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## ARTISTIC HERITAGE OF POLINA RAIKO IN THE SPACE OF MODERN CULTURE: RELEVANT IDEAS AND PROJECTS

### Анотація / Abstract

Статтю присвячено унікальним настінним розписам у садибі-музеї Поліни Райко в м. Олешки Херсонської області, що внаслідок злочинного підриву російськими військами Каховської ГЕС в червні 2023 року були суттєво пошкоджені або знищені великою водою. Затоплення художньої спадщини Поліни Райко актуалізувало низку проблем, пов'язаних з утратою пам'яток культури за умов новітніх викликів, зумовило поглиблене переосмислення візуального досвіду наївного мистецтва в сучасних реаліях.

Про самобутні хатні розписи П. Райко писало чимало дослідників. Утім, поглибленого наукового аналізу значення наївного мистецтва в сучасному культурному просторі України, у взаємозв'язках традиційного та модерного, в аспекті збереження художньої спадщини за умов новітніх викликів здійснено не було.

Наївне малярство П. Райко, попри виразну авторську стилістику, брак фахового підґрунтя, творчу автономію щодо соціокультурної традиції певного осередку, зберігає генетичну спорідненість зі звичаєвою народною культурою. У статті досліджуються глибинні зв'язки стінописів майстрині з традиційними візуальними практиками Півдня України, що проявилось в особливому світосприйнятті, орнаментальних структурах, мотивах, техніках розпису.

Настінними розписами П. Райко інспіровано низку актуальних проектів та артзаходів у просторі сучасної культури. У цьому контексті здійснено огляд резонансних виставок 2023 року – «Поліна Райко. Зникоме» та «Спецоперація “Зруйнувати рай”», спрямованих на підтримку її будинку, відновлення творчої спадщини, знівченої під час російсько-української війни.

**Ключові слова:** творча спадщина, наївне мистецтво, розпис, ідеї, проекти.

The article is devoted to the unique wall paintings in the estate-museum of Polina Raiko in the town of Oleshky in Kherson region, which has been damaged and destroyed significantly by high water as a result of the criminal detonation of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant in June 2023 by Russian troops. The flooding of the artistic heritage of Polina Raiko has actualized a number of problems related to the loss of cultural monuments in the conditions of the latest challenges, caused a deep rethinking of the visual experience of naive art in modern realities.

Many scholars have written about P. Raiko's unique house wall paintings. However, a profound scientific analysis of the significance of naive art in the modern cultural space of Ukraine, in the relationship between traditional and modern, in the aspect of preserving the artistic heritage in the conditions of the latest challenges, has not been carried out.

Polina Raiko's naive painting, despite the expressive authoress's style, lack of professional background, creative autonomy in relation to the socio-cultural tradition of a certain center, retains genetic kinship with ritual folk culture. The deep connections between the artist's wall paintings and the traditional visual practices of the South of Ukraine, manifested in a special world view, ornamental structures, motifs and painting techniques are investigated in the article.

A number of current projects and artistic events in the space of modern culture has been inspired by wall paintings of P. Raiko. In this context, a review of the high-profile exhibitions of 2023 – «Polina Raiko. Disappearing» and «Special Operation “To Destroy Paradise”» aimed at supporting her house, restoration of creative heritage, mutilated during the Russian-Ukrainian war, is submitted.

**Keywords:** creative heritage, naive art, painting, ideas, projects.

**A problem statement.** Polina Raiko's unique house wall paintings have been kept in the authentic space of her estate-museum in the city of Oleshky in Kherson Region until recently. The criminal blowing up of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant by Russian forces in June 2023 has led to a large-scale environmental and humanitarian disaster in the region. As a result, a considerable part of the original works has been destroyed or damaged by heavy water.

The flooding of the artist's heritage has caused a powerful resonance in the society, actualized a number of problems related to the loss of cultural monuments under the conditions of the latest challenges, and led to an in-depth rethinking of the visual experience of naive art in modern realities.

**Review of research and published works.** Polina Raiko's works have become a real discovery in the early 2000s, thanks to the Kherson local historian Serhii Diachenko. A catalog book has been published in 2005 with the reproductions and a description of the artistic system of the craftswoman's home wall paintings, individual iconic images in her works [5]. The unique painted farmstead has been reported in the local periodical of the Kherson Region. The artist's heritage is reviewed in professional publications by Larysa Ivanyshyna [2], Natalia Prykhydchuk [4], Svitlana Yatsenko [11] and other authors. Separate aspects of the transformation of P. Raiko's works in the

design activity of the Kherson Region are also considered [3]. However, a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of naive painting in modern culture, its relationship with traditional authentic and the latest practices in the context of the latest challenges has not been carried out.

**The purpose of the article** is to analyze and reveal the meaning of naive art in the modern cultural space of Ukraine, namely, to examine the home paintings of the master Polina Raiko in the relationship between traditional and modern, to consider measures aimed at preserving her creative heritage in the current conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

**Presentation of the basic material.** Polina (Pelaheia) Raiko (1928–2004) was born and lived all her life in her native city of Oleshky (former Tsiurupynsk) in Kherson Region. The craftswoman has neither art education nor professional training, but started painting at the age of about seventy. Taking brush, she has found salvation and solace in creative works after a personal tragedy – the loss of a daughter, a husband, later – a son... It is just the period when P. Raiko has painted her estate: surfaces in the interiors of six rooms of a private house (ceilings, walls, doors), as well as auxiliary buildings, gates, fences, etc. The craftswoman has said: “I am happy only when I paint”.

The original paintings of the master of the late 20th – early 21st centuries are described with the stylistics of naive art as a complex,

multifaceted, ambiguous phenomenon. The works of this trend are characterized by a bright authoress's worldview, the absence of a professional background, creative autonomy in relation to the socio-cultural tradition of a certain center [7, p. 525].

At the same time, traditional folk art, in particular, home wall painting is among various sources of visual folklore that feed the phenomenon of the so-called third culture. This ancient collective-individual artistic practice, subordinated to the calendar rites, has reflected the value orientations of the collective memory of the family in numerous variations. Over time individual creative work has been determined by collective experience with a pronounced authoress's image system and style on the basis of home painting (due to creative repetition, imitation and especially substitution).

Polina Raiko has been creating an unreal art space in her own homestead, born of her rich creative imagination, for four years. Family portraits, sacred Christian motifs, as well as plant, bird and zoomorphic images have coexisted harmoniously in this picturesque environment, combining earthly and heavenly.

The corresponding mood, theme and color solution have prevailed in the paintings of each room. In particular, the craftswoman has depicted her own interpretation of Christian plots in one of the apartments, there is a self-portrait next to the images of the deceased angel sisters on the opposite wall; the painter has reproduced mainly landscapes, namely reed beds with expressive fish motifs, the figure of her husband in a boat on the walls of another room.

The placement and interpretation of individual ornamental structures and motifs in the general artistic system of decor brings P. Raiko's painting closer and genetically related to home wall paintings and other types of creative practices in the traditional culture of Southern Ukraine. One can feel the profound interrelationship of the craftswoman's work with the home wall paintings of Khersonshchyna, in particular those reproduced by Kostiantyn

Shyrotyski in his well-known study of the polychromy of housing construction in Ukraine [10, p. 133]. This is the application of a dense "carpet" filling by drawing all the free space of the planes. The artist has dissolved plot and portrait images in a weave of lush bouquets, plants with large inflorescences and bright buds.

Ceiling paintings by P. Raiko with a wreath (or several wreaths) in the center, plant and ornithomorphic motifs in the corners are also close to the folk tradition of home painting in the southern regions of Ukraine. Samples of similar paintings originating from the centers of the current Kherson, Dnipropetrovsk and Mykolaiv regions are kept in several museum collections of Ukraine. The affinity of drawn ribbon compositions with the motifs of "bouquets" and "pots" under the windows in P. Raiko's dwelling with local textile products can be traced.

The artist's painting is connected with the tradition of home paintings by the techniques of decorating door and window openings with paired motifs. For example, she has painted "potted flowers" to the entire height of the wall on both sides of the door of one of the rooms, she placed expressive authoress's images of "leopards" on both sides of the entrance to another room. There are paired motifs of birds with a deep symbolic meaning, located mainly in the upper parts of walls, above windows and doors, among P. Raiko's favorite images.

Realizing her ideas, the artist intuitively reproduced the colors and means of expression typical for traditional home wall paintings: an active blue background in the compositions, the use of plastic lines, short strokes, small dots to depict stylized realities – plant, ornithomorphic motifs, etc.

Before the full-scale invasion of Russian troops on the territory of our country, the unique estate has been protected by the Law of Ukraine as a monument of cultural heritage, where cultural and artistic events have taken place, in particular festivals and film shootings. Expeditions have also been carried out to Oleshky. These facts are documented in wall paintings.

The artistic heritage of the craftswoman has united and inspired the artists of Khersonshchyna to establish Polina Raiko Charitable Fund and the Kherson Museum of Modern Art to creative experiments, a number of art events, including *Polina's Dreams* (Olena Afanasieva is a curator), the project *Ghosts of Polina Raiko* (Natalia Ryzhenko is a designer), workshop for creative youth *Zurich 2021: about Polina Raiko by the Language of Comics* and others [3; 9].

For example, N. Ryzhenko has created a fashion collection combining monochrome minimalist models of vintage clothing with expressive linear plastic décor – her own interpretation in a new context of recognizable images of P. Raiko's works. Reflections on the artistic heritage of the craftswoman are typical for the other types of design practices of the Kherson region – graphics and environment design [3, p. 31].

The visual experience of Polina Raiko has inspired modern artists to new ideas not only with its figurative system and original style, but also with a unique spatial way of self-expression. The generalized image of a painted room from the artist's house as the personification of the authoress's creative space has been reproduced in 2019 within the *Own Space* collective project at Pinchuk Art Center (Tetiana Kochubinska, Tetiana Zhmurko are the curators). According to the idea, the organizers and participants of the project have explored the art space in the light of the position of women in the society. It has taken place in the form of an original dialogue between modern artistic practices and creative phenomena of the past [6].

Two significant events have been dedicated to Polina Raiko in 2023. They have represented the artist's heritage in various aspects and perspectives. The purpose of the documentary exhibition *Polina Raiko. Disappearing* in the *Ukrainian House* National Center (Oleksii Ananov, Alisa Hryshanova, Mariana Dzhulai are the curators), which has taken place from August 10 to September 17, is to draw society's attention to the cultural heritage that we have lost and are losing in modern complex realities,

to show the need to support culture in the conditions of war.

The works by Polina Raiko, in particular the house wall paintings, have been represented for the first time in such a large-scale event. It is significant that it has taken place at the same time as the exhibition *Mariia is Drawing. 100 Unknown Works by Prymachenko* from the private collection of the art studier Eduard Dymshyts.

The organizers have chosen the words of Lina Kostenko "Everything goes, but not everything passes over the banks of the eternal river" as the epigraph to the *Polina Raiko. Disappearing* exhibition. The exposition in the exhibition hall on the second floor of the center has created an anxious feeling of lost, disappearing images in a half-empty space. The main bright accent is a video installation of works by Polina Raiko and audio accompaniment with the sounds of water flows.

The multifaceted exhibition space has been opened by a number of digitally printed works. The theme of Khersonshchyna flooding has united through the graphics of Mariia Kinovych *Consequences have no Borders*, Khrystyna Tsvenher *The Flooded Life*, Hrasia Oliiko *The Russians have Blown up the Kakhovka HPP*, Valentyna Romanova *It Hurts*, Viktor Hrudakov *Morning, the Sun is Sinking in the Water* as well as *Work Dedicated to Kherson* by Masha Foia, *When Everything Matters* by Yuliia Tveritina, *Black Water* by Mitia Fieniechkin, *Kakhovka Dam* by Anastasia Khomutova, *Black Water* by Kateryna Stepanishcheva, *Kakhovka HPP* by Dasha Podoltseva, etc.

Then the photos of Polina Raiko's works from the pre-war period have been represented, highlighting the compositions, as well as iconic images typical just for her works: *Black Crow*, *Mermaid*, *Leopards*, *Bug*, *Angel*, *Mountain*, etc. The photos of the paintings have been supplemented by a short text concerning the interpretation of these images from the words of the artist herself. For example, the *Black Crow* has symbolized a tragic fate in her life, the image of the *Mountain* is the authoress's vision of the heavenly Paradise.

The curators of the exhibition provide detailed information about those who have studied and preserved the estate-museum, and also presented striking documentary evidences of the consequences of the flooding of the house. The photos show the current state of the estate, mostly complete and sometimes partial destruction of the paint layer on the wall surfaces.

Documentary films about the artist have been shown as a part of the project in addition to the video installation with P. Raiko's works. These are, in particular, the film *Paradise* (2006, Nadiia Koshman is a screenplay author and director), awarded with several international prizes. The works by Polina Raiko in this film are revealed to the viewer through the authentic environment in which the craftswoman has lived, through the stories of her sister Mariia Svystukhina and the local priest Father Petro, as well as through the impressions of her paintings by the professional artist Borys Yegiazarian.

The synthesis of visual and auditory practices in a single exhibition space has evoked the experience of the inevitable loss of important values in the soul of the visitor.

An equally high-profile event dedicated to the works of Polina Raiko has lasted from August 22 to November 30, 2023 at the *Ivan Honchar Museum National Center of Folk Culture*. The purpose of the exhibition project with the eloquent title *Special Operation "To Destroy the Paradise"* (curator is Petro Honchar) is to support the Polina Raiko Charitable Fund and money collection of funds for the restoration of the estate. The project is particularly in tune with the tragic realities of war today, when many Ukrainians become forced migrants, losing their homes. According to the concept of the organizers, "the public program of the exhibition will take place around the theme of the home as a shelter and space for self-expression and therapy

through art – artists, soldiers and all of us, each immersed in the war in the own way" [8].

The founders have organized the exhibition space unconventionally, using installation tools as a relevant genre of modern visual practices. Photographs of Polina Raiko's paintings, documented by the expeditionary museum group in 2013, have been reproduced on canvases according to their real scale and represented in the courtyard of the Ivan Honchar Museum. The visitors of the exhibition have been felt personally present in the interiors of the estate, in individual rooms, been able to perceive them in space, virtually enter the creative world of Polina Raiko, stand near the painted doors in her home and at the same time feel protected in this peculiar blooming environment.

Last year many charity actions and events aimed at actualizing the problem of lost cultural heritage have taken place. The expressive motifs of Polina Raiko's paintings have been reproduced on one of the shawl models of the charity collection *Stolen Art* according to the concept of the project of the Ukrainian brand Oliz and the United 24 platform – to show the world lost works belonging to Ukrainian culture through mass textile products (silk shawl) (October 2023) [1].

Conclusions. The uniqueness of the ways of development of Ukrainian naïve art lies in the continuity of the folk tradition of creativeness, in the preservation of a special ethnic worldview, in the creative replacement of collective and individual artistic practices, which have lost their relevance in the peasant environment, with original ones. In today's complex realities, Polina Raiko's paintings continue to exist in the cultural space of Ukraine - in design activities, various artistic events, exhibition projects, returning the general public to the origins and depths of folk art, healing, warming the soul from the traumatic experience of today and inspiring, restoring faith in life.

### Примітка

<sup>1</sup> Після смерті Поліни Райко у 2004 році створили художники В'ячеслав Машницький та Семен Храмцов.

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