



## ***IN THE EYE OF THE STORM***

### ***Modernism in Ukraine, 1900-1930s***

**29 November 2022 to 30 April 2023**

**Curators:** Konstantin Akinsha, Katia Denysova y Olena Kashuba-Volvach

The exhibition *In the Eye of the Storm: Modernism in Ukraine, 1900–1930s* presents the ground-breaking art produced in Ukraine in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, showcasing different art trends from figurative art to futurism and constructivism. The development of Ukrainian modernism took place against a complicated socio-political backdrop of collapsing empires, World War I, the revolutions of 1917 with the ensuing Ukrainian War of Independence (1917–1921), and the eventual creation of Soviet Ukraine. The ruthless Stalinist repressions against Ukrainian intelligentsia led to the execution of dozens of Ukrainian writers, theatre directors and artists, while the Holodomor, a man-made famine of 1932–1933, killed nearly five million Ukrainians.

Despite the historical tragedy, Ukrainian art of the period lived through a true renaissance of artistic experimentation. *In the Eye of the Storm* reclaims this essential but little-known chapter in the West phase of European modernism, displaying *ca.* 70 works in a full range of media – from oil paintings and sketches to collages and theatre designs.

Arranged chronologically, the show presents works by masters of Ukrainian modernism, such as Oleksandr Bohomazov, Vasyl Yermilov, Viktor Palmov, and Anatol Petrytskyi. Exploring the polyphony of styles and identities, the exhibition includes neo-Byzantine paintings by the followers of Mykhailo Boichuk and experimental works by members of the Kultur Lige, who sought to promote their vision of contemporary Ukrainian and Yiddish art, respectively. It contains pieces by Kazymyr

**Images from left to right:** Mykhailo Boichuk. *Dairy Maid* (1922-1923). National Art Museum of Ukraine; Davyd Burluk. *Carousel* (1921). National Art Museum of Ukraine; Alexandra Exter. *Still Life* (1913). Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza.



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**More information and images:** Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza. Paseo del Prado, 8. 28014 Madrid. Tel. +34 913600236 / +34 914203944. [presna@museothyssen.org](mailto:presna@museothyssen.org) ; [www.museothyssen.org](http://www.museothyssen.org) <https://www.museothyssen.org/en/private-area/press/dossiers/eye-storm-modernism-ukraine-1900-1930s>



Anatol Petrytskyi. *Costume designs for Minister Pinh in the opera 'Turandot' at the State Opera Theatre, Kharkiv, 1928.* Museum of Theatre, Music and Cinema of Ukraine.

the exhibition will travel to the Museum Ludwig in Cologne.

Malevych and El Lissitzky, quintessential artists of the international avant-garde who worked in Ukraine and left a significant imprint on the development of the national art scene. The exhibition also features artworks of internationally renowned artists who were born and started their careers in Ukraine but became famous abroad – Alexandra Exter, Wladimir Baranoff-Rossiné and Sonia Delaunay.

In this most comprehensive survey of Ukrainian modern art to date, with many works on loan from the National Art Museum of Ukraine and the State Museum of Theatre, Music and Cinema of Ukraine, the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza celebrates the dynamism and diversity of the artistic scene in Ukraine, while safeguarding the country's heritage during the intolerable present-day occupation of its territory by Russia. After its presentation in Madrid,



Ivan Padalka. *Photographer, 1927.* National Art Museum of Ukraine.

### Acknowledgements:

This exhibition has been made possible by the support of President Zelensky and the Office of the President of Ukraine. Also key is Oleksandr Tkachenko, the Ukrainian Minister of Culture, whose collaboration has enabled us to secure the exceptional loan of these works from a war-torn country.

We extend our gratitude to the National Art Museum of Ukraine and the Museum of Theatre, Music and Cinema of Ukraine for their generous loans, as well as to the private collectors who have collaborated.

Special thanks are due to Baroness Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza, a member of the Board of Trustees of the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, who has passionately and courageously promoted the project from the outset and facilitated the complex negotiations to bring these works to Spain.

The support of the PinchukArtCentre has also been notable. Mention should likewise be made of the work and dedication of the curators Konstantin Akinsha, Katia Denysova and Olena Kashuba-Volvach and their revealing essays that appear, together with those of other research scholars, in the magnificent edition published by Thames & Hudson.

This exhibition has been made a reality thanks to the support of Francesca Thyssen-Bornemisza, Museums for Ukraine, the Deputy Directorate-General for State Museums of the Directorate-General for Cultural Heritage and Fine Arts (Spanish Ministry of Culture and Sport), Mastercard, Omega Capital, SITSpain and Hammam Al-Andalus, among others.

The exhibition is presented chronologically, divided into the following sections:

### 1. Cubofuturism

The first section focuses on the work of the young Ukrainian artists who combined elements from French Cubism and Italian Futurism, giving rise to a local version characterised by compositional dynamism, the simplification of forms and a gradual move towards abstraction and a prolific use of colour inherited from folk traditions and Ukrainian decorative art. Alexandra Exter, the brothers Davyd and Volodymyr Burliuik, Oleksandr Bohomazov, Wladimir Baranoff-Rossiné and Vadym Meller are among the artists represented in this gallery. Particularly noteworthy is Alexandra Exter, who was in Paris on various occasions from 1906 onwards and who became friends with many of the pioneers of Cubism and Futurism. Following her return to Kyiv she introduced these new trends and they were taken up by local artists. David Burliuik and Vadym Meller also went to Paris as well as to Munich, where Meller established contacts with the Expressionists of the “Blue Rider” group, while Burliuik wrote the first 20th-century manifesto of the Russian and Ukrainian avant-garde.



Vadym Meller. *Composition*, 1919-1920. National Art Museum of Ukraine.



Issakhar Ber Ryback. *City (Shtetl)*, 1917. National Art Museum of Ukraine.

### 2. *Kultur Lige*

The *Kultur Lige* association was founded in Kyiv in 1918 to promote the advancement of all aspects of contemporary Yiddish culture. Its art section brought together young Jewish artists from numerous cities in Ukraine who promoted a synthesis of the Jewish artistic tradition and the achievements of the European avant-garde. The *Kultur Lige* became the most important organisation for Jewish cultural life in Ukraine in the early 1920s but it ceased to exist in the mid-decade due to growing pressure from the Soviet regime. This section presents works by some of its principal representatives, such as Marko Epshtein and Issakhar Ber Ryback. The latter actively participated in the association from its outset, adopting radical artistic techniques in order to reflect the culture and lifestyle of his people. In 1926 he emigrated to France where he joined the international artistic community now known as the École de Paris.

### 3. Theatre Design

In the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Ukraine’s principal cities became centres for theatrical experimentation involving directors, playwrights and set designers who revolutionised theatre. Two figures particularly stand out as catalysts in this transformation. The first is Les Kurbas, a theatre director who introduced the modern European repertoire into his programming and made use of the most avant-garde artists as set designers in order to explore the creative intersections between Western achievements (particularly Expressionism and Constructivism) and the renaissance of native folk traditions. The second

Vadym Meller, *Sketch of the ‘Masks’ choreography* for Bronislava Nijinska’s School of Movements, Kyiv, 1919. Museum of Theatre, Music and Cinema of Ukraine



is Alexandra Exter a pioneer in the application of Cubist principles to set design. In 1918 she opened a studio in Kyiv that offered a course entirely devoted to theatrical design and which trained some of the most highly regarded designers of the next generation. This gallery displays sketches and costume designs for a number of productions by artists including Vadym Meller, Anatol Petrytskyi and Oleksandr Khvostenko-Khvostov, all of whom were associated with the studio.

#### 4. Kharkiv (\*)

After almost five years of a bloody war of independence (1917-1921), the Bolsheviks defeated the Ukrainian nationalist forces and founded the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic with Kharkiv as its capital. Previously a provincial city, it rapidly became a sophisticated cultural hub and a launching pad for the ambitious project to create a new cultural identity that was simultaneously Ukrainian and Soviet, bringing together the best writers, academics and artists. Notable among the latter was Vasyl Yermilov who in 1920, following a Cubist phase, began to introduce both stylised Ukrainian folk decoration and Kazimir Malevich's Suprematism into his work, two apparently irreconcilable styles. Yermilov subsequently moved towards Constructivism, producing large numbers of figurative and abstract reliefs. Another figure was Borys Kosarev, a multi-faceted artist inspired by Yermilov who gradually moved from experimenting with Fauvism and Suprematism to creating a rational, functional art.



Vasyl Yermilov. "Nove Mystetstvo" ("New Art", magazine cover design), ca. 1927. National Art Museum of Ukraine.



Since 1897 Ukrainian artists had participated in the Venice Biennale, initially exhibiting in the Imperial Russian pavilion and from 1924 in the Soviet one. Ukraine was the only republic of the USSR to have its own section in that pavilion, in 1928 and 1930. The Neo-Byzantine works by the school of Mykhailo Boichuk dominated the Ukrainian section in 1928, while two years later one of the most notable exhibits was *The Invalids* (1924) by Anatol Petrytskyi, included in this exhibition.

Anatol Petrytskyi. *The Invalids*, 1924. National Art Museum of Ukraine.

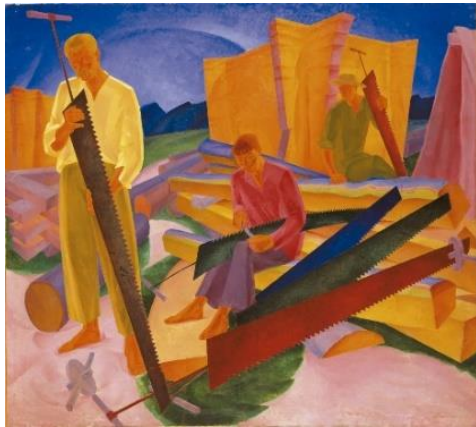
#### 5. Boichukists

Born in Halychyna in western Ukraine, Mykhailo Boichuk was one of the country's young artists who travelled to various European capitals in order to complete his training, studying at the art academies in Vienna, Krakow, Munich and Paris. In late 1917 Boichuk opened a studio for fresco and tempera painting and mosaics in the recently founded Ukrainian State Academy of Arts. He promoted a concept of art as national heritage, achieving a synthesis of styles based on Byzantine art, pre-Renaissance Italian frescoes and Ukrainian folk art. Boichuk's students, who were known as "Boichukists", undertook numerous State commissions for buildings and public spaces. Soon after, however, they would be branded bourgeois nationalists and many of them, including Boichuk himself, were executed in the Stalinist purges of the 1930s while most of their art was destroyed.



Vasyl Sedliar. *Portrait of Oksana Pavlenko*, 1926-1927. National Art Museum of Ukraine.

Among the works on display in this section is *The Dairy Maid* (1922-23) by Mykhailo Boichuk; *Women under the Apple Tree* (1920) by his brother Tymofii Boichuk; *Photographer* (1927) by Ivan Padalka; and *Portrait of Oksana Pavlenko* (1926-27) by Vasyl Sedliar, which was shown at the Venice Biennale in 1928.



Oleksandr Bohomazov. *Sharpening the Saws*, 1927. National Art Museum of Ukraine.

## 6. Kyiv Art Institute

The principal driving force in the visual arts in Ukraine in the 1920s and 1930s was the Kyiv Fine Arts Institute, successor to the Ukrainian State Academy of Arts, the country's first university-level art school founded when independence was declared in 1917. Its name was changed in 1924 to reflect the Soviet regime's new ideological programme and to align its educational methods with artistic tendencies of the time, such as industrial design. In order to do so a new team of teachers from across the Soviet Union was engaged, including a significant number of leading avant-garde artists such as Kazimir Malevich and Vladimir Tatlin. Other teachers at the Institute included Viktor Palmov, a notably experimental artist and one of the most active participants in the Republic's art projects, and Oleksandr Bohomazov. The latter is represented here by one of his most important works, *Sharpening the Saws* (1927), part of an unfinished triptych executed in a hybrid style and particularly representative of the attempt by these artists associated with the Institute to find a place within the new referential context imposed by the regime.

## 7. The Last Generation

Graduates for the most part of the Kyiv Fine Arts Institute, the last generation of the Ukrainian avant-garde was fascinated by the international art movements New Objectivity and the Italian Novecento, but their activities were cut short by a radical shift in the political climate. In 1932 Socialist Realism was imposed as the only official Soviet art style and one that valued art's propagandistic qualities more than any avant-garde experimentation. This section includes work by Kostiantyn Yeleva, Semen Yoffe and Oleksandr Syrotenko.



Kostiantyn Yeleva. *Portrait*, 1920s. National Art Museum of Ukraine.

**(\*) The names of the cities have been transliterated to respect Ukrainian spelling rather than Russian, for example Kyiv, not Kiev, and Kharkiv, not Kharkov.**

The artworks on display at the exhibition made their way from Kyiv to Madrid's Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in exceptional conditions, becoming the largest legal art transport from a war-torn country to date. The **Hasenkamp transport company** has been in charge of this transfer, carrying out a very difficult job and with a lot of risk.

**Free entry to the exhibition for Ukrainian citizens.**

**The information on the museum's website and the audio guide are available in Ukrainian as well as Spanish and English.**

### **EXHIBITION INFORMATION**

**Title:** *In the Eye of the Storm. Modernism in Ukraine, 1900-1930s*

**Organiser:** Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza.

**Venue and dates:** Madrid, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, 29 November 2022 to 30 April 2023.  
Cologne, Museum Ludwig, 3 June to 24 September 2023.

**Curators:** Konstantin Akinsha, Katia Denysova y Olena Kashuba-Volvach.

**Technical curator in Madrid:** Marta Ruiz del Árbol, curator of Modern Painting at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza.

**Number of works:** 69 works.

**Related publications:** *In the Eye of Storm. Modernism in Ukraine, 1900-1930's*, Thames & Hudson (London, 2022). English edition. Essays by Konstantin Akinsha, Katia Denysova and Olena Kashuba-Volvach and others

**Website:** information in Spanish, English and Ukrainian:

<https://www.museothyssen.org/en/exhibitions/eye-storm-modernism-ukraine-1900-1930s>

**Audio guide:** available in Spanish, English and Ukrainian.

### **VISITOR INFORMATION**

**Address:** Paseo del Prado, 8. 28014, Madrid Rooms 48 to 52 of the Permanent Collection. First floor.

**Opening times:** Mondays, 12 to 4 pm (free entry); Tuesdays to Sundays, 10 am to 7 pm (combined ticket).

**Ticket prices:** Combined ticket: Permanent Collection and temporary exhibitions. Standard: 13 €; reduced price: 9 € (visitors aged over 65, pensioners and students with proof of status); groups (7 or more people): 11 € per person; free entry: Ukrainian visitors, visitors aged under 18, officially unemployed Spanish citizens, disabled visitors, Large Families, currently employed teachers and holders of the Youth Card and European Youth Card. Advance ticket purchase from the museum's ticket desks, its website and on tel: 91 791 13 70.

**More information:** [www.museothyssen.org](http://www.museothyssen.org)

### **PRESS INFORMATION**

<https://www.museothyssen.org/en/private-area/press/dossiers/eye-storm-modernism-ukraine-1900-1930s>