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MANIFESTATION OF TRANSCENDENTAL IN ABSTRACT ART (ON THE MATERIAL OF THE LATE 20TH – 21ST CENTURY UKRAINIAN PAINTING)

Marhaychuk N., Osadcha O. Manifestation of Transcendental in Abstract Art (on the material of the late 20th – 21st century Ukrainian painting). Contemporary culture is commonly presented as secular and completely detached from its spiritual roots. This article argues this approach is largely irrelevant nowadays, considering the growing interest towards religious themes in the art of recent decades. Reactualization of sacred is discussed in the connection with the emergence of the new evolving philosophical paradigm, which replaced postmodernism and gradually re-establishes the vertical cultural hierarchy and viability of myth and grand religious narratives. To support the statement, the article draws on the contemporary modes of interpreting religious themes on the samples of the late 20th – 21st century Ukrain-

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ian abstract art dedicated to the Christian motifs and concepts. The language of nonfigurative painting is reviewed in connection with the bases of Christian theology and national traditions of icon painting. The aesthetics of abstract art is claimed to have strong connections with the idea of Transcendental, enabling the painters to give the shape to the spiritual experience and visualize the immaterial. Specific attention is paid to the interpretation of the problem in the regards to the local context and unique characteristics of the Ukrainian artistic process.

Keywords: *transcendent, abstract art, nonfigurative painting, contemporary Ukrainian art, spirituality, re-actualization of sacred.*

Мархайчук Н. В., Осадча О. А. Манифестація трансцендентного в абстрактному мистецтві (на матеріалі українського живопису кінця ХХ — початку ХХІ століття). Сучасна культура зазвичай презентується як секулярна та повністю віддалена від своїх духовних коренів. У даній статті здійснено спробу ствердити застарілість цього твердження для сьогодення, зважаючи на зростаючий інтерес до релігійної тематики в мистецтві останніх десятиріч. Причини реактуалізації сакрального вбачаються у формуванні нової філософської парадигми, яка прийшла на зміну постмодернізму. Вона поступово відновлює вертикальну культурну ієрархію та життєздатність міфа, великих релігійних наративів. Теза підтверджується аналізом сучасних шляхів інтерпретації релігійної тематики в полотнах українського абстрактного мистецтва ХХ–ХХІ століть, присвяченого християнській мотивіці та концептам. Мова нефігуративу розглядається у зв'язку з основами християнської теології та національної іконописної традиції. Естетика абстрактного мистецтва аналізується як така, котра має зв'язки з концепцією трансцендентного, що дозволяє живописцям надавати форму духовному досвідові та візуалізувати нематеріальне. Особливу увагу приділено інтерпретації проблеми з позиції місцевого контексту й розвитку українського художнього процесу.

Ключові слова: *трансцендентне, абстрактне мистецтво, нефігуративний живопис, сучасне українське мистецтво, духовність, реактуалізація сакрального.*

Мархайчук Н. В., Осадчая А. А. Манифестація трансцендентного в абстрактном искусстве (на материале украинской живописи конца ХХ — начала ХХІ века). Современная культура обычно освещается как секулярная и полностью оторванная от своих духовных корней. В данной статье сделана попытка показать устарелость этого утверждения для сегодняшнего дня, учитывая возрастающий интерес к религиозной тематике в искусстве последних десятилетий. Причины реактуализации сакрального усматриваются в формировании новой философской парадигмы, сменившей постмодернизм. Она постепенно возобновляет вертикальную культурную иерархию и жизнеспособность мифа, как и больших религиозных нарративов. Тезис подтверждается анализом современных путей интерпретации религиозной

тематики в полотнах українського абстрактного мистецтва ХХ–ХХІ століть, присвячених християнській мотивації та концептам. Мова йде про нефігуративну живописність, яка розглядається в контексті основ християнської теології та національної іконописної традиції. Її естетика аналізується як така, що дає живописцям можливість надавати форму духовному досвіду та візуалізувати нематеріальне. Особливу увагу приділяється інтерпретації проблеми з позиції місцевого контексту та розвитку українського арт-процесу.

Ключові слова: трансцендентне, абстрактне мистецтво, нефігуративна живописність, сучасне українське мистецтво, духовність, реактуалізація сакрального.

Introduction and objectives. The aspect of contemporary culture that evidences the detachment with the postmodern mentality, with its focus on the immanent side of existence, is the shift of attention on the metaphysical issues. Artists of the recent decades return to the profound perception of reality, acknowledging the dualistic (both immanent and transcendent) nature of art, reconsider the methods of visualising transcendental in art. Being in synchrony with the current international art-processes, Ukrainian art indicates similar tendency, namely in the sphere of non-figurative painting, which has an over-century long local tradition. The tendency is especially evident in the recent years that provide us with numerous pieces connected to the topics of spirituality, sublimity and religion. These observations prompt us to give a closer look at the source of such transformations and analyse the specificity of visualizing transcendental in the works of Ukrainian masters from the 1990s–2000s.

Background. The research of the subject in the local context was strongly affected by the prejudiced and largely negative attitude towards Abstract art in the Soviet art criticism, which claimed it to be the formalistic bourgeois art. Changes in the state of affairs became apparent in the early 1990s, when publications attempting to reconsider the perspective on the nonfigurative legacy appeared (by Leonid Bazhanov and Vladimir Turchin) [1]. The way to a coherent study of the subject was gradual, starting with separate reviews of the works by the “third wave” of Ukrainian abstract artists: materials of the mid-late 1990s of Oleksii Tytarenko, Halyna Sklyarenko, Olha Savytska provided a valuable insider fractographic materials and analysis of then-current situation [19; 18]. However, first complex scientific investigation of the phenomena of Abstractionism appeared not in the field of visual studies, but in aesthetics: PhD dissertations of Lidmyla Matveieva and Tetiana Yemelianova cover the range of questions on its genesis and develop-

ment [5; 4]. Yemelianova pays specific attention to the connection of abstract oeuvre of Wassily Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich, Natalia Goncharova and other masters of the early 20th century, to icon painting. Doctoral research of Halyna Rudyk has shaped a methodological basis for deeper understanding of Ukrainian painting of the 1990s in the context of the world tradition of Abstractionism [15]. The author establishes the rootedness of Ukrainian Nonfigurativism in the modernistic paradigm. Similar angle was chosen by Iva Pavelchuk in her monography “Artistic models of Abstract painting in Ukraine 1980–2000 (Epistemology of creation)” [9], demonstrating the desire to overcome the stereotypical impression of the isolation of local cultural process. However, as we can state, the very problem of the renewed attention to the sphere of transcendental in the art practices at the turn of the centuries remained out of the major scientific discussions, being outlined mostly in the sketchy way. One of the few art critics, who paid attention to the subject, was Olha Petrova: she suggested two types of non-figurative artists – “formists” and “transcendentalists”. The latter are inspired by the Christian colouristic system, developed in the Middle Ages. In our research, we significantly rely and develop this thesis, attempting to give it a broader theological and contextual background.

Results.

Representing transcendental in art. The number of features of the global culture of the recent decades testify the reactualisation of the Sacred in art: the authors regularly refer to the questions of spirituality and religious motifs, characters, and subjects, namely the Christian ones. Their artistic interpretations have been largely influenced by the traditional postulates of the Christian art, the visual language of which is grounded in several interrelated theological notions.

A phrase from Paul’s epistle to the Romans concerns the Christian vision of the relations between the Creator and people: “But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Does not the potter have power over the clay ...” (Rom 9:20–24). The quote brightly illustrates the doctrine of God’s transcendence, which affirms his existence beyond the empirical experience. Christianity suggests two different attitudes toward that conviction – *Cataphatic* and *Apophatic* theology. *Cataphatic* theology (from Greek *kataphasis* – affirmation) – is the direction, based on the idea of the cognoscibility of God through the notion of his creations. *Apophatic* or negative theology (from Greek *apophēmi* – “to deny”), in contrast, states God’s inconceivable and incomprehensible nature.

The last theological concept had a predominant impact on the orthodox Christian aesthetics with its well-developed symbolical language. Dionysius the Areopagite claimed the necessity of symbol as a mediator with the sphere of intangible, talking about cognate images [26]. Cognate images apply the range of rationally designated idealistic traits and features of certain objects and phenomena. With the help of the intellectual intuition, they are formed into the archetypes; the archetypes are inevitably represented with the means and formal language of the material world. Yet, on the assumption of the doctrine of God's transcendence, it is the Creator, who centres the highest level of Beauty in himself. Jacques Maritain also considers divine to be the main source of Beauty: "He is beautiful to the extreme (superpulcher), because in the perfect simple unity of His nature there pre-exists in a super-excellent manner the fountain of all beauty" [32, p. 31]. Therefore, the sensual level of beauty is the lowest one and can't be used in the description of Sacred.

As we see, apophatic theology denies the possibility of representing divine with the help of positivistic knowledge and methods. Consequently, the only way of grasping it is revelation. Divine perfection exceeds human's idea of perfection, hence non-cognate images are more relevant for that purpose, being oriented on the deep subconscious levels of our psycho. Such qualities of that type of images help concentrating on the spiritual essence of things. That perception of the correlation between idea and image is rooted in Ancient Greek philosophy, particularly in Neoplatonism, since these were Plato and his follower, who suggested the concept of the immaterial soul and existence of the otherworldly world. Alain Besançon defines two main tendencies in the correlation between symbol and image. The first one, iconolatry, is the display of cataphatic theology, admitting the possibility of creating the symbolic equivalent of the transcendental part of the Universe. The other, iconoclastic, tendency negates the propriety of the anthropomorphic iconography in the visualisation of the Divine image. As Jacques Lacan wrote, "The picture does not compete with appearance, it competes with what Plato designates for us beyond appearance as being the idea" [31, p. 112]. Byzantine iconography became the "golden mean" that combines both theological tasks – distancing from mimesis and, along with that, the importance of the visual communication as an essential part of any cult.

The icon's mission is eliminating the distance between the visible and invisible "Other" – the Prototype. It is commonly known that the means developed for this purpose were successfully adopted by the Avant-garde, as the researchers conclude (as

Camilla Grey and Alain Besançon observe) [21; 27]. The artists' experiments garde of the early 20th century were more than a quest for the aesthetical instrument that would be in line with the aspiration towards archaization and primitivism that were inherent to that epoch. Nonfigurative art, according to A. Besançon, was a response to the desacralisation of reality. Proceeding from the dialectic method, which states every determination already contains its opposition in itself, the masters refer to the utmost objective reality – the matter itself, pursuing to conquer its limitations: "Since the divine was no longer visible in things, things had to be urged, forced, their forms deformed, to make them show their presence, a presence that was slipping away from them, until a few artists took the final step and decided to do without them altogether. [...] Its founders (*of abstraction* – Authors) experienced it as a revolution, and furthermore, as a complete shift, and not only in painting" [21, p. 381].

Nonfigurativists, like Kazimir Malevich and Wassily Kandinsky, saw the transcendence of the world as equally real as the physical world is. Since transcendence declares itself in our consciousness, then the art that reflects it is also transcendent. In particular, analysing the connection between art and the outer world, Edmund Husserl goes into the core of the image and image-object correlation through the problem of the frame. The picture frame doesn't merely separate it from the surrounding. It creates borders – the borders of the life world (*Lebenswelt*) and the world of the art piece. In his essay, Husserl wrote, "We look through the frame, as if through a window, into the space of the image, into the image's reality" [29, p. 50]. On the semiotic level, such separation demonstrates the transcendental character of the art object and its content.

The masters of Abstract painting employed the mentioned approach in their works, aiming to enable viewers to "enter" the space of the canvases. By absorbing the idea, they represent an imprint of Cosmos, which explains the reason the artist tend to choose large-scale formats. However, trying to depict impersonal experiences, the painters seek to attain the delicate intonations and accuracy in their representation, in spite of the laconic manner, typical for the large-scale compositions. In this way, the effect of "viewer getting smaller and respectively... 'expansion' of the contemplation time" is achieved, contrasting and, along with that, merging the author's and the viewer's chronotopes [14, p. 95]. For instance, Mark Rothko set 18 inches as the perfect distance between his piece and a recipient that enables embracing the author's intent in its fullness [22]. Rothko's contemporary Barnett Newman also insisted on reducing the distance of viewing art, so the

painting occupies the entire field of view, because, as he believed, “looking has to transform into being with the image, sharing its presentation” [25, p. 63].

Such scheme of the interaction between public and artwork resembles the principles of Orthodox icon painting. For one of its most significant theoreticians, Pavel Florensky, stated Christian liturgy and icon as its part are not the reflection of the absolute reality, but its mystical embodiment; not surprisingly, he defines icon as the “window” into the world of the genuine things [20]. That is why the space in the sacred painting is always shown as open with the help of the reverse perspective. Florensky points out that the reverse perspective is a deeply theosophic element, which unveils the core of things, liberating them from the illusion of “seemingness.” Similar to an icon painter, a practitioner of the nonfigurative painting also targets the extreme objectivity and specificity of image, and therefore he articulates to the only reality given to us – the physical actuality of the matter (paint, surface, colour). From that point of view, abstract painting possesses the highest degree of reality, which, as a thing, brought to its extreme, sways to its opposite – the sphere of spirituality.

Embodiment of the Absolute in the art of the 20th century is done through the stages of Revelation-Enlightenment-Transformation – the elements of the trans-rational character that disclose themselves through vision and contemplation, scilicet hearing the Being (Martin Heidegger). It is not the subjective emotions, but the transpersonal experience, that becomes the source for representing Absolute, defining the mythopoetic of the contemporary nonfigurative art. One of the Ukrainian artists, Vitaly Didenko, claims the absolute reality, which is created this way, “is not reflected in the artist’s mind, but rather transformed and shaped by his spiritual world, and an art piece as a creation brings out its traces in the tangible-empirical forms and therewith expresses the depth of the artist’s spiritual life in all its complexity and dynamics – from feeling to knowledge, from unconsciousness to awareness, from intimate to general” [3, p. 55].

The preconditions of nonfigurative painting reactivation in the Ukrainian art of the 1980s – 1990s. The development of art practices in the Ukrainian art has reached a significant pace by the late 20th century (from the beginning of “Perestroika”), as a spring, released from the pressure of the official social realistic art and ideological control. The artists craving for creative freedom delved into the radical experience that was quickly estranging from the centuries-old art system of genres and types, pushing traditional arts like painting into the background. That tendency did not only give the result, which was opposite to the expected decay of

the painting, but actually gave a push to evolving a generation of the masters, who were oriented on the aesthetics of painting, in the 1980s. Their oeuvre was aimed at the “purification” from the dogmas brought by the Soviet artistic officialdom. This included not only purification of the painting language from narrativity and superfluity of the expressive means, but purification of the artist’s spiritual life as well, influencing greatly the becoming of the nonfigurative line of the Ukrainian painting of the 1990s [16].

Metaphysical problematics occurred as a major concept in then-contemporary culture. At the same time, it has been a factor that prevented from the profound discussion about nonfigurative movement and its role in the Ukrainian art criticism on the appropriate level. The situation wasn’t unique: during the first wave of Avant-garde, when Kandinsky, Mondrian, Malevich manifested “Grand Spirituality,” critics disclaimed the possibility of considering the metaphysical background of Abstractionism. Notwithstanding, as the Ukrainian and Western researchers uphold, we must explore the “idealistic” postulates of nonfigurative art today, without being challenged with thoughts on the impossibility of the rational comprehension of the creative philosophic background, which is thought to contradict the scientific method of research. Our task is to work out the well-balanced approach toward “new humanism” in the Ukrainian nonfigurative painting of the late 20th century, which is only possible in the dialogue of the researcher’s position and manifest legacy of the artists.

Christian motifs in contemporary Ukrainian nonfigurative art. *Picturesque Sanctuary* (original name – *Zhyvopisny Zapovidnyk*) was the most influential group of the nonfigurative domain in Ukraine in the 1990s, oriented on the “pure” lyrical painting. The artistic atmosphere of the epoch, as it has been already mentioned, was characterized by the ideological confrontation with social realism on one hand, and slow introduction of the postmodern preferences and digital medias. Despite that, the number of masters, who were member of the collective, Marko Geyko, Tiberiy Silvasi, Mykola Kryvenko, Anatoly Kryvolap, Oleksandr Zhivotkov, sought to continue of the traditions of the 20th century international painting and Ukrainian avant-garde.

They produced the whole range of the art pieces that demonstrates the profound interpretations of the Christian canons and iconographic schemes, and intellectual comprehension of the Biblical text, combined with its sensual experience. The notion of transcendence was now conveyed through a medium, not an image, which, in fact, is consonant with the idea of icon painting. Nevertheless, it wasn’t the tautology of long-established formal methods, but rather their qualitatively new interpretation.

One of the icon's foundations is the thesis of its God-inspired origin – icon is believed to be not merely created by a master, but mediated to people through him. For that, a master had to achieve a certain state of spirit. The “echoes” of that idea (but now applied to painting) can be found in the manifest of *Picturesque Sanctuary*. Tiberiy Silvashi, the author of the text, affirms, “The act of art makes a painter proceed from the point of emptiness, purity; from the depth of their being unaware of it; from their own shortage and obey painting language. Painting paints itself and bends to its will the painter, who just hold the conversation” [17, p. 3].

The significant detail, which proves the parallels between theosophy of icon and nonfigurative painting, lies in the uptake of the categories of Space and Time, or to be more precise, their transcendental forms – Eternity and Timelessness. Back in 1978, Silvashi had formulated his concept of “chronorealism”: “It's sense, roughly speaking, is in the existence of subjective time and time, which I defined as metaphysical. There is a moment we're in and experiencing subjectively, imagining both the moment, and its context very clearly. At the same time, it's the global metaphysical time that rushes past us. I was interested in the combination of those time categories. [...] The scheme for organising the painting's space was simple – a described episode or a scene of the subjective perception was expressed in an almost hyperrealistic image, whilst the space of metaphysical time was expressed in the blocks of pure colour. There is colour, and there is a certain depicted situation, but there is also something beyond the scene that can't be explained” [12].

For Silvashi, colour is a self-sufficient actor, organism with the qualities inherent solely to him. It is free of any dictate, and an artist is only an “instrument” for the manifestations and transition from the ontological state (as he appears in the painter's mind) to the existential one.

Curiously, Silvashi is one of the few authors, who refers to the motifs from the Old Testament in his works. The prepotency of the subjects from the New Testament can be explained with more extravagant and monumental character of the Old Testament, in comparison to the personal, introverted tonality of the Gospels. On this account, their narrativity is easier to be “silenced” down to uncover the required messages.

The subject (or rather a metaphysical content) of Silvashi's *David and Goliath* cycle (1992) is based on opposing two Biblical characters that symbolise spiritual obedience and arrogance, Good and Evil (1 Samuel 17:1–58). Each part of the diptych is organized according to the same compositional principles. Nevertheless, colouring and dynamics of the

piece evince the similitude and, together with that, unevenness of the characters content. Dynamics of the canvases is defined by the directions of “painting reliefs,” using the *a contrario* method: the areas with a more intensive texture on the first part are less actively rendered in the second. Such “montage” of the spaces and texture areas would be the recognizable feature of Silvashi's legacy from the 1990s.

Another participant of the Picturesque Sanctuary, who follows the same creative moto, is Oleksandr Zhivotkov – one of those masters from the 1990s generation, who broke up the canons, resisting the vulgarization of art. His artistic vision derives not only from the idea of the predominance of aesthetic mission, but from sacralisation of creative process, reinforced by the a priori positive attitude to the world.

John of Damscus claimed the icon is meant to visualise immaterial and incorporeal “for a clearer apprehension of God and the angels, through our incapacity of perceiving immaterial things unless clothed in analogical material form” [24, p. 153]. Zhivotkov sees canons developed for that purpose not as a limitation, but as a way of spiritual self-discipline. Therefore, he elaborates his own “canon” to experiment within. It can be observed in the colour asceticism first – the artist distances himself from the polychromy in favour of working with modulations of black and white, which endow his images with special fluorescence.

Interpretation of religious motifs in Oleksandr Zhivotkov's art is marked by the complete domination of medium and departure from the figurative approach. In one of his interviews, the master stressed that, “As a person of Christian culture, I like images, especially the folk Ukrainian ones, with their charming immediacy; although the canonic icon, done in the Byzantine-Russian tradition, also meant a lot for my upbringing. Today I perceive image in two aspects: as a spiritual substance, and apart from that as a ritual item, which is always enticing to touch and hold it in your hands. Doing this is prohibited at churches or museums, but allowed at home. Those touches are specifically delightful. The image as a thing has weight, volume. Icon panel had unique smell and that “colour of centuries” inherent to it” [cited after: 11, p. 29]. That deeply personal, “haptic” experience of the Christian symbolic and Bible stories is imprinted in the pieces by the artist from the early 1990s, namely the series of *Crucifixions* and the range of the individual paintings like *The Girl with the Crucifixion* (1992). Despite the absence of any clearly depicted character on it, this canvas still has certain quality of figuration, which evolves as the result of the viewer's reflection, shaped up by the variety of the visual nuances – proportions of the

compositions, density of painting layers and rhythmicity of colour masses, their interfusion. The colour palette itself has the element of imagery, yet its interpretation is so subjective on the emotive level that it can be “decoded” only in combination with the title of the piece. The only fragment of the work that connects it to the name is the cross in the upper left corner.

The material qualities of a painting as a physical object, evincing the traces of the author’s state during the creation, became crucial for the artist; he sees painting as the product, a shell a viewer fills with meanings. Paradoxically, although the content now appears to be shadowed with the formal side, it still preserves its value by absorbing the characteristics of sacred items one can embrace only on the subconscious level, without any rationalisation.

Zhivotkov achieves specific virtuosity in rendering the painting surface in his *Maria* canvas (1992–1994) that depicts the Virgin Mary. Unlike the previous painting, which had no anthropomorphic figures, this one features the stylized female shoulder-length silhouette, scratched over the goldish background. The texture is lavish, varying from the smooth flat areas to the “disturbed” roughness and scratches. The cross that looks etched in the paint layer is both compositional and semantic centre of the work. To accentuate the figure even more, the artist adds it with the strokes of red – the colour that symbolized the sacrifice of Christ. Thus, it becomes obvious the artist balances between imagery and visual in this piece.

Ukraine as the important centre of abstract art at the beginning of the 20th century, as well as the country with the centuries-old tradition of icon painting, was specifically sensitive to the concept of non-narrative with its fully developed metaphysics of light and colour, and eidetic content. It was one of the ways of cognizing national authenticity. Artists, like O. Zhivotkov, M. Geyko, and others, stressed upon the importance of the Orthodox icon for their art. M. Geyko notes: “I’m simply enamoured with it and believe our Orthodox icon to be the apogee of the world painting.”

The artist’s attitude towards the subject can be clearly seen in his *Image* canvas (2001). The piece belongs to the realm of semi-abstractness, containing visual parallels with icon. However, it’s important to underline the predominance of the non-narrative painting elements in the image’s structure, like the treatment of colour, its luminosity, dynamism of the multi-layered painting surface and maestra of the line, which creates an outline of the female head and gives a subtle hint at the character of the Virgin Mary. Parallels with the Orthodox icon are supported not only by the analogies with the iconographic

compositions (the silhouette of Mary is surrounded with a “kiot”), but by the colour symbolism as well: the golden-yellow palette, accompanied with green and red, embodies the Christian representation of the “heavenly world” (Augustine of Hippo), never seen by a human. This is probably the notion that inspired the abstract character of the artistic manner, since icon painting detaches itself from the narration.

The analysed painting by Geyko illustrates the polystylistic method: along with the traditional Byzantine Mother of God iconographic scheme, one can find the references to cosmism and duality of the national mentality and use of the sacred elements of the Kyivan Rus’s church painting. The synthesis of these components results in the contemporary image of the high spirituality.

The core of the minimalistic non-narrative compositions is defined by the presence of the ontological, divine light. “Light, its movement *extrudes* colour” (italicized by us), as Robert Falk once wrote [cited after: 16, p. 8]. This thought became the leading one for the nonfigurative artists, who experiences colour as the emanation of light. The light is perceived as the idea of the immaterial light-as-the-God’s-essence, as the “language of Existence,” which serves as the framebase for the origin of the Pure Painting. *The Moment* diptych painting by Mykola Malyshko can serve as a sample of visualizing the quintessence of light. Composition of the work is based on the juxtaposition of diptych’s colouring. The darkened left side is contrasted with the lighted chaos of the right one. Colour is the moment, which changes the directions of the changeable events of the Universe. The chaotic composition of the dark and light colour spots reveals the mystery of embodying the “rays of the cosmic lights,” which characterizes the whole oeuvre of the painter. The same “rays” are featured in Malyshko’s *In Majesty. Christ in Majesty* or *Christ the Saviour Among the Heavenly Powers* is the iconographic scheme that represents the theological concept of appearance of Christ in its Glory at the end of times “to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ” (Ephesians 1:10). The image is based on the text with the descriptions of the visions of the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1: 4–6, 10, 13–16, 18, 22–28).

Malyshko rejects the iconographic canon, showing just a shining sphere that departs from another radiance below. That sphere is the visualisation of the Tabor Light the Evangelists saw during the Transfiguration of Christ. It was the sign that proved the divine nature of Jesus; since it’s ungraspable, the painter depicts it only radiance as its manifestation. Unlike Zhivotkov, who made texture the main tool of expression in his works, Malyshko doesn’t pay it equal attention. Trying to detach himself from the

material, the artist attempts to create the sense of the image's luminosity. The aspiration toward symbolism, metaphysicality of the visual language, submission of form to idea, brings the artist close to the basis of Orthodox icon painting. Considering this, the material the master used for the piece is also interesting, as *In Majesty* is done with tempera that has been used by the icon painters for centuries.

Marie-José Mondzain in her *Image, Icon, Economy: The Byzantine Origins of the Contemporary Imaginary* analyses the numerous resources of the pre-iconoclast and iconoclast period through the prism of Aristotelian philosophy. Discussing the problem of visualising kenosis, the researcher compares it to the icon painting, since the transcendent has to "diminish" itself, its integrity to embody itself in the matter [33, p. 95].

Hence, the mystery of the light energy merging with tempera and canvas, and the evolved luminescent emptiness can't be comprehended with the help of the rational interpretation of the Universe. That mystery incorporated the ontological understanding of the eternal "Absolute" that affects the creative consciousness and prompts the artists to meditate on the religious theme.

As the above-mentioned samples demonstrate, the majority of the artists, who worked on the works featuring Christian motifs, belong to the generation, which stepped out on the Ukrainian art-scene in the 1980s – 1990s. Their discoveries are fuelled from the sources of the Ukrainian and global avant-garde of the early 20th century, developing their inclination for the aestheticization, "sacralisation" of the painting elements – colour and texture. Valery Bondar was one of those masters, who was oriented on the heritage of the national modernism.

The combined oil and tempera piece *The Righteous Job* (2006) by the artist has a rather untypical support: instead of panel or canvas, the author chose glass. Tradition of painting on glass has a long history, beginning in the 18th century in Central Europe (Bavaria and Bohemia) and spreading across the Ukrainian territories, namely Galicia and Bukovina, in the 19th century. Apart from the genre images for decorating the interiors, the technique was used in icon painting ("Folk glass icon" 2008). However, the artist didn't "borrow" any other methods from the masters of that craft, staying faithful to his creative identity. In his commemorative article on Valer Bondar (as the friends used to call him), a poet and art critic Bohdan Tereschchenko characterized the artist's approach: "Avant-garde has found himself a faithful successor of the 1910s – 1920s traditions in the person of Valer Bondar, declaring the origin of the unique language, gesture, individual underground, which always confronts the official system"

[2]. His life and temper impelled him to choose the hard path of experiments and standing up for his vision.

Conflict is what formed the core of Bondar's creative individuality, and, consequently, the artistic manner. This resulted in the tendency to wide application the "nervous," twisted lines, white brushstrokes that we see in *The Righteous Job*. The recognizable style was developed while exploring graphic techniques and later transferred into the painting practice: "Bondar's line desperately hits into the flatness of paper, as into the barrier. <...> Provoking a spontaneous and dynamic gesture, anxiety and spiritual shiver leave the dramatic traces of the insecurity in the world's firmness" [2]. The painter favours the heritage of German Expressionism defined by vigorous colouring, with tint exuding emotional tension. In the story of the Old Testament prophet Bondar wanted to show not devout patience Job symbolized, but the moment of suffering and testing he went through. For that purpose he picked up intensive, fiery colours (red, orange, yellow), shaded by the accents of the cold blue hues. The elongated horizontal format "clamps" the image, conveying almost physical sense of discomfort.

As we see, similar to the Expressionists, Bondar's attitude is drawn by the pivotal episodes of struggle, fight, which encourages addition of dynamism to the composition. Therefore, Christian subjects that sacralise suffering started appearing in his oeuvre as early as the late 1980s. Their representation hardly changes over two decades: *The garden of Gethsemane* (1989) is done on glass and defined by the same stylistic features as *The Righteous Job*.

Works of the Ukrainian nonfigurativists featuring the New Testament subjects reveal the trend in the contemporary Ukrainian art that is centred around national self-identification and critical attitude towards globalization. Olga Petrova noticed the first representatives of postmodernism in Ukraine applied "national archetypes to create innovations" [10, p. 13]. That local variant of the "deconstruction" isn't a mere collage of the motifs-subjects-attributes, bringing the artists into the dialogue with the ethnosphere, leaving the *ratio* component aside.

This perspective is the most relevant for considering the legacy of Halina Novozhenets. It has the points of contact with the ideas proclaimed by *Picturresque Sanctuary*, since the "philosophy" of the artist is prevailed by colour: the primacy is given to the reserved palette, based on the triad of red, ochre and golden, and local application of paint. The principled two-dimensionality, flatness of compositions is the result of the reflection on the Byzantine canon and its realization in the Ukrainian art. Orest Holubets characterized the painter's method as "materialized

poetry". One of the outstanding Ukrainian linguists of the 19th century, Oleksandr Potebnja, defined poetry as "the definiteness of the character causes the fluidity of meanings, i.e. the mood of seeing outside the content of the few character's qualities, where the allegory appears even without the author's or even contrary to him" [13, p. 156]. All elements on the artist's canvases shape up an integrity, which reminds the non-persistent substance of memory. It's an attempt to capture Plato's *noema* – as the trace of the ideal *eidos* in human's mind. Its permanent alterability prompts cogitating on the themes in the formats of cycles, series, groups (triptychs, diptychs).

Most of the Ukrainian non-narrativists of the 1990s were influenced by the Far East tradition, particularly, Zen art; the motifs of "empty consciousness," "enlightenment," "spiritual calmness" stand out especially eloquently. Although Novozhenets' pieces belong not to the non-narrative, but to the nonfigurative art, they still show the impact of the buddhist aesthetics. Her *The White Mandylion* painting (2007) and *Twelve* (2008) diptych are modelled with the limpid combination of geometric figures, giving the insight, how the artist's *modus operandi* is reduced to the schematic and de-personalized formula, filled with strong religious-aesthetic feeling. That feeling has been occupying the niche, which was empty because of devaluation of the religious dogmas during the modern era, and is close to Kant's category of *sublime*. At the beginning of the 20th century, Rudolf Otto suggested defining it as *numinosum*, interpreted by Carl Jung as "something" that "is strange to us and yet so near, wholly ourselves and yet unknowable, a virtual centre of so mysterious a constitution that it can claim anything – kinship with beasts and gods, with crystals and with stars – without moving us to wonder, without even exciting our disapprobation" [30, p. 237].

Conclusion. Analysis of the strategies of visualization of the Transcendence category in the Ukrainian abstract art of the 1990s–2000s demonstrated it's the feeling of the painting's immanence (painting as Absolute), absorbed from Modernism, which occurred to be the starting point for the rage of artists. Pure and isolated from the mimetic connections with *Lebenswelt* (Edmund Husserl), it shows itself like an alternative reality. Absolutization of the artistic media (texture, color) encourages the Ukrainians masters to apply the language of Nonfigurativism as an instrument to discuss the problem of spirituality, since the abstraction itself allows avoiding creation of simulacrum and ratio that interfere transcendence of consciousness.

Apart from the modernist influence, the researched nonfigurative pieces are based on the theosophic background of the icon's aesthetics. Although

the latter is formed by clearly defined canons, contemporary artists still long for the subjectivity and liberation in their work with the means of expression, valuing the personal attitude in the representation of their relations with the Christian egegore.

Further perspectives of the research. Ukrainian society largely perceives the idea of Transcendent from the perspective of Eastern Orthodoxy, which has been conditioning the local cultural field for centuries. That fact determined the selection of the research material with the focus on the Christian thematic. However, a whole range of other sources of the cultural influence (like pagan Slavic mythology, Eastern practices) has been left aside. To outline the perspectives for further research, it should be noted that expanding our notion of the reactualization of spirituality in contemporary art requires a larger circle of art objects. This is essential for thinking "outside the box" of the Christian paradigm and its vision of the connection between material / spiritual, sacred / profane, enabling us to put the local specificity into the larger global context.

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