

# Interdisciplinary Approach to Forming Views of a Holistic Picture of Culture and Art Development in the Study of Courses “Art of Western Europe in the Middle Ages” and “Renaissance Art”

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**Abstract** The article considers the content structure of the author’s educational programs “Art of Western Europe in the Middle Ages” and “Renaissance Art”, which involve the component of interdisciplinary links. It states that many types of art and spheres of artistic creativity during this period were integrated into the general European context and developed in parallel ways. It is indicated that in the process of studying, it is important to show modern achievements of the humanities in this direction, the advantages of integrative complex analysis methods, to teach students to identify the contextual linkages of a work of art in the historical, philosophical, and aesthetic aspects, to search for and find adequate research approaches and apply them in future term papers, final qualifying papers, and further professional activities of graduates. The main structure of the programs, their substantive aspects, which indicate the skills and abilities obtained as a result of program development, are analyzed. Interdisciplinary approaches not only to the study of specific reconciling features of the arts but also to the continuity of mastering the themes of programs from the art of Western Europe in the Middle Ages to the Renaissance art are shown. The importance of visual material related to various types of creativity, studied in a synchronous way, influencing the formation of students’ artistic perception and their professional competences, is especially emphasized. The problems of art historical thinking and educational discourse, designed to activate the imagination, thought, get away from the standardization of emotions and common interpretation of artistic facts, are indicated. A system, which integrates all types of art and stylistic features as a whole, uses them as linguistic means and simultaneously forms its peculiar problematic field for further study and research.

**Keywords** Art of Western Europe in the Middle Ages, Renaissance art, Educational programs, Interdisciplinary approach, Art history, Regional specific features, Development paths

## 1. Introduction

Modern art history, which exists not only as a science but also involves the educational sphere, is currently focused not only on research tasks but also on the sphere of methodology for studying its teaching in addition to the traditional classical material presentation. “Modern science is actively searching for interdisciplinary links, so there is a need to search for a methodology that combines classical (generalizing) methods and non-classical (individualizing) approaches” [1]. Similar tasks are facing art history education. In the theoretical pedagogy of art education, there are general developments on the problems of an interdisciplinary approach in art education [2] or those addressing specific issues regarding students’ views of the use of new technologies in higher art education, an interdisciplinary approach to art assessment [3,4].

Among the studies, it was not possible to find specialized art history programs with a focus on the interdisciplinarity of their development. The developed training courses “Art of Western Europe in the Middle Ages” and “Renaissance Art” refer to the disciplines of a fundamental professional cycle and are included in the basic part of training of art historians. It includes the study of the main stages in the development of medieval architecture and fine arts in the era that stand side by side and replace one another, immanent patterns and external causes and factors determining them. This includes the historical evolution of styles, trends, national schools, patterns of regional development of architecture and art, technological aspects of this evolution, analysis of specific works, their stylistic characteristics, and the study of iconographic features. The author-compiler set the goal of giving students a holistic picture of medieval culture and art development. At the same time, this training course also solves other important tasks that logically follow from the specifics of the medieval artistic culture and Renaissance culture, from the specific status of art and the ways of its functioning during these periods [5]. Moreover, the art of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance cannot be considered outside the general flow of culture.

Based on the typological diversity of medieval and Renaissance cultures on a civilizational scale, the main goal of the study has been determined. It consists in identifying the main accents of the interdisciplinary approach, indicated in the structure of the university educational program in art history. Its relevance lies in the fact that, despite few programs available, their content and structure are still not fully developed, and further development and improvement as a subject sphere of art history science requires not only search for and discovery of new historical sources, description and systematization of facts but also comprehension of their immanent links, maximum identification of subjective and objective factors inherent in the history of art of these eras. Students must understand and master the methodology of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of this training course, overcoming “purely art historical” methods. Note that the training course is largely based on generally accepted rules of material presentation according to the historical-chronological principle, stages of stylistic development and changes of artistic eras. The regional and country-specific approach is actively used; it becomes predominant starting with the Romanesque period and ending with the period of the late Renaissance. Based on existing factual materials and comparison of various sources, the author tries to present an integral outlook at visual arts development in the era under consideration.

## **2. Literature review**

There are numerous publications that make it possible to approach the study of the problem posed. First, these are cultural studies, the study of intercultural interaction and mutual influence [6-9]. In the work by Kilimnik and Orlova [6], a cultural-historical analysis of medieval culture evolution in the regions of Western Europe was carried out. The specificity of social development and the degree of influence of the human mentality of the Middle Ages, which had a significant impact on the creation of works of visual art, were studied. On the basis of the applied approach, the authors identified the distinctive features of European sociocultural development, determined the factors that influenced the transformation of medieval fine art. It was noted that its synthesis was clearly manifested in masterpieces, in which there was a fusion of architecture, painting, sculpture, and applied art. Relying in his research on a systematic approach that allows representing art in the interaction of culture, society, and man, Popov [7] concludes that art should be considered at an interdisciplinary level, which greatly increases the possibilities for a more comprehensive and in-depth study of this phenomenon. Within the framework of various sciences and knowledge, a unified theoretical and methodological strategy for the study of art should be formed. Aiken’s book [8] is devoted to the study of the

theological system of the Middle Ages, which plays an important role in the formation of the iconography of art monuments of the era.

Currently, there is an increase in the number of art history works dedicated to the era of the Western European Middle Ages and the Renaissance, art schools or certain masters [10,11]. For example, Makho [10], considering the European cultural tradition, notes a fundamental change and understanding of the field of art in the Renaissance, which is currently known as the field of fine arts. Woolfson's article [11] examines complex cultural intersections from the early Tudor period to the early 1540s, discusses key topics regarding Italian influence mediated by France, the Netherlands, and England. Reflections on the universality of eras and the integrative features of artistic thinking are provided in the works by many prominent authors [12-15]. Separate studies and collections of articles were published [16-19]. Butterfield [16] draws analogies between Renaissance art and modern science. In his research, Steele [17] offers lesson plans on the art of the European Renaissance. He concludes that the integration of art history, criticism, and production provides all students with opportunities for success in art education. The problem posed in this study in the context of an interdisciplinary study of these periods was only indirectly touched upon in reports, articles, and scientific papers [1,20,21]. Speaking about the application of a synergetic approach within the framework of an interdisciplinary paradigm, Demshina [1] comes to the conclusion that it makes it possible to consider contemporary art as a nonlinear self-organized system, which contains many trends related both to the history of art and to other spheres of human being. Kim's research [21] emphasizes the need for interdisciplinary practices to ensure the development of students' creative abilities through art education aimed at developing creative talents. However, it can be seen that a more detailed examination of the art of the Western European Middle Ages and the Renaissance from the standpoint of the developed author's programs and teaching aids, the idea of interdisciplinarity in forming the views of a holistic picture of culture and art development has not been carried out.

### 3. Materials and Methods

The materials of the study include the author's programs "Art of Western Europe in the Middle Ages" and "Renaissance Art", as well as teaching aids to them: "Interdisciplinary Approach to Studying the Art of Western Europe in the Middle Ages" and "Integration of Science and Art in the Artistic Culture of the Renaissance", which involve the components of mutually enriching specific, genre, figurative, and stylistic links. Research materials, which are the well-known monuments of art (architecture, sculpture, monumental painting and miniature, theater, literature), represent through dialogue not only the search for new means of artistic expression and the renewal of artistic vocabulary but also focus on the revision, selection, and rethinking of the traditional course teaching, the use of non-canonized approaches. Whatever the attitude towards the studied periods may be, due to the extensive factual material and the developed symbolism of the artistic language, complex sign formations in the medieval era, the scientific achievements of the Renaissance, these historical periods provide great opportunities for creative and research experiment for all levels of university and postgraduate education.

The research methodology is based on the use of a typological and classification approach to reveal the features of the author's programs. The structural method of analysis and the systematic approach made it possible to consider in detail the art of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance as new phenomena of artistic culture that students get to know in the process of their study [22,23]. A comprehensive analysis of subject areas of the courses made it possible to prove the need to develop teaching aids and identify the ways to find out research directions focused on the direct participation of

students in the educational process.

#### 4. Results

The discipline “Fundamentals of Western European Art in the Middle Ages” refers to the basic part of the professional cycle and is logically connected with the main previous disciplines, is a necessary continuation of art history courses, such as “Fundamentals of Art in Ancient Greece”, “Fundamentals of Art in Ancient Rome”, “Fundamentals of Early Christian Art and Byzantine Art”. The next consistently studied period is the “Renaissance Art” with a new picture of artistic culture development, with a new world outlook and a new plastic language. The Renaissance achievements further determine the development paths of European culture. Certainly, these courses go beyond the medieval era in terms of coverage of artistic phenomena, and these are their specific features, which make it possible to trace the continuity, give a vertical cut of art, and not only to study it along horizontal layers, as is done in most cases. To successfully master the discipline, a student should have the basics of knowledge in history, cultural history, history of philosophy, history of aesthetics, history of literature, a methodology for studying the history of art. The relationship with other disciplines and educational program practices contributes to the in-depth training of students for solving special practical and professional tasks and the formation of the necessary competencies [24]. It should be noted that interdisciplinary links in teaching involve the coordinated study of concepts, theories, and provisions related to a number of disciplines. However, this principle neither includes the interdisciplinary approach nor applies to the paradigm of knowledge in studying the course.



**Figure 1.** Cover of the author’s teaching guide “Interdisciplinary Approach to Studying the Art of Western Europe in the Middle Ages”



**Figure 2.** Cover of the author’s teaching guide “Integration of Science and Art in the Artistic Culture of the Renaissance”

The purpose of mastering the disciplines “Fundamentals of Western European Art of the Middle Ages” and “Renaissance Art” in accordance with the author’s programs is as follows: acquaintance of students with the stages of development of medieval and Renaissance architecture and fine arts, immanent patterns and external causes and factors determining them, the detailed history of the evolution of styles, trends, national schools, the characteristics and patterns of their regional development. The educational process includes the issues of studying specific works of architecture, painting, sculpture, and decorative-applied art, their stylistic characteristics, iconographic features in the context of world heritage.

The tasks of mastering the disciplines include determining the place and significance of the art of the European Middle Ages and the Renaissance in connection with the development of European civilization, analyzing the causes and conditions of the influence of ancient art, explaining the “phenomenon of revival” in the medieval period and understanding its heyday during the Renaissance as a new cultural paradigm in the system of anthropocentrism.

Students should acquire knowledge on the emergence and development of major historical styles of medieval art (Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance art) as an expression of a new stage in the multi-stage development of European civilization and culture. To understand the essence of the transformation of traditions of the international Gothic into the Renaissance. To trace the differences between the Italian artistic paradigm and the artistic concept of the northern countries – the Netherlands, Germany, and France. To know national schools, features and patterns of regional architecture and art development, the technological aspects of this evolution. Among the problems of the formation and development of medieval art, the issue of national traditions and related mutual influences is one of the most difficult to address. The definition of “interdisciplinary approach” and “integration” presents certain difficulties for students and seems to be a concept difficult to understand. This method has several study dimensions. Interdisciplinary links can be found in the specific and genre characteristics of various arts developed in this era, they can also be found in the stylistic influences of various regional schools, be observed in the structure of literary works and creative methods of masters. It is important to bear in mind that interdisciplinarity and integrativity in the art of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance are not only features of convergence between the named tendencies (regional schools, masters, stylistic features, etc.) but also a set of common parameters in their synthesis.

As a result of mastering the discipline, a student should have an idea of the processes of mutual influence between the history of theology and the church, the development of the Christian cult and liturgy, on the one hand, and the evolution of architecture, fine arts and the formation of iconography, on the other hand. To be able to apply theoretical knowledge on medieval art and the Renaissance in practice; to systematize and analyze information materials on the history of art of these periods, use deep knowledge about specific monuments of fine art and architecture in such countries as France, Italy, Germany, England, Spain, and the Czech Republic in professional activities in the necessary degree of completeness of their visual characteristics. This also manifests the principle of an interdisciplinary approach and integrative links.

Having completed the courses “Art of Western Europe in the Middle Ages” and “Renaissance Art”, students should learn to master the methodology of material analysis, terminologically accurately characterize works of art, know the spatial system and design features of architecture, especially cult architecture. They also should learn to “read” the iconography of an art monument correctly, master the initial skills of attribution of works of art, defining their stylistic features, belonging to a certain national school, identify the qualities of the material structure of a work of art. In this regard, tasks to conduct a comparative stylistic analysis of architectural and sculptural monuments of various regional

schools may be of interest, where a cultural dialogue may be observed, which is reflected in polystylism or may seem like an antithesis. It cannot be said that the history of art of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance has been thoroughly studied. Certainly, art history has accumulated enough facts, made attempts to systematize them, separated large phenomena from insignificant ones, main directions from secondary ones. However, much has not been fully addressed [25,26].

Among the various documents and materials of the medieval time, which reflected the artistic life of Western European countries, a special place belongs to the illustrative material, which is necessary at lectures, as a kind of evidence of what has been seen. Its geography is remarkable for its extraordinary breadth, as it demonstrates the characteristic features of art monuments of various regional schools. In this regard, their comparative visualization is extremely important, since it can show the general and the unique, trace the features of artistic influences. Many types of art and spheres of artistic creativity during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were integrated into the general European context and developed in parallel ways. The parallel study of visual material related to different arts of the same era has a unique dynamic system and can underlie the work on an independent research project. This genre cannot be called only architecture, painting, decorative-applied art, or literature. This is what makes it unique – it becomes synthetic, concentrates the efforts of many outstanding representatives of a certain culture. This path makes it possible not only to achieve a holistic, coordinated combination of often complex text material (which is an urgent task today) but also to fully implement the processes of comprehension, to deepen, expand, interpret the content of the text. Thus, the points of contact between the architecture of Notre Dame Cathedral and its description in the novel by Hugo Notre Dame Cathedral, between the art of graphic representation in medieval miniature for biblical manuscripts or the combination of stained-glass compositions with organ sounds, between the figurative description of the heroes of Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet* and the interpretation of the era in the decoration and costume design of the theatrical performance, reproducing the architecture and stylistics of the Renaissance, are designed to form an idea of artistic synthesis, they can outline a tendency for the interaction of scientific, art historical and philosophical thought. The architecture of Gothic stained-glass windows in its entirety shows the bright facets of the interaction of spatial and non-spatial art, and the interiors of cathedrals, permeated by the refraction of colored stained glass light, dissolving in the organ sounds, give rise to figurative expressiveness of non-earthly origin. Detailed descriptions of Notre Dame Cathedral in Hugo's novel give an idea of its height and constructive system, but they are interpreted not in the art historical language, but in the artistic one, in the context of the novel heroes. The sculptural figures of saints arranged in the niches of cathedrals reflect the eternal enduring values associated with the people's idea of the spiritual religious principle embodied in the entire architectural structure. Sculpture, which is allowed not only in the interiors and exteriors of medieval cathedrals, unlike the Orthodox tradition, occupies the altar zone and extends to its entire space, demonstrating a vivid plastic synthesis. Medieval books, decorated with ornamental vignettes and miniature biblical images, have not only a religious meaning but also represent a unique decorative style, which has its own aesthetics and the evolution of artistic language. The many-sided activities of Renaissance artists such as Alberti, Bramante, Brunelleschi, Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Durer, and others were determined by the creative method, as well as by the scientific one. The new concept of illusionistic monumental and easel painting, the features of the developed image in the altar, religious and mythological views are an example. These and many other variants of the interdisciplinary approach are of interest in many ways, because the described phenomena are at the intersection and have an extended meaning, in contrast to a separate analysis of art monuments of the era. Thus, it is important to show the modern achievements of the humanities in this direction, the

advantages of integrated analysis methods, to teach students to search for and find adequate research approaches and apply them in future term papers, final qualifying papers, and further professional activities of graduates.

## 5. Conclusions

Thus, it can be concluded that each facet of the problem under consideration introduces new accents into the seemingly established ideas about medieval artistic culture. The author's program and teaching guide are designed to form the basic skills of working with historical sources in future art historians, help them master the vast amount of information from the period under study, help to study the main directions of interdisciplinary links and approaches on the material of Western European artistic culture in the Middle Ages. This work is done in terms of the growth of a comparatively figurative source about the presentation of an overall medieval artistic picture, integrating all types of art and stylistic features in a complex, uses them as linguistic means, but also forms its own problematic field for further study and research. This fully reveals the research power of the interdisciplinary method, since in the structure of scientific knowledge today there is a dynamic interaction of various subject areas. The views of the interaction of related arts contribute to a more meaningful and deep view of students on artistic phenomena. A broad interdisciplinary approach in the study of Western European art in the Middle Ages helps them to be convinced of the multifaceted nature of this period and to learn about it at a qualitatively different level.

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