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CULTURE OF MEMORY IN EXHIBITION PRACTICES DURING WAR

In the context of the ongoing Russian–Ukrainian war, we observe a dynamic artistic response from Ukraine’s creative community through works that reflect collective memory not only by portraying frontline realities but also by depicting contemporary civilian life, united by a persistent belief in victory. The artists convey both personal experiences of war and shared collective emotions, encouraging fellow citizens and the international community to defend democratic values together.

Cultural and creative processes actively engage with complex systems of social communication. During global transformations and wartime, they not only integrate into these systems but also assume a distinct identificational function that shapes collective experience (Assmann, 2008). Due to its semiotic nature, visual art serves as an effective medium for representing these processes, transforming individual experiences into visual representations.

Amid wartime realities, Ukrainian art assumes particular sociocultural significance, fulfilling the functions of collective memory culture and mediating traumatic experience (Gantt & Tinnin, 2009). Within this framework, visual art becomes a communicative mechanism that translates experiences of violence into the realm of cultural dialogue.

A telling example of such analysis is the exhibition *Ukraine. Under a Different Sky*, presented in 2022–2023 at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw (Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, n.d.). The curatorial concept focused on documenting the consequences of aggression and drawing attention to the war within the European public sphere. Thus, the exhibition transcends the aesthetic dimension, functioning as a tool of international cultural dialogue and interaction.

The exposition showcased over 200 works by both established and emerging Ukrainian artists, all centered on the experience of war. It presented a visual narrative combining documentary, metaphorical, and experimental strategies. In this context, art serves as an intercultural mediator, transcending the limitations of personal perception through the universal semantics of imagery. Visual exhibition practices have become carriers of collective affectivity, forming “sites of memory” in spatial and medial form (Nora, 1989).

This research aims to identify the specific features of representing memory and resistance within the project *Ukraine. Under a Different Sky*. The study employs an interdisciplinary methodology that combines principles of visual analysis, interpretation, post-colonial critique, and memory studies (Павлишин, 1994). This approach enables the interpretation of exhibition practices as a component of cultural representation policy.

The analysis reveals three main representational strategies within the exhibition:

- a **documentary–archival** approach, exemplified by photographic and video materials;
- a **metaphorical–imagistic** approach, evident in painting, graphics, and sculpture;

- an **interactive–experimental** approach, which invites the viewer to become a participant in the spatial art object.

This categorization exposes the multilayered representation of *Ukraine. Under a Different Sky*—from empirical documentation of events to their metaphysical interpretation, even at a considerable distance from the front lines. The curators developed the exhibition strategy around the dynamic sequence of “shock–reflection,” transforming the exhibition space into a “topos of memory” for collective experience.

The exhibition emphasizes the act of witnessing as an ethical gesture that embodies the concept of “art of witnessing,” merging documentary truth with moral stance (Oliver, 2001).

Conclusions. The exhibition *Ukraine. Under a Different Sky* represents a complex cultural phenomenon. Within these exhibition practices, visual art fulfills the functions of representing cultural memory, bearing political testimony, and facilitating intercultural mediation. Its visual language and curatorial strategies create a model of universally comprehensible communication for the international community. The exhibition’s format has evolved into a cultural practice that frames Ukraine’s wartime experience as part of global history, contributing to the construction of a shared European space of memory. Contemporary Ukrainian art thus serves as both a catalyst of cultural relations and an active participant in international cultural dialogue.

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НАЦІОНАЛЬНА АКАДЕМІЯ МИСТЕЦТВ УКРАЇНИ
ІНСТИТУТ ПРОБЛЕМ СУЧАСНОГО МИСТЕЦТВА НАМ УКРАЇНИ
ІНСТИТУТ КУЛЬТУРОЛОГІЇ НАМ УКРАЇНИ
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