



Article

## Reflections on Reality: Contemporary Ukrainian Visual Art and Role in Society

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### Abstract

*The study aimed to determine how contemporary Ukrainian visual art contributes to the formation and strengthening of national identity in the context of rapid socio-cultural change. The methodology included content analysis and comparative analysis of artworks, as well as a semiotic approach, which was used to interpret national symbols and cultural markers in contemporary art. The main findings show that contemporary Ukrainian visual art actively integrates national symbols and historical themes, reinterpreting them in new forms that meet cultural and social demands. Through art, contemporary artists address topics such as national identity, war, freedom and social justice, making these works meaningful to a wide audience. The artists are actively exploring how traditional cultural symbols can be adapted to new challenges, giving them new meaning and embodying the ideas of decolonization and the revival of national values. In addition, the study determined that Ukrainian art not only focuses on national motifs but also creates new visual codes that shape cultural memory for future generations. The analysis of the works of several artists shows that art is becoming a way of understanding socio-political realities, uniting the audience based on common values and historical heritage. The findings of the study emphasize the importance of contemporary Ukrainian visual art as a means of expressing national identity and reflecting on social challenges, which contributes to the preservation of national cultural identity and the development of cultural dialogue in modern society.*

**Keywords:** artistic interpretation, cultural heritage, design, national identity, painting

### Suggested citation:

Volska, S., Tiutiunnyk, I., Matsyshyna, Z., Datsiuk, N., and Krailiuk, L. (2025). Reflections on Reality: Contemporary Ukrainian Visual Art and Role in Society. *International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion*, 7(SI1), 845-870. <https://doi.org/10.63931/ijchr.v7iSI1.345>



## Introduction

The relevance of studying contemporary Ukrainian visual art is due to its role in expressing national identity, preserving cultural heritage, and reflecting social changes in globalization. Visual art has become an important means of self-identification and communication, allowing artists to rethink the world through individual, national, and global symbols. Studying this art form demonstrates the evolution of Ukraine's cultural identity, especially in the context of contemporary challenges and social change.

Contemporary visual art in Ukraine reflects social, political, and cultural processes of global significance (Kresan & Mhitaryan, 2024; Efremov, 2025a). The changes that have taken place in Ukrainian society since 2014 have been reflected in artistic practice, shaping new views on cultural heritage and its place in the modern world. The importance of this topic is reinforced by the general interest in Ukrainian art, which is increasingly becoming the subject of scientific and cultural research abroad in the context of the growing international recognition of Ukrainian culture. The study of visual art describes the transformation of cultural space, especially regarding its impact on public sentiment, national identity, and interaction with global cultural trends.

Contemporary Ukrainian visual art covers various fields, from painting and graphics to the latest media arts (Kaluzhynska & Shynkar, 2024). Since the early 2020s, a growing interest in using digital technologies in artistic practice, driven by the global trend towards integrating innovations into artistic processes, has been present. In addition, art projects devoted to socio-political topics have become widespread, reflecting modern society's current problems and conflicts. Ukrainian visual art forms a new space for communication with the public, which was used to explore its role as an instrument of social influence and self-expression (Shmarko & Hrechanyk, 2023; Chaika, 2024). Another important aspect of the subject is preserving and transforming national identity through artistic images, motifs, and symbols. For instance, the visual heritage of Ukrainian artists is studied by scholars who study the works of 20th-century artists such as Opanas Zalyvakha and Volodymyr Patyk. Attention to the cultural heritage of Ukrainian art helps to rethink the historical role of the visual arts in shaping the public outlook and defining Ukraine's place on the global cultural map. Thus, contemporary Ukrainian art can be considered part of a broader global artistic process where national identity is intertwined with innovative forms and concepts.

Over the past five years, many studies have been published on the visual arts of Ukraine. Lischynska (2023) studied national and cultural identity in the context of contemporary Ukrainian art, analyzing how globalization affects the change in

approaches to artistic expression. The researcher showed that integrating global images with local symbols is becoming increasingly popular among Ukrainian artists, as this combination allows them to preserve national uniqueness while meeting global cultural standards. The author highlighted the need to expand such research to understand better the public response and the impact of these changes on artistic practices. Volska (2023) conducted an in-depth analysis of Mykhailo Kuziv's work, emphasizing innovative techniques in reproducing the philosophy of life, man, and the universe. The author noted that Kuziv's style combines traditional historical images with the latest artistic personalities, creating a unique approach to the artistic image of the present. This study focuses on the artists' personalized approach to the Ukrainian heritage, contributing to the original development of Ukrainian art in the contemporary context.

Holubets (2022), a book on Ukrainian art, mentioned the work of Dmytro Stetsko, where the author focused on the uniqueness of the artist's style, which combines folk motifs with modern artistic trends. The author analyzed the use of color palettes and symbols that reflect the spiritual and cultural code of the Ukrainian people. A special place in the work is given to the interpretation of landscapes and portraits, where the artist's connection with the traditions of the Hutsul region is revealed. Holubets emphasizes the importance of Stetsko's work in the context of national revival and identity preservation. The study demonstrates the depth of the artist's influence on contemporary Ukrainian art and its place in the cultural space.

Mazur (2020) analyzed the role of art in shaping social consciousness, emphasizing its ability to reflect and transform social realities. The study shows that contemporary artists, addressing social issues, use art to deepen their understanding of social issues. B. Mazur stated that such works create the basis for critical reflection, forming a particular public discourse around Ukraine's cultural and political challenges. Karpenko (2022) highlighted the role of war themes in contemporary Ukrainian painting, analyzing its influence on the aesthetic decisions of artists. The author noted that many artists express national resilience and the desire for independence through their works, reflecting public emotions in conflict. According to O. Karpenko, this phenomenon is a unique example of how art not only reflects realities but also becomes a tool of collective identification. Yasyenyev (2021) studied the development of the visual arts in independent Ukraine, focusing on the change in images and symbols in the post-independence period. The author determined that national culture has become more open to innovative solutions while preserving its cultural identity. The study expanded the description of the interaction between national and world artistic traditions in the contemporary Ukrainian context.

Hudziienko (2024) discusses Natalia Vergun's contribution to the museum heritage of Ukraine, particularly nationally oriented themes. The author notes that Vergun enriches national art by using unique techniques that combine traditional elements with modern expressive means. Hudziienko emphasized that such artists' work is important for preserving Ukrainian cultural heritage. Zhosul (2024) discussed the artistic style of Oleksandr Kodenko, which is the ability to create complex symbolic images that reflect Ukrainian culture. Zhosul addressed Kodenko's special approach to interpreting traditional images through innovative stylistic forms that form a multifaceted artistic discourse. As such, this practice enriches the contemporary cultural context and reflects unique national features. Panfilova and Koleniuk (2022) studied the promotion of Ukrainian art in the global art market, emphasizing the role of economic strategies for cultural promotion. The authors noted that the art market's development is a key factor in supporting Ukrainian artistic products internationally. The study points to the need for further analysis of market strategies to integrate national art into the global cultural industry successfully.

Despite numerous studies, the impact of digital technologies and urban trends on contemporary visual art in Ukraine and the integration of socio-political themes and their importance for developing national identity and cultural heritage in the context of globalization remains insufficiently covered. The study aimed to identify the key features of contemporary Ukrainian visual art and analyze its impact on national identity and cultural consciousness in the context of global change. Study goals included:

1. Study trends in the development of contemporary Ukrainian art concerning social and cultural processes.
2. Assess the importance of visual art in shaping public consciousness.

## Methodology

The chronological framework of the study covered the period from 2015 to 2023, when Ukrainian art saw a significant expansion of socio-political themes and innovations in artistic approaches. This timeframe was used to examine the evolution of artistic practices in the contemporary context and explore how artists adapt national symbols to current realities.

The data collection was based on analyzing the works of leading Ukrainian artists who are recognized representatives of contemporary visual art. The sample includes artists whose works focus on issues of cultural identity, historical memory, social change, and national symbols. Among them, Oksana Mas's *"Altar of Nations"*, Alevtina Kakhidze's *"War Diary"* (Shaparenko, 2022), Serhiy Zakharov *"Arrest"*, *"In the Prison of the DPR Group"* (Volchek, 2014), Vladyslav Shyrshkevskyi's *"Halfway*

*through my earthly world, I came into a gloomy, dense forest...*", "Plebiscite" (Mazurash, 2024), Roman Minin's "Escape Plan from the Donetsk Region" (Bakieva, 2023), "Miner's Angel", David Chichkan's "Lost Opportunity", "The Other Side of War", Oleksandr Grekhov's "Shevchenko's Quantum Leap" (Viruk, 2019). The data was collected by studying the works on display in museums, galleries, and online resources, including archival materials and exhibition reviews. In addition, the study included an analysis of visual materials and critical reviews, which were used to describe the influence of cultural heritage on contemporary art and the peculiarities of interpreting national symbols.

The research methodology included content analysis, which was used to study and structure artistic symbols that reflect national and cultural elements in contemporary art. This method was used to explore the works' symbolism, identify the artists' main themes, and assess the significance of national symbols in the cultural context. The comparative analysis was used to compare different approaches to depicting national themes in works of art, identifying changes and innovations in interpreting cultural codes. Comparative analysis was also used to reveal the influence of social and political factors on the style and themes of artists' works. Cultural analysis determines the complex meanings artists put into their works through social symbols and metaphors reflecting society's collective consciousness and cultural values. This approach was used to define the cultural function of art as a means of supporting national identity and interacting with the audience. The semiotic approach was applied to a detailed analysis of symbols and iconic images, which was used to demonstrate how artists use these symbols to convey socio-political ideas and create new cultural markers. This semiotic interpretation provided a deeper understanding of how Ukrainian artists convey ideas through various images that appeal to the viewer emotionally.

The interpretation of the data was based on an interdisciplinary approach, including cultural, sociological, and historical analysis, which expanded the definition of the social and cultural aspects of Ukrainian visual art. Combining these approaches made it possible to identify national trends and assess their significance in global cultural change. This approach demonstrated how contemporary Ukrainian art preserves cultural authenticity while adapting to new conditions and social challenges.

## **Results and Discussion**

### *The role of contemporary visual art in expressing national identity*

Contemporary visual art is crucial in expressing and rethinking Ukraine's national identity in a globalized world. In the context of the postcolonial discourse, Ukrainian artists create new visual narratives that reflect traditional cultural codes and rethink them in the light of contemporary socio-cultural challenges. The transformation of the visual language from ethnographic romanticism to contemporary art demonstrates the evolution of national identity and its adaptation to

modern realities. An important aspect of this process is the integration of traditional symbols into a new context, which allows for preserving cultural authenticity while engaging in a dialogue with the global artistic space. Forming a new visual language occurs through rethinking historical experience and creating new forms of artistic expression (Kashshay, 2024). Studying this phenomenon requires a comprehensive analysis of both the formal artistic means and the conceptual content of works of contemporary Ukrainian art.

An analysis of contemporary art practice in Ukraine shows that artists actively use traditional symbols in a new context. Elements such as Easter eggs, embroidery, and folk ornamentation are transformed into conceptual installations and large-scale art projects. A typical example is the work of Oksana Mas, who creates large-scale installations of Easter eggs, rethinking traditional art in the context of contemporary challenges. The most famous project, *Paradise Place* (2010), is a vast mosaic from thousands of painted wooden Easter eggs collected worldwide. This work has symbolized unity and diversity of cultures while reflecting a deep respect for traditional Ukrainian culture.

Particularly noteworthy is the *Altar of Nations* project (2011-2012), where the artist uses Easter eggs as a metaphor for harmony between people and nature and a tool for global dialogue between cultures. This work combines traditional forms with contemporary concepts, creating a new narrative that promotes the understanding of national heritage in a global context. The project has been highly praised at international exhibitions, demonstrating the ability of Ukrainian art to integrate local traditions into contemporary artistic discourse.

Oksana Mas also explores the semantics of Easter eggs as symbols of the cyclical nature of life, renewal, and spiritual upliftment. The works show how traditional Ukrainian ornaments can be interpreted in a contemporary context, pointing to the deep interaction between past and present. In *Soul of the Nation* (2013), the artist uses Easter eggs based on folk art to create images that resonate with contemporary social and cultural issues. This project highlights the importance of preserving national identity through reinterpreting traditional art.

Artists turn to the archetypal symbols of Ukrainian culture, giving them a new sound in the context of contemporary art (Mironova, 2021a; 2021b). An important aspect is the study of the semantics of traditional visual elements and their adaptation to contemporary artistic context. This approach allows preserving cultural heritage while developing new forms of expression. Mas's works demonstrate that rethinking traditions allows art to preserve cultural heritage and develop new forms of expression that become relevant in the global artistic discourse.

Lozhkina (2024) explored the evolution of contemporary Ukrainian art, particularly its integration into the global cultural space. The author emphasized that preserving and rethinking national traditions are key to understanding the contemporary art scene in Ukraine. Considerable attention was paid to analyzing how artists use archetypal images and cultural symbols to express themselves in a global context. Lozhkina emphasizes that national traditions are not static – they are constantly evolving, responding to the challenges of time and preserving cultural authenticity. Mosendz et al. (2022) analyzed how Ukrainian art responds to the challenges of martial law by adapting its practice to new realities. The authors emphasized art as a means of social cohesion, particularly in times of crisis. Traditions of Ukrainian art, which, according to the study, ensure cultural resilience in difficult times, were emphasized. In addition, their study highlighted the importance of preserving the cultural sector as an element of national identity and spiritual support for society. Compared to the present study, Mosendz et al. showed how Ukrainian art reinterprets traditional symbols and techniques in the context of current events, maintaining a connection with the past and offering new forms of expression. This study develops these ideas by emphasizing how traditions become the basis for creating new narratives adapted to social and political realities.

Rethinking historical trauma and postcolonial experience is particularly important in expressing national identity. Contemporary Ukrainian artists address the topics of the Holodomor, Soviet occupation, and Russian aggression, creating powerful visual metaphors that contribute to collective understanding and overcoming traumatic experiences. Visual art decolonizes consciousness, articulating complex historical and social processes through artistic images (Pitenina, 2018; Gonçalves, 2024). An important aspect is the use of archival materials and their creative interpretation, which establishes a connection between the past and the present. Artists create works exploring collective memory's mechanisms and transformation in the contemporary context. Using documentary materials in art projects allows for new narratives that contribute to rethinking historical experience (Biedarieva, 2022). Kotlyar (2020) examined the Baroque influence on Jewish and Ukrainian national artistic traditions through a comparative analysis of stylistic elements and symbolism, emphasizing art's intercultural interaction. The author demonstrated the uniqueness of the Ukrainian Baroque tradition, which, while maintaining its authenticity, integrated elements of other cultural influences. The study is an important contribution to understanding the processes of synthesis of national and foreign artistic traditions in the context of the Baroque. A similar topic was covered by Panyok (2024) in a study on the iconography of Slobozhanshchyna,

which analyzed the influence of Western European Baroque artistic traditions on the formation of regional styles. The author emphasized that the iconography of this region reflected not only spiritual identity but also served as an important element of national heritage. The paper emphasized the historical continuity of Western artistic influences and their adaptation to local cultural contexts, revealing the role of art in shaping national expression and intercultural dialogue.

The role of visual art in expressing the new Ukrainian identity in the context of European integration deserves special attention. Artists explore themes of cultural belonging, creating projects that reflect the complex process of self-identification in the modern world (Berdynskykh et al., 2025; Dmitrenko et al., 2025). An important aspect is the dialogue between local and global contexts, which can be used to express a new denotation of national identity. Artistic projects often address the themes of migration, cultural exchange, and the interplay of different traditions (Jumabekova et al., 2024; Bedelbayeva et al., 2023). Such works help to understand the place of Ukrainian culture in the European context while preserving national specificity. Artists create new forms of visual expression that reflect the complexity of contemporary cultural processes. A summary of the main aspects of the impact of contemporary visual art on the expression of national identity is presented in Table 1, which demonstrates the relationship between artistic means and their role in shaping cultural markers.

*Table 1. The main aspects of the influence of contemporary visual art on the expression of national identity*

| Impact aspect        | Artistic means                    | The result of the identity image               |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Historical memory    | Archival materials, installations | Rethinking the traumatic experience            |
| Traditional culture  | Reinterpretation of symbols       | Creating new cultural codes                    |
| Current challenges   | Conceptual art                    | Adapting tradition to the global context       |
| Decolonization       | Documentary projects              | Formation of an independent cultural narrative |
| European integration | Intercultural projects            | Dialogue with the European tradition           |

An important aspect of expressing national identity through visual art is interaction with public space. Street art, murals, and public installations are becoming important elements of the urban environment, creating visual markers of national identity in everyday space (Koshbakova, 2022). Creating large-scale murals that reflect important historical events and cultural symbols is of particular importance. Such projects change the visual image of cities and contribute to forming a new urban space that combines traditional and modern elements. It is also important to involve the community in creating public art projects, which help create a sense of involvement in the cultural process. Public art becomes a platform for dialogue between different

social groups, forming a shared and inclusive vision of national identity (Galchynska et al., 2024).

Contemporary visual art actively explores the relationship between individual and collective identity (Zhykharieva, 2020; Efremov, 2025b). Artists create projects that address personal experience and its reflection in the context of national culture. An important aspect is the study of family stories, local traditions, and their inclusion in the national narrative. Particular attention is paid to the heritage of cultural traditions and their transformation in the modern context. The artists often use personal archives, family photos, and documents as material for their artistic projects. Such work establishes a connection between individual memory and collective experience. Nikitin (2020) highlighted the philosophical aspect of Ukrainian art in the work of Serhiy Zoruk, which explores the issues of human existence and the meaning of life. It is compared to the results of a recent study that found that many Ukrainian artists use philosophical concepts to reflect on socio-political issues and to determine collective identity. Artists are incorporating socially relevant elements into their work, addressing the personal search for meaning and important social issues, making art more socially oriented.

Experimental art is substantial in expressing national identity and exploring new forms of visual expression (Kieliszek, 2025; 2023). Artists experiment with different media, creating hybrid forms that combine traditional techniques with contemporary artistic practices (Dobrolyubska et al., 2024). An important aspect is to explore the possibilities of different materials and their symbolic meaning in the context of national culture. Experimental projects often turn to rethinking traditional crafts and adapting them to a contemporary context. Such works contribute to developing a new visual language that meets the needs of modern society.

In the context of globalization, the ability of contemporary Ukrainian art to engage in a dialogue with the international artistic environment while preserving national specificity is of particular importance (Doszhan, 2023; Pancer-Cybulska & Zlenko, 2024). The participation of Ukrainian artists in international exhibitions and biennials demonstrates the growing integration of the Ukrainian art scene into the global context. An important aspect is the ability of artists to articulate local experiences in forms open to a global audience (Bakirov & Petrenko, 2023). Artists create projects that reflect the specifics of Ukrainian culture while addressing universal themes and issues. This strategy allows them to preserve cultural authenticity while actively participating in the international artistic dialogue.

A study by Lishchynska (2014) addressed Ukrainian art's cultural contributions and interaction with international influences. Contemporary artists actively integrate foreign elements into their works while preserving national characteristics. It confirms that while remaining open to global cultural processes, Ukrainian art continues to preserve its authenticity and adapts national identity to the modern globalized cultural environment. Salatyuk (2021) emphasizes the development of the *transavant-garde* in Ukraine and its influence on the style and themes of contemporary Ukrainian art.

Contemporary artists use the transavant-garde to reflect complex social realities, which preserve their national identity while adding new meanings in the context of the present (Mironova, 2021; Wu & Oktrova, 2024). This approach allows Ukrainian art to remain relevant and, at the same time, maintain a connection with traditions.

The analysis conducted by Baltaziuk (2021) addressed sacred symbols in Ukrainian painting at the turn of the XX-XXI century. The author explores how artists used sacred images to reflect cultural heritage. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between traditional symbols and contemporary artistic concepts. The conclusions emphasize the importance of sacred symbols for the preservation of cultural identity.

As such, contemporary visual art substantially expresses Ukrainian national identity through reinterpreting traditional symbols and creating new cultural codes. Important aspects of this process are the decolonization of visual language, integration into the global context while preserving national specificity, and the development of new forms of artistic expression. Art's ability to articulate complex historical and social processes is of particular importance, contributing to rethinking national identity in the modern world.

#### *Integrating socio-political themes into artistic practices*

Ukrainian visual art actively addresses socio-political issues, reflecting the important questions of our time and the challenges faced by society. Artists use their work as a means of communication, conveying ideas that resonate with sensitive topics such as war, economic instability, cultural identity, and the struggle for rights through visual images (Szerszeń, 2024). Alevtina Kakhidze, Roman Minin, Serhiy Zakharov, Vladyslav Shereshevskyi, and other artists reflect the public mood, revealing contemporary issues and uniting the Ukrainian audience around shared values and ideas.

Alevtina Kakhidze is one of the leading Ukrainian artists known for graphic diaries, through which the author documents and interprets social and political realities. Works created during the occupation of the Kyiv region, such as the series of drawings *Body in the Shelter* and *War Diary*, reflect the personal experiences and complex emotional states the author and other residents faced daily (Figure 1). Kakhidze's work focuses on the human experiences, fears, and uncertainties that became part of everyday life under military threats. The drawings are more than just documentary images; they attempt to convey the depth of emotions accompanying the war experience.

The artist also addresses the loss of an everyday life that suddenly changes due to external circumstances. The author captures the simplest moments, such as sharing shelter or feeling constantly anxious, reminding viewers that war affects physical objects and each person's inner world. These works demonstrate the resilience and, at the same time, the vulnerability of people who are forced to adapt to new realities while maintaining their humanity and dignity. Kakhidze uses art to voice those in

situations where everyday life has become unattainable, and stability has become a dream. Through the artistic approach, the author aims to highlight the social aspects of war, including the psychological experiences and emotional trauma that are not always visible from the outside but leave a deep mark on people's minds.



Figure 1. A drawing from the “War diary” series. Alevtina Kakhidze, 2022  
Source: Shaparenko (2022).

Jagnicka (2019) explored integration with other forms of visual culture in the work. The author analyses the issue of expanding the boundaries of artistic practice and interaction with new media. Artists are integrating new media and techniques that allow them to use art for social reflection and national identity formation. For instance, Serhiy Zakharov, a Ukrainian artist popular for artistic resistance during the occupation of Donetsk in 2014. The work depicts the brutal reality of war and has a deep socio-political meaning. Zakharov highlights the absurdity and violence of the occupation regime through caricatures and installations that have become a powerful symbol of Ukrainian resistance in the occupied city. One of the best-known works is the drawing “In the prison of the ‘DPR’ group” (Figure 2). This graphic depicts the emotional and psychological experience of those who are captured by pro-Russian militants. Zakharov, who survived imprisonment and torture in the basements of the “DPR”, conveys through artwork the hopelessness and fear felt by fellow prisoners. In the paintings, dark figures dissolving in the darkness symbolize the complete isolation

and psychological pressure the prisoners were subjected to. Zakharov highlighted the disenfranchisement and powerlessness of people, reflecting the moral degradation of the occupiers. The works have become a testament to the survivors and a memory of those who did not return from captivity, which gives them a deep social significance.



*Figure 2. In the prison of the “DPR” group. Drawing by Sergey Zakharov, 2014*

*Source: Volchek (2014).*

The painting *Arrest* depicts the moment of detention by militants. It conveys all the uncertainty and fear that accompany this process. With precise contours and a limited color palette, Zakharov creates an atmosphere of tension and hopelessness that a person feels when their freedom is lost. The faces of the figures in the painting are devoid of individual features, symbolizing the depersonalization and suppression of human dignity that become part of this reality. Through art, Zakharov shows the repression that the occupation regime used to control citizens, emphasizing injustice and cruelty.

Furthermore, one of Zakharov’s most famous projects was street installations in Donetsk, including caricatures of leaders of the DPR group such as Strelkov and Motorola (Figure 3). The artist created satirical images of the militants in the form of comic figures that were installed on walls in public places. These installations symbolized peaceful resistance and ridicule of the occupiers, gaining considerable public support. Through the comic and absurdity of these images, Zakharov undermined the images of the DPR leaders, turning them from “heroes” of the

occupation regime into figures to be mocked and ridiculed. The installation of these works was an artistic act and a symbol of defiance and courage, as Zakharov risked his own safety by ridiculing the people who held actual power in the occupied city. Zakharov's installations and cartoons show how art can be used to fight for freedom and to resist political pressure and violence. The works have become iconic as they reflect a spirit of resistance and courage, stating that even under conditions of repression and occupation, there is always room for truth-telling.



Figure 3. *A militant commander nicknamed Motorola next to the bride. Sergey Zakharov, 2014*  
Source: Volchek (2014).

Vladyslav Shyrshevskyi is known for a unique artistic style, which combines irony, satire, and social criticism. Through the paintings, the author ridicules the absurdity of contemporary political and social situations, focusing on topics relevant to Ukrainian society. Shyrshevsky highlighted aspects such as the influence of the media, consumer culture, national stereotypes, and political instability, turning these topics into humorous and sometimes even grotesque scenes. The painting *"Halfway through my earthly world, I came into a gloomy, dense forest..."* is one of Shyrshevsky's works that interprets the inner state of a modern person lost in social and political realities (Figure 4). The title of the painting refers to a famous quote from Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, which emphasizes the state of mental anxiety, doubt, and search for one's path. In this work, Shyrshevsky uses images that symbolize a person's inner struggle in a complex and confusing world. The depiction of a gloomy forest in the painting becomes a metaphor for the social and political chaos in which society

finds itself due to constant change and instability. The character in the painting has a unique expression that reflects a sense of uncertainty and anxiety. Shyrshevsky depicts the forest as a dark, almost irreversible environment in which ideals and moral guidelines are lost. It is a place where political and social phenomena are confusing and often lack transparency, and where the people trying to survive in it feel fear and alienation.



Figure 4. "Halfway through my earthly world, I came to a gloomy, dense forest..." Vladyslav Shyrshevskyi, 2022  
Source: Mazurash (2024).

A plebiscite is a satirical work in which Shyrshevsky mocks democracy and public choice, revealing the superficiality with which some people approach political processes (Figure 5). The work title uses the concept of "plebiscite", which usually

means a form of direct democracy. However, here the artist emphasizes the word “*plebeian*” (i.e., commoner), hinting at a certain passivity and even primitivism in people’s attitude to their right to choose. It shows Shyrshevsky’s ironic attitude to superficial democracy when people make choices without understanding their full importance and consequences. In *Plebeianism*, the author depicts characters with expressions reflecting indifference, passivity, or superficial enthusiasm for political promises. Through these grotesque images, Shyrshevsky tries to demonstrate how easy it is to manipulate the masses when people make decisions without a proper understanding of the context. The painting demonstrates that the lack of critical thinking and independent opinion in society can lead to choices that do not contribute to the true well-being of the nation. Shyrshevsky uses vivid, although ironically chosen details to emphasize the comic and absurdity of a situation where political decisions are made in haste and irresponsibly.



Figure 5. “*Plebiscite*” by Vladyslav Shyrshevskiy, 2014

Source: Mazurash (2024).

Roman Minin is known for his work, which combines industrial and socio-political themes specific to the Donbas region. The work reflects a deep connection to the culture of the mining region, using bright colors, geometric shapes, and symbolic imagery to help convey complex social issues and depict people’s struggle for identity and freedom. “*Escape Plan from the Donetsk Region*” is one of Minin’s most famous

works, symbolizing the desire of many people to escape the constraints and isolation imposed by the industrial landscape and socio-economic situation of the region (Figure 6). Minin depicts labyrinths, mines, and underground tunnels, creating images embodying the sense of trap and hopelessness people are trying to escape. The bright colors and abstract shapes contrast with the dream of freedom and the harsh realities of miners' lives. The labyrinth in the works is a metaphor for the physical and social constraints in mining towns and reflects the complex process of finding a way out of these conditions.

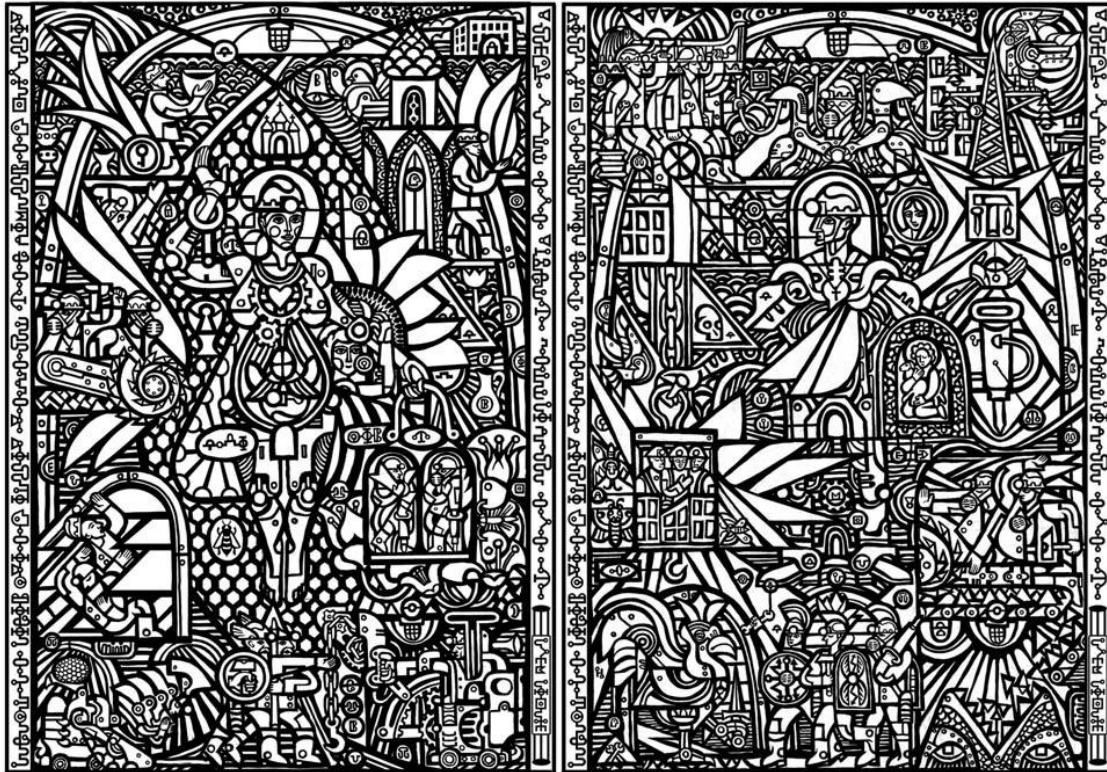


Figure 6. Diptych "Escape plan from the Donetsk region". Roman Minin, 2014  
Source: Bakieva (2023).

Another work is Miner's Angel, which symbolizes the spiritual endurance of the people of Donbas. It combines images of mines and religious symbols, reflecting the strength and resilience needed to survive in the face of industrial reality and social constraints. Minin creates the image of an angel who seems to protect and guard the people who work underground, risking their lives. It is not just a guardian figure but a symbol of courage and self-sacrifice that has become an important element of the collective identity of the mining region. The "Icons of Donbas" is a series of works in which Minin uses religious symbolism to create parallels between traditional icons and contemporary images of miners and workers. These icons do not just reproduce images but become allegories of the strength and courage needed to survive under challenging conditions. The artist demonstrates that miners' work is sacred and that their daily struggle for life and safety deserves respect and honor. It is especially

relevant in the context of the social problems associated with the mining profession: low wages, difficult working conditions, and lack of development prospects for the region.

Roman Minin's work also criticizes the social isolation of the Donbas region from the rest of Ukraine and the world. Using geometric shapes and bright colors, the author depicts industrial landscapes that become barriers and symbols that dwell on the restrictions imposed on society (Sorochynska & Pitenina, 2022). The works describe a sense of alienation from the rest of Ukraine while maintaining a sense of pride in identity and heritage. Through the paintings, the artist emphasizes social isolation but also demonstrates hope for unification and a way out of this isolation, which is especially important in the current political situation. Roman Minin is not only an artist but also a visionary who, through art, seeks not only to reflect the realities of the mining region but also to create a new aesthetic that celebrates this identity. Work is a manifesto of resilience, humanity, and hope extending beyond the region and echoes into people's hearts, fighting for freedom and the opportunity to live in dignity.

David Chichkan is a contemporary Ukrainian artist highlighting the most pressing social and political issues. The author's work is marked by a radical approach to depicting problems, including revolutions, war, social inequality, corruption, and social apathy. Chichkan uses art as a political protest, which defines the work as profoundly social and opinion-activating. Many works challenge the viewer, forcing them to reflect on reality and their place in it. One of the author's best-known series is *"Lost Opportunity"*, where the artist addresses the topic of the Revolution of Dignity and the hopes it brought to Ukrainian society. In this series, Chychkan shows images of people who took part in the revolutionary events but often remain forgotten or underestimated after the end of the revolution. Through expressive faces and rich colors, the artist conveys the emotions of disappointment, doubt, and disbelief many Ukrainians felt after the revolution. The author highlights the theme of the lost opportunity to build a better society where the ideas of the revolution could have become a reality. This series is not just a commentary on the events, but also a criticism of a society that, in the author's opinion, failed to fulfill the potential for change.

Another work is *"The Other Side of War"*, where Chychkan explores the war in eastern Ukraine. In this series, the author not only depicts the conflict from the point of view of military events but also raises the issue of the social divide it causes. The artist depicts people's faces on both sides of the conflict to show that war is a tragedy for everyone, regardless of political views. With the help of contrasting colors and sharp lines, the author conveys the tension, despair, and loss experienced by Ukrainian society. This series demonstrates that war leaves a deep imprint on everyone involved and shows how conflict can divide a society. Chichkan is also known for posters and graphics, with bold symbols and slogans to address political and social issues. The series *"Heroes Do Not Come Home"* addressed patriotism and loss, questioning the public's willingness to support those who sacrifice for their country. Chichkan shows images of soldiers and activists who are left forgotten and highlights the hypocrisy of

politicians who use patriotic themes for personal purposes. The author criticizes the politics of war and public indifference to veterans and their problems after returning from the frontline.

Thus, David Chichkan's work is a sharp social criticism aimed at drawing attention to unresolved societal injustices. The works are marked by courage and uncompromisingness, and each painting symbolizes the struggle for social equality, justice, and actual values that should not disappear under the pressure of social and political manipulation.

Oleksandr Hrehov is a Ukrainian artist who uses colorful graphics, pop culture elements, and an ironic approach to draw attention to important social and political issues. The works are characterized by an original approach to depicting national and cultural symbols, making them understandable to a contemporary audience. The artist addresses topics such as national identity, the popularization of Ukrainian culture, the influence of the media, and political manipulation, reflecting current societal challenges. Among Hrehov's projects is a series of works dedicated to Taras Shevchenko, "*Shevchenko. 200 Years*", in which the artist depicted the national poet Taras Shevchenko in the images of popular cultural characters, including the Terminator, Jack Sparrow, Superman, Batman, and the Joker (Figure 7). This approach serves as a satirical interpretation and a means of reinterpreting Ukrainian cultural symbols, giving them a modern sound and making them more accessible to the younger generation. In this series, Hrehov demonstrates that national images can remain relevant, but new interpretations are needed to retain their significance in the contemporary context. This modernisation promotes the image of Shevchenko while raising questions about how society interprets its identity in the context of cultural globalism. The project "*Shevchenko's Quantum Leap*", presented in the Kyiv subway, has become an important cultural phenomenon. In it, Shevchenko appears in the form of various historical and contemporary characters representing different cultural influences. The project sparked a broad public debate about the role and meaning of national symbols. It provoked an adverse reaction from some visitors who considered the depiction of Shevchenko to be disrespectful to the national symbol. The exhibition was closed early due to threats. This reaction highlighted the complexity and controversy of national identity issues in Ukrainian society, and how art can express such deep feelings and contribute to public reflection.



Figure 7. Materials of the exhibition “Shevchenko’s Quantum Leap. Subway”. Alexander Grekhov, 2018

Source: Viruk (2019).

A study by Vysheslavsky (2020) highlighted how Ukrainian art has become increasingly mainstream-oriented, using themes that resonate with public sentiment. The study’s results also confirmed this trend, showing that contemporary Ukrainian art responded to current political and social topics, including social conflicts and ideas of decolonization. Compared to Wyszczelawski’s findings, contemporary art has moved from simply interpreting the mainstream to actively participating in the formation of national identity, with an emphasis on global and European integration processes. Moreover, Cherniyavskyi et al. (2022) studied the role of digital art as a new global trend in the socio-cultural space of Ukraine. The authors focused on the impact of digital technologies on the development of artistic practices in visual communication. They also analyzed the interactivity and accessibility of digital art as a tool for social dialogue. According to the study, contemporary Ukrainian artists used digital technologies, adapting their works to new formats, which allowed them to reach a global audience and create new visual markers.

The series “Women in Ukrainian History” is another iconic work by Grekhov, where the artist depicted prominent Ukrainian women in the style of pop art, focusing on their contribution to history. Among the images in this series are Princess Olga, Lesya Ukrainka, Olena Teliha, and others. Grekhov shows that women were and are central to the history of Ukraine, even if their contribution was not adequately recognized. Through bright colors and dynamic imagery, the artist draws attention to issues of gender equality and justice by highlighting the role of women in society. This series is not only a reinterpretation of history but also a reminder of the need for equal

recognition of the contributions of all members of society. Another important aspect of Grekhov's work is environmental posters addressing environmental issues. Using humor and irony, the artist draws attention to pressing environmental issues, presenting them in a light-hearted way that engages a broad audience. The style of the posters, inspired by Soviet propaganda posters, gives the works a sense of nostalgia combined with modern messages. This approach demonstrates how socially responsible art can be an enjoyable and effective means of communicating with the audience.

The study by Zaeri and Roozafzai (2024) analyzed how visual art initiates social change by conveying powerful messages and raising awareness of pressing social issues. The study demonstrated that artistic practices can effectively focus attention on social challenges by using visual images to shape public consciousness. The study emphasized that art could engage audiences in dialogue on social issues, demonstrating its power as a means of influence and communication. Similar aspects were considered by Nyamari (2024), who highlighted the role of visual art in social movements, such as protests or reform initiatives. The author explored the ability of art not only to raise social issues but also to mobilize the public to achieve change. The article cited examples from different countries that confirmed the impact of art on social transformation, emphasizing its universality for social change. Compared to these studies, the results of this research focus on the role of contemporary Ukrainian visual art in preserving and redefining national identity through artistic images and symbols. Although the emphasis of R. Zaeri and Roozafzai (2024) and

Nyamari (2024) is devoted to the global aspect of social change; this study focuses on local contexts where art has been used to decolonize and understand historical challenges. Thus, it complements previous work by adding a regional dimension to the overall understanding of the impact of art on society.

Thus, contemporary Ukrainian art actively integrates socio-political themes, creating artistic images that reflect the challenges and realities of our time. Through the work of artists such as Alevtina Kakhidze, Serhiy Zakharov, Vladyslav Shyrshevsky, Oleksandr Grekhov, Roman Minin, and David Chichkan, viewers can gain a deeper understanding of Ukrainian society, its aspirations, and struggles. Their works reflect on our time's problems and help unite the audience around shared values, expressing national identity through art.

## Conclusions

The study determined that contemporary Ukrainian visual art is central to expressing and maintaining national identity by integrating cultural symbols, archetypes, and national images into the contemporary artistic context. Ukrainian artists refer to traditional motifs, historical themes, and archetypes, preserving their meaning while reinterpreting them following the socio-cultural conditions of our time. Through this approach, artists maintain a connection with the cultural heritage and give it a new meaning, which allows traditional images to remain relevant and reflect

the specifics of the contemporary Ukrainian experience. It contributes to creating new cultural markers that help strengthen collective memory and express identity, resonating with viewers and giving them a sense of belonging to a common cultural history.

Among the artists who address the themes of national identity are Roman Minin, Alevtina Kakhidze, Serhiy Zakharov, Oleksandr Grekhov, and many others. Their works contain deep symbolic meanings that reflect important themes for Ukrainian society, including the struggle for independence, social justice, historical memory, and cultural revival. By using national symbols and cultural codes, these artists create new forms of expression that can preserve and strengthen national identity despite globalization. Their contribution to the development of contemporary Ukrainian art is extremely valuable, as they contribute to preserving cultural heritage and forming national consciousness through art, reflecting both individual and collective experience.

Integrating socio-political themes into artistic practices has become one of the defining features of contemporary Ukrainian art, demonstrating its ability to respond to current social challenges. Artists actively address issues of war, cultural identity, social justice, and decolonization. It makes Ukrainian art an important tool for social dialogue, helping to raise awareness and engage audiences in discussions of important issues. Through artistic images that resonate with social reality, Ukrainian artists help viewers understand society's challenges and contribute to strengthening collective identity. The limitation of this study was that it was theoretical and did not involve an empirical analysis of the impact of art on the general population.

It is recommended that the research be extended to the empirical level to study the impact of individual art projects on the formation of public attitudes and cultural consciousness. Further research could include the impact of international exhibitions and cultural exchange on the development of Ukrainian art and its adaptation to the global cultural context. It is also necessary to consider the interaction of art with other forms of social activism and explore how art projects can influence social change and public opinion. Furthermore, further research could focus on the role of art in educational programs, which would help to broaden cultural awareness and encourage the younger generation to preserve and rethink national heritage.

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