



**“JONAH”: INTERACTIVE MEDIA, SCIENTIFIC  
AND ARTISTIC PROJECT AS MOVEABLE  
MUSEUM PLATFORM<sup>1</sup>**

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“And the Lord appointed a great fish  
to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was  
in the stomach of the fish three  
days and three nights”.  
*The Book of Jonah 2: 1*

Globally, we humans seem to share certain mythologies. For millennia, these have largely informed our spiritual culture. In one such story, people all over tell a strikingly similar story of a man finding himself in the belly of a gigantic creature, but eventually managing to get out unassisted. The story lives in the cultures of Europe (the Baltic and Scandinavian regions, the Volga region, the Balkans, the Caucasus), in Asia Minor, Western, Central and Southwestern Asia, in Iran and India, along the territories of Siberia, including the coast of the Arctic Ocean, in China and Korea, on Sakhalin and in Japan, on the islands of the Pacific Ocean, in Indonesia and on the Philippines, all over the Americas (from the arctic regions to California, from Mexico to Patagonia), and everywhere, too, in Africa. Its versions can be found in Assyrian and Babylonian myths as well as in ancient Greek ones, in the Old and New Testaments, in the Qur’an and sunna of the Prophet, in the Kalevala and Shah-nama, in a number of Muslim cosmographies and in the major text of Kabbalah, the Zohar...

In various versions of the myth the protagonist could be swallowed by different fish, sea and river animals, to which gigantic sizes were ascribed (whale, killer whale, shark, dolphin, bonito and sabato fish, trout, salmon, pike, gigantic shellfish tridacna, seal, fur seal, octopus, sea otter, marine turtles, crocodile, beaver). Other versions of the myth mention large snakes (boa constrictor, anaconda, rattlesnake), huge land animals (elephant, mammoth, moose, buffalo, wolf, tortoise), man-eating eagle, various mythical creatures (dragon, daeva, evil water spirit, mammoth pike, “Bay Bolter”, water and subterranean toads, gigantic vagina, “hairy snake with the paws of a jaguar”, “snake resembling a crayfish”), as well as different natural objects such as mountains, rocks, whirlpools, “the belly of the tree”, a monster in

<sup>1</sup> Bu metin 2014 yılında, Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi çatısı altında düzenlenen *Uluslararası Sanatı Yönetmek Sempozyumu*’nda bildiri olarak sunulmuştur.



the form of a hill overgrown with grass, and a devouring cave<sup>2</sup>. The basic content of the myth is the return of the hero who sinned to the womb for “correct rebirth”.

It is very important to all of us today that we grasp how much we live in a common world inspired in its deepest sense by our collective past reflected in shared mythological imagery and stories. From a foundation of traditional cultures comes our core understanding of such concepts as “good” and “evil”. Humans who can create similar mythologies also have similar worthiness. Thus, an increased awareness of our linked cultural inheritance has true potential for laying a cornerstone of mutual understanding now.

On November, 4—5, 2013, the official presentation of “Jonah”, integrated interactive media, scientific and artistic project took place in the Marble Hall of the Russian Museum of Ethnography (Saint-Petersburg)<sup>3</sup>. The project is grounded in the outcome of systematic research works of many years on the subject of peculiarities of registering the cultural code of various nations in the ancient myth and ritual systems.

A traveling exhibition room/movie theatre “Whale” will serve as the basis of the project (*fig. 1*). It is a spherical inflatable dome with a special interior surface for video projection, it is 10 meters long and 7.2 meters in diameter, and it sits around 30 people at a showing (*fig. 2*). The entire surface of the dome is used for the multimedia demonstration which provides the effect of full immersion. The whole construction can be easily transported and installed anywhere, even to small villages and towns. It takes 1.5 — 2 hours for a team of three people to assemble and mount the construction. The suggested service run in the conditions from +30 to – 30 . The size of potential audience provides extensive cost-effectiveness of the project, and impressive appearance of the “Whale” will minimize the cost of advertising.

The project includes an exhibition “Jonah: a symbol of life and deliverance” — copies of the four pictures presented because of the kind permission of the museums and the courtesy of Natalia Harmaz, widow Eugeny Abegauz:

1. Jonah and the Whale. Miniature from: Rashid al-Din. Jami‘ al-Tavarikh (Compendium of Chronicles). Iran, 14th century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1933 (33.113)

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<sup>2</sup> For details, see: <http://www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/berezkin/>

<sup>3</sup> For details, see: [http://www.kunstkamera.ru/en/news/2013\\_11\\_15/](http://www.kunstkamera.ru/en/news/2013_11_15/)



2. Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568—1625). Jonas entsteigt dem Rachen des Walfisches, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen – Alte Pinakothek (Munich)

3. Jonah in the belly of the whale. Russian icon, Tobolsk, 18th century (Tobolsk Historical and Architectural Reserve).

4. Eugeniy Abezgauz (1939—2008). Jonah and the whale in the port of Haifa (1977). Private collection (Israel).

An important element of the exhibition — the mirror with the inscription “Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, otherwise they will not come near to you” (Ps. 32: 9).

Five films compose video program of the project. They are created specifically for the project or presented with the kind permission of the authors or under the license:

1. “Jonah project — the Introduction” (7 min. Russia, 2013, script writer and producer — Efim Rezvan, director — Tatiana Solovyova, camera man — Cyril Goretzkiy, montage — Sergey Snegirev)<sup>4</sup>

2. “Jonah” (17 min., Tanzania – United Kingdom, 2013, directed by Kibwe Tavares)<sup>5</sup>.

3. “The Butterfly Circus” (20 min., USA, 2009, directed by Joshua Weigel with Nick Vujicich)<sup>6</sup>.

4. “Adagio” (10 min., Russia, 2000, directed by Garry Bardin)<sup>7</sup>.

5. “Shoes” (20 min., 2012, Russia – Czech Republic – Poland – Belarus – France – USA, directed by Kosta Fam, a movie nominated for “Oscar-2013”) in the category “Best Artistic short film”. Special screening organized with the participation of the film's producers)<sup>8</sup>.

As well as paintings, films selected for the project, represent different religious and cultural traditions dating back to our joint system of values, ideas and mythology.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pb9-8sSOETY&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pb9-8sSOETY&feature=youtube_gdata_player)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UU5Gd6Kv25U>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_qdbCvLCevk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_qdbCvLCevk)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gG-TL0S3sN8>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJvZ1ah7LvQ>



Upon emerging from the “Whale” every participant received the “Passport of Jonah” — the catalog of the exhibition, a special stamp in which “assured” her or his personal involvement in the project (*fig. 3*).

“Jonah” is a flagship for socially focused and cultural projects of a new type. It is a modern platform for actual media and exhibition projects. Depending on the chosen subject, the audience can be children's (family), teenage or adult. The project aims to reduce tensions in society, mitigate inter-ethnic and inter-religious issues. It will be implemented for children and youth programs — especially for students in the College of Russian culture named after A.S. Znamenskiy in the Siberian city of Surgut, where the “Whale” went already on November 6, 2013. The exhibition round outside Russia is supposed also<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> The project was presented at the 10th anniversary session of the World Public Forum “Dialogue of Civilizations” (Rhodes, Greece, 3 — 8 October 2012) It was realized in Kunstkamera Museum under the program of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area — Yugra “Prevention of extremism, the harmonization of interethnic and cross-cultural relations and the strengthening of tolerance in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area — Yugra for 2011 — 2013” It is commissioned by the Department of Culture of Autonomous Area — Yugra, “Society of the Russian culture” and the College of Russian culture named after A.S. Znamenskiy (Surgut) (Director — Ekaterina Lonshakova) and realized in partnership and with the assistance of the Russian Ethnographic Museum. Project authors are sincerely grateful to “Planeta” company (Saint-Petersburg), young Iranian composer Arman Habibi and Lev Osadchy, a student of Central Special Music School of the St. Petersburg Conservatory named after N.A Rimsky-Korsakov (Director — Valentina Fedoseyeva), teachers and students at the school for the assistance and active part in the creation of the project.