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CREATIVITY OF F. KIESLER ON THE BACKGROUND OF MODERN ART TENDENCIES

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To create architecture which would correspond to specific conditions of modern life, our worldview – it would become its aesthetic value. This architecture cannot obey any law of historical succession. It should be new, the same as state of our soul is...

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Abstract. The main directions of the activity as well as the influence on art and architecture of the 20th century of a prominent philosopher, architect and designer F. Kiesler are considered in this article.

Key words: surrealism, modernism, Dadaism, designers, architects, artists, exhibitions, space.

1. Introduction

Art of the 20th century is still not studied properly. Swift development of styles and tendencies was preceded by the period of active experiments and searches. Picture of artistic life of this epoch is not compared to any other from the previous epochs in its diversity and paradoxicality. Numerous new genres appear – it is either thanks to new technical possibilities or as the result of reinterpretation of traditional ones. One cannot find past stylistic unity, it is possible to encounter both traditionalism and irresistible innovation. Art synthesis is becoming more and more widespread. It all leads to the appearance of large-scale figures, which via their creativity set the vectors of further development of various art branches.

The aim of the article is highlighting the artistic work of F. Kiesler through the analysis of the activity of significant figures that influenced the establishment of art in the 20th–21st centuries and defined the character of its development.

2. Basic Theory Part

Opening the commemorative plaque in autumn 2015 in Chernivtsi, where F. Kiesler was born gave a new powerful impulse to studying the activity of this artist in Ukraine. This event was dedicated to the 125th anniversary since his birthday, the 50th anniversary since his death and the 50th anniversary since finishing the construction of a temple-museum of ancient manuscripts in Jerusalem. Nowadays there are only a few significant scientific publications, issued abroad, which are dedicated to F. Kiesler. During a lot of years numerous projects, aimed at immortalizing the memory about famous Chernivtsi resident who became worldwide famous, have been developed at the department of architectural environment design of Lviv Polytechnic National University under the supervision of professor V. I. Proskuryakov.

3. Result and Discussion

The beginning of the 20th century can be characterized by the appearance of numerous directions, branches, schools in the sphere of artistic creativity literature, architecture, painting, music, theatric art that are all accustomed to be called by a common term “modernism” (modern – new). This term does not aim to differentiate some common feature – the variety and diversity of artists is obvious. They are united by avant-gardism in the first place – disparity in established norms and traditions, rebellion against old shapes not only in art but also in life. At the same time different artists had absolutely different goals on the one hand, and style and direction of the protest on the other hand.

One of such key figures in that time art of avant-garde was Friedrich Kiesler. Born in the last decade of the 19th century he became the foreteller of new ideas in art of the 20th century. Although his childhood was in the period of stormy development of Chernivtsi in shapes of historical method, under the influence of general tendencies of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, architecture of traditionalism had never fascinated him. Having graduated from Vienna Higher Technical School and the Academy of Art F. Kiesler penetrates into stormy artistic life of Europe. In the twenties he was working as a designer of the theatre and artistic plays in Vienna and Berlin. During that time, the artistic ideas of spatial theatre (Raum Theatre) and endless, universal theatre were starting to emerge marking the revolution in traditional concept of theatrical space. In the open vertically-spiral building, designed by F. Kiesler and B. F. Doblin a dynamic action of the play took place on two levels simultaneously. Generally, F. Kiesler treated theatre scene not as a designer’s object but as an integral part of “Gesamtkunstwerk”. Attention of the audience was defocused in circle what created the illusion of collective participation. Space was not divided into audience and scene – everybody was participating simultaneously.

Short cooperation of F. Kiesler with an architect Adolf Loos in 1920 may show an active interest and search for the sources of avant-garde art and architecture (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. (a) Adolf Loos (1870–1933) [1]

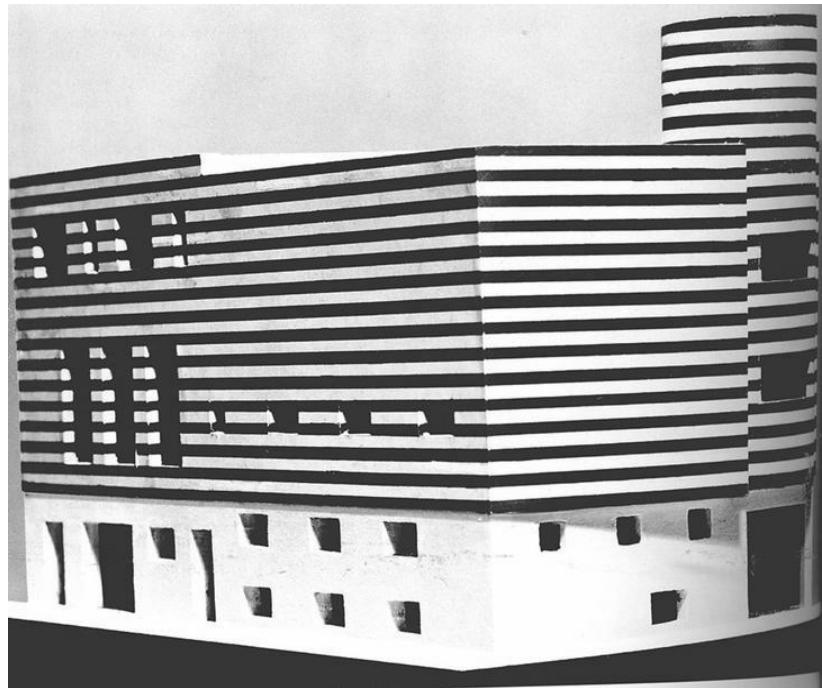


Fig. 1. (b) House of J. Baker.1927 [1]

What is more, in 1897 A. Loos started performing as a theoretician and a publicist on the issues of modern art, leader of his own architecture school and in 1908 he published theoretical work “Ornament and crime” where he characterized the 20th century by the following words “Ornament has lost whole connection with our culture, it stopped being the means of its expression. Ornament which is created nowadays is not a creation of live creative work of certain society and certain traditions; it is a plant without roots which is unable to grow and reproduce itself. Creator of modern ornaments is not a brave and healthy artist anymore who could

speak on behalf of his people; he is a lonely dreamer who fell behind from life and is an ill person... Really modern person... treats naturally created ornaments of the past with respect. He respects the tastes of certain people and nationalities... but they don't need ornaments themselves; they know that a person of our time is not able to invent ornament which has right to exist..." [1]. Yes, indeed, art of the 20th century breaks off with ornaments gradually and it is substituted by emotionality of world perception, comfort, functionality and aesthetics of simple shapes. However, the period prior to World War II is all dedicated to search and experiments.

Further search led F. Kiesler to the society of artists, namely, "Style" (Dutch De Stijl) in 1923, it was established in Leiden in 1917 (Fig. 2). They led direction which was named neoplasticism. From 1917 to 1931 the society issued a journal "Style" (De Stijl), where they published their aesthetic program gradually. Its main feature was setting on the radical renewal of art to its very basics by means of changing a person from inside and their life conditions from outside. An artist should not lock himself in his creativity and worked isolated in his studio, as a technical expert he should attack actively modern to him social and economic life conditions with the aim of their renewal. The first part in artistic work should play a rationally-utilitarian accent and be clever design, clearly and energetically, in "engineering cleanliness and specificity" of its purpose and administrative function. At the same time they dogmatically declared the following to be the main elements of painting: right angle and three colors – red, yellow and blue which could be added with black or white [2].

While applying these principles in architecture and design a general functional rule appeared: the building was presented as plastic image which was hovering over the ground. Aesthetic and philosophical purism of the society "Style" influenced the architecture of the 20th century significantly and first of all via Bauhaus where Theo van Doesburg taught in 1921–1923. He was especially brightly presented in the works by Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Roeh, Le Corbusier, Erich Mendelsohn, Bruno Taut. F. Kiesler did not keep aside either. Conducting experiments with building the space and designing furniture, at the beginning of the 20th century he addresses the theme of bright surfaces and horizontal and vertical lines.

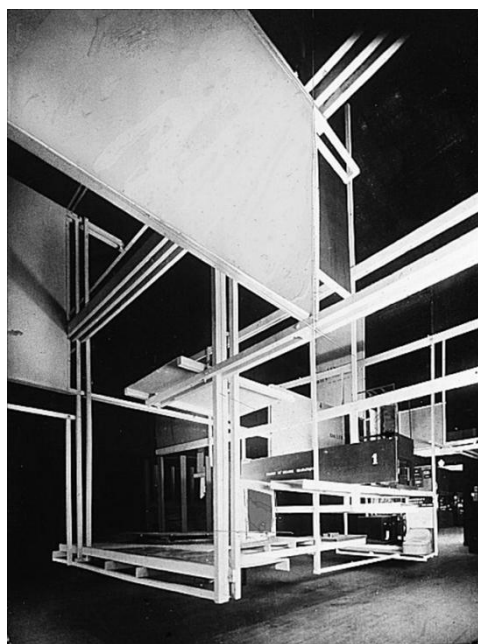


Fig. 2. Space city and furniture design created by F. Kiesler under the influence of the society "Style" in 1925 [2]

Under the influence of the ideas of innovatory art F. Kiesler in 1924 organized showing of 16-minute film "Mechanical Ballet", Dudley Murphy was the editor, the idea was the one of Fernand Leger and Man Ray (Fig. 3). This film is a bright example of implementing the ideas of Dadaism which became modern at the beginning of the twenties among the artistic youth of Paris.

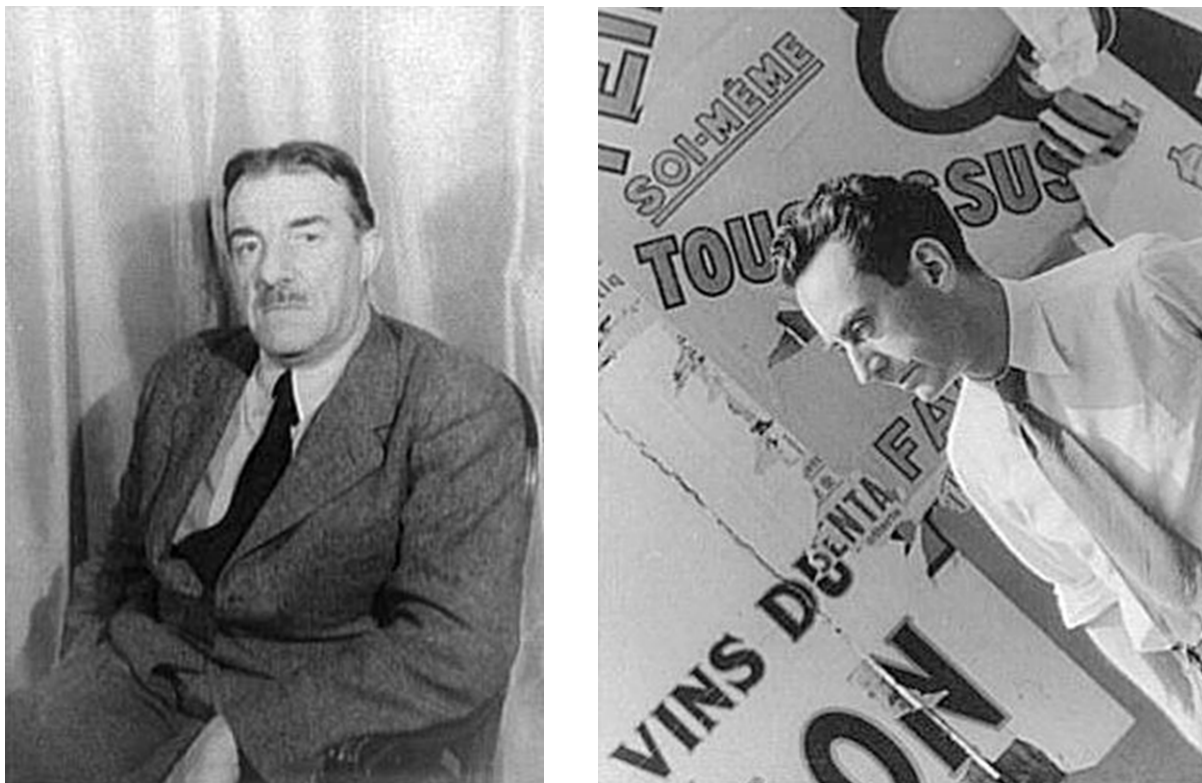


Fig. 3. Joseph Fernand Henri Leger (1881–1955) – French painter and a sculptor, master of decorative art.
 May Ray (Emmanuel Radnyskiy) (1890–1976) – French and American artist,
 photographer and director [4]

Dadaism is an avant-garde tendency in literature, art, theatre and cinema. It emerged during World War I in Switzerland, in Zurich (Cabaret Volter). A poet Tristan Tzara, who had found a word “dada” in the dictionary, is a founder of this tendency (Fig. 4). “In the language of a Negro tribe Kru – Tzara wrote in manifesto in 1918 – it means the tail of holy cow, in some regions of Italy mother is called like that, it can be a definition of children’s wooden horse. It could also be a definition of indistinct babbling of a child. Anyway, it is something absolutely illogical what nowadays has become the most successful name of the tendency”. Dadaism appeared as the reaction to the consequences of World War I, the cruelty of which, in opinion of Dadaists, emphasized the vanity of existence. Rationalism and logic were presented as one of the main culprits of devastating wars and conflicts. The main idea of Dadaism was consecutive destruction of any kind of aesthetics. Dadaists claimed the following “Dadaists mean nothing, nothing, nothing, undoubtedly they will achieve nothing, nothing, nothing”. The main principles of a “dada” were irrationalism, denying established canons and standards in art, cynicism, disappointment and lack of system. Dadaism is considered to become a predecessor of surrealism, having outrun its ideology and methods in many aspects [3].

Generally speaking, they understood their mission in the following way “Neither what we do nor how we do it is important, only the consequences of our activity are important”.

A new tendency spread to cinematograph as well, having become the precursor to surrealism and influenced such directors as Luis Bunuel. “Ballet Mecanique” is a bright example of one of avant-garde directions which strived for complete cinema autonomy, that is creating, so called, “clear film” which Louis Delluc talked about.

The first half of the 20th century entered the history under the sign of one culture crisis and another culture birth. F. Leger understood it perfectly and experimented with art in a new way. “We live” he wrote “in a dangerous and beautiful epoch of desperate clash of two worlds – one, which is coming to an end and another one, which is being born. Their complicated overlapping makes our epoch look feverishly anxious and contradictive. However, over this mix of decadent phenomena and elementary creations a few modest flowers rise. It looks like a “new space” appears where twenty-year old ones develop finding new opposition points” [4].

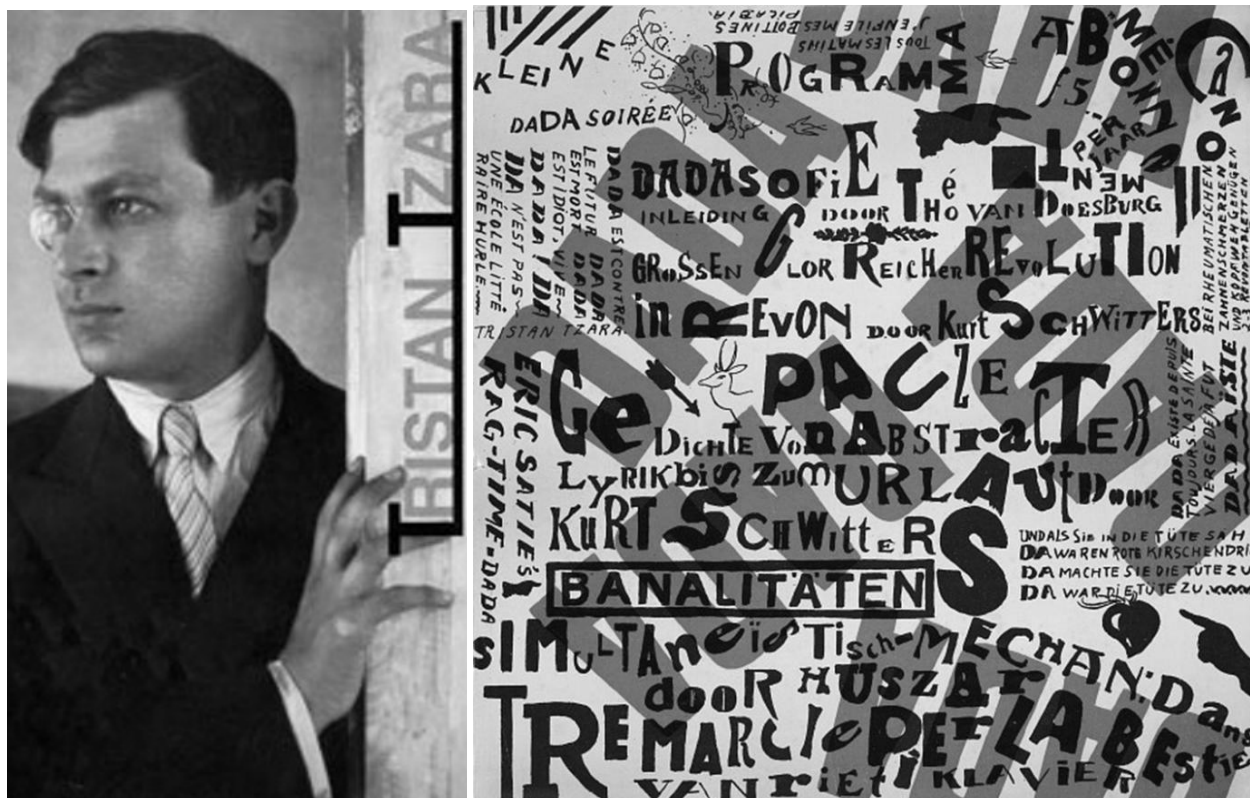


Fig. 4. Tristan Tzara (fr. Tristan Tzara), Samy Rosenstock (1896–1963) – Romanian and French writer of Jewish origin, founder of Dadaism [4].

Theo van Doesburg, Poster with the advertisement of Dadaist's evening [4]

In 1926 F. Kiesler and his wife move to New York to organize the exhibition where they start cooperation with surrealists and Marcel Duchamp – painter, sculptor, art theoretician and chess player. M. Duchamp worked in the styles of Dadaism and surrealism and had a great influence on various directions of modern art. He was famous for his invention of “ready-made” objects among which his “Fountain” was especially popular and was a urinal with inscription “R. Mutt” (Pic. 5). M. Duchamp considered that everyday use and mass production of objects at the will of an artist when ripped out of usual life could be brought to exhibition halls and become the works of art. It was supposed to ruin the image of classical art, combine it with real art, implementing the idea that anything can be the art. Not a single picturesque copy can show the object as the object itself. Thus, it is better to exhibit the original and not try to picture it. He bought his most famous exhibit “Fountain” in plumbing shop in 1917. Defending his work in front of astonished exhibition committee the artist claimed that “it doesn’t matter whether Mr. R. Mutt made it himself or not... He took standard everyday product, integrated it into unusual environment and did it in a way that his initial purpose disappeared” [5]. Although the artistic creation of M. Duchamp is not quite extensive, however, due to originality of his ideas he is considered to be one of the most influential figures in art of the 20th century. His creativity influenced the formation of such art trends of the second half of the 20th century as pop-art, minimalism, conceptual art etc.

F. Kiesler’s emigration to America was connected with plans of practical realization of theatre projects. Search for non- standard solutions for constructing space caused communication with people who had modern and innovative views on art. However, a dream to make a grand utopian reality came true only partially. The majesty of his radical projects concerning a theatre space of an architect-revolutionist demanded cosmic expenses. Unfortunately, the lack of funds felt by an architect-revolutionist led to the failure of practical implementation of most his plans.



Fig. 5. Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) French and American painter, sculptor, art theoretician and chess player [5].
M. Duchamp "Fountain". 1917 [5]

F. Kiesler's most important ideas got implemented after winning New York contest of multimedia projects for Woodstock Music & Art Fair summer festival. His project The Space Theatre Woodstock received the first award (1931). However, during the time of American stock exchange crisis (1929) the construction of Festspielhaus was postponed for indefinite time. Nevertheless, activity of F. Kiesler drew wide response and became a reason for inviting him to occupy the position of an artist-producer of opera theatre in the most prestigious in New York – Juilliard music school. Being responsible for scenography and theatrical design (1933–1957) F. Kiesler organized staging of the operas of W.-A. Mozart, B. Britten, I. Stravinsky, D. Milhaud, L. Dalapikola and an American composer G. Antheil (1900–1959).

In his projects F. Kiesler tried to avoid the static character of architecture space, make it maximally natural, round and flexible. He said that "... if people live on the sphere then sphere will be the most suitable place for them!" "Mother's womb has always been the ideal space and environment for a person". F. Kiesler strived for creating such artificial environment which would obey the cosmic laws. "My work is indeed similar to magic – it is creating life and freedom". With this he resisted modernism and was close to the ideas of surrealism.

Surrealism (Fr. *surrealisme* – over realism) is one of the most widespread directions in modern art and literature. Its distinctive feature lies in using the illusions as well as a paradoxical combination of shapes. This literature and artistic style appeared after World War I in France and was introduced by French writer Andre Breton, which is considered to be a founder of surrealism. Philosophical principles of surrealism are subjectively-idealistic conceptions of intuitionism, Freudianism, Oriental mystical religious teachings. Aesthetic basics of the direction are presented in "Surrealism manifestos" by A. Breton. Surrealists urged to the birth of a free human "ego" from the "chains" of materialism, logic, which they believed to be the result of bourgeois civilization. In their opinion, an artist should base oneself on the experience of unconscious expression of spirit – the dreams, hallucinations, intuition, etc. in order to penetrate into the other level of consciousness, that is, to cognize and comprehend the implicit, indefinite and eternal [6].

In F. Kiesler's opinion, the very thing did not matter but only something that occurred just in time was of great importance. For example, a person's existence in an internal space is that in he (she) contacts with things, colors, light and shadows, which constantly change. F. Kiesler aspired to create a dynamic flexible life space calling it "Endless house", which remained realized on paper only. Similar ideas of space which reminds mother womb-sphere were presented by a famous artist surrealist Salvador Dali in his work "Geopoliticus child". Created during World War II with its human losses it declares further optimistic development of human kind which will be born through suffering, with humanity, which feels cramped in the limits of dying epoch. The baby, watching the birth of new society is scared. However, in half of the century this baby will become the ruler of the world, but, for all it, a new one, a different one. Natural sphere is a center of picture composition (Fig. 6).

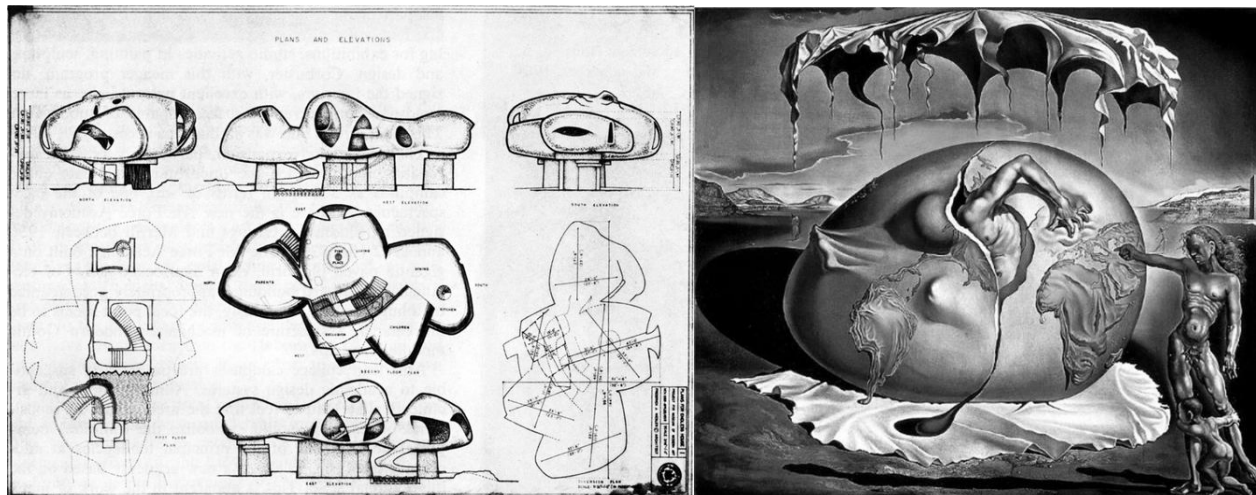


Fig. 6. F. Kiesler “Endless house”. 1947 [6].
S. Dalí. Geopoliticus child. 1943 [6]

From 1937 to 1943 F. Kiesler was a director of the “Design Correlation Laboratory” at architecture department of Columbia University. At this time he designed a few original projects of furniture. The idea of total space staging was later finalized by F. Kiesler into his own author style – “co-realism” – reflecting the space of other reality. Up until nowadays his inventions are not simply unique super modern projects, but just an expressive confirmation of a new philosophy concerning an ideal universe, artistic utopia of the future, which had been embodied in the creative work of the following generations of artists.

4. Conclusions

Life and artistic way of F. Kiesler is an example of a constant search for new styles in art of the 20th century. Thus, there is the impression that none of culture phenomena of that time passed by the participation of this extremely talented and active person who had laid the foundation of each of them. His interests were part of his own search of himself through achieving new experiences and artistic evolution.

Nowadays, when one can watch the growth of interest in art and architecture of the 20th century in general and modernism, in particular, the necessity to study the artistic work of significant figures, which have pricelessly contributed to the world culture legacy is positively amplifying.

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ТВОРЧИСТЬ Ф. КІЗЛЕРА НА ТЛІ СУЧАСНИХ ТЕНДЕНЦІЙ В МИСТЕЦТВІ

Анотація. Розглянуто основні напрями діяльності видатного філософа, архітектора та дизайнера Ф. Кізлера, а також його вплив на мистецтво та архітектуру ХХ століття.

Ключові слова: сюрреалізм, модернізм, дадаїзм, дизайнери, архітектори, художники, виставки, простір.