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**"LOHENGRIN" BY R. WAGNER IN THE CONTEXT OF IDEAS OF SAINT  
AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO AND REFLECTIONS OF MODERN IDEOLOGISTS OF  
ETHNIC RELIGIONS**

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*In the presented article, for the first time, attempts are made to consider the content of the opera "Lohengrin" by R. Wagner in the context of the ideas of Saint Augustine of Hippo, set forth in the treatise "The City of God Against the Pagans". Philosophical reflections of modern researchers of ethnic religions of the Balts A. Yu. Greimas, J. Trinkūnas, I. Trinkuniene, O. Zauers will become the "intersection point" of the ideas of two turning period in the history of Christianity – the end of the era of patristics and the ideological formation of neo-paganism of the 20th century. The "focus" of such an intersection will be the opera "Lohengrin" by R. Wagner. The idea of St. Augustine the Blessed about the city of God and the city on earth made it possible to illuminate and understand the main conflict of the opera in a new way, which reveals the meaning of the philosophical and theological categories of "good", "evil", "sin", "free will", "love", "fidelity", "faith" in their artistic interpretation. Features of the philosophical thought of St. Augustine the Blessed, who came to Christianity, having experienced a strong influence of paganism, allows using his legacy to comprehend the processes of theological formation of modern neo-paganism, which quite expressively declares itself in the Baltic countries.*

*The stated research topic can be continued in the following directions: reflection of Christian theodicy in other operas by R. Wagner, in particular – "Tannhäuser", "Parsifal" and the tetralogy "The Ring of the Nibelung". The interweaving of the ideas of Christian theodicy and the aesthetics of romanticism, embodied in plots borrowed from Scandinavian and German mythology, as well as medieval novels and legends. A generalization of the principles of Wagnerian ethics, reflected in the characters of his opera heroes. The consistent solution of these tasks should gradually lead to the creation of a new Ukrainian philosophical Wagner studies, free from the ideological clichés of the last century and based on modern achievements in philosophical thought, aesthetics, and art history.*

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**Keywords:** *the teachings of Augustine Aurelius (Saint Augustine of Hippo), R. Wagner, "Lohengrin", Wagner studies, ethnic religions, Christian theodicy, phaenomenology of religion.*

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## "ЛОЕНГРІН" Р. ВАГНЕРА В КОНТЕКСТІ ІДЕЙ АВГУСТИНА ІПОНІЙСЬКОГО ТА РЕФЛЕКСІЯХ СУЧАСНИХ ІДЕОЛОГІВ ЕТНІЧНИХ РЕЛІГІЙ

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В пропонованій статті вперше робиться спроба розглянути зміст опери "Лоенгрін" Р. Вагнера в контексті ідей святого Августина Блаженного, викладених ним в трактаті "Про Град Божий проти язичників". Філософські рефлексії сучасних дослідників етнічних релігій балтів А. Ю. Греймаса, Й. Трінкунаса, І. Трінкунієне, О. Зауерса є "точкою перетину" ідей двох моментів зламу в історії християнства – кінця доби патристики та ідейного становлення неоязичництва в ХХ столітті. "Фокусом" такого погляду є опера "Лоенгрін" Р. Вагнера. Ідея святого Августина Блаженного про град Божий та град земний дозволила по-новому висвітлити та зрозуміти основний конфлікт опери, в якому розкривається зміст теологічних категорій "благо", "зло", "гріх", "свобода волі", "любов", "вірність", "віра" в їх художній інтерпретації. Особливості філософської думки святого Августина Блаженного, який прийняв християнство після тривалого впливу язичництва, дозволяє за допомогою його філософської спадщини осмислити процеси становлення сучасного неоязичництва, котре достатньо виразно заявляє про себе у країнах Балтійського моря. Пропоновану тему дослідження можна продовжити в таких напрямках: віддзеркалення християнської теодицеї в операх Р. Вагнера "Тангейзер", "Парсифаль" та тетралогії "Перстень нібелунга"; переплетення ідей християнської теодицеї та естетики романтизму в сюжетах скандинавської та германської міфології, середньовічних романів та легенд; узагальнення принципів вагнерівської етики в характерах його оперних героїв.

Послідовне вивчення вагнерівської творчості у філософському аспекті має призвести до створення нового українського вагнерознавства, вільного від ідеологічних штампів минулого століття та заснованого на сучасних досягненнях філософської думки, естетики та мистецтвознавства.

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**Ключові слова:** вчення Августина Аврелія (Іпонійський), Р. Вагнер, "Лоенгрін", вагнерознавство, етнічні релігії, християнська теодицея, феноменологія релігії.

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**The main problem settment.** The creativity of R. Wagner is being regarded not only by the musicologists and philologists, but also by the philosophers more than one and a half century. The philosophical treats of the genius German componists creativity are various and represent the wide space of the approaches, that includes exploration and bounds between thwe theoretical works of the composer and his musical masterpieces; the impacts of the German philosophy of the 19th century on his outlook, it's revealment in the opera libretto as the leading ideas of the European philosophy, also – the importance of the Germanic and Scandinavian mythology for the dramaturgy of his operas.

The regards on the Wagnerian creativity by philosophers is contraversial and can be placed between such " polarnesses" as a very polemic work by F. Nietzsche "The Case of Wagner" ("Der Fall Wagner", 1888), that

tell us the very negative view on the Wagner`s creativity: «Wagner is a great corrupter of music. With it, he found the means of stimulating tired nerves, – and in this way he made music ill" [5, p. 28] and the works by A. Losev, that manifistates the "divine pover of his achievements" [1]. A. Losev regards the impact of "New Germany" ideas on the worldview of R. Wagner, as well as of Feuerbach, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Hegel. Based on the explorations of the creativity of composer and analysis of his theoretical works A. Losev comes to conclusion, that the Wagner`s philosophy was created during the process of the art creativity – it is a differenciation and conscious of the creative intuitionous experience [1].

The intuition of genius, that has reveald itself in the works with sources and the creatment of the libretto texts, gives us the approach to find the special view of the understanding opera masterpieces by. R. Wagner fromthe

position of philosophy, that had been held explored and analyzing the opera "Tannhäuser" from the view of the numinous regard by R. Otto and the poetry by Walther von der Vogelweide in the sphere of the ideas of Christian [3].

For this article we choose opera «Lohengrin» by R. Wagner, and the point of view and analysis – the work by Saint Augustine of Hippo "The City of God Against the Pagans" ("De civitate Dei contra paganos"). Such an approach is devoted to aim of representance the famous masterpiece by R. Wagner as a basics for revealment of the ideas of the medieval Christian philosophy and to regard a composer as an explorer of these ideas in a form of masterpiece. This approach seems to be possible and scientifically fulfilled, because the explorational function of art is obvious since the times of Aristotheles.

Thanks to the efforts of the famous musicologist M. R. Cherkashina-Gubarenko, Ukrainian Wagner views open up new horizons in the studies of the work of the outstanding German composer. In line with the renewal of ideas about the ideas and meanings of Wagner's work, in the presented article, for the first time, attempts are made to consider the content of the opera «Lohengrin» by R. Wagner in the context of the ideas of Saint Augustine of Hippo, set forth in the treatise «The City of God Against the Pagans». Philosophical reflections of modern researchers of ethnic religions of the Balts A. Yu. Greimas, J. Trinkūnas, I. Trinkuniene, O. Zauers will become the «intersection regard» of the ideas of two turning views in the history of Christianity – the end of the era of patristics and the ideological formation of neo-paganism of the 20th century. The "focus" of such an intersection will be the opera "Lohengrin" by R. Wagner.

**The revealment of the main content.** As it is known, the basical ideas of the Christianity were written by the scholars of Church, who were active in the period of 3th to 9th century. The Patristics is a wide amount of the

philosophical-Christian literature, and its central question is about exploring God and human. One of the examples, that brightly shows the interest to this philosophical question is the ideology of one of the most prominent representatives of Patristics Saint Augustine of Hippo, who contributed the most to the Christian philosophy in the times between the Antiquity and Middle Ages and became a founder of Patristics as the philosophy. Our task doesn't include the detailed analysis of the Aurelius Augustin's philosophy in general. For achievement of our aim we will concentrate only on the idea of the heaven city and the earth city, because this idea is the key to the understanding of the main conflict in opera "Lohengrin". About the reason of appearance of two cities and of their impact Saint Augustine of Hippo tells in the eleventh book of his work. On his opinion they were founded by evil and kind angels: "Chapter 1. – Of This Part of the Work, Wherein We Begin to Explain the Origin and End of the Two Cities. The city of God we speak of is the same to which testimony is borne by that Scripture, which excels all the writings of all nations by its divine authority, and has brought under its influence all kinds of minds, and this not by a casual intellectual movement, but obviously by an express providential arrangement. For there it is written, Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God. And in another psalm we read, Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of His holiness, increasing the joy of the whole earth. And, a little after, in the same psalm, As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God. God has established it for ever. And in another, There is a river the streams whereof shall make glad the city of our God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved. From these and similar testimonies, all of which it were tedious to cite, we have learned that there is a

city of God, and its Founder has inspired us with a love which makes us covet its citizenship. To this Founder of the holy city the citizens of the earthly city prefer their own gods, not knowing that He is the God of gods, not of false, i.e., of impious and proud gods, who, being deprived of His unchangeable and freely communicated light, and so reduced to a kind of poverty-stricken power, eagerly grasp at their own private privileges, and seek divine honors from their deluded subjects; but of the pious and holy gods, who are better pleased to submit themselves to one, than to subject many to themselves, and who would rather worship God than be worshipped as God. But to the enemies of this city we have replied in the ten preceding books, according to our ability and the help afforded by our Lord and King. Now, recognizing what is expected of me, and not unmindful of my promise, and relying, too, on the same succor, I will endeavor to treat of the origin, and progress, and deserved destinies of the two cities (the earthly and the heavenly, to wit), which, as we said, are in this present world commingled, and as it were entangled together. And, first, I will explain how the foundations of these two cities were originally laid, in the difference that arose among the angels" [7]. Now let's turn to the synopsis of the opera "Lohengrin":

Act I. Meadow on the banks of the Scheldt. The German King Henry sits under an oak tree, surrounded by a retinue of Saxon and Thuringian nobles and knights, opposite him are the Brabant nobles and knights, led by Count Friedrich von Telramund, near the count is his wife Ortrud. The king convened the Brabantians, needing their help in the war with the Hungarians, and wants to know the reason for the discord that prevails in a country devoid of a ruler: he asks Frederick to tell about the sad events in Brabant. He tells that the Duke of Brabant, before his death, entrusted him with his children Elsa and Gottfried. One day Gottfried disappeared. At the instigation of his wife Ortrud,

Friedrich accuses Elsa of fratricide ("Dank, König, dir, dab du zu richten kamst!"; "I am glad, King, that you have come to judge"). Heinrich invites Elsa to justify herself. The girl timidly, but with inspiration, tells that she saw a heavenly knight who will help her ("Einsam in truben Tagen"; "I remember how I prayed, grieving with my soul"). The king decides to resort to God's judgment and invites Elsa to choose a protector. Elsa prays, calling on the warrior seen in her dream. A boat appears on the river, drawn by a swan, from which a knight in shining armor emerges. Saying goodbye to the swan ("Nun sei bedankt, mein lieber Schwan!"; "Now swim, my swan"), he announces that he is ready to fight, prove the girl's innocence and marry her on one condition: if she does not ask who he is such. Elsa swears, and Heinrich orders to start the duel. The mysterious knight defeats Telramund, grants him life and advises him to confess his slander. Elsa's innocence has been proven.

Act II. Castle in Antwerp; night. Telramund and Ortrud are in despair that the plan has failed. Friedrich accuses his wife of falling out of favor ("Durch dich muss ich verlieren"; "You ruined me"). Ortrud assures her husband that what happened is the fruit of magic and that Elsa must be forced to break her promise to the knight: only in this way will he lose his "secret power". Friedrich must also try to injure the stranger and cut off his finger, depriving him of his witchcraft charms (duet "Weibst du, wer dieser Held?"; "Do you know who that hero is?"). Ortrud hypocritically asks for forgiveness from Elsa when she goes out onto the balcony and sings about her happiness ("Euch Luft, die mein Klagen"; "O light-winged wind"). Elsa invites her into the house. Ortrud, overwhelmed with wild joy, appeals to the infernal spirits ("Entweihte Gotter"; "Oh gods of hell! Send me help"). During the conversation, she instills doubt in Elsa's soul, advising not to trust the unknown knight (duet

"Du Armste kannst wohl nie ermessen"; "Poor thing, you can't understand").

With the coming of the day, the wedding is being prepared. Everyone will know the decree of King Frederick: Telramund and Ortrud are expelled, the knight marries Elsa and receives the crown of Brabant. The wedding procession comes out ("Gesegnet soll sie schreiten"; "Lord, bless you give your servant"). Ortrud and Telramund accuse the groom of witchcraft and demand that he reveal his name. Telramund tells Elsa that he will hide near her bedroom at night to injure a stranger: then he will stay with her forever.

Act III. With a wedding hymn ("Treulich gefuhrt"; "Our Lord is good"), the courtiers escort the young to the bedroom. Elsa is tormented by doubts and fear, the knight tries in vain to calm her down (duet "Das sube Lied verhalt"; "The heart burns with a wonderful fire tenderly"). When she asks him fatal questions ("Who are you? Where are you from?"), Telramund bursts into the bedroom and four more with him. Elsa manages to give the knight a sword, and he strikes Friedrich: the rest fall to their knees before the hero.

On the banks of the Scheldt, a stranger reveals that his name is Lohengrin, he is the son of Parsifal, a knight of the Holy Grail, called to protect honor and virtue, but if he is forced to say who he is, then he must return to the castle where the Grail is stored ("In fernem Land, innahbar euren Schritten"; "In a foreign land, in a distant, mountainous kingdom"). The boat reappears on the river. Lohengrin consoles Elsa, saying that her brother is alive and will return soon. Ortrud taunts her and admits that by the power of magic she turned Gottfried into a swan. Then Lohengrin bows in prayer; a dove flies from the sky and takes the place of a swan, which plunges into the river; Gottfried comes out of the water. As Lohengrin moves away, Elsa falls dead in her brother's arms.

It is traditionally believed that the main problem of the opera is the idea of

the loneliness of the creator in the contemporary world for R. Wagner. The grounds for such an understanding were laid by the composer himself in his literary work "A Communication to My Friends" [8]. The artist does not find understanding among the "crowd". The magic knight Lohengrin came to earth to do good, but did not find understanding and support there, and therefore was forced to return to his magical kingdom. However, the history of art knows a huge number of examples when the author gives an incomplete description of his work. That is what happened in this case as well. The conflict embodied in the opera is ambiguous. At the beginning of the first act, an impression is created. That the basis of the drama is the slander that Elsa is erected by her enemies. Such a conflict is typical for theatrical works, starting from Antiquity. However, Lohengrin's victory over Friedrich Telramund resolves it. At the end of the opera, the representatives of the "evil forces" are defeated. But this does not mean a happy ending to the whole drama. Elsa did not understand the bright knight, and the knight did not find the ideal love that he dreamed of.

The main conflict of the drama is the conflict between Lohengrin and Elsa, in which the tragedy of Lohengrin is emphasized. Elsa, on the other hand, is a symbol of the "crowd", which is not able to understand a genius.

Such is the traditional view of the content and dramaturgy of the opera, determined, as we have already said, by the statements of the composer himself, in the context of the ideas of romantic aesthetics. However, this interpretation cannot be considered exhaustive.

In our opinion, the key to understanding the main idea of the opera is in the last monologue of Lohengrin, which he utters on the banks of the Scheldt, waiting for the boat in which he will sail forever: "In a far-off land, inaccessible to your steps, there is a castle by the name of Montsalvat; a light-filled temple stands within it, more beautiful than anything on earth; therein

is a vessel of wonderful blessing that is watched over as a sacred relic: that the purest of men might guard it, it was brought down by a host of angels; every year a dove descends from Heaven to fortify its wonderful power: it is called the Grail, and the purest, most blessed faith is imparted through it to the Brotherhood of Knights. Whosoever is chosen to serve the Grail is armed by it with heavenly power; the darts of evil prove powerless against him, once he has seen it, the shadow of death flees him. Even he who is sent by it to a distant land, appointed as a champion of virtue, will not be robbed of its holy power, provided that he, as its knight, remains unrecognised there. For so wondrous is the blessing of the Grail that when it is revealed it shuns the eye of the uninitiated; thus no man should doubt the knight, for if he is recognised, he must leave you. Hear how I reward the forbidden question! I was sent to you by the Grail: my father Parsival wears its crown, I its knight – am called Lohengrin" [9].

The knight Lohengrin leaves Elsa forever because she broke her oath (asked the knight for his name), did not believe in the sincerity of his promises, and succumbed to the spell of evil forces. This is how the dramatic situation looks when viewed from the point of view of romantic operatic aesthetics. If we are guided by the categories of Augustine Aurelius, then the situation acquires a deeper meaning than the parting of the spouses. According to the philosophy of Augustine Aurelius, the city of God (*civitas Dei*) and the city of the earth (*civitas terrena*) are created by different "kinds" of love: earthly, which inevitably gives rise to insensitivity to the divine, and heavenly, which leads to self-forgetfulness, but the only one that brings glory in the Lord. From this point of view, Elsa chooses glory from people, which forever deprives her of the opportunity to enter the city of heaven.

Undoubtedly, R. Wagner, in his solution of the artistic task, went far beyond the framework of romantic

aesthetics in general and the operatic tradition in particular. Traditional for medieval society pride in their origin and genealogy, provide material for philosophical generalizations. They provide the ingenious opera not only with a bright stage life, but also with an "increase in meaning", which makes it interesting for philosophical analysis more than a century and a half after its creation. In Lohengrin's monologue, the words symbols sound – Monsalvat, Grail, Parsifal. Deciphering them creates another layer of meanings that lead to several origins – the medieval novel, Scandinavian and Germanic mythology, as well as their philosophical meanings. In this part of the study, we rely on the methodology of C. Lévi-Strauss, presented by him in an article "The Structural Study of Myth" and published in "The Journal of American Folklore" [4]. According to the idea of C. Lévi-Strauss, any myth can be read in two ways. In the case of "horizontal reading" it looks like a primitive fairy tale. In the case of a "vertical" reading, he solves the problem of universal communication. All R. Wagner's operas need such a "vertical" and, let us add, multi-vector reading. In this case, new meanings will open that can link together different eras, cultures, civilizations. From the point of view of the psychological structure of the act, the behavior of the opera characters is quite understandable: they all act in accordance with their desires (for example, authorities, like Ortrud and Telramund), as well as on the basis of social rules and norms (Elsa, demanding from Lohengrin an answer to the "forbidden question"). Performing their actions, each of the characters actualizes a complex range of experiences, which includes fear, humility, hope, faith, humility, love, anger, vanity, envy, enjoyment of profit and revenge, etc.

The musical embodiment of this range of experiences and emotional states forms the basis of romantic aesthetics, in accordance with which R. Wagner builds the dramaturgy of the opera. In terms of C. Lévi-Strauss, this

will constitute a "horizontal" reading vector. If, however, to approach the consideration of this issue from the position of Augustine the Blessed, then the picture will turn out to be a slightly different picture, namely: the establishment of a higher moral order, lying outside the limits of the earthly world.

R. Wagner poses the problem of evil, demonstrating the diversity of its manifestations (sin, suffering, death). However, the problem of evil cannot be considered outside the worldview and personality, therefore, each religion seeks to solve this issue theoretically (in theological teachings) and practically in real collisions with evil in various guises.

As an example, let us cite an observation that demonstrates the fruitfulness of discussions, which were stimulated by the philosophy of St. Augustine, the opera *Lohengrin* by R. Wagner, as well as scientific meetings of members of the European Congress of Ethnic Religions.

When discussing the pantheon of the Baltic gods, mythical creatures and their relationship with people, the issue of good and evil was raised more than once. Unlike Christianity, where God is the embodiment of good, and evil is understood as its absence, in polytheistic religions the power of higher powers is distributed among many good and evil beings, each of which has limited power and responsibility. Therefore, modern understanding requires the question of the definitions of the concepts of will, choice, omnipotence and derivatives from them.

Modern neo-paganism, which is considered by many Baltic scholars as one of the factors of national and cultural self-identification, urgently requires the solution of this issue on a modern scientific and philosophical basis. Therefore, the discussions more than once discussed the works of Augustine the Blessed, a representative of both antiquity (paganism) and the Middle Ages (early Christianity).

The operatic work of R. Wagner, with his reliance on Scandinavian and German mythology, provides material for historical reconstruction and the study of mythological images in modern culture. In addition, centuries-old cultural ties between the Baltic Sea countries, including in the field of music, make it possible to identify common mentality traits that are manifested in the assessment of ethical issues posed in works of art, in particular, the opera *Lohengrin*.

The ideas of R. Wagner's operas were the source of the inspiration also for those philosophers and historians who explore the early Christianity and its revealment in Northern European countries. The interest to the exploration the symbols and ideas of R. Wagner's tetralogy "The Ring of the Nibelung" was very popular in Latvia and Lithuania. The professor of Vilnius University Jonas Trinkunas was one of those, who inspired the interest to the operas by R. Wagner. He considered that it is the revealment of the European pre-Christian tradition.

As an example of this interest among the philosophers in religious sphere, we can tell about the conference of the historians, where participated scholars and students from various countries of Europe, including the representatives of Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine, Poland and Germany. During the discussion, some of the representatives spoke about Wagner's opera "Lohengrin". Among them there was Latvian poet and musician Oskars Zauers, further known also as a first translator of "Parsifal" and "Tannhäuser" into Latvian. His words, told during the conference, excited everyone, who had heard them, Here is what he said: "I don't know any other more genius masterpiece, that is a revealment of idea, that vanity – is the first enemy of any spiritual life, than Wagner's "Lohengrin". It seems strange, that rarely is seen how is it revealed. When Lohengrin had forbidden to ask about his origin and name, he wants to understand, whether Elsa and others



have a spiritual understanding of anything. Can people see the inner meaning, not only the obvious things? Can value not the origin and social position of the person, but actions, soul, spirit? Is there an understanding of the fact, that the inner power of any person is higher than social position and origin, so the provement of the aristocratical origin, that had been waited by most people is not as important as the spiritual life? Also, the restriction to ask about name and origin was thr exam of faith: can Elsa and others belive in not obvious things, itn ones, that can't be seen and proved? The great faith in that, what is not seen, unproved and unknown is a highest gift from heaven" [6].

**Conclusion.** Summarizing the above, we can draw the following conclusions:

1. For the first time in Ukrainian Wagner studies, we applied the ideas of St. Augustine the Blessed to analyze the philosophical content of R. Wagner's opera "Lohengrin" and became convinced of the fruitfulness of this approach;

2. The idea of St. Augustine the Blessed about the city of God and the city on earth made it possible to illuminate and understand the main conflict of the opera in a new way, which reveals the meaning of the philosophical and theological categories of "good",

"evil", "sin", "free will", "love", "fidelity", "faith" in their artistic interpretation;

3. Features of the philosophical thought of St. Augustine the Blessed, who came to Christianity, having experienced a strong influence of paganism, allows using his legacy to comprehend the processes of theological formation of modern neo-paganism, which quite expressively declares itself in the Baltic countries.

The stated research topic can be continued in the following directions:

1. Reflection of Christian theodicy in other operas by R. Wagner, in particular – "Tannhäuser", "Parsifal" and the tetralogy "The Ring of the Nibelung";

2. The interweaving of the ideas of Christian theodicy and the aesthetics of romanticism, embodied in plots borrowed from Scandinavian and German mythology, as well as medieval novels and legends;

3. A generalization of the principles of Wagnerian ethics, reflected in the characters of his opera heroes.

The consistent solution of these tasks should gradually lead to the creation of a new Ukrainian philosophical Wagner studies, free from the ideological clichés of the last century and based on modern achievements in philosophical thought, aesthetics, and art history.

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