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EROS AND UKRAINIAN ART SINCE INDEPENDENCE: SELF AFFIRMATIONS THROUGH PAINTING AND DESIGN

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ЕРОС І УКРАЇНСЬКЕ МИСТЕЦТВО ДОБИ НЕЗАЛЕЖНОСТІ: САМОСТВЕРДЖЕННЯ У ЖИВОПИСІ ТА ДИЗАЙНІ

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Abstract

The aim of the research is to show that after Independence that Ukrainian artist were rewarded for supporting Western values, not Ukrainian values. Ukrainian artists were left with three different paths, to either commit to the West, with the promise of attention and financial reward, or to support the Soviet idea of Moscow as a cultural capital or the difficult path of building a contemporary Ukrainian identity. The last option is the difficult path that not only has no rewards for the artist themselves but also acts in opposition to both the West and the East. **Research methodology.** Methods of historical and art-study analysis are used. **Scientific novelty.** For the first time facts were introduced into scientific circulation about Eros in Ukrainian art in the period of Ukrainian Independence.

Анотація

Метою дослідження є показати, що за час незалежності український художник здобув демократичні пріоритети і наблизився до європейського розуміння цінностей. Українські митці опинились між різними шляхами, або зобов'язуватися перед Заходом, з обіцянкою уваги і фінансової підтримки, або слідувати радянській ідеології і ступати на шлях побудови сучасної української ідентичності. Існує й інший, складний напрямок, який не тільки не має винагороди для самого художника, але й виступає проти Заходу і Сходу. **Методологія дослідження.** Використовуються методи історичного та мистецького аналізу. **Наукова новизна.** Вперше в науковий обіг були введені факти про Ерос в українському мистецтві в період

Conclusions. The Contemporary Ukrainian Identity in the visual arts will be a merging of Western and Eastern concerns transformed through a Ukrainian point of view. Artists will seek both their own validation and self-worth through expressing themselves freely but also search for a community that appreciates their work. The Ukrainian beliefs in Eros, happiness, fun and mutual benefit is in contrast to the imperialistic beliefs of European countries and Russia. For a Ukrainian identity to be truly and honestly formed, it will have to forgo both financial and emotional rewards from foreign countries in order to support its own voice.

незалежності України. **Висновки.** Сучасна українська ідентичність у образотворчому мистецтві буде об'єднанням західних і східних проблем, трансформованих через українську точку зору. Художники шукатимуть як власну перевірку, так і самоцінність через вільне вираження, а також пошук спільноти, що цінує їхню роботу. Українське розуміння Еросу – це щастя, веселощі і взаємна вигода, що протиставляються імперіалістичним переконанням європейських країн і Росії. Для того, щоб українська ідентичність була правдивою і чесно сформованою, їй доведеться відмовитися від фінансових та емоційних нагород від зарубіжних країн, щоб утвердити власні мистецькі цінності.

Key words: **Ключові слова:**

Ukrainian contemporary art, Eros, painting, Ralko, Roitburd, Europe, national art.

сучасне українське мистецтво, Ерос, живопис, Ралко, Ройтбурд, Європа, національне мистецтво.

Introduction **1**

Since Independence, Eros has been the distinctive criterion of Ukrainian contemporary art, in spite of the dual distractions of nostalgia and trauma.

Nostalgia for the lost possibilities of an undisturbed and pure, even innocent, Ukrainian culture (Nadkarni, & Shevchenko, 2004) and the trauma of the Ukrainian history stretching back before the 20th Century, exemplified in the Holodomor and Ukrainian culture in general.

Camouflaged these two extremely powerful influences, what characterizes Ukrainian art most of all is its commitment to optimism and the rediscovery of its place in Europe and the world. While Eros is an unimportant concept in other cultures, often associated with weakness and femininity as such is an unrewarded goal, in Ukrainian culture it serves both the antidote and protection from the very traumas and losses that threaten Ukrainian culture.

It is imperialistic cultures that have the luxury of indulging in their narcissistic collection of self-absorbed trophies. Post imperialist societies, freeing themselves from the parasite imperial cultures who used military and economic force to feed on culture, must find their own foundations that protect their free expression.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, with its sanitization and sterilization of pleasure (Sigel, 2005), the state was no longer the sole owner of culture (Buyandelgeriyn, 2008) and artists were left to digest the eighty years of Western Modernism and post-modernism that it had missed as well as contemporary feminism and also the ascendance of the late-capitalist market that replaced philosophical criticism as the main arbiter of taste (D'Alessandro, 2002). Modernism had rejected moral puritanism, embracing city

life and pursued self-expression, originality and untrammelled liberty from conventions (Phillips, 1918, p. 101).

Post-soviet countries were in the strange position of being once again part of Europe, but having to communicate with a Europe which had learnt different lessons. Social Realism while depicting the common man was not seen to answer the inner needs of common man. And in the 1990s, the common man was itself undergoing rapid change.

The aim of the research

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2. The aim of the research is to show that after Independence that Ukrainian artist were rewarded for supporting Western values, not Ukrainian values. Ukrainian artists were left with three different paths, to either commit to the West, with the promise of attention and financial reward, or to support the Soviet idea of Moscow as a cultural capital or the difficult path of building a contemporary Ukrainian identity. The last option is the difficult path that not only has no rewards for the artist themselves but also acts in opposition to both the West and the East.

The methodology and analysis of sources

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3. Methodology and analysis of the source base. In the course of scientific research the methods of historical and art-study analysis were used.

Ukrainian artists indulged in the newfound freedom of Europe, but also understood quickly that they must develop to the same aesthetic levels as Europeans in order to join the global art world. These artists took on the role of «makers of knowledge» (Glisson et al., 2014, p. 7). doi:10.2979/teachlearning.2.1.7, who had to examine themselves and question their own assumptions while also building a sense of a contemporary national identity. This knowledge would be born of personal experience (Donham, 2018).

The first Ukrainian artists who gained acceptance were those from the Moscow Conceptualism. Artists such as Kabakov gained immediate recognition, because they agreed with the Western beliefs that capitalism supplied freedom for artists to express themselves (Baraban, 2012). Kabakov's use of autobiography allowed personal empathy to combine with mythological symbolism in a sequence of images and installations that referenced the despair of artists in the Soviet Union. Kabakov provided a pure message infused with passion that the world could embrace. However, this was the expression of an individual artist from an already dead culture and while it supported and defended the West's political position, it did not speak for the newly emerging cultures of the Post-Soviet space (Buyandelgeriy, 2008).

Ukrainian artists, still connected to their hometowns and families were not so nomadic as the Moscow conceptualists and instead looked to their own human experiences to be seen in plastic terms and written in visual language that they hoped would also be recognized by the West and their own country. Protest, which inspired Kabakov and Kulik, could not build the Ukrainian contemporary

culture, which need sustenance and care. Most national identities during the 1990s benefited from support mass media, such as television (O'Guinn, & Shrum, 1997), however Ukraine suffered from an overload of foreign influence and very little of its own programs that supported contemporary national identity. The creation of the Ukrainian visual language was left in the hands of artists.

Freedom from censorship allowed artists to test the boundaries of good taste. Artists, who never had material wealth, could now explore expression in all areas including sexual pleasure through visual forms. Especially using taboo symbols, specifically nakedness, embraces and intimate places to both stand for artistic freedom and comment on their inner emotional states. Art is considered to be the «revelation of an individual's personality» which if a group of artists exhibit a uniformity of purpose, becomes a movement (Phillips, 1918, p. 101). Even though Ukrainian artists have embraced freedom of expression, their individuality is still too extreme to form such a movement.

This short period of excessive sexual imagery faded as the economic reality of the 1990s took hold (Bigler, 1996). As with all art worlds, only a small percentage of artists are financially successful and visible. The Ukrainian artists who stayed within their own culture either experimented with new media or used traditional media to forge a uniquely Ukrainian and local critique on the contemporary world.

**Scientific
novelty and
practical
significance
of the
research**

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The theme of the nude body has long been the subject of study by researchers of various profiles in European and Ukrainian art and design. Already the first photos can be attributed to the section of the theme of photography and design. They are dated for the most part in the nineteenth century. In this context, it is worth mentioning the artistic works of such artists as Egon Schiele, the designer and artist of European significance A. Toulouse-Lautrec.

In the twentieth century Kharkiv artist Boris Mikhailov worked at the theme of the naked body in Ukrainian art, in particular, collages as a kind of design. His photographic art of the naked body tends to a conceptual and socio-documentary character, which gave rise to the birth of the famous Kharkiv school of photography.

During the time of independence, in the times of democratic freedoms, the body in art of design is becoming more and more popular, as well as in the art of a poster and books.

For example, these trends appeared on the cover of Irena Karp's book Freud's Crying, published by the Kharkov publishing house Folio, «Yellow Book» in the covers of Oksana Zabuzhko's «Field Studies on Ukrainian Sex» (fig. 4.1.).

Thus, the theme of eroticism in the Ukrainian fine arts and design acquires new features and methods of embodiment in the beginning of the XXI century, for example illustration of boock by Iv Vensler, «Vagina Monologists» (fig. 4. 2.).



Fig. 4. 1. Oksana Zabuzhko's. «Field Studies on Ukrainian Sex».

Рис. 4. 1. Оксана Забужко. «Польові дослідження українського сексу».

Fig. 4. 2. Iv Vensler. «Vagina Monologues».

Рис. 4. 2. Ів Енслер. «Монологи вагіни».

This theme was also featured in the posters of a younger generation of artists, such as Sergei Zapadnya «Limonchello and Red Label» (2011). Using the most diverse techniques and means of expression, the artist combined women's and men's origins not only with the nude torso, but also with the symbols of drinks, while emphasizing the phallic and vaginal centers of the portraits (fig. 4. 3.).

Two artists, one male and one female, exemplify the Ukrainian approach to the figure in the 1990s and 2000s – Alexander Roitburd and Vlada Ralko. Other Ukrainian artists played with media and various postmodernist interpretations of visual language and the discredited inheritances from the Soviet Union, but these two artists concentrated on their version of the figure, its use as a symbol of life and as a way to comment on the present day life in Ukraine.

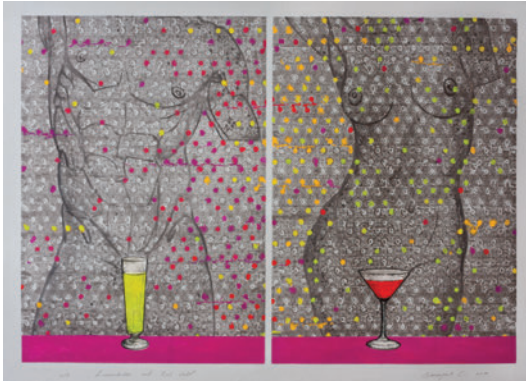


Fig. 4. 3. Sergei Zapadnya «Limonchello and Red Label». (2011).

Рис. 4. 3. Сергій Западня. «Лимончелло і Ред Лейбл». (2011).

Roitburd travelled back through time and reconnected to the early 20th century, avoiding the Soviet aesthetics that his contemporaries grappled with. He assumed the role of genius by simply aping the activities of early Modernist artists such as Picasso. By assuming this role, he gave himself the flexibility to assume any role in creating art spicing his art with a clownish aspect. The artist's activities became a game in itself, a lifestyle in itself. Even when Roitburd creates artworks that strictly follow the rules of Modernism, his admiration is also in the spirit of play.

He simply reinterprets earlier masterpieces so that they become a part of Ukrainian culture. What was lost for eighty years suddenly comes back. Whether it is Max Beckman's black lines or the compositional structures of Picasso, they are changed through a non-serious playfulness that combines Ukrainian subject matter with clean and accomplished painting technique.

There is no Roitburd style, except that which he chooses to employ. Even when he resembles Picasso's use of cutup compositions and bright colors that push forward the passion and desire in a digestible manner, it is with a knowing smile. These are none of the violence of Picasso in his work, as it is not a creative process but a reinterpretation that both examines what is being shown and how it is to be perceived, both postmodern concerns, as well as playing on the audience's expectations and knowledge of famous Modernist artworks. After all, Picasso seen is a less an artist than as a symbol of creative genius in the late 20th century. Roitburd reveals his goal of playing the part of artistic genius, of creating a mythology that will be remembered, connected to other artists of the past. In doing so, he elevates Ukrainian art. There is no reason Ukrainians would not also have been a part of these developments if allowed to do so.

Taking advantage of the non-seriousness of his painting, Roitburd can paint scenes reminiscent of Impressionists and Modernists in exploring accepted visual genres such as the nude, relationships between friends, sensual colors he reveals an already accepted version of eroticism that does not challenge but joins the near past. His refinement of technique assures the public of his craftsmanship

while his referencing of the past shows his understanding of design and formalism (Robertson, & McDaniel, 1999) (fig. 4. 4.).



Fig. 4. 4. Alexander Roitburd. *The Great Odalisque*. 2013.

Рис. 4. 4. Олександр Ройтбурд. *Велика Одаліска*. 2013.

His eroticism is easily described in words. It is not an invention but an exploration in what was formerly banned. The Postmodernist mixing of styles, techniques while reconnecting with Art history creates a contemporary Ukrainian art that can happily fit with the rest of the world. Roitburd's goal seems to be not to challenge but to simply enjoy freedom.

His sensuality is to enjoy life in itself, but Roitburd suggests visually this pleasure comes at the price of survival and that the figures are playing with fire. The darkness in the pictures comes directly from Picasso, who was as fascinated with death as he was with sex. However, for Picasso this was a personal discovery but for Roitburd it is a learned one. Roitburd plays around and is at a distance from reality. The paintings advertise, through the use of dark colors and the excessive gestures of the figures, that it is safe to play in a fictional world, but reality is something different. The artworks seem preconceived, without the faults and flaws that would come from grasping at truth. Paintings like these are a juggling show, where there is no risk of losing – it is swimming in shallow water with a few careful movements. What is accentuated?

While Roitburd plays with the erotic and with Eros, they are simply part of a set of toys, which once pleurably arranged can also be playfully contrasted with difficult messages. Roitburd plays at being a moralist by pointing out that which people are ignoring at their peril, but, in fact, it is reassuring that the dangers are not so deep or life changing. The explosions here are not bombs but merely fireworks.

Roitburd sees the role of an artist as part of society, where adults can relax and regress. By enjoying the visual balancing acts he produces using craftsmanship which are combined with subject matter that hints at suffering and darkness, he creates a commercially acceptable symbol of art that acts as an adult's playground. In creating desirably commercial cultural objects made for the Ukrainian market, Roitburd created a form of self-affirmation

(Townsend, & Sood, 2012) and negation of the sense of threat in unstable times.

The enjoyment of Independent Ukrainian is clear here, soothing the public into accepting freedom in spite of its reservations. Roitburd promotes the experiential view that focuses on the hedonistic nature of consumption (Holbrook, & Hirschman, 1982), of enjoying art and the present.

His adherence to this concept what limits Roitburd's art, especially as it continues through to contemporary times. He rejects risking moving into less controllable areas and instead continues to play with other artist's achievements but also suffers from repeating returns.

His paintings become a touchstone for reducing fear of freedom but also lose the poignant meaning of embracing Modernism they had in the 1990s. The public now moves faster than in the past and had already voraciously consumed mass media and all its taboos and clichés. Freedom changed to Capitalism with the right to consume taking center stage for the Ukrainian public.

Roitburd's safe eroticism was acceptable as a product, but without its context began to operate as nostalgia, especially when his later paintings reference his earlier styles.

By consciously and obviously adopting Modernist visual tropes and subject matter that was recognizable to both Soviet and Western audiences, Roitburd created a space in Ukrainian art where the artist could make personal statements to a public audience.

Roitburd, like Picasso, is obsessed with the interpretations of classic canvases, however for Roitburd these are not only paintings, but any image that has caught hold of the popular imagination.

Roitburd's Modernist style doesn't question the male point of view and instead revels in the joys of the masculine lifestyle. Although women are active in the paintings, they are less so than the men. The images recall the everyday lifestyle of Soviet families who themselves were informed by European traditions in their free time. There is a warmth to Roitburd's paintings, not simply in the use of hot colors and energetic lines, but in the relations between figures and towards the viewers.

This is strongly contrasted by Ralko's paintings that take place two decades later.

Ralko's works are also informed by Europe, but instead she chooses the colder, sharper, less dramatic styles in which to depict the present – a present that is different to the one Roitburd references.

Again, Ralko's style negates any faults or confusion. She is a postmodernist who follows the mixing of styles into a coherent message, however unlike Roitburd, Ralko embraces the politics of her time, more so than other Ukrainian artists. However, unlike Roitburd, she doesn't fashion personal expressions but personal points of view.

Her paintings are a communication, but one that does not seduce through technique or visual juggling. It is a clean and sharp incision with only one message for the audience.

The paintings show a clearly thought out process of drawing, which she adheres to even during the painting process. Color and texture obey the diagrammatic figures. Her critical attitude is achieved with personalizing (Hale, 2014).

Ralko prefers clear communication, the language of business rather than Roitburd's language of politics. Where one plays the victor, the other plays the victim.

In all images, Ralko takes on the role of machine, of a camera that records the equations taking place in contemporary life. If late capitalism has transformed everything into a market and art is also something to be traded, then Ralko observes these transactions, but not of the personal and every day, instead she takes on the genre of history painting and seeks to detail the transactions of the nation's life.

The imagery is always from the nation's point of view, even when figures are being dissected. Ukraine is presented as a minority identity, which internalizes its suffering and endures violence, both internal and external (Siebers, 2017).

Ralko's colors are extremely cold, pure and symbolic (Elliott, 1958). She separates the imagery into their allotted spaces. There is no interaction but instead the impression of newly dead things.

Ralko's is a forensic eye like Manet (Beeny, 2013). She depicts the scene after the crime, when the criminals are absent, and even the victims are gone and only the evidence is left. Even her drawings are created as if from reconstructions of crimes. There is no present in Ralko's paintings but the distance of the near past.

As Roitburd offers self-affirmation in the 1990s, Ralko exhibits evidence of the opposite reactions in her works, since pain disables self-affirmation, emancipation and empowerment, producing instead a desire for recognition» (Siebers, 2012, p. 112).

Ralko's artistic achievement is not only to communicate this but to transform it into fun. A macabre fun similar to that of pulling the wings of insects, poking dead cats, of investigating the nature of viruses, of seeing how things work. We are left with the results of destruction but are able to act, rather than stay silenced.

The evolution of Ukrainian fun began as a dangerous gift that only the brave indulged in until it was absorbed in its lowest forms by the masses, but then, in the 2010s it has strengthen until it achieves its rightful place – as a tool to combat trauma and horror (Good, & Hinton, 2016).

Ralko is a contemporary war artist, due to her own choice of creating a diary like series of drawings about the current strife in Ukraine. Art is traditionally aimed at promoting peace, however to attain the best in life people must look at current problems (Burr, 1918, p. 63). Even while she has fun trying to express the pain of contemporary life, she is able to show that it is an abnormal life, one that has no destination apart from the aftermath of destruction,

which can only be seen with emotionally controlled scientific curiosity (Belfiore, 2002).

Ralko's painting is a visual question of 'how is this happening?' 'What are the motivations behind these actions?' The paintings answer that it is the result of systems and processes. Machines, that do not even acknowledge human emotions, simply carry out their function and physics does the rest. Ralko's paintings show the results of the world, of ignoring common sense and occasions when disaster is unavoidable.

Where Roitburd appropriates the pleasure and foreign influenced external fun of modernism – in technique, style and subject matter, Ralko takes the contemporary joys of self-harm upon herself to feel something internally real (Sloan, 2007).

She courts fear to generate excitement, which is a historical strategy for female artists (Bann, 2000). The primary subject matter is whatever assemblage of symbols that construct the contemporary situation, in most cases a variation on the attack on the defenseless, she pastes on characterless backgrounds, the secondary subject is always the fear of uncaring contemporary life. Ralko's paintings are pleas and prayers for rescue and help from a rational, civilized Western world (Dorsch, 2007).

In erotic art, there is a sense of identity and presence that the viewer can participate in emotionally and usually that involves questions that touch people's fears deeply.

Ralko's figures are diagrams not personalities, so they stand in for the viewer. It is not the figure that is cut, but the viewer themselves. It is by taking on the painter's point of view that Ralko's paintings open up to the viewer (Brown, 2010) (fig. 4. 5).



Fig. 4. 5. Vlada Ralko. Kiev Diary. 2013.

Рис. 4. 5. Влада Ралко. Київський щоденник. 2013.

The theme of sexuality in Ralko's work is of the females' inner vision and use of symbols to communicate in an acceptable manner. No matter the subject matter, Ralko's technique and

presentation, not to mention colors and lines, are firmly within the painting tradition of modernism and postmodernism. Perhaps the acceptable face of artistry, with the familiar use of brushstrokes and color combinations, allows her attitude in displaying her subjects, but many male Ukrainian painters avoid interpreting the figure in general. Ralko uses the figure as a child would – to tell a story. The figure and figurative painting are being used, rather than the artist being used by them.

When an academic painting is produced, the figure is in control. There is an expectation of a certain type. And while there is a Ralko-type, there is no expectation of it. Ralko makes the figure act the way it does because she wants it to.

Foucault argued that social control works best if it is unconscious and unseen, that propaganda only works when it works on the body, inducing fear and shame for the self that is then used to control and train the person (Tarnopolsky, 2004). Ralko investigates the effects of the contemporary wartime propaganda that attacks not with words or even images but through the direct, controlled and apologetic use of violence and abuse.

Ralko is further removed from commerciality than other Ukrainian artists, she does not censor her taste, although she does compromise her paintings for the audience. In reacting to the current crisis, she dredges up difficult feelings that would usually stay submerged (Dubin, 1990). There is a balance between letting enough of the subject to be seen and having its abhorrent aspects softened by the delights of formal sensuality.

Sensuality is suspect but acceptable in Ukrainian art, perhaps because its inescapable.

It is actively dismantled in many male Ukrainian artists, who remove it from the body and position in activity. Ralko keeps sensuality in the entirety of the figure, even when exhibition its amputations the form feels once whole.

The cleanliness of the color allows for a quiet contemplation even when engaged in symbolic torturing of the body. Of course, Ralko is even further distanced from the body than Francis Bacon, an artist she resembles, except Bacon used paint's unpredictability to create imagery (Cappock, 2002), while Ralko forces paint to obey her, primarily through the use of discordant colors that play, again, at a childish view of the world. Children color in flat uniform colors (Hilbert, 2005), and Ralko uses the same approach, in order to purify her communication. To make her message clear.

The reaction to the victims in her painting is one of action. There was a past transgression and now there is a present evaluation. Ralko is of the younger generation of artists who grew up during the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The ones who did not instigate the changes, but were the recipients of those changes. She is one of those who come in as the second chapter.

Unlike earlier Ukrainian artists, she is not marked with the fatality of failure, of being forced to accept difficult conditions, she has

the power to resist them with alternative ideas (Ledeneva, Bailey, Barron, Curro, & Teague, 2018).

However, she also doesn't have the wild joy at playing with artistic formal elements that Western artists did. She doesn't celebrate her freedom; she sees where it will take her. However, all her imagery and technique keeps itself under control. Ralko fears the emotional consequences of unfettered Eros, which is no surprise considering she wrestles with the plain facts of life that are «weighted with our own personal death» (Ledeneva, Bailey, Barron, Curro, & Teague, 2018).

There is a sense of life under a distant threat and that power can prove superior to life – at least a pleasant life. Ralko paints the present, of her own invented world, but it is presented as a moment which will very soon bitterly fall upon itself. Using thick lines and flat, smooth colors she is about to create nausea (Wright, 1998).

There is no sadness in the painting, that is only communicated in the choices of imagery. Instead it is seen as a mechanical process that will only reach its end with everything else by human hand.

The impersonality of damaging and dissecting as a part of contemporary life. The artificiality of contemporary life and contemporary painting are accepted wholeheartedly and the earlier convictions of paintings are totally discarded. Ralko is of a newer generation, a current generation, who too will be supplanted, but not before it runs out of strength. There exists a crazy, infernal laughter in Ralko's works, that counterpoints her clean presentation of acceptable horror. The ghosts that others depict in their paintings are undedicated in Ralko, but they seem to be her main subject, her only obsession. Those active and aggressive forces that shape people's lives but that ordinary bodies seem unable to deal with. The body is an object of conflict and experiences of violence which Ralko opens up to explore new and dangerous meanings (Barrett, 2010).

There is a defeated energy in the figures, as if they have made their pyrrhic victory, but now a second battle approaches. Their desire has shaken them free but has also condemned them to face the aftermath in the 21st Century.

For Ralko, the day of destruction is always together with the days beforehand and the seconds afterward, which both feel the same length.

Obviously, fun requires skill in order to truly let go and feel freedom. Skill is a type of control (Newell, 1985), which Ukrainians constantly apply to fun, in all its forms. There is no relinquishment of sense when engaged in Ukrainian fun. It is always kept in its strict boundaries, aimed towards an emotional effect, like a well told anecdote.

It is here that the truth of Ukrainian life is allowed to grow, with all its blemishes and complexities. Ukraine is an east European country with a tragic past and a difficult present but filled with a belief in a good future (Mandelbaum, 1996). The fun pursued is in order to heal the wounds and pain of the past. Nostalgia doesn't hold Ukrainian culture, even though it also has its traditions and values, because it

is a culture that is engaged in the present, in life, in the problems and solutions that make up living. There is no ghost in Ukraine that people must live up to, there is only the question of what to do to live life fully.

Eros in Ukrainian Art since Independence means that the past, which the West and Russia obsess about, must be left behind. The truth of what Ukrainian culture independently values must be realized, even in the rest of the world fails to understand or reward it.

Since Independence, Eros has been the distinctive criterion of Ukrainian contemporary art, in spite of the dual distractions of nostalgia and trauma.

Nostalgia for the lost possibilities of an undisturbed and pure, even innocent, Ukrainian culture (Nadkarni, & Shevchenko, 2004) and the trauma of the Ukrainian history stretching back before the 20th Century, exemplified in the Holodomor and Ukrainian culture in general.

Camouflaged these two extremely powerful influences, what characterizes Ukrainian art most of all is its commitment to optimism and the rediscovery of its place in Europe and the world. While Eros is an unimportant concept in other cultures, often associated with weakness and femininity as such is an unrewarded goal, in Ukrainian culture it serves both the antidote and protection from the very traumas and losses that threaten Ukrainian culture.

It is imperialistic cultures that have the luxury of indulging in their narcissistic collection of self-absorbed trophies. Post imperialist societies, freeing themselves from the parasite imperial cultures who used military and economic force to feed on culture, must find their own foundations that protect their free expression.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, with its sanitization and sterilization of pleasure (Sigel, 2005), the state was no longer the sole owner of culture (Buyandelgeriyn, 2008) and artists were left to digest the eighty years of Western Modernism and post-modernism that it had missed as well as contemporary feminism and also the ascendance of the late-capitalist market that replaced philosophical criticism as the main arbiter of taste (D'Alessandro, 2002). Modernism had rejected moral puritanism, embracing city life and pursued self-expression, originality and untrammelled liberty from conventions (Phillips, 1918, p. 101).

Ukrainian artists indulged in the newfound freedom of Europe, but also understood quickly that they must develop to the same aesthetic levels as Europeans in order to join the global art world. These artists took on the role of «makers of knowledge» (Glisson et al., 2014, p. 7). doi:10.2979/teachlearninqu.2.1.7, who had to examine themselves and question their own assumptions while also building a sense of a contemporary national identity. This knowledge would be born of personal experience (Donham, 2018).

The first Ukrainian artists who gained acceptance were those from the Moscow Conceptualism. Artists such as Kabakov gained immediate recognition, because they agreed with the Western beliefs that capitalism supplied freedom for artists to express themselves (Baraban, 2012). Kabakov's use of autobiography allowed personal

empathy to combine with mythological symbolism in a sequence of images and installations that referenced the despair of artists in the Soviet Union. Kabakov provided a pure message infused with passion that the world could embrace. However, this was the expression of an individual artist from an already dead culture and while it supported and defended the West's political position, it did not speak for the newly emerging cultures of the Post-Soviet space (Buyandelgeriyev, 2008).

Ukrainian artists, still connected to their hometowns and families were not so nomadic as the Moscow conceptualists and instead looked to their own human experiences to be seen in plastic terms and written in visual language that they hoped would also be recognized by the West and their own country. Protest, which inspired Kabakov and Kulik, could not build the Ukrainian contemporary culture, which need sustenance and care. Most national identities during the 1990s benefited from support mass media, such as television (O'Guinn, & Shrum, 1997), however Ukraine suffered from an overload of foreign influence and very little of its own programs that supported contemporary national identity. The creation of the Ukrainian visual language was left in the hands of artists.

Freedom from censorship allowed artists to test the boundaries of good taste. Artists, who never had material wealth, could now explore expression in all areas including sexual pleasure through visual forms. Especially using taboo symbols, specifically nakedness, embraces and intimate places to both stand for artistic freedom and comment on their inner emotional states. Art is considered to be the «revelation of an individual's personality» which if a group of artists exhibit a uniformity of purpose, becomes a movement (Phillips, 1918, p. 101). Even though Ukrainian artists have embraced freedom of expression, their individuality is still too extreme to form such a movement.

This short period of excessive sexual imagery faded as the economic reality of the 1990s took hold (Bigler, 1996). As with all art worlds, only a small percentage of artists are financially successful and visible. The Ukrainian artists who stayed within their own culture either experimented with new media or used traditional media to forge a uniquely Ukrainian and local critique on the contemporary world.

Two artists, one male and one female, exemplify the Ukrainian approach to the figure in the 1990s and 2000s – Alexander Roitburd and Vlada Ralko. Other Ukrainian artists played with media and various postmodernist interpretations of visual language and the discredited inheritances from the Soviet Union, but these two artists concentrated on their version of the figure, its use as a symbol of life and as a way to comment on the present day life in Ukraine.

Roitburd travelled back through time and reconnected to the early 20th century, avoiding the Soviet aesthetics that his contemporaries grappled with. He assumed the role of genius by simply aping the activities of early Modernist artists such as Picasso. By assuming this role, he gave himself the flexibility to assume any role in creating art spicing his art with a clownish aspect. The artist's ac-

tivities became a game in itself, a lifestyle in itself. Even when Roitburd creates artworks that strictly follow the rules of Modernism, his admiration is also in the spirit of play.

He simply reinterprets earlier masterpieces so that they become a part of Ukrainian culture. What was lost for eighty years suddenly comes back. Whether it is Max Beckman's black lines or the compositional structures of Picasso, they are changed through a non-serious playfulness that combines Ukrainian subject matter with clean and accomplished painting technique.

There is no Roitburd style, except that which he chooses to employ. Even when he resembles Picasso's use of cutup compositions and bright colors that push forward the passion and desire in a digestible manner, it is with a knowing smile. There is none of the violence of Picasso in his work, as it is not a creative process but a reinterpretation that both examines what is being shown and how it is to be perceived, both postmodern concerns, as well as playing on the audience's expectations and knowledge of famous Modernist artworks. After all, Picasso seen is a less an artist than as a symbol of creative genius in the late 20th century. Roitburd reveals his goal of playing the part of artistic genius, of creating a mythology that will be remembered, connected to other artists of the past. In doing so, he elevates Ukrainian art. There is no reason Ukrainians would not also have been a part of these developments if allowed to do so.

Taking advantage of the non-seriousness of his painting, Roitburd can paint scenes reminiscent of Impressionists and Modernists in exploring accepted visual genres such as the nude, relationships between friends, sensual colors he reveals an already accepted version of eroticism that does not challenge but joins the near past. His refinement of technique assures the public of his craftsmanship while his referencing of the past shows his understanding of design and formalism (Robertson, & McDaniel, 1999).

His eroticism is easily described in words. It is not an invention but an exploration in what was formerly banned. The Postmodernist mixing of styles, techniques while reconnecting with Art history creates a contemporary Ukrainian art that can happily fit with the rest of the world. Roitburd's goal seems to be not to challenge but to simply enjoy freedom.

His sensuality is to enjoy life in itself, but Roitburd suggests visually this pleasure comes at the price of survival and that the figures are playing with fire. The darkness in the pictures comes directly from Picasso, who was as fascinated with death as he was with sex. However, for Picasso this was a personal discovery but for Roitburd it is a learned one. Roitburd plays around and is at a distance from reality. The paintings advertise, through the use of dark colors and the excessive gestures of the figures, that it is safe to play in a fictional world, but reality is something different. The artworks seem preconceived, without the faults and flaws that would come from grasping at truth. Paintings like these are a juggling show, where

there is no risk of losing – it is swimming in shallow water with a few careful movements. What is accentuated?

Roitburd sees the role of an artist as part of society, where adults can relax and regress. By enjoying the visual balancing acts he produces using craftsmanship which are combined with subject matter that hints at suffering and darkness, he creates a commercially acceptable symbol of art that acts as an adult's playground. In creating desirably commercial cultural objects made for the Ukrainian market, Roitburd created a form of self-affirmation (Townsend, & Sood, 2012) and negation of the sense of threat in unstable times.

The enjoyment of Independent Ukrainian is clear here, soothing the public into accepting freedom in spite of its reservations. Roitburd promotes the experiential view that focuses on the hedonistic nature of consumption (Holbrook, & Hirschman, 1982), of enjoying art and the present.

His adherence to this concept what limits Roitburd's art, especially as it continues through to contemporary times. He rejects risking moving into less controllable areas and instead continues to play with other artist's achievements but also suffers from repeating returns.

His paintings become a touchstone for reducing fear of freedom but also lose the poignant meaning of embracing Modernism they had in the 1990s. The public now moves faster than in the past and had already voraciously consumed mass media and all its taboos and clichés. Freedom changed to Capitalism with the right to consume taking center stage for the Ukrainian public.

Roitburd, like Picasso, is obsessed with the interpretations of classic canvases, however for Roitburd these are not only paintings, but any image that has caught hold of the popular imagination.

Roitburd's Modernist style doesn't question the male point of view and instead revels in the joys of the masculine lifestyle. Although women are active in the paintings, they are less so than the men. The images recall the everyday lifestyle of Soviet families who themselves were informed by European traditions in their free time. There is a warmth to Roitburd's paintings, not simply in the use of hot colors and energetic lines, but in the relations between figures and towards the viewers.

This is strongly contrasted by Ralko's paintings that take place two decades later. Ralko's works are also informed by Europe, but instead she chooses the colder, sharper, less dramatic styles in which to depict the present – a present that is different to the one Roitburd references.

Again, Ralko's style negates any faults or confusion. She is a post-modernist who follows the mixing of styles into a coherent message, however unlike Roitburd, Ralko embraces the politics of her time, more so than other Ukrainian artists. However, unlike Roitburd, she doesn't fashion personal expressions but personal points of view.

Her paintings are a communication, but one that does not seduce through technique or visual juggling. It is a clean and sharp incision with only one message for the audience.

The paintings show a clearly thought out process of drawing, which she adheres to even during the painting process. Color and texture obey the diagrammatic figures. Her critical attitude is achieved with personalizing (Hale, 2014).

Ralko prefers clear communication, the language of business rather than Roitburd's language of politics. Where one plays the victor, the other plays the victim. In all images, Ralko takes on the role of machine, of a camera that records the equations taking place in contemporary life. If late capitalism has transformed everything into a market and art is also something to be traded, then Ralko observes these transactions, but not of the personal and every day, instead she takes on the genre of history painting and seeks to detail the transactions of the nation's life.

The imagery is always from the nation's point of view, even when figures are being dissected. Ukraine is presented as a minority identity, which internalizes its suffering and endures violence, both internal and external (Siebers, 2017).

Ralko's colors are extremely cold, pure and symbolic (Elliott, 1958). She separates the imagery into their allotted spaces. There is no interaction but instead the impression of newly dead things.

Ralko's is a forensic eye like Manet (Beeny, 2013). She depicts the scene after the crime, when the criminals are absent, and even the victims are gone and only the evidence is left. Even her drawings are created as if from reconstructions of crimes. There is no present in Ralko's paintings but the distance of the near past.

As Roitburd offers self-affirmation in the 1990s, Ralko exhibits evidence of the opposite reactions in her works, since pain disables self-affirmation, emancipation and empowerment, producing instead a desire for recognition» (Siebers, 2012, p. 112).

Ralko's artistic achievement is not only to communicate this but to transform it into fun. A macabre fun similar to that of pulling the wings of insects, poking dead cats, of investigating the nature of viruses, of seeing how things work. We are left with the results of destruction but are able to act, rather than stay silenced.

The evolution of Ukrainian fun began as a dangerous gift that only the brave indulged in until it was absorbed in its lowest forms by the masses, but then, in the 2010s it has strengthen until it achieves its rightful place – as a tool to combat trauma and horror (Good, & Hinton, 2016).

Ralko is a contemporary war artist, due to her own choice of creating a diary like series of drawings about the current strife in Ukraine. Art is traditionally aimed at promoting peace, however to attain the best in life people must look at current problems (Burr, 1918, p. 63). Even while she has fun trying to express the pain of contemporary life, she is able to show that it is an abnormal life, one that has no destination apart from the aftermath of destruction, which can only be seen with emotionally controlled scientific curiosity (Belfiore, 2010).

She courts fear to generate excitement, which is a historical strategy for female artists (Bann, 2000). The primary subject matter is whatever assemblage of symbols that construct the contemporary situation, in most cases a variation on the attack on the defenseless, she pastes on characterless backgrounds, the secondary subject is always the fear of uncaring contemporary life. Ralko's paintings are pleas and prayers for rescue and help from a rational, civilized Western world (Dorsch, 2007).

In erotic art, there is a sense of identity and presence that the viewer can participate in emotionally and usually that involves questions that touch people's fears deeply.

Ralko's figures are diagrams not personalities, so they stand in for the viewer. It is not the figure that is cut, but the viewer themselves. It is by taking on the painter's point of view that Ralko's paintings open up to the viewer (Brown, 2010).

Ralko uses the figure as a child would – to tell a story. The figure and figurative painting are being used, rather than the artist being used by them.

When an academic painting is produced, the figure is in control. There is an expectation of a certain type. And while there is a Ralko-type, there is no expectation of it. Ralko makes the figure act the way it does because she wants it to.

Foucault argued that social control works best if it is unconscious and unseen, that propaganda only works when it works on the body, inducing fear and shame for the self that is then used to control and train the person (Tarnopolsky, 2004). Ralko investigates the effects of the contemporary wartime propaganda that attacks not with words or even images but through the direct, controlled and apologetic use of violence and abuse.

Ralko is further removed from commerciality than other Ukrainian artists, she does not censor her taste, although she does compromise her paintings for the audience. In reacting to the current crisis, she dredges up difficult feelings that would usually stay submerged (Dublin, 1990). There is a balance between letting enough of the subject to be seen and having its abhorrent aspects softened by the delights of formal sensuality.

Sensuality is suspect but acceptable in Ukrainian art, perhaps because its inescapable.

It is actively dismantled in many male Ukrainian artists, who remove it from the body and position in activity. Ralko keeps sensuality in the entirety of the figure, even when exhibition its amputations the form feels once whole.

The cleanliness of the color allows for a quiet contemplation even when engaged in symbolic torturing of the body. Of course, Ralko is even further distanced from the body than Francis Bacon, an artist she resembles, except Bacon used paint's unpredictability to create imagery (Cappock, 2002), while Ralko forces paint to obey her, primarily through the use of discordant colors that play, again, at a childish view of the world. Children color in flat uniform colors

(Hilbert, 2005), and Ralko uses the same approach, in order to purify her communication. To make her message clear.

The reaction to the victims in her painting is one of action. There was a past transgression and now there is a present evaluation. Ralko is of the younger generation of artists who grew up during the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The ones who did not instigate the changes, but were the recipients of those changes. She is one of those who come in as the second chapter.

Unlike earlier Ukrainian artists, she is not marked with the fatality of failure, of being forced to accept difficult conditions, she has the power to resist them with alternative ideas (Ledeneva, Bailey, Barron, Curro, & Teague, 2018).

However, she also doesn't have the wild joy at playing with artistic formal elements that Western artists did. She doesn't celebrate her freedom; she sees where it will take her. However, all her imagery and technique keeps itself under control. Ralko fears the emotional consequences of unfettered Eros, which is no surprise considering she wrestles with the plain facts of life that are «weighted with our own personal death» (Miller, 2015, p. 155).

There is a sense of life under a distant threat and that power can prove superior to life – at least a pleasant life. Ralko paints the present, of her own invented world, but it is presented as a moment which will very soon bitterly fall upon itself. Using thick lines and flat, smooth colors she is about to create nausea (Wright, 1998).

There is a defeated energy in the figures, as if they have made their pyrrhic victory, but now a second battle approaches. Their desire has shaken them free but has also condemned them to face the aftermath in the 21st Century.

For Ralko, the day of destruction is always together with the days beforehand and the seconds afterward, which both feel the same length.

Happiness is the criterion of Ukrainian art – evident through both folk art and the fine artworks in the three decades since Independence. These two artists show, even though their aim is to be European artists than merely local Ukrainian ones, their style of creating is filled with energy and optimism, a wish for a better life, allowing them the latitude to engage in difficult subject matter or to hint at the darkness in everyday life.

Obviously, fun requires skill in order to truly let go and feel freedom. Skill is a type of control (Newell, 1985), which Ukrainians constantly apply to fun, in all its forms. There is no relinquishment of sense when engaged in Ukrainian fun. It is always kept in its strict boundaries, aimed towards an emotional effect, like a well told anecdote.

Conclusions **5**

It is here that the truth of Ukrainian life is allowed to grow, with all its blemishes and complexities. Ukraine is an east European country with a tragic past and a difficult present but filled with a belief in a good future (Mandelbaum, 1996). The fun pursued is in order to heal

the wounds and pain of the past. Nostalgia doesn't hold Ukrainian culture, even though it also has its traditions and values, because it is a culture that is engaged in the present, in life, in the problems and solutions that make up living. There is no ghost in Ukraine that people must live up to, there is only the question of what to do to live life fully.

Eros in Ukrainian Art since Independence means that the past, which the West and Russia obsess about, must be left behind. The truth of what Ukrainian culture independently values must be realized, even in the rest of the world fails to understand or reward it.

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