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Along the line: Art and Politics in Andriy Yermolenko Artworks

Уздовж межі: Мистецтво і політика у творчості Андрія Єрмоленка

Abstract. The artworks by Andriy Yermolenko, extraordinary and exciting artist and designer who makes famous political posters and images in Ukraine, are researched in the article. The author analyzes visual methods that the artist uses to influence the audience. These methods change from simple illustrations of reality to deep associative and philosophical contents.

The research focuses on the series of posters dedicated to the FIFA World cup 2018 in Russia. In these series, the artist creates approximately seventeen images that urge to boycott the event. He chooses political topics that demonstrate the aggressive behavior of Russia around the world, proving this policy to be a reason for the boycott. The article explores essential and unique features in Yermolenko's posters. These are absence of protesting texts, overwhelming silhouettes, and use of traditional symbols that usually associate with favorite political and sports topics. Other poster series of Andriy Yermolenko are briefly described. The article gives a brief outline of phenomenon of Ukrainian political poster (in the context of Yermolenko's creativity) compared with general meanings of identity in contemporary Ukrainian art. Necessity for future cultural and art studies of the political poster as the unique contemporary art form is underlined.

Keywords: political poster, Andriy Yermolenko artworks, contemporary art, identity of Ukrainian art, national identity.

Problem statement in general and its connection with important scientific or practical tasks. The political poster is one of the means of art to reflect the spirit and sense of the era and the place where the events take place. The higher the degree of social tensions is, the more relevant and useful becomes the proper artistic word, engraved in a poster. Andriy Yermolenko's artworks with their bright ideological and political coloring also have distinguished artistic traits, to study which is no less important than the social context.

Posters are unusually clear reflections on the values, trends and importance of the events of the time. The poster acts as an indicator, forms a relation and thus is a beautiful mirror of the period when it was created.

The unique interaction between the image and the text is a special characteristic of a poster. The poster gives an opportunity to appeal to the viewer's consciousness and emotions [1]. At the same time, in the posters by A. Yermolenko we encounter the absence of any classical poster slogan characteristic, that is, within studied series framework, a specific text with a call for boycott. The artist tries to affect the viewer's consciousness by exclusively accurate image, leaving a place for the slogan of his own in the viewer's imagination.

Analysis of recent research works and publications, which initiated problem solution and the author is based on,

previously unsolved parts of the general problem allocation.

Historiography of the research includes mass-media news publications, interviews with artist and researches on the history of worldwide political poster or Ukrainian political posters from other periods.

Contemporary Ukrainian political poster was of little interest for professional art criticism. More often than not, it becomes journalist's object of interest. In the scientific sense, one of the major research publications of the recent years related to the issue is the thesis by Igor Shalinsky "The Cultural Code of the Ukrainian Poster during the Revolution of Dignity" [12]. Andriy Yermolenko's artwork here is highlighted in the context of the Zhlob Art (lowbrow art). The brief description of the series "Mother Anarchy", "Shevchenko", "Stella Ukraine" is given. Shalinsky avoids the detailed art-study characteristics of plots or elements in posters, emphasizing their ideological content.

Natalia Musienko mentions Andriy Yermolenko's artwork in the context of Maidan's events in her article "Art of the Maidan. Research on Socio-Cultural Anthropology" [12]. "Regarding the works presented in Barbacan and the works of this very winter, I want to draw attention to the poster by Andriy Yermolenko, where the painter takes the well-known picture by Eugène Delacroix, *Freedom*

of the *Leading People* as a basis. Delacroix painted the piece in 1831, reacting to the revolutionary events in France in July 1830 that had put an end to the restoration of Bourbons monarchy. The creative interpretation of this picture by Andriy Yermolenko was originally thought up for the cover of the weekly edition of the *Ukrainian Week* (No. 1–2, 2014), and later transformed into a poster. In Delacroix's piece, the barricades of Paris are covered with dead bodies. Yermolenko covers the barricades of the Maidan with tires" [7, p. 174].

V. Tarasov and V. Shevchenko [9] are engaged in poster study of another historical period, still, they characterize the methodology of poster study as a historical source. The authors include three main element components to the general features of visual sources: 1) artistic language, 2) semiotic structure, 3) artistic work context and relations with the social and professional environment [9, p. 83]. It corresponds with the analysis of Yermolenko's posters.

The series, dedicated to the World Cup (World Cup 2018), has attracted much attention, both domestic and from the foreign mass media. Many journalists who interviewed the artist placed images on their own resources [4–6]. Yermolenko created a folder on the file exchanger, where everyone could download the work in a good quality. Thus, the political and social orientation of Andriy Yermolenko's artworks caused the fact that there are plenty of artist's interviews on various occasions as well as analytic articles about him as a public figure in the media and on the Internet. At the same time, the artistic characteristics of his work step aside "to the background". It is clearly evidenced by the fact that the name of the artist is mentioned in the section "Politics" more often, rather than "Art". Therefore, none of the abovementioned sources provide a complete description of Yermolenko's artworks.

Objectives of the study. Article aims to investigate the artworks by Andriy Yermolenko in the context of his creative reaction to socio-political events taking place in modern Ukraine on the example of posters series dedicated to the 2018 World Football Championship. Another goal is to reveal the peculiarities of the artist's works after the period of Zhlob-Art and posters, dated back to the Revolution of Dignity, and the influences of personal and collective identity on contemporary Ukrainian art.

Presentation of the main research material. According to some academic definitions, contemporary art is art that takes place here and now, reflects on the circumstances, conditions of the world around and the artists' personalities. In this context, art studies of contemporary art are becoming the most objective when they occur here and now.

The summer of 2018 in brief: a hunger strike of a Kremlin political prisoner Oleg Sentsov, a football championship in Russia, unprecedented showers in large Ukrainian cities. And if the latter, to a greater extent, became a plot for talented memes on the Internet, the first two themes were reflected in poster art—in the posters by the recognized Ukrainian designer Andriy Yermolenko.

Andriy Yermolenko is an author who, without exaggeration, is one of the most prominent exponents of the poster art in Ukraine. His series of works from different periods of time emphasized and intensified the attention to problems, challenges, and drive for pride that arose in the realities of Ukrainian society. As the author himself says, the poster is his weapon and the way to lead war, being away from the front line [5].

Andriy Yermolenko was born in Kyiv in 1972, received a degree in chemistry, but was always fond of art. He is a painter, designer, illustrator, engaged in digital art. HE works as an art director of the *Ukrainian Week* magazine, produces clothing under his own brand and in cooperation with the Osavul sports brand. At the same time, he is a man with a clear political position, which is reflected in all his activities. Each of his series, among them *Shevchenko*, *United Colors of Ukraine*, *Stella Ukraine*, *MAMA-ANARHIYA*, patriotic posters series (in the framework of exhibitions and beyond) deserve a separate art research study today in the focus of the series, dedicated to the 2018 World Football Championship.

Andriy Yermolenko successfully compiles techniques of modern graphic design with Ukrainian symbols, both cultural and popular. Is is clearly followed in the most famous author series. Often the artist uses ornaments resembling traditional Ukrainians to convey a certain image. However, he mixes the distinctive features of different cultures. For example, a series of prints on T-shirts *Santa Muerte de Ukrania* with images of the skulls of the Cossacks / Ukrainians combines at least several different cultures features. The cult of the dead (*Santa Muerte*), the traditional images of worship of which are festive ornamented skulls, is popular in Mexico and in the United States. Yermolenko connects a brightly ornamented skull with traditional stylized elements, associated with the traditional image of Ukrainians (herring, cape, mustache, brooches, and wreath). However, the ornamentation of images resembles the ornamentation of a traditional Ukrainian rushnyk (embroidered ritual cloth). Each skull is decorated with the "tree of life".

Yermolenko's artistic vision peculiarity is combined with technical perfection, and creative artistic ideas—with impeccable visual realization. The lack of professional artistic education is not an obstacle for an artist. All posters and prints are compositionally balanced, colorfully winning, with readable fonts. Although he is self-critical in the following statement, "I would not call myself an artist. The artist is something so great, and I am just a designer-applicator, master-builder. I am more a chemist than an artist, even for the works that I am doing. Some kind of alchemy is present in that: I like to change the unchangeable, to receive some result from that. Drawing was always my hobby, I was obsessed with it in my childhood and I was glad to study to become a chemist. I studied at post-graduate courses, wrote a candidate's thesis, and then by lucky chance when I sat in the laboratory and watched a recorder, and besides the reactor where bacteria were roaming, I realized that my life would go through. I realized that I did not like it. The next

day, I resigned and started to paint. I painted churches, icons, decorated books, engaged in web design... But, as I am finished with chemistry, my hobbies became my work and now I have no hobbies..." [11].

Along with artistic value, social importance of his works also matters for Yermolenko. It is interesting to observe his posters: to discover and investigate the artist's reaction to the events taking place around him. His slogans can be supported or protested. One may associate personally, the personality of a neighbor, the history of the country with the images proposed by the artist, or to deny the presence of such connections.

"Unfortunately, the world is ruled by money, not by conscience. And when you see injustice, there are two options: either to silence, or to engage yourself, at least in a solo protest. This is my 'solo protest' against those great state forces that do nothing" [6]. It is the quotation from one of the interviews that best reveals the artist's civic standpoint.

The series devoted to the 2018 World Football Championship has 17 posters (in public access), decorated in red and black, with accented inclusions of the colors of the Russian flag (blue, white, red), using the official font of the World Cup (World Championship). All inscriptions are in English. There is a transformed image of a world cup wrapped with barbed wire, where, instead of soccer ball, is a screaming skull on every poster. Also, each poster is "signed" with author's three component logo (mustache, sunglasses, a bang), and the text "ERMOLENKO". The given logo identifies the author as a person, and as a representative of Ukrainian culture. Posters demonstrate to the audience the controversial Russian international policy, which the author believes is a good reason for boycott: the annexation of the Crimea, the support of militants in eastern Ukraine, the suppression of Boeing over the Donbas, the bombing of Syrian Aleppo, the fate of Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia, the poisoning of Sergei and Julia Fiddlers in Britain [6].

The vast majority of posters are made only of several main components like silhouettes that matter in the context of the subject as an individual. Among the characteristic transformed characters, worth emphasizing are most commonly encountered: a ball is a skull or a grenade, a net of soccer gates is a barbed wire, a goalkeeper is a "green man" (a recognizable silhouette of the Russian military on the Crimean Peninsula).

Let us dwell on the characterization of some posters from the series. *You can not stop me, suckers!* poster is an echo of Zhlob-Art, in particular the popular image of the "typical lowbrow", popular in the means direction. Its classic elements here are: out of recoil, a characteristic position of the fingers, and also a sports suit. At the same time, the poster is not perceived ironically, due to psychological difficult elements: bloodstains on clothing and footwear, and pyramids of human skulls, on which the main character of the poster sits. This mountain of skulls is an analogy with one of the most famous paintings by Russian artist Vasyl Vereshchagin *The Apotheosis of War*. The phrase writ-

ten on the frame of the work brings recollections at once, "It is dedicated to all the great conquerors, former, present, and future".

A poster, depicting a red card attracts attention, as a laconic construction of the composition and the subtext lay therein. "Red Card" is a card issued during a gross violation of the rules in many sports games, including football. In the second half of the 20th century, it was first used as a sanction against violators of rules during a sports match. A player who receives a red card from a judge leaves the football field and is deprived of the right to participate in the next match. On a poster on a black background is a wrist of a skeleton judge holding a card with blood colored in red on the right side. The left bottom of the text is typical for all posters in the FIFA World Cup series. The right upper corner is the artist's logo. In fact, the poster consists of only two elements, but has a profound meaning. The hand of the skeleton is an arbitrator who distributes red cards to the inappropriate dominant top of the "players", excluding them from the "game". Here, the analogy goes with a number of uncovered crimes against journalists and politicians, who "played not by the rules of the match".

The color palette of the poster where a "Green Man" on a soccer gate and a cat silhouette is depicted is red and black. Elements are silhouettes. It uses the traditional image of a military weapon in the form of a non-recognizable sign for the latest Ukrainian history. Such "green men" in the minds of everyone who had access to the Ukrainian mass media associated with the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. For those who had access to the Russian media, they were called the "little green men" on the other, and in this context, it was the cat who was an element of the propaganda "eternity". The military figure, together with the fluffy domestic animal, later became the prototype of several monuments on the Crimean territory.

The tragedy that rocked the world community in July 2014 was the Malaysian Boeing down. The ones who are official guilty in this doing, are yet to be named. Andriy Yermolenko hints at the perpetrators of the tragedy due to the associative image as the football player who knocks the plane down the ball.

Conclusions from the research and perspectives for further investigation in the indicated direction. Political posters, taking into account the orientation towards mass culture, the severity of the proposed themes, and significant authorial subjectivity, cannot be the object only of art studies. Events that have taken place already left an imprint on the collective consciousness, and therefore on the perception and effectiveness of the political poster. From an artistic point of view, Yermolenko's series, dedicated to the 2018 World Cup are not the most attractive, but they best illustrate "up-to-date" art, the interaction between society and the artist in a given period of time. In this case, the artist's poster allegory, association and comparison, used in details, require coverage and clarification, since they are informative not only for contemporary events, which the poster addresses.

Not every artist takes responsibility to reflect social identity needs, in the context of political themes diversity, but as Yermolenko himself said, “I am more a chemist than an artist, even for the work that I do” [11].

From the art point of view, for example, prints devoted to the logos of Ukrainian cities and textile designs of Yermolenko attracted more attention. They combine symbols and elements, ideas and creeds that are significant for the Ukrainian culture in author’s professional modern interpretation. The posters

and images also reflect on social identity needs, but at the angle, indicated by the author. They promote fashion for the Ukrainian without calls and slogans, and the “usual” influence on consciousness, the algorithm, which is applicable only to “chemists-artists”. Andriy Yermolenko is interesting as a public figure and an artist. His work deserves in-depth study in historical and artistic contexts. The article is not able to cover this lacuna completely. Nevertheless, it aims to open doors for further research and publications.

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Зіненко А. В.

Уздовж межі: мистецтво і політика у творчості Андрія Єрмоленка

Анотація. Досліджено творчість екстраординарного та цікавого сучасного українського художника Андрія Єрмоленка у контексті актуальних тем сучасного політичного плаката як явища. Автор здійснює аналіз виражальних засобів, якими художник послуговується для досягнення найбільшого ефекту впливу на глядача: від простої ілюстративності до глибокого асоціативно-філософського змісту. Формат плакату Андрієм Єрмоленком застосовує також у малюнках на футболках, нашивках тощо. У статті проаналізовано трактування політичного плаката та обґрунтовано, чому цей вид мистецтва не втрачає актуальності у сучасному світі. Доведено, що феномен сучасного українського політичного плаката, досліджуваний через призму творчості Андрія Єрмоленка співвідноситься із загальними сенсами ідентичності українського мистецтва. Підкреслено необхідність подальшого культурологічно-мистецтвознавчого дослідження політичного плаката як особливої форми сучасного мистецтва.

Ключові слова: політичний плакат, творчість Андрія Єрмоленка, сучасне мистецтво, ідентичність українського мистецтва, національна ідентичність.

Зиненко А. В.

Вдоль черты: Искусство и политика в творчестве Андрея Ермоленко

Аннотация. Исследуется творчество экстраординарного и интересного художника Андрея Ермоленко в контексте актуальных тем современного политического плаката как явления современной культуры. Автор проводит анализ выразительных средств, которые использует художник для достижения наибольшего эффекта влияния на зрителя: от простой иллюстративности до глубокого ассоциативно-философского содержания. Формат плаката используется Андреем Ермоленко также в рисунках на футболках, нашивках и т. д. В статье анализируется трактовка политического плаката, обосновывается, почему с точки зрения автора этот жанр не теряет своей актуальности в современном мире. Доказано, что феномен современного украинского политического плаката, исследуемый сквозь призму творчества Андрея Ермоленко, соотносится с общими смыслами идентичности украинского искусства. Подчеркнута необходимость дальнейшего культурологического и искусствоведческого исследования политического плаката как особой формы современного искусства.

Ключевые слова: политический плакат, творчество Андрея Ермоленко, современное искусство, идентичность украинского искусства, национальная идентичность.

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