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## PHOTO ART PROJECTS ON SACRED ART AS ONE OF IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF PRESERVING AND PROMOTING UKRAINIAN RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE IN THE WORLD CULTURAL SPACE

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### Abstract

**The purpose of this research** is to analyse sociocultural representations of photo art projects focused on sacred themes, taking into account relevant publications in audiovisual art. It seeks to reconsider the potential of screen culture works as an important factor in preserving the material heritage of the religious architecture in Kyiv during the prolonged full-scale war waged against Ukraine. This article also outlines key issues related to studying sacred art in modern cultural environment, both in Ukraine and abroad. **Research methodology.** The study applies an interdisciplinary approach that combines a set of academic methods. First of all, a theoretical method is used to analyse modern Ukrainian and international scientific sources on the study and promotion of sacred art. Equally important is a method of generalisation, applied to compare themes and directions of the Master's degree photo art projects, including those related to the topic under discussion. A comparative method is also employed in order to highlight various research concepts regarding religious sites across different regions of Ukraine, as well as to identify their shared and distinctive peculiarities, assess their influence on the global community in the context of preserving the cultural heritage during wartime. **Scientific Novelty.** For the first time in global audiovisual art and production, this article offers a multi-level, in-depth analysis of the Master's degree photo art projects created at Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts, and at Kyiv University of Culture. These projects are studied as an important element of preserving and promoting the material heritage of sacred sites in Kyiv, Boykivshchyna and Zaporizhzhia. **Conclusions.** This study analyses the sociocultural representation of photo art projects focused on sacred themes, considering relevant audiovisual art publications. It reinterprets the potential

of screen culture works as a significant factor in preserving the material heritage of Kyiv's religious architecture during the prolonged full-scale war against our country. It characterises key issues in researching sacred art in the modern cultural environment of Ukraine and abroad.

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**Problem statement**

On the screen, sacral art opens new dimensions for viewers' perception of religious images and symbols, taking them beyond the walls of museums or temples. Photographic art and cinema are capable of reproducing these works via digital reinterpretation, emphasising their emotional depth and spiritual power. This allows a wide audience, which may not have direct access to the originals, to engage with both world and national cultural heritage.

The particular relevance of such a phenomenon lies in the use of modern photographic technologies that make it possible to examine in detail the texture, colours and composition of ancient frescoes or icons. Thanks to high resolution and special effects of modern cameras, screen-based projects can literally "bring to life" biblical narratives or mystical events. As a result, sacral art becomes not only an object of study but also a powerful visual experience for broad segments of the population.

At the same time, the transfer of sacral images to the screen provokes discussions regarding interpretation and the permissibility of artistic freedom when dealing with deeply spiritual themes. Photographers, especially non-professionals or even beginner students, often face the challenge of preserving the original sanctity of the work while avoiding its secularization or simplification. Ulti-

mately, successful master's-level photographic art projects demonstrate how a photograph or a screen can become a bridge between faith, history and modern culture. This issue has become especially relevant during the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war for independence.

**Analysis of Recent Research and Publications**

S. Bordenyuk, I. Gavran and V. Hrymalska in the article "Features of Street Photography and its Affinity with Cinema" (2021), S. Bordenyuk and V. Byshovets in their publication "Psychological Aspects of Social Photography" (2021), V. Kukorenchuk and V. Bondar in their work "Eroticism in Photographic Art through the Centuries" (2022), O. Bezruchko and N. Kachmar (2021) in their article "The Development of Contemporary Ukrainian Cinema" conducted a thorough analysis of modern Ukrainian photographic art and its affinity with cinema.

The issue of researching sacral art within the modern global cultural field is presented in the works of foreign scientists: B. Daskas (2020) "Picture and text: on the "iconography" of sacred spaces in middle-Byzantine ekphraseis"; E. Újvári (2020) "Religious Symbols from the Point of View of Visual Semiotics"; B. Albia, B. Blanza and A. Chanco (2023) "From Icons to AI: Evolution of imagery in religious commu-

nication"; J.-K. Chung (2025) "Sacred art and iconography in religious traditions".

Ukrainian sacral art is studied by domestic scientists: K. Novikova (2012) in the book "At the Crossroads of the World and the Spirit. A Short Essay on the Sacred Painting of Ukraine"; D. Stepovyk (2012) in the monograph "The New Ukrainian Icon of the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries: Traditional Iconography and New Stylistics"; T. Lesiv (2021) in the PhD thesis "Iconography of Galicia in the late 19th – early 21st centuries: artistic image and theoretical discourse"; V. Kozinchuk in the article "Ukrainian Canonical and Non-Canonical Church Iconography in the Context of Western European Sacral Art" (2023) and the DSc thesis "Transformation of the Icon-Painting Tradition in the Ukrainian Cultural Space" (2024); I. Khasanova (2024) in the article "The Sacred Code in Contemporary Ukrainian Fine Art".

In the works of foreign scientists, the issue of using photographic art in archaeological studies of cult structures is addressed (J. Stewart (2017) "The Use of Photography in Archaeology: A Review"; T. Dutta, "The Importance of Photography in Archaeological Research: An Indian Perspective" (2024)).

Yu. Harmash and O. Priadko (2018) in "The Special Role of Color in the Dramaturgy of Screen Painting Works"; O. Bezruchko and A.-N. Manuliak (2019) in "The Influence of Color on the Audience of Interactive Television"; O. Kovsh and M. Dziuba (2022) in "Symbolism of Color in Cinema" study the symbolism, role and influence of colour in audiovisual works, including photography.

### The purpose of this research

The purpose of this article is to analyse the sociocultural representation of pho-

tographic art projects on sacral themes, taking into account relevant publications in the field of audiovisual art. It also aims to reinterpret the potential of screen culture works as an important factor in preserving the material heritage of religious structures in the city of Kyiv during the prolonged full-scale war unleashed against Ukraine. Additionally, the article seeks to characterize the issues surrounding the study of sacral art in the modern global cultural environment in Ukraine and abroad.

### Main research material

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine embarked on a comprehensive process of reforms aimed at building a democratic, legal and market-oriented state that meets the Copenhagen criteria for EU accession and NATO standards. According to K. Yakunina (2021, p.100), these transformations encompass political, economic, legal, defense and spiritual spheres: "The development of Ukrainian society as a democratic, open system that overcomes the ideological clichés of the past largely depends on the depth of theoretical reflection on the phenomena and processes of its multifaceted, multi-vector, and contradictory reality, including the spiritual one".

Such reforms represent a long-term process that significantly accelerated after the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, and especially after the Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, when Ukraine applied for accelerated NATO membership and obtained EU candidate status. An important component of this path is a reform of secondary and higher education.

Ukraine has a strong system for training specialists in audiovisual art and production. Among recent publications devoted

to this issue are the following: "Film and Television Directing as an Academic Discipline and Teaching Methodology" (Bezruchko and Desiatnyk, 2013); "Course, Bachelor's, and Master's Works of Students of the Department of Film and Television Art at ITCT KyIU: Methodological Guidelines and Examples" (Bezruchko, 2014a, 2014b); "The Skill of a Television Presenter as an Academic Discipline and Teaching Methodology" (Bezruchko, Desiatnyk, Ishchenko, Poleshko and Porozhna, 2015); "The Use of Digital Technologies in the Professional Training of Bachelors of Artistic Specialties under Distance Learning Conditions" (Barytska et al., 2021); "The Formation of Empathy in Higher Education Students of Pedagogical Profiles in the Learning Process" (Postolenko, Vozniuk, Kyrychenko, Gavran, Brukhovetska and Chausova, 2021); "Current Problems of Contemporary Directing Education" (Pogrebniak, 2022); "Formation of Readiness for Creative Activity in the Field of Audiovisual Art and Production" (Bezruchko, Cherkasov and Shiutiv, 2023); "Criteria and Indicators of Readiness Formation for Creative Activity in the Field of Audiovisual Art and Production" (Bezruchko, Cherkasov and Shiutiv, 2023); "Methodological Analysis of the Criteria for the Cultural Space of Digitalization of the Generation of Higher Education Applicants" (Bezruchko, Chmil, Korablova, Demchuk and Kuznietsova, 2025). Still, only filmmaker-educators from Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts (KNUCA) and Kyiv University of Culture (KUC), considering the declared autonomy of Ukrainian higher education institutions, have developed unique methodologies for training photographic artists. All this is presented in the works "Master's Projects in the Specialty 'Audiovisual Art and Production' at Kyiv

University of Culture" (Bezruchko, Havran, Medvedieva and Chmil, 2020a, 2020b) and "Master's Projects in the Specialty 'Audiovisual Art and Production' at Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts" (Bezruchko, Gavran, Kotliar and Chmil, 2020; Bezruchko, Zheliezniak, Kotliar and Chmil, 2020).

The latter defines a Master's Photo Art Project as a series of "25–30 photographs printed in a photo album, united by a creative theme and accompanied by documentation of at least 25 pages, which includes artistic and figurative descriptions and the titles of each photograph with their technical characteristics" (Bezruchko, Zheliezniak, Kotliar and Chmil, 2020, p.9). Educators at KUC emphasise that the creative component of such projects must be complemented by "a package of scholarly publications that present the master's student's research" (Bezruchko, Havran, Medvedieva and Chmil, 2020a, p.9), in order to integrate creative and scientific components.

The Master's degree photographic art projects of these two leading Ukrainian universities impress with their thematic diversity, including "Chernobyl: The Horrors of Reality" (Horevalov and Kostrykova, 2020); "The Surrealism of Contemporary Reality: A Human-Dimensional Context" (Kukorenchuk and Hutevych, 2020); "Ukrainian Renaissance". Part 1: "Ukrainian Girl with a Pearl Earring. In the Footsteps of Jan Vermeer" (Havran, Kotliar and Zaspas, 2021); "Ukrainian Renaissance". Part 2: "Mavka Ofeliia" (Kotliar and Zaspas, 2021); "Photo Art Project 'Female Multi-Component Associative Image 'Fern Blossom'. Part 1" (Zaspas and Bezruchko, 2021); "Photo Art Project 'Female Multi-Component Associative Image 'Fern flower'. Part 2" (Zaspas and Bezruchko, 2022); "The Development

of Ukrainian Film Distribution in the Lviv Region as a Component of Film Production in Ukraine" (Bezruchko and Kachmar, 2022); "Eroticism in Photography: From Analogue to Digital". Part 1 (Kukorenchuk, Vdovychenko and Bondar, 2022a); "Eroticism in Photography: From Analogue to Digital". Part 2 (Kukorenchuk, Vdovychenko and Bondar, 2022b); "In Search of the Meaning of Being" (Bezruchko and Hrymalska, 2022); "Master's Photo art Project Hen Party" (Chernichkin and Balan, 2025), among others.

In recent years, public interest in Ukraine – particularly among young people – has grown toward the spiritual heritage of the nation. A theologian and art historian Vitalii Kozinchuk (2023, p.362) notes the following: "Over the past decades, interest in sacral art has increased in Ukraine".

During the ongoing full-scale war in the centre of Europe, creative work with light and shadow around sacral objects emphasises the spiritual contrast between good and evil unfolding in war. This interplay resonates with the biblical idea of the eternal struggle between light and darkness. Photography on screen visually conveys the idea that good (light) will overcome evil (darkness). Similar to the ideas expressed by O. Bezruchko and N. Stepanenko (2024), I. Khasanova (2024, p.56) has such a thought: "The preservation and transmission of cultural traditions and values through a sacral code helps society remain connected to its history, practices and spiritual roots, contributing to the formation of a shared self-aware community".

Therefore, several Master's degree photographic art projects were prepared at KNUCA and KUC that highlight Ukraine's sacral heritage of Boykivshchyna and Zaporizhzhia. Cult art on screen

temporarily replaces destroyed spaces of communal ritual, fostering a sense of national unity despite temporary occupation. Virtual reproduction enables a cathartic experience for Ukrainians, even amid the temporary physical absence of the state within its 1991 borders as a national shrine.

In the article "Social and Psychological Aspects of Religiousness", K. Yakunina (2021, p.100) notes: "One of the most pressing tasks of contemporary society is the problem of searching for spiritual guidelines. In this context, there emerges an acute need to form a new paradigm of worldview that would expand a person's outlook from rational-pragmatic interests toward spiritual and transcendent meanings of existence".

The Boyky are one of the distinctive ethnographic groups of the Ukrainian nation, residing in the Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk and Zakarpattia regions. V. Bardyn and O. Bezruchko created the Master's project "The Ethnic Language of the Sacred" (2021a) and a series of related publications: "Boyko sacred culture on the movie screen" (Bezruchko and Bardyn, 2022a), "Subject environment of cult buildings of Boykos region in Screen Arts" (Bezruchko and Bardyn, 2022b), "Mass Media as One of the Instruments of Preservation of Sacred Art Monuments of Boikivshchyna" (Bezruchko and Bardyn, 2021b), "Presentation of the Sacred Heritage of Boikos by Means of Audiovisual Art" (Bezruchko and Bardyn, 2022).

In wartime, images of saints on screen are often perceived as archetypes of protectors – warriors of spirit and light – echoing the traditional image of Saint George as a symbol of victory over evil. Thus, sacral art projects heroism onto contemporary defenders of Ukraine. According to K. Yakunina's (2021, p.100) vi-

sion, “the development of contemporary society, which must be enriched by overcoming the consequences of a prolonged spiritual crisis, actualizes the need to implement universal human values into the consciousness of our contemporaries – values that constitute the moral and ethical foundation and harmonize the inner world of the individual”.

The unofficial capital of the Boyko region is the city of Sambir. Therefore, A. Anisimova and O. Bezruchko (2024a) presented the Master’s Photo Art Project “Ancient Sambir in Modern Photographs”, as well as a number of publications on this topic, including “Material Cultural Heritage in Modern Audiovisual Discourse: Ancient Sambir” (2024b), “Audiovisual Content as a Form of Indirect Communication between the Tourist Product and the Viewer” (2024), “Some Aspects of Joint Research of Photo Art by Ukrainian Specialists” (2025).

Zaporizhzhia has long been considered a symbol of freedom for the Ukrainian people. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, bloody battles have been taking place on its territory, resulting in the destruction of residential buildings, infrastructure and architectural monuments. Photographs depicting the ruins of ordinary houses or ancient churches, shattered apartment windows, or damaged historical mosaics form a new, tragic aesthetic that shocks and draws the attention of the world. Today, its destruction has generated a new tragic “aesthetics of ruins”, in which photography captures a painful yet compelling beauty born of loss.

In the Master’s Photo Art Project “Manifestations of the Sacred Zaporizhzhia”, O. Sydorenko and V. Zaporozhchenko (2023, p.278) set out to “recreate the unique atmosphere and the sacred and historical spirit of Khortytsia Island,

where the symbol of Ukrainian Cossackdom – the Zaporizhzhian Sich – was located. For every nation, its history is of great importance, and for many centuries Khortytsia has preserved the heritage of our people. At all times, the island has attracted attention not only for its beauty but also for its sacred significance”.

Photographic film projects bring damaged or destroyed sacral heritage sites of Ukraine to the global stage, calling for international intervention and emphasizing that Ukrainian cultural heritage belongs to all humanity. Surviving icons and frescoes function as visual symbols of spiritual resilience – such as the widely circulated image of the intact Vasylyk majolica rooster in the city of Borodianka.

These images reflect centuries of struggle for freedom and echo the words of Taras Shevchenko (2003, p.344):

“Fight – and you shall overcome, God helps you!

Truth is on your side, glory is on your side, And sacred freedom!”.

Screen projects on sacral art preserve not only religious architecture but also the emotional context of the Russian–Ukrainian war within the digital archive of world culture, reinforcing the imperative to remember in order not to repeat the mistakes of the past. Such works affirm the importance of “remembering everything” in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of past wars.

Photographs of Ukrainian churches preserved through photo art projects serve as a kind of testament for future generations to protect, cherish, and develop their own church and statehood. Particularly relevant is a view expressed by J.-K. Chung (PhD, Kwangshin University (South Korea)), in the article “Sacred Art and Iconography in Religious Traditions,” in which he emphasises the “importance of a com-

prehensive approach to the preservation, interpretation, and transmission of sacred art, which is key to safeguarding religious and cultural heritage for future generations" (Chung, 2025, p.45).

### Conclusions

Under conditions of the full-scale war in Ukraine, sacral art transferred into photography has acquired new critical significance as both witness and symbol of national resilience. Digital copies and screen-based projects document damaged or destroyed shrines and become part of the evidence of war crimes against Ukrainian culture.

On screen, sacral images (such as icons and temple frescoes) transform into

powerful symbols of hope and spiritual endurance for internally displaced persons and refugees. Their representation in news reports, artistic films and exhibitions underscores the Ukraine's cultural vulnerability and serves as a visual prayer and reminder of the value of identity for which Ukrainians are fighting.

Screen media actively promote the world's sacral masterpieces as a part of a broader European cultural family, appealing to the international community. Spiritual art transmitted through the camera lens becomes a tool of cultural diplomacy and resistance to Russian propaganda, creating a strong emotional link between the protection of Ukrainian heritage and the preservation of universal human values.

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## ФОТОМИСТЕЦЬКІ ПРОЄКТИ ПРО САКРАЛЬНЕ МИСТЕЦТВО ЯК ОДИН З ВАЖЛИВИХ ЕЛЕМЕНТІВ ЗБЕРЕЖЕННЯ ТА ПОПУЛЯРИЗАЦІЇ У СВІТОВОМУ КУЛЬТУРНОМУ ПРОСТОРІ КУЛЬТОВИХ СПОРУД УКРАЇНИ

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### Анотація

**Мета дослідження** – проаналізувати соціокультурну репрезентацію фотомистецьких проєктів сакральної тематики з урахуванням відповідних публікацій у сфері аудіовізуального мистецтва. Переосмислити потенціал творів екранної культури як важливого чинника збереження предметного поля культових споруд м. Києва в умовах багаторічної повномасштабної війни, розв'язаної проти нашої держави. Схарактеризувати проблематику дослідження сакрального мистецтва в сучасному культурному середовищі України та за кордоном. **Методологія дослідження.** У статті застосовано міждисциплінарний підхід, у межах якого органічно поєднано комплекс наукових методів. Насамперед використано теоретичний метод – з метою аналізу сучасних українських і закордонних наукових джерел, присвячених дослідженню та популяризації сакрального мистецтва. Важливим також став метод узагальнення – для зіставлення тематик і напрямів магістерських фотомистецьких проєктів, зокрема з вищезначеної тематики. Крім того, застосовано компаративний метод – для висвітлення концепцій дослідження культових споруд різних регіонів нашої держави, виявлення їхніх спільних і відмінних рис, а також визначення їхнього впливу на світову спільноту з метою збереження в умовах воєнного сьогодення України. **Наукова новизна.** Вперше у світовому аудіовізуальному мистецтві та виробництві проведено багаторівневий ґрунтовний аналіз магістерських фотомистецьких проєктів, підготовлених у Київському національному університеті культури і мистецтв та Київському університеті культури, як важливого елементу збереження та популяризації предметного поля сакральних споруд м. Києва, Бойківщини та Запоріжжя. **Висновки.** У результаті дослідження проаналізовано соціокультурну репрезентацію фотомистецьких проєктів сакральної тематики, враховуючи відповідні публікації з аудіовізуального мистецтва. Переосмислено потенціал творів екранної культури як важливого чинника збереження предметного поля культових споруд м. Києва під час багаторічної повномасштабної війни, розв'язаної проти нашої держави. Схарактеризовано проблематику дослідження сакрального мистецтва в сучасному культурному середовищі України та за кордоном.

**Ключові слова:** фотографія; сакральне мистецтво; магістр; фотомистецький проєкт; війна в Україні; архітектура; культові споруди

