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# ART EXPERIMENT OF THE "BURIME" ART GROUP: FROM UTOPIA TO PRACTICE

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## ABSTRACT

The article examines the activity of the modern Ukrainian art group "Burime" in the context of their artistic experiments. The group emerged in Kharkiv at the end of the 1990s, during the turning point for the Ukrainian authorities, and has been an active participant in the art scene of Ukraine for more than 30 years. The members of the Burime's art association embodied the utopian idea of Vincent van Gogh with their collective writing, who believed that the highest art could be created only by the joint efforts of artists. Burimists stand out from other art groups with their original visual language and specific approach to painting. They create joint large-format monumental works in which vital themes are revealed. In addition, the article outlines the connection between design and painting, which was successfully combined in the works of the members of the Burime art group and is part of their technical experiments. The events that shaped their design and imaginative thinking are also highlighted. The obtained results of the research will be applied in the scientific work, which is devoted to experimental searches in the painting of modern Kharkiv artists.

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## Introduction.

The turning point of the 1980s and 1990s was marked by severe social and political upheavals, the collapse of the Soviet authoritarian machine, which affected all spheres of activity of Ukrainians, but at the same time contributed to the emergence of freedom of expression, including artistic ones, as well as the activation of all cultural processes. In addition, the restoration of Ukrainian independence in 1991 became a significant impetus for the renovation of artistic activity and a kind of legalization of cultural strata and phenomena that existed underground alongside the official ones during the Soviet era. At this time, a new generation of multidisciplinary masters appeared - graphic artists, artists, photographers, designers, who sought to unite in groups for self-expression and creative experiments. In this regard, in the 90s, a number of groups emerged one after another in the Kharkiv bohemian environment: "Kharkiv Group", "Letter A", "Art-Bat", "True Artists", "Color of Art", "Independent studio", "Red horse", "Oxymoron" and "Burime". Most of these societies turned out to be shaky, unable to withstand the fluctuations "wicked 90s", ending their existence at the very beginning. However, the creative group "Burime" indomitably withstands all the fluctuations of fate and has existed for more than 30 years, outlining a significant section of the artistic environment of Kharkiv in recent decades.

## Aim.

The purpose of this work is to research the artistic experiment of the Kharkiv art group "Burime".

### **Material and methods.**

The research methodology is based on the complex use of sources, which is due to a systematic approach. The choice of methodology was based on the use of both general scientific and special research methods. Special methods of art historical research, namely iconographic and iconological methods, were used to reveal the peculiarities of the artistic language of the Burimists. General scientific methods of analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, analogy made it possible to deepen the artistic heritage of artists, as well as to analyze their author's approach to collective writing. The study uses a biographical method to reveal the connection between the artistic language of the members of the Burime art group and their design past.

### **Results.**

Officially, "Burime" starts the countdown from 1991, when their first group exhibition was held in the Artist's House in Kharkiv. However, the history of their cooperation begins earlier. At the beginning of the 90s, artist-designer Oleksandr Shekhovtsov joined plein air painting which began to become popular. Later, he was joined by designers and architects of the Kharkiv branch of VNITE (named after the acronym for the All-Union Scientific Institute of Industrial Design), graduates of the Kharkiv Art and Industrial Institute (now Kharkiv State Academy of Design and Fine Arts) and the architectural faculty of the Kharkiv Engineering and Construction Institute (now Kharkiv National University of Construction and Architecture). Joint open-air activities, group summer trips and exhibitions contributed to the unification of like-minded people into a creative group.

Initially, the group was called "Slobozhanské burime", having gathered a number of artists of various fields around it, in particular, Oleksandr Riznychenko, Oleksandr Shilo, Volodymyr Landkof, Volodymyr Shandyba, Boil Savchenko, Hennadiy Kavtaradze, Oleksandr Postupny, Mykhailo Popov, Petro Mos, Serhii Sbitnev, Ilya Luchkovsky, Volodymyr Kochmar, Nikolina Bakumenko, Maria Beznoshchenko-Luchkovska, Oleksandr Boychuk, Volodymyr Golenishchev, Oleg Grunzovsky, Mykhailo Zuyev, Oleksandr Kotsarev, Denys Sarazhyn, Lidia Starodubtseva, Taras Sereda, Serhiy Uvarov, Yurii Shkodovskyi, Valery Shmatko and others. Then not only the name of the group was shortened to "Burime", but also its composition was reduced. However, the tradition of grouping remained unchanged. Therefore, from time to time, a number of masters of the so-called "Burime circle" join the main core of the group - Oleg Lazarenko, Oleksandr Shekhovtsov, Oleksandr Lysenko and Valentin Hrytsanenko (who passed away in January 2022) to create joint projects. According to O. Shekhovtsov, "Burime" is an informal association, <...> We do not have our own charter, we do not pay membership dues. Neither rank nor social status matters here <...> Anyone who has talent, who loves nature, understands women's beauty and doesn't drink like a horse can join us" [7, p.81]. An interesting fact is the unusual for today use of the phrase "Kolo Burime". Hereby artists outline the environment of friends and colleagues that temporarily participated in actions, plein airs, trips, exhibitions, writing joint works, just like art critics and art curators who carried out scientific research and organized exhibitions for "Burimists". "Participants of the "circle" push back, leave, take part, everyone incorporates something of their own into the joint creation..." - notes researcher L. Anuchina [1, p. 69].

The name of the art association was chosen by the participants deliberately with a significant amount of symbolism. The word "bouts-rimes" comes from the French *bouts-rimes*, which literally translates as "rhymed ends" and denotes a literary game, which consists in composing poems, often humorous, with given rhymes, sometimes and on a given topic. The game appeared at the court of Louis XIV in the 17th century (invented by the little-known French poet Dulot), gaining particular popularity in aristocratic salon circles, and later among the masses. Sometimes "burime" includes another game, where several lines or even stanzas are written down and passed to a partner to continue, leaving only the last of them visible. The same can be done with an image. The members of the art association transformed a traditional literary game from a text format into a visual one. As G. Gavryliv notes, "the game of burime involves the preservation of individual manner and style by each participant. Artists also saw the main principle of their creativity as the mandatory preservation of their own painting style, manner, artistic orientations and tastes" [7, p.87].

The creative work of the group includes more than a hundred domestic and foreign collective and personal exhibitions, projects, promotions, presentations. Artists they have not been recorded for a long time, but group exhibitions in the 1990s are among the most interesting in Ukraine — Kharkiv, Feodosia (O. Green gallery), Kyiv — and Russia (Moscow), the Czech Republic (Tabor), as well as

later in time, the jubilee exhibition for the band's 15th anniversary "Kolo Burime" (Kharkiv, 2005) and a large-scale exhibition at the "Yermilov Center" CSM (Kharkiv, 2016).

Nevertheless, the idea embedded in the name of the group, realized not only in joint art exhibitions, but also in the principle of collective creation, to which artists turned to at the turn of the millennium. At the end of the 1990s, the work of the "Burimists" began to take shape monumentalism and collectivism — philosophical and conceptual large-format canvases appear, written according to the principle of collective creation.

The newspaper "Evening Kharkiv" notes that the painters were pushed to this experiment by the employees of the "AVEK" gallery, offering to paint a picture measuring  $1.5 \times 4$  meters directly in the hall galleries in front of the public [12]. The artists themselves it is said that the idea of collective creativity arose spontaneously on one of the plein airs while reading Vincent van Gogh's letters to his brother Theo out loud. The outstanding post-impressionist expressed his opinion about the creation of a higher synergistic art, which is possible only under the condition of joint artistic creativity: "More and more I am convinced that one isolated individual cannot create the paintings that must be written in order for modern painting to become completely by itself and rose to heights equal to the sacred peaks reached by Greek sculptors, German musicians and French novelists. These paintings, apparently, will be created by groups of people who will unite to realize a common idea" [7, p. 28].

Similar methods of collective creativity are familiar to the history of art since the time of the primitive order, later from icon painting, the Pre-Raphaelite movement in England or the extravagant play of the surrealists with the telling name "Exquisite Corpse". In addition, van Gogh himself also tried to cooperate with colleagues, in particular with Gauguin. However, all attempts to implement the concept of joint writing were unsuccessful among the predecessors of "Burime", due to excessive individualism and unwillingness to be in the shadow of a fellow artist.

Members of the Burime art group, each with their own specific view of life, their own manner and creative handwriting, write on the same canvas [4]. Their works are complex layers of multiple selves that dialogue with each other and reveal meaningful themes using complex symbolism. This is vividly illustrated by the works "Ode to Vanity" ("From Malevich's Square to the Black Hole" fig. 1), "Se Diva Chista" ("Slobozhansk Madonna", fig. 2), "Mission" ("Summit", "The Last Supper", Fig. 3).



*Fig.1. Burime. "Ode to Vanity". 2001. Oil on canvas, 1.5x6m*





*Fig.2. Burime. "Se Diva Chista". 2003. Oil on canvas, 3x3m*

Where every work is hypermetaphorical, loaded with meaning and intertextual. The visual language of "Burimists" is colorful, but not devoid of harmony and understandable to the viewer, since the artists provide a number of images-hints, which makes it possible to read their statements. According to the researcher L. Starodubtseva, "before us is what in poetry is called the Greek word "oxymoron": a combination of the incompatible. In philosophy, this is called "coincidence of contradictions..." [7, p. 75].



*Fig.3. Burime. "Mission". 2003. Oil on canvas, 1.5x6m*

It should be emphasized that "Burimists" are characterized by project-like thinking, which is dictated by the design education that most of the members of the group have. When starting to create, artists do not have a ready-made composition in front of their eyes. It appears to them as the process itself, the result of which cannot be predicted. Moreover, the design past contributes to collective creativity, since at one time a number of "burimists" were participants in design projects, where without consensus and coordination it is impossible to implement the plan.

### **Conclusions.**

So, for more than 30 years, artists have successfully coped with the archival task of coexistence in an a priori individualistic and competitive artistic environment [2, p.90]. Using a unique artistic vocabulary, they appeal to eternal existential themes, materialize the idea of Love, humanism and the eternal human aspiration to spiritual heights. Also, their art has a deep national connotation, which together with the above makes the Burime art group an organic part of the modern art space.

### **Prospects for further research.**

The obtained results of the research will be applied in the scientific work, which is devoted to experimental searches in the painting of modern Kharkiv artists. The author plans to continue researching the activities of the Burime art group and examine in detail the synthesis of design and painting in their visual language in the context of Ukrainian art.

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