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## Dimensions of freedom of Ukrainian art in the late 80s and early 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and their manifestation in artistic associations of that time

**Abstract.** The relevance of the research topic lies in the insufficient study of such a period of Ukrainian art as the turn of the 1980s and early 1990s, when banned artists came out of the underground, taking advantage of the weakening of the ideological pressure of the Soviet system, and led powerful artistic movements involved in the formation of dimensions of free creativity. The purpose of the work is to clarify the conditions for the development of Ukrainian art at the turn of the 80s and 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and to highlight the importance of creative associations in the process of artists' realisation of new tasks in the emerging continuum of freedom (on the example of the associations "The Way" and "The Strontium-90"). The methodological apparatus of the study consists of three stages (preparatory, research and synthesising) using the following methods: analysis of literary and scientific sources, dialectical method in the emergence of a new phenomenon, method of logical analysis, method of critical and comparative analysis, synergistic method, generalisation, method of hypothesis and forecasting. The study found that at the end of the 1980s, under the influence of the Chernobyl disaster, Ukrainian "unofficial" art left the status of marginal, and its representatives became the forerunners of a new free creative continuum. The artists of the new generation, using the neo-avant-garde experience of their colleagues and the factor of freedom of expression, strive to use the latest creative practices, which has connected them to the global artistic space. The study argues that neo-mythologism, as one of the main principles of world art of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s became decisive in the process of creating a free artistic continuum. This principle led to the most individualised figurative system of expression of Ukrainian artists of the new generation. The paper examines two artistic associations, "The Way" and "Strontium-90", and their role in shaping the Ukrainian free creative continuum. The practical significance of the study lies in the use of the results in the creation of recommendations and methodological guides on the history of Ukrainian art of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries and gallery business

**Keywords:** "unofficial" art; art the Chernobyl disaster; continuum; mythologeme; neo-expressionism; tratlfreyrealism

### Introduction

The artistic processes in Ukraine at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s became crucial in the formation of a free creative continuum, and therefore require more detailed coverage. An important source in analysing the processes of this crucial period is the monographic collection of articles by the Ukrainian artist and scholar O. Petrova (2015). The researcher's essays characterise both

individual artists and the circumstances in which they lived, revealing ideas and philosophical concepts popular in creative circles of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. It is O. Petrova (2015), who notes the powerful impact of the Chernobyl disaster on the social activity of the forbidden art. A detailed picture of the events of the formation of free art in Ukraine is

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presented in A. Lozhkina's (2019) study. Although the Ukrainian art critic analyses Ukrainian art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – early 21<sup>st</sup> century as a holistic phenomenon, but a detailed analysis of the artistic phenomena of the era of independence is especially valuable. The use of the latest practices and figurative language are the focus of the study. The renewed interest of the new generation of artists in the historical styles of Ukrainian art is noted by researcher H. Sklyarenko (2020). The researcher traces the peculiarities of interpretation Baroque tradition by young artists in the late 1980s and early 2000s. The author emphasises the tradition and its continuity. In this context, the results of O. Klymenko's (2021) research contained in the publication "The noosphere-space direction of development of Ukraine and the world" are important. The author insists on the importance of the noosphere-space theme in the contemporary discourse of culture and the visual arts. The Ukrainian curator I. Abramovych (2019) comes to the conclusion about the importance of worldview traits and cultural trends in the formation of national art. He analyses the activities of the Kyiv art group "Volitional Edge of National Post-Electicism" (1987 – early 1990s), which was involved in the formation of a new continuum of free art. An important scientific work in understanding the relevance of the phenomenon of neomythologism is the article by A. Polishchuk (2023) "Neomythologism in the painting of Kyiv artists of the 1990s: The state of study of the issue". The scientist reviewed and systematised the works of prominent researchers of the phenomenon of neomythologism and mythology in the context of Ukrainian art of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the concept of the "frontier" in the 1980s and 1990s really characterises the state of artistic life in Ukraine at that time. The weakening of ideological pressure led to the flourishing of Ukrainian "unofficial" art. Representatives of the forbidden art had different creative destinies: students of academic schools, autodidacts, and representatives of the naive. They were united not only by their thirst for freedom of creation, but also by their own study of foreign and Ukrainian modernist heritage, their constant need for literature, music, and familiarisation with philosophical and scientific concepts. Paying attention to this period, it should recall the impact of the Chernobyl disaster. Nonconformists representing various areas of intellectual activity, concerned about the man-made disaster and the Soviet government's attitude to the consequences of this event, began to form various organisations, both political (People's Movement, 1989) and creative, such as music and literary groups and artistic associations ("The Way", 1989; "The Strontium-90", 1990). Chernobyl has changed the whole picture of the modern world, as stated by leading European philosophers of 21<sup>st</sup> century – Paul Virilio, Jean Baudrillard, Frederic Lemarchand (Post-Chernobyl..., 2012). It is true to say that in Ukraine there is a process of "nationalisation of the Chernobyl accident".

In this regard, the topos of a "spiritual Chernobyl" is becoming more widespread.

The purpose of the study is to shed light on the circumstances behind the growth of Ukrainian art at the turn of the 1980s and 90s, as well as to emphasise the significance of artistic collaborations at that period in the process of artists taking on new challenges within the burgeoning continuum of freedom.

In accordance with the goal, the task was to analyse the activities of the little-studied artistic associations "The Way" and "The Strontium-90" that emerged in the late 1980s, and to present the peculiarities of creating a new continuum of freedom of expression, which manifested itself in various artistic mythologies.

The scientific novelty of the study is to identify the defining aspects of the formation of free Ukrainian art at the turn of the 80s and 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which resulted in the formation of various associations of artists of a new generation, including the little-studied groups "The Way" and "The Strontium-90", whose activities are covered in the work. The study substantiates the position that mythologemes become the fundamental principle of the formation of a new continuum of Ukrainian art.

### ◉ Literature Review

The proposed study uses a number of scientific developments, which helped to comprehensively reveal the main issues. A significant contribution is L.V. Smyrna's (2017) monograph "A century of nonconformism in Ukrainian visual art", which analyses in detail the phenomenon of nonconformism in visual art. The study provides a chronology of this phenomenon and its geography. The researcher notes that artistic non-conformism has not disappeared in 2024. The dominance of socialist realism has been replaced by commercialisation, corporate orders, and the globalisation of art, which threaten the national style. The gaps in the assessment of the significance of the art of banned artists are filled by the book by artist and art critic O. Holub (2017) "The feast of disobedience and the everyday life of the underground. Biography of two artists not recognised during their lifetime, with comments". She highlights the biographies of the artists M. Tregub and his friend W. Baklytsky, who were not recognised during their lifetime, whom she knew personally, and for the first time publishes some archival documents and works by these artists. Among the important studies is M. Yur's (2019) monograph "Metamodel of Ukrainian painting", which also examines the influence of national self-identification on the spatial organisation of an artwork. The author uses an interdisciplinary approach in forming her own theoretical concept concerning changes, transformations, modifications of the semantic, constructive, artistic, aesthetic, and value components of Ukrainian painting. Among the works of philosophical orientation, which examine the phenomenon of mentality and its impact on cultural and artistic achievements, it should mention the work of the famous Ukrainian

philosopher M.V. Popovych (2018) "Philosophy of freedom". The scientist comprehends the events he saw directly. He compares these processes with the world experience, because his goal is to find their preconditions in the historical past of the Ukrainian people. In this context, the collective research of M. Yuriy & L. Aleksiyevets (2017) "Archetype and mentality through the prism of history", which is devoted to the place and role of the archetype in the structure of mentality, is consonant with this. The authors examine the evolution of mentality through the triad of archetype-culture-mentality and identify cultural archetypes as the primary basis of spiritual life, which naturally affects the formation of the national artistic tradition. It is through the prism of archetypal thinking in art, which is expressed by symbols and metaphor, that the researcher I. Soliariska-Komarchuk (2023) examines the work of F. Tetianych (Fripulia). The author explores the genesis of Tetianych's philosophical and poetic thinking and reveals the interconnection between the artist's individual mythopoetics and the creative means for its realisation. The article "The Way" as a catalyst for cultural and artistic processes in Lviv in the 1980s and 1990s" by H. Havryliv (2017), which analyses the activities of the post-Soviet non-conformist artistic society "The Way" (Lviv, the turn of the 1980s and 1990s), discusses creative searches and world-class artistic achievements. The author evaluates the work of the group's members, who were not biased by the remnants of socialist realism, and points to the presence of postmodern play with form, colour, space, and time. The great importance of the Lviv association "The Way" is noted in his online publication by B. Myshuha (2020) "The one who defined our "The Way", as Ukrainian art experts are only fully engaged in assessing their activities in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The author emphasises the importance of such a figure as Yurko Boyko, who was involved in the creation of the manifesto of the "The Way" group. Equally valuable is the publication in the online edition by L. Khomyakov (2020) "Ukrainian artists honored the image of the Chernobyl liquidator", which concerns the little-known art group "The Strontium-90". The author describes the final work of the group "The Liquidator", which actualises the problem of the Chernobyl disaster, and also describes the creative achievements of all members of this association. Among foreign publications, it is worth mentioning the work of Polish researcher P.J. Przybysz (2021) "Stefan Morawski and Grzegorz Sztabiński: Several comments on the background of neo-avant-garde art". Based on the theoretical work of two well-known Polish art historians, S. Morawski and G. Przybysz proves an axiological convergence in their decisions in favour of neo-avant-garde art, which opposes postmodern art.

### Materials and Methods

The methodological apparatus of the study consists of three stages. The preparatory method helped to clarify

the relevance of the chosen topic, which is confirmed by recent published studies by leading Ukrainian and foreign scholars. Accordingly, the goal and objectives were formed, and the expected results were set out in the formulation of novelty. The range of sources of both art history research and related disciplines, such as philosophy and literary studies, was also described, which in general allow for a deeper understanding of the chosen problem. In particular, the information on the methods of mythopoetic analysis mentioned in the works of Ukrainian literary critics was used: G.F. Dranenko (2010) "The mythologeme of the labyrinth as a means of reconstructing the dramatic form", O.I. Kobzar (2013) "Mythopoetic analysis of the work of art". Much attention was paid to the works of Ukrainian philosophers who indirectly address important issues of contemporary art: O. Polishchuk (2010) "Artistic and expressive thinking as a type of figurative thinking: Nature, essence and potential", V.A. Lychkovakh (2011) "Philosophy of ethnoculture. Theoretical, methodological and aesthetic aspects of the history of Ukrainian culture". Among cultural studies, the online publication "Post-Chernobyl: Catastrophism as a new national idea" (2012), which provides a holistic view of the problem of the Chernobyl disaster as an event that forces us to change philosophical, political, and ideological concepts for the sake of saving our civilisation. The initial data obtained made it possible to effectively carry out the second, research stage. The conclusions drawn in the course of the final synthesising stage confirmed the content of the above novelty. Specific methods were used in the course of the research: an interdisciplinary analysis of the problem (art history, philosophy, cultural studies, literary studies) was used, which led to a detailed analysis of both scientific literature and essays. The dialectical method made it possible to consider a number of artistic (the emergence of "unofficial" art from the shadow of prohibition, the formation of a new artistic continuum in Ukraine in the late 1980s, the preservation of national traditions by Ukrainian artists in a globalised world) or social (the impact of the Chernobyl tragedy on the public activity of artists) phenomena in all the contradictions of their manifestations. The method of logical analysis allowed us to trace and state that the figures of the forbidden art preserved the national artistic tradition and, in the difficult conditions of ideological terror, developed their creative pursuits, which became the basis for the rapid formation of a free continuum of creativity. Thanks to the method of critical and comparative analysis, which was used when considering information about similar processes in Polish art, special mythologemes inherent only to Ukrainian representatives of the neo-avant-garde were identified, which also determined the characteristic symbolic language of expression. The synergetic method allowed us to determine the role of artistic associations in the formation of new Ukrainian art at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. Generalisation was used

to assess the achievements of the artistic associations “The Way” and “The Strontium-90”. The method of forecasting showed that there is a great need for further research into the role of little-studied art movements that were widespread in Ukraine at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, as they preserved the national artistic tradition and continued to develop it in the global context, based on Ukrainian cultural archetypes.

### Results and Discussion

In the late 80s and early 90s, interesting creative practices were initiated and carried out in the space of freedom cleansed of ideology, as the artistic underground was legalised in 1989 (Petrova, 2015). In this regard, “unofficial” art loses its protest significance and reveals itself to the world as a full-fledged artistic phenomenon, whose representatives not only preserved the system of national artistic thinking based on archetypes manifested in the already realised phenomena of Baroque, Romanticism, Avant-Garde, and Modernism, but also transformed through it those newest world practices that actually kept them in the underground. This status of the work of Ukrainian “dissident” artists is evidenced by the sad fact that most of their works are in foreign museum and private collections. One can certainly point out that in times of totalitarian control, creative “dissenting” intellectuals still managed to keep abreast of the artistic achievements of their foreign colleagues in various ways (“samizdat”, conversations in narrow circles, hidden foreign magazine reproductions, publications from “Druzhba” bookstores, snatched from the drowning out wheezing of Radio Liberty broadcasts). In the Soviet reality, an artist who wanted to become a free creator nevertheless found invaluable sources of formation of his or her skills. Artists turned to the heritage of folk and professional art, and each region of Ukraine had its own original interpretations, associated with different socio-political conditions of development. Thanks to like-minded people, there was also an opportunity to get acquainted with banned works of art, such as visual and literary works created by Ukrainian and foreign avant-garde and modernists. One should not forget about communicating with colleagues from different Soviet republics. Ukrainian dissident artists, visiting other republics where they often had friends, enriched their experience and impressions. They not only tried to learn from the experience of their colleagues from the Baltic States, Georgia, Armenia, and other Soviet republics, but also tried to attend all the exhibitions of world masters: G. Jukker, R. Rauschenberg, J. Kunelis, D. Rosenquist (Petrova, 2015). Meetings with like-minded people were secretive, which led to the emergence of the phenomenon of “apartment art”, when conversations about “forbidden” art took place in kitchens, workshops, cafes, and among close friends. It happened more than once that famous autodidactic artists were formed in the company of a like-minded colleague (M. Tregub, W. Baklytsky, V. Holeiko in Kyiv, K. Shyshko

and O. Valenta in Lutsk). According to the author, an important milestone of Ukrainian “unofficial” art is the artist’s focus on inner experiences, which became a trend in world art in general in the postwar period, and ultimately leads to *neo-mythologism* and *expressive forms* of expression of the most individualised image system. “Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, virtually all Ukrainian artists have become sincerely and sometimes surprisingly interested in themselves” (Avramenko, 2006). This orientation of the banned Ukrainian artists determines the undeniable relevance of their work in the international artistic space of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The mature artistic form of this trend was the neo-avant-garde, which was based on expressionist methods manifested in different ways (Przybysz, 2021). In different countries, this neo-expressionism received different names: Arte Cifra or La Transavanguardia in Italy, Figuration Libre in France, New Image Painting in the United States, Neue Wilde in Germany, Nowa Expression in Poland. Neo-expressionism flourished in the late 70s and 80s. The work of many Ukrainian artists of the “unofficial” art of this period is absolutely in tune with the work of their foreign colleagues (K. Zvirynskiy, partially D. Dovboshynskiy, M. Tregub, W. Baklytsky, L. Fripulia, and V. Loboda).

The term “transavant-garde” was adopted by Ukrainian artists and art critics in the late 1980s from B. Oliva, who was considered the theorist of this phenomenon at the time (Lozhkina, 2019). In the first third of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Ukrainian art criticism, the transavant-garde is defined as the work of the “new wave” artists (late 1980s – early 1990s), who, unlike their “dissenting” colleagues, used its principles in an “academic” version (Lozhkina, 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to reconsider the Ukrainian “unofficial” art and to single out Ukrainian neo-expressionism of the 70s and 80s as a separate artistic phenomenon of the European neo-avant-garde in its “hot” stage.

Speaking about the new generation of artists, in the 1980s, in the process of self-education, they got acquainted with the works of C.G. Jung, aesthetics by A. Bergson, psychoanalysis by S. Freud, philosophical concepts by A. Maslow, E. Fromm, M. Heidegger, and M. Mamardashvili’s lectures. The author O. Petrova (2015) notes that intellectual enrichment inspired young people to experiment, which increased their interest in finding subconscious models in culture. The new artistic continuum, having lost its ideological bias, was gradually structured and enriched by innovative practices. At the same time, the legacy of the Socialist Realists in the new dimension of free art turned into exotic antiques and became a valuable segment of the contemporary art market. The formation of various artistic associations that gave rise to many creative destinies of famous Ukrainian artists of 21<sup>st</sup> century was significant for this period. Communication with like-minded people in the new social continuum was important in the process of realising what values should be brought into it, what meanings should be

expressed in forms, what kind of person should become its creator and inspiration. Young artists were especially active in changing the language of artistic means to one that was understood in the world. “Crossing the boundaries between genres and art forms has become the norm, and the technique of works is increasingly being labeled as mixed” (Vysheslavsky, 2020). In the 1990s, the ideas and programs of subjective artistic thinking shaped by European philosophy, including postmodernists, became part of Ukrainian aesthetic thought and artistic practice. Of course, the creative views of young artists were different. In fact, pluralism is becoming an essential dimension of the new Ukrainian art.

Among the most studied by experts are such creative associations as the “New Wave”, the “Picturesque Reserve”, “The Paris Commune”, “The Rapid Response Group”, and the environment of Odesa conceptualists. However, there are a number of interesting artistic associations whose activities at the time are worthy of attention. These are, in particular, Lviv’s “The Way” and Kyiv’s “The Strontium-90”.

The youth art association “The Way” (1989-1992) in Lviv was the first “informal” organisation after 1944. It emerged under the auspices of the Lviv branch of the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation. The group’s members and its main organiser, Yurko Boyko, stated that they were continuing the traditions of ANUM (Association of Independent Ukrainian Artists), which operated in 1931-1939. The main task of the ANUM was to unite Ukrainian artists abroad, to introduce national art to the European artistic context, and to promote Ukrainian art and its leading masters. The participants of the “The Way” also took on the same tasks, and enshrined them in the text of the manifesto. Their main goal was to fight stagnation, which hindered the development of culture and art, and negatively affected the formation of aesthetic and artistic tastes of both artists and viewers. When organising the association, it was crucial to gather people who were not only talented but also moral and not interested in vanity. It is important to emphasise that, among other Ukrainian cities, Lviv was a center of modernism even during the Soviet period (since 1939), hiding powerful artists of “unofficial” art in its depths. The underground “Roman Selskyi School” and the “Karlo Zvirynskiy Academy” operated here. Roman Selskyi, adopting the experience of the leading art schools of pre-war Europe, absorbing the traditions of Ukrainian art and impressions from the workshops of K. Sikhulskiy, O. Novakivskiy, F. Leger, Y. Pankevych, Y. Megoffer, and F. Kovarskiy, formed and developed his own style. He expanded the “School of Ukrainian Colorism”, which also gave impetus to the creative pursuits of the generation of artists of the 1980s. Karlo Zvirynskiy, who had been a supporter of the banned neo-avant-garde since his student days, taught young like-minded artists underground from 1959 to 1966. Among them were Z. Flinta, O. Tsehelska, O. Minko, A. Bokotey, R. Petruk, B. Soika, S. Shabaturova,

P. Markovych, I. Marchuk, and P. Hrytsyk (Fig. 1). Thus, the Ukrainian artistic tradition in the Lviv environment, although it was banned, inspired many artists of the new generation to further creative transformations, without losing the codes of the nation.



**Figure 1.** S. Shabaturova. Cassandra. Wake up, Troy! Death is coming for you, 1971. Tapestry

Source: based on K. Vyshneva (2020)

The association “The Way” included about twenty young outstanding artists – painters, graphic artists, sculptors, collectors of folk and professional art (M. Andrushchuk, A. Helitovych, A. Humeniuk, P. Humeniuk, H. Drul, V. Kaufman, Y. Koch, M. Krasnyk, M. Krytskiy, H. Novozhenets, B. Turetskiy, Y. Shymin, N. Shymin, V. Kostyrko). The society not only promoted the development of artistic life in Lviv, but also actively exhibited and popularised “unofficial” (dissident) art and its representatives in various cities of Ukraine (Kyiv, Kharkiv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lutsk) (Fig. 2).



**Figure 2.** P. Humeniuk. *The Last Supper*, 1995. Painting

Source: based on O. Subach (2021)



**Figure 3.** L. Loboda. *Childbirth 5*, 1982. Painting

Source: NuArt (2019)

In this way, the monopoly on exhibition activities of the Union of Artists of Ukraine was being destroyed. Thus, one of the tasks of “The Way” was to popularise the non-conformist layer of culture and to form an unbiased view of art. The joint exhibition “The Way”-“The look” (Lviv-Kyiv) on the occasion of the Day of Unification of the UPR and ZUNR, held in 1991 at the Taras Shevchenko State Museum, was symbolic. In this way, the artists demonstrated the spiritual and creative unity of Lviv and Kyiv. It is noteworthy that the exhibition was organised under the auspices of the Taras Shevchenko Ukrainian Language Society (Lviv) and the People’s Movement of Ukraine (Kyiv). The goal of the event went beyond the usual exhibition of artworks: the essence was to demonstrate the spiritual and creative unity of artists from Lviv and Kyiv. According to the members of “The Way”, the art of the “dissenters” should not only be appreciated by fellow citizens, but also turned into a valuable asset of the nation as an important aspect of self-identification. Therefore, in 1988, the society organised the first major exhibition of works by the dissident sixties artist O. Zalyvakha. The association was equally active in popularising the work of artists Liudmyla and Volodymyr Loboda, who moved to Lviv from eastern Ukraine (Dnipro) in the late 1980s. After moving, V. Loboda did not leave his homeland, trying to bring the spirit of freedom that was already in Lviv to the artistic environment of the then Dnipro. In particular, in the late 1980s, in his hometown, he created “The Step” artistic association, whose members included Serhiy Aliyev-Kovyka, Oleksandr Nemyaty, Serhiy Bublyk, Anatolii Sologub, and Petro Pshevlotskyi. The goal of the art group was to return to the sources of Ukrainian art, as well as to search for lost cultural and intellectual achievements in the space of the city and the steppe. The artists traveled through the steppes and villages of Poltava and Dnipro regions in search of treasures of Ukrainian culture, painted, photographed, and got acquainted with the autochthons of their native land (Fig. 3).

L. Loboda’s first solo exhibition took place in 1990 at the Lviv Art Gallery. It was curated by the legendary connoisseur of Ukrainian art Borys Voznytskyi. Especially for it, the artist created the large-scale cycles “Human Comedy” and “Iconostasis” (now owned by the Lviv National Gallery of Art named after Borys Voznytskyi).

The events organised by “The Way” had a great resonance, as they were covered by the national press, radio, and television. Art critics were involved in analysing their activities. This publicity aroused the interest of the foreign public, so the names of the members of “The Way” were mentioned at international exhibitions in Canada, the USA, and Poland, though mostly in diaspora circles. In particular, in 1990, at a seminar at the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Alberta, Yuriy Boyko presented a paper on “Contemporary Art of Western Ukraine”. In the same year, he presented slides of artworks by members of “The Way” Society at the Plast House in Toronto (Havryliv, 2017). (Fig. 4).



**Figure 4.** O. Minko. *Cry*, 1968. Painting

Source: based on K. Vyshneva (2020)

The ideological inspirer of “The Way” and the initiator of its creation was Yuriy Boyko, who at the time worked as the head of the contemporary art department at the Lviv Museum of Ukrainian Art. Yuriy was obsessed with the desire to gain valuable knowledge through the book, which he did in the field of philosophy and artistic words. “Within a few years, Yurko Boyko had in his library the catalogs of the avant-garde unions of inter-war Lviv: “GDUM” (Circle of Ukrainian artists), “ANUM” (Association of Independent Ukrainian Artists), and “Artes”. A whole decade before the publication of the heritage of the Ukrainian avant-garde in Lviv, he already had an awareness of what was real in 20<sup>th</sup> century art” (Misiuha, 2020). It was M. Yuriy & L. Aleksiyevets (2017) who came up with the idea, and later the strategy, of returning to the artistic space of the Sixties, which was realised through exhibition activities. He was involved in the return to history of the iconic names of Roman Selskyi, Karlo Zvirynskiy, Petro Markovych, Vasyl Polevyi, and many others.

In the early 1980s, Boyko met the brothers Petro and Andriy Humeniuk and Volodymyr Loboda. He soon became friends with Jurij Koch and Vlodko Kaufman. They gathered in his apartment to discuss important art issues, as artistic personalities, the members of “The Way” were formed in the mid-1980s “under the distinct influence of authoritative artistic figures Roman Bezpalkiv, Valeriy Hnatenko, Karlo Zvirynskiy, Volodymyr Loboda, and Ivan Ostafiychuk” (Havryliv, 2017). An important component in the formation of this new continuum of creativity was friendship and cooperation with figures of the musical and literary circle. The members of “The Way” communicated with young writers such as Ivan Malkovych, Mykola Riabchuk, Yuriy Andrukhovych, Viktor Neborak, Yuriy Vynnychuk, musician Viktor Morozov, members of the “Ne Zhuryys” theater, and the bands “Mertyv Piven” and “Plach Yeremii”. Representatives of “The Way” also collaborated with the Lviv Youth Theater Studio named after L. Kurbas. In particular, the Humeniuk brothers, V. Kaufman, and M. Andrushchuk created scenography for the plays “Snow in Florence”, “Grateful Erodus”, and “Narcissus”. United by a common desire to create free artistic works of words, metaphors, images, melodies, and scenography, the young artists created a powerful layer of culture, becoming the basis of the Eighties movement. Having absorbed the neo-avant-garde experience of their older dissident colleagues, the young artists of the new generation continued their creative experiments, using the power and potential of symbol, metaphor, colour, form, and space, as all of this made it possible to express their inner experience and feelings with maximum expression. “The Way” Art Association became an important center for the formation of contemporary art in the Western Ukrainian region. The creative communication of its members contributed to their individual searches, because the newly emerging continuum of Ukrainian art, cleansed of the dictates of

Soviet ideology, was to continue and enrich the national artistic tradition that dissident artists had so inspiringly maintained and developed. In the mid-1990s, when each member went his or her own way, the association ceased its activities.

Unlike their colleagues from “The Way” artistic association, the members of “The Strontium-90” (1990-2020) organised themselves without any support from government institutions, remaining completely “informal”. The reason for the formation of the association was the Chernobyl disaster, which is reflected in its name. Independent artists formed a social and environmental group in 1990 in Kyiv. Accordingly, the aim of “The Strontium-90” association was to protect the purity of the Earth’s ecology and draw the world’s attention to Chernobyl, which became a symbol of human negligence and spiritual decline. The influential figure of the group was Woodon Baklytsky (1942-1992), who was considered by his young colleagues and students to be a classic of the underground (Fig. 5).



**Figure 5.** W. Baklytsky. Stump, 1990. Painting  
Source: based on Baklitsky Woodon (2024)

The artist participated in several exhibitions of the association in 1991 (in particular, at the Ukrainian House and the Art-Inform Gallery). The group created a manifesto stating that “the Chernobyl disaster encourages a new look at man, his place in the world, and ultimately, a change in people’s consciousness. Because the root cause of Chernobyl and other environmental disasters lies in the consciousness, level of morality of people, and their spirituality” (Mykhailyk, 2016). Woodon’s death in 1992 seemed to end the first stage of “The Strontium-90” existence. In the 1992-2020s, the leader of the association was Valeriy Goleiko, or Ven Star (1956-2024). And while Woodon’s work was characterised by catastrophism, reflected in the “destruction” that filled his landscapes, Valeriy’s vision was a complete fantasy. He even presented his birth as a reincarnation of the American artist, representative of abstract expressionism, Jackson Pollock, whose day and year of death became Valeriy’s date of birth. In the mid-1990s, Goleiko became the

creator of such an artistic movement as tratlfreyrealism. The artist was impressed by K. Vonnegut's book about the fictional planet Tratlfamador. The world of the planet's inhabitants, who live in the fourth dimension, is filled with beauty, goodness, and light. Valeriy deepened this story and created his own mythology, reflecting it in the concept of "tratlf" – "Transformation of Reality by Art, Love, Fantasy". That is why the work of the Trafalcists looks like a pleasant game. The artist, having mastered Pollock's "playful" technique of dripping, invented CD Tratlfrealism (drop-diffusion traffic realism) (Fig. 6).



**Figure 6.** Night in Baghdad, 1994. Painting  
Source: photo from personal archive of the author

The concept of tratlfrealism attracted other well-known members of the association. Thus, in the mid-90s, the artist-autodidacts Tetiana Chebrova and later Oleksiy Breus, who worked at the Chornobyl nuclear power plant and was a liquidator, appeared. In 2001, the artists of "The Strontium-90" association began a long-term collaboration with the Enigma Art Gallery (Kyiv, Troieschyna). Since then, the artists have created both joint projects and personal ones. Butterflies adorn T. Chebrova's paintings, O. Breus created the cycle "The Gospel of Chornobyl", and V. Goleiko paints fish. The theme of strange animals and fish came to Valeriy in the late 1990s, and through it the author called for the protection of all living things. In particular, the theme of fish, "ichthyofauna", as the author noted, is characteristic of his work, because he has painted more than a dozen of them – different incarnations of one picture. For T. Chebrova, butterflies are a symbol of the human soul, so the author attaches great importance to the colour scheme when creating them. She is convinced that colour is as necessary for humans as food and air.

Leonid Hopanchuk (1955-2013), Honored Artist of Ukraine, was looking for his creative path in the circle of the artistic association "The Strontium-90". Hopanchuk, who had an academic degree in painting, joined the art group in 1990, but very quickly found his own style. For Leonid, the worldview of the Trafalcists, among which the recognition of harmony as the main spiritual, moral,

and aesthetic value was the basis of his creative credo. This understanding of the world and interaction with it was instilled in the artist in his childhood. His father was a priest in the Protestant community, although he also worked as a gardener and beekeeper on a collective farm. In the turbulent 1990-1991 years, socio-political changes and the destruction of Soviet ideology, Hopanchuk searched for his own creative path in the new artistic continuum, consonant with his worldview. In the 1990s, he studied, experimented, formed his own painting style, and as a result developed his own author's style, which made him recognisable. This is transrealism. Philosophical questions have always interested Leonid, who considered the spiritual growth of humanity to be the main theme of our existence. Understanding the necessity of dialog with the Creator led the author to artistic discoveries. The desire to emphasise the spiritual in a person actually prompted the author to use a bright colour, which can be traced in his paintings (portraits, landscapes, paintings on religious themes, still lifes). This belief shaped his negative stance on certain destructive and destructive manifestations in the works of the Surrealists and Cubists. Leonid was concerned with the healing of the human soul, not its destruction. Instead, he greatly appreciated Claude Monet, Van Gogh, and Velázquez. Before painting, Leonid Hopanchuk studied architecture at the Kyiv Art Institute, so the theme of historical monuments of Ukraine occupied a special place in his painting. The artist tried to influence the process of revival of national spiritual shrines through art, as they were connected with historical memory and knowledge of the true dramatic history. His author's project "Shrines of Ukraine-Rus" (about 54 works) was intended to awaken genetic memory and national consciousness among the new generation of Ukrainians. This idea, after the artist's death, continues to be realised in 2019 and 2022 (Struk, 2023). Thus, the example of L. Hopanchuk's creative path demonstrates the important role of the artistic association "The Strontium-90" as a center of like-minded people in the newly emerging continuum of free creation. Thanks to this, the artist, starting from tratlfrealism, found and developed his own trend – transrealism.

One of the important activities of "The Strontium-90" association was the organisation of artistic events. In particular, the members of the art group – V. Goleiko, T. Chebrova, O. Breus – initiated the action "Defensive Flowers", which took place within the framework of the international art project "SIP: Shelter Imaginary Point" in memory of Chornobyl. Later, young talented artists Oleksiy and Yana Hlazunov joined the group. Valeriy Goleiko and Oleksiy Hlazunov received a gold medal, the Medal of Honor, for their contribution to art from the President of Palestine in connection with their participation in the international project "Heart of Peace". The author of the idea is the Palestinian artist Jamal Badwan, who proposed to create a huge painting, more than 8 meters high, and open it in Bethlehem on the Manger

Square. The project involved artists from Germany, the Netherlands, Israel, Palestine, Poland, Ukraine, France, and Chad. For two weeks, they worked on a painting that depicts the “heart” of the world. The composition is based on the image of a woman, the prototype of the Virgin Mary, who calls for peace in different languages, regardless of religion, political views or social status.

The members of “The Strontium-90” group also presented the completion of their joint activities in 2020 in the form of a project, Liquidator. The Ornament Gallery in Kyiv presented a huge monumental canvas (3×1.5 m), created by V. Goleiko, O. Breus, and Y. Glazunov. It depicts the “Liquidator”, whose prototype was Breus, stylised as a Vitruvian Leonardo da Vinci (Fig. 7).



**Figure 7.** V. Goleiko, O. Breus, O. and Y. Glazunov. Liquidator, 2020. Painting

Source: based on L. Khomyakov (2020)

“With his arms outstretched and shielding the planet from danger, he, like a superman, acts as a symbol of courage and resilience of all those who gave their health and lives to save others” (Mykhailyk, 2016). This work demonstrates a number of dialectical processes of our time. In particular, the authors of the “Liquidator” consider the Chernobyl tragedy not only from the point of view of the path of our civilisation, which is fascinated by technological achievements, but also try to draw attention to the spiritual state of a person who belongs to the “nuclear culture” and feels responsible to nature and the world as a whole (Post-Chernobyl..., 2012). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century Chernobyl is turning into a symbolic event of global proportions, affecting the notion of existence in the modern world, and requiring the attention of the entire scientific community in understanding and creating new philosophical, cultural, and political concepts. Chernobyl has also become a factor that, within the framework of the Western modernisation project, filled with ideas about scientific progress and social justice, focuses attention on the value of the lives of ordinary citizens who are forced to overcome the consequences of miscalculations. The “Liquidator” mission becomes not only a biographical fact but also a moral virtue.

## Conclusions

The period of the late 80s and early 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century became a milestone for Ukrainian art not only chronologically, but ideologically. Political events, the Chernobyl disaster, which in the circles of the Ukrainian intellectuals received the status of a topos of “spiritual Chernobyl”, provoked an active struggle and zeal of the

artists of the new generation and their older “dissenting” colleagues (representatives of Ukrainian “unofficial” art) to form a free art, which must be necessarily involved in the context of the world art, because it is based on the same ideological values. The turn of the 80s and 90s in the Ukrainian artistic environment resembled a space of chaos, and the latest mythologies (catastrophism, ecology, vitality, tralficking, transrealism), which were formed among the members of various artistic associations of that time, sowed new meanings in the newly formed artistic continuum. The emergence of various artistic associations became a landmark for this period. The members of the Lviv artistic association “The Way” popularised the achievements of underground “unofficial” art through exhibitions, clearly realising their aesthetic, spiritual, and moral guidelines. Thus, they demonstrated the absence of intervals in the development of the Ukrainian artistic tradition, as the imaginative thinking of Ukrainian artists skillfully represented archetypal symbols and metaphors by means of the most up-to-date techniques. Representatives of “The Strontium-90” art group, which emerged as a socio-ecological movement, also promoted the transformation of humanity through spirituality and aesthetics, freely using the artistic experience of both Ukrainian and foreign colleagues. Thus, the activities of many such little-studied associations as the Lviv-based “The Way” and the Kyiv-based “The Strontium-90” require attention and evaluation by experts. Their members became both heirs and continuators of the Ukrainian artistic tradition, which, as representatives of a new generation, they felt and accepted as a fundamental constant of the new continuum. For the most part, the

members of the art groups of the 1980s and 1990s became well-known artists in Ukraine in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and it is important to trace the impact of being a member of a particular artistic association on the creative development of each of them.

Given that the artistic associations of the turn of the 80s and 90s were numerous, emerging in different cities of Ukraine, and played an important role in the

formation of a new artistic continuum, a more detailed study of their activities is needed.

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None.

### ● Conflict of Interest

None.

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## Виміри свободи українського мистецтва кінця 80-х – початку 90-х років ХХ століття та їх прояв у тогочасних мистецьких об'єднаннях

■ **Анотація.** Актуальність теми дослідження полягає в недостатньому вивченні такого періоду українського мистецтва, як рубіж 1980-х – початок 1990-х років, коли заборонені митці вийшли з підпілля, скориставшись послабленням ідеологічного тиску радянської системи, і очолили потужні мистецькі рухи, причетні до формування вимірів вільної творчості. Мета роботи – з'ясувати умови розвитку українського мистецтва на зламі 80-90-х років ХХ століття, а також висвітлити значення творчих об'єднань у процесі реалізації митцями нових завдань у континуумі свободи, що формувався (на прикладі об'єднань «Шлях» та «Стронцій-90»). Методологічний апарат дослідження складається з трьох етапів (підготовчого, дослідницького та узагальнюючого) з використанням таких методів: аналіз літературних і наукових джерел, діалектичний метод у виникненні нового явища, метод логічного аналізу, метод критичного та порівняльного аналізу, синергетичний метод, узагальнення, метод гіпотези та прогнозування. Дослідження виявило, що наприкінці 1980-х років під впливом Чорнобильської катастрофи українське «неофіційне» мистецтво вийшло зі статусу маргінального, а його представники стали предтечами нового вільного творчого континууму. Митці нової генерації, використовуючи неоавангардний досвід своїх колег та фактор свободи самовираження, прагнуть застосовувати новітні творчі практики, що долучило їх до світового мистецького простору. У дослідженні стверджується, що неоміфологізм, як один з основних принципів світового мистецтва другої половини ХХ століття, на зламі 1980-1990-х років став визначальним у процесі створення вільного художнього континууму. Цей принцип призвів до найбільш індивідуалізованої образної системи вираження українських художників нової генерації. У статті розглядаються два мистецькі об'єднання «Шлях» і «Стронцій-90» та їхня роль у формуванні українського вільного творчого континууму. Практичне значення дослідження полягає у використанні отриманих результатів при створенні рекомендацій та методичних посібників з історії українського мистецтва ХХ-ХХІ століття та галерейної справи

■ **Ключові слова:** «неофіційне» мистецтво; мистецтво Чорнобильської катастрофи; континуум; міфологема; неоекспресіонізм; тратлфрейреалізм