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Report of the member of Thesis' Council on the thesis

"Surrealist Photography of the 1920s–1970s: the Key Concepts and Problems"

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by Shik Ida Aleksandrovna

at Saint Petersburg State University

Report for Candidate of Art History Studies submission

Ida A. Shik

SURREALIST PHOTOGRAPHY OF THE 1920S–1970S: THE KEY CONCEPTS AND PROBLEMS

Prof. Lev Manovich, Doctor of Philosophy in Visual and Cultural Studies

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The dissertation is theoretical study of Surrealist photography in the 1920s–1970s. This topic is situated in the larger context that includes the concepts and theory of Surrealist movement, selected concepts from social and philosophical discourses of the 20th century, and contemporary art history and cultural studies. The dissertation shows how Surrealist concepts were interpreted in photography. This work is very relevant for contemporary art history given

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its significant interest in historical Surrealism and photography, and for visual and cultural studies in Russia.

The thesis consists of introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and references (292 sources). The *Introduction* provides a good overview of the topic and motivations for its study. The author makes a literature review and states her goal and objectives of the research. It also described the main results of the study, its scientific novelty, and practical and theoretical implications.

In the first chapter *Historiography and Theoretical Problems of Surrealist Photography*, the author provides an overview and critical analyses of interpretation of surrealist photography in the theory of Surrealism and also the investigation of Surrealist photography in contemporary cultural studies. In the second chapter *Conceptions of Surrealism in Photography of the 1920s–1970s*, the author identifies conceptual and aesthetic principles of Surrealist photography and examines the main artistic strategies of Surrealist photographers. She pays special attention to the experimental technics used by Surrealist photography. The author demonstrates that the concepts developed in Surrealism movement in general were also important for photography part of the movement, including both its “straight” and manipulated versions. They include automatism, “double image”, paradoxical juxtapositions, convulsive beauty, the formless, found object. In the third chapter *The Problem of Surrealist Photography Interaction with Social and Philosophical Discourses of the 20th Century* the author continues discussion of Surrealist photography in relation a number of important topics from the 20th century thought: analysis of the self, eroticism, gender identity, representation of social life, colonialism, fascism, and war etc. considered on the example of Surrealist photography of the 1920s – 1970s. *The conclusion* summarizes the results of the study and identifies further questions for research.

One of the aspects of the dissertation that I found in particular impressive is a very large number of examples that cover many countries. This wider perspective is not common in the Western art historical studies that I am familiar with – they still often continue to focus on the narrow range of already canonical artists. But in this dissertation, we encounter over 300 300 work of many Surrealist photographers - Man Ray, R. Ubac, M. Tabard, J.-A. Boiffard, Brassai, H. Bellmer, C. Cahun, P. Nougé (France and Belgium), R. Penrose, L. Miller, E. Agar, P. Nash, H. Jennings, H. Spender (the United Kingdom), J. Štyrský, K. Teige, E. Medková, V. Reichmann, A. Nožička, M. Napravnik, M. Korecek, F. Vobecký (the Czech Republic), C. J. Laughlin, F. Sommer, R. E. Meatyard, M. Alvarez Bravo, K. Horna (USA and Mexico). This unusually broad scope and author’s analysis clearly show that 20th century Surrealist photography was an international artistic phenomenon. (In my view, the same is true for cubism that became

one of the leading visual languages of modern art in many countries in 1920s-1940s.)

The dissertation clearly identifies the main ideas, issues, themes, and motifs of Surrealist photography. It also offers the original periodization of the development of this photographic culture during 1920s–1970s. It also includes a good discussion of how Surrealism influenced contemporary photographers using examples of J. Uelsmann, C. Madoz, C. Sherman, J.-P. Witkin, J. Saudek, S. Grav, A. Buron, and A. Mora.

The dissertation critically engages with the works of the leading authors who have written on Surrealism and related topics in history of modern art and photography. The work is written in good English, and uses appropriate academic terminology. The argument progresses well, and relevant literature is cited when its needed. The presentation of theory and case studies follow the intellectual standards required for a PhD dissertation. The dissertation makes original contribution to art history, the studies of photography history, and contemporary art criticism. It offers a comprehensive analysis of its topic and makes original contributions to the field of art history.

In conclusion, I believe that this work titled *Surrealist Photography of the 1920s–1970s: the Key Concepts and Problems* written by Ida Shik and presented for the degree of Candidate of Art History Studies, meets the qualification requirements for candidate dissertation on specialty 17.00.09 Theory and History of Art.



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