

THE KHARKIV STUDIO MOVEMENT AND BLUE LILY STUDIO AS AN ASPECT OF EUROPEAN ART PRACTICES

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The article examines the studio movement in Kharkiv in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and how it was influenced by European cultural and artistic processes. The studios of Yegor Schrader (1875–1907), Yevhen Agafonov's Blue Lily (1907–1912), Oleksiy Grot, Eduard Steinberg, Mykola Savvin, Oleksiy Zahonov (1909–1913), the Thistle (1913–1914), and Nakos'-Vykos' (1914) were recipients of European artistic practices; they involved Ukraine in European artistic processes and contributed to the creation of a Ukrainian version of European styles and movements. A special role in Kharkiv's artistic life was played by the Blue Lily studio, founded by Kharkiv artist Yevhen Agafonov, which quickly turned into an artistic association. Its members were engaged in painting, drawing, engraving, organized plein air, exhibitions, including innovative ones (The Ring, 1911, 1912), where they introduced the public to the new art that had burst upon Europe. The students published the literary and artistic almanac "Blue Lily" (1911), and were involved in theater activities. Yevhen Agafonov was a stage designer for the first cabaret theater in Kharkiv, the Blue Eye (1909–1911), which introduced the Kharkiv audience to modernist plays and modernist aesthetics. The Blue Lily Studio, focusing on contemporary European models, became a place of learning, experimentation and practice, one of the initiators of the Ukrainian avant-garde. The presence of national Ukrainian themes in the artistic works of the Studio Movement (in particular, Yevhen Agafonov) was an important contribution to the nation-building process. And the various types of creative activity of the studio artists turned Kharkiv into a European city involved in building a common European cultural space.

Keywords: studios, studio movement, Blue Lily, Thistle, Nakos'-Vykos', Yevhen Agafonov, Oleksiy Grot, Mykola Savvin, Eduard Steinberg, Oleksiy Zahonov

ХАРКІВСЬКИЙ СТУДІЙНИЙ РУХ ТА СТУДІЯ «БЛАКИТНА ЛІЛІЯ» ЯК ПРОЯВ ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКИХ ХУДОЖНІХ ПРАКТИК

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У статті розглядається студійний рух у Харкові наприкінці XIX – на початку XX століття, а також вплив на нього європейських культурно-мистецьких процесів. Студії Єгора Шрейдера (1875–1907), «Блакитна Лілія» Євгена Агафонов (1907–1912), Олексія Грота, Едуарда Штейнберга, Миколи Саввіна, Олексія Загонова (1909–1913), «Будяк» (1913–1914), «Накось-Викось» (1914) були реципієнтами європейських художніх практик, залучали Україну до європейських мистецьких процесів і сприяли створенню української версії європейських стилів і течій. Особливу роль у мистецькому житті Харкова відіграла заснована харківським художником Євгеном Агафоновим студія «Блакитна лілія», яка швидко перетворилася на мистецьке об'єднання. Його члени займалися живописом, графікою, гравюрою, організовували пленери, виставки, в тому числі й новаторські («Кільце», 1911, 1912), де знайомили публіку з новим мистецтвом, що охопило Європу. Студенти видавали літературно-художній альманах «Блакитна Лілія» (1911), займалися театральною діяльністю. Євген Агафонов був сценографом першого харківського театру-кабаре «Блакитне Око» (1909–1911), який знайомив харківську публіку з модерністськими п'єсами та естетикою модерну. Студія «Блакитна лілія», орієнтуючись на актуальні європейські зразки, стала місцем навчання, експериментів і практики, одним з витоків українського авангарду. Присутність національної української тематики у творчості студійців (зокрема, Євгена Агафонов) стала важливим внеском у процес націєтворення. А різноманітні види творчої діяльності художників-студійців перетворили Харків на європейське місто, залучене до розбудови спільного європейського культурного простору.

Ключові слова: студії, студійний рух, «Блакитна Лілія», «Будяк», «Накось-Викось», Євген Агафонов, Олексій Грот, Микола Саввін, Едуард Штейнберг, Олексій Загонов

Relevance

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Ukrainian culture was much more integrated into European cultural processes than contemporary historical accounts often reveal. The particularly unfavorable times when Ukraine was part of the Russian Empire were marked not only by cultural pressure (the Valuev Circular (1863), the Ems Decree (1876)), but also by the necessity of participating in the creation of high culture through St. Petersburg. This concerned Ukrainian artists more than, say, writers, since there was no other way to enter the profession than through the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts, which, despite having figures like Ilya Repin, was in serious crisis and had to turn to Europe for both ideas and their technical realization. Very often, Ukrainians borrowed European practices directly, and this was organic for them, as Ukraine had centuries of cultural ties with Europe, which were visible on the streets of Ukrainian cities and villages in the form of Cossack baroque architecture. Emphasizing these ongoing ties with Europe — at the level of ideas, traditions, cultural codes, and various cultural practices that attest to the historical development of Ukrainian lands as part of European history — is especially timely for Ukrainian historians today, as the current public demand for European integration represents less a paving of the way for something new, and more a return to one's own cultural home.

The art studios that operated in Kharkiv in the early twentieth century were an important aspect of Ukrainian culture's Europeanness. Where did European ideas and practices come from in Kharkiv? Who implemented them and how exactly? How did they influence the cultural landscape of the city? Were they involved in the nation-building process, the center of which was Kharkiv? These questions are the focus of our research.

Historiography

Kharkiv's studio movement has been studied by Kharkiv art historians Larysa Savickaya (2003), Alla Pivnenko (1990; 2006), Tetiana Pavlova (2014). The studios of Kharkiv are the focus of the attention of Myroslava Mudrak (2018) and Valentyna Chechyk (2020). At the same time, Yevhen Agafonov's studio Blue Lily receives the most attention both because of the centrality of its founder in the cultural field of Kharkiv and because of the availability of a more complete set of sources (Pavlova 2014; Lowack 2019; 2024a).

The theoretical basis of our study in the context of the nation-building process is the work of foreign and Ukrainian theorists and practitioners of the national movement, such as Benedict Anderson (2001), Miroslav Hroch (1992), Roman Szporluk (2001), Mykola Riabchuk (2000), Yaroslav Hrytsak (2011), Georgiy Kasianov (1999), and Serhiy Naumov (2017; 2019).

Insufficient scholarly attention to the studio movement and the approach to it exclusively through an imperial-centered lens negated the possibility of integrating it into the context of European artistic processes of which it was actually a part. Therefore, the consideration of Kharkiv's cultural and artistic processes as a component of European cultural history remains an urgent task for both art historians and historians.

Objectives and goals of the study

The research aims to examine studio activity in Kharkiv from the late nineteenth century to the First World War of 1914 as a holistic phenomenon, to draw parallels and comparisons between different studios, despite the complexity of comparative studies given the limited source base of research on individual studios. Since there was an obvious connection between the studios, in particular, the continuity between the Blue Lily, Thistle and Nakos'-Vykos', personal and ideological contacts between young and progressive artists, we can speak of a cultural process. Identifying the characteristics of this process is the central goal of the study, namely, revealing the essence of the studio movement, its points of inspiration, the dynamics of development in the context of European artistic processes, and its consequences for the further development of cultural and artistic processes in Kharkiv and Ukraine as a whole. Since a central theme of Ukraine's socio-political and cultural development in

the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the process of nation-building, it is worth looking at studio activity from this perspective as well, since its role seems interesting and not at all obvious.

Sources and methodology

The source base of the studio movement in Kharkiv is represented by documentary materials, memoirs, original works by studio participants and their photocopies, as well as Kharkiv periodicals of the early twentieth century. The main set of sources is fond 553 of the Central State Archive-Museum of Literature and Art of Ukraine (hereinafter – TsDAMLM Ukrainy), which contains documents related to the activities of the studios Blue Lily, Thistle and Nakos'-Vykos'. An important corpus of sources is contained in fond 208 of the Central State Museum of Art and Letters of Ukraine by art historian Dmytro Hordiev (Hordeiev), who was a direct participant in the events and preserved a large number of documents from that era. Since both funds contain a large number of memories in the form of correspondence, subjectively colored and inaccurate due to the natural imperfection of human memory, as well as deliberately constructed due to the existence of an ideological framework, an important source is the periodicals of the time, such as the newspaper *Utro* (The Morning). It contains valuable news, articles, criticism, reviews of exhibitions and theatrical performances, studio advertisements, and theater posters, that are time-fixed slices of the era.

Memoirs constitute an important source, although in relation to this period of time, they are not extensive. The memoirs of Vladimir Milashevskij (1972; 1989) are worth highlighting: attentive, profound, intellectual, and ironic. In the first edition of 1972 he presented Kharkiv and Oleksiy Grot's studio in the period between the revolutions in the most complimentary way. The second edition of 1989, *Yesterday, the Day Before Yesterday: Memoirs of an Artist*, which is positioned as “*corrected and supplemented*”, completely lacks memories of his early years and of Kharkiv. Instead, St. Petersburg, which, along with the Academy, in the first edition is criticized for its bourgeois and cultural stiffness, begins to be praised in a somewhat strange way (Milashevskij 1989, 8–12), which turns the artist's sophisticated, admirably nuanced view into an exalted and grotesque one, and in doing so even devalues those moments of delight that were much less present in the first edition and therefore especially valuable, including memories of Kharkiv. Comparing the two editions of Milashevskij is a task for literary critics and textual scholars, who should have the last word on whether we are dealing with a simple falsification after the author's death.

The study reconstructs and comprehends the activities of Kharkiv studios by comparing different types of sources, examines their nature and significance in the context of the European artistic process.

European art schools and studios

The tradition of art studios originated in France, where the first private schools, the Academie Julian and the Academie Colarossi, were founded in the late 1870s with an innovative approach to teaching drawing and painting. These private schools became an alternative to the official *École des Beaux-Arts*, which was perceived by young artists as too conservative. Private schools, ateliers, or studios of this new type were characterized by grouping students around individual masters, cultivating horizontal teacher-student relationships, and emphasizing life drawing. Gradually, this phenomenon spread across Europe, where Munich, Vienna, and Krakow became artistic centers in addition to Paris.

Thus, at the turn of the century in Munich, there were two prominent schools of art by the Hungarian Simon Hollósy (since 1886) and the Slovenian Anton Ažbe (1891–1905), known for their progressive teaching methods and preservation of the student's individuality, which turned the school into a place of experimentation and creative research.

A special relationship between teacher and student, namely close relationships, respect and active involvement of the teacher in the process, as well as emphasis on the ethical component (service to art as the meaning of the artist's life), natural joy from the success of colleagues and students determined the communication component of the success of the Anton Ažbe School. The bright personality of the eccentric Ažbe was enhanced by his outstanding talent: in his time, Ažbe gained a reputation as the best draughtsman of the Munich Academy, and the teaching system he developed provided the school graduates with high skills and emancipation in drawing, brightness in painting, and encouraged them to find their own style.

An important dimension of Anton Ažbe's personality was his national self-awareness. Being a Slovene by nationality, he emphasized his national origin and stressed that he wanted to show what Slovenes were capable of with his art, essentially proclaiming the importance of the national in art (Lowack 2024b, 62, 65).

Among the Ukrainian artists who attended Anton Ažbe's school are Oleksandr Murashko, David Burliuk, Volodymyr Burliuk, Ivan Trush and Abram Manevych, artists who developed an individual style and became central figures of the modernist era in Ukraine. For them, as well as for other Ukrainians who studied in European art centers, spending time in Europe made it possible to establish contacts and acquaintances that technically facilitated access to international exhibition venues, and thus enabled them to become involved in creative competition at the European level. Examples of such success are, in particular, Oleksandr Murashko, David and Volodymyr Burliuk (Lowack 2024b, 62, 66–67).

Having arrived in Europe, Ukrainian artists joined the process of creating a new aesthetic, searching for ideas, shaping practices and tastes. As they honed their skills, they were fertilized by European ideas (whether in Western academies or in private schools and studios) and continued to develop them in Ukraine, enriching them with

national traditions and creating national variants of major world styles and art movements, such as Ukrainian Impressionism, Ukrainian Symbolism, and Ukrainian Art Nouveau.

Kharkiv studios

In the second half of the nineteenth century, private educational centers also emerged in Ukraine, such as the Odesa Drawing School (1865–1899), the Maria Rayevska-Ivanova School in Kharkiv (1869–1912) and the Mykola Murashko Drawing School in Kyiv (1875–1901). The purpose of these schools was, among other things, to select and prepare the most talented students for study at the St. Petersburg Academy. At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, the Academy was in a deep crisis, unable to provide either proper technical training or to be at the forefront of the times in search of new ways of artistic development. The dominance of academicism as a method did not disappear even after the reform of the Academy by the Peredvizhniki, who established new principles – realistic image and true reflection of reality. The focus on the photographic reproduction of nature, excessive attention to detail, and disregard for colorism contradicted the needs of the younger generation, which was already familiar with European modernism and wanted to independently seek new forms and means of expression, focusing on the purely artistic component. Vladimir Milashevskij, who, after the innovative studio of Oleksiy Grot in Kharkiv in 1913, went to the St. Petersburg Academy, notes:

“How could one forget all these joys of discovery and turn back into a dullard stubbing out a plaster nose! And this is what the state academicism demanded, which stretched its wings from St. Petersburg to Vladivostok!” (Milashevskij 1972, 29).

The aforementioned Ukrainian private schools were different from European studios, where the spirit of innovation and experimentation reigned, where the teacher not only passed on his or her own methodology but also encouraged exploration, where the usual plasters and hatching were replaced by life drawing, which sought liberation and individuality. In bridging this gap between academic education and current trends in European painting, art studios became the central link, and the studio sector of art education should be considered one of the primary sources of the history of the Kharkiv art school and the graphic school in particular (Tytarenko 2011, 401).

The first, early studios (O. Viezzhev, M. Uvarov) that existed in Kharkiv in parallel with the school of Maria Rayevska-Ivanova were not yet such European and innovative centers. Most likely, the workshop of the harrow painter E. A. Klodt, who had experience at the Imperial Moscow Bolshoi Theater and in 1909 offered classes in drawing, wood and fabric painting, and firing (Utro 1909, 18 avgusta). Vladimir Milashevskij reflects on their nature: *“But there were private ‘studios’, as drawing*

schools were called back then, run by one artist?” one might ask. Yes, there were. But the heads of these studios themselves were no different from state artists, and sometimes they were the same. It was only after the Mir Iskusstva that new trends emerged: the studio of Bakst and Dobuzhynsky, the studio of Tsionglinsky. But that was in the capital” (Milashevskij 1972, 28).

V. Milashevskij very well notes both this watershed and the role of the *Mir Iskusstva* (World of Arts) (1898–1927) as a bifurcation point for all-Russian artistic practices and the presence of these practices in the capital, St. Petersburg.

The early Kharkiv studios were most likely the old type of private schools of which Milashevskij says that “[...] *the studio existed specifically for aristocratic ladies and maidens*”, where “[...] *watercolor lessons were taught. Alpine violets, chrysanthemums, two roses in a Venetian glass*” (Milashevskij 1972, 28).

The first of a new type of studio can be considered the studio of Yegor Schradler, founded in 1875, which was quite innovative (Sokoliuk, 2008). But the typical European studios were the private studios of Kharkiv’s innovative artists Yevhen Agafonov, Oleksiy Grot, Mykola Savvin, Eduard Steinberg and Oleksiy Zahonov, founded in the early twentieth century. Their fundamental difference from previous private schools was their focus on nude painting, creative search, and innovation. Myroslava Mudrak writes about experimental groups that promoted the ideas of modernism: “*Getting acquainted with the artistic trends of Europe, they tried out modern trends in their own way both in the visual arts – starting with post-impressionism and expressionism of the 1890s – and in their own works of modern household design. These peculiar searches were inspired by a combination of French Art Nouveau, German Art Nouveau, Austrian Secession, as well as Russian Modernism, which was popular at the time*” (Mudrak 2018, 98). Kharkiv was characterized by cooperation between artists as they built joint studios. The most studied studio today is Yevhen Agafonov’s Blue Lily (Savickaya 2003; Pavlova 2014; Chechyk 2020; Lowack 2019; 2020; 2024).

The innovations of the above-mentioned artists led to some friction in the Society of Kharkiv Artists, as a result of which they separated and stopped exhibiting together with the Society (Utro 1911, 8 oktyabrya), creating instead the Kharkiv group the Ring, which held its own exhibitions of the same name in 1911 and 1912.

The first Ring’s exhibition was quite successful – it was seen by more than two thousand visitors, 16 paintings by E. Agafonov, D. Mytrokhin, M. Savvin, E. Steinberg, F. Nadezhdin were sold, and 3 paintings by D. Mytrokhin and F. Nadezhdin were stolen (Utro 1911, 15 noyabrya).

In 1912, Yevhen Agafonov, Oleksiy Grot, Mykola Savvin, and Mytrofan Fedorov formed the jury that allowed other artists to participate in the exhibition *The Ring* (Utro 1912, 28 oktyabrya). Not only Ukrainians exhibited in Moscow and St. Petersburg, but also Russians exhibited in Ukraine. In 1912, the Kharkiv artists were joined by representatives of the largest avant-garde association in the empire, the Bubnovyi valet (Jack of Diamonds), including P. Konchalovsky, R. Falk, A. Lentulov, and I. Mashkov.

Studio of Yegor Schrader (1875–1907)

The tendency to borrow European experience was evident in Kharkiv quite early on. In 1875, Yegor Schrader created a studio that differed significantly from the academic school in its approach. A native of Chuhuiv (a city in the Kharkiv region), who studied at the Munich Academy of Arts and later at the St. Petersburg Academy, Schrader innovated in the creation of landscapes, focusing more on sketches, completely rejecting the conventional division into plans, giving the space depth and length, introducing diagonal construction, fragmentary compositions (Sokoliuk 2008, 106), and organizing plein airs with his students. The studio existed for quite a long time – in 1907, visitors were offered painting, drawing, and sculpture classes (Utro 1907, 20 yanvarya).

Schrader's studio was attended by V. I. Zarubin, M. V. Dosekin, O. L. Della-Vos-Kardovska, G. S. Vereiskyi, P. O. Levchenko, and M. S. Tkachenko (Sokoliuk 2008, 107).

Studio of Yevhen Agafonov Blue Lily (1907–1912)

A special role in Kharkiv artistic life was played by the Blue Lily studio, founded by Kharkiv artist Yevhen Agafonov in 1907 (TsDAMLM Ukrainy, f. 553, op. 1, spr. 30, ark. 2). At the beginning of 1908, the first announcement of enrollment of students in Yevhen Agafonov's studio, which was not yet called Blue Lily and offered only 1 painting class (3 hours) and 1 life drawing class once a week. Already in August 1908, we see the expansion of the school's offer: in addition to painting and drawing, there were also courses in firing, carving, taught by S.A. Kuznetsova, who had studied at the Berlin Academy of Applied Arts, as well as lectures on art history and art issues (Utro 1908, 31 avgusta).

Agafonov's studio quickly turned into an artistic association. Its members were engaged in painting, drawing, engraving, organized plein airs, exhibitions, including innovative ones (The Ring in 1911, 1912). The students published a literary and artistic almanac *Blue Lily* (1911), and were involved in theater activities. Yevhen Agafonov was a stage designer of the first cabaret theater in Kharkiv, the Blue Eye (1909–1911), which introduced the Kharkiv audience to modernist plays and modernist aesthetics. The Blue Lily Studio, focusing on contemporary European models, became a place of learning, experimentation, and practice, one of the origins of the Ukrainian avant-garde.

Yevgeny Agafonov was a graduate of the St. Petersburg Academy, where he studied, among other things, with Dmitry Kardovsky, a student of the Munich artist Anton Ažbe. Therefore, we can say that Ažbe indirectly influenced Yevhen Agafonov. As in typical European studios, the Blue Lily concentrates on drawing nudes, on quick 15-minute steps, and on simplifying the lines of the drawing, which was very close to Anton Ažbe. Interestingly, it was the painting of nudes that became the main activity of the first Ukrainian futurist studios Thistle (1913–1914) and Nakos'-

Vykos' (1914), supplemented by literary work, communications, and pre-actionism (Lowack 2024a, 70–72).

It is interesting that the close teacher-student relationship, which was cultivated in European studios (Deuchler 2003, 57), can also be observed in Yevhen Agafonov's case: his students noted his respect for students, and this was constantly emphasized, which may be evidence of the atypical nature of such behavior in this environment. In particular, Larisa Gatova recalls:

“Agafonov had many students, all of whom he called by name and patronymic without exception, although most were girls and boys” (TsDAMLM Ukrainy, f. 553, op. 1, spr. 93, ark. 11).

Prominent representatives of Ukrainian culture studied and formed in the studio, including Dmytro Hordeiev (scholar, art critic), Borys Rudnev (cultural figure, founder of the Lebedyn Art Museum), Vasyl Yermilov (artist, constructivist), and Mariia Synyakova (artist, neo-primitivist).

Another important component of the studios was women artists, who traditionally, since the days of French private art schools, were allowed to paint male nudes but could not study at official art academies. At Anton Ažbe's school, women made up a third of the students. Interestingly, this was typical for Kharkiv as well: the Synyakov sisters Maria, Ksenia, and Shura, as well as Sofia Gatova, Olena Chyrykova, Nina Nadezhdina, and other women studied with E. Agafonov.

The Studio Blue Lily was closed in 1912 due to Agafonov's planned move to Moscow, where he worked as a portrait painter in 1913 (TsDAMLM Ukrainy, f. 208, op. 2, spr. 90, ark. 4).

Steinberg-Grot Studio (1909–1911)

In 1909, Eduard Steinberg, after returning from Munich, where he had studied at the Academy of Arts and the private Munich school of Shimon Hollosy, founded a joint studio with Oleksiy Grot, who had studied with Henri Matisse in Paris. Oleksiy Grot studied at the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics at Kharkiv University and at the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts, from which he was expelled through revolutionary activities. After returning from Europe, the artists set up a studio, which was visited by Vasyl Yermilov and Vladimir Milashevskij, among others.

In 1911, Steinberg-Grot's studio offered daily painting classes with a live model (10 rubles per month), and twice-weekly drawing classes. The studio also had two-hour evening classes twice a week, and for 25 kopecks visitors could make independent “sketches” from a live model (Utro 1911, 10 sentyabrya).

Vladimir Milashevskij, for whom Kharkiv is a European city with an almost Parisian art scene, writes about the practice of this studio:

“I don't remember the first time I came to the studio of Grot and Eduard Steinberg. It seems that twice a week in the evening and on Sundays you could

come in, pay twenty-five kopecks and paint a nude model. This is the practice in Paris. You could work without a teacher. Daytime sessions are painting. In the evenings, only drawing. It was the first time I painted a naked woman. An event in the artist's life. The model was a young nineteen-year-old girl with very mature female forms" (Milashevskij 1972, 44).

Vladimir Milashevskij returns to and constantly emphasizes the importance of Kharkiv in his personal development. When we read Milashevskij's memoirs, we are struck by his emotionality and awareness of Kharkiv's European character, which is expressed in the direct text of an intelligent, thoughtful observer. The absence of self-praise on the part of the Ukrainians is valuable, because the author of the text is a Russian who, after Kharkiv, goes to St. Petersburg, which for Milashevskij, despite the understanding of the availability of incomparably greater resources for the development of art, remains in the pictorial sense a "*backward city*" (Milashevskij 1972, 44) compared to Kharkiv. For Milashevskij, his acquaintance with real European art, in which he was personally involved, began in Kharkiv, and St. Petersburg, with its academicism, became a setback.

The invisible presence of Paris in Kharkiv is always evident in his memories: "*I chose the studio of A. Grot and E. Steinberg. I chose them because I could have studied at a state-run evening school with academic teachers. Even then, at the age of seventeen, I was drawn to the "new" or, as they said then, decadent painting. I had already been stung by this "new", and there was no way for me to return to plasters and penmanship and diligent shading exercises. No, I wanted the heightened vitality that shone through in the revered "virgins" of Toulouse-Lautrec. I was fascinated by this new language of art, captivated by new feelings.*

Oleksiy Grot himself has recently returned from Paris, where he spent several years and perceived everything that Paris of the early nineteen hundreds breathed in painting.

The whole atmosphere of this studio fascinated me. I saw how Grot himself painted the model. How he boldly placed green and purple, almost unmixed colors in the shadows of the body. "How beautiful it is", I thought, "and how young in its very essence and in its sense of joy", I will add now. Grot taught me to see impressionistically, that is, he taught me the techniques of seeing that the French had developed" (Milashevskij 1972, 47).

Vladimir Milashevskij attends both painting and drawing classes. About the latter, he notes: "*And drawing! What a bold and free drawing was taught here! There were two drawings hanging in the studio: a Serov drawing of a female model (original), a gift from Valentyn Serov to Eduard Steinberg, and a reproduction of Pevsner's Man Walking. Grot told me:*

– Here is a drawing by the first student (Serovs), and here is a drawing by the master. One day you will understand the difference.

These were ideas that were completely inaccessible to me at the time" (Milashevskij 1972, 49).

Vladimir Milashevskij stayed in Kharkiv on purpose to continue attending the studio: *“I stayed in Kharkiv for one more year after graduating from the real school. I often visited Grot’s studio and thought only about painting. I was sick with it, it was typhus, plague, tropical fever!”* (Milashevskij 1972, 52).

The artist describes in detail how Grot teaches his students to find the right shadow color in impressionist painting and summarizes the lesson: *“Break, break your eyesight. You have to get rid of the philistine view and learn to see like an artist. This is a French technique, as difficult and, if you like, unnatural as the unnatural direction of sound into the palate in Italian singing. But you won’t get a beautiful color if you don’t master this difficult vision. All of them had it – Cezanne, Lautrec, Van Gogh, and my friends Otto Friez and Jean Puy...”* (Milashevskij 1972, 48–49).

In addition to classes for adults, the Steinberg-Grot studio also offered classes for children: for 5 rubles a month, children had one lesson a week. In the following years, the studio’s teaching staff changed somewhat.

Studio of Steinberg-Grot-Zahonov CROQUIS (1910)

In 1910, advertisements featured a modified version of the studio, where O. Grot and E. Steinberg were joined by the artist O. Zahonov. An advertisement in the newspaper *Utro* shows the existence of a studio for group lessons with children in painting and drawing *“according to the new methodology”*. The Europeanized approach was demonstrated not only in the name of CROQUIS but also in the name of Oleksiy Grot, who was known as Ksei Grot (*Utro*. 1910, 8 sentyabrya).

Myroslava Mudrak notes that the studio focused on formal techniques and the use of material, in particular, Steinberg was fascinated by the use of tempera (Mudrak 2018, 100).

Studio of Grot-Savvin (1912–1913)

Oleksiy Grot also had a studio together with Mykola Savvin, most likely it was opened in 1912–1913. The studio was located in Kharkiv at 48 Sumska Street, where daily painting and drawing classes were held (*Utro* 1912, 3 oktyabrya). The catalog of the 2nd exhibition *Rings* (1912) by Savvin lists this address of the studio.

There is very little information about Savvin. It is known that he participated as an illustrator in the Moscow literary and artistic magazine *Yunost’*, close to the Symbolists, where Alexander Blok, Konstantin Balmont, and Andrei Belyi, among others, were published. His works were published in the first issue of this magazine (*Utro* 1907, 28 iyunya).

Mykola Savvin, like Yevhen Agafonov, was a scriptwriter for the modern miniature theater “Blue Eye”. In particular, he prepared sketches for plays by D’Annunzio and Strinberg (*Utro*. 1910, 22 avgusta), and scenery for the play *The Dumb Wife* (*3 Pictures by Anatoly France*) (*Utro* 1910, 2 oktyabrya).

In his article “Notes on Art”, critic L. Kamyshnikov, writing about the next exhibition of the Kharkiv Society of Artists (founded in 1897), says that only Mykola Savvin and Yevhen Agafonov are “*the only worthy of attention*” among the exhibitors: “*And only Messrs. Savvin and Agafonov, among the many exhibitors, have shown their undoubted desire for new aesthetic forms. But their loneliness among the other gray and boring facelessnesses seems to emphasize the complete alienation of society, its sleepy provincial complacency in assessing the correct, broad paths of true art*” (Kamyshnikov 1910, 8).

The critic emphasizes the artist’s modernity: “*M. R. Savvin, somewhat careless, slightly vague in his searches, nevertheless keenly follows the colorful victories of the troubadours of the new art. A kind of aching, elegiac note sounds in his motifs, among which I find his sketches of European, perhaps Parisian, impressions most endearing. And the subtle nuances of white and blue in his unpretentious sketch speak more strongly than the sooty landscapes of the conscientious oleographers of the Shishkin school*” (Kamyshnikov 1910, 8).

The central theme of both the Paris and Kharkiv studios was working with nature. Obolentsev, a former student of the studios, noted in this regard: “*By the way, both the Blue Lily and Thistle studios were not some kind of circles or societies of like-minded artists. They were studios in the literal sense of the word – workshops in which artists could work with nature, mostly nude*” (TsDAML Ukraine, f. 553, op. 1, spr. 6, ark. 21).

Models for drawing in Grot-Savvin’s studio were attracted, among other things, through advertisements in the Kharkiv newspaper *Utro* (*Utro* 1912, 16 oktyabrya). The studio offered daily morning and evening classes, as well as daily morning and evening group classes with children (*Utro* 1912, 3 oktyabrya).

In 1913, the studio had an already established program with monthly prices, which indicates the stability of the educational process and stable demand. For 3 hours in the morning every day, Grot-Savvin’s studio offered painting for adults with a monthly fee of 20 rubles. Three times a week – drawing with a monthly fee of 10 rubles. Sunday classes with students with a monthly fee of 5 rubles. 5 times a week – independent sketching from a live model for 40 kopecks per session. There was also a separate activity group for children, which offered classes once a week (monthly fee of 5 rubles). It was emphasized that the main task of the classes was to “*develop in children a sense of beauty through vivid perceptions of colors and forms of reality*” (*Utro* 1913, 19 yanvarya).

It should be added that classes with children in studios began to be practiced even earlier, in particular, it is known that in 1910 the studio of Mademoiselle R.M. Evenbach, located in a private house at 19 Mykolaivska Street, offered group painting and drawing classes with children “*according to a new method*”. Children from poor families were admitted to classes without payment (*Utro* 1910, 7 oktyabrya).

At the end of the fall of 1913, the activities of the heads of the studios of E. Agafonov, O. Grot, and M. Savvin ceased due to the departure of these artists to Moscow (*Utro* 1913, 22 oktyabrya).

Studio Thistle (01.09.1913 – Summer 1914)

The founders of Thistle (Budyak in Ukrainian) were former members of the Blue Lily, including D. Hordeev, K. Storozh (Storozhnychenko), and M. Nedashkivsky, and its “full members” were O. Pochtennyi and O. Hladkykh. V. Tretyakov, P. Korotov, S. Polevyi, S. Shcherbakov, O. Hatov, and P. Obolentsev regularly visited the studio. Also, Yevhen Agafonov (when he was in Kharkiv), V. Picheta, M. Fedorov, H. Tsapok, and V. Yermilov came to work in the studio occasionally. The studio existed for less than a year and was closed due to the outbreak of World War I. The Thistle Studio had no director, and its participants were united primarily by “*careful study of nature*” (TsDAMLM Ukrainy, f. 553, op. 1, spr. 6, ark. 24). The studio also had no ideological platform, was characterized by a diverse membership and disparate interests.

Studio Nakos’-Vykos’ (1914)

In 1914, an even more left-wing group split off from Thistle and opened its own *Nakos’-Vykos’ Sosvetor-Futurist Studio*. Its founders, “*Sosvetor-members*”, were then students of Kharkiv University – V. Tretyakov, P. Korotov, K. Prokopovych, and P. Obolentsev. The main activity of the Nakos’-Vykos’ studio was also practicing the drawing of nature, mostly nudes. Nakos’-Vykos’ collaborated with Thistle, and the studio members attended each other’s drawing sessions, especially since they were located in the same building and on the same floor. E. Agafonov, M. Synyakova, and V. Yermilov also periodically attended drawing sessions at Nakos’-Vykos’. After the drawing sessions, they would have tea parties, read reports, discuss art, and stage their own “*Interludes*”, in which improvisation played a major role. The “*Sosvetor-members*” performed futuristic practices, such as painting their faces with watercolors, and even going to restaurants with their faces painted (TsDAMLM Ukrainy, f. 553, op. 1, spr. 6, ark. 25zv.). Nakos’-Vykos’ did not exist for long and closed in August 1914 due to the mobilization of studio members into the army (TsDAMLM Ukrainy, f. 553, op. 1, f. 152, ark. 1).

The most frequent visitors to the studios were students, as Kharkiv was a large student city. Founded in 1805, Kharkiv Imperial University became the educational center of the region and the first university on Ukrainian territory in the Russian Empire. In 1884, the Kharkiv Practical Institute of Technology was opened. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Kharkiv had 4 men’s and 2 women’s gymnasiums, 2 real schools, a theological seminary, several private gymnasiums and boarding schools, the Institute of Noble Ladies, the Commercial School, 5 higher primary schools, and other educational institutions.

The presence of studios allowed citizens interested in art to get involved in it in a practical way, to try to practice it personally, and thus bring their interest to a new and higher level. This contributed to the growing interest in art exhibitions that were held in Kharkiv on a regular basis.

The studios allowed artists to earn a small but steady income. After all, the financial situation of even professional artists was not very stable. Vladimir Milashevskij recalls how a model from Grot-Steinberg's studio discouraged him from becoming an artist because of the financial instability of the profession: "*Eduard Steinberg has a wife and two children, and they don't have money for lunch, for bad soup!*" (Milashevskij, 1972, 44).

Studios were also important for professionals who could work together. Thus, there are cases when Yevhen Agafonov worked in the studio together with one of the founders of the Kharkiv Art School Mytrofan Fedorov (TsDAMLM Ukrainy, f. 208, op. 2, spr. 159, ark. 128).

Artistic search and orientation towards European contemporary models laid a solid foundation for the further development of art in Kharkiv: it was from the studio movement that the future neo-primitivist Maria Synyakova and the future constructivist Vasyl Yermilov emerged, and based on these many fold and rich origins Kharkiv later became the center of the avant-garde movement in Ukraine.

Studio movement and nation-building

Despite the huge number of publications on nation-building, this process remains incompletely understood to this day. There is no consensus among scholars not only on the complex process of nation formation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but also on the state of this process in the twenty-first century. Yaroslav Hrytsak believes that the Ukrainian nation and identity are formed (Hrytsak 2011, 171, 177). Whereas Mykola Riabchuk considers that the formation of the modern Ukrainian nation was not completed either in the nineteenth or twentieth century (Riabchuk 2000, 34), and in the times of existence of the modern independent Ukrainian state after 1991, Ukraine is in the second (cultural and educational) stage of nation-building, as the national landscape is represented by the modern Ukrainian nation formed in the western part of Ukraine and the proto-Ukrainian ethnic substrate of eastern part of Ukraine, which has a "local" rather than modern national identity (Riabchuk 2000, 7). The thesis of the incompleteness of the process of creating a Ukrainian political nation is also supported by the British political scientist Andrew Wilson, who believes that the Ukrainian nation is still not fully "constructed" in the sense of having formed clear exclusive identities, that is, that the Ukrainian identity still needs to be "rebuilt" by separating it from other national histories with which Ukrainians have been associated for centuries – Russian, Soviet, Polish, etc. (Wilson 2004, 378).

As V. Vasylenko and H. Holuyuchyuk rightly note, "*in the last few decades, it has been considered a sign of good taste in the academic environment to adhere to the constructivist (also known as modernist or instrumentalist) concept of the formation of modern nations, while its opponents, the primordialists, have been pushed into a kind of intellectual ghetto*" (Vasylenko et al. 2023, 74). Constructivists rely on Benedict Anderson's concept of the "Imagined Communities" and the works of

Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm. Miroslav Hroch's central theory explaining the mechanisms of construction of "small", "non-historical" nations is 3 phases of development: (A) academic, (B) propaganda, and (C) political (Hroch 1992, 7).

It should be noted at the outset that M. Hroch's model, despite its undoubted advantages – clarity of formulation, plausibility and ease of transfer to different nations – raises questions about the sequence of stages. Adopting Miroslav Hroch's theory, Roman Szporluk emphasized that the cultural phase was political from the very beginning: "*Regardless of the nature of the arguments – whether they were historical, ethnographic, or philological – the claims of a separate Ukrainian cultural identity had a political context from the very beginning. In one way or another, they questioned the official, imperial vision of the nation. According to the official doctrine, Russia was based on autocracy – collecting and popularizing folk songs that celebrated freedom meant disagreement with this system*" (Szporluk 2001, 22).

It should be noted that the "Ukrainian project" was formed in a rather competitive environment. Its existence was marked by confrontation with the "Russian project" and the "Polish project" (Szporluk 2001, 18–21, 26–30). Moreover, there was no single "Ukrainian project," but rather different projects formed by representatives of different identities – the "old Little Russian", the "regional Slobidska", the "new cultural and ethnic Little Russian" (all integrated into the general imperial identity), as well as identities based on which projects were formed that were excluded from the general imperial identity – the Ukrainian national political project (as part of the pan-Slavic federal project) and the Polish Ukrainian project (appealing to a common political past) (Zhurba 2019, 63).

Somewhat schematized, the origins of the "Ukrainian project" can be derived from two "Little Russian projects" – the first, pre-modern, elite, and the second, modern: "*In the second variant, which was both a continuation and a negation of the first, the leading role gradually passed to a new, cultural elite – the intelligentsia, constantly appealing to the "national" factor and aimed at moving forward, "progressive" cultural values, creating new cultural phenomena on a "historical" basis and their public recognition. It could be defined as intellectual, modern, primarily linguistic and cultural, national*" (Naumov 2017, 115).

Different concepts and approaches are united by the central role of culture. The theory of M. Hroch's theory, although it highlights the specifics of the Ukrainian case, namely the delayed transition from phase B to phase C after the revolution, which was due to *foreign oppression* (Hroch 1992, 10), does not explain the Ukrainian experience, why, despite the end of the cultural and propaganda phase (A, B) during the political phase (C), cultural and educational work remains present as the initial stage of the national consciousness of the masses (Naumov 2006, 17, 27–28), and culture continues to be the central field of struggle and the field of transformation, a sphere to which there is a regular return, as documented by G. Kasianov as "*several 'national revivals'*" (Kasianov, 1999, 296–297).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, in the face of fierce opposition from the Russian Empire, Ukrainians could not go through these phases in the same way as other “small” “non-historical” nations, such as Finns, Czechs, Slovenes, and Croats. Therefore, the phases did not have the classic sequence in the Hrochian sense. Although here one may well ask whether these phases in the Ukrainian version were not initially mixed and did not coexist side by side.

Yet this article is not about theoretical speculation, but about a very specific aspect that has received insufficient attention from researchers, namely the role of the visual arts in the process of nation building. The emphasis on the linguistic component is quite reasonable and does not require discussion. Although the significant role of works of Ukrainian fine art in the nation-building process is stated (Averianova 2009, 21), the process of forming the visual image of Ukrainians and Ukraine is underrepresented in historiography.

The visual arts (due to their specificity – pictoriality, visuality, and static nature) are able to visualize the national existence of Ukrainians in different spatial and temporal dimensions (Averianova 2009, 19), and have an immediate impact on recipients, given the ease of assimilation and high level of emotional impact. This is especially true for the core of the national myth, the Cossack component. It is important to note that the process of nation-building involved actors who had no intention of doing so, and sometimes even denied the process itself. However, by doing so, they contributed to emphasizing the peculiarities, specificity, and distinctiveness of Ukrainian culture, which was later used by the conscious creators of the “Ukrainian project”. This topic requires a separate study, which is broader than our research question.

Within the framework of our question, it is interesting to look at the role of studios in nation-building. And the simplest conclusion would be to say that it is absent. But if we take a closer look at those where we have more sources, such as the Blue Lily, the obviousness is dispelled, as we find a number of facts that testify to activities where the national specificity of Ukrainian culture is expressed and represented by images that, due to their technical execution, become the embodiment of Ukrainian national high culture.

We are interested in Yevhen Agafonov’s unobvious involvement in the nation-building process. As a Russian-speaking artist in Russian-speaking Kharkiv, a completely urban portraitist (primarily), with a central interest in bringing modernism to the Kharkiv urban cultural field (in particular, the founding of the Blue Eye Theater with modernist themes (plays by S. Przhelyshevsky, M. Metterlinck), as well as stimulating artistic searches of a modernist quality (in particular, the interest of Cézanne), Yevhen Agafonov remains thematically involved in national painting, as he creates a number of works with national themes – “Portrait of Oksana Bondareva” (1903) (Ill. 1), “Courtyard” (“Blue and Green”) (ca. 1906) (Ill. 2), “Meeting” (ca. 1906), “Portrait of a Woman with a Child”, “Girls” (“Multicolored on Green”, “In the Field”) (ca. 1910).



III. 1. Yevhen Agafonov
Portrait of Oksana Bondareva, 1903
Pencil, watercolor
Kharkiv Art Museum



III. 2. Yevhen Agafonov
Courtyard (Blue and green)
TsDAMLM Ukrainy

For us, the key to understanding the role of the Ukrainian national landscape is an interesting quote by Professor Sumtsov:

“By some happy and dear accident, I have preserved one sepia painting, marked “by a 3rd grade student M. Sumtsov, 1866 – a Little Russian autumn landscape – a house, bare trees, wattle and daub, and a road going into the distance... This drawing is sweet and dear to me, because for me personally it serves as a kind of proof that at the age of 12 I already felt like a Ukrainian and tried to reproduce the features of my picturesque homeland” (TsDAMLM Ukrainy, f. 553, op. 1, spr. 98. ark. 9zv). It becomes obvious that the author himself perceives the national motifs of the artwork as his own national identification.

Yevhen Agafonov worked together with David Burliuk, as Burliuk recalls: *“In the summer of 1906, Brodsky, Martyshchenko, Orland worked for us, and Agafonov and Fedorov visited. Baran (Rossine) worked with my brother Volodymyr. In the Kozy estate (...) I wrote a number of light green sketches, (...). We worked continuously on sketches, sketches, drawings of peasants and peasant women who posed in the large hall we had turned into a studio”* (Burliuk 1997, 120). Agafonov also repeatedly went on expeditions, during which he made sketches of peasants in national costumes. For the work “Girls” he used sketches (Ill. 3) collected in the village of Skelka, Poltava province (TsDAMLM Ukrainy, f. 208, op. 2, spr. 67, ark. 6). Such activities, when artists collected essentially ethnographic visual material, can be attributed to the first phase A according to Hroch. But on the basis of this material, they created works that belong to high national culture (phase B).



III. 3. Yevhen Agafonov
Sketches from life
TsDAMLM Ukrainy

It is not known to what extent E. Agafonov reflected on his national identity, at least we do not have documents confirming this (despite the fact that he was involved in Ukrainophile circles (the Hordeev family, Stefan Taranushenko). At the same time, we also do not see his imperial narratives – it would be strange to observe them in a person who was administratively expelled from St. Petersburg for participating in the student demonstrations of 1905–1906. Most likely, this issue was not relevant to Agafonov, as his attention was captured by art.

E. Agafonov was the creator of “high” (modern) Ukrainian culture and at the same time he turned to national images that actualize Ukrainian folk themes, in this case it does not even matter whether in its “Little Russian” or “Ukrainian” version (after all, both projects can illustrate this). In our opinion, Agafonov was closer to the “Little Russian project” during the Blue Lily studio’s activity, and his fascination with national themes in the visual arts was a consequence, on the one hand, of the organic aesthetics and high pictorialism of Ukrainian folk peasant culture, which he, as a professional artist, could not ignore. On the other hand, it was a consequence of the presence of Ukrainian themes in the constant discussions of the Ukrainian intellectuals he met, who broadcast the need for national culture so often that it could not be avoided in Kharkiv. Although his views, in our opinion, were closer to the early Little Russian project of the “Kharkiv romantics,” as Serhiy Naumov outlines it: “...they were at the “Herderian” stage of admiration for the “common people” and their culture, were not the direct creators of any of these “projects”, did not set themselves such a task and did not realize it, did not think in “national” categories” (Naumov 2018, 193). But at the same time, the significance of Agafonov’s work is equivalent to that of the “Kharkiv Romantics”: “They are of invaluable cultural significance, and from the point of view of the historical perspective, they are nation-building, as is the entire activity of the ‘collectors of spiritual heritage’. This generation drew the attention of the educated layers to the “Little Russian” people, created the cultural basis for raising the question of who the “Little Russians” are from a national point of view and how united the “Russian people” are” (Naumov 2018, 193).

It is also important for us to note that despite the lack of conscious intention on Agafonov’s part, he joined those central figures (such as David Burliuk) who legalized national themes within the framework of modernism. This path was not obvious. Genre national scenes were present in the Ukrainian Peredvizhnyks (S. Vasylykivsky, S. Trutovsky, etc.), while young artists wanted to break away from Peredvizhnykism and challenged it. This challenge could well have extended to the rejection of folk and rural themes and concentration on urban themes. However, both David Burliuk and Yevhen Agafonov remain in the paradigm of national art through their subjects. At the 2nd Ring exhibition in 1912, where members of the Jack Of Diamonds, the first and largest avant-garde association of the Russian Empire, sent their works, Yevhen Agafonov exhibited his work “Girls” (Ill. 4, Photo 1), which, despite its decorative nature, goes beyond the stylistic definitions of the Art Nouveau style (Sokoliuk 2011, 178) and is at the same time a work on national themes. In the art space, new, experimental modern art meets national themes and incorporates them into itself.

Ukrainian national images pass from the Peredvizhniki to the Modernists, and the simplification of the form is a connection with folk art, which can be further observed in the Ukrainian avant-garde, attesting to its paradoxical feature, as Myroslava Mudrak notes: *“Instead of severing all ties with the past and discrediting any connection to it, the current that we will call the ‘Ukrainian avant-garde’ reveals the places of ruptures between the art of the present and the past and combines them in a new art that is unexpectedly anomalous and disjunctive”* (Mudrak 2006, 31). And this is at the stage when it is only being established. That is why Yevhen Agafonov’s role here looks very important, even though it was hardly conscious.



III. 4. Yevhen Agafonov

Girls (In the field)

Illustrated supplement to the newspaper *Utro*,
1912, November 18



Photo 1. Works of Yevhen Agafonov at the exhibition

The Ring, Kharkiv, 1912

Photo by Borys Rudnev

Lebedynsky B. K. Rudnev City Art Museum

Nevertheless, through Ukrainian folk images, E. Agafonov continues the tradition of the Peredvizhnyks in forming the visual component of the national concept of the Imagined Community (Anderson 2001, 22), which is united not only by language but also by culture in a broad sense, where, for example, folk clothes, jewelry, and hairstyles create an image around which Ukrainians will unite. This indicates that Yevhen Agafonov's work is integrated into the nation-building process, despite his lack of conscious intention.

Conclusion

The training of Ukrainian artists in Paris, Munich, and other European centers and their involvement in European educational, cultural, artistic, and social networks had a significant impact on their creative biographies and had a significant impact on the Ukrainian artistic landscape and the development of Ukrainian art in the European paradigm. Ukrainian artists brought European practices to Kharkiv and developed them at home, creating new types of art studios with a progressive European approach. At the same time, in practice, through the involvement of the national visual tradition, Ukrainian artists of the new type of studios (E. Agafonov) joined the process of nation-building and at the same time legitimized national themes in Ukrainian modernism. The various types of creative activity of the studio students turned Kharkiv into a European city involved in the construction of a common European cultural space. A promising area for further research is the conceptual development of the influence of the fine arts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on the processes of nation-building in Ukraine.

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