

# The Features of Ukrainian Media Art in a Global Context

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## Summary

The article seeks to explore Ukrainian media art and its features in a global context. In particular, it performs an in-depth analysis of the stages of its development from video art of the 1990s, media installations of the 2000s, and to various digital and VR technologies today. Due to historical circumstances, the development of media art was quite rapid, as young artists sought to gain new experience in media art. Most often, their experience was broadened through international cooperation and studying abroad. The paper analyzes the presentation of Ukrainian media art outside the country during 1993-2020 and distinguishes the main thematic areas of the artists' work. It examines how artists present and reveal the peculiarities of the Ukrainian worldview, aesthetics, and culture through the problematization of certain aspects and themes in their work. Specifically, among the principal topics which are problematized in the work of media artists are a sensory experience, limited sensory capabilities, gender issues, the Chernobyl tragedy, the development of utopian models of the city, and global communication. The leading themes of Ukrainian artists also include revolution and war. Notably, political and social sentiments determine the unique energy and vitality of contemporary Ukrainian art, create a revolutionary creative environment, and unite media artists in group art projects. It is concluded that by showing, exhibiting, and presenting them outside the country, artists shape the image of Ukrainian art in a global context.

### Key words:

*Media art, video art, media installation, digital technology, VR, Venice Biennale.*

## 1. Introduction

From practice of media art, including the Ukrainian one, offers persuasive evidence to the fact that media is widely regarded not only as technology but also as a relevant cultural practice. The representatives of the young generation of artists quickly master modern technologies and boldly experiment with them.

We can observe certain common features in the development of video art in the socialist bloc of countries, which is associated with the common ideological space of historical, social and cultural conditions. Nevertheless, the consideration of national peculiarities makes it possible to comprehensively analyze Ukrainian media art.

In the context of the growing complexity and conflictogenity of media, the self-actualization of art and creativity of both an individual artist and an individual national art is a certain existential challenge. Modern media culture is a space in which numerous innovative experiences rapidly emerge and new opportunities for creativity and advanced levels of knowledge arise. Accordingly, considering Ukrainian media art in the context of its presentation on the world art platform, it seems relevant to discuss to what extent it aligns with the global trends in media art, its level of openness to world experience, global issues, national specifics, adherence to evolutionary processes, technological compliance, etc.

Researchers pinpoint that both Ukrainians and Europeans “feel a significant lack of information about the genealogy of Ukrainian media art” [1]. Among the immediate reasons are the chaotic and heterogeneous development of this branch of art in the post-Soviet conditions, as well as the low activity of media artists due to the lack of specialized institutions. On the other hand, viewers in Ukraine are not yet ready to perceive media art, as the topic of media art is rarely supported at the cultural, institutional, and informational level.

The purpose of the article is to clearly identify the features of representation or presentation of Ukrainian media art in the world, to critically analyze key works which have been distinguished at the international level, to exhaustively discuss the authors, who are the participants of international media practices which set a trend in the work of young artists, to clearly highlight the main thematic blocks of these works, and to extensively review the dominant topics which are problematized and covered by Ukrainian media artists.

## 2. The overview of Recent Research and Publications

Currently, there are numerous studies of the development of media culture and media art, which is generally associated with the development of digital technologies, the expansion in the scope of their operation, and use in culture and everyday life. Ukrainian media art

has a relatively recent history, and it is often studied by artists who experiment with the media in their work. Foreign critics, on the other hand, rarely turn to the work of Ukrainian artists.

Art researchers [1-8] consider the specifics of the formation of the Ukrainian media art from the 1990s to the present from different perspectives. Valuable conclusions are formulated primarily by scientists working at the crossroads of philosophical anthropology, aesthetics, and philosophy of media. Thus, the works of [9-14] are conceptually important for this research. Most of these researchers are also curators of media art projects, so they take an active part in the promotion of Ukrainian media art abroad, publishing the most relevant information in international publications or Internet resources.

The question of women in media art and topical gender issues are raised in the researches of [15-18]. Although the peak of interest in gender issues is no longer particularly relevant in many countries, for post-totalitarian Ukrainian society these problems are still quite acute, and, consequently, are problematized in the work of media artists. The archive of Ukrainian media art (created by Yanina Prudenko), Internet resources, and personal web pages of artists are also valuable for the study of media works.

## 2.1 On the History of Media Art in Ukraine

To fully comprehend the context in which contemporary Ukrainian art is currently developing, it is essential to understand the coexistence of modern and postmodern dimensions in current culture, the advantages of traditional art over a small share of media and performative practices, the lack of sufficient institutionalization of media art, and innovation in creative projects. In the art arena, one can observe the continuation of mental coexistence of irrelevant standards of the past and ultra-modern creative trends, as well as an active desire to develop in the context of world contemporary art, the desire to quickly master new technologies and previously unavailable media. As Natalia Manzhaliy posits, "The rapid development of new technologies and their use in the artistic process have led to a certain migration of contemporary artists to the "new territories of art" to find other ways of artistic expression" [5].

### 2.1.1. Video Art of the 1990s as the Beginning of Ukrainian Media Art

In the process of studying the history of art, it is impossible not to pay due regard to the history of a particular country. It is particularly relevant if it is versatile and censored, with hidden facts and numerous inconsistencies. Television, which is often viewed as the origin of media art in the world, was clearly controlled and regulated, while video cameras were in short supply in the Soviet Union. Important issues of aesthetics, which

gradually evolved in the West, were quite rare and out of date.

Until the 1990s, the tradition of video art in the realm of contemporary art had been a well-established area. Ukrainian art, which eventually gained legitimacy and the opportunity to express itself, sought to catch up with lost opportunities and to become part of global trends. Interest in media art could not be fully manifested due to the obvious lack of technical means and relevant information. Therefore, the first videos are characterized by naivety and narrative nature.

Bohdan Shumylovych states that the first works of video art "became the quintessence of the artistic processes of the late 1980s and early 1990s when the Ukrainian SSR painfully but irrevocably turned into Ukraine. Critics have noted that art of that time was dictated by a need for transgression" [1], and it is not surprising. In the work of artists, we can observe a rethinking of the role task of the work of art and its relationship with the "social body". The process of transformation or transgression is most noticeable in video art. It comes as no surprise as a video has its own "specific phenomenology" which is historically associated with explicit or implicit desires, ideologies, or discourses. The researcher also identifies certain trends, changes and directions in the development of video art: "The strategies to establish an identity 'proper' to Ukrainian video art varied: while some groups of artists sought to legitimize their creativity through references to the local or national past, others found legitimacy through appealing to global trends or entirely subjective experiences" [1].

The first attempts at media art research are related to video art in the 1990s. In the article "Video – Art" Hlib Vysheslavskyi presents several typological groups. In particular, video documentation of performances, happenings, actions, concerts ("Art in Space" (1993) by Ihor Podolchak, "Gate of the Sun" (1989), "Love, Angel, Death" (1990) by Hlib Vysheslavskyi) and "experimental" or "author's" video "Crooked Mirrors" (1993) by Oleksandr Hnylytskyi, Nataliia Filonenko, Maksym Mamsikov, "Rings of Saturn" (1994) by Anatoliy Hankevych, "Milk Sausages" (1994) by Vasyl Tsaholov, "Voices of Love" (1994) by Arsen Savadov, "Metanosis" (1994) by Andriy Bludov, "The Tale Told by Francis of Assisi" (1997) by Oksana Chepelyk, "I am Time" (1995) by Anna Kuts, Viktor Dovhalyuk).

A special place in the history of Ukrainian video art belongs to the epoch-making project of the independent art group "Masoch Foundation" called "Art in Space" (1993). It became the first work of art of independent Ukraine, which was presented at the Biennale of Arts in Sao Paulo (Brazil) in 1994. This is the documentation of the project, which took place on January 25, 1993, when the astronauts of the Russian space station "Mir" showed graphic works by Ihor Podolchak on board for the first time in outer space. The concept of this project was to bring into outer space not

only the technological but also the artistic value of humanity. The artists were concerned about the continued existence of art when it leaves the cultural orbit or context. One of the first media works of independent Ukraine to be shown in Europe was the installation of “emotional conceptualist” Andriy Sahaidakovskyi, exhibited together with Vasyl Bazhay’s paintings and presented at the exhibition of Ukrainian art in Warsaw under the metaphorical title “Steppes of Europe” (1993, curator Jerzy Onuch). Having the opportunity to present their work in the world, the artists of independent Ukraine sought to make it as interesting and bright as possible in the presence of limited or minimal technical means. Performative practices recorded on video become video documentation, which raised the question of the “presence” of the viewer. Thus, the video not only performed a retransmission function but also became a viewer. As Vysheslavskyi notes: “In the mid-1990s, another line of video art developed, close in its aesthetics to traditional short films. It is characterized by meditation, authorial narrative, figurative complexity, poeticism, admiration for good shots and the desire for impeccable editing”. [3, p. 55] Such is the video work of Andriy Bludov “Metanosis” / “Mythical World” created in 1994. The author models the figurative drawing of signs of mythological origin on the walls of houses, bodies and in nature, labeling the created video as a change of state of consciousness or half-sleep. The artist Vasyl Tsaholov created several author’s conceptual projects and video experiments, aestheticizing violence and mysticism: videos “Milk Sausages”, “The End” (1994), “Werewolf” (1997), “Big Walk” (1997), and multimedia installation “Solid Television Studio” (1998). His colleague Oleksandr Hnylytskyi presented the video performance “Sleeping Beauty in a Glass Coffin” (1992) and the video “Crooked Mirrors - Living Pictures” (1993), which he made together with Maxym Mamsikov and Nataliia Filonenko. The images of sexual intercourse were reflected in five crooked mirrors, as a result of which the parts of the body fused and absurdly changed shape and size. The ability of media art practices to problematize the relationship between freedom and communication was demonstrated at “FLASHBACK. Ukrainian Media Art of the 1990s” (Kyiv, 2018), where the experiments of artists of the 1990s were presented. Most works confirmed that the evolution of media art and media practices in theater and music is usually synchronous with the development of digital media communication technologies. However, media practices often precede the mass dimension of their use, harmonize or disharmonize the relationship between the media, technology and the human, are a manifestation of technophilia or become a “cure for technophobia” [9].

Many of the video works of the 1990s were shown at the retrospective exhibition “[De][Re] Construction” in Wrocław (2016), dedicated to the 25th anniversary of Ukrainian media art, and the “Exhibition of Achievements

of Ukrainian Media Art” in Moscow (2017, Centre for Creative Industries “Factory”). The curator of the exhibition, Yanina Prudenko, notes that “any phenomenon of postcolonial culture acquires the status of a legitimate one only in the process of a paternalistic act of recognizing it as such by the center of the former empire.” Thus, the exhibition is “a symbolic act of completion of the gestalt of postcolonial behavior and thinking, for which it was important to take place, to become visible and noticeable in the center of the empire” [11].

Historically challenging times affected the work of artists. Bohdan Shumylovych believes that the new era after the fall of the USSR requires the artist to be not only the creator of the work but part of the work itself: “Each generation seeks [a] new expression of space in form, line, colour, music, relationships. [...] [The] [c]reation of new unions, new institutions, new relationships between people gives new forms, new semantic combinations, new words, new pleasure from life, new hypnosis” [8].

In the work “Crosses” (1993) Anna Kuts and Viktor Dovhalyuk synthesized a series of images from abstract paintings and videos. Numerous graphic sculptures in the video work in an ensemble with a video-documented action of naturalistic mise-en-scène. The motif of the cross was to carry both symbolic content and formal characteristics, the association of horizontal-vertical, life-death, and reality-eternity. The need for new semantic connections and new forms of expression is perceived.

“Crosses” is the first video work conceived as an answer to new artistic questions, rather than as an experiment with a moving image or imitation of Western trends. It was with “Crosses” that the development of a unique style and formation of Ukrainian media art began, which was not limited to protest and denial, but interpreted and retransmitted the features of Ukrainian art with new force and with the help of new means. Later, this work will help Viktor Dovhalyuk and Hanna Kutz to obtain a diploma from the Institut fuer Neue Medien in Berlin. Currently, these are the most famous Ukrainian media artists, namely Akuvido. They work outside Ukraine.

Independence and European nostalgia for the forgotten past became the leading themes of artists in the early 1990s. “Their works, however, took the form of burlesque rituals and carnivalesque buffoonery.” [8] The manifestation of such cultural rituals is the first festivals of alternative culture. The Dreamcatcher Festival (1998) was the first forum and platform for the presentation of video art and presented a number of iconic works. In particular, the multimedia project of Ilya Isupov and Ivan Tsyupko “Zhaga/Interactive Object of Desire” (1998) became the first computer animation made exclusively for artistic purposes and the first attempt in Ukraine to combine traditional “painting” techniques with the ability provided through morphing technology, computer animation, and electronic music” [5]. The project was demonstrated in

Moscow (2017) and Wroclaw (2016) as part of a large retrospective exhibition dedicated to Ukrainian media art.

### 2.1.2. Media art of the 2000s and the Presentation at the Venice Biennale

The second stage in the development of media art in Ukraine is connected with the activities of the Soros Center for Contemporary Art and the Goethe-Institut German Cultural Center in Kyiv. The activities of the center were to organize training for young artists, inviting foreign colleagues with lectures and workshops. The festival of multimedia art KIMAF (2000-2002) served to create certain cultural content. Along with foreign projects, Ukrainian artists presented their media works. Under the theme of "Alter Natura", the artists focused on the study of the interaction between artificial processes and nature. It led to the emergence of the first interactive installation "Come to me" by Ivan Tsypko and Nataliia Holiborda (2000), which explores the nature of human desires and their unattainability.

During KIMAF, the organizers also presented projects from other festivals: Ars Electronica, EMAX, ZKM, FACT, National Audiovisual Institute (Paris), Videotrafic (France), and RIGASOUND. This provided an opportunity to present the works of Ukrainian media artists in an international format, facilitated the integration of Ukrainian art in the world and took it beyond the local presentation. [5] Thus, the realized projects of Ukrainian artists were presented at art exhibitions and festivals in Germany, USA, France, and others. In particular, Hlib Katchuk's project "Industrial Fountain" was presented during the Uberwasser International Festival in Germany. As a screen, the artist used the surface of the water, i.e. a two-meter waterfall, on which the projection "fell" in the direction of the water.

During the interactive installation of Olha Kashembekova and Hlib Katchuk "Anti-karaoke", the audience was invited to sing into a microphone next to an empty shower. During the singing, a translucent curtain falls and the audience sees a man washing and hears the sound of water. When the singing stops, the water stops at the same time and the man or a woman in the shower freezes, grits his teeth, or is indignant and leaves the shower. The project was continued and repeatedly demonstrated abroad at media festivals.

The idea of Hlib Katchuk's project "Carmageddon-karaoke" is based on a forbidden game. The purpose of the virtual chase or race around the virtual city is to score points, knocking down passers-by. Combining a virtual game with karaoke, one observes the dependence of the player's car speed on the play of a song in karaoke. Media art as a separate field of art is constantly in search of new digital tools. It is the unique variety of design and imaging instruments offered by modern digital technologies which arouse growing interest in media art, as evidenced by

a large number of exhibition projects and biennials, in which, undoubtedly, Ukrainian artists seek to participate.

The annual Venice Biennale demonstrates that the development of media art produces new and extraordinary forms of artistic formation, as well as opening new names in art. As this is a world-class event, the presented objects largely represent a slice of contemporary art in the broadest context. Most of the works, needless to say, are selected and supervised, but the presence of national pavilions, over which the curators of the Biennale have no influence, allows different countries to show their current art, as well as popular and extraordinary artists. Media art objects often contain ideas and issues which are global in nature but also local ones. This is associated with a special interest in national pavilions, where one can see the features of the problematization in the contemporary art of each state and its aesthetics conveyed by modern media. The scale of the event and the number of audiences contribute to the creation of art objects and works of quick perception and understanding using virtual tools, videos, art objects, installations, or video performances.

Ukrainian art resumed its participation in the Biennale in 2001 after a break of 43 years. That year, Biennale curator Harold Zeman screened Olexandr Roitburd's "Psychedelic Invasion of the Battleship "Potemkin" into Sergei Eisenstein's tautological hallucination" (1998), a combination of original silent film footage of Eisenstein and contemporary footage.

The idea of quoting the Last Supper is revealed by a video installation by Viktor Sydorenko "Mill of Time" (2003), which was presented at the 50th Venice Biennale. The main thesis of the project: "Everyone grinds one's own, but we all do the same thing. We are lonely and indifferent to each other, we must coexist together, but separately - friends, enemies, traitors and betrayed ..." [19]. This is an image of the grinding of human destinies, which is an exhausting circular motion. According to Viktor Sydorenko, the plot of the video is filled with the history of life, cyclicity, and abstract concepts, which are more like instruments of torture: bullets, crosses, and support objects, which are quite "realistic" in philosophical and metaphysical terms. For the Ukrainian audience, the metaphor of bread is unambiguous, because the trauma of the Holodomor is embedded in national memory. Meanwhile, the theme of bread echoes the Christian symbol of the Body of Christ, which closes the circle of signs, like the movement of millstones spinning in this video installation. The artist's creative experiments continued in the following years, but, as Olena Som-Serdyukova notes, "presence, as a fact of participation in the world's most prestigious Biennale, is insufficient to be noticed" [12, p.232]. Projects of the Ukrainian pavilion are often overlooked by critics and properly covered in the press. The reasons for this can be excessive authenticity, foreign or

incomprehensible aesthetics on the one hand, and weak organization on the other hand.

## 2.2. The Main Thematic Areas of Ukrainian Media Art

The very presentation of Ukrainian contemporary art on the international arena raised the question of its self-identification and external presentation. What exactly distinguishes us from others and what can Ukraine tell the world about itself through visual arts? This was especially important for a country which had recently appeared on the geopolitical map of the world and sought to separate itself from the Soviet past and show its otherness. The task was not an easy one, as the development of art in the Soviet Union was suspended for 70 years. We had to bridge the gap in art at a rapid pace: from previously banned topics to deeply national or global issues. The traumatic experience which Ukrainians gained as a nation, as well as other limitations such as lack of art education or poor access to information, as well as limited technological means, have become apparent.

### 2.2.1. Sensory Experience and Limited (Sensory) Capabilities

The process of formation of Ukrainian culture was not simple and the continuous shortage of something was a constant in which we had to survive. People with disabilities became an allegory through which artists tried to convey both their helplessness and social or collective helplessness. "Choir of the Deaf and Dumb" (1998) by Oksana Chepelyk is a conceptual video based on a performance at the Center for the Deaf and Dumb (Kyiv), which explores the physical degree of the endurance of the social body. The video explores personal physical and political boundaries marked by traditions and social rituals. The concept of opposites of individual and collective is investigated. If the gesture of a deaf-mute has an informational ability, then the absurdity of a collective gesture turns into an existential metaphor. It is also a reaction to a united Europe when Ukraine is forced to become isolated and loses its voice. "Choir of the Deaf and Dumb" is a project in which questions were raised about the impossibility of choice and communication in the absence of a voice in the collective choir. The video has not lost its relevance and has been shown at dozens of festivals, including the United States, Russia, Germany, France, and Poland.

People with disabilities become the object of Oksana Chepelyk's video "Not Just a Game" (2017). The number of disabled people appearing in Ukraine as a result of the war is constantly growing. In the video, players who have unbuckled or detached their prostheses play volleyball while sitting on the floor. The sounds of hitting balls turn into shots; thus, both realities of war and peaceful life merge in the space of the gym. The project "Not just a game" is

about trauma and overcoming pain, both physical and psychological. The author wonders how empathy can be maintained and the painful experience transformed into a driver for social change. The work was presented at the contest of the International Festival Signes des Nuit, Paris. One of the socio-ethical projects of artists using technology is "Invisible Way" (2007-2010) by Yuriy Kruchak and Yuliia Kostereva aimed at integrating people with visual impairments into society. This is an audiovisual installation filled with city sounds and layouts. In this way, viewers who did not have vision problems could feel how blind people live moving in the dark and feeling the models.

The project "Invisible Way" was demonstrated at festivals in Amsterdam (2011) and Stockholm (2012). The authors believe that Ukrainian media projects in Europe are read a little differently: "This is due to the specifics of our thinking and cultural differences. We have a greater perception of the external side of work, in Western Europe people are interested in how everything is done, for them, a moral and ethical criterion is very important" [20]. Confirmation of this opinion is the characterization of art critic and curator Aaron Moulton, who calls "Invisible Way" a "poetic-ironic" project. Blindness and groping models are just an attempt to imagine the architect's idea. In this blindness, Aaron Moulton sees the short-sightedness of state cultural policy and the call for immediate awakening [21].

The most complex genres of video art are represented by artists from Western Ukraine, who often do internships in neighboring Poland, participate in international festivals and joint Polish-Ukrainian projects. Multichannel video installation "Breathing" (2010) by Serhiy Petliuk consists of modules with monitors which display human faces constantly diving in and coming up for a new breath. The work refers to people constantly balancing between real and abstract, between pain and joy, between fragility and strength, between hopelessness and believe, between life and death. Simple, repetitive, monotonous acts of breathing on the screens keep the audience in suspense and force them to breathe together with the displayed media characters [22]. A video installation by the artist "Revelation" (2019) is devoted to the study of everyday living space. People rediscover things around them through touch. Slowing down their movements leads to immersion in personal or inner space, which seems familiar but is often ignored.

### 2.2.2. Utopia in the Focus of Media Art

Utopias today have little in common with social theory. Every artist prefers to create his art as a private or own utopia and to complete reality to the desired integrity. In this way, compensation for unresolved issues often occurs.

Oksana Chepelyk's video project "Urban Multimedia Utopia" (2002) is a project of a new visual language which responds to the global world. The artist understands the connection between an individual's private existence and one's social environment, which is less and less defined by "place" and may include employees, partners, and friends who work on the other side of the world. New communication and information networks emphasize the difference in understanding and mastering the space between local and global, domestic and nomadic. "The city, as an n-dimensional matrix, is no longer a common space, but acts as a fragmented matrix of multi-time and multi-spatial radically opposed different urban forms" [13, p.120]. In 2002, the author received the Special Werkleitz Award from the 16th EMAF, the European Media Art Festival in Osnabrück, Germany, for her video project, "Urban Multimedia Utopia", which was related to the impact of new communication technologies on Sydney's urbanization. For the author, such installations are "an opportunity to offer ideas for a new visual language that responds to the global world" [13, p.115].

The multimedia installation "Text GENE" (2004, Los Angeles) focused on the project as a model of intercultural communication presented in a synthesis of theoretical and practical research. The work deals with the formation of culture through science and technology. The visitor prints messages on the computer in his native language to his virtual partner. With the help of a program of automatic translation and visualization of appearance according to typical national, racial, and sexual characteristics, the viewer gets a specific virtual interlocutor. Moreover, the change of text messages leads to the correction of the 3d-face of the participants of the dialogue. This interactive installation reflects the processes generated by globalization, i.e. the processes of cultural transmission.

The visualization of Akuvido projects is often an associative informative graphic of the city, which conveys the environment and influences the real city for its further development and planning. According to the authors, their net art "is not just about the Internet - it is rather a compilation of video art, photography, music, performance, programming and installation" [23]. The first such interactive project in Akuvido's work was *Esse* (1998), presented in Berlin. The interactive work "360 B'U" (1998) presents computer-generated and animated graphics and explores the artificial nature of "technospace" by synthesizing a visual object and electronic sound in cyberspace. This work was presented in the program of the Kyiv International Film Festival "Youth" and at the Clermont-Ferrand Short Film Festival 1998 in France. The *Stadtsoundstation* project (2002, Berlin) is based on audiovisual sounds and symbolizes the exploration of Berlin's urban space through the developed game. With the help of a software set of sounds, the user can create their

composition of the city sound with a complementary graphic effect.

The next net-art, "City\_interactive" (2004, Rotterdam), is a study of the real city, which the authors view as a social entity with streams of information which cannot be grasped at once. It does not give the opportunity to see and hear the whole city at once with all its plans, schedules, navigation, and information landmarks. The compositional graphic design of the program gives the chance to unite it all in one whole. All links and clicks of the program are activated and expand the image-graphic information element of the scene. The authors say: "An art project is a synthesis of many arts: video art, photography, graphics, architecture, music, performance programming and installation, the existence of which depends on the form of presentation via the Internet or as a video projection in the gallery's exhibition space" [14].

Slightly different, according to the presentation of the author's idea, is the project *Akuvido* "Decode" (2002), which reveals the attempts to analyze the situation of creating a computer language of media art. Each epoch expresses its socio-cultural codes through a graphic component or element ranging from drawings to letters, signs, to abstract works by Malevich, Klee, and Mondrian. Thus, the latter are interpreted by the authors "as signs and circles of planar-screen painting, which are the carriers of the new programming language of media art" [23].

Another project of virtual and symbolic space on the Internet is *WebWuerfelWerkstatt* (2002). Reproduction takes place through a sign system and visual associations of images and sounds. A project is presented as a game in which the user creates one's music and visual image. By mastering new technologies, artists get the opportunity not just to change the world around them, but to create a new one. Using VR, one can move to any place, either real or imaginary, to abstract and to live another life.

Virtual reality is gradually becoming part of media art. VR is a particularly attractive technology for artists who are creative and have a visual language. Daryna Fes' project "Maze" consists of a space, where the viewer wears a VR-helmet and enters a virtual maze. Finally, he/she returns to the real world of an empty room.

### 2.2.3. Art Feminism and Media Art

The artistic narrative of the body or through the body as a means is always socially and politically conditioned. Personal issues often reveal norms and rules of a general or universal nature. For a long time, "women's issues" were not covered in Ukrainian art. Even now they are still "discussed" quite timidly. Thus, too provocative or outright exhibitions close before opening due to personal threats or public condemnation.

Admittedly, the opening of borders, participation in festivals, and the opportunity to study outside of Ukraine

contributed to the discovery of not only new art forms but also themes. Kateryna Yakovlenko, a researcher of Ukrainian art, notes: "Video and digital art have become an emancipatory element and provided artists with a new dimension for the realization of creative ideas, adding opportunities for freedom of creative expression and experience of cooperation" [18]. One of the first provocative videos was the above-mentioned work "Crooked mirrors - Living Paintings" (1993, Oleksandr Hnylytskyi, Maksym Mamsikov, Nataliia Filonenko), which was repeatedly shown retrospectively abroad. Among the first videos is also "Comparative Anatomy" (1994, Tetyana Hershuni, Kyrylo Chychkan). In the frame, the viewer sees body parts or a visually composed hybrid endowed with female and male features. The video demonstrates the new sensuality, and plasticity, tenderness which is inherent in a person regardless of gender. Addressing the art of this period, the artist Nikita Kadan notes: "In the informal art of the perestroika period and in the post-Soviet works of the 90s, the body becomes an instrument of transgression, overcoming disciplinary order through the shock effects of documentary or physical transformation into fantasy, the subject of erotic hallucination" [24].

Turning to feminist optics, one cannot ignore the artistic practice of Oksana Chepelyk. In the early 1990s, the artist did an internship at CIES in Paris (1993) and studied at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam (1998). Since the early 1990s, she has methodically addressed "women's issues", i.e. emancipation, fashion, stigma, motherhood, social instability, and the image of women as metaphors for the state. Analyzing the works of that period, the artist notes: "My works at the time were about the oppression of women by the male world, as the bearer of the totalitarian principle, and the world of politics, as a repressive and manipulative mechanism. It was important to pay attention to the painful points. Then, the mainstream was to have fun, to be ironic, but not to raise critical issues" [15].

The video work "Chronicles of Fortinbras" (2001) became a kind of political and feminist manifesto [18]. This filmed performance based on the collection of essays of the same name by the writer Oksana Zabuzhko (1999) points to the importance of analyzing the traumas of Ukraine's colonial past in the gender aspect. In particular, it is said that the totalitarian government tried to completely control the physical and sexual life of its citizens, from the way they organized their living space to the language they spoke. The video is also a reflection on the culture and gaps created during the totalitarian and colonial state of the country and continue to be formed as a result of ineffective policies since independence. The "body" of culture falls victim to the cruel and senseless games of totalitarianism, which embodies the masculine principle. Thus, the video reveals the hidden processes of conservation of totalitarian consciousness, which, despite any reforms, is acute in our

time. "A woman's body is really a political body," the author concludes [25]. The film was presented at 15 International Festivals, including the Kwandu Biennale (Taiwan, 2018) and Karlovy Vary (Czech Republic). "Cinema and video art open additional spaces for Oksana Chepelyk's work", says Jade, a member of the American Association of Film Producers. "Her bold video works are a search for a new creative reality and at the same time a critique of the deep darkness of Ukrainian realities" [25]. One can say that Oksana Chepelyk is one of the most realized artists of Ukrainian media art. Her films and video installations have been screened around the world, winning prizes in New York, London, Tallinn, St. Petersburg, Osnabrück, Montecatini, Linz, Moscow, Paris, Berlin, Oberhausen, Liverpool, Belo Horizonte, Karlovy Vary, Chisinau, Weimar, Tel Aviv, Ankara, Pesaro, Santa Fe, Stuttgart and others.

In the 2000s, artists took a leading role in artistic processes. Analyzing contemporary Ukrainian art, curator Alisa Lozhkina calls it "women's territory", because the presence of women in different positions, in her opinion, reaches 80-90%.[26]. Art group "R.E.P" unites four artists, namely Lada Nakonechna, Lesya Khomenko, Zhanna Kadyrova, and Ksenia Hnylytska. In the work of each of them, the female theme occupies a prominent place. In particular, Ralph Rugoff, the chief curator of the 58th Venice Biennale, chose Zhanna Kadyrova as a participant in the central exhibition. In 2018, the artist received the main prize of the Pulse Contemporary Art Fair in Miami (USA).

Discussing the group "R.E.P", Aaron Moulton posits that their goal is "to revolutionize a language for contemporary art, one that is not a hybrid East-West dialect but something truly Ukrainian used to decipher locality with a critical approach" [21]. He continues: "Their work, easily placed within an updated yet site-specific vernacular of institutional critique, aims everywhere from the passerby, the feint official infrastructures for art, the education system to an even wider ambition of making concise and astute observations and interventions around the geopolitics that shroud Ukraine" [21].

Alevtina Kakhidze created many original media works. In 2004-2006, the artist studied at the Jan van Eyck Academy (Maastricht, the Netherlands), won art awards, participated in many international exhibitions and biennials in Ukraine and abroad. In her performances, the artist raises the issue of marginalization of women in art. In the video installation "I can be a girl with blue eyes" (2005), in which she uses her own body as a presentation object of research, touches on the problem of changing personality and individual characteristics. The video presents in slow motion the shooting of a detailed procedure of wearing a lens and fixing the change of brown eyes to blue ones. The author reveals the intimate and complex psychological subtleties of image change, demonstrates the typical desire

of women to change their appearance. The close-up and detailed process of changing lenses shows, as Tamara Zlobina notes, “an unpleasant physiological process is a metaphor for social and cultural processes, no less painful and unpleasant” [16]. This video work by Alevtina Kakhidze was presented in several European capitals as part of the project “1989-2009: Changing World - Told Time” (2010).

#### 2.2.4. Between Revolution and War: Media Art and Times of Social Upheaval

Historically, Ukrainians have repeatedly had to fight for their independence through peaceful protests on the Maidan, the square which became the main location of the protesters and defend their borders in a military confrontation with the aggressor, Russia. “The shock caused by the bloody events at the end of Maidan protests, Russian annexation of Crimea, and the beginning of the war in Donbas have become visibly traumatic for the Ukrainian artistic community. For some artists who participated in the Maidan events, this period was the time of a heavy post-revolutionary “hangover”, says critic and curator Alisa Lozhkina [26].

In the article “Maidan: Return of Europe” Vasyl Cherepanyn considers “Euromaidan” as a total political and artistic media installation, which unfolded online and offline: “As a field for artistic interventions and constantly producing new sophisticated figures (barricades, burning tires, hollowed cobblestones, Molotov cocktails), the Maidan was, using the concept of Joseph Boyce, a social sculpture, i.e. a situation in which society is a work of art whose creation engages everyone.” [7, p.7]

“The symbiosis of the rave spirit, which unexpectedly returned to Ukrainian art in the midst of a severe post-traumatic crisis, and acute political meanings, is perhaps the most characteristic feature of the second half of the 2010s” [26]. Alisa Lozhkina says that the past is still very active in the minds of Ukrainians, which testifies to the deep wounds which are further exacerbated by the ongoing war. “At the beginning of the twentieth century, the future was the deity of the avant-garde. The fetish of modern Ukrainian artists is the past. Probably, only having it thoroughly articulated, we would finally be free to look at the present”, says the researcher [26].

Curator Aaron Moulton in his article “A Revolution on Standby”, analyzing the state of contemporary art in Kyiv, was stunned by the positive changes in the development of media art: the emergence of the PAC art center, festivals and exhibition spaces for media projects. He assesses the development of contemporary art in Ukraine as particularly rapid, characterizing Ukrainians as enterprising and resourceful, and society as prone to revolutionary change. He mentions “a problematically self-evident effort to legitimize through an East-West call and answer of rather clumsy curating” [21].

Revolutionary sentiments in Ukraine, in his opinion, “offer an interesting creative environment for socially engaged practices or people (individuals, personalities) who are interested in (changing) the dynamics of national identity” [21]. At the same time, he notes that it is difficult to properly assess the processes observed in the media art, “because they are all privately funded” [21]. For example, the Ukrainian pavilion, sponsored by businessman Pinchuk, was overlooked by local media, and the reason for this is seen in the “hybridization” which was observed there.

The upsurge which accompanied each subsequent revolution and reform was later complemented by the tragedy and sense of helplessness which comes with the annexation of Ukrainian territories, and the death of thousands of patriots defending the border. Experiencing these events from their own standpoint, the artists still try to broadcast it through group art projects and demonstrate them in many countries. In this manner, they strive to tell the world about the challenges which Ukraine now faces. A notable project was “The Ukrainians” at the Daadgalerie in Berlin (2014, curated by Bettina Klein), which aimed to add an artistic perspective to numerous publications in the media about Ukraine and to create space for public discussion. The art project of Mykola Ridnyi and Serhiy Zhadan “Blind Spot” (2014) was demonstrated in this exhibition, and later was presented at the Venice Biennale (2015). The artist took the images from media reports about the war in Eastern Ukraine and painted them black, leaving just a small spot intact, which makes a viewer feel the limitedness and irrelevancy of their vision of this fragment of reality. At the same Biennale, the Ukrainian pavilion exhibited yet another video installation about the East Ukrainian war: “Synonym for “Wait” by the Open Group. The artists put surveillance cameras in the homes of people who left for the war, and these cameras showed real-time footage [26].

For the main exhibition of the Venice Biennale, curator Okwui Enwezor chose a video by Mykola Ridnyi “Ordinary Places” (2015). This is a 15-minute film about the confrontation between supporters of various political forces in Kharkiv. The film shows the fine line between peace and war. Copies of the video were purchased in particular by the Munich Pinakothek and the Ludwig Museum in Budapest. Ukrainian-Russian project “WARNING!” (2015, Lviv; 2016, Austria) serves as a medium for dialogue between artists of the two countries. Artists raise the issue of the geopolitical situation, using the means of media art. Project curators notes that the works selected for the project anatomically accurately depict injuries, phobias, disorders, and neuroses acquired in the form of ideological burden, loss of critical thinking and self-identification, guilt, anticipation of catastrophe, a state of painful distrust. Among the presented works, there is a media installation by Anton Lapov “#hero”, Oleksiy Shulhin and Aristarkh Chernyshov “Design of the neoliberal regime” and a video



by Yanina Prudenko “Flag” and Mykhailo Mamsikov “Stumbling”.

In Serhiy Petliuk’s video installations, the use of textile surfaces for multi-channel video design is typical. Thus, in the installation “Dreams about Europe” (2012) the projection is imposed on numerous pillows, and in “Untitled” - on clothes (second-hand). The topic of politics is particularly vividly revealed by the author in the video installation “Limit of Comprehension” (2015). The video of naked people is projected on military uniforms laid out on the floor. People speak to each other, calling chess moves. “We perceive wars of others rationally. However, when a war starts at home you must face its inhumanity and absurdity all the time, you must imagine your practical future, you must rethink your close past. The all-pervasive violence of the war becomes a part of your naked immediate life” [27]. The number of issues increases with the number of war victims. Each of us is faced with a choice – either to accept or to understand. This and other videos by Serhiy Petliuk often make a deep impression and have repeatedly distinguished at international festivals. In particular, the author won the competition 2015 UK / raine: Emerging Artists from the UK and Ukraine, Saatchi Gallery, London (GB) as an overall winner & winner in the new media category.

The Alevtina Kakhidze’s project “History of Strawberry Andreevna, or Zhdanivka” (2014-2018) is a subtle and piercing reaction to the war in Ukraine. The work covered four years of telephone conversations and meetings between the artist and her mother, who lived in the occupied territory. The project included drawings from 2014-2018, video performances, as well as propaganda printed materials [26].

The high-profile exhibition “Permanent Revolution” (2018, Ludwig Museum, Budapest) curated by Alisa Lozhkina and Konstantyn Akinsh was dedicated to the art of Independent Ukraine. In the same year, the project was nominated for the prestigious American award in the field of museum exhibitions Global Fine Arts Awards in the category of Best Post War / Contemporary (WWII-Present). Among the project participants, there are Piotr Armianovski, Hlib Katchuk, Olha Kashembekova, Alevtina Kakhidze, Alina Kleitman, Serhiy Petliuk, Oleksiy Radynskiy and others. The next step was the project “Between Fire and Fire. Ukrainian Art Now. Septemberpot” (2019, Vienna, Austria), and in 2020 Alisa Lozhkina’s book “Permanent Revolution” [4] was published in three languages. In particular, the French translation of the book was presented at the Pompidou Center in Paris (2020). According to the author, the specificity of Ukrainian art, in general, is being at the existential break, in the mode of “permanent revolution”. Social and political upheavals determine the unique energy and vitality of its art.

Another project is the exhibition “Front Line Art: an exhibition on Ukraine’s six years of conflict, 2013-2019”

(curators Svitlana Bidareva, Hanna Deikun), which took place at the National Museum of World Cultures (2020, Mexico City, Maksyk) and “Center” (2020, Winnipeg, Canada). Among the goals of the project, in particular, is the search for universalism, “which would help the interpretation of art which reflects the social and political situation in Ukraine in recent years” [28]. It was important to show a critical perspective on the dramatic events in Ukraine and its positioning in international politics through the choice of cultural strategy in particular. As a result, the project received the status of interdisciplinary, as it was accompanied by numerous conferences, panel discussions (Mexico, Canada, Great Britain, Ukraine). Documentary projects, which make up most of the exhibition, bring the viewers’ perception of the experience of artists and their protagonists as close as possible. It is noteworthy that “In recent years, many Ukrainian artists have turned to documentary projects, trying to reflect and complement a reality which turned out to be more interesting and dramatic than any artistic construct” [28]. The video installations of the exhibition participant Piotr Armianovski include two short films “In the East” (2015) and “Me and Mariupol” (2017) about the places where the fighting is taking place. Video works show how everyday life can be a stage for political expression and the transformation of a new type of identity. Olha Mykhailyuk’s video describes the 40-kilometer route of women fleeing shelling in occupied Luhansk in November 2014. The railroad tracks have been blown up, so the women decide to walk. The video was also presented in Munich in 2014. “It’s about people and their stories, and it’s not about objective truth about the situation but it’s a lot of stories”, Hanna Deikun [29] According to the curators, the purpose of the project is greater than the artistic one, as the social and political context is revealed. “Every war has many fronts where individual battles can be won. Battles in the field of culture may seem somewhat marginal, but they have the longest lasting effect. The experience of showing the exhibition in Mexico and Canada gave us the opportunity to see how dialogue can be established, despite cultural barriers and historical differences” [27].

### 2.2.5. The Chernobyl Disaster and Its Reflection in Contemporary Art

One of the best ways to bring the Chernobyl catastrophe to the forefront, to rethink the tragedy, and to prevent similar catastrophes in the future is to speak about it in the language of contemporary art. The beginning of Ukrainian contemporary art is most often traced back to 1986, the year of the Chernobyl tragedy [8]. The trauma of the catastrophes and Soviet political reforms influenced new artistic practices in the then Soviet Union. Ideology often could not withstand changes in the surrounding reality. Therefore, it is not surprising that the post-traumatic (Chernobyl disaster) and post-Soviet (the need to build their

own identity) situation will significantly affect the practice of Ukrainian artists in the coming years.

One of the first media projects to cover this topic at the international level was Oksana Chapely's installation "Breakfast on the Grass" (1996) at the Luc Quyerel Gallery in Paris, which was dedicated to the 10th anniversary of Chernobyl. The author received close media attention and significant international recognition: the gallery chose her as the artist of the month and invited her with a retrospective exhibition (2000).

The topic of the threat of nuclear energy, environmental destruction, mutations and concealment of information unite artists, who rethink them in group projects. The ghost town has become a site for filming and music videos, and the walls of abandoned buildings and reactors adorn the work of international street art festivals. One such project is "Clouded Lands" (2016-2017). For the 30th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, the Food of War group has developed a traveling exhibition through European cities (Minsk, Berlin, Oslo, Rome, Madrid, London), which will repeat the path taken by the radioactive cloud. In their works, Ukrainian and foreign artists tried through modern metaphors and symbols to rethink the events of the 1986 tragedy, their impact and consequences for people and the planet in general. The project is supplemented by ethnographic material and documentary video. All activities are designed to give the audience the opportunity to draw their conclusions about the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, which one can feel every day thinking about the safety of food and drink.

ARTEFACT (2018-2020) is an art project with the participation of international and Ukrainian artists, which combines media and digital art. Chernobyl became the place and starting point for the project. The project is dedicated to the problem of ecology and information manipulation. The authors consider the Chernobyl tragedy a post-traumatic syndrome for the Ukrainian nation and compare it to rape. Ukrainian society is still left alone with this problem. The project was a reaction to this problematic condition, the treatment of an unhealed wound. "As part of the ARTEFACT project, we recorded the sounds typical of the Zone: the crack of the dosimeter, the squeak of the Ferris wheel, the noise of the Red Forest, technical sounds, echoes, the roar of the current, etc. The reverberation and frequency-phase distortions characteristic of these places give the music a unique character and help to convey the atmosphere of Chernobyl," says the author of the art project Valeriy Korshunov [30] "Sounds of Chornobyl" became the soundtrack to the interactive digital sculpture ARTEFACT: perceiving and analyzing music, the sculpture uses artificial intelligence to select video content and project it on screens. The creative work on the project resulted in 14 art objects, an audiovisual laser performance "Radioactive Rain", a laser show "Radiation" and original music, which were successively presented to the general public at public events.

The artists also created an innovative documentary social art film about the rethinking of the Chernobyl disaster "Artifact: The first art rave of Chernobyl" (2019) and the first virtual exhibition about Chernobyl "ARTEFACT: CHOrnoby1 34" [30].

As part of the Burning Man Festival (2019, Black Rock, USA) Valeriy Korshunov and his team joined the creation of a media art object - the PlayAlchemist pyramid and presented the national program Digital Culture, created from more than 70 works by Ukrainian artists, and opened the portal to Chernobyl: the artists created a special application AR.TEFACT, with which it was possible to get into the simulated "world" of Chernobyl owing to AR technologies. The next Burning Man (2020), where the Ukrainian project was in the main program, was completely virtual. To get to the event, one had to download the application, create one's virtual avatar, and then jump to the portals following the organizers.

### 3. Conclusion

The study of Ukrainian media art, in particular its presentation in a global context, allows us to draw conclusions about the stages of its development, the formation of its key themes and, in parallel, the presentation of Ukrainian media art at the international level. Thus, in the early 1990s, media art was limited to experimental video (Viktor Dovhalyuk, Anna Kuts, Ihor Podolchak, Vasyl Tsaholov, and others), which were shown internationally much later, in the 2000s, in retrospective exhibitions.

In the following years, an important step for Ukrainian art was the opportunity to present the national pavilion at the Venice Biennale. It can be argued that for the artists, it was an incentive to reconsider their ideas and main thematic areas in the context of world trends and current plastic incarnations. In media installations (Viktor Sydorenko, Oksana Chepelyk) socio-political issues are raised and psychological and physiological states of people are studied. With the development of modern technologies and programming, interactive forms of media art are being created (Akuvido, Hlib Katchuk, Olha Kashembekova, Oksana Chepelyk).

Among the main topics addressed by young Ukrainian media artists are sensory experience and limited sensory abilities (Yuriy Kruchak, Yuliia Kostereva, Serhiy Petliuk, Oksana Chepelyk), utopia as an opportunity to compensate for unresolved problems (Akuvido, Daryna Fes, Oksana Chepelyk), art -feminism (Tetiana Hershuni, Alevtina Kakhidze, R.E.P, Natalia Filonenko, Oksana Chepelyk), revolution and war (Piotr Armianovski, Hleb Katchuk, Olha Kashembekova, Alevtina Kakhidze, Alina Kleitman, Anton Lapov, Serhiy Petliuk, Oleksiy Radynskyi, Mykola Ridnyi), the Chornobyl catastrophe (Valeryi Korshunov, Taya Kabayeva).

Today, Ukrainian artists are actively involved in global trends in media art and are expanding the ways of presenting modern media art. Media art tools allow artists to create for a wide audience through the network, interact with different contexts and viewers around the world, while staying in Ukraine. However, the lack of institutions, exhibition spaces and limited means of expression still force young artists and curators to go abroad in search of new meanings and bright prospects.

The last year has brought significant changes in the field of media technology, which have become not only part of the entertainment, but also education, work, and communication at the global level. Ukrainian artists also use the wide opportunities of digital art, in particular through the presentation of their work on online resources, festivals in a pandemic situation. Under such circumstances, art as a means of translating values and problematizing social issues is undergoing significant transformations. Thus, it is likely that 2020 will mark the beginning of a new era in culture and the arts. There is no doubt that this era will be largely “digital”.

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