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**LVOV EX-LIBRIS SCHOOL AS THE TRADITIONS KEEPER
OF THE INTAGLIO PRINTING TECHNIQUES IN THE UKRAINIAN
GRAPHIC ARTS AT THE TURN OF THE XXTH AND XXITH CENTURIES**

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Fecha de Recepción: 24 de enero de 2021 – **Fecha Revisión:** 29 de enero de 2021

Fecha de Aceptación: 20 de febrero de 2021 – **Fecha de Publicación:** 01 de abril de 2021

Abstract

The article is devoted to the ex-libris in the context of the role of the Lvov printmaking school in contemporary Ukrainian art. A general characteristic of Ukraine's ex-libris is presented, the main evolution stages of the contemporary book plate are outlined, the special role of the Lvov school is emphasized, a brief comparative analysis of the stylistics of different ex-libris schools (Kiev, Odessa, Kharkov, Lvov) is carried out. The change in ex-libris role in the general character of the art process of last years (since the 1990s) is actualized and the reason for this phenomenon is argued. The preference of the Lvov school graphic arts experts for intaglio printing techniques is emphasized, the ex-libris is considered as an element of the contemporary artistic process, a communication tool in the cultural space of nowadays.

Keywords

Ex-libris – Printmaking – Etching – Mezzotint – Aquatint – Drypoint – Intaglio printing techniques

Para Citar este Artículo:

Romanenkova, Julia; Bratus, Ivan; Mykhalchuk, Vadym y Gunka, Anna. Lvov Ex-Libris School as the traditions keeper of the intaglio printing techniques in the ukrainian graphic arts at the turn of the XXth and XXIth centuries. Revista Inclusiones Vol: 8 num Especial (2021): 321-331.

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Introduction

Ukrainian printmaking, having more than 400 years of history, is in a stage now when it's possible and necessary to talk about the problems associated with the prospects for its preservation in the classical form in which it existed since the 16th century. Despite the fact that just printmaking can be considered one of the best, most professional segments of Ukrainian fine arts, the modern Ukraine's art process is characterized by a threatening tendency towards a decline in its demand and popularity. There are several reasons for this. Some of them can be projected not only on the situation in the Ukrainian cultural sphere, but also on the world art process as a whole. First of all, it is the rapid pace of popularization of computer graphics, computer generated design (CAD), which has become an integral component of contemporary art and often replaces traditional techniques of printmaking. This is due, first of all, to their labor intensity, the high cost of the process of implementing works in some techniques and complexity. Just complexity that is the main reason for the gradual interest decline in printmaking among artists, some of whom prefer to follow a more accessible, simpler way. Modern realities dictate the dominance of computer graphics. Another reason is a sharp decline in the level of art education, which doesn't provide masters with the necessary knowledge in the field of classical printmaking techniques. These processes are proceeding so fast that they can cause the disappearing of schools that have been created for several centuries. Therefore, one of the main aims of contemporary art nowadays is to preserve the traditions of classical printmaking techniques, to ensure their coexistence with modern new techniques, to prevent the displacement of the classics by novelty and the extinction of the academic foundations of graphic art. And one of the keepers of Ukraine's classical traditions is the Lvov printmaking school, which has always been one of the most powerful in the Ukrainian art space.

Since Ukrainian printmaking in general is a very wide sphere for art criticism analysis, which is more than once covered in scientific researches, including individual schools, the purpose of this article is to highlight the role of the Lvov ex-libris school as one of the most characteristic segments of Ukraine's graphic art. Ukraine's ex libris in its current development stage began its history in 1991 only, when we can speak about the Ukrainian book plate and its scientific study not as a segment of Soviet art and science, but as an independent phenomenon. After USSR collapse, when Ukrainian art began to write a new page of its history, ex-libris became one of those tools that most effectively and profitably present the country's cultural makeover in the international art space, contribute to the creation of its positive art image in the cultural field. The first book plates appeared in the 16th century, and the Ukrainian ex-libris in its formation and evolution went the same way as the book plate of any other country. The stages of its evolution coincide with the development milestones of European ex-libris schools, although the level of this phenomenon's research can still be considered very weak. An ex-libris club was created in Kiev in 1993. Its president, art critic and collector Petr Nesterenko, is the author of most of the scientific essays, mainly devoted to Ukraine's book plate until the middle of the XXth century. N. Belichko, Y. Kamenetskaya, V. Mikhalchuk, V. Tupik, T. Safonova, this article's author devote their researches to the later years of the development of the Ukrainian ex-libris, including the present days.

Contemporary Ukrainian book plate schools

Ukraine's ex-libris quickly changed the vector of its evolution and actively began to integrate into the international art field, that it succeeds quite successfully. This process happens very quickly, the reasons for it are primarily artists' mobility (they began to exhibit

often their works outside the country and participate in international exhibitions and competitions of mini-print) and the demand for a book plate in the international art society. In Ukrainian printmaking, first of all - in ex-libris - several main schools have been formed, each of them is characterized by its own stylistic features, but the main criterion for distinguishing their stylistics is the level of closeness to foreign, primarily Western European features of ex-libris. The most significant ones since the early 1990s, when the Ukrainian book plate began a new round of its development, were the Kiev, Lviv, Kharkov schools, each of which took its own place in the history of contemporary Ukrainian graphic arts. Of course, there are also many cities that are represented by super-professionals, but they are not enough to talk about the formation of independent school – these are Sumy (V. Lomaka), Chernovtsy (I. Balan, O. Krivoruchko), Lugansk (K. Kalinovich), Ivano-Frankovsk (I. Khrapko), Ternopol (N. Dmitrukh, Y. Tsuprik), Severodonetsk (B. Romanov), Chernigov (V. Leonenko), Mukachevo (V. Fenchak), Dnepr (A. Khvorost, V. Khvorost, A. Khudyakov, I. Kolyadina). Kharkov, despite its powerful traditions, clearly lags behind in the aspect of the ex-libris development, although distinguish by the presence of interesting experts (A. Litvinov, N. Neymesh, V. Usolkin), but hasn't a special individual stylistics which characterizes the entire school as a whole. It's possible to position Odessa and Lugansk Separately separately. The reason for the special status of these cities is the presence of powerful professionals in the field of printmaking, artists with an individual, original style, known far beyond the borders of Ukraine.

Unfortunately, it often happens that Ukrainian graphic artists are much better known and in demand abroad than in their own country, which is due to their mobility (on the one hand) and due to the low demand for graphic arts, the lack of commercialization of the process of its development in Ukraine (on the other hand). The Odessa cultural center in the field of ex-libris is represented primarily by the creative work of David Bekker (1940), who can be called one of the most significant Ukraine's ex-librists of 20th century. And for the development of graphic arts for the Luhansk center, the most significant is, of course, the person of Konstantin Kalinovich, popular not only as the book plates' author of but also as a highly professional expert of mini-print sheets, a wonderful watercolorist, creator of an author's book, and a painter.

The Kiev book plate school is characterized primarily by the fact that among its artists there are no vivid preferences in techniques, as well gravitation towards certain traditions of foreign schools. Among the capital's exlibrists there are experts whose style developed in relief printing techniques, mainly plastic engraving (R. Agirba, A. Burtovoy, R. Vygovsky, Y. Galitsyn, A. and G. Pugachevsky V. Romanenkov, A. Savich, N. Stratilat), linocut (G. Zadnepryany, G. Zubkovsky, G. Korin, Yu. Saratovsky, G. Sergeev, V. Taran), less often woodcut (V. Lopata, A. Miklovda). But among the Kiev graphic artists there are many who also work in intaglio printing techniques, often combining etching with aquatint, mezzotint, sometimes with drypoint and soft-ground etching. In addition, Kiev experts don't have strict preferences in the color of their works, creating both monochrome or black-and-white sheets and polychrome complex compositions, printing with the help of many boards (R. Agirba, K. Antyukhin, V. Syurkha, etc.).

We can say that the Kiev school is quite universal in its character. But still, one general trend can be identified: the older generation of artists tends more towards naturalism, towards a realistic images interpretation, towards subject compositions (A. Pugachevsky, G. Zadnepryany, N. Stratilat, A. Miklovda). Representatives of the middle and young generations often turn to avant-garde compositions, non-figurative images, stylization is their permanent tool (R. Agirba, K. Antyukhin, G. Pugachevsky).

Lvov ex-libris school in the context of Ukrainian printmaking at the turn of the XXth and XXIth centuries

But the most original, vibrant and productive, undoubtedly, can be considered the Lvov school of the book plate. Its history is rooted in the origins of engraving, but it is more correct to speak of an independent Lviv school of book graphics in independent Ukraine since 1991. Lvov school artists are closest to Western European graphic arts, are subject to its influence, and due to this they integrate more easily and quickly into the international art space. Lvov experts are well known outside Ukraine, they are constant participants in all international congresses held by "FISAE", many Lvov artists organize one-man exhibitions in Europe (and not only), regularly participate in competitions and collective exhibitions around the world, are members of specialized organizations in Belgium, Great Britain, Germany, USA, Czech Republic. Their works are presented in the collections of the world's leading ex-libris owners (the Belgian L. van den Brill, the Italian M. de Philippis, the Austrians O. Premstaller and H. Pungs, the German G. Weiss, the Portuguese A. M. da Mota Miranda, etc.). Lvov experts in their stylistics are often close to the Austrian, Belgian, Slovak and Dutch schools of engraving, there are some artists who were exemplars for many Ukrainian ex-librists in the formation of their individual creative style: Austrian expert O. Premstaller, Slovak graphic artists A. Brunovsky, K. Felix, P. Kochak, Dutch artist of mini-print L. Strick, etc. Sometimes we can see the stylistic affinity in their works, but at the same time the Lvov school retains its originality. Lvov artists have been showing their best in intaglio printing techniques for many years. These experts are proficient in traditional, classical techniques, and, while working excellently in computer design (CAD), they don't abandon the academic tradition of classical intaglio printing techniques, bringing their mastery of them to perfection. And, thus, they preserve the traditions of professional art education, not allowing the extinction of interest in intaglio printing techniques. Of course, it is impossible to single out artists specializing in the book plate only, all representatives of the Lvov school have a very wide range of creative possibilities, most often they are engaged in easel graphic arts and mini-print, first of all, a book plate, sometimes – making an author's book (that is really possible for very small number of authors today only), book design and the of book illustrations' creation, graphic and web design, often – and painting, sculpture.

Intaglio printing techniques in the works of Lvov experts: stylistics, technological characteristics

Since the 1970s (S. Aksinin), we can talk about the formation of the school character. Most of Lvov graphic artists use more than one technique in their graphic sheets, although Lvov experts are famous primarily as excellent highly professional etchers. In most cases, they synthesize etching, mezzotint, aquatint, drypoint, soft-ground etching. Steel engraving is not popular in the modern Lvov environment, and copper engraving is not particularly attractive for contemporary experts, although it was very popular in previous centuries in Ukrainian printmaking. So, etching is a constant favorite of Lvov graphic artists.

There are quite a lot of Lvov artists who form the basis, the core of the Lvov contemporary book plate school, but we focus on some of them only, whose creative work can be consider as the most characteristic both as an indicator of the general tendencies of the school, and as an example of the synthesis of local traditions and foreign influence, and most importantly – as proof that the Lvov graphic school preserves the classic traditions of Ukrainian printmaking, which, unfortunately, needs updating, popularization and support these days. Most of the artists of the Lvov school create mainly monochrome or black-and-white sheets (V. Demyanishin, E. Kozanevich, V. Rubansky, who often work in etching

techniques combined with aquatint), only a few of them work in the technique of colored etching. Roman Romanishin (1957) is one of the most characteristic artists known for his multicolored etching. His works are very original, first of all, it is interesting that the artist tries himself in painting, installation, sculpture, easel graphics, and painting techniques are often transferred to graphics, which explains the unusualness of these sheets, is reflected in their character. Romanishin often works in the levkas on the board technique, which brings his pictures closer to icons, moreover, to folk painting, he writes in a peculiar manner that imitates folk art and primitivism. He transfers this manner to graphic arts, ex-libris, where he retains the color, characteristic for painting, with a brightly predominant peculiar red, and a plot with a tendency to stylize images (fig. 1).



Fig. 1

Romanishin R. Ex-libris Hans Manche. C₃C₅. 2020

Among the experts specializing in monochrome etching, well known outside of Ukraine, one of the most interesting, characteristic Lvov school representatives, is Oleg Denisenko (1961). This artist is a kind of connecting link between Ukrainian art and foreign graphic schools, between the past and the present of graphic arts. He is called a master-hand who was born 500 years later than his time, his creative work attracts the attention of both ordinary graphic lovers and critics, professionals, since 1992 he has been conducting continuous exhibition activities.

Even monarchs visit his expositions in different countries of the world – in 1994 in Sweden the graphic sheets by the Lvov master were highly appreciated by the King Karl XVI and Queen Sylvia, in 1998 in the Netherlands Queen Beatrice admired the artist's graphic works. O. Denisenko is a member of the Ukraine National Artists' Union, full member of the Academic Senate of the Roman Academy of Contemporary Arts, winner and owner of the honour prizes in more than 30 international competitions in Great Britain, Spain, Italy, Korea, Russia, Romania, Slovakia, USA, France. His one-man exhibitions have been repeatedly held in Ukraine, Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Denmark, Italy, Canada, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Romania, Slovakia, USA, Finland, France, Sweden.

The artist's works both in the field of book plate and in free graphic arts, book illustration, author's book, sculpture, painting, including the technique of graphic art on levkas, that he invented. The artist's techniques are very original and extraordinary, the reason for which is primarily the synthesis of graphics and painting methods, which Denisenko made the basis for the technical implementation of many his works – he sometimes uses painting methods, manner in graphic sheets, and he demonstrates his graphic skills in paintings.

It is interesting that both in mini-print, ex-libris and book illustrations, the artist remains faithful to his main stylistic orientation - the basis of his artistic language is in the study of Renaissance graphic arts, the influence of the Northern Renaissance experts can be seen in all of his graphic sheets. Medieval - in spirit, Northern Renaissance - in style, his sheets very organically convey the nature of the 16th century graphic arts, it's easy to see the deep knowledge of the creative work of Dürer Bosch, Brueghel there.

The figurative nature of his sheets clearly echoes the artistic style of Bosch, Bruegel, is full of symbols, signs, compositions are based on an unusual philosophical code. In easel graphics, in ex-libris, in Denisenko's book illustrations, the font is always important, which the author uses not only as an informative addition, but also as an ornamental, decorative element that stylizing the font elements under the medieval style (fig. 2).

This is clearly seen in the graphic pages of the book, created by the artist at an early stage of his creative biography, which began successful, sometimes triumphant exhibition projects of the artist in different countries of the world. Such book is not just a collectible, it acquires the status of a museum piece.

This work, created on Dutch hand-made paper, with a leather cover, a hand-sewn spine, hand-created font inserts, illustrated with etchings - "Ship of Fools" by S. Brandt, the work on which the master began in 1997. The book, decorated with monochrome etchings, enriched calligraphic text excerpts, perfectly inscribed in the stylistic manner of the medieval font, was published in 9 copies only, one of which became the property of the Dürer Museum in Nuremberg, where the book was exhibited for the first time, several copies became a part of private collections.



Fig. 2
Denisenko O. Ex-libris Martin Gaidos. C₃. 2011.

Denisenko's works always have a deep philosophical meaning, he is an expert of allegory and stylization. The artist's ex-libris are owned by the most famous collectors of the whole world, which confirms the demand for the master in the international art market.

The Lvov graphic artist Sergey Hrapov (1956) is also well known in foreign art space. A member of the National Artists' Union of in his country, he received recognition outside of Ukraine, becoming a member of the Austrian Ex-libris Society. Like O. Denisenko, Hrapov prefers an active exhibition activity, having many one-man expositions in different countries of the world – Austria, the Netherlands, Turkey. As a participant of international competitions, this artist tried his hand at more than a hundred events, at many of which he was awarded (medal of the International Ex-libris Competition, Poland, 1997; medal of the International Biennale of Contemporary Ex-libris, Poland, 2000; prize of the International Exhibition of mini-print, USA, 2001; prize of the International Biennale of Ex-libris, Bulgaria, 2003; prize of the First International Ex-libris Competition, Turkey, 2003, etc.). Like Denisenko, S. Hrapov works in monochrome, often combining etching with mezzotint (fig. 3), but often he creates his sheets exclusively in etching, without enriching it with the effects of other techniques (fig. 4). His sheets are contrasting in tone, but mostly always monochromatic.



Fig. 3

Hrapov S. Ex-libris A. M. da Mota Miranda. C₃C₅. 1997.



Fig. 4

Hrapov S. Ex-libris Agaath and Jod van Waterschoot. C₃. 1996.

The images are very symbolic, to read them we need knowledge in the field of history, symbolism of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. If O. Denisenko made the image of a knight his main idea and sacral sense of creative work, then among this artist's favorite images there are fish and bird, which also cannot but remind their sign system of Bosch and the context of the Northern Renaissance. Most of the main works were created by the author in the late 1990s, when the Ukrainian ex-libris began a new page of its history. Then the famous reputable collectors of the book plate, in whose collections there are many works of S. Hrapov, also got acquainted with his creative manner now.

Sergey Ivanov (1957) is one of the most characteristic representatives of the Lvov ex-libris school, who is among the keepers of traditions of intaglio printing techniques today. This is one of the few artists who are successful not in the foreign art space only, but also have recognition in own country too – he is a member of the National Artists' Union and Honored Artist of Ukraine. It is interesting that all these masters have the same way of professional development, art education at the Ukrainian Academy of Printing, i.e. became carriers of the traditions that were laid down in them during the period of study in one of the most best specialized universities in the country, which provide a good education in the field of graphic arts, especially printmaking, i.e. Ukrainian Academy of Printing. The creative biography of S. Ivanov includes one-man exhibitions not in Ukraine only, but also in France, Denmark, participation in international art projects around the world (Poland, Spain, etc.). But if S. Hrapov or O. Denisenko prefer to combine different intaglio printing techniques in their works, then S. Ivanov most often works in etching only, without synthesizing its technological possibilities with the artistic tools of other techniques (fig. 5).



Fig. 5

Ivanov S. Ex-libris Wilhelm Wiszkocsil. C₃. 1996.

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His creative baggage includes both book illustration, to which most ex-librists refer, and painting. The artistic language of S. Ivanov, the way of creative communication are also filled with symbols, allegories, without which it is difficult to imagine the ex-libris of the Lviv school. Among his images you can often see a lady, a bird, but one of the artist's favorite images, symbols that can be seen in his paintings and graphic sheets, is the jester - one of the most serious and philosophical images in art.

Conclusions

Lvov ex-libris school and printmaking in general are characterized by polystylism. The artists are clearly influenced by the Dutch, Austrian, Belgian, Slovak schools of the book plate, but at the same time they retain their identity. The experts, who are the school golden fund, are very multi-vector in their creative experiments. They try themselves both in academic techniques and in new, modern techniques for creating works in graphic arts, including computer graphics, that is a great help for an experienced professional, but a serious danger for a beginner who has not mastered the basics of traditional academic methods. But more often Lvov graphic artists prefer intaglio printing techniques, and the Lvov Art Center can be considered a stronghold for the preservation and development of the traditions of classical intaglio printing techniques, both independently and in synthesis – etching, mezzotint, aquatint, soft-ground etching, drypoint, steel and copper engraving.

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