

# Game Projects in Multipurpose Museums

Nikolay Selivanov

Studio of art designing, Moscow, Russia

## Abstract

*Great Museum Game (GMG) are short-term art educational projects carried out directly in museums in the context of museum collections. GMG is a synthesis of tabletop and role-playing game forms designed to immerse participants in creative activities, providing mobilization of cognitive motivation and creative will, activation of imagination. The games have no competitive purposes. The participants create their own artistic reality in the context of the museum, give birth to new ideas, metaphors, and images. The games are aimed on motivated teenagers from 14 to 18 years old, engaged in artistic activities on a permanent basis. Five GMG-format projects will be presented in this research.*

**Keywords:** museum pedagogy, game technology, immersive projects in a museum, contemporary art in a traditional museum, creative education, epistemological constructivism

## Introduction

I consider a developed imagination — the ability to construct metaphors, to create unexpected collisions of meaning, and to find a plastic and media embodiment for all this — as key properties of contemporary artistic intelligence. Artistic intelligence, based on cultural memory, turns into a generator of new meanings, and manifests itself primarily in sign-symbolic forms.

The new model of art education that I am developing with my associates is based on the rotating principle of changing cognitive attitudes between the student and the teacher, which I define as “memory / project.” The teacher constantly changes his or her position of expert to that of researcher-projector, engaging in creative dialogue with the student.

The rotational principle of “memory / project” allows not only the development of students' artistic thinking, but also the most effective correction of this process. Speaking of memory, I mean a specific memory associated with the creative experience of the embodiment of one's metaphors.

“Creative memory” is formed in the process of implementation of individual ideas in the context of appropriation of historical and cultural experience. It is not enough to learn about the existence of some images, ideas, and metaphors, but it is necessary to become a participant in the process of artistic interpretation, to embody new metaphors (Lakoff, 2004).

The most generalized view of the evolution of art allows us to see that the original purpose of all visual activity is to be an instrument of thinking, giving meaning to human life through the use of signs. This understanding of the original destination of art forms the basis for a new model of artistic education, which directly depends on the sign-symbolic sphere.

The rotational principle “memory / project” is based on the inner need of each of us to develop our own semantic space with the help of a sign-symbolic heritage. I am sure that the “archeology” of signs has a great future. This is a powerful way to develop an individual's worldview.

The process of model formation occurred spontaneously at the expense of various requests for educational products of sign-symbolic content oriented at the project forms of education and practical application. These were electronic educational systems, virtual constructors, textbooks for schools, training programs for teachers, and workshops for a variety of target groups and different contexts. One of these areas has become large-scale game projects in multipurpose museums.

## The Emergence of the Idea and the Development of the Concept of Museum Games

In 2004, the Studio of Art Designing began to develop a new format of museum projects — playful art projects in big museums. This format was born in the process of preparing the next museum plenary session in the State Hermitage Museum (St. Petersburg). The immensity of a museum, its immense spaces filled with an infinite variety of images, ideas, artistic experiences and historical associations put any visitor in a very difficult position. To understand this museum "space" in a short period of time is impossible. But it seemed to us that the use of a creative game will allow us to grasp "at a glance" a rather wide field of museum content, form in our students the inner necessity to perceive the cultural heritage as the main source of their own artistic ideas (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Grotesques. State Hermitage. St. Petersburg (2004, 2009)*



Today we define these museum projects as immersion play forms. Immersion — immersion in creative activity by means of game methods, provides mobilization of cognitive motivation and creative will, activation of imagination, triggers the process of internal dialogue.

The basis for the development of the content of our museum projects is the history of ideas, which has its origins in the iconology of Erwin Panofsky (Panofsky, 1924). The history of ideas is an opportunity to see a holistic picture of the world in which scientific knowledge and artistic creativity are equal producers of meanings. The history of ideas reveals the meaning and place of each thing in this picture. Is it necessary to say that any museums, where things are kept and made sense of, are spaces where ideas live? For our projects, the history of ideas is not an end in itself, because the study of things and images for the artist has a practical purpose — to activate the mechanism of creativity, to create a context for their own discourse.

We have named our creative museum game projects GMG (Great Museum Game), indicating in the name the scale of these projects designed for large universal museums (Figure 2). We address universal museums, or combine several museums simultaneously, in a project to gain a holistic view of complex phenomena, making connections between things spread over time and circumstance in different museum spaces.

**Figure 2**

*L'amour. Louvre Museum, Paris, 2013. The final of the game.*

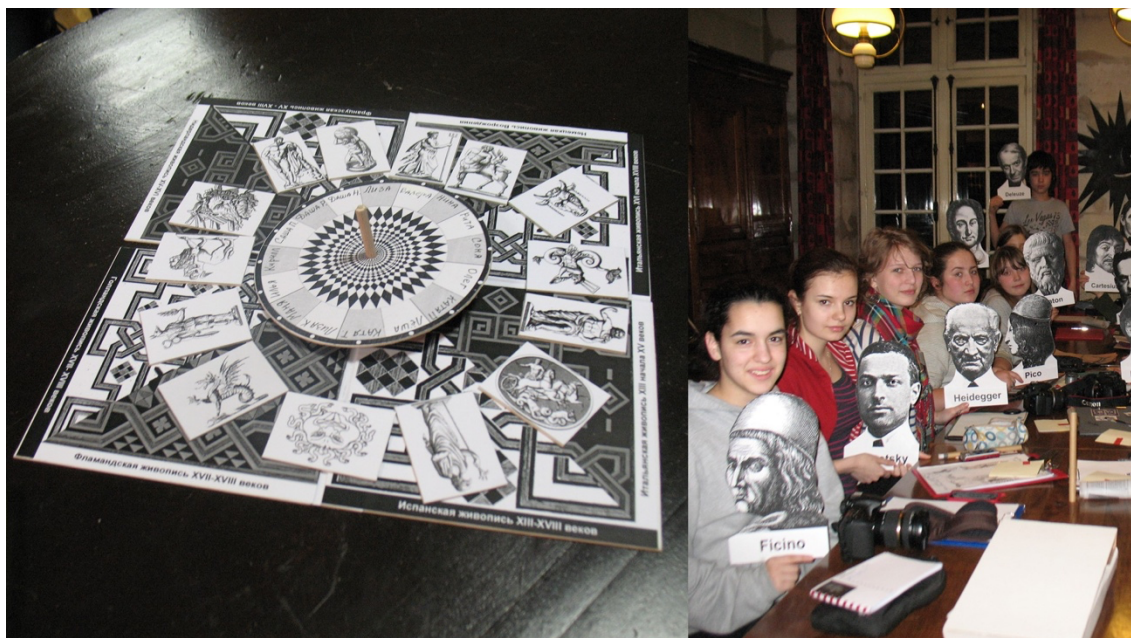


### What is the Great Museum Game (GMG)?

GMG is a short-term but intensive form of art educational projects, carried out directly in the museum, based on museum collections. GMG is a synthesis of tabletop and role-playing forms, providing immersion in the content of the project and developing the creative process (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

*Play set for Grottesques (State Hermitage) and the drawing of the role-playing masks of philosophers (Louvre Museum).*



GMG is a generator of new visual metaphors. GMG is always different games. Each project is unique in content, organization, toolset and design. GMG has no competitive goals. Everyone wins at GMG. Participants create a new artistic reality, give birth to new ideas, metaphors, and images.

We treat this activity as the most topical artistic practice, as a creative method for a new era. Analyzing our experience of museum game projects, we tried to formalize their general organizational and content characteristics. Thus, each project includes three modules.

Game module:

- tools for drawing game moves (board game or digital tools);
- navigation (most often it is a map of the museum, on which the player projects his/her route);
- role mask and character attributes, - visual game design.

Information module:

- lectures and collective discussions,
- independent search for information (sources of different types - Internet, books, communication with museum researchers),
- analysis of the spatial and object environment.
- Representational module:
- search for metaphors explaining and expressing the meaning of the phenomena highlighted in the process of perception of the museum context,
- development of individual visual means of expression,
- special tasks for mastering technical means of expression (digital photography, video, computer tools for image editing, etc.)
- analysis of the results of the game moves (reviews of the completed tasks).

The main body of the games' participants are motivated teenagers between the ages of 14 and 18 who are engaged in artistic activities on a regular basis. Although both younger students and adult participants, our colleagues, take part in the games. And such an expansion of the age of the participants enriches the content of the projects.

### **A Brief Description of Several Projects**

#### **GMG. Grotesques. The State Hermitage Museum. St. Petersburg (2004, 2009)**

The two games with the same name, which were realized in the Hermitage at different times, are similar but have fundamental differences. Both games are devoted to the foundations of the imagery of European art, which has its origins in Antiquity (the collection of Ancient art is on the first floor of the museum) and has developed during subsequent ages (second floor of the museum). In the course of the game the contents of the collections of the first floor and second floor of the Hermitage were integrated (Figure 4).

The playing field for these two games was a schematic plan of Raphael's Loggias — a strip of thirteen successive squares, to which the fields of the halls were placed in random order to the left and right. The player received his assignment by going through several drawings — getting the sequence number of loggias, choosing the side of the exit from it, the number of cells in the hall. Therefore, the board game consisted of several tools for step-by-step navigation — game stones and two wolves with their own fields. Such complexity of navigation was perceived by participants with special interest.

**Figure 4***Grotesques. State Hermitage. St. Petersburg (2004, 2009)*

All participants in these games were given two roles each and performed two functions — the role of the mythological character who lived on the first floor, and the role of the keeper of the room of Western European art on the second floor of the Hermitage (Figure 5).

After the casting of the role masks on the first floor the characters were directed to the second floor where the tasks invented by the custodians of the halls were played out. Each museum room included in the game had a figurative description, including color and light, sound and smell, associated with the art of the era and the works kept in the room. The hall was transformed into a figurative context into which the character and his or her attributes fell. And this collision between the character and the context had to be portrayed. This was the creative task.

In the first version of the game, the answers to the task were drawings, in which the mythological character partially changed his or her appearance when placed in the context of the hall. The second version of the game offered the construction of a "grotesque" from the attributes of an ancient character and elements of the context. In this game the "grotesque" was assembled according to the compositional schemes used in the paintings of Raphael's Loggias. Twelve such schemes were selected. It is not about graphic schemes, but about the most different ways of connecting the elements of the image - ornamental, symbolic, optical, etc. The scheme the player also received as a result of the drawing.

**Figure 5**

*Play set. Grotesques. State Hermitage. St. Petersburg (2004, 2009).*



Each day there was a change of mask and a drawing of tasks. In the end, each role-mask combined a set of seven to eight drawings created by different authors. The drawings pertaining to each mask were assembled into vertical strips of "new grotesque." A collective work was created, all parts of which were of equal importance to the participants of the game.

The most significant result of the game was the game itself, the process of intellectual struggle and discovery.

### **GMG. Labyrinth." State Hermitage Museum. St. Petersburg (2010)**

We developed a completely different game design for mastering the collection of primeval art from the collection of the State Hermitage Museum (St. Petersburg). We supplemented the Hermitage collection with several sections from the collection of the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera). That is, the game developed on the territory of two museums.

Once in the game, the participant found oneself in the center of the "labyrinth" and had to undergo initiation — to overcome twelve obstacles, guarded by formidable spirits — the lords of Darkness, Fire, Sleep, Wind, Water, etc. It was only possible to overcome the barrier by finding things in the museums' exhibits that people invented and made to control the powers of these "spirits." To use the "magic" things it was necessary to understand the craft — how to make and use these things.

No role masks were used in this game, each player was him or herself. As an introduction to the game, we used a puzzle object — a disassembling frog figure whose body parts were divided among the "spirits." And for navigation we used an image of a labyrinth (Figure 6).

**Figure 6**

*Labyrinth. State Hermitage Museum. St. Petersburg (2010). Play set, work with the museum collection, folding book page.*



The sequence of obstacles in the labyrinth was played for each player individually, so each participant got into his individual labyrinth. The players plotted their way through the labyrinth in a pop-up book, sketched "magic things" found at the exposition, depicted schemes of their devices, created a visual narrative, telling about the use of this thing, and recorded ritual appeals to the spirits (Figure 6). The result of the museum's "initiation" was twenty fold-out books, from which the participants in the game assembled a large labyrinth in one of the Hermitage halls (Figure 7).

**Figure 7**

*Labyrinth. State Hermitage Museum. St. Petersburg, (2010). The final of the game.*



**The Number  $\pi$ . Philosophers. Louvre Museum, Museum of Arts and Crafts of the City of Paris. Paris (2011)**

The game "The Number  $\pi$ . Philosophers" based on the collections of two Parisian museums, was dedicated to the history of philosophy.  $\pi$  was an irrational number that became a symbol of the unattainability of rational exact knowledge. It was a game in which there was no boundary between scientific and artistic knowledge of the world, but the history of ideas unfolded.

The ancient Egyptian Senet game was used as the prototype of the role-mask board game. Beginning with this image, the game aimed to find visual metaphors that responded to the game tasks.

The game masks were portraits of European thinkers of different eras: — Diotima, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Vygotsky, Arendt, Deleuze, Sontag etc. Each player received a philosopher's mask and a scroll with a text, which briefly described the key ideas of this philosopher, the basic concepts of his theory, and his worldview. This text became a filter for evaluating the ideas and images encountered by the player in the course of his/her acquaintance with the museums.

Every day each player received text message with a task, which consisted of a Latin term with a short commentary, and the name of the room in the museum where he had to work. The Latin term had to be illustrated from the point of view of their game mask, using the museum resources — objects and images. Examples of terms: "ANIMA, the soul; the opposite of flesh," "ESSE, being, existence," "FORMA SEPARATA, a separate, detached form," etc. The selection of terms came at random from a prepared terminological base. The process of drawing, preparing and sending tasks to the players was automated with the help of a computer program placed on the Internet and optimized for mobile devices. This tool allowed for very quick draws and sending individual assignments to participants on their phones in the form of a text message (Figure 8).

The answer to the task was a graphical sheet, with a predetermined structure, on which the players entered their information and made sketches in the museum. Three goals were intertwined in this game: to comprehend the collections of two large museums, to learn about the history of philosophy, and to creatively construct visual metaphors.



**Figure 8**

*The Number Pi (Philosophers). Louvre Museum, Museum of Arts and Crafts of the City of Paris (2011). Play set, the final of the game, the smartphone with an app for playing.*

**L'amour. Louvre Museum, Paris (2013)**

The boundaries of the deceptively familiar world are constantly changing. One of the boundaries, indicative of the tectonic transformation of our civilization, becomes visible when we ask the question "What is love?" The game "L'amour" is a search for answers to the question "What is love?" in the world's largest universal museum, the Louvre, whose spaces contain the millennial memory of humanity. The Louvre is filled with images of the strongest human aspirations that affirm life, and therefore have to do with love. These are the will to power, the struggle against death, the desire for luxury, the energy of eros, beauty as an argument for eternity. But the main "archaeological" basis of our project in the Louvre was the culture of Courtois, synchronous with the time when Philip Augustus XII built the fortress. Courtois-ness, which turned love into

an object of ethical and philosophical perception, remains today the most striking experience in the creation of a mega-symbolic phenomenon called "Love."

The symbolic images and rituals created by the Courtois authors link antiquity to the Middle Ages and sprout into the present day. Symbolism of the Courtoise culture was used in the design of the game — the symbolism of flowers and plants, the image of the garden, which has become for us a metaphor of the Louvre Museum.

The role masks of the game were the characters of the 13th-century French allegorical poem "The Romance of the Rose" – Reason, Wealth, Hope, Sweet-tongue, Pretension, Fantasy, Magnanimity, etc. (Lorris, Guillaume de, XIII c.). Traps for the players were their encounters on the playing field with Love's Longing, Madness, Illusion, etc.

Description of several masks.

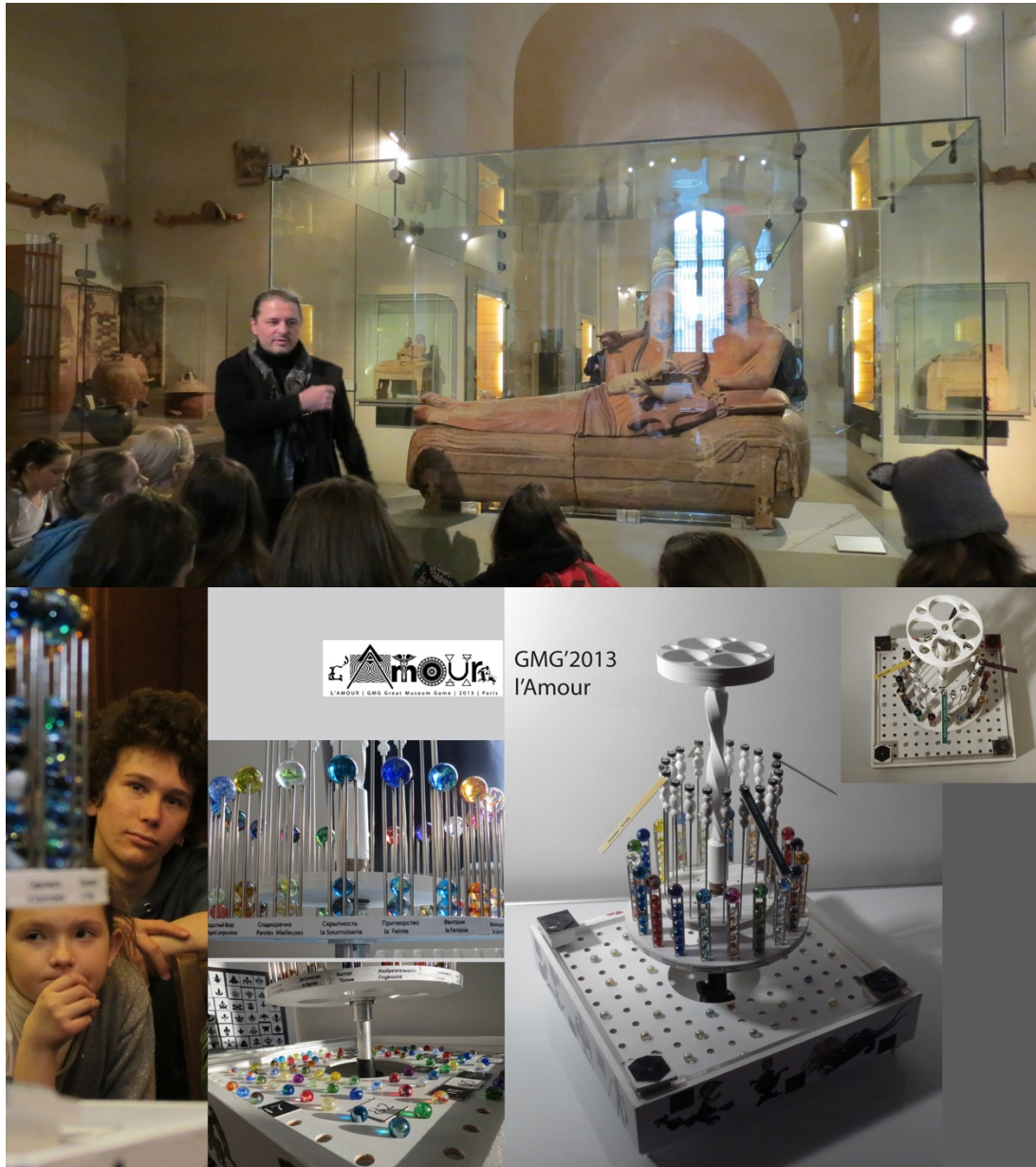
- Wealth: – la Richesse.  
Richesse brings out the value of phenomena in everything, focusing on luxury, "gold," expensive jewelry as symbols of wealth.  
The key concept is [gold].
- Hope: – l'Espérance.  
All phenomena are conceptualized in terms of the presence or absence of hope for development, achievement of happiness, a happy outcome, good luck.  
The key concept is [future].
- Un Regard Langoureux.  
Expressiveness of mimic "masks", information conveyed without words - by gestures, intonation, gaze (arsenal of silent cinema).  
The key concept is [mimicry].
- Concealment: – la Sournoiserie.  
Secrecy needs ciphers, codings, cryptography, a secret language of colors and gestures, hints, and complicated allegories.  
The key concept is [cipher].

The board game was a model of a garden with a rotating tower, set on a board for the game of the Four Seasons (or matter - Fire, Air, Water, Earth), described by the troubadour and king of Castile Alfonsus the Wise in 1283 (Figure 9).

The board was divided into four parts by color and values. At the corners of the playing field were installed symbolic figures of these matter - Bishop (air, spring, green), Knight (summer, fire, red), Castle (autumn, earth, black), and Lady (winter, water, white). And on the wall of the "garden" on the outer side were placed the vices - Hate, Treason, Selfishness, Stinginess, Envy, etc.

All this created a strong emotional motivation and an active intellectual context for the players, being an immersion tool. The development of the game could be monitored by filling a separate field (magnetic board) of one hundred cells with "colors," which served as a display.

**Figure 9**  
*L'amour. Louvre Museum, Paris (2013). Work with the museum collection and the play set.*



**Figure 10***L'amour. Louvre Museum, Paris (2013). The final of the game.*

The goal of the game move was to create a graphic sheet where the player's answer to the question "what is love?" would be inserted. Changing role masks and the museum context brought new meanings, new metaphors every day. So, in the process of the game an original complex of visual metaphors, describing the most complex semantic phenomenon — "love" — was cultivated (Figure 10).

The participants of the game created 120 works (texts + collages from sketches + photos). All the works, laid out on the floor in one of the Louvre halls (Figure 10), formed a large "panel", which we later digitized, printed, and showed at the Russian Museum Forum "Intermuseum" in 2013 (Figure 11).

### **Fortunatus. State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (2019)**

The connection between antiquity and the Renaissance and all subsequent times is clear. But how to make this connection visible, represented by concrete names, ideas, events, images, works of art? How does the contemporary artist find his or her place in the artistic tradition today?

Fortunatus is a name common in ancient Rome. The poet Joseph Brodsky refers to the generalized image of the ancient Roman "Roman friend" (Brodsky, 1976) through the centuries. The name "Fortunatus" has become a symbol of such a connection through the ages.

Works of painting by ancient Greek artists have not survived. But descriptions of their works, brief information about the lives of artists, anecdotes and impressions remain. The connection of the times in the European tradition of painting was carried out through the study of these texts on ancient art written by ancient Roman authors. The subjects of the works and the artistic methods of the European artists of the Renaissance and subsequent times were formed on the basis of these texts.

Each artist of antiquity developed his own idea of painting, which, centuries later, began to determine the direction of the development of European art. The idea of the game "Fortunatus" is the search for Greek traces of these directions (paths) in the works of art represented in the collections of the State Hermitage from the Renaissance to the early 20th century.

From the descriptions left by Pliny the Elder and several other authors, we have developed role masks of "ancient painters," there were twenty-eight names in all.

**Figure 11**

Stand with GMG projects at the Russian Museum Forum "Intermuseum" in 2013.



During the raffle each participant in the game received a name folder of an ancient painter. The folder contained a mirror plastic profile to separate a sheet of paper into two parts and a text with the character's "legend," briefly describing his artistic discoveries and significant works (Figure 12).

Each profile is a copy of a profile of a "capitello" or cornice of one of the famous antique architectural monuments. In our project the profile is an ekphrasis, a projection of the ancient world. The profiles are made of mirror material. Mirror means reflection, duality, a boundary state between matter and immaterial likeness, an imaginary world. But most importantly, the mirror represents the idea of the interconnectedness of phenomena in the history of European art.

The mirror profile of the "capitello" in the player's folder was designed to divide a sheet of paper into two parts. In one part the player placed the information that they received by writing down concepts and metaphors, and making sketches. The other part of the sheet was for free imagination, for images that appeared in the context of museum impressions.

**Figure 12**

*Fortunatus. State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (2019). Work in the halls of the museum.*



The system of consecutive rotation of the profiles during the change of the holder ensured that all the drawings were assembled into a single structure (Figure 13).

A necklace with stringed game cubes was used for the drawing. The necklace is a metaphor for the continuity of the European artistic tradition. The necklace is untied, the cubes are scattered — the game begins. Each player receives a die from the necklace with the monogram of one of the ancient artists. Each subsequent drawing performs a change of masks and allows participants to get acquainted with different artistic concepts.

**Figure 13**

*Fortunatus. State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (2019). The final of the game.*



A total of six drawings were planned and, accordingly, the folder of each ancient artist had to contain six drawings. And each participant of the game could meet only six characters. All in all, about 180 graphic sheets were created (Figure 14).

**Figure 14**

*Fortunatus. State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (2019). Fragments of the panel. Entire panel.*



The outcome of the game was the assembly of all the drawings into a large graphic work, which, thanks to the use of templates, was perceived as a single whole — a giant sketch presenting the new information picture of the world created in the course of the game.



### Conclusion

The ability to create poetic metaphors was a necessary skill for a free citizen in ancient Greece. Without developed imagination, it was impossible to create a bizarre world of medieval manuscript books and stone sculptures of cathedrals. In the era of the formation of craft cities, creative development was directly aimed at mastering the formation of the universal abilities of the intellect.

But there were times when the creation of metaphors, fantasy and the universality of the intellect became unnecessary, redundant. Then 'art education' was reduced to copying ready-made samples, thoughtless reproduction of compositional schemes, and the aesthetic ideals of the past became a dogma.

In Russia, this process was accompanied by the rooting of intellectual limitation as a social norm, which was embodied in philosophical and aesthetic naturalism, in intellectual helplessness, in the absence of philosophical problems.

The changes that have taken place in the artistic culture of Russia in recent decades have practically not affected the sphere of art education as a whole, and my appeal to visual semiotics is due to the desire to change this state of affairs. In this sense, museums are the main spaces in which the semantic content of the future can be constructed.

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