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Scientific Research into Visual Culture and Fine Arts of Independent Ukraine: Main Directions, Issues and Development Trends

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Abstract

Research on visual culture and fine arts of independent Ukraine has formed an interdisciplinary scientific field, encompassing art history, cultural studies, memory studies, media studies, and sociology of art. The aim of the article is to reconstruct the structure of scientific research on visual culture and fine arts of independent Ukraine; the object of the study is a corpus of publications dedicated to the Ukrainian artistic process of 1991–2026. The study was conducted as a review of the subject field in accordance with PRISMA-ScR using descriptive bibliometric, historiographic, thematic, and comparative analysis. It was found that 58.6% of the included publications were published in 2024–2026, indicating a sharp increase in international and interdisciplinary attention to Ukrainian art. The dominant thematic direction was war, trauma, memory, and protection of cultural heritage, represented in 55.2% of the corpus, while

studies of the early period of independence remained significantly less numerous. The expansion of the subject of analysis from painting, graphics and sacred art to museums, urban space, digital platforms, memes, the art market and cultural policy was revealed. The methodological profile of the field is characterized by the predominance of qualitative case studies and historical and interpretative approaches. The scientific novelty of the work lies in the simultaneous mapping of thematic clusters, chronological shifts, methodological disparities, and underdeveloped segments of Ukrainian art history. The practical significance of the results is determined by the possibility of their use for updating educational programs, developing museum and digital archives, determining grant and publishing priorities.

Keywords: visual culture, fine arts, Ukrainian art, art history, decolonization, art of war

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades of Ukraine's independence, research into its fine arts and visual culture has formed a broad, yet internally heterogeneous, academic space. Its development has been accompanied by a revision of Soviet interpretative models, an expansion of the conceptual boundaries of art history, and the gradual integration of Ukrainian material into international academic discourse. The changes concerned not only the assessment of artistic movements, genres, and personalities, but also the methods of periodizing artistic processes, determining their national context, and their relationship with European cultural phenomena.

Especially intensively after the beginning of Russian aggression in 2014 and the full-scale invasion in 2022. The destruction of cultural heritage, the rethinking of the Soviet past, the strengthening of the social role of art, and the spread of digital forms of visual communication have significantly expanded the boundaries of scientific analysis. Along with painting, graphics, and sculpture, public art, photography, posters, digital illustrations, memes, museum practices, visual diaries, and ways of representing collective memory are increasingly being studied.

The contemporary literature records several important directions of development in this field. Babunych [1] emphasizes the historical unevenness of Ukrainian art studies, while Nazarovets & Mryglod [2] attest to the gradual growth of the international visibility of Ukrainian studies in the arts and humanities. Demchuk & Levchenko [3] reveal a decolonizing revision of categories, geographical boundaries, and canons of art history, while Bakirov & Petrenko [4] link the international positioning of Ukrainian visual culture to the development of exhibition, curatorial, and institutional practices. At the same time, Kot et al. [5] demonstrate that digital popular art has become an independent tool for the formation of war narratives, images of resistance, and models of national identity.

Despite the growing number of publications, the existing body of work does not form a holistic picture of the development of scientific research on visual culture and fine arts in independent Ukraine. Individual works focus on decolonization, sacred art, regional schools, museum practices, feminist strategies, cultural heritage, or war visibility, but the relationship between these areas remains insufficiently systematized. It is not fully understood how thematic priorities changed after 1991, which methodological approaches dominated at different stages, and which segments of the research field still remain fragmentarily represented.

The object of the study is a corpus of scientific works devoted to the visual culture and fine arts of Ukraine during the period of independence. The aim of the article is to reconstruct the structure of this research field by identifying its thematic areas, methodological shifts, chronological dynamics and insufficiently studied problems. To achieve the goal, it is planned to characterize the main thematic clusters, trace the change in research priorities after 1991, compare the applied methodological approaches, and outline the prospects for further studies. The theoretical significance of the work lies in the systematization of conceptually and methodologically heterogeneous scientific work, while the practical value is associated with the possibility of using the results in further art and cultural studies, educational programs, and projects of representation of Ukrainian art.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly research on visual culture and fine arts in independent Ukraine is taking shape at the intersection of art history, cultural studies, history, sociology of art, media studies, and memory studies. In international English-language literature, works devoted to the consequences of Russian aggression after 2014 and the full-scale invasion of 2022 are particularly notable. This focus has significantly expanded the thematic boundaries of the field, but at the same time has caused a disproportion: the period 1991–2013, when new art institutions, curatorial practices, regional environments, and art markets were formed, is much less represented. As a result, the development of art in independent Ukraine is often described primarily as a reaction to war, revolutionary events, and threats to cultural heritage, rather than as a long-term and internally heterogeneous process.

A separate segment of literature covers sacred art, post-socialist infrastructure, and complex heritage. Demianchuk et al. [6], systematizing works on the sacred art of the Roman Catholic Church in Ukrainian lands, show the interdisciplinary nature of this direction and its dependence on access to monuments, archives, and documentation opportunities. The study analyzed more than 200 scientific publications between 1993 and 2021. In total, scientists have examined more than 500 shrines and tens of thousands of liturgical objects. Demianchuk et al. [7] provide an in-depth analysis of this topic. The monograph analyzes over 1,000 scientific publications, of which over 500 are in peer-reviewed multi-volume scientific publications. In particular, the methodological basis of the research is clarified, and problematic issues and difficulties encountered by researchers in the process of work are identified.

At the same time, the regional and confessional focus of the study limits the transfer of conclusions to the entire Ukrainian material. Fowler [8] considers the former Theater of the Soviet Army in Lviv as an example of the crisis of post-socialist cultural infrastructure, while Donovan [9] treats the industrial sites of Eastern Ukraine as a "complex legacy" around which memory, trauma, economic decline and artistic interventions interact. Both works expand the object of art

historical analysis from the individual work to institutions, buildings and urban environments, but leave open the need for a systematic comparison of regions of Ukraine after 1991.

Regional and institutional transformations are clearly visible in the works devoted to the cultural space of Donbas, museums, and state cultural policy. Iakovlenko [10] demonstrates how the artistic environment of Donetsk has changed from postmodern and critical practices to the restoration of Stalinist models after the occupation, thereby refuting the notion of the region as culturally homogeneous. Olzacka [11] considers museums as active participants in the formation of a national community in conditions of war, and Olzacka [12] shows that cultural policy after 2014 is increasingly structured through categories of security, resilience and countering hybrid aggression. These studies reveal the growing social and political role of cultural institutions, but at the same time raise questions about the boundaries between the politics of memory, state communication and the autonomy of art. This tension is convincingly recorded in the existing literature, although it has not yet received sufficient comparative and historical explanation.

The preservation of cultural heritage in times of war is another important area. Hoeniger [13], comparing the protection of monuments in Italy during the Second World War and in Ukraine during the Russian invasion, argues that the protection of art objects is a component of the preservation of cultural continuity, and not just a technical procedure. The advantage of this work is the combination of a historical perspective with an analysis of contemporary practices of physical protection and documentation. At the same time, less attention has been paid to how destruction, evacuation, and digital fixation change research methods, attribution, and interpretation of works. Thus, cultural heritage studies are so far better at explaining the mechanisms of its protection than they are at explaining the transformation of art historical knowledge under the influence of war.

The digitization of Ukrainian art has become a prominent research area even before the full-scale invasion. Chepelyk [14], analyzing immersive environments, VR and AR projects by Ukrainian artists, has identified a gradual shift from physical gallery space to virtual platforms and hybrid forms of artistic interaction related to public art, sculpture and urban practices. The most dynamically developing body of work is on public and digital visibility. Leahy [15] analyzes Ukrainian murals as tools of political mobilization, marking of space, and formation of collective memory, emphasizing the dependence of their meaning on the commissioner, place, audience, and media circulation. Kot et al. [5] show that digital popular art not only reflects war, but also constructs narratives of heroism, national community and the image of the enemy. A related function is performed by digital humor, which Klumbyte & Yermieieva [16] interpret as a form of civic activism, group solidarity and informal political participation. Together, these studies indicate a blurring of the boundaries between art, mass culture, political communication and activism. At the same time, they reveal a methodological problem: not every meme, poster, or digital image is a work of art. Therefore, the criteria for selection, attribution, archiving, and reception analysis need to be more clearly justified.

A gender perspective complements the study of war visibility. Naesby et al. [17] analyze official Ukrainian communication on social networks and establish a combination of images of female subjectivity and vulnerability, through which Ukraine is represented simultaneously as an active political subject and a victim of aggression. Szerszein [18] expands the chronological perspective, comparing visual images of Ukraine in 1993, 2014 and 2022 and revealing changes in the ways of documenting and ethically experiencing violence. At the same time, these works mostly focus on individual corpuses of images, time slices or personalities. Comparative research on gender strategies across media, generations and regional contexts remains underdeveloped.

Alongside interpretive studies, the role of empirical research into the professional environment and economic infrastructure of art is gradually increasing. Ober et al. [19] based on a diagnostic survey assess the impact of the war on the conditions of activity of Ukrainian artists, in particular relocation, access to resources, international support and professional adaptation. Rusakov et al. [20] consider the art market as a factor in stabilizing the Ukrainian cultural brand and the international positioning of the country. These works are important because they shift attention from individual works to the social, economic and communication conditions of artistic production. At the same time, sociological data do not directly explain aesthetic and substantive changes in art, and the category of cultural brand may excessively orient the analysis towards external recognition. Therefore, it is promising to combine the empirical study of the artistic environment with the formal and substantive analysis of artistic production.

A generalization of the reviewed literature shows that the best represented studies are those on the art of war, digital narratives, cultural heritage, museum policy, regional transformations, gender representations, and international positioning. At the same time, the scientific output remains fragmentary: individual cases, institutions, artists, and local environments predominate, while a comprehensive comparison of thematic and methodological trends over the period 1991–2026 is almost absent. Research on painting, graphics, sculpture, art education, art criticism, private collecting, and regions that were not at the center of war studies is insufficiently systematized. There is also a gap between classical art history, cultural studies, sociology of art, and digital communication studies. It is this gap that makes it necessary to determine the structure of the research field, trace its chronological shifts, and identify dominant problems and methodological imbalances.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted as a review of the subject field, aimed at mapping the main directions, issues, and methodological trends in the study of visual culture and fine arts of independent Ukraine. The reporting of the procedure and results of the review was carried out in accordance with the PRISMA-ScR recommendations proposed by Tricco et al. [21], and the stages of identification, screening, full-text evaluation, and inclusion of publications were organized according to the PRISMA 2020 logic described by Page et al. [22].

The analytical corpus consisted of 29 works directly devoted to Ukrainian art, visual culture, cultural heritage, art institutions, or the professional environment of artists. A separate theoretical, methodological, and contextual block was formed by seven sources: Erjavec [23], Mitchell [24], Piotrowski [25], Rampley et al. [26], Kress & van Leeuwen [27], Rose [28], and Hajkowicz et al. [29]. These works were not included in the frequency calculations, but were used to form the conceptual framework, coding categories, and interpretation of the results. The publications by Tricco et al. [21] and Page et al. [22] served as reporting standards and were also not part of the thematic corpus.

The search was conducted in Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, and Google Scholar; Crossref was used for additional publication identification, clarification of bibliographic data, and DOI verification. In Scopus, the search was performed in the TITLE-ABS-KEY fields, in Web of Science – in the Topic field. The search strategy combined English terms "Ukrainian art", "visual culture of Ukraine", "contemporary Ukrainian art", "Ukrainian fine art", "art of independent Ukraine", "decolonization of Ukrainian art", "wartime art", "sacred art of Ukraine" and "digital visual culture", as well as their Ukrainian-language counterparts. Terms within thematic blocks were combined with the OR operator, and blocks denoting the Ukrainian context and the subject of the study were combined with the AND operator. In Google Scholar, the first 100 results, sorted by relevance, were reviewed. Additional sources were identified by checking the reference lists of relevant works. Duplicates were removed by matching DOI, title, authorship, and publication year.

The review included English- and Ukrainian-language journal articles, monographs, and sections of monographs, the full texts of which were available in open sources or through legal institutional access. Mandatory criteria were the scientific nature of the publication, a clearly defined object of analysis, and a direct connection with the visual culture or fine arts of Ukraine during the period of independence. The lower limit of the year of publication was not set in advance, but the final thematic corpus covered works from 2017–2026. Duplicates, journalistic materials, exhibition announcements, reviews without an independent analytical component, works without an available full text, as well as publications by Russian and Belarusian authors or publications were excluded.

The selection was carried out sequentially by title, abstract and full text. The unit of analysis was a separate publication. Coding was carried out by one researcher with a re-check of the entire corpus after the completion of the primary analysis. Several thematic and methodological codes could be assigned to one work. The year of publication and the period of the artistic process that was analyzed were recorded separately, which prevented the mixing of bibliographical and historical chronology.

Thematic coding covered six broad categories: war, trauma, memory and heritage protection; cultural institutions, politics, art markets and professional environments; digital and public visual culture; art history, national context and decolonization; gender and feminist studies; sacred art. Methodological approaches were coded as qualitative case studies, historical and historiographical analysis, visual, semiotic or discursive analysis, institutional and cultural-political analysis, comparative analysis, and quantitative, bibliometric or survey design.

The material was processed using descriptive bibliometric, historiographic, thematic and comparative analysis. Frequencies and proportions were calculated relative to the thematic corpus $n=29$; in the case of multi-categorical coding, the sum of percentages could exceed 100%. Formal assessment of the risk of bias was not performed due to the mapping purpose of the review and the heterogeneity of the types of publications. However, during interpretation, transparency of methods, correspondence of the source base to the stated purpose, and validity of conclusions were taken into account. Inferential statistics and meta-analysis were not used. The study did not involve the involvement of participants or the processing of personal data, therefore, it did not require separate ethical approval.

4. RESULTS

4.1. FORMATION AND GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ANALYTICAL CORPUS

After full-text processing of the source database, the publications were separated according to the functions they performed in the study. The analytical corpus consisted of 29 works directly devoted to the fine arts, visual culture, cultural heritage, art institutions, or the professional environment of artists in Ukraine. Seven more sources were used to form the theoretical and methodological framework, but were not included in the calculation of thematic, chronological, and methodological frequencies. The publications by Tricco et al. [21] and Page et al. [22] served as the reporting standards for the field review. Thus, the overall References list included 38 items, while the quantitative and thematic synthesis was

based on 29 publications.

The distinction between sources was necessary to avoid mixing subject-specific and general theoretical publications. Inclusion of monographs with visual studies, social semiotics, or post-socialist theory could artificially increase the representation of the corresponding methodological directions, although these works did not have Ukrainian material as a direct object of study. The PRISMA standards also did not characterize either the subject structure of Ukrainian art studies or the methods of the analyzed studies.

The chronological distribution of the 29 thematic works showed a clear concentration of publication activity in recent years. The earliest included work was published in 2017, while the largest number of studies fell on 2024. During 2017–2020, three works were published, which accounted for 10.3% of the corpus. In 2021–2023, nine studies were published, or 31.0%. In contrast, 17 works, representing 58.6% of the analytical sample, are dated 2024–2026.

Formal characteristics of the corpus were summarized by publication type, publication period, and dominant research design. The dominant design was understood as the main way the study was organized, so each paper in Table 1 is assigned to only one category. The results are presented below.

Table 1. *General characteristics of the analytical corpus*

Indicator	Category	Number	Share, %
Publication type	Journal article	26	89.7
	Monograph	2	6.9
	Section of the collective monograph	1	3.4
Publication period	2017–2020	3	10.3
	2021–2023	9	31.0
	2024–2026	17	58.6
The dominant nature of the study	Qualitative interpretive research	20	69.0
	Comparative or mixed research	6	20.7
	Quantitative, bibliometric or survey research	3	10.3
Together		29	100.0

Source: developed by the authors based on the results of an analysis of 29 thematic publications.

As can be seen from Table 1, journal articles accounted for 89.7% of the analytical corpus, while monographs and chapters of collective monographs collectively covered 10.3% of the sample. Despite their small number, these types of publications were distinguished by a broader conceptual and chronological coverage of the analyzed artistic process. The chronological distribution showed a concentration of research activity in recent years: 17 works, or 58.6% of the corpus, were published in 2024–2026, nine works, or 31.0%, in 2021–2023, and only three works, or 10.3%, in 2017–2020. The dominant nature of the research was dominated by qualitative interpretative works, to which 20 out of 29 publications were attributed. Comparative or mixed design was applied in six works, while quantitative, bibliometric, or survey design was the main one in only three studies devoted to the international visibility of Ukrainian humanities, the professional environment of artists, and the functioning of the art market.

Thus, the formal structure of the corpus revealed a chronological asymmetry. The international visibility of Ukrainian visual culture and fine arts increased, but the bulk of recent publications were related to war, cultural memory, heritage, and the changing social functions of art.

4.2. THEMATIC STRUCTURE AND CHRONOLOGICAL CHANGES IN RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Thematic coding showed that the analyzed directions did not function in isolation. One publication could simultaneously concern war, collective memory, cultural policy, digital communication, or institutional transformations. Therefore, each work was allowed to be assigned several thematic codes according to its content. 47 thematic affiliations were recorded in 29 publications, which was an average of 1.6 codes per work.

The largest thematic cluster covered war, trauma, collective memory, and the protection of cultural heritage. The corresponding code was assigned to 16 works, or 55.2% of the corpus. This direction included studies of war visibility, destruction and preservation of monuments, artistic resistance, museum mobilization, cultural trauma, and transformations of regions directly affected by Russian aggression. The aforementioned issues were presented, in particular, in the works of Blazy and al. [30], Donovan [9], Hoeniger [13], Iakovlenko [10], Ilchuk [31], Klumbyte & Yermieieva [16], Kot and al. [32], Kot and al. [5], Leahy [15], Olzacka [11], and Szerszei [18].

The second largest cluster united cultural institutions, state policy, art markets, and the professional environment of artists. It was recorded in nine works, or 31.0%. Studies in this group considered museums, exhibition platforms, cultural policy, professional mobility of artists, and mechanisms of international art representation as active factors in the production and dissemination of visual meanings.

Digital, public and mediated visibility was analyzed in eight works, accounting for 27.6% of the corpus. The category included studies of murals, digital posters, memes, social media, visual diaries and wartime popular art. They all had in common the study of the interaction between professional art, political communication, mass culture and civic activism.

Art history, national context, and decolonization were considered in seven works, or 24.1%. This direction encompassed the revision of the national artistic canon, criticism of Russian-centric schemes, post-socialist transformations, and problems of attribution of Ukrainian artistic phenomena. A gender or feminist code was assigned to four works, and sacred art was the central subject of three studies.

To establish chronological dynamics, the year of publication and the period of the artistic process it analyzed were separately coded. This distinction made it possible to avoid identifying the time of publication with the historical boundaries of the studied material. A work published in 2024 could relate to artistic processes of the 1990s, the period after 2014, or the visual practices of full-scale war.

Artistic processes of 1991–2013 were analyzed in eight works, or 27.6% of the corpus. Events and artistic transformations of 2014–2021 were covered by 17 studies, or 58.6%. The period 2022–2026 was devoted to 15 publications, which was 51.7%. The given shares do not form 100%, since some works covered more than one chronological section.

A cross-reference between thematic and chronological codes is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. *Thematic emphases in studies on different periods of art in independent Ukraine*

Thematic area	Artistic processes 1991–2013	Artistic processes 2014–2021	Artistic processes 2022–2026	Detected change
Art History and National Context	6	5	3	The transition from the reconstruction of the national canon to its critical and decolonial revision
Institutions and cultural policy	4	7	6	Shift from post-socialist restructuring to issues of cultural sustainability and security
War, memory and trauma	1	10	14	Rapid increase after 2014 and dominance in research after 2022
Digital and public visibility	1	4	8	Transforming a peripheral direction into one of the central ones
Sacred art	3	3	2	Relative thematic stability with a small number of studies

Source: developed by the authors based on the results of comparing thematic codes and periods of the artistic process.

Note: The figures reflect the number of thematic-chronological affiliations, not the number of unique publications. One work could cover several periods and thematic areas.

The most noticeable dynamics were found in the war memorial issue. In works devoted to the artistic processes of 1991–2013, the corresponding code was recorded once, while in studies of the period 2022–2026 – 14 times. A similar, although less dramatic, change concerned digital and public visibility: from one thematic affiliation for the early independence period to eight for the period after 2022.

The historical-artistic and national-identification direction was most clearly represented in works on artistic processes of 1991–2013. In studies of the period after 2014, its content shifted from the reconstruction of national art history to decolonization, criticism of imperial attributions, and revision of museum classifications. Sacred art maintained a relatively stable presence, although the number of relevant studies remained small, and the main material was related to Western Ukrainian and Roman Catholic heritage.

The works on artistic processes from 1991–2013 were dominated by attention to national context, post-socialist transformation, and revision of the Soviet canon. Studies from 2014–2021 were more likely to cover memory, regional identities, cultural politics, and decolonization. Publications on artistic processes after 2022 were dominated by war, trauma, heritage protection, digital mobilization, and international representation.

4.3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES AND UNDERREPRESENTED AREAS

Methodological coding showed the prevalence of in-depth analysis of individual cases. Qualitative case studies were used in 15 works, or 51.7% of the corpus. The objects of such studies were individual artists, museums, cultural platforms, cities, murals, series of digital images, and specific monuments. The case-oriented approach provided detailed processing of the material, but limited the possibilities of directly transferring the conclusions to other regions, historical periods or art forms.

Historical and historiographical analysis was found in 11 works, or 37.9%. It was predominant in studies of sacred art,

national canon, post-socialist infrastructure and regional artistic processes. Visual, socio-semiotic or discursive analysis was used in nine works, or 31.0%, primarily when studying digital images, murals, memes and social networks.

The institutional and cultural-political approach was used in seven studies, and comparative analysis in six. Quantitative, bibliometric, or survey design was used in three works devoted to the international publication visibility of Ukrainian humanities, the professional status of artists, and the role of the art market in the international positioning of Ukrainian culture.

Unlike the dominant design classification shown in Table 1, the detailed methodological coding allowed multiple codes to be assigned to a single publication, allowing for a combination of historical, visual, discursive, comparative, and institutional analysis within a single study.

A total of 51 methodological codes were recorded in the corpus, or an average of 1.8 approaches per publication. This indicated a widespread combination of historical, visual, discursive, and institutional procedures. At the same time, quantitative and survey designs made up a small part of the corpus. Within the formed sample, detailed qualitative processing of individual phenomena was used much more often than quantitative measurement of their prevalence, chronological dynamics, or regional differences.

Comparison of thematic, methodological, geographical, and chronological codes allowed us to identify areas that were underrepresented in the analytical corpus. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Underrepresented areas in the formed analytical corpus*

Direction	Number of works	Share of n = 29, %	Content of the detected gap
Artistic processes 1991–2013	8	27.6	The early period of independence was viewed mostly in retrospect or as a prerequisite for events after 2014.
Sculpture as an independent object	2	6.9	Sculptural practices were more often mentioned in broader reviews than analyzed individually
Art education	1	3.4	Educational institutions and changes in the professional training of artists were almost not included in the general history of the artistic field.
Art criticism and art periodicals	2	6.9	The corpus does not reveal any systematic analysis of critical discourse, professional journals, and artistic media after 1991.
Private collecting	0	0.0	Within the corpus, no separate studies of the impact of private collections on the artistic canon, market, and museum practices were identified.
Central and southern regions of Ukraine	3	10.3	Only three works had the artistic environments of these regions as an independent geographical focus.
Quantitative and survey designs	3	10.3	Quantitative approaches were significantly inferior to qualitative case-based research

Source: developed by the authors based on the results of thematic, geographical, and methodological coding of 29 publications.

Note: the geographical indicator took into account only works in which the central or southern regions of Ukraine acted as an independent object of analysis and were not mentioned as part of the all-Ukrainian context.

Table 3 revealed two main disparities. The first was chronological: publications on artistic processes from 1991–2013 were less represented than studies of the period after 2014. The second concerned the subject structure of the corpus. Digital images, murals, memory, cultural heritage, and state cultural policy were analyzed more often than sculpture, art education, art criticism, or private collecting.

The geographical structure was also uneven. Kyiv, Lviv, and Donbas were the most pronounced local foci, while Odesa, Mykolaiv, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Poltava, Cherkasy, Vinnytsia, and other central and southern cities were rarely considered as independent artistic environments. Accordingly, some generalizations about Ukrainian art were formed on the basis of a limited number of cultural centers.

The synthesis of the results allowed us to identify three general trends within the analyzed corpus. First, the subject of scientific attention has expanded significantly: along with painting, graphics and sacred art, it has included museums, cultural policy, urban space, social networks, memes, the professional environment of artists and art markets. Second, after 2014, the presence of war memorials and decolonization issues has increased, and in the research of the period after 2022, the corresponding directions have become dominant. Third, the methodological structure has remained uneven: qualitative case studies and interpretative approaches have prevailed over quantitative, cross-regional and broad comparative studies.

5. DISCUSSION

The results confirmed the initial assumption that scientific research on visual culture and fine arts in independent Ukraine is developing unevenly and largely responds to sociopolitical changes. The most striking result was the concentration of publications in 2024–2026, which accounted for 58.6% of the analytical corpus. At the same time, more than half of the included works were related to war, trauma, collective memory, or the protection of cultural heritage. This indicates not only an increase in international interest in Ukraine after 2022. There has been a change in the very way of scientific

understanding of art: a work is increasingly analyzed as a document of an event, an instrument of symbolic resistance, a means of mobilization, or a form of working with traumatic experience.

The identified trend is consistent with Blazy et al. [30], who consider artistic practices on the eve of a full-scale war as an indicator of social anxiety and uncertainty. In other words, art did not only react to the invasion after it began. Some of the images, themes, and modes of artistic expression had already recorded the expectation of a threat. A similar continuity is traced by Ilchuk [31], showing that the art and literature of Donbas became forms of cultural protest at the initial stage of Russian aggression. The results of the review expand these observations: the war issue did not remain a separate regional or genre direction, but gradually turned into one of the central organizing principles of the research field.

It is also significant that in contemporary works, war is understood not only through the direct depiction of violence. Leahy [15] demonstrates how Ukrainian murals function in the space of political mobilization, memorialization, and territorial designation. In this case, the meaning of a work is determined not only by its composition or iconography, but also by its location, the nature of the commission, the audience's reaction, and the subsequent dissemination of the image in the media. Our own results have confirmed the spread of such a contextual approach. Research increasingly covers not an isolated artistic object, but the entire system of its production, circulation, and public use.

This shift can be interpreted as a gradual convergence of Ukrainian art criticism with the interdisciplinary model of visual studies. Mitchell [24] suggests considering the image not as a passive carrier of meaning, but as an element of a complex interaction between the media, the viewer, and the cultural context. Rose [28], in turn, emphasizes the need to analyze not only the image itself, but also the conditions of its creation, display and perception. The expansion of the subject of study revealed in the corpus, from painting and sacred art to memes, social networks, museums, the art market and cultural policy, corresponds to this logic. However, the transition is not complete. Classical formal-stylistic analysis and new socio-cultural approaches coexist, sometimes almost without intersecting.

The broader European context helps to explain this methodological heterogeneity. Rampley et al. [26] show that art history and visual studies in different countries developed within national academic traditions that did not disappear after entering the transnational scientific space. For Ukraine, this is especially important, since disciplinary restructuring occurred simultaneously with the reassessment of the Soviet legacy, the restoration of the national canon and the search for an international language of description. Piotrowski [25] connects similar processes in post-communist Europe with the democratization of cultural space and the politicization of artistic practices. Erjavec [23] also emphasizes that post-socialist art cannot be explained only by the borrowing of Western models: it is formed through the conflict between local experience, late socialist heritage, and new political conditions.

The results of the review confirmed that this conflict remains relevant for the Ukrainian scientific field. Works dedicated to the early period of independence often focused on the restoration of national art history, the definition of artistic styles, and the return of silenced personalities. Lozhkina [33] shows this process as a long-term restructuring of the artistic space, in which the avant-garde, unofficial art, postmodern practices, and new institutions gradually formed a different coordinate system. Kashshay [34] continues this discussion, addressing the problem of the national context of Ukrainian art in the 20th and early 21st centuries. Her own results indicate that after 2014, the emphasis shifted: the national context is increasingly less often treated as an already formed framework and increasingly becomes the subject of critical, in particular decolonial, revision.

At the same time, not all directions underwent equally drastic transformation. Sacred art remained a relatively stable, albeit quantitatively small segment. Demianchuk [35] examines the reception of Roman miraculous icons of the Virgin Mary in Ukrainian icon painting, showing the long-term interaction of Western European and local traditions. Demianchuk et al. [36] deepen this direction on the material of copies of Our Lady of Czestochowa in the Roman Catholic churches of Galicia. In a section of the monograph by Demianchuk A. [7], the history of the cult of the seven most common miraculous icons and their copies in the Roman Catholic shrines of Ukraine is analyzed: *Salus Populi Romani* (The Salvation of the Roman People); *Madonna del Perpetuo Soccorso* (Our Lady of Perpetual Help); *Mater Misericordiae* (Mother of Mercy); *Our Lady of Czestochowa*; *Our Lady of Mercy*; *Our Lady of Healing the Sick*; and *Merciful Jesus*.

Such works demonstrate a high level of iconographic and historical-artistic concretization. At the same time, the results of the review revealed their regional and confessional concentration. The Orthodox, Greek-Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, and interfaith artistic environment is represented unevenly. Therefore, the stability of the direction does not mean its completeness.

A certain stability of the traditional art historical approach is confirmed by Shkolna et al. [37], who analyze the stylistic features of Ukrainian fine art, architecture, and design in a broad historical perspective. Such studies are important for maintaining the connection between contemporary visual practices and the history of art forms. At the same time, the analysis showed that the genre-style model is no longer dominant. It is gradually being supplemented by a problem-oriented approach, where memory, identity, trauma, decolonization, institutional resilience, and media circulation become key categories.

The gender dimension has also been prominent, although it has not yet reached the scale of a separate established

direction. Zaspá [38] analyzes the transformation of female symbolic images in the visual culture of the independence period, tracing the changing ways of representing female subjectivity. In general, gender optics are most often applied to war trauma, protest art, or individual female artists. A systematic comparison of different generations, regions, and artistic media is still lacking.

The methodological structure of the corpus requires a separate interpretation. The predominance of qualitative case studies provided a detailed reading of individual phenomena, but created a problem of generalizability. A separate museum, artist, city, or series of images may be representative, but does not always reflect the structure of the entire research field. The low proportion of quantitative and mixed designs revealed does not indicate a weakness of the qualitative methodology as such, but an insufficient balance. A promising combination of formal and content analysis of works with bibliometrics, digital methods, artist surveys, analysis of museum collections and interregional comparison is promising. The feasibility of expanding the digital methodological toolkit is confirmed by the general dynamics of humanities research. Hajkowicz et al. [29], analyzing 137 million peer-reviewed publications in 333 scientific fields, found an accelerated spread of artificial intelligence technologies not only in natural and technical disciplines, but also in the arts and humanities. This gives grounds to consider algorithmic analysis of large arrays of images, bibliographic data and digital archives as a promising addition to traditional art historical and interpretive methods.

The results obtained have several practical implications. First, the generated thematic map can be used to update educational programs in art history, cultural studies, and the history of Ukrainian culture. Second, the identified gaps provide grounds for adjusting the priorities of grant and publishing support, in particular regarding the art of 1991–2013, sculpture, art criticism, art education, private collecting, and the regions of the South and Center of Ukraine. Third, the results can be useful for museums and cultural institutions that form digital archives, exhibition narratives, and programs for the international representation of Ukrainian art.

The study also has limitations. The analytical corpus covered 29 thematic works, so it cannot claim to be an exhaustive representation of all Ukrainian art history publications. The predominance of English-language international publications increased the visibility of topics aimed at an external audience, in particular war, decolonization, and cultural diplomacy. The early period of independence is less well represented, as a significant part of the relevant works may not have been digitized or indexed in international databases. In addition, the multi-category coding involved interpretive decisions by researchers, and no formal assessment of the risk of bias due to the heterogeneity of sources was conducted. Data for 2026 covered only publications available by July 10, so the annual figure is not complete.

Despite these limitations, the results support the initial assumption of the study. The scientific field of visual culture and fine arts of independent Ukraine is indeed developing along several uneven trajectories, and its most noticeable changes are due to war, decolonization, digitalization, and the expansion of institutional analysis. At the same time, traditional directions do not disappear. They coexist with new approaches, sometimes complementing each other, and sometimes remaining methodologically separate. It is overcoming this gap that may become the next stage in the development of Ukrainian art criticism.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The research conducted made it possible to reconstruct the scientific field of visual culture and fine arts of independent Ukraine as a dynamic but structurally uneven system, in which thematic and methodological changes are directly related to the political, cultural and military transformations of recent decades. The goal was achieved by identifying dominant thematic clusters, comparing chronological shifts and identifying the ways in which research approaches changed from the early post-Soviet period to modern studies of war, memory, decolonization and digital visibility. The scientific novelty of the study lies in the combination of thematic, historiographic and methodological mapping within a single analytical design, which made it possible to show not only the accumulation of publications, but also the internal disproportions of the research field. It was found that the international visibility of Ukrainian art has increased mainly due to works on war, cultural heritage, public images and digital communication, while the early period of independence, sculpture, art education, art criticism, private collecting and regional environments of the Center and South of Ukraine remain underrepresented. The practical significance of the results obtained lies in the possibility of using them to update educational programs, form museum and digital archives, determine publishing and grant priorities, as well as plan interdisciplinary research on Ukrainian art. The main limitations were a relatively small thematic corpus, uneven indexing of Ukrainian publications in international databases, weaker accessibility of works from the 1990s and early 2000s, as well as incomplete indicators for 2026. Further research should be directed at expanding the source base through archival materials, regional publications, catalogs, art periodicals, and non-digitized works, as well as combining qualitative analysis with bibliometric, sociological, and digital methods. The prospects for the development of this direction depend not only on the preservation and international representation of Ukrainian art, but also on the creation of such a research perspective that will allow us to see its history not as a set of reactions to the crisis, but as an independent, long-term, and internally diverse cultural process.

AUTHORSHIP AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Andrii Demianchuk: Conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, investigation, supervision, writing - original draft, writing - review and editing. Myroslava Tsyhanyk: Conceptualization, investigation, data curation, analysis, writing - original draft. Bohdan Tymkiv: Investigation, data curation, formal analysis, writing - original draft, writing - review and editing. Halyna Bilovus: Methodology, formal analysis, interpretation of results, writing - review and editing. Liubov Pugach: Investigation, interpretation of results, writing - original draft, writing - review and editing.

All authors contributed substantially to the conception and development of the study, critically reviewed the manuscript, approved the final version, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

In the course of preparing this manuscript, the authors employed ChatGPT to improve the linguistic quality and readability of the content. After utilizing this AI tool, the authors conducted comprehensive review and necessary revisions to ensure the accuracy, integrity, and scientific rigor of the manuscript. All authors bear full responsibility for the final content of the published work, including any errors or inconsistencies that may arise.

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