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*As a manuscript*

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**Visual Rhetoric in the Relevant Practices  
of Russian Artists from 2010 to 2023**

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## I. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

### **The relevance of the study**

The problems of isoverbal text, in which verbal and visual contexts are closely intertwined, have always occupied a special place in the art of any era, genre, style. In Russian art, this problem acquires a special status, since the formats of linguistic art are diverse. Contemporary artists use text in various mediums – objects, photographs, graphics, sculptures, paintings, installations, performances, graffiti. The inclusion of text in artwork is a constantly used method of the 21st century, a way of conceptualizing, psychologizing, and comprehending the world.

The period from 2010 to 2023 deserves special research, since it directly reflects the complex interweaving of relevant social, cultural, psychological, and axiological characteristics of Russian society. Visual art most dynamically responds to changes in social life and aptly reflects the trends in the development of society. It is obvious that the movement created by contemporary artists is currently incomplete and represents a kind of cultural cross-section recorded at a certain intermediate stage. Many artists have not yet reached their creative peak. Their artistic journey will continue into the 2030s and 2040s. Prominent philosopher, curator, and theorist of contemporary art B. Groys rightly noted, *Today the term “contemporary art” does not simply mean art created in our time. Rather, today's contemporary art demonstrates the way in which modernity represents its essence – the act of presenting the present*<sup>1</sup>.

Contemporary art is not always recognized by its contemporaries: it seems unusual, shocking, provocative, it frightens and attracts at the same time. The artworks of some Peredvizhniki, avant-garde artists, Dadaists, and representatives of Moscow conceptualism were not perceived by a significant part of their contemporary audience as real art. The works of these artists, at the time of their creation, were seen as a relevant practice, a product of the era. However, contemporaries form the first opinion about works of contemporary art; collectors and patrons support the artists through institutional

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<sup>1</sup> Groys B. The Topology of Contemporary Art // Khudozhestvennyi zhurnal [Moscow Art Magazine], 2006, no. 61/62.

mechanisms. In Russia, numerous institutions are involved in the development of contemporary art.

Today, most contemporary Russian artists work with text<sup>2</sup>. In their artworks, they raise important topics related to the problems of cultural heritage in the context of globalization, information technologies, Fourth Industrial Revolution, digitalization, urbanization, inclusion, social policy, issues of overcoming discrimination, structural inequality, aspects of cultural identity, ecology and others.

The study of the latest verbal-visual practices of contemporary Russian artists is relevant from the point of view of creative and artistic tasks, and in a broader sociocultural context. It is important to identify the key trends in verbal-visual art that determine the “new vision” of the world – the setting of semantic priorities of the artistic community.

### **The current state of research on the scientific problem**

Verbal-visual art is considered by researchers using various methodological approaches. In this paper, visual rhetoric is analyzed as a complex problem that includes

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<sup>2</sup> In the last decade, the exhibitions *Artist and Text* (June 9 – August 20, 2023, State Museum and Exhibition Center “ROSIZO”), *Only the Word* (March 11 – April 14, 2023, CCA Creador), *Text as a landscape* (March 8 – April 14, 2023, Pop/off/art Gallery), *You will not be recognized* (October 9 – November 6, 2022, Gogol House), *PGT. Personal exhibition of Valery Chtak* (September 9 - November 30, 2022, Center for Creative Industries Fabrika), *Between the lines. Textual in the visual* (September 8 – October 9, 2022, Triumph Gallery), *The last words are lost. Personal exhibition of Vladimir Abikh* (July 1 – September 24, 2022, Ural Vision Gallery, Yekaterinburg), *Architecture of the Word* (April 8 - September 11, 2022, CCA Winzavod), *Kirill Kto. Check* (May 24 – September 1, 2022, CCA Winzavod), *Generation of Thirty Years in Contemporary Russian Art* (March 4 – June 28, 2021, State Russian Museum), *A Little More Than Usual* (November 26 – December 21 2021, gallery “Syntax”), *Valery Chtak. It could have been much worse* (January 22 – April 30, 2021, Multimedia Art Museum), *Few letters. And those extra ones* (January 22 – February 28, 2021, “Triangle” gallery), *Generation XXI. Gift of Vladimir Smirnov and Konstantin Sorokin* (July 3 - September 6, 2020, State Tretyakov Gallery), *Buffer Zone* (September 12 – November 22, 2019, MYTH gallery), *I didn't recognize you either* (March 2 - April 14, 2019, Syntax gallery), *The Great Oblivion. Through the pages of a forgotten book* (September 14 - October 1, 2018), *Enter your text...* (June 3—9, 2017, Berthold Centre), *Chtak. In my case, by no means* (August 25 – October 16, 2022, MMOMA), *Intertext* (November 13, 2015 – January 18, 2016, Erarta), *Image as a word. Media poetry as a method* (January 18 - March 20, 2016, project "Floors"), *The Artist's Book* (March 21 – April 24, 2015, MMOMA), *Semyon Motolyanets. Big paintings solve big questions* (May 22 – July 4, 2015, Marina Gisich Gallery), *Maxim Ima. It is clear that nothing is clear* (May 14 - June 30, 2015, project "Floors"), *New storytellers in Russian art of the XX—XXI centuries* (March 25 - June 21, 2015, State Russian Museum), *United States of Siberia* (January 16 – February 10, 2013, Siberian Center for Contemporary Art), *Only the truth. Valery Chtak* (September 24 - October 24, 2011, Winzavod Center for Contemporary Art), *Kirill Kto. A lot of letters*" (September 18 - December 31, 2010, exhibition hall "Protvor") took place in Russia.

a range of various issues: 1) strategies for studying verbal-visual art; 2) conceptualism as the basis of the contemporary logocentric practices; 3) contemporary Russian art.

### **1. Strategies for studying verbal-visual art**

In the theory of sign systems, two independent directions can be distinguished: 1) the structuralist theory proposed by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure; 2) the semiotic direction, the founder of which is the American philosopher and mathematician Charles Sanders Peirce.

According to the structuralist theory, a sign is determined by two types of connections: the signifier with the signified and with other signifiers in the system<sup>3</sup>. Language is perceived as an autonomous, non-referential system of forms. According to F. de Saussure, the signifier (the form of the sign) is more important than the signified (meaning)<sup>4</sup>. The connection between the signifier and the signified is conditional: words do not denote specific things, but groups, classes of objects or concepts. It is no coincidence that F. de Saussure's theory found understanding primarily among the cultural figures<sup>5</sup>. The opacity of language is most clearly felt in art. In the European tradition, before the advent of F. de Saussure's theory, language was usually viewed as an instrument used by the mind to express thoughts. In classical philosophy it was believed that thought and consciousness cannot exist without language.

Another concept was proposed by C.S. Peirce. It is based on the connection of three elements: 1) the object to which the sign points; 2) the form of the sign (representamen, similar in meaning to Saussure's signifier) and 3) the meaning that arises in consciousness (the interpretant or signified)<sup>6</sup>. C.S. Peirce in his theory emphasizes that meaning arises precisely in the process of understanding. The interpretant (the meaning) can change depending on who, how, and when reads a certain sign. Each reader can understand things only within the boundaries of the awareness, abilities, moods. Meaning is constructed through the process of interpretation.

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<sup>3</sup> Saussure F. Course in General Linguistics. Ekaterinburg, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Peirce C.S. Selected philosophical works. Moscow, 2000.

Today, there are various research approaches related to the theories described above. The two most influential of these are semiotics and poststructuralism. From these positions, the image is considered not only as a text, but also as a sign system. The elements of the image are considered as structures for the functioning of the text or language.

The concept of *artistic text* is discussed in detail in the studies of Russian and European philosophers, representatives of the semiotic school: M. Bakhtin, M. Schapiro, R. Barthes, J. Lotman, U. Eco, B. Uspenskij. In semiotics, it is customary to highlight the triple structure of the sign: the signifier, the signified, and the sign (the association or relationship established between them).

Poststructuralists (J.-F. Lyotard, G. Deleuze, M. Foucault, J. Baudrillard, J. Derrida) expanded the scopes of the signs and meanings. Poststructuralism is based on the discoveries in the field of linguistics and communication theory. According to poststructuralists, language provides the possibility of the existence of society, because denotes its structure. Language is perceived by poststructuralists not as a tool or mean of communication, but as a form of life, an autonomous system that determines a person's relationship to the world and shapes reality. The existence of the world is also recognized as accessible only through linguistic forms<sup>7</sup>.

Various aspects of poststructuralism and the methodology of semiotic analysis of verbal-visual representations are presented in the studies by S. Avanesov, N. Arutyunova, M. Böhmig, N. Dmitrieva, N. Zlydneva, G. Lakoff, K. MacLeod, W.J.T. Mitchell, K. Moxey, A. Moles, V. Petrenko, I. Sakhno, V. Toporov, Ch. Forceville, Sh. Shukurov, M. Yampolsky, and others.

Few studies have been devoted to the verbal-visual texts in contemporary Russian art. Researchers often use the terms *polycode*, *hybrid*, *synthetic*, and *isoverbal*. Polycode texts include cases of combination of natural language with the code of another semiotic system (painting, ballet, music, performance, theater)<sup>8</sup>. This term is used by linguists,

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<sup>7</sup> Kirilina A.V. Poststructuralist view of language // Ferdinand de Saussure and contemporary humanitarian knowledge. Moscow, 2008. P. 138.

<sup>8</sup> Anisimova E.E. Text linguistics and cultural communication (based on creol texts). Moscow, 2003. P. 107.

philologists, and art historians. Hybrid text combines previously unconnected phenomena that arose in a certain cultural era<sup>9</sup>. These can be phonographic and ideographic signs, signs of scientific languages and others<sup>10</sup>. One of the most important aspects of verbal-visual representation in art is the integrative nature of isoverbal text. The term *isoverbal text* as a zone of intersection of verbal and visual languages is actively used in the studies of culturologist and art historian I.M. Sakhno<sup>11</sup>. Isoverbal text is considered as an interdisciplinary field, a two-level construct in which verbal and visual languages are combined.

The author of the study combines the most valuable findings in the field of art history with the most important scholarly contributions in the philology, semiotics, post-structuralism, the philosophy of logical positivism, and the sociology of language.

## **2. Conceptualism as the basis of the contemporary logocentric practices**

Among the publications devoted to Moscow conceptualism (1970s–1980s), there are relatively few works examining its theory. The authors of these texts, as a rule, are the artists themselves. This deprives this approach of a critical view to the problem<sup>12</sup>.

Famous researcher of Moscow conceptualism E. Bobrinskaya in book *Conceptualism* identifies the factors that influenced the development of conceptual art in Russia<sup>13</sup>. She compares the Moscow conceptual school with the European one; defines the key features and characteristics, analyzes the specifics of unofficial art in the USSR. Particular attention is paid to the description and interpretation of the artworks by Ilya Kabakov, Rimma and Valery Gerlovin, Andrei Monastyrsky and others.

Art critic E. Degot, in the monograph *Russian Art of the 20th Century*, examines the main artistic trends of Moscow conceptualism in the context of visual poetry, sacred

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<sup>9</sup> Likhachev S.V. Communicative aspects of the functioning of hybrid texts // Communication studies. 2018. №. 3 (17). P. 47–65.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. P. 47–65.

<sup>11</sup> Sakhno I.M. Receptions of symbolism in Avant-garde poetry: the formation of a new optics of the word // Link of times: history of arts in the context of symbolism. Collective monograph. Moscow, 2021. P. 233–251.

<sup>12</sup> For example, I. Kabakov, I. Bakshtein, A. Monastyrsky and others.

<sup>13</sup> Bobrinskaya E.A. Conceptualism. Moscow, 1994.

minimalism and performance, and draws attention to the philosophical prerequisites for the development of this type of art<sup>14</sup>. The author emphasizes the rootedness of unofficial art in the surrounding cultural space.

Doctoral dissertation by art historian A. Florkovskaya is devoted to the Moscow unofficial art of the 1970–1980s<sup>15</sup>. The work examines in detail the evolution, sociocultural context, communities of unofficial artists, style, trends, specifics, and main periods. According to the researcher, in the 1970s–1980s there was a transition from the late modernism to early postmodernism, which led to the pluralism – a wide range of movements and directions within the framework of unofficial art. The pluralism of artistic movements and the continuity of generations allow us to speak of the phenomenon of Moscow unofficial art as an integral phenomenon that has had a significant impact on the artistic processes of the post-Soviet period and modernity. The present research allows to consider unofficial culture as a logical stage in the history of Russian art, and to analyze the origins of the postmodernist paradigm of culture.

PhD thesis by philosopher, culturologist A. Apresyan is devoted to the aesthetics of Moscow conceptualism<sup>16</sup>. Conceptualism in his study is considered as a direction that combines the processes of creativity, research and cognition, theory and practice, reflection and criticism. The author notes that conceptualism primarily addresses the issue of the functioning of art. *Conceptual art is art that analyzes its own language*, writes the researcher<sup>17</sup>. A. Apresyan reconstructs the history of the development of conceptualism in the USSR, determines the reasons for the emergence of conceptualism in the Russian art, explores the genre and aesthetic features of this movement.

The book *Moscow Conceptualism in Context*<sup>18</sup> by American researcher A. Rosenfeld, is based on the famous Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection at Rutgers University's Zimmerli Art Museum (USA), comprising more than 25,000 works by over

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<sup>14</sup> Degot E. Russian art of the 20th century. Moscow, 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Florkovskaya A.K. The phenomenon of Moscow unofficial art of the late Soviet era: evolution, sociocultural context, communities, strategies, artistic movements. St. Petersburg, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Apresyan A.R. Aesthetics of Moscow conceptualism. Moscow, 2001.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Rosenfeld A. Moscow Conceptualism in Context. Prestel, 2011.

900 artists from Moscow and Leningrad 1956–1987. The monograph presents articles by leading scientists and interviews with artists (Ilya Kabakov, Rimma and Valery Gerlovin, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid). The author describes the history of the conceptualism in the USSR, compares the artworks of Moscow, European, and American conceptualists.

Various aspects of conceptual art are discussed in the articles by I. Bakshtein, E. Bulycheva, B. Groys, E. Lazareva, R. Krauss, P. Osborne, V. Pivovarov, V. Tupitsyn, O. Kholmogorova, and others.

### **3. Contemporary Russian art**

A great deal of research on the phenomenon of contemporary art from 1991 to 2023 was analyzed. However, it is worth noting that clearly expressed movements and strict definitions of the art of the 21st century do not currently exist. Most of the literature devoted to contemporary Russian art is associated with the problems of the genesis, the definition of concepts, and chronological frameworks. The terms *postmodernism* and *metamodernism* are often used.

Among the studies that determined the main vector, it should be noted the works of Russian art critic and curator E. Andreeva<sup>19</sup>. In the book *Parallel Modernities. Texts about Russian art of the 1980s–2010s*<sup>20</sup>, the art critic, calling the period 1980s–2010s “post-Soviet”, argues that the last thirty years in the art world have become a time of confrontation between globalization and neoconservatism. The book is based on the texts dedicated to artists (A. Ter-Oganyan, Olga and Alexander Florensky, V. Mamyshev-Monroe, T. Radya, I. Tuzov, and others) and their artworks. Most of the articles are based on the analysis of artists’ personal exhibitions. E. Andreeva draws the reader’s attention to the fact that the emergence of the artist as a researcher in the second

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<sup>19</sup> Andreeva E.Yu. *Postmodernism: Art of the second half of the 20th – early 21st centuries*. St. Petersburg, 2007; Andreeva E.Yu. *Discrepancy angle. Schools of nonconformism*. Moscow – Leningrad, 1946–1991. Moscow, 2012; Andreeva E.Yu. *Everything and Nothing. Symbolic figures in the art of the second half of the 20th century*. Moscow, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Andreeva E.Yu. *Parallel modernities. Texts about Russian art of the 1980-2010s*. St. Petersburg, 2021.



half of the 1990s became one of the most significant trends in European and American culture<sup>21</sup>.

One of the important studies on Russian art of the 1990s–2010s is the doctoral dissertation by L. Bondarenko *Main Adaptive Trends in Contemporary Russian Art at the Turn of the Century (1991–2011)*<sup>22</sup>. The researcher determines the artistic values of the era, analyzes the communicative, interactive, informational, aesthetic, and marketing aspects of contemporary Russian art. L. Bondarenko associates the emergence of Russian postmodernism with the intensification of contacts with European artists and the development of information technology. However, the analysis of the artworks is practically not provided in this paper.

A book by contemporary art critic and art historian A. Kovalev *An inconclusive story. Contemporary Russian art in the faces*<sup>23</sup> is dedicated to 50 contemporary Russian artists from different regions (Moscow, St. Petersburg, Voronezh, Yekaterinburg, Kazan, Krasnodar, Nizhny Novgorod, Novosibirsk). Among them are Yu. Albert, K. Zvezdochetov, A. Osmolovsky, P. Pepperstein, P. Pavlensky, Kh. Sokol, D. Gutov, V. Logutov, I. Korina, T. Novikov and others. Based on the biographical facts and analysis of the artworks, A. Kovalev determines the distinctive features of the creative method of contemporary Russian artists.

In revealing the issues of the current artistic process, the studies by S. Batrakova, E. Bobrinskaya, A. Borovsky, K. Bishop, N. Bourriaud, S. Gracheva, K. Grovier, B. Groys, K. Zatsepin, I. Karasik, A. Karlova, A. Kovalev, R. Krauss, D. Pyrkina, P. Rodkin, M.V. Rubicheva, N. Khrushcheva, S. Shuripa, and the catalogs of exhibitions of contemporary art played an important role.

Despite the typological diversity of existing studies, a review of published works leads us to the understanding that today there is no systematic work on studying the verbal component of the artworks by contemporary Russian artists. The tools for studying visual rhetoric in the relevant logocentric practices have practically not been developed. The

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<sup>21</sup> Andreeva E. Yu. *Parallel modernities. Texts about Russian art of the 1980-2010s*. St. Petersburg, 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Bondarenko L.K. *Main adaptive trends in contemporary Russian art at the turn of the century: 1991—2011*. Moscow, 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Kovalev A. *An inconclusive story. Contemporary Russian art in faces*. Moscow, 2021.

present study combines various methodologies and approaches to contemporary verbal-visual art.

**The objective** of the proposed research is to identify the relationship between the relevant practices of Russian contemporary art from 2010 to 2023 with visual rhetoric and various spheres of culture.

Within this broad objective, the **following tasks** will be completed:

1. to analyze the features of visual rhetoric in the context of linguistic turn, semiotics, visual studies;
2. to identify the prerequisites for the emergence of contemporary Russian verbal-visual art in Russian and European artistic traditions;
3. to describe the main artistic strategies for working with text in contemporary art in various mediums (paintings, graphics, collages, sculptures, installations, street art, etc.);
4. to classify the options for interaction between words and images;
5. to determine the specifics of the creative method of each of the authors under consideration and identify the characteristic features of the artistic style;
6. to analyze the reasons for the interest of contemporary artists in narrative strategies;
7. to identify the relevant range of topics, techniques, means of expression, problems reflected in contemporary isoverbal art.

In parallel and in connection with this, it is necessary to clarify the key trends in the development of contemporary art, its genre and thematic diversity, the specifics of artistic language.

**The research hypothesis** is based on the assumption that many contemporary Russian artists are the followers of conceptualists and post-conceptualists. The aesthetics of contemporary Russian art is associated with ideas, and not with the objective world and the usual semantic series.

## Methodology

It is necessary to emphasize the methods of identification the visual rhetoric in the relevant practices of Russian artists.

In this paper, the artworks by contemporary Russian artists will be examined in the context of visual studies – a critical project that should bridge the gap between disciplinary and methodological approaches to art, in particular between philology and art history<sup>24</sup>. Today, within academic discourse, the interaction between disciplines and fields of knowledge is often minimal. Such notions of methodological purity and adherence to disciplinary standards are often means of preserving time-honored traditions. Visual studies make it possible to create a form of exchange between representatives of various sciences, responding to the challenges and complexities of the 21st century.

The methodology of the thesis is based on the research of art from the perspective of visibility, which draws on psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, philosophy of logical positivism, linguistics, semiotics, and morphology of art. To identify the features of the language of contemporary Russian art, this study used interdisciplinary approaches of visual research, the principles of social history of art, sociology of culture, iconology, formal stylistic, and historical-cultural methods.

The interview method allowed us to obtain unique information about the life and work of contemporary artists. Especially valuable to the researcher were the interviews with artists, art critics, and curators published in the journals *Artchronika*, *Dialogue of Arts*, *Pinakotheka*, *Art Magazine*, *The Art Newspaper*, *The Art Newspaper Russia*. In addition, the websites of art organizations, forums and communities were analyzed (*the Innovation Prize*, *Kandinsky Prize*, *Prize for contemporary art named after Sergei Kuryokhin*, *the Black Square Prize*; the leading exhibitions of contemporary art in the State Tretyakov Gallery, the State Russian Museum, the Moscow Museum of Modern Art and others). The search for relevant publications was carried out on the websites of the

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<sup>24</sup> Murray D.C. On reciprocity: expanding the dialogue between disciplines // *Visual Studies*. 2021. 36(3). P. 177—186.

Russian State Library, the Russian State Art Library, the Library for Foreign Literature, the State Public Historical Library of Russia, Garage Library.

### **Limitations of the study**

The research is limited to the period from 2010 to 2023.

The traditional boundaries between art and everyday life are gradually blurring. Artists often design a wide variety of things<sup>25</sup>. In this regard, it is necessary to draw a demarcation line between two blocks of phenomena. The first block is the creative industry (a sector of the economy based on the sale of creative products). The second block is the independent creative activity. The focus of this work is on the second block of non-utilitarian effects of art on the social world.

**The object** of this study is the verbal-visual practices in the artworks of the most famous and active contemporary Russian artists born from 1979 to 1994<sup>26</sup>. In 2024, these artists will be 30–45 years old<sup>27</sup>. Despite the wide public recognition, the works of these artists have not been thoroughly analyzed in the scientific literature<sup>28</sup>.

**The subject** is the communicative mechanisms, verbal and narrative components of the artworks by contemporary Russian artists from 2010 to 2023.

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<sup>25</sup> Ossian W. *Ways of Looking: How to Experience Contemporary Art*. Moscow, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> This generation of artists is often called the “Millennials”, “generation Y”, “generation XXI”, “young Russian artists”.

<sup>27</sup> Among them are Pavel Otdelnov (born 1979), Andrei Kuzkin (born 1979), Maria Burtova (born 1979), Vladimir Logutov (born 1980), Natalya Timofeeva (born 1981), Valery Chtak (born 1981), Semyon Motolyanets (born 1982), Andrey Syailev (born 1982), Vitya Fruit (born 1982), Stas Bags (Stanislav Ivanov) (born 1984), Arseny Zhilyaev (born 1984), Kirill Kto (Lebedev) (born 1984), Igor Samolet (born 1984), Ivan Tuzov (born 1984), Anna Titova (born 1984), Pavel Arsenyev (born 1986), Vladimir Abikh (born 1987), Liza Bobkova (born 1987), Maxim Ima (born 1987), Andrey Shatilov (born 1987), Alina Glazun (born 1988), Asya Marakulina (born 1987), Ilya Mozgi (born 1988), Timofey Radya (born 1988), Rimma Savina (born 1988), Mayana Nasybullova (born 1989), Ivan Simonov (born 1991), Artem Filatov (born 1991), Tanya Peniker (born 1994), Mitya Bezydeiny.

<sup>28</sup> In this PhD thesis, many works of contemporary Russian art are introduced into scientific circulation for the first time. Several artists were interviewed regarding their creative method (Appendix 3).

## **Scientific novelty**

Thematic spectrum of contemporary Russian art from 2010 to 2023 is wide, varied and difficult to systematize. At the moment, there is no universal system for analyzing contemporary art that combines both traditional guidelines (the integrity of the artistic image, manner of execution, idea, content, originality of composition, color) and a new system of assessments (relevance, conceptuality, innovativeness).

Despite the growing interest in the phenomenon of narrative in contemporary Russian art, the studies related to the field of visual rhetoric are numerous, as well as the studies related to the isoverbal texts in Russian art. To date, the visual rhetoric in the relevant practices of Russian artists from 2010 to 2023 has not yet been systematically studied. The comments on this topic are presented in articles, reports, and museum catalogues.

As part of this study, the research will attempt to answer the following questions.

- Why many artists include text in the artworks?
- What is the reason for the interest in storytelling strategies?
- What is the genesis of the aesthetic foundations of contemporary isoverbal art?
- Are contemporary artists followers of conceptualists, street artists, comic book artists or poets working with the synthesis of arts?
- Is the image redundant in relation to the text in the visual arts? How visual elements contribute to meaning in the contemporary isoverbal texts?
- What are the boundaries between the text and the image in the Russian contemporary art? Why did the boundaries between the text and the image begin to blur?

The scientific novelty of the study is as follows:

1) A new way of working with visual rhetoric in the context of the linguistic turn, semiotics and visual studies is proposed on the example of contemporary Russian verbal-visual art.

2) The prerequisites for the emergence of contemporary verbal-visual art in Russian and European artistic traditions have been identified.

3) The main artistic strategies for working with text in contemporary Russian art in various mediums (paintings, graphics, collages, sculptures, art objects, ready-mades, installations, street art, etc.) are explained.

4) The key forms of contemporary Russian isoverbal art are systematized and analyzed.

5) The specificity of the artists' creative methods is shown.

6) The reasons for the interest of contemporary artists in narrative strategies are identified.

7) The relevant range of topics, techniques, images, ideas addressed by Russian contemporary verbal-visual art are traced and explained.

### **Main findings and results**

1) Contemporary Russian artists explicitly and implicitly work with text in a wide variety of mediums: painting, graphics, collage, sculpture, art objects, installations, street art, etc. The art object is one of the most relevant forms of verbal-visual art.

2) The emergence of contemporary isoverbal practices is determined by the Russian cultural tradition (Peredvizhniki, Russian Avant-garde and Moscow conceptualism). European and American conceptualism of the late 1960s and early 1970s, pop art, graffiti culture, and visual poetry had a significant influence on Russian isoverbal art.

3) The key strategies for working with text in contemporary Russian art are phraseological units, metaphors, metonymies, homonyms, paronymic attractions, neologisms, boustrophedons, palindromes, abbreviations, antonyms, comparisons.

4) Explicit verblity predominates in the artworks of contemporary Russian artists. The main options for the interaction of word and image in contemporary Russian art are the verbal image that explains, complements, duplicates the image, conflicts with it; the text as an image; the verbal commentary and image; the collage of letters and phrases; the image consisting of letters and text.

5) Russian art scene of verbal-visual representations (2010–2023) ceases to be exclusively Moscow. Artists from Moscow, St. Petersburg, Bryansk, Voronezh,

Yekaterinburg, Kazan, Krasnodar, Nizhny Novgorod, Novosibirsk, Perm, Pskov, Samara, Saratov, Stavropol, Tomsk, and other regions of Russia work with compositions of letters and words. Contemporary art forms a dialogue with a wide audience, leading the viewer to thoughts and reflection.

6) Many artists of the 21st century are in a state of search for the “third meaning” – the boundaries between the verbal and the visual. The role of text in the artworks turns out to be comparable to the meaning of the image.

7) Contemporary Russian artists are concerned with a wide range of phenomena inside and outside the field of art (the themes of the development of art and the preservation of cultural heritage in the conditions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and globalization; problems of loneliness, escapism, internet addiction, online communication, social justice, consumer excess; issues of digitalization, robotization, the emergence of new communication systems; aspects of environmental policy, interaction between man and nature (Appendix 4)).

### **Approbation of the research results**

The key ideas of the PhD research were discussed at seminars at the Doctoral School of Art and Design at the HSE University.

The main results of the PhD thesis were presented at the Russian and international scientific conferences<sup>29</sup>. The materials of study were published in journals indexed in Scopus, WoS, Russian Science Citation Index.

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<sup>29</sup> 1) International conference *Scientific Spring–2023* (April 26-28, 2023, Moscow, The State Institute for Art Studies); 2) International conference *Theories and Practices of Art and Design: Sociocultural, Economic and Political Contexts* (April 6-8, 2023, Moscow, HSE University); 3) *II International St. Petersburg Historical Forum* (October 10—16, 2022, St. Petersburg, Saint Petersburg State University); 4) X International Conference *Actual Problems of Theory and History of Art* (October 4–6, 2022, Moscow State University, Saint Petersburg State University, State Hermitage Museum); 5) International conference *Pictures of the world and the attitude to the world: the basic concepts of Max Weber and the prospects of fundamental sociology* (September 16, 2022, Moscow, HSE University); 6) XI International Scientific Conference *The Role of Citizen Self-Organization Institutions in the Post-Crisis Development of Economy and the Social Sphere* (October 20, 2022, Moscow, HSE University); 7) International conference *Theories and Practices of Art and Design: Sociocultural, Economic and Political Contexts* (April 6-8, 2022, Moscow, HSE University); 8. Annual conference *Academic dialogues* (March 25-26, 2022, Moscow, RANEPa).

The results of this study were also used in the publishing project *Verbal-visual art. Isoverbal text in the relevant practices of Russian artists from 2010 to 2021* (2021–2022, HSE University)<sup>30</sup>, curatorial project *Language Generation. Words in contemporary Russian art* (2022—2023, HSE University)<sup>31</sup>, academic course *Visual rhetoric in the artworks of contemporary Russian artists from 2010 to 2022* (2022–2023, HSE University), research projects of the Laboratory for Human Capital and Education Research (2022–2024, HSE University), popular science publications<sup>32</sup>, series of lectures at the Faculty of Creative Industries and at the Institute of Education (HSE University), education courses at the SBVEI “Vorobyovy Gory”.

### **Theoretical and practical significance of the results**

From the theoretical point of view this research can contribute and enrich the studies on Russian contemporary art, as well as provide some ideas on the attitudes of traditional methodology in art history. This study reveals new points of view in the analysis of verbal-visual representations of contemporary artists, cultural policy, which can serve as the basis for further works in this area.

As for the practical significance, findings of the paper can be a source of direct strategies of Russian exhibition practices. The results, interviews and illustrative material of the PhD research can be used in scientific and practical activities of art historians, cultural experts, philosophers, philologists, sociologists; scientific researchers of museums and galleries, curators, artists for the interpretation of Russian art, in the development of lecture courses, trainings, and educational programs; in the creation of exhibitions, curatorial and publishing projects (articles, catalogs, albums, monographs).

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<sup>30</sup> Afanaseva I.A. Publishing project. Verbal-visual art. URL: <https://hsedesign.ru/project/91ca8ae152f74255ac5541acbeb25b35>;

Afanaseva I.A. Verbal-visual art. Isoverbal text in the relevant practices of Russian artists from 2010 to 2021. URL: <https://portfolio.hse.ru/Project/141758>.

<sup>31</sup> Afanaseva I.A. Exhibition project. Words in contemporary Russian art. URL: <https://hsedesign.ru/project/485db3fd8a2c482c9274fc58361fb137>

<sup>32</sup> Afanaseva I.A. Semyon Motolyanets. Text is the speech of the painting, a dialogue window. Interview with the artist. URL: <https://design.hse.ru/news/2630>



## **Dissertation structure**

The objectives determine the logic and structure of the work. The dissertation consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a list of references and four appendices. The total volume is 259 pages (vol. 1 – 189 pages, vol. 2 – 70 pages).

## II. THE MAIN CONTENT OF THE RESEARCH

Contemporary Russian isoverbal art is a holistic artistic phenomenon that has acquired its own development since the 2010s. In recent years, there has been an increased interest of artists, sculptors, and street art masters in working with texts, phrases, statements, words in the context of the visual and object-spatial environment.

**The first chapter** of the study identifies and analyzes different forms and strategies of representation of words and visual narratives in the context of semiotics and visual studies.

Painting, sculpture, graphics, design, architecture as spatial forms of art appeal to a visual language<sup>33</sup>. At the same time, the visual arts often use narrative, allegories, metaphors, literary quotations, mythologies, and turn to the material of verbal language – sentences (poster), words (emblem), letters (letter collage), etc<sup>34</sup>.

Visual rhetoric is the process of formation of a visual object and its communicative connections – for example, text and image, reader and viewer<sup>35</sup>. Visual rhetoric examines the process of formation of a work of art in time and space, explores the meaning of the integrity of an object and the hierarchy of its component parts<sup>36</sup>.

Researchers define implicit and explicit verballity<sup>37</sup>. Implicit verballity is associated with the literary references, internal focus on narrative, sequence of actions. The plot of the artwork can be retold in words. Explicit verballity implies the direct inclusion of text (sentences, statements, words, letters) in the artwork.

From the point of view of semiotics, visual rhetoric explores the relationship between artistic elements, words and images in order to analyze their communication (R. Barthes, Yu. Lotman, U. Eco, B. A. Uspensky, etc.). From the perspective of visual studies (W.J.T. Mitchell, K. Moxey, etc.), visual rhetoric focuses on the social effects of

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<sup>33</sup> Sakhno I.M. “Ut Pictura Poesis”: the Poetic and Pictorial Emblem of the Baroque // *Observatory of Culture*. 2015. №5. P. 94–101.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Danesi M. *Visual Rhetoric and Semiotic* // *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Shukurov Sh.M. *Visual Rhetoric* // *Chelovek*. 2021. Vol. 32, №5. P. 180–191.

<sup>37</sup> Zlydneva N.V. *Verbal in Contemporary Art* // *Poetics of Quest or Search for Poetics. Proceedings of the International conference “Poetic language at the turn of the XX–XXI centuries and modern literary strategies (May 16–19, 2003). M., 2004. P. 423.*

visual experience at the intersection of words and images, narrative and figurative language. The role of the critic, viewer, curator becomes important. Cultural scientists and art historians (N. Zlydneva, I. Sakhno, Sh. Shukurov, etc.) analyze visual rhetoric as the integration of verbal and visual means in a single artistic space, the correlation of verbal and visual continuums<sup>38</sup>. The contextual and conceptual characteristics of isoverbal texts become indicative<sup>39</sup>.

**The second chapter** examines the genesis of the aesthetic and cultural foundations of contemporary verbal-visual art, drawing the parallels between the works of Moscow conceptualists (1970—1980) and contemporary artists (2010—2023).

The research shows that the emergence of contemporary isoverbal practices is based on the Russian cultural tradition: Peredvizhniki (V. Perov, I. Kramskoy, V. Makovsky, I. Repin and others), Russian avant-garde (K. Malevich, N. Goncharova, M. Larionov, I. Puni, M. Matyushin, and others) and Moscow conceptualism (I. Kabakov, V. Pivovarov, E. Bulatov, A. Monastyrsky, V. Komar, A. Melamid, A. Kosolapov, L. Rubinstein, R. Gerlovina, D. Prigov and others). In the 1990s in Russia, Yu. Avvakumov, Yu. Albert, G. Bruskin, I. Waldron, G. Kiesewalter, M. Ksuta, A. Kuzkin, R. Lebedev, B. Orlov, A. Pankin, D. Prigov, D. Rakitin, M. Roginsky, A. Suzdalev, L. Tishkov, E. Schiffers also worked with words and images.

European and Moscow conceptualism had a decisive influence on the contemporary Russian isoverbal art. The priority of ideas over materials and forms, the expansion of the formal boundaries of art, the formulation of general questions as problems of language, the themes of the absence of logical foundations, chaos, entropy, and absurdity unite these two directions. However, it is worth noting that the relevant experience of working with text is partially different from the previous one. A significant part of contemporary isoverbal artworks is built on the game of understanding and misunderstanding, homonymic and patronymic words, folk etymology.

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<sup>38</sup> Sakhno I.M. "Ut Pictura Poesis": the Poetic and Pictorial Emblem of the Baroque // *Observatory of Culture*. 2015. №5. P. 94–101.

<sup>39</sup> Shukurov Sh.M. *Visual Rhetoric* // *Chelovek*. 2021. Vol. 32, №5. P. 180–191.

The inclusion of words in the pictorial space was not a discovery of the conceptualists. The text was actively used in Egyptian and Arabic calligraphy, Byzantine palimpsests, Chinese and Japanese manuscripts, works of art of the Middle Ages, Russian popular prints of the 17th century, Baroque engravings, Cubo-Futurist collages, free words of the Futurists, texts by European conceptualists, and representatives of Pop Art. Text is an integral part of posters, advertising, graffiti. Within the social context, the dominance of verbal information symbolized authoritarian regimes. Visual images determined the liberalization of communication relations.

**In the third chapter** of the study, the main artistic strategies for working with text in contemporary art in various mediums are determined.

– Painting: V. Abikh, S. Bags (S. Ivanov), M. Burtova, I. Volkov, M. Ima, K. Kto (K. Lebedev), V. Logutov, D. Matskevich, K. Manchunsky, S. Motolyanets, M. Nikatin, R. Savina, I. Samolet, V. Chtak and others.

– Graphics: M. Bezideiny (D. Dyachenko), L. Bobkova, P. Bumazhny, P. Otdelnov, T. Pöniker and others.

– Collages: I. Simonov, A. Shatilov.

– Art objects, ready-mades: R. Peeks, V. Abikh, P. Arsenyev, M. Bezydeiny (D. Dyachenko), A. Glazun, A. Zhilyaev, A. Kuzkin, A. Marakulina, S. Motolyanets, M. Nasybullova, S. Ovseykin, U. Podkorytova, M. Somik, A. Syailev, A. Titova, I. Tuzov, L. Uchaeva, V. Chtak, Recycle Group and others.

– Installations: L. Bobkova, A. Gart, I. Samolet, A. Zhilyaev, A. Kuzkin, P. Otdelnov.

– Street art: V. Abikh, S. Akramov, A. Gushchin, K. Kto (K. Lebedev), I. Mozgi (Chistykh), Slava PTRK (S. Komissarov), I. Simonov, T. Radya, A. Filatov, V. Fruits, Taknado Group et al.

The classification of interactions between words and images is proposed. The specificity of the artists' creative method is determined.

The study showed that many images, unlike texts, are understandable to animals, children, and speakers of different languages. The main options for the interaction of word and image in contemporary Russian art are the verbal image that explains, complements,

duplicates the image, conflicts with it; the text as an image; the verbal commentary and image; the collage of letters and phrases; the image consisting of letters and text.

Most images are suitable for expressing feelings, based on strategic perception skills. Images can be read in different ways. The number of possible readings of the isoverbal texts depends on the different types of knowledge projected onto the image (culture, traditions). Words are more conventional than images. Isoverbal texts acquire meaning in an indirect way, through a cultural code. Verbal and visual arts involve different cognitive operators.

The main trends of contemporary verbal-visual practices are continuity, reflection, equal presence of verbal and visual means, a wide range of techniques and themes. The boundaries between different mediums are blurring. Digital information technologies are actively introduced into contemporary art and transforming it.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this study, the author examined intertextual interaction, the relationship between the verbal and the visual. The artistic possibilities of visual rhetoric in the works by contemporary Russian artists in various mediums (paintings, graphics, collages, art objects, installations, street art, etc.) were identified. The paper analyzes various types of connections between word and image, cultural codes of verbal components of artistic texts, ways for the interaction between Russian and European art in a historical perspective.

The hypothesis of this study was confirmed. Based on the analysis of the interviews with representatives of the contemporary artistic community, it is shown that the main sources of inspiration for Russian artists are Russian avant-garde artists (K. Malevich, A. Kruchenykh, M. Matyushin, L. Popova, V. Stepanova), representatives of Moscow conceptualism (I. Kabakov, V. Pivovarov, E. Bulatov, D. Prigov, O. Vasiliev, I. Chuikov, Yu. Albert, group *Collective Actions*) and social art (sots-art) (V. Komar, A. Melamid), as well as the Belgian surrealist R. Magritte, German representatives of postmodernism (J. Beuys, Z. Polke, G. Richter), American conceptualists (S. LeWitt, J. Baldessari,

M. Bochner, L. Weiner, E. Ruscha, J. Kosuth, J. Holzer), abstractionists (Cy Twombly), representatives of pop art (A. Warhol, J. Rosenquist), graffiti artists (J.-M. Basquiat), etc.

Interest in literature (F. Dostoevsky, A. Chekhov, A. Kuprin, S. Chorny, D. Kharms, R. Rozhdestvensky), philosophy (J.-F. Lyotard, J. Derrida, J. Lacan, G. Deleuze, M. Foucault, J. Baudrillard), psychology (S. Freud), language games (L. Wittgenstein), visual poetry is reflected in many isoverbal works of contemporary artists.

The conducted research revealed that contemporary art is contextually determined. The intensive development of social, economic, political, and cultural trends contributes to the active interaction of contemporary art with reality. Contemporary verbal-visual practices, appealing to the different ways of perception, refer to linguistic paradoxes and images of mass culture. The main object of many artworks is the visual narrative and its semiotic system.

In the 2010s–2020s, the Russian art scene of verbal-visual representations ceases to be exclusively Moscow, spreading to other towns and cities. Artists from Moscow, St. Petersburg, Bryansk, Voronezh, Yekaterinburg, Kazan, Krasnodar, Nizhny Novgorod, Novosibirsk, Perm, Pskov, Samara, Saratov, Stavropol, Tomsk and other regions of Russia work with compositions of letters and words. The author's interpretation of an artwork becomes an important component of art. Like conceptualism, contemporary Russian art does not always imply the possibility of formal stylistic analysis in terms of form, composition, and style. The main tendency of artistic practices is to discover the problems of the relationship between an object, its image, and language.

The study has shown that the Russian art scene from 2010 to 2023 represents a complex, diverse, multiplicity phenomenon. Contemporary artworks are about the creation of images of a perfect world, the perception of which makes people more active in choosing their own position in life. As a source of inspiration, artists use almost any materials and technologies that people encounter in everyday life. Contemporary Russian artists do not limit themselves to one material or creative method. They are concerned with a wide range of phenomena within and outside the field of art: variations on the themes of the development of art and the preservation of cultural heritage in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and globalization; problems of loneliness, escapism, social

justice, consumer excess; issues of digitalization, the emergence of new communication systems; aspects of environmental policy, interaction between man and nature. Contemporary art is built on an understanding of the cumulative problems of socio-economic reality, reflecting current trends and challenges of the 21st century.

The study of visual rhetoric in the relevant practices of Russian artists from 2010 to 2023 may become the basis for the further scientific and practical work in this area. The proposed approach can serve as a methodology for analyzing the verbal-visual practices of artists from other countries and periods. A number of aspects raised in the study can be expanded across time frames and regions, which will allow us to analyze the broader picture of contemporary isoverbal art. The issues of the relationship between words and images can be considered within the framework of a comparative analysis of contemporary methodological approaches, which will make it possible to determine the specifics of relevant approaches in the history of art.

Many artworks by contemporary Russian artists are logocentric. Art shares empirical experience, theoretical knowledge with the viewer, and formulates ethical and social problems. A key aspect of isoverbal art is to create the communicative qualities. Through art and language, artists show their attitude to reality. Contemporary Russian artists often reveal the linguistic nature of the images, asserting the autonomy of a statement, word, syllable, or letter.

### III. VALIDATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY

#### Main publications

1. Afanaseva I.A. Language Generation: Word in Contemporary Russian Art // *Chelovek*. 2022. T. 33. № 6. P. 136—155. <https://chelovek-journal.ru/s023620070023384-9-1/> (Q4, Scopus, HSE Journal List, RSCI).
2. Afanaseva I.A. Russian Avant-Garde Receptions in the Artworks of Contemporary Russian Artists // *Articult*. 2022. № 4(48). P. 27—35. <http://articult.rsuh.ru/articult-48-4-2022/articult-48-4-2022-afanaseva.php> (HSE Journal List, RSCI).
3. Afanaseva I.A. Labyrinths of “Turns” in Contemporary Art: Linguistic, Iconic, Visual // *Observatory of Culture*. 2023. №20(2). P. 188—196. <https://observatoria.rsl.ru/jour/article/view/1551> (HSE Journal List, RSCI).
4. Afanaseva I.A. The Linguistic Generation: Logocentric Practices in the Works of Contemporary Russian artists (2010–2022) // *Shagi / Steps*. 2023. № 9(3). P. 218—238. <https://doi.org/10.22394/2412-9410-2023-9-3-218-238> (Q2, Scopus, HSE Journal List, RSCI).
5. Afanaseva I.A. The Toposes of Vision and Narratives in the Artworks of Contemporary Russian Artists P. Arseniev, M. Bezideiny, S. Motolyants, V. Chtak // *Tomsk State University Journal of Cultural Studies and Art History*. 2024. T. 52. (In the press) <https://publications.hse.ru/articles/809766184> (WoS, HSE Journal List, RSCI).
6. Afanaseva I.A., Sorokin P. S., Goloshchapov A.A. Agency in contemporary European art (2017–2023) in the context of social and cultural trends: manifestations and effects // *Shagi / Steps*. 2024. № 10(1). P. 341–362. <https://publications.hse.ru/articles/880713591> (Q2, Scopus, HSE Journal List, RSCI).
7. Afanaseva I.A. “Artistic Text” in the Artworks of V. E. Makovsky: Rhetorical Figures and Visual Tropes // *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. Arts*. 2023. №2(13). P. 255–272. <https://artsjournal.spbu.ru/article/view/16337/10821> (Q1, Scopus, WoS, HSE Journal List, RSCI).



8. Sorokin P.S., Afanaseva I.A., Goloshchapov A.A. Art and Agency in the Era of De-Structuration: Exploring a New Field // Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science. 2023. P. 1-17 <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12124-023-09777-w> (Q1, Scopus, HSE Journal List).

### **Other publications**

9. Afanaseva I.A. The Dialogues Between the Verbal and the Visual in the Artworks of Vladimir Makovsky (1846—1920) // The 5th International Conference on Art Studies: Research, Experience, Education (ICASSEE 2021). – Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021. P. 7—16. <https://www.aup-online.com/content/papers/10.5117/9789048557240/ICASSEE.2021.002> (WoS).
10. Afanaseva I.A. V.E. Makovsky and European Artists of the 19th Century // Three Centuries of Russian Art in the Context of World Culture. Moscow: BooksMART, 2022. P. 37—41. <https://publications.hse.ru/chapters/740606843> (RSCI).
11. Afanaseva I.A. Vladimir Makovsky and the Partnership of Traveling Art Exhibitions // Partnership of Traveling Art Exhibitions. On 150th Anniversary of the Foundation: Materials of the International scholarly conference. Moscow: State Tretyakov Gallery, 2022. P. 296—310. <https://publications.hse.ru/chapters/797966395> (RSCI).
12. Afanaseva I.A. V.E. Makovsky and Russian Writers of the 19th Century. Previously Unknown Materials // Hudozhestvennaya kul'tura [Art & Culture Studies]. 2023. №2. P. 156—187. [https://artculturestudies.sias.ru/upload/iblock/721/5q06r3rxh7a9qovhczc0750sd4o1baad/hk\\_2023\\_2\\_156.pdf](https://artculturestudies.sias.ru/upload/iblock/721/5q06r3rxh7a9qovhczc0750sd4o1baad/hk_2023_2_156.pdf) (RSCI).