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## **APPEAL TO FOLK TRADITIONS OF ORNAMENTATION IN PETRYKIVKA PAINTING OF THE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY**

**Abstract:** The study analyzes the unique phenomenon of one of the varieties of Petrykivka painting – paintings on paper, based on continuity with folk traditions of wall painting and ornamentation. Versions regarding the origin of Petrykivka painting are analyzed, using the example of the works of the master Pelageia Hlushchenko, and the techniques of using paintings and materials are described. The concept of the “ideal natural world” in flower compositions is characterized. Petrykivka painting is inherently connected with folk traditions of paintings based on the convention of images and specific techniques of execution. The original appearance of such compositions is due to the use of egg tempera, which gives the effect of transparency of colours, homemade tools and techniques of the four basic strokes.

**Keywords:** folk traditions, ornamentation, Petrykivka painting, Pelaheia Hlushchenko, François Jullien, dé-coïncidence

### **Introduction**

The Ukrainian people have long had a tendency towards decorativeness in folk art and everyday objects. It is worth noting that the meaning usually attributed to the concept of “national identity” was most fully expressed precisely in those spheres of the life of the Ukrainian people that were not limited

by official prohibitions. This applies to both secular folk art and naive church painting, when icons were painted not by famous artists with professional education, but by local icon painters. In such cases, the Mother of God with Jesus and the saints could be depicted as representatives of the Ukrainian ethnic group, in robes with folk ornaments.

More freedom was felt in secular folk art, which permeated all spheres of Ukrainian life. In the Podillia and Poltava region, housewives whitewashed the walls of houses and decorated them with paintings: flowers or plot compositions. If we talk about returning to the sources, to the origins of art, then the most famous phenomenon to be considered here is Petrykivka painting. The centre of this folk school of decorative and ornamental painting is the village of Petrykivka in the Dnipro region. The bright masters of Petrykivka painting were Tetiana Pata, Pelaheia Hlushchenko, Marfa Tymchenko, Vira and Anna Pavlenko, Vira Zhukova and Fekla Kucherenko.

Today, there is no single version of the origins of this art. Most often, the emergence of this style in the Dnipro region at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is associated with the Cossacks and settlers from Poltavshchyna, Slobozhanshchyna and Podillia in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, where the tradition of painting houses and household items had long been widespread. The most common version is that Petrykivka painting originated from the traditional painting of the walls of Ukrainian houses. In Podillia and Slobozhanshchyna, external walls were covered with paintings, just like household items made of wood, most often wedding chests for dowries. Back in the 1860s, paintings on the walls of houses were widespread in the Kupiansk district of the Kharkiv province. Since ancient times, the walls of houses have been painted with paints based on natural dyes from multi-coloured clays and plants, later with aniline dyes. In terms of ornamentation, the prototype of Petrykivka painting is also considered to have been provided by icons in the style of naive painting from the Middle Dnipro region, which date back to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>. It is also possible that the influence of wall paintings of huts with floral ornaments in the Podillia, Uman, and Slobozhanshchyna regions in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was also influential.

The problem is that Petrykivka painting was not studied until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, so it is quite difficult to establish its exact origins. It was first studied by ethnographer Dmitry Yavornytsky, on whose initiative the first exhibition of Petrykivka paintings was opened in St. Petersburg in 1913.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Orlenko, I. Buzin, Y. Ivashko, A. Dmytrenko, D. Kuśnierz-Krupa, D. Mykhailovskyi, S. Belinskyi, A. Urakina, *Reproduction and Restoration of Iconostases of Ukrainian Churches*, "International Journal of Conservation Science" 2023, vol. 14, iss. 2, pp. 511-526.

In 1860, house painting in the form of murals (both outside and inside houses) was first recorded in Petrykivka. Already from the end of the 19th century, with the advent of aniline dyes, paintings on paper, the so-called "*maliovkas*", began to appear, which craftsmen could prepare in advance and thus decorate the interior walls of houses without visiting them. These paper decorations – flowers in an oval, vases-bouquets, friezes, rectangular rugs – were glued to the walls, following the traditional rules of decorating the house interior (on the chimney, above the windows and on the floor). There was great demand for *maliovkas*, since they were easy to transport, replace with new ones, and could be purchased at fairs<sup>2</sup>.

The evolution of this type of Petrykivka painting from monumental and decorative-utitarian painting to easel painting continued after its revival in 1936 on the initiative of the artist and art critic Oleksandr Statyva. Folk craftsmen, working on a separate sheet of paper, began to gradually move away from imitating the motifs of wall paintings, paying more and more attention not so much to the place where the painting should hang as to the size and format of the sheet. From an applied "painting", subordinated to the structure of a village house, it gradually turned into a self-valuable work of art.

Thus, the creation of Petrykivka painting became an original variant of the phenomenon characterized by François Jullien as *dé-coïncidence*<sup>3</sup>. This is a form of art formed on the basis of naive painting and folk worldview, which shows an ideal world of nature without people outside of space and time, a certain magical, unreal world of absolute harmony, and a symbol of a return to the beginnings<sup>4</sup>. Such compositions were aimed at creating a sense of absolute harmony and perfection of the natural world, and here again we can draw a parallel with ancient China, where nature was the embodiment of absolute harmony and beauty, therefore the styles of art "huā niǎo" and "shan shui" glorified the beauty and grandeur of nature without people<sup>5</sup>.

The purpose of the study is to explore the folk art of Petrykivka painting as an example of a return to the origins of naive art and, at the same time, the desire to create an ideal world that exists as if outside of space and time, in a space without a background.

<sup>2</sup> Y. Smolii, *Petrykivka's home painting of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> – first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: origins, evolution, artistic features*: author's abstract of thesis. M. T. Ryl'skyi Institute of Art History, Folklore and Ethnology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Kyiv 2011. (Смолій Ю. Хатнє малювання Петриківки другої половини ХІХ – першої третини ХХ століття: витоки, еволюція, художні особливості: Автореф. дис... канд. мистецтвознавства, Інститут мистецтвознавства, фольклористики та етнології ім. М. Т. Рильського НАН України, Київ 2011).

<sup>3</sup> F. Jullien, *De-coïncidence: D'où viennent l'art et l'existence*, Grasset, Paris 2017, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 10 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-16. F. Jullien not only posits a West-China contrast but also points to the potential of "reading" Chinese thought as an alternative without essentialism.

Sources were investigated in the following areas:

- style as an embodiment of national identity<sup>6</sup>,
- general questions of art theory<sup>7</sup>,
- the influence of monumental painting on easel, decorative and applied painting<sup>8</sup>.

The scientific novelty of the research lies in the following:

- the national identity of Petrykivka painting outside Ukraine is highlighted,
- the peculiarities of the transformation of monumental painting into easel, decorative and applied painting are revealed using the example of Petrykivka painting,
- the art of Petrykivka painting is investigated as a Ukrainian artistic variant of "returning to the beginnings" and creating an ideal world beyond time and space.

The research objectives determined the choice of general scientific research methods. The main methods were: culturological analysis to study the national origins of the art of Petrykivka, art historical analysis to analyze

<sup>6</sup> S. Baiandin, Y. Ivashko, A. Dmytrenko, I. Bulakh, M. Hryniewicz, *Use of Historical Painting Concepts by Modern Methods in the Restoration of Architectural Monuments*, "International Journal of Conservation Science" 2022, vol. 13, iss. 2, pp. 381-394; *Pelaheia Hlushchenko. Album*, Mystetstvo, Kyiv 1977. (Пелагея Глущенко. Альбом, Мистецтво, Київ 1977.).

<sup>7</sup> P. Gryglewski, Y. Ivashko, D. Chernyshev, P. Chang, A. Dmytrenko, *Art as a message realized through various means of artistic expression*, "Art Inquiry. Recherches sur les arts" 2020, vol. XXII, pp. 57-88; M. Orlenko, Y. Ivashko, *The concept of art and works of art in the theory of art and in the restoration industry*, "Art Inquiry. Recherches sur les arts" 2019, vol. XXI, pp. 171-190; F. Jullien, *Éloge de la fadeur: à partir de la pensée et de l'esthétique de la Chine*, Philippe Picquier, Paris 1991; F. Jullien, *Essai: «Fonder» la morale, ou comment légitimer la transcendance de la moralité sans le support du dogme ou de la foi (au travers du Mencius)*, "Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident" 1985, no. 6, Une civilisation sans théologie? (2e trimestre), pp. 23-81; F. Jullien, *La conception du monde naturel, en Chine et en Occident, selon Tang Junyi* (La valeur de l'esprit de la culture chinoise, Zhongguo wenhua jingshen jiazhì, chap. V, 1983, en particulier § 2-3-4-5; F. Jullien, *L'absenced'inspiration: Représentations chinoises de l'incitation poétique*, "Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident" 1982, no. 1, Essais de poétique chinoise et comparée (4e trimestre), pp. 31-71.

<sup>8</sup> I. Sandu, S. Wang, B. Boros, Y. Ivashko, A. V. Sandu, P. Tišliar, *Analysis of the Wall Painting of the Dunhuang Fresco as a Basis for Its Preservation and Restoration*, "International Journal of Conservation Science" 2024, vol. 15, spec. iss., pp. 371-388; S. Wang, I. Sandu, Y. Ivashko, M. Krupa, A. Krukowiecka-Brzezce, T. Yevdokimova, S. Stavroyan, O. Kravchuk, A. V. Sandu, *Methods for the Preservation and Restoration of Dunhuang Wall Paintings: Foreign Experience*, "International Journal of Conservation Science" 2024, vol. 15, iss. 1, pp. 731-748; M. Orlenko, Y. Ivashko, Y. Ding, *Fresco Wall Painting and Its Regional Modifications*, "International Journal of Conservation Science" 2022, vol. 13, iss. 1, pp. 57-72; Y. Ivashko, I. Buzin, I. G. Sandu, D. Kuśnierz-Krupa, J. Kobylarczyk, A. Dmytrenko, L. Bednarz, *State-Of-The-Art Technologies of Imitation of Mural Painting from the Kyivan Rus and Baroque Periods in the Reconstructed St. Michael Golden-Domed Cathedral in Kyiv*, "International Journal of Conservation Science" 2022, vol. 13, iss. 1, pp. 147-162.

artistic techniques and methods, comparative analysis to compare images using different systems of indicators, and systemic analysis to systematize common plots and argue for the most common ones (this also applies to colours).

### **Artistic techniques of Petrykivka painting by Pelaheia Hlushchenko**

The artistic style of Pelaheia Hlushchenko, as well as that of other masters of Petrykivka painting, was influenced by the multifunctionality of their paintings, including “bihuntsis” (vertical ornaments), such as book covers, sketches for fabrics and chests, among others. Researchers of Petrykivka painting emphasize that phytomorphic compositions dominated, often featuring birds or leaves, but never as a literal depiction of a specific flower. Instead, it was a conscious exit into an illusory world with fantastic flowers and plants. However, in some ornaments there are allusions to peonies, dahlias, less often to asters, other field and garden flowers (Fig. 1). Nevertheless, there is never a literal similarity, and this is precisely the “return to the origins” of naive Ukrainian art. The works of the artist Pelaheia Hlushchenko from the exposition of the National Museum of Decorative Arts of Ukraine were used for the study.



Fig. 1. Flower, 1946

A paradoxical situation is created: the viewer realizes that in front of them is an imaginary flower that does not exist, but admires it, appreciating first of all not realism, but skill, originality of execution. The viewer agrees that several different flowers grow from one stem, and two-dimensional and three-dimensional flowers are depicted nearby, but a certain degree of harmony is observed even here. Despite the variegatedness of the flowers, the color scheme creates the impression of integrity. The “Petrikivka phenomenon” is created when the fairytale composition begins to be perceived by the human brain as existing.

The creation of such an impression of “fairytale realism” is also facilitated by the thoughtful combination of filled and unfilled parts of the sheet. Using traditional folk techniques, the effect of different-scale elements is created when unbloomed or barely opened buds, leaves, plants and berries are drawn around a large flower. This adds additional picturesqueness to the compositions.

Often, paintings on paper were influenced by the previous experience of the artists in wall painting. This was the case with Pelaheia Hlushchenko, when wall painting techniques were integrated into drawings on paper.

Another specific feature of traditional Petrykivka painting in the tempera (prepared with raw eggs) technique is the absence of preliminary drawing with a pencil. The artist mentally imagines the composition of the elements on the sheet and immediately draws with a brush in full color. This requires special skill, given the impossibility of corrections<sup>9</sup>.

Here it is worth drawing a parallel with traditional Chinese art, where the basis of the artist's creativity was their ability to “feel in their imagination” their image down to the smallest detail.

The background of the drawing plays an important role in the painting. In Pelaheia Hlushchenko's case, this is most often a white, green, blue-green, blue, or ocher background (Figs. 2, 3). According to experts, using a coloured background for such paintings is a very difficult task. It should be noted that painting with wet paint on a painted background must be done carefully, because the paint applied on top can blur the background paint and lose the purity of colour and the characteristic shape of the stroke. To avoid this, Pelaheia Hlushchenko first diluted the starch, then diluted the paint of the desired colour and consistency in half a glass of water, and added a third of a glass of already diluted starch to this solution. She applied the prepared paint with a wide brush across the entire sheet from top to bottom, and then across. Such a coloured ground well absorbed moisture from the paints placed on top of the

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<sup>9</sup> *Pelaheia Hlushchenko. Album*, Mystetstvo, Kyiv 1977, p. 11. (Пелагея Глуценко. Альбом, Мистецтво, Київ 1977, с. 11).



image itself and prevented the mixing of the colours of the background and the elements of the drawing<sup>10</sup>.

At the same time, such compositions on a colored background, not a white one, seem less bright, because egg tempera is transparent and lets the background color through. That is why it is extremely difficult to achieve the effect when there is a colored background, when individual elements seem to glow from the inside or are illuminated by the sun. In compositions on a white background, there is no such problem.

To achieve this effect, Pelaheia Hlushchenko used the following technique: after the coloured background had completely dried, before painting the flowers, the artist applied whitewash spots of a certain configuration in certain places, and then flowers or leaves were placed on top of them. This creates the impression of a flower that glows from the inside (Fig. 4, 5).

In Petrykivka painting, it was only possible to supplement the composition with additional elements already in the process of painting.

The main tool for painting was a brush. However, it was not a flat brush, which cannot be used to draw thin, complex lines and spots with different colour intensities.



Fig. 2. Vertical ornament ("bihunets"), 1960

Fig.3. Vertical ornament ("bihunets"), 1963

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-15.



Fig. 4. Flower, 1964 (fragment).  
Glow from the inside effect



Fig. 5. Flower on a blue background,  
1960 (fragment).  
Glow from the inside effect

When an ordinary watercolour brush is used, it does not give a typical “Petrykiv” brush stroke of paint. It can only be achieved with the help of a “cat brush” made of cat hair, which is folded into a bundle and tied to a handle with a thread<sup>11</sup>. Only such an unusual homemade brush, dipped in paint, wet, immediately straightens as soon as the pressure stops and the brush is torn off the paper. This property of the “cat brush” allows the artist to draw a line or stroke of the desired pressure as long as necessary and during the drawing process, without tearing the brush off the paper to change the force of pressure, or the stroke direction and width. It is the “cat brush” that creates unique Petrykivka strokes, of which there are four.

It seems strange, but various floral compositions are created by a limited number of techniques. We have already talked about four types of strokes, which have the popular names “*hrebinyky*” (“combs”), “*zerniatka*” (“grains”), “*horishky*” (“nuts”), and “*perekhidnyi mazok*” (“transitional stroke”)<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 12-14.





Fig. 6. A “*hrebinyk*”(“comb”) stroke

It is worth analyzing in more detail the techniques used by Pelaheia Hlushchenko. The most common technique for her, as well as for other masters, is a stroke that begins with pressure and ends with a thin tendril – “*hrebinyk*” (“comb”) (Fig.6).

The combination of several such strokes, placed side by side, forms a wavy strip on top and ends with thin tendrils at the bottom, which gave the stroke its name.

With the help of such strokes, you can also create a flower rosette, when the “combs” are placed around a rounded spot and the brush is placed with its antennae towards its centre. The flower, similar in structure to a rosehip, is drawn with the same strokes, but arranged differently, with strokes applied in pairs. A complex acacia leaf can be depicted if the combshaped brush is placed symmetrically on both sides of the drawn thin stem. At the same time, the length of the brush is constantly changing, allowing you to create a wide palette of images, which explains its prevalence in Petrykivka painting and its dominance in the works of Pelaheia Hlushchenko in particular.

The second stroke in Petrykivka painting is the so-called "*zerniatko*" ("grain"), which is applied from the lightest touch to the greatest pressure. Placed on both sides of the stem with the tip outward, it resembles the image of an ear of corn, which, in fact, gave rise to the name of this technique. It can be used to depict a leaf similar to that of nettle when the "grains" are applied around a lanceolate leaf with the tip outward. Such a stroke plays a secondary role in the paintings; it complements the images made with a comb stroke or the third type of stroke – "*horishok*" ("nut").

The "*horishok*" ("nut") type of brushstroke is the third type of artistic brushstroke in Petrykivka painting, similar to the "comb", but there are differences: the "nut" consists of two comb-like brushstrokes, drawn in semi-arcs and placed opposite each other in the shape of a horseshoe. If the empty space between these semi-arcs is filled with another comb or two or three "grains", a shape similar to a hazelnut is formed. With this brushstroke, the artist depicts ovaries or buds. This is a common type of brushstroke in the works of Pelaheia Hlushchenko.

The fourth type of brushstroke is the so-called "transitional brushstroke." In Pelaheia Hlushchenko's works, it is present in the so-called "*bihunets*" (vertical ornaments) made with white tempera on a gray background. The paint is applied not in a dense spot, but in a brushstroke with different pressure. The same technique is present in her other works, when the paints seem to "shine through" each other, without mixing at the same time. This strange effect is created by the "transitional brushstroke." It is applied with one brush, but with two paints. The paints are stirred until the consistency of sour cream, after which the dry brush is dipped into one paint to the very handle, and then into the second. And with such a brush with two layers of different paints, a brushstroke is performed, when from under one colour (applied second) another (applied first) shines through. The brushstroke ends with only the original color, with thin streaks of the second colour. The paints do not mix because they are made with raw eggs and are not liquid.

In addition to the brush, the artist often used her fingertips, dipping them in paint. If we talk about this technique in Pelaheia Hlushchenko's ornamental compositions, then the round spots, lighter in the center and darker at the edges, are just fingerprints. In this way, the artist depicts a bunch of rowanberries, grapes and blackberries (Fig. 7).

The third specific tool of Petrykivka painting is a small rod of cattail cut diagonally. It is dipped in paint and used to draw stripes with a gradation of colour. Placed in a row and row after row, such stripes help the artist depict multi-petaled flowers, similar to asters or chrysanthemums, as well as fantastic fruits "with lobes".

A separate technique is used to depict veins on leaves – by scratching with the pointed end of a splinter or a brush handle over the thick layer of paint on the leaves. Separate accents can be added using the following technique: with the end of the handle, dipped in thick paint, dots are applied to the drawn flowers and leaves. If necessary, you can create a necklace effect by drawing a series of such dots.



Fig. 7. Drawing berries with fingertips. Vertical ornament, 1964 (fragment)

## Conclusion

Petrykivka painting is a kind of national version of “return to the origins” with the simultaneous creation of an image of an ideal fairy-tale world of nature without people. “Return to the origins” occurs on several levels (Fig. 8):

- the tradition of ornamentation, which originates from ancient times and is closely related to home wall paintings and paintings of household items (such ornamentation has long implied the stylization and convention of images),
- the use of purely local techniques of execution, which are not found in other regions,

- the use of illusionistic techniques in plane painting,
- the use of homemade paints - egg tempera without prior drawing of images and homemade brushes.

Thus, such a view of the phenomenon of Petrykivka painting allows us to analyze it not only as a type of art, but as a certain unique philosophical, cultural and artistic phenomenon, based exclusively on local traditions. Unlike official artistic styles, folk art was devoid of restrictions and developed exclusively on the basis of local traditions.



Fig. 8. Flower, 1949

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## ODWOŁANIE DO LUDOWYCH TRADYCJI ZDOBNICTWA W MALARSTWIE PETRYKIWSKIM XX WIEKU

### (streszczenie)

W badaniu analizuje się unikatowe zjawisko jednej z odmian malarstwa petrykiwskiego – malowideł na papierze, opartych na ciągłości z ludowymi tradycjami malarstwa ściennego i zdobnictwa. Analizuje się wersje dotyczące pochodzenia malarstwa petrykiwskiego na przykładzie dzieł mistrza Pelagii Hluschchenko, opisuje się techniki wykorzystania obrazów, materiałów. Charakteryzuje się koncepcję „idealnego świata przyrody” w kompozycjach kwiatowych. Malarstwo petrykiwskie jest nierozzerwalnie związane z ludowymi tradycjami malarstwa opartymi na konwencji obrazów i specyficznych technikach wykonania. Oryginalny wygląd takich kompozycji wynika z zastosowania tempery jajowej, która daje efekt przejrzystości kolorów, domowych narzędzi i technik czterech podstawowych pociągnięć.

**Słowa kluczowe:** tradycje ludowe, zdobnictwo, malarstwo Petrykiwki, Pelaheia Hluschchenko, François Jullien, (dé-coincidence)

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