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## THE TRANSFORMATION OF FEMALE IMAGE-SYMBOLS IN THE MODERN UKRAINIAN VISUAL CULTURE: THE TIME OF INDEPENDENCE

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### Abstract

The purpose of the article is to consider and study the transformation of female image-symbols as a manifestation of cultural form in the visual culture of modern Ukraine, to outline their features; to reveal their influence on the life of the people as a whole and female representatives in particular; to establish relationships between the images of visual culture and the lives of Ukrainian women, who are the prototypes of their creation. Research methodology. The following theoretical methods of scientific knowledge are applied: analysis (to determine the essence and features of female image-symbols of the visual culture of Ukraine, the reasons for their formation, to identify the relationships and consequences for culture and society); synthesis (to combine the collected facts and research materials into a single whole for the comprehensive coverage of the issue of creation, transformations, and manifestations of the studied images). With the help of the empirical method, a generalisation and comparison are carried out, namely, the comparison of the forms of expression of visual images of women, their characteristics according to the time of creation, place, and manifestation in creative work, socio-cultural sphere and other spheres of human life, tracing similarities and differences. The hermeneutic research method with semiotic understanding was used to interpret the images and their symbolic meanings. Scientific novelty. The article is the first attempt to conduct a general cultural analysis of female image-symbols in the visual modern culture of Ukraine, their transformation and influence on a person as a subject and carrier of culture, in particular on women, are traced. Conclusions. The author of the article considers and analyses the transformation of female image-symbols as a manifestation of the cultural form in the visual culture of modern Ukraine, identifies their features, traces changes taking into account the development of society and culture; reveals their influence on the life of the people as a whole and female representatives in particular; determines and studies relationships, factors of influence and conditions of their creation.

**Keywords:** female images; visual culture of Ukraine; cultural symbols; man and culture; woman in culture; cultural values; visual art

## Introduction

A woman is an integral part of society, a subject of culture, its bearer and repeater. However, the study of feminine traces in the culture of the world and Ukraine in particular, the experience of women is insufficient. The historical prerequisites for this were the patriarchal structure of society, which can be traced to this day. Since a patriarchal society is built on the dominance of men, everything related to women is sometimes considered second-rate or not worth attention. Because of that many problems arise on the basis of inequality. The modern progressive civilised world chooses the trend of building gender equality and the harmonious existence of both genders with equal opportunities. After all, it is possible to build a healthy, full-fledged society with a happy future only under such conditions. The study of the transformation of female images of symbols in the visual modern culture of Ukraine reveals a considerable layer of information about the time and position of women in general cultural and social terms. Thus, it allows studying and monitoring the interrelationships of cultural processes, on the analysis of which, you can come to conclusions about what contributes to the development of culture and what does not. Each of the transformations inevitably brings changes to the culture, which are important to monitor, analyse and research in order to study the value orientations of society, its moods in order to consider and form vectors of further development.

The study of this topic includes a combination of the image as a socio-cultural construct, a person, namely a representative of the female gender, as a subject of culture and visual culture, in particular of Ukraine. Therefore, this problem requires a comprehensive understanding, which will help to find previously unknown relationships, factors influencing the creation of images, and their impact on the life of society and its further cultural development. Nowadays, it is possible to distinguish studies related to the topic of gender in culture by Ukrainian authors. For example, S. V. Kotova-Oliinyk in the article "Visual Representations of Gender in Culture: Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the Study of the Problem" (2009) analyses modern mass visual culture and the main theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of the issue of gender representation. The mass culture of the Soviet and post-Soviet periods is taken into account, where some visual images of femininity and masculinity are considered. Special attention is paid to the latest masculine representations in modern Ukrainian mass media discourse, in advertising, in particular. The research also outlines the future perspective of the mentioned topic (p. 1).

An important work in the study of women's traces in the culture of Ukraine is the work of ethnologist O. Kis "Woman in Traditional Culture" (2008). This monograph is the first historical and ethnological study in Ukraine that examines the gender roles of women and their position within the Ukrainian peasantry. The research allows you to get acquainted with the main stages of the formation of the feminist paradigm in social and cultural anthropology (Kis, 2008). Another thorough study by O. Kis on the subject of women is "Models of Constructing a Woman's Gender Identity in Modern Ukraine" (2003). In his work "Cultural Discourse of Femininity in Mass Culture"

(2007), N. Ye. Donii examines the new forms of culture emerging in the Modern and Postmodern era, and with them new stereotypes and clichés inherent in mass culture. The topic of objectification, which the image of a woman undergoes, is raised, and its change and axiological dimension are traced. T. Khrapach in the article “Gender Approach in Cultural Studies” (2020) considers the idea of gender equality as something that should shape the future new Ukrainian society. The author refers to famous philosophers — Aristotle, J.-J. Rousseau, I. Kant, F. Nietzsche, noting that they supported the idea of female subjectivity and naturalness. He also cites opponents of feminist ideology — A. Schopenhauer, Z. Freud, and others. T. Khrapach traces the rise of the concept of gender equality in individual works of French scientists Voltaire and D. Diderot. The question of women in war, gender aspects of war is also raised (Khrapach, 2020, pp. 146–147).

It is important to note that foreign works had a significant impact on the research of gender studies, as well as feminine images and women’s experience in culture and society in Ukraine. One of the outstanding researchers of this topic is Simone de Beauvoir and her fundamental work *The Second Sex* (2017), published in 1949. The study analyses the place and role of women in life, raises issues of gender inequality, as well as systemic oppression of women. The author finds out and establishes the reasons for this situation of women and the mechanisms that lead to it. This publication is considered a landmark of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. “The appearance of *The Second Sex* in the first years of independence was of great importance for the rereading of the history of national culture. “It was because of de Beauvoir that we knew Ukrainian society as a patriarchal society at that time”, says V. Ageeva (2017), a professor at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. The scholar also notes that at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Ukraine, at that time, “there were not only serious theoretical justifications and interpretations but also a well-organised women’s movement”. We are talking about the “Union of Ukrainian Women”, which operated throughout Galicia in branches (Ageeva, 2017). As for the study of the vision of women in Ukrainian culture, L. Ushkalov in his book *Skovoroda, Shevchenko, Feminism...* (2014) examines “The Women’s Question in Ukrainian Culture of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century” (2014). The researcher carries the study by starting his analysis through the writings of L. Zakher-Mazokh about Ukrainian women and verifying the realism of his statements through the study of Ukrainian songs, literary works, and the figure of women in them. The author relies on research on women’s issues by I. Franko and M. Drahomanov, M. Pavlyk, O. Kobylanska, N. Kobrynska, M. Vovchok, L. Ukrainka, F. Pruhnikova, and many other authors. He lists publications in chronological order. The author also studies the position of women during repressions by the authorities. Research is also being conducted comparing female images and their manifestation in culture between different folks. For example, I. Shkitska in her publication “The Image of a Woman in Ukrainian and Jewish Cultures” (2021) compares the position of women in the socio-cultural space, describes the manifestation of the cult of the mother and outlines the trends of changing the image of women today. The author notes that “the image of a woman as an object of scientific research has long attracted the attention of scientists from various fields of knowledge — ethnology, sociology, gender linguistics, philosophy, religious studies, etc” (2021, p. 41), which cannot be disagreed

with. The image of a woman becomes the subject of research in fine art, which in turn forms visual culture. For example, T. Melnyk in his work "The figure of a Woman in Modern Visual Art" describes the "special feature of female imagery in various types of art (video art, painting, performative practices)" during the independence of Ukraine, with the help of analysis and systematisation. The study also examines feminist-oriented art and the processes associated with its development and stagnation in the country. A. Honcharenko examines "Female Images in the Modern Urban Sculpture of Ukraine" (2018). It is worth noting the narrow specialisation in genres and types of art, in the analysis of studies of female images in art, which in turn creates a wide field for research and at the same time complicates its general analysis.

### ■ Purpose of the article

The purpose of the article is to consider and study the transformation of female image-symbols as a manifestation of cultural form in the visual culture of modern Ukraine, to outline their features, changes; to reveal their influence on the life of the people as a whole and female representatives in particular; to establish relationships between the images of visual culture and the lives of Ukrainian women, who are the prototypes of their creation.

### ■ Main research material

The concept of "symbol" is considered, in order to investigate the transformation of female images-symbols in Ukrainian modern visual culture. Today, there are many definitions of the word "symbol". L. Dovbnya and T. Tovkailo, in the study "Symbol as an Ethno-spiritual Code of the Nation" (2021, p. 55), inspect this concept and refer to the research of other scientists. The study provides the following interpretation of the symbol according to S. Gatalska (2005): "A symbol is a meaningful image (F. Schelling), a meaningful organ of the image, the key of the image to the essence" (p. 194). The definition of symbolism by E. Cassirer, who sees in it the fundamental function of thought that determines the types of worldviews, is considered. S. Gatalska (2005) assigns a special place to the symbol among the diversity of cultural realities and calls it the most important mechanism of cultural memory. "As an integrator of human experience, it encompasses all cultural 56 phenomena and elements with its semantic field, revealing the most complete and universal form of expression of human meaning and human relations" (p. 194).

Therefore, female-image symbols are also certain mechanisms of cultural memory, by which it can be explored and understood. The female image-symbol in culture is endowed with the worldview of society. An image-symbol can be interpreted as a socio-cultural construct assembled from certain meanings, which is expressed in visual culture through visual arts, media, etc. O. Kis in the study "Models of Constructing a Woman's Gender Identity in Modern Ukraine" (2003) states that the changes brought about by the independence of Ukraine destroyed the monopoly of the ideological ideal of femininity of the "Soviet super-woman" that existed at that time (within the existing gender contract "working mother"). The axiological dimension of society is starting to transform, new orientations in behaviour models, moral norms, and life standards are emerging. O. Kis singles out two main sources at that

time for forming a “new system of values” (2003). One of them is “the ideology of Ukrainian nationalism (or the Ukrainian national-state idea)” (2003). The author calls the second source “Western models” of modern civilisation, which appeared to be something attractive and new. The author singles out “two main models of femininity — Berehynia and Barbie” (2003), which were offered to Ukrainian women. Their patriarchal origin is noted (Kis, 2003).

N. Ye. Donii in the study “Cultural Discourse of Femininity in Mass Culture” (2007, p. 7). characterises the 80s and 90s as a time when ideals are dictated by celebrities whose mannerisms are imitated. Since on the TV screen they are in certain conditions different from ordinary life, the standard becomes irrational. The emergence of the power of the body over the mind in advertising is described. Mass art is thus abstracted from the real female body, according to the author. Now it had to meet the standards of beauty in men’s opinion. There is a problem with the sexualisation of women. At the same time, as a result, the desire of the female half of humanity for a ghostly ideal is followed, sometimes even to the detriment of your health. For example, anorexia among models and their followers, changes in appearance with the help of plastic surgery, painful procedures, uncomfortable clothes, and shoes. All this is done for the sake of conforming to the invented canons.

The predominance of male narratives, after gaining independence, which promoted the aesthetics of physicality, sexuality, is also noted by the researcher T. Melnyk in her work “The Figure of a Woman in Modern Visual Art of Ukraine” (2019). The researcher cites the image of the muse, who is the inspiration of the artist, as an example. The 2007 exhibition of Hrytsia Erde’s project “Females and Nests” in Drohobych is also mentioned. The project aimed to “present women’s bodies in a realistic light, devoid of glamorous decorations: tired and deformed under the influence of reproductive processes and work” (Melnyk, 2019, p. 146). However, it was subjected to devastating criticism and closed. Such a reaction may indicate that the imaginary ideal of the image-symbol of a woman, which was formed after the independence of Ukraine, existed until that time. Society was not ready to see a real live image of the female body.

Let’s return to Berehynia’s form, which was singled out by O. Kis at the same time as Barbie’s method. The main content of the sense in the image of Berehynia is to bring the female reproductive function to full. The scholar emphasises this figurative symbolism of the main vocation, which is natural. In this way, the eternal image-symbol of the mother is manifested. The author finds a connection between the image of Berehynia and a real Ukrainian woman of that time in the fact that a Ukrainian mother takes care of all the problems of her children. The protest, according to the author, is a flaw about the impact of normative pressure on a woman. Meanwhile, the father’s role remains “purely formal” (Kis, 2003).

While analysing in the article “Female Images in Modern Urban Sculpture of Ukraine” (2018), A. Honcharenko points out that “usually until the 2000s, these were either images of the Madonna (in the western regions) or image-symbols of the “Motherland”, “Mourning mother” in the monumental sculpture of the Soviet era” (Honcharenko, 2018, p. 125). There are also monuments to outstanding women, and that’s where their diversity ended. The author also mentions the image of Berehynia

as an identifier of the ancient Slavic pagan religion. Berehynia symbolises the mother of all living things, who protects her home and family. Ukraine and Ukrainians, in a more global sense.

O. Kis sees the danger in using this image in politics as a component of the national idea in such a figure as a symbol of Mother Berehynia. The ideas under which a universal motherhood is meant, without other female representations in society (2003).

Another type of symbolic image is a praying woman. Faith as a sacred component of culture is a powerful unifying factor that is reflected in works of art., especially in difficult and traumatic times for society. This image is, often, embodied by a mother who is waiting for her son from war. A. Honcharenko notes that the image of the Motherland is transformed in this way. The personalisation of the created sculptures and the modesty of their image during the time of Independence are also noted.

It is worth considering the image of the mother in modern cinema while investigating its transformation in the modern visual culture of Ukraine. After all, cinema is a form of audiovisual art that can spread quickly and massively, especially if it's a series on public television. Let's consider the television series *Mama* (2020). The image of the mother in this audiovisual film changes from an outdated — inactive one, limited once in the past only to suffering at home for her military son, to an active one. The mother becomes free, able to actively react to the events that happen to her, and is the leader of her own destiny (Zaspa, 2021, p. 69).

Nowadays, a particularly important and acute topic for Ukraine, which finds its expression in audiovisual art and culture, is the reflection of war. Women in the main and secondary roles embody female images in the realities of war. One of the examples is the series *The Guard* (2015–2017), which highlights the Russian intervention in Ukraine, due to which the heroes have to defend their Motherland. The female image here is embodied by Nat, one of the main characters. She is the most skilled soldier as a sniper of the reconnaissance group. In addition, she has the title of biathlon champion. "The main leitmotif of Nata from the series *The Guard* becomes equality with men in all manifestations of the military, which protects its state" (Zaspa, 2021, p. 68). However, the image of Nata is capable of showing tenderness and love for her beloved. That is, the heroine can manifest herself in different ways, depending on the situation, and is not a hostage to the image of a strict warrior endowed with masculine qualities. Another female character in this series is Maryla, a Polish journalist. Her image is depicted as a professional in her life's work, faithful to her completely, sometimes even fanatically. The girl repeatedly risks her own life, while performing her journalistic duty. "There is absolute parity in the gender roles of this series, which is caused by the war" (Zaspa, 2021, p. 68).

O. Kis singles out two more female images as alternative models of femininity, "Businesswoman and Feminist" (2003), noting their marginal position in Ukrainian public discourse. In turn, the scholar refers to the Ukrainian researcher T. Zhurzhenko, who considers "Businesswoman as an independent type of identity, defining her special Ukrainian features" (2003). Among such special features, the following are distinguished: maintaining a balance between work and home; perception as one who is forced to work under some circumstances; endowment her with traits of Bere-

hynia in the environment of conducting her affairs. The image of a feminist in society often carries a negative emotional colour due to stereotypical ideas and a lack of understanding of the true principles of feminism. O. Kis (2003) finds the reasons for this in "the discrediting of the concept of feminism within the framework of communist ideology and as a result of distortions during Soviet practice".

N. Ye. Donii also writes about the image of a businesswoman, characterising it as "the media-presented image of a superwoman, as a competent, economically independent woman who makes a brilliant career" (2007, p. 8). Leaving behind unequal conditions for obtaining a decent job and payment for the work itself. The research by N. Ye. Donii and O. Kis equally mentions the difficulties faced by the so-called businesswoman. The conflict of images and roles that a businesswoman must embody at the same time is emphasised, which is to "continue to remain an impeccable housewife, a gentle and loving mother and wife, a charming mistress" (Donii, 2007). N. Ye. Donii hopes that once, images of women in visual culture will not traumatise her, but will be called to harmony and health. Such trends are already present in the modern paradigm of optical symbols.

## Conclusions

Consequently, transformations of female image-symbols, as a manifestation of cultural form in the visual culture of modern Ukraine, are considered and researched. In particular, the main image-symbols that are gender models of a woman's identity, which crystallised after Ukraine gained independence, are considered. Their features are outlined, such as a certain set of qualities in accordance with the image, as well as possible stereotypes, and changes in female images in modern Ukraine are traced. The article demonstrates that their influence on the life of the people as a whole and, in particular, on the female representatives, is significant. The influence takes place through public pressure of derived canons of conduct, appearance, moral qualities of one or another female figurative form reflected in the visual culture of society. It is broadcast in some places as generally accepted, even at the state level. All these factors force a woman to either adapt to these requirements or go against them, thereby encountering resistance. It also affects men, who become hostages of patriarchal manifestations in expectations of certain gender behaviour on their part as well. In this way, the relationships between the images of visual culture and the life of society and Ukrainian women, who are the prototypes of their creation, are established. It should be noted that the position of female images is constantly changing and depends on the consciousness of society. Stereotypical forms still exist, but they are gradually weakening with the chosen trends of development towards gender equality. They will be destroyed and, in prospect, leave space for building a free and developed society. The topic gives a wide scope for future research, detailed study, broad and highly specialised analysis.

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## ■ **ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ ЖІНОЧИХ ОБРАЗІВ-СИМВОЛІВ У СУЧАСНІЙ УКРАЇНСЬКІЙ ВІЗУАЛЬНІЙ КУЛЬТУРІ: ЧАС НЕЗАЛЕЖНОСТІ**

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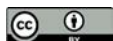
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### ■ **Анотація**

Мета статті — розглянути та дослідити трансформації жіночих образів-символів як вияву культурної форми у візуальній культурі сучасної України, окреслити їх особливості; виявити їх вплив на життя народу в цілому та представниць жіночої статі зокрема; встановити взаємозв'язки між образами візуальної культури та життям українок, які є прототипами їх творення. Методологія дослідження. Застосовано такі теоретичні методи наукового пізнання: аналіз (для визначення сутності та особливостей жіночих образів-символів візуальної культури України, причин їх утворення, виявлення взаємозв'язків та наслідків для культури та соціуму); синтез (для об'єднання зібраних фактів і матеріалів дослідження у єдине ціле заради комплексного висвітлення проблеми творення, трансформацій та виявів досліджуваних образів). За допомогою емпіричного методу здійснено узагальнення та порівняння, а саме зіставлення форм виразу візуальних образів жінки і їх характеристик за часом творення, місцем та виявом у творчості, соціокультурній царині та інших сферах життя людини, простеження схожого та розбіжного. Для тлумачення образів, їх символізму значень використано герменевтичний метод дослідження із семіотичним осмисленням. Наукова новизна. Вперше зроблено спробу загального культурологічного аналізу жіночих образів-символів у візуальній сучасній культурі України, прослідковано їх трансформації й вплив на людину як суб'єкта та носія культури, зокрема на жінок. Висновки. У дослідженні розглянуто й проаналізовано трансформації жіночих образів-символів як вияву культурної форми у візуальній культурі сучасної України, означено їх особливості, простежено зміни з огляду на розвиток суспільства та культури; виявлено їх вплив на життя народу в цілому та представниць жіночої статі зокрема; встановлено й опрацьовано взаємозв'язки, чинники впливу та умови їх творення.

■ **Ключові слова:** жіночі образи; візуальна культура України; культурні символи; людина та культура; жінка в культурі; культурні цінності; візуальне мистецтво



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