, No. 64 [3]), which criticized not only the reliefs, but also the concept of the ensemble as a whole. After that the project was again examined and approved by the proper authorities.

As ARWM, Ada Rybachuk and Volodymyr Melnychenko had never aimed to take credit for the architect A. Myletskiy's work. As they pointed out in one of the interviews, they have always recognized his leading position and authorship. At the same time they did not agree to remain anonymous. They demanded, that their names as authors would be written in the history of this monument. In 1968 they were not aware of the fact that they would become the authors of the Wall of Memory. They began their work as the co-authors of Kyiv crematorium. At the very beginning, they encountered problems with the name of the building. The term "crematorium" seemed controversial in the postwar period, and could be hardly accepted by the citizens. That is why other variants were discussed: memorial and funeral complex, ceremonial complex, the Park of Memory. In her article for the magazine *Decorative Art*



A. Rybachuk and V. Melnychenko. The Wall of Memory. 1981. View from southeast

of the USSR Ada Rybachuk explained and justified the necessity to build the Park of Memory in Kyiv as the home of a new ritual of commemoration [1, p. 20]. She also discussed the problem of place and role of an artist on a construction site. The budget of the project allowed to spend only 1–2 % of it to the monumental design, which was certainly not enough to execute an adequate work of art. That is how life itself suggested the way out: to create the reliefs simultaneously with the construction of the wall. This was a cost effective, but physically intense solution, as the artists depended on the construction works.

Color solution has undergone some changes in the process. The artists came across a photo of cave painting images. Cave painting evoked associations with the ancient way of civilization identification: the drawings of the wall became the kind of ode to a certain period of time and space. Thus, as the artists, “the color should have entered the wall’s sounding, becoming its integral part”. “We wanted the Wall over the lake, reflecting in the lake, become multicoloured and iridescent, like rainbow” [1, p. 20]. The Wall raised yet another topic: that of eternal unity and contradiction, underlying the process of beginning and ending. And, respectively, the continuation of life in memory, when you are looking back at your life. Ada Rybachuk claims, that the funeral is one of the most important elements of culture, and an artist plays an important role here. The influence of such new type of funeral as cremation depended on what a new ritual would look like. “Funeral of the new era should have been adequate to the principles of the Soviet morality and contribute to the revival of a person, experiencing bereavement.” The authors took care not to solve the task formalistically. They managed to create such a building that presupposed the possibility of a new adequate ritual.

“The closure of the reliefs” was justified by the authorities with the fact that the crematorium management

and the city authorities received a number of letters from the citizens with criticism of the reliefs and their ideological orientation. The Ministry of National Economy of the Ukrainian SSR and city administration initiated organization of the board of experts in order to examine the work one more time.

In December 1981 the board of experts on monumental sculpture of the Ministry of Culture of the Ukrainian SSR and Derzhbud of the Ukrainian SSR examined the reliefs at site. 80 % of the work was ready. The board of experts came to the conclusion that the work deviated from the approved drafts, and that such kind of artwork is not adequate for the site from the ideological and artistic points of view.

It is absolutely clear, that the Wall of Memory with its artistic and ideological orientation did not fit into the frames of party ideology and culture. It was ideologically alien, for it advocated philosophic values and universal laws, and suggested some idea of afterlife continuum. It was filled with spirituality of real-life communication and sacral homage to the afterworld. Besides, the Wall practically did not contain Soviet symbols, and this was absolutely out of the question in the totalitarian society.

The Wall demonstrated the craving for liberty, advocated the value of personality. In the society of that period the existence of such kind of ideas was inadmissible.

In 1982 Kyivproject was commissioned to work out the scheme of coverage: the wall was closed into a kind of a wooden box. In March 1982 the process of concrete pouring began.

In 1989, Tahara-San from Osaka, Japanese professor, an expert on Ukrainian and Russian avant-garde, visited Kyiv in order to see with his own eyes the buried reliefs of the Wall of Memory, “the Dead Wall”: “I covered a distance of 12 000 km in order to see, what had happened. I saw the world after nuclear disaster” [4, p. 205].

Conclusions. The Wall of Memory was several decades in advance of its time, as well as its authors Ada Rybatchouk and Vladimir Melnichenko were above their time and place, thus having made an immortal epitaph to the memory of people, who approved it at first, and then, having lost the courage, ruined it. Soviet propaganda machine was working to its full extent: no more possibilities, no more commissions, the artists were universally ignored. The irony of fate: the work of art, created for the cemetery, has been buried there.

Taking into account all of the aforementioned, all controversial points of view, it is worth saying, that the reliefs of the Wall of Memory on Baykova Hill in Kyiv, 1968–1981, are the outstanding example of modern monumental art, and they are worth further examination. It is very important for the history of art, that the experts have the possibility to observe the work with their own eyes. Since the 2 × 3 m² fragment of the wall was open in May 2018, this became possible to a certain extent.

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Горова Н.

Стіна пам'яті

Анотація. У статті піднімається питання долі монументального художнього твору у тоталітарному суспільстві. Розглянуто композиційно-художні характеристики унікального архітектурно-мистецького ансамблю крематорію в Києві, споруджуваного в 1960–1980-х роках, роль і місце у ньому головного художнього елемента — «Стіни пам'яті» з рельєфами, створеними художниками-монументалістами А. Рибачук і В. Мельниченком. Монументально-пластична унікальність стилю та авторського виконання твору полягала у тому, що «Стіна» демонструвала прагнення до свободи, пропагувала цінність кожної людської особистості, що у тодішньому суспільстві було неприйнятним і диким.

Автор подає аналіз виражальних засобів, характеризує окремі композиції цього твору, знищеного радянською владою у 1982 році. Окреме місце у статті займає культурологічна характеристика соціокультурного тла, в умовах якого здійснювалося творення художніх образів.

Ключові слова: монументальне мистецтво, Стіна пам'яті, Ада Рибачук, Володимир Мельниченко.

Горова Н.

Стена памяти

Аннотация. В статье поднимаются вопросы судьбы монументального художественного произведения в тоталитарном обществе. Рассматриваются композиционно-художественные характеристики уникального по своей сущности архитектурно-пластического ансамбля «Парк Памяти» в Киеве, создаваемого в 1960–1980-х годах, место и роль в нем главного художественного элемента — «Стены памяти» с рельефами, созданными художниками-монументалистами А. Рыбачук и А. Мельниченко. Монументально-пластическая уникальность Стены Памяти в контексте Парка памяти в Киеве состояла в том, что Стена демонстрировала стремление к свободе, пропагандировала ценность каждой человеческой личности, что в социуме того времени было крамольным, неприкрытым и диким. Автор подает анализ выразительных средств, характеризует отдельные композиции произведения, уничтоженного советской властью в 1982 году.

Ключевые слова: монументальное искусство, Стена памяти, Ада Рыбачук, Владимир Мельниченко.

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