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Floral symbolism in Ukrainian painting of the second half of the 20th century

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Abstract. The relevance of the study is determined by the need for a comprehensive study of floral symbolism as an important means of preserving and the transmission of national identity in Ukrainian painting during the period of ideological restrictions (1940s-1980s), which is of particular importance for understanding the mechanisms of cultural resistance and the formation of national consciousness. The aim of the study was to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the development of floral symbolism in Ukrainian painting in the second half of the 20th century and to determine its role in the formation of national artistic identity. A set of art history methods was applied: iconographic analysis of symbolic meanings, stylistic analysis of artistic features, and a semiotic approach to reveal the system of symbols. The work of leading Ukrainian artists (M. Glushchenko, V. Kostetsky, T. Golembiievska, I. Krasny, O. Shovkunenko, T. Yablonska, E. Volobuev) in the period from 1940 to 1980 was analysed. The evolution of floral symbolism is traced from the symbols of hope in the 1940s through the search for national identity during the “thaw” period to the philosophical understanding of being. The research has clarified the symbolic meaning of key floral motifs, for example, the peony is associated with rebirth, the cornflower with love for the native land, the mallow expresses the idea of family well-being, and the combination of the daffodil and the ear of corn embodies the cyclical nature of nature. The use of floral images as a means of indirectly expressing patriotic feelings in conditions of ideological restrictions has been proven. It has been established that the multi-layered semiotic system created by artists functioned at the level of individual expression and collective memory, which ensured the transmission of national values in changing historical conditions. The results of the study can be used in teaching Ukrainian art history, art history, cultural studies, curatorial activities, and the creation of museum exhibitions

Keywords: Ukrainian art; national identity; florography; still life; artistic tradition; semiotics; cultural memory

INTRODUCTION

Research into floral symbolism in Ukrainian painting in the second half of the 20th century has become relevant in the context of contemporary geopolitical challenges and the decolonisation of Ukrainian culture. During the Soviet era, Ukrainian artists were forced to seek indirect means of expressing national identity, and floral symbolism became one of the most effective means of symbolically encoding patriotic meanings in visual forms acceptable to the official ideology. Understanding these mechanisms is essential for comprehending the processes of cultural resistance and preservation of national self-awareness in conditions of political pressure. At the same time, the systematic study of floral symbolism as a

holistic cultural phenomenon allows to identify the specifics of the formation of Ukrainian artistic identity and its difference from the Soviet Russocentric cultural model, which was imposed with the aim of unifying national cultures, which is particularly important for the contemporary rethinking of the national artistic heritage.

The issue of symbolism in Ukrainian art attracts the attention of researchers from various fields. S. Biedarieva (2024) analysed the development of artistic practices in Ukraine from the Orange Revolution in 2004 to the current Russian war and concluded that art functions as a key mechanism for constructing identity and anti-colonial resistance. The author proved that Ukrainian artists

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consistently used symbolic systems to express national self-awareness in conditions of political restrictions, creating complex codes of cultural resistance. Y. Horichko (2023) researched Ukrainian identity in the images and symbols of Olena Kulchytska's graphic works. The researcher found that the symbolic images in the works of the Ukrainian artist functioned as carriers of national and cultural meanings, which allowed Ukrainian identity to be preserved under political pressure. The author proved that the iconography of O. Kulchytska's graphic works demonstrated parallels between the horrors depicted and events in Ukrainian history from the early Middle Ages to the second half of the 20th century, emphasising the timeless nature of most images and symbols. This study created a theoretical basis for understanding how Ukrainian artists used symbolic systems to express national self-awareness in complex historical conditions.

A. Pavlyshyn (2022) analysed Ukrainian symbols and archetypes in historical and folkloric imagery. The researcher found that folkloric and historical images in the works of Ukrainian artists carry not only a direct but also a figurative meaning, filled with certain symbolism that allows to function as carriers of national memory. The researcher proved that the structure of a symbol is aimed at immersing a separate phenomenon in the whirlpool of the primary forces of nature and presenting a holistic image of the world through this phenomenon. This study revealed the mechanisms of how natural images, including floral motifs, function as symbolic carriers of national meanings. A. Tkach (2021) explored the contemporary stylisation of Ukrainian song folklore in academic and non-academic practice. The author found that stylisation is characterised by a deep interpenetration of elements of the author's and folkloric foundations, accompanied by the formation of an original artistic text that has a genetic connection with folk melodies. The researcher proved that the effectiveness of folk stylisation in artistic culture is enhanced by the use of authentic folk performance styles. This study confirmed the importance of turning to folk traditions as a means of preserving national identity through artistic creation.

D. Brandenberger (2025) revealed the mechanisms of Soviet historical propaganda and its influence on Ukrainian cultural policy. The researcher established that the Stalinist regime deliberately constructed a "suitable past" that was supposed to combine the pre-revolutionary heritage with the Stalinist present, while marginalising Ukrainian national identity. This study revealed the context in which Ukrainian artists were forced to develop alternative means of expressing national sentiments. O. Nenko (2025) analysed the role of art in the processes of restoring the identity of places disrupted by military action (since 2022). The researcher concluded that artists used symbolic images, including natural motifs, to reconstruct memories of lost places and maintain cultural continuity in conditions of forced displacement.

S. Kot *et al.* (2024) explored the discursive power of digital popular art during the Russian-Ukrainian war. The authors analysed how artists use digital media to shape and transform visual narratives that counter Russian propaganda and strengthen Ukrainian national identity through modern technological means. T. Moldorf & T. Vilkhovchenko (2024) explored floral symbolism in the context of choreographic art and found that floral images function as a multifaceted phenomenon that combines philosophical, cultural, and artistic traditions. Their research confirmed the universal nature of floral symbolism as a means of cultural coding in various art forms. O. Ishchenko & I. Saitarly (2024) proved in their study of the political aspects of floral symbolism that floral images play an important role in shaping state and national identity. The authors found that plant elements in state attributes function as powerful symbols that immortalise historical events and reflect national values, creating a cultural code on the international arena. O. Borzenko (2021) analysed the role of floral symbolism in shaping the emotional context of Lesya Ukrainka's literary works and established a close connection between floral images and folklore traditions. The researcher proved that flowers in Ukrainian culture acquire multiple meanings – from symbols of love to images of national identity.

An analysis of scientific literature has shown that despite the growing interest in the issue of symbolism in Ukrainian art, a comprehensive study of floral symbolism in painting in the second half of the 20th century as a holistic cultural phenomenon has not yet been carried out. The aim of the study was to analyse the evolution and functioning of floral symbols in the works of leading Ukrainian artists of the second half of the 20th century in order to clarify their role in preserving national identity under ideological pressure.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodological basis of the study was a comprehensive approach combining methods of art history, semiotics, and cultural studies. The choice of methodology was determined by the specificity of the object of study – floral symbolism as a complex sign system functioning in a cultural and historical context. The iconographic method was used to analyse the symbolic meanings of floral images in the works of Ukrainian artists. This method made it possible to identify three levels of meaning in a work of art: primary (actual), secondary (conventional) and internal (symbolic). The semiotic approach was used to analyse floral images as sign systems. Semiotic analysis included the study of syntax (relationships between signs), semantics (meanings of signs) and pragmatics (use of signs in communication). This made it possible to consider floral elements not only as decorative motifs, but as carriers of deeper meaning that form the communicative structure of a work of art. Stylistic analysis was used to study the artistic features of the embodiment

of floral motifs in works from different periods. This method included an analysis of compositional decisions, colouristic features, execution techniques and stylistic devices. The contextual method was used to consider floral symbolism in a cultural and historical context. This approach involved analysing the social, political, and cultural conditions that influenced the formation and functioning of symbolic systems. Thus, floral images were considered not in isolation, but as a reflection of social changes and ideological trends, which provides a deeper understanding of their meaning. The hermeneutic method was used to interpret the symbolic meanings of floral images. This approach is particularly important for analysing ambiguous symbols that can have different interpretations depending on the context, which allows to reveal the deeper layers of meaning hidden behind the external image. The comparative-typological method was used to compare floral symbolism in the works of artists from different periods. This approach has made it possible to identify general trends and specific features in the use of floral motifs.

The empirical basis of the study consisted of paintings by Ukrainian artists of the second half of the 20th century: "Peonies" by M. Gluschenko (1950s), "Still Life" by V. Kostetsky (1946), "Mallows" by T. Golembiievskva (1950s), "Bird Cherry and Pansies" by I. Krasny (1965), "Roses and Peaches" by O. Shovkunenko (1970s), "Still Life with Flowers" by T. Yablonska (1979), "Lilies of the Valley" by E. Volobuev (1980s). The selection of works is based on their representativeness for different periods and the active use of floral motifs. The chronological scope of the study covers the period from the 1940s to the 1980s, which corresponds to the second half of the 20th century and is characterised by a particular intensity of processes of national self-awareness in Ukrainian art. The theoretical basis of the study was formed by contemporary works on the semiotics of art, decolonial studies, cultural studies, and research on national identity under political pressure.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An analysis of the evolution of floral symbolism in Ukrainian painting in the second half of the 20th century has allowed to identify three main periods, each characterised by specific features in the use of floral motifs and their symbolic meaning. This periodisation reflects not only artistic but also socio-political changes that influenced the possibilities and strategies for expressing national identity through art. The wartime and post-war period of the formation of socialist realism (1940-1953) was characterised by artists' use of floral images as symbols of hope and affirmation of life in the context of wartime trials and post-war reconstruction. This period combined two interrelated processes: the need to restore spiritual strength after the trauma of war and the simultaneous adaptation to the new ideological requirements of the Soviet regime. Ukrainian artists used

visual metaphors to transition from mimetic representation to the ideal level, seeking to find a source of spiritual strength and optimism in natural images. Floral symbolism was particularly emotionally charged and pathetic, reflecting the desire for national revival (Mudrak, 2019). At the same time, artists found a balance between expressing national sentiments and complying with official cultural policy, which made floral symbolism a particularly valuable process of "safe" cultural coding of patriotic meanings (Biedarieva, 2024).

An early example of such cultural coding is the work of painter V. Kostetsky, who used floral motifs to express patriotic feelings. V. Kostetsky, a graduate of the Kyiv Art Institute, developed as an artist in the difficult conditions of the war and post-war period, when issues of national identity became particularly acute against the backdrop of destructive processes and the need for spiritual revival. The painting "Still Life" (1946) (Fig. 1), depicting cornflowers, daisies and roses, is a complex symbolic system in which each flower has a specific national meaning. Compositionally, the work is built on the principle of a central group, where flowers are gathered in casual bouquets in small vases, emphasising the naturalness and sincerity of the expression. Cornflowers, traditionally associated with Ukraine due to their blue colour reminiscent of the Ukrainian sky, are combined with daisies as symbols of purity, innocence and simplicity of the national soul, while roses function as a sign of love and beauty. This composition created a kind of "picturesque anthem" to the native land (Ogiievskva & Golub, 2014).



Figure 1. Volodymyr Kostetsky, "Still Life", 1946
Source: I.V. Ogiievskva & O.E. Golub (2014)

The technical execution of the work demonstrates the artist's academic training: a realistic style of depiction is combined with a subtle sense of colour and chiaroscuro. V. Kostetsky used the technique of oil painting with moderate impasto, which allowed to achieve clarity of form and at the same time convey the delicate texture of the petals. The artist chose these particular flowers, which had deep symbolic meaning in

folk tradition, but at the same time did not arouse the suspicion of censors as manifestations of “bourgeois nationalism”. The artist turned to wildflowers rather than cultivated garden plants, emphasising the connection with folk culture and the natural environment of Ukraine. This strategy allowed the artist to create a work that functioned on two levels simultaneously: as an aesthetically appealing still life for official perception and as a coded message about national identity for the informed viewer. This became a model of how Ukrainian artists of the 1940s found ways to preserve national discourse within the limits of permitted artistic forms, creating a foundation for the further development of national art under ideological restrictions.

This line was continued by the artist M. Glushchenko's work “Peonies” (1950-1953) (Fig. 2), which showed the use of floral images as symbols of rebirth after the destruction of war. Peonies in the work are multifunctional symbols that combine universal meanings (beauty, blossoming, vitality) (Ukraineflora, 2024) with nationally specific meanings (the rebirth of Ukraine, the optimism of the post-war period). The choice of peonies was not accidental; in Eastern tradition, these flowers symbolised honour, wealth and nobility, which in the context of post-war Ukraine took on the meaning of hope for the restoration of national dignity and cultural prosperity. The artist skilfully used bright, saturated colours – red, pink and white shades of petals against a background of rich green foliage, which emphasised the life-affirming nature of the symbolism and created a sense of festive solemnity. Compositionally, the work is built on the principle of a frontal presentation of a bouquet of flowers, which gives the image a monumentality and solemnity characteristic of the art of the early post-war years. The impasto technique of oil painting allowed the artist to convey the rich texture of the petals and create the effect of the material presence of flowers, which reinforced their symbolic meaning as signs of a real, tangible rebirth of life.



Figure 2. Mykola Glushchenko, “Peonies”, 1950s
Source: M. Glushchenko (n.d.)

During the war and post-war period (1940-1953) and during the formation of socialist realism, the need to adapt floral symbolism to the requirements of official ideology occupied a special place. The Stalinist regime attempted to create a “suitable past” that would combine the pre-revolutionary heritage with the Stalinist present, while marginalising Ukrainian national specificity (Brandenberger, 2025). In such conditions, artists found ways to preserve national traditions within ideologically safe themes: everyday scenes, natural motifs, labour themes, while avoiding direct national symbols or historical allusions. Floral symbolism became one of the most effective means of such preservation, as floral images were not perceived by the authorities as politically dangerous or nationalistic.

A characteristic example of such adaptation was the work of professor and People's Artist T. Golembiievska, who created the work “Mallows” (Fig. 3) in the 1950s. The artist presented mallows in the context of a peasant hut window, symbolising the boundary between the inner private and outer public worlds. The compositional solution with the flowers placed on the windowsill created an intimate atmosphere and emphasised the role of mallows as guardians of the hearth according to Ukrainian folk beliefs. In traditional Ukrainian symbolism, hollyhocks were associated with maternal care and family stability – these tall flowers, which withstand inclement weather near the walls of houses and fences, symbolise the unbreakable bonds of family and loyalty to the home. The artist skilfully used a soft, pastel colour scheme – the delicate pink and purple shades of the flowers harmoniously combine with the warm ochre tones of the wooden window frame, creating a sense of calm and homely comfort (Shamoi *et al.*, 2023). The realistic style characteristic of the official art of that period was combined with subtle lyricism in the rendering of light and shadow effects and the texture of flower petals. This interpretation allowed viewers to recognise in the image of mallows not only a decorative motif, but also a profound symbol of cultural memory and national identity, encoded in the “safe” form of an everyday still life.

The “thaw” period (1954-1965) brought new opportunities for artistic expression and exploration of more intimate and personal themes. The policy of de-Stalinisation initiated by N. Khrushchev created space for a cautious but noticeable departure from the rigid canons of socialist realism (Opulski, 2019). Artists were given the opportunity to experiment with form, address universal human themes, and move away from straightforward ideological engagement. Floral symbolism was characterised by greater sophistication, psychological depth and lyricism, allowing artists to turn to refined forms of expressing national identity through conceptual rather than literal means (Mudrak, 2019). During this period, floral images became a means of subtle psychological

self-expression, allowing artists to explore the inner world of man and his connection with nature without direct political connotations.



Figure 3. Tetiana Golembiievska, "Mallows", 1950s
Source: T. Golembiievska (n.d.)

A special place in the floral symbolism of this period was occupied by the bird cherry, which was embodied in the watercolour painting by architect and graphic artist I. Krasny, "Bird Cherry and Pansies" (1965) (Fig. 4). The choice of bird cherry as the central motif was symbolically significant – this tree, one of the first to bloom in spring, embodies the hope for spiritual renewal of society and the possibility of freer self-expression. In traditional Ukrainian symbolism, bird cherry is associated with tenderness, youth and purity, while pansies symbolise fidelity, devotion and wisdom. The combination of these floral images created a symbolic composition that reflected the ideas of national memory and spiritual revival in the context of the "thaw" period. This combination of youth (bird cherry) and wisdom (pansies) is a synthesis of the new and the traditional, characterising the cultural processes of the "thaw" and the desire for renewal while maintaining a connection with national roots. The composition is based on the principle of asymmetrical balance, where the branches of the bird cherry tree create a natural rhythm, directing the viewer's gaze from the upper left corner to the centre of the work. The snow-white bird cherry blossoms, rendered with thin transparent strokes, contrast with the bright purple and yellow pansies located in the lower part of the composition. The watercolour technique allowed the artist to skillfully convey the different textures of the plants: the

airiness of the bird cherry blossoms through transparent washes and the density of the pansy petals through more saturated colour spots.

The period of late Soviet art (1966-1980) was characterised by a gradual liberation from the dogmas of socialist realism and a search for individual artistic languages. The processes of liberalisation in cultural life that began after Stalin's death created space for more personal forms of artistic expression by 1966. Floral symbolism acquired greater philosophical depth, individualisation and aestheticisation. Artists used floral images to express existential themes, personal experiences and the search for spiritual values.



Figure 4. Ivan Krasny, "Bird Cherry and Pansies", 1965
Source: Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine (n.d.)

The symbolism of roses was embodied in the work of artist O. Shovkunenko, "Roses and Peaches" (1970s) (Fig. 5). In this work, roses, as symbols of ideal beauty and aesthetic perfection, embodied the artist's desire to create an image of unchanging, eternal beauty beyond ideological limitations. The choice of roses as the central motif reflected a return to classical aesthetic values and universal ideas of beauty. The author demonstrated masterful command of oil painting technique and classical principles of compositional structure. The roses, located in the centre of the composition, are painted using the impasto technique, which emphasised the velvety texture of the petals and created a sense of their materiality. This technique maximally conveyed the beauty of the floral forms, emphasising their luxury and nobility. The artist used a rich range of red and pink shades – from deep burgundy to pale pink – which conveyed the different stages of the roses' bloom. This colouristic diversity created a sense of aesthetic completeness, where each shade corresponded to a certain aspect of

beauty, from bright saturation to refined tenderness. O. Shovkunenko created a work that affirmed the right of art to beauty in conditions of the dominance of utilitarian approaches to artistic creativity.



Figure 5. Oleksii Shovkunenko, "Roses and Peaches", 1970s

Source: O. Shovkunenko (n.d.)

In the work of T. Yablonska, floral symbolism acquired a special philosophical depth and psychological expressiveness. The painting "Still Life with Flowers" (1979) (Fig. 6) demonstrated the search for more personal forms of artistic expression characteristic of the 1970s and a shift from monumental compositions to intimate, meditative images. T. Yablonska, known for her large-scale canvases on civic themes ("Morning", 1954; "Bread", 1949), turned to the intimate genre of still life as a space for the coded expression of feelings during this period. In the artist's diaries, it was noted the importance of natural motifs as a means of conveying emotional states and spiritual quests (Atayan, 2020). The composition of the still life is a bouquet combining daffodils and wheat ears among general green leaves in a ceramic pot. This combination of symbols of spring (daffodils) and summer (ears of wheat) created a complex temporal metaphor reflecting the cyclical nature of nature and the continuity of life on Ukrainian soil. The still life was painted in spring, when the daffodils were fresh and the ears of wheat from the previous year's harvest were still preserved. This compositional idea allowed the artist to combine different seasons in a single artistic expression. In classical symbolism, daffodils embody the ideas of rebirth, spring renewal and self-knowledge

(Gladka, 2019), which in the context of the 1970s took on the meaning of an inner spiritual search and a desire for national authenticity. Wheat ears, as a traditional symbol of Ukrainian land and its fertility, function as a veiled sign of patriotic feelings. The artist could openly depict this agricultural symbol without arousing the suspicion of the censors, but for the conscious viewer it was a clear national code. The green leaves that unite these symbols created a natural basis for the composition and reinforced the impression of living, unspoiled nature as the embodiment of national identity.



Figure 6. Tetiana Yablonska, "Still Life with Flowers", 1979

Source: T.N. Yablonska (n.d.)

The technical execution of the work demonstrated the artist's mature skill: thick strokes of oil paint created a rich texture, both in the delicate petals of the daffodils and the rough surface of the ears of corn. T. Yablonska used different densities of paint: thin, transparent strokes to convey the spring tenderness of daffodils contrast with denser, textured strokes to depict ripe ears of corn, emphasising the symbolic contrast between youth and maturity, the beginning and end of the natural cycle. The colour scheme is based on the contrast between the warm ochre tones of the pot and the cool grey-blue shades of the background, emphasising the central role of the bouquet of flowers in the composition. The golden hues of the ears of corn harmoniously combined with the warm colour of the ceramics, creating a feeling of comfort and family well-being, while the white daffodils added a note of freshness and purity. This work demonstrated T. Yablonska's ability to create multi-layered symbolic messages, where patriotic meanings were encoded through traditional Ukrainian images of nature, which remained aesthetically appealing and ideologically "safe" for official perception.

During the same period (1970-1990), the work of artist E. Volobuev, known for his landscapes and still lifes, took its place in the search for individual artistic languages. Volobuev's creative style was influenced by impressionist trends and neo-romantic moods, which allowed to create works devoid of any ideological bias. "Lilies of the Valley" (1980s) (Fig. 7) embodied the idea of modest beauty and spirituality characteristic of the artistic explorations of the 1970s and 1980s. The choice of lilies of the valley as an artistic motif was programmatic; these flowers symbolise a departure from the pomposity of official art to chamber, intimate images that resonated with the inner world of the viewer. Volobuev's attention was most often drawn to those objects of nature that primarily influenced a person's poetic moods – trees, flowers, fruits, birds. In the language of flowers, lily of the valley meant "I have loved you for a long time and secretly," which gave these flowers a special intimacy (Liedenko, 2022). This symbolism of secret love took on additional meaning in the context of Soviet reality – as a metaphor for hidden love for true beauty and spirituality, untainted by ideology. The artist conveyed the subtle beauty of these flowers through the delicate play of light and shadow on their bell-shaped inflorescences. The lily of the valley flowers against the backdrop of green leaves created a sense of pristine purity and innocence. The artist skilfully used the technique of impasto to convey the texture of the leaves and the delicate gradations of white in the flowers. The composition is based on the principle of natural ease, where the lilies of the valley seem to have found their place in the space of the canvas themselves. The organic nature of the composition also reflected the artist's desire for harmony with nature as an alternative to the artificiality and imposition of official culture. The white colour scheme of the lilies of the valley contrasted with the rich green background, creating a glowing effect that emphasised the spiritual, almost sacred nature of these flowers.

Semiotic analysis revealed that floral images functioned on three levels of meaning. The iconic level was associated with the visual similarity of the depicted flowers to real objects. Ukrainian artists paid attention to accurately conveying the visual characteristics of flowers – their shape, colour, and texture – for their recognisability and emotional impact on the viewer. The indexical level was formed through the contextual connections of floral images with specific phenomena and concepts. For example, bird cherry was associated with spring, creating an indexical connection with the ideas of renewal and rebirth, while hollyhocks, which usually grew near peasant homes, were indexically linked to the concept of home and family. The symbolic level proved to be more complex and culturally conditioned, with floral images functioning as carriers of conventional meanings formed in cultural tradition.



Figure 7. Evhen Volobuev, "Lilies of the Valley", 1980s
Source: Z. Borovets (2022)

The system of floral symbols was characterised by its multi-layered and multifunctional nature. Peonies functioned as symbols of rebirth and vitality, forming meanings based on natural characteristics (large, bright, luxurious flowers) and cultural connotations (association with prosperity and wealth). In the work of M. Gluschenko, peonies acquired additional significance as symbols of national rebirth after the destruction of war. Cornflowers were traditionally national symbols of Ukraine, based on folk traditions and visual associations (the colour blue was associated with the Ukrainian sky). In the works of V. Kostetsky, cornflowers, as metonymic symbols of Ukraine, allowed the artist to express patriotic feelings in an acceptable form.

In Ukrainian culture, hollyhocks symbolised home comfort and family well-being, forming meanings based on gardening traditions and folklore beliefs. In T. Golembiievska's work, mallows are symbols of private space, as opposed to the official public sphere. In traditional symbolism, bird cherry is associated with tenderness, youth and purity, based on its natural cycle of early spring flowering and established cultural beliefs. Daffodils and ears of corn in T. Yablonska's work combined the symbols of spring rebirth and summer fertility, creating a multi-layered metaphor for the cyclical nature of nature and the continuity of national life. Roses symbolised beauty and love, and in the context of national art, they acquired the additional meaning of aesthetic perfection. Lilies of the valley symbolised modesty and spirituality.

The results of the study allowed to rethink the role of floral symbolism in Ukrainian painting in the second half of the 20th century. The analysis showed that floral

symbolism functioned as a complex semiotic system that played an important role in preserving and transmitting national identity under ideological pressure. The results of the study confirmed the conclusions of S. Biedarieva (2024) regarding the functioning of art as a mechanism for constructing identity and anti-colonial resistance. The data obtained expanded her theoretical positions and demonstrated that floral symbolism was one of the most effective and at the same time safe means of such cultural coding, as it combined aesthetic appeal with deep symbolic meaning, which made it possible to circumvent the ideological restrictions of the Soviet regime. While S. Biedarieva examined the general mechanisms of anti-colonial resistance through art, the analysis conducted specified these mechanisms through the study of the specific phenomenon of floral symbolism. D. Brandenberger's (2025) study of the Russocentric policy of the Stalinist regime revealed the historical context in which Ukrainian artists were forced to develop alternative means of expressing national sentiments. The results of the analysis confirmed his conclusions about the marginalisation of Ukrainian national identity, demonstrating specific strategies used by artists to preserve national meanings through floral symbolism under conditions of ideological control.

The evolutionary nature of floral symbolism proved to be important. The study showed that the system of floral symbols was not static but developed in line with changes in the socio-political context. From the pathetic symbols of rebirth during the war period (peonies by M. Gluschenko, cornflowers by V. Kostetsky) through images of domestic comfort adapted to socialist realism (T. Golembiievsk's mallows) to the lyrical symbols of spiritual renewal of the "thaw" period (I. Krasny's bird cherry) and the philosophical reflections of the late Soviet period (O. Shovkunenko's roses, T. Yablonska's daffodils and ears of corn, E. Volobuev's lilies of the valley). The evolutionary nature revealed confirmed and at the same time specified the conclusions of M. Mudrak (2024), who analysed the use of symbolism by Ukrainian artists as a means of transition from mimetic representation to the ideal level. While M. Mudrak considered the general principles of the symbolist method, the analysis demonstrated how these principles functioned specifically in floral symbolism, revealing three clearly defined periods of evolution in line with political changes.

An analysis of the artists' work revealed individual characteristics in their use of floral symbols. M. Gluschenko gravitated towards monumental forms of symbolism, using bright colours to emphasise the life-affirming nature of his images. V. Kostetsky developed patriotic symbols, creating "picturesque hymns" to the native land through a combination of national floral symbols. T. Golembiievsk focused on the intimate aspects of national identity, using mallows as symbols of private space. I. Krasny used lyrical forms of symbolism, conveying them through watercolour techniques. T. Yablonska

combined symbols of different seasons (daffodils and ears of corn) in her work, creating multi-layered metaphors of the cyclical nature of nature and national life. O. Shovkunenko developed aesthetic symbolism, using roses as symbols of ideal beauty and aesthetic perfection. E. Volobuev created a system of symbols of spiritual connection with nature. These individual characteristics testified to the diversity of Ukrainian floral symbolism, which was not reduced to a single scheme but had different approaches and interpretations. At the same time, all these approaches were united by a common function – to express and support national identity. Most of the floral symbols used by artists had deep roots in Ukrainian folklore tradition, which ensured their comprehensibility to a wide audience and enhanced the emotional impact of the works. This fully correlated with the theoretical conclusions of O. Afonina (2018), who established that cultural code is an established structure that conveys information historically concentrated in signs and symbols. The analysis specified her theory of "double" coding, demonstrating how Ukrainian artists created multi-level messages through floral symbolism: the surface layer (the aesthetic appeal of flowers) was perceived by a wide audience, while the deeper national meanings were revealed only to the knowledgeable viewer.

The study also revealed gender aspects of floral symbolism. Female artists (T. Golembiievsk, T. Yablonska) more often referred to the intimate aspects of floral symbolism associated with family, home space, and natural life cycles. Male artists (M. Gluschenko, V. Kostetsky, I. Krasny, O. Shovkunenko, E. Volobuev) more often used floral images to express civic and patriotic feelings or philosophical reflections. These observations correlated with the conclusions of O. Zavyalova & H. Stakhevych (2022), who pointed out that women's artistic practice was formed in conditions of social restrictions, which determined specific genre and thematic preferences, in particular, the appeal to intimate, chamber space in creativity. The results of the study showed that cultural identity can be preserved and transmitted through symbolic systems that are not perceived as threatening by the authorities. This is relevant for understanding contemporary cultural processes, as confirmed by research by S. Kot *et al.* (2024) on the use of traditional symbols in contemporary war art. Their conclusions about the functioning of traditional Ukrainian heritage in contemporary digital art as a means of countering propaganda echo the patterns identified in 20th-century floral symbolism. This demonstrated the continuity of Ukrainian cultural resistance strategies throughout various historical periods, from Soviet ideological pressure to the current war with Russia.

Contemporary research on the decolonisation of Ukrainian art history, conducted by S. Demchuk & I. Levchenko (2024), confirmed the conclusions about the need for Ukrainian artists to develop alternative means of expression. The authors proved that the

introduction of the Soviet system of “art studies” in 1937 led to a break with Western scientific discourse, which correlates with observations about the necessity of searching for “safe” forms of national self-expression, which became floral symbolism. The context of academic activism, researched by J. Costas *et al.* (2024), coincided with the conclusions about the role of art as a form of cultural resistance. While the authors considered contemporary forms of academic activism in wartime, the study revealed historical precedents of cultural resistance through symbolic systems in the 20th century, confirming the continuity of Ukrainian strategies for preserving national identity. The bibliometric analysis by S. Nazarovets & O. Mryglod (2025) on the low integration of Ukrainian research into the global academic community partially explained the insufficient study of the phenomenon of floral symbolism in Ukrainian painting, which makes this study particularly relevant for filling this gap in scientific discourse.

Thus, the study not only revealed the aesthetic and symbolic multidimensionality of floral imagery in Ukrainian painting of the second half of the 20th century, but also demonstrated its significance as a stable form of cultural resistance and preservation of national identity in conditions of political pressure. Floral symbolism emerged not only as an artistic technique, but as a deeply rooted communicative system capable of transmitting collective meanings, values, and memory in a visually accessible but ideologically “safe” form.

CONCLUSIONS

The evolution of floral symbolism during the second half of the 20th century took place in three main stages, each of which was characterised by specific features in the use of floral motifs. The war and post-war period (1940-1953) was marked by the use of floral images as symbols of hope and affirmation of life, which was embodied in the works of V. Kostetsky and M. Gluschenko. At the same time, floral symbolism was adapted to the official ideology of socialist realism, as shown in the works of T. Golembiievska. The “thaw” period (1954-1965) brought greater sophistication and psychological depth to the works of I. Krasny. The period of late Soviet art (1966-1980s) was marked by philosophical depth and individualisation in the works of O. Shovkunenko, T. Yablonska and E. Volobuev.

The symbolic meanings of the main floral motifs were formed on the basis of a combination of the natural characteristics of flowers with cultural traditions. As the analysis showed, peonies in M. Gluschenko’s work

symbolised rebirth and vitality after the destruction of war. Cornflowers in the works of V. Kostetsky functioned as metonymic symbols of Ukraine, embodying love for the native land. Mallows in the works of T. Golembiievska meant family well-being and private space. Bird cherry in the watercolours of I. Krasny symbolised spring renewal and national memory. Daffodils and ears of corn in T. Yablonska’s work combined symbols of spring rebirth and summer fertility, creating a metaphor for the cyclical nature of nature and the continuity of national life. O. Shovkunenko’s roses symbolised beauty and aesthetic perfection. E. Volobuev’s lilies of the valley embodied a spiritual connection with nature and modest beauty. The revealed system of floral symbols demonstrated a deep rootedness in folklore traditions, which ensured their effectiveness as means of cultural communication and transmission of national meanings across generations. The processes of cultural coding included direct symbolic representation (cornflowers as symbols of Ukraine), metonymic substitution (natural images instead of political themes) and allegorical cultural coding (complex compositions with multi-level meanings). Decoding was carried out by viewers who possessed cultural codes, which created a special form of cultural communication outside of official discourse.

The individual characteristics of the use of floral symbols in the works of different artists testified to the diversity of Ukrainian floral symbolism. Each artist developed own interpretation of floral images, which were united by the common function of expressing national identity. The gender differences identified in the use of floral symbolism opened up prospects for further research into the role of gender in the processes of cultural coding. Prospects for further research include the study of floral symbolism in contemporary Ukrainian military art, analysis of the transformation of traditional symbolism under the influence of globalisation processes, comparative study of floral symbolism in the art of different regions of Ukraine, as well as research into its functioning in the context of decolonial studies and cultural resistance theory.

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Квітковий символізм в українському живописі другої половини ХХ століття

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Аспірант

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Анотація. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена необхідністю комплексного вивчення квітового символізму як важливого засобу збереження та трансляції національної ідентичності в українському живописі періоду ідеологічних обмежень (1940-1980-х рр.), що має особливе значення для розуміння механізмів культурного опору та формування національної свідомості. Метою дослідження був комплексний аналіз особливостей розвитку квітового символізму в українському живописі у другій половині ХХ ст. та визначення його ролі у формуванні національної художньої ідентичності. Застосовано комплекс мистецтвознавчих методів: іконографічний аналіз символічних значень, стилістичний аналіз художніх особливостей та семіотичний підхід для розкриття системи символів. Проаналізовано творчість провідних українських художників (М. Глущенко, В. Костецький, Т. Голембієвська, І. Красний, О. Шовкуненко, Т. Яблонська, Є. Волобуєв) у період 1940-1980-х рр. Визначено еволюцію квітового символізму від символів надії 1940-х рр. через пошуки національної ідентичності періоду «відлиги» до філософського осмислення буття. У процесі дослідження з'ясовано символічне навантаження ключових квіткових мотивів, наприклад, півонія асоціюється з відродженням, волошка – з любов'ю до рідної землі, мальва виражає ідею родинного добробуту, а поєднання нарциса й колосся втілює циклічність природи. Доведено використання квіткових образів як засобу непрямого вираження патріотичних почуттів в умовах ідеологічних обмежень. Встановлено, що створена художниками багатозарова семіотична система функціонувала на рівні індивідуального висловлювання та колективної пам'яті, яка забезпечувала трансляцію національних цінностей у змінюваних історичних умовах. Результати дослідження можуть використовуватися у викладанні історії українського мистецтва, мистецтвознавстві, культурології, кураторській діяльності та створенні музейних експозицій

Ключові слова: українське мистецтво; національна ідентичність; флорографія; натюрморт; художня традиція; семіотика; культурна пам'ять