

Oksana REMENIAKA

Head of the Department
of the Modern Art Research Institute,
Candidate in Art Studies, Senior researcher

THE DIASPORA VISUAL ARTS OF THE INTER-WAR AND POST-WAR PERIODS

“As historians and writers, we can give an outline of our history, while you, artists, are able to provide a vision of the events. Creating a great vision of our Motherland, do your best to create it!” These inspiring words belong to Yuri Lypa, a prominent Ukrainian writer and publicist, who often repeated them in his lectures to his audience—the members of the Ukrainian Artistic Group *Spokii* (“Serenity” in English) [1, 175]. In 1927, besieged by postwar hardships, torn from their looted homeland, some young talented Ukrainian students of the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts formed an artistic group and called it “Serenity”, in spite of all the disturbing circumstances. At first, these and other representatives of the talented artistic youth of the inter-war and post-war generations, found themselves in Ukrainian migrant camps, in which, under extremely complicated conditions, they managed to promote the teeming art activity and later, already in emigration, continued “to create a great vision” of their distant homeland.

Historical and political circumstances during the inter-war and post-war period were conducive to Ukraine’s losing a substantial passionarian part of its population; the Ukrainian intellectual elite had to leave their motherland in order to save their lives. This “great emigration exodus” caused a potent rift of cultural processes in Ukraine by giving momentum to the tragic experiment on cultural assets of one of Europe’s biggest states—on one hand, it was a challenge for the Ukrainian artists’ vitality in a foreign land, on the other hand, it was the scope of resistance to total censorship and dissimulation under ideological pressure upon those who remained in the homeland occupied by Bolsheviks.

The Ukrainian artists, who had to settle outside their motherland, were convinced that one day they would come back home. They were also aware that, first and foremost, it would be the return of their artistic heritage created in the free world.

So, this brings up a question: what is the place of emigrant artists’ creative legacy in forming the holistic view of the Ukrainian Visual Arts of the above-mentioned period? Is it the place these artists had always dreamed of taking and had been preparing themselves for all their lives.

It is also crucial to understand the spiritual situation of creative environment in emigration: how did the emigrant artists managed to combine the traditional values brought along from their homeland with modern endeavor and the natural aspiration of any painter to be incorporated in the world artistic context?

Bearing in mind that history has no subjunctive mood, there emerges an involuntary question: what the holistic picture of the 1930s and 1970s Ukrainian art would have been like, had it developed naturally beyond the clamps of socialist realism, without the “iron curtain” with breezy gaps created in it by the Khrushchev Thaw by way of Polish, Hungarian, Romanian art magazines that were the source from which the artists of Soviet Ukraine used to devour any information about the world art tendencies they could find?

A complicated spiritual process of getting acquainted with the world cultural heritage, the necessity to keep a clear and sober view of the native people’s culture, the resistance to higher and higher quality fraud of the national art produced by the Soviet authorities for export, with the aim of propaganda, the meticulous work on preserving the national heritage and, at the same time, the constant struggle for physical survival—here is the path of that artistic part of the Ukrainian community in emigration who declared their spiritual loyalty to the Ukrainian world.

The Ukrainian emigrant artists of the inter-war and postwar periods played an exceptionally important role by showing the trend in which the Ukrainian art would have developed, had it not been placed under the total command of communist censorship. In this sense, in the categories of artistic traditions, the interwar generation of artists was inseparably connected with the postwar generation.

These artists lived outside their homeland, in which they had grown up physically and spiritually, and it put a responsibility burden on their conscience: aspiring for recognition in the artistic world, they always kept creating the “vision” of Ukraine in their works. P. Kovzhun won numerous awards at various European and American exhibitions; M. Butovych, V. Maslyutyn, R. Lisovsky, S. Hordynsky, M. Andriyenko, S. Borachok, M. Hlushchenko, V. Hmelyuk, M. Krychevsky, V. Perebyynis, M. Dolnytska, Ya. Hnizdovsky, P. Holodnyy (jr.), M. Osinchuk, P. Mehyk, a.o. gained the world recognition.

It was no coincidence that one of the trends in which these artists worked and did research was the sacred art that was a domain of lethal danger in Soviet Ukraine since the extermination of Mykhailo Boychuk and his school. The diaspora artists were filling up that lacuna by frescoing Ukrainian churches of the USA and creating works of art devoted to the sacred theme—here we see profound understanding of the icon’s ecclesiastic essence, its mission and destination, the clear realization of their own creative manner in the modern interpre-

tation of Byzantium and Kyiv sacral tradition, penchant for figurative abstractionism and the search for contemporary language for the semiotic system of sacred art.

In 1952 the most potent Ukrainian artists got together in New York to establish the Ukrainian Artists' Association in the USA ("Obiednannia mystyvs ukrainsiv v Amerytsi"—OMUA). The sculptor S. Lytvynenko was unanimously elected its head, while a group of artists organized by P. Mehyk created an autonomous branch of OMUA in Philadelphia. The activity of OMUA and other artistic associations which were one of the forms of self-preservation, as well as a spiritual harbor for Ukrainian artists in an alien cultural environment is one of the areas of my academic interests.

A paramount event for the Ukrainian diaspora occurred in Chicago in 1971. Initiated by Dr. Ahil Khreptovsky, Kostyantyn Melonadis, Mykhailo Urban and Vasyl Kachurovsky, the Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art (UIMA) was established. It became one of the few artistic communities "incorporated as a general culture non-governmental organization", the main aim of which was to "promote contemporary artistic creativity in the Ukrainian community as well as to spread the name of Ukraine in culture-forming structures of the American environment".

The Institute of Modern Art became the place in which the concept of Ukrainian art development in exile was defined: "The occupant in Ukraine stands in the way of the uninhibited development of the Ukrainian culture institution, so the contemporary forms of that culture can and should be established here, where nothing hampers the free progress of creative ideas".

At the time when the uninhibited development of art and culture in Ukraine was out of question, the contemporary forms of Ukrainian culture took a new lease of life in emigration owing to the unceasing work of artists, who were the bearers of that culture.

The younger generation of artists, mentally connected with the heritage and achievements of the inter-war generation, elaborated the domain of modern art, the development of which in Ukraine was also on the margin: L. Hutsalyuk, M. Urban, K. Melonadis, O. Mazurok, V. Prokuda, R. Pachovsky, Kh. Olenska, A. Olenska-Petryshyn, a.o. did their best to break free from the purely ethnic approach to art issues. They struggled with the provincial aestheticism in artistic environment and aspired to deal with problems of universal scope.

The awareness of the artists' role and responsibilities towards their nation brought about quite a fierce dispute in the artistic circles of the Ukrainian diaspora of America. The discussion between modernists and traditionalists was related to the ways of Ukrainian art development in exile. Free access to spiritual treasures of the European culture gave birth to new ideas, new aestheticism

and the comprehension of ultimate necessity for every artist to become an organic part of the contemporary world art environment, which did not always accord with the feeling of responsibility towards the lost homeland and profound sentiments for the traditional Ukrainian culture.

A particularly ardent discussion happened between the adherents of the traditional art and the advocates of the modern trend. It revealed the generation gap, the essence of which was reflected in the verbal battle that thrived on the pages of the *Svoboda* newspaper around the panel related to the topic *Where We Stand in Art* (the Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences (UVAN), January 30, 1977). The polemic discussion was going on between Petro Andrusiv (the former member of the *Spokii* Artistic Group) and the young generation representatives—Arcadia Olenska-Petryshyn and Iryna Petrenko-Fedyshyn [1,102]. However, that dispute, like other verbal battles, could not bring about the ultimate understanding of the issue, if not completed with visual imagery, because the dispute also required pictorial arguments the research of which is no less important.

While in Ukraine the works by O. Arkhypenko were destroyed and his name was under stringent prohibition, two of the master's talented disciples in the USA, Irena Bukoyemska and Ivanna Pryyma, together with Mykhailo Dzyndra carried on the famous sculptor's formal endeavor and aesthetic ideology. The prospects of the research in this trend can be quite interesting, all the more so, that it was only after the 1990s that Ukraine discovered Arkhypenko. Whereas M. Dzyndra's works are easily accessible for reviewing and studying in Lviv (the exhibition in the Pinzel Museum, the Modern Sculpture Dzyndra Museum in Bryukhovychi), the original works of the aforementioned sculptors are little-known in Ukraine and require further detailed learning.

Artistic assets created far beyond the homeland require profound examination, the ultimate goal of which is the reproduction of the holistic view of Ukrainian art of the 1930s and 1970s, in which the heritage of diaspora artists had to fill up the lacunas in the national art's specific trends, which, by force of circumstances, could not be developed comprehensively in their motherland—these are mainly the formal endeavor and sacred art traditions.

To a great extent the mental consequences of the potent experiment on the cultural heritage of Ukraine in the 1930s and 1970s: on one hand, it was the freedom challenge in a foreign land, while on the other hand, it was the ordeal of total censorship and ideological pressure in the homeland occupied by Bolsheviks.

The Ukrainian emigrant artists always emphasized their appurtenance primarily to Ukrainian culture: P. Andrusiv, S. Hordynsky, Yu. Soloviy, P. Mehyk, and others never failed to point out in their works that their being outside the

motherland was a forced and temporary occurrence, that the main role of the emigrant artists' works lay in "forming the new life of free Ukraine", because they would "be the only works of art created by a free artistic Ukrainian person at this stage" [2, 176–177] (Yu. Soloviy). Meanwhile, the present-day Ukrainian Art Studies tend to view the creative legacy of emigrant artists, who are physically and spiritually rooted in the Ukrainian tradition, as a separate block almost outside the context of Ukrainian art.

Література

1. *Andrusiv P.* Art is the weapon of power. New York; Paris; Sydney; Toronto, 1987. 437 p.
2. *Soloviy Yu.* About things greater than stars // *Sučasnist.* 1978. Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 77-92691.