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Ornamental Compositions of Vasyl Krychevsky: Sources, Directions, Graphemes

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Abstract. The study aims to conduct a preliminary reflexive systematization of ornamental compositions by Vasyl Krychevsky (1872–1952) in the context of his entire artistic work, to introduce into the scientific circulation and visual thesaurus of the artistic culture at the 19th — the first quarter of the 21st century new information about the graphic assets of the artist as an important historical and cultural source. The historico-comparative method was used, which made it possible to determine common and different aesthetic approaches to the creation of ornaments in various types of art during the 20th century. Iconographic and stylistic analysis is applied for a detailed description of the means of aesthetic expressiveness. In the article, for the first time, a complete complex of the master's ornamental heritage is analyzed, with a selection of works that were transferred by his family to the Ukrainian museums at the beginning of the 21st century. Vasyl Krychevsky emancipated ornament, as the Impressionists freed light and color from subordination to the plot and nature, as the Symbolists turned the symbol into a self-worth category. Krychevsky's ornaments are so active and self-sufficient that sometimes it is difficult to imagine their practical use: expressiveness and compositional virtuosity are much greater than what is required of the decor. Krychevsky relied on the historical heritage, responding to the demands of the present, but tried not to betray himself in favor of the stylistic circumstances of the time. A full understanding and practical integration of his colossal work in ornamentation is yet to come[1].

Keywords: ornament, ornamentation, ornamentality, stylistic tendencies, Ukrainian graphics, Vasyl Krychevsky, museums, private collections, Ukrainian diaspora, Oleg Bodnar.

[1] When writing the article, the English translation of our text by Diana Sheludkevich was partly used from the album "Vasyl Krychevsky. Ornamental compositions. Kharkiv, 2023." We appreciate very much the permission of the publisher Oleksandr Savchuk.

It is regrettable that none of the Ukrainian researchers has shown interest in Vasyl Krychevsky as an exceptional ornamental artist and has not adequately explored his work thus far.

Eugenia Krychevska, 1950s

Relevance of the research topic. The commemoration of Vasyl Krychevsky's 150th anniversary became an occasion for a series of academic conferences, reevaluation, and reinterpretation of the jubilarian's legacy in the years 2022 and 2023 (fig. 1). One of the significant discoveries was the previously unknown in its entirety body of Krychevsky's work as an ornamental artist. This became possible due to the artist's descendants, who returned to Ukraine a substantial portion of his works that had been preserved abroad. We are talking about two hundred ornamental exercises on small sheets of paper, the size of a postcard or slightly larger, which have now been transferred to the museums of Kanev, Kharkiv, Kyiv, Lebedyn, Opishna, Poltava, Sumy, and were collected for the first time by the tireless Oleksandr Savchuk for a separate publication [6].

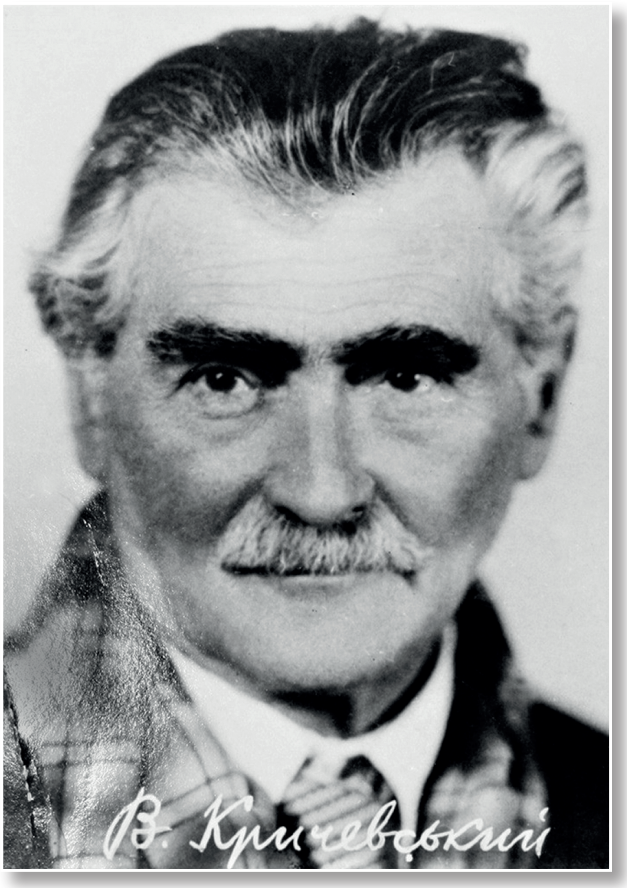

fig. 1. Vasyl Krychevsky, photo from the 1940s
https://vufku.org/names/vasyl-krychevskyi/

Review of research and publications. Almost all researchers of the work of Vasyl Krychevsky (1873–1952) have focused on the role of ornamentation and ornamentalism in his architecture, graphics, paintings, and above all, — his decorative art. From the beginning of the 20th century until today, there has emerged an almost countless number of publications dedicated to this peculiar, even enigmatic, artist and architect, whose work is still waiting to be understood.

The leading place in this realm belongs to the monographs by Vadym Pavlovsky [24] and Valentyna Ruban-Kravchenko [27], whose meticulously crafted texts seem to lead us into the sanctuary of Krychevsky's life, allowing us to make soft barefoot steps and observe: the patterns on the parquet, the ornamentation on the rug, the decoration of the walls, the adornment of the ceiling, and to gaze out of the windows in hopes of catching sight of the artist amidst his works and his extraordinary sketch visions, exceptional within the European graphic culture of the 20th century.

The decade has not yet passed, when the literature on the artist has been supplemented with an exemplary two-volume chrestomathy (2016, 2020) prepared by Kharkiv publisher Oleksandr Savchuk, demonstrating exceptional scholarly and design-compositional precision, achieving a comprehensive understanding available today [5]. This compendium contains all the texts of Krychevsky accessible to contemporary scholars, an outline of his entire artistic heritage, biographical materials, correspondence, articles, and memoirs about the artist. It is hard to disagree with the editor that "the two-volume *Vasyl Hryhorovych Krychevsky: A Chrestomathy* will serve as merely the beginning of more thorough and systematic research on the significant figure in Ukrainian culture during the first half of the 20th century" [28]. It seems to be not just a beginning — but a powerful start capable of providing an instant acceleration to anyone who approaches Ukrainian visual heritage with genuine interest in the geometro-syntactic quest for a complete artistic form. Indeed, the last thesis of O. Savchuk has already been confirmed by the

fig. 2. Cover of the book
Vasyl Krychevsky: Ornamental Compositions: Album,
edited by Oleksandr Savchuk. Kharkiv, 2023.
https://savchook.com/books/krychevskyi-ornamentni-kompozycii

fig. 3. Title pages of the book:
Vasyl Krychevsky: Ornamental Compositions: Album,
edited by Oleksandr Savchuk. Kharkiv, 2023.
https://savchook.com/books/krychevskyi-ornamentni-kompozycii

recently published book [6], dedicated to the ornament compositions of V. Krichevsky (fig. 2–3).

Most of the authors of both academic and popular publications about Vasyl Krychevsky briefly touch on his ornamental opus in their works, but usually use them as illustrations for the presentation, and not as a separate subject for research.

The purpose of our research is representation of the informational potential of Krychevsky's ornamental works as an important historical and cultural source of introduction into scientific circulation and a visual thesaurus of artistic culture of the end of the 19th — the first quarter of the 21st century of new information about the artist's graphic assets. To achieve this goal, several tasks must be performed:

1) identification of the ornamens and ornamental components in the general oeuvre of the artist;
2) preliminary reflexive systematization of Vasyl Krychevsky's ornamental compositions in the context of his entire artistic work — architectural, decorative, graphic and pictorial, as well as cinematographic;
3) delineation of the ideological context and circumstances of the ornament's interpretation at specific stages — in the imperial period; during the revolution; in the 1920s and 1930s, during World War II and emigration;
4) showing the role and importance of Krychevsky the ornamentalist as an artist and organizer of the artistic and pedagogical processes;
5) analysis of Krychevsky's ornaments in the light of the concepts of dynamic (spiral) symmetry and the geometric principle of phyllotaxis discovered in recent decades.

Results and Discussion. The two hundred ornament sketches, mentioned in the article's preface and recently transferred from private collections abroad to museums of Ukraine, were created by Krychevsky during the period from the 1920s to the early 1950s. Most works are dated to 1945 and 1951, when the author was in forced displacement and presumably had no commissions. The matter should be considered not so much in the fact that he had no commissions, but rather in the fact he could not refrain from sketching during his free time between work, meals, and sleep.

This time should not have been wasted for him, without a trace of creative output at least. Writers in such ways, — leisurely, one might say, — leave behind diaries, "notes on the margins"; while an artist preserves sketches, lines, and blots on paper. These "handy" ornaments of Krychevsky are like a looking glass reflecting the ceaseless cavitations of his creative consciousness, with an amalgam inverted and confronting the viewer: there, beneath the impenetrable surface, visual wonders are preserved, a Borgesian "garden of forking paths", that entices one to bring them together, mastering all directions at once. But perhaps we mistake our desires for reality? After all, Eugenia Krychevska, his wife, recalled that Krychevsky engaged in ornamentation sporadically: "During the most difficult, restless

times of war or revolution, he was unable to fully dedicate himself to painting or architecture. However, when he occasionally picked up a pencil or scrap of paper, he would start developing patterns" [5, vol. 2, p. 345].

He also confessed to Euhenia Krychevska that while drawing patterns, he felt as if he was solving an algebraic equation: "It makes me forget about (the harsh) reality" — this took place in the Sudeten Mountains in the spring of 1945, "when German troops were in disarray, not knowing where to hide, and cannons were roaring in the distance, and American planes were bombing Dresden, Pilsen, Prague, and even our tiny village of Těchlovice" [5, vol. 2, p. 345]. Fortunately, the sketches remained along with the solved algebraic equations, which we will discuss shortly.

According to biographical data, Krychevsky began sketching patterns and collecting ornamented works at a very young age, in 1891. Later on, numerous materials from those studies found their way into academic and popular publications. In fact, at that time, he would sketch and often copy everything that caught his attention. This is a common practice for a novice artist: to try and recreate by hand what they find visually appealing. Hapto-optical assimilation of the world — perhaps the paramount opportunity for honing and enriching individual taste.

A similar stage was experienced somewhat later by another famous ornamentalist, George Narbut (1886–1920). Both of them adopted this juvenile imitation as a school for the future profession. It should seem the very act of such domestic, manual schooling influenced their choice. Krychevsky will recollect later step by step with vivid personal coloring, in particular, how exactly he contributed to the gradual process of adaptation of the Ukrainian ornamentation by Narbut after moving from St. Petersburg to Kyiv [16].

Thus, in 1902, at the age of thirty, Krychevsky received a commission from the organizers of the 12th Archaeological Congress in Kharkiv to design a model of a Ukrainian peasant house from the region of Slobozhanshchyna for an ethnographic exhibition to be displayed at the University Library. The following year, he designed the famous building of the Poltava Local Administration, where ornamentation was given a leading role in shaping the architectural form. And it continued, even more so, as it turned out that throughout his whole life Krychevsky, a skillful visual artist, worked on ornamentation in all its manifestations: architectural, artistic, and industrial, in book art, theater, and film production. Even in the very credits of the first Ukrainian color film, Sorochynskyi Fair (director Mykola Ekk, 1938), a pattern emerges, as though of 'folk' style, but executed so professionally by the hand of Krychevsky, the artistic director of the film, that one forgets about its artificiality and recognizes it as truly high artistry.

In his 1938 autobiography, Krychevsky wrote: "I started working in the industrial sector of art in 1892, creating ornaments for mettlach tiles at the Bergengheim Factory in Kharkiv, later for the sculptural and molding studio of Jacobs in Kharkiv, for a carpet factory in Warsaw (upon the request of the artist I. Alchevsky), for a ceramics factory in Moscow, and so on.

From 1913 to 1916, I supervised the artistic department of the carpet-weaving workshop of V. N. Khanenko in the village of Olenivka, Kyiv province. Carpets and decorative cloth prints based on my designs received a Gold Award in Leningrad [now St. Petersburg] at the All-Russian Handicraft Exhibition in 1913 (the tapestry panel *Illia Muromets* acquired by the Museum of the "Salt Town" in Leningrad) and the highest award at the Kyiv Handicraft Exhibition in 1913, and they were sold out at the handicraft exhibitions in Paris and Berlin in 1914" [5, vol. 1, p. 280].

In other words, Krychevsky perceived ornamental creativity as an auxiliary layer of existence in the living space of industrial goods and domestically useful household tools, as an epidermis of a handicraft product that, thanks to ornamentation, became self-contained, stirred up interest, and drew attention. Today, he would be referred to as a "designer." Back then, such a word did not exist in our language, and Krychevsky's activities were perceived as a kind of scenography for the everyday life of highly skilled craftsmanship. On the background of these "decorations" unfolded the lives of consumers, who purchased the abstraction of visual pleasure at a tangible expense.

In this socially beneficial context, we should note the ambiguous attitude that artists of that time adopted towards ornamentation. In the second half of the 19th century, it had largely been devalued due to its widespread use in architecture and all other forms of decoration. Ornament existed separately from the object on which it seemingly parasitized, like plaster-and-concrete atlantes and caryatids on eclectic facades. In the spirit of the eclectic movement of that time, artistic

albums were produced with patterns of any style for reproduction in any material, using any technique — and even in a factory manner. Thus, ornamental art was being transformed into impersonal craftsmanship imperiously and in a politically economic sense stubbornly.

The first to sense this danger were the workshops in England, which represented the pinnacle of craftsmanship worldwide at that time. Krychevsky studied the theoretical texts of John Ruskin, the ideologist of the Arts & Crafts Movement, and William Morris, the leader of this movement. Their goal was to cultivate "high taste" among contemporaries by rejecting industrial production of "popular consumption" goods — and instead revitalizing the methods of creating a medieval material environment that still survived in the rural backwaters.

Of course, these socially utopian artistic abstractions clashed with the impossibility of achieving production profit, but who is concerned with the gloomy truth of life in the romantic age? Stefan Taranushenko recalled how the young Krychevsky adored everything English, even quit his job at the Kharkiv City Administration when he was denied permission to travel to St. Petersburg for an exhibition of British art. His taste did not require refined education; it was simply innate [5, vol. 1, p. 114–126].

In other European countries of the modern era (also referred to as "Art Nouveau," "stile Liberty," "Modern Style," "Secession," "Jugendstil"), ornamentation was also reinterpreted by abandoning the dominance of classicism and rejuvenating the repertoire of motifs and style through the means of addressing exotic or native archaism and visual folklore. Perhaps Krychevsky was familiar with the works in this direction of Ivan Bilibin, the teacher of Narbut, Vienna architect Otto Wagner, Catalan architect Antonio Gaudi i Cornet, Flemish architect Henry Van de Velde (who even designed his wife Maria Sete's dress in the Secession style to integrate it into the interior furniture of their home in Uccle), and many other artists who, in creating something new, did not resort to quoting the past but were taking it as a basis, striving to create a "total work of art," Gesamtkunstwerk: everything around, if not nature, must inevitably be art.

Unlike all of them, for nurturing the new Ukrainian ornamentation Krychevsky set his primary focus not on showcasing artistic individuality but rather on delving into the realm of "folk" heritage, which was still largely unexplored, unpopularized, and not yet activated "for inspiration." The attitude towards traditional decoration was often indulgent, if not skeptical. The famous phrase attributed to Illia Repin, "Let us leave embroidery of patterns to delicately nurtured damsels," was repeatedly expressed. Though embroidery of "Epitaphios" for Kyiv St. Volodymyr's Cathedral by Elena (Liolia) Prakhova in the technique of obverse needlework (so called "drawing with a needle") was more of an exhausting service than ladies' fancywork, so it represented a high artistic work and exemplified creative conscientiousness.

Even more scathing towards ornamentation in contemporary art was the Viennese architect Adolf Loos. In his programmatic article "Ornament and Crime" (1908), first published in French in 1912 [34], he argued why ornaments were, for him, relics of primitive culture and equivalent to tattoos on the body of a savage. Loos saw progress in liberating modern utilitarian objects from ornamentation and embodied this principle in his own work. In particular, his most famous building, located opposite the Hofburg (the Emperor's palace in the center of Vienna), was constructed without any decoration. Perhaps that is why it is now used as the venue for presenting Austrian design awards: the purity of form always visually prevails and does not distract attention during ceremonial events.

Certainly, alongside Loos's radical purism, there were alternative concepts, and professional debates were often triggered by different interpretations of individual polysemantic terms and concepts. For instance, Ukrainian words derived from the Latin root "décor" have various meanings, including "облагороджувати" (to refine), "облаштовувати" (to furnish), "обставляти" (to adorn), "оздоблювати" (to decorate), "оформлювати" (to arrange), "нагороджувати" (to reward), even "говіти" (to fast). This is what determines the aphorism of the Polish artist Stanisław Wyspiański, which is opposite in meaning to Repin's: "Sztuka dekoracyjna? Takiego pojęcia nie ma. Każda dobra sztuka jest ze swej natury dekoracyjna." — "Decorative art? Such a concept does not exist. All good art is inherently decorative."

Here we present contradictory opinions of Krychevsky's several contemporaries to demonstrate the difficulties he faced in carving his own path — in the realm where ornament, ornamental and ornamentality

fig. 4. Oleksii Beketov's house in Kharkiv, 1898.
The facade was designed by V. Krychevsky
https://www.pslava.info/XarkivM_ZhonMyronosVul_OsobnjakANBeketova10,145882.html

held a central place in architecture, graphics, decorative arts, painting, pedagogy, and even art criticism. Except perhaps he did not fully explore "ornamental prose," typical for belletristic literature of the Fin de siècle.

From his autobiography of 1938 and the "Chronology of Vasyl Hryhorovych Krychevsky" [«Хронологія Василя Григоровича Кричевського»], compiled by his stepson Vadym Pavlovsky (1907–1986), we learn that from the age of 15 the future master was already sketching designs for private houses in the outskirts of Kharkiv ("tiny bourgeois houses (around 300 projects) for the Kharkiv municipal authorities") [5, vol. 1, p. 279].

Starting from 1889, he also worked on facades under the guidance of architects Serge and Iliodor Zahoskin, Carl Spiegel, and, from 1894, the Kharkiv academic architect Oleksii Beketov. Architectural sketches are closely intertwined with ornamentation: if you were to place the measurements of these structures on a table and examine them, you would feel as if you were looking at a carpet — the composition and arrangement create the pattern of the elements in a certain rhythmic order. But it is not only that. Being a generic feature of ornament, rhythm, especially geometrical rhythm, accompanies any factor of our life: the rising of the sun, the blinking of an eye, the changing of seasons, the cyclic nature of daily events, etc. In artistic creation, it acquires the author's distinctive features that are difficult to confuse with others. Just like the unique rhizome of lines on fingers and palms, the artist's sense of rhythm, expressed "in material," attests to their uniqueness. Krychevsky's pattern cannot be mistaken for someone else's.

In 1895, alongside his work with Beketov, where Krychevsky was entrusted with "facade" projects at the bureau (such as the house in the Moorish style for Dmytro Alchevsky and the carpet woven for it in Warsaw; houses in the "Neo-Greek" style for Professor Mykola Zalesky and the city house of Beketov himself (fig. 4); in Renaissance style; the District Court in Classicism style; the Medical Society building in 'Neoclassical' style; the tenement house of Rubinstein in "Neo-Rococo" style; the Trade Bank in the manner of "Viennese Secession," and other buildings)[1], the master began to create sculptural decorations for interiors in various styles, as well as majolica and mettlach tile on commission for Kharkiv enterprises.

The ten-year apprenticeship in Beketov's workshop proved to be highly productive. Who among present-day students could see their "drawing sheets" recreated in a life-size form? Certainly, such ornament exercises and their physical realization inspired and instilled confidence, albeit quietly and secretly. If a talented person is also intelligent (which is rare), they will not boast of their abilities but will assertively navigate them through life's storms. Attempting to impede them is dangerous. Krychevsky moved through the history of Ukrainian art like a sturdy icebreaker.

In the autumn of 1897, at an art exhibition in Kharkiv, Vasyl Krychevsky exhibits Crimean etudes from Beketov's summerhouse in Alushta, which can be considered the beginning of his artistic career. The following

[1] It is impossible to agree with the opinion of Volodymyr Yasiievych (1991), who strongly contradicted Vadym Pavlovsky, as the latter "attributed" to Krychevsky the authorship of projects which he executed as Beketov's assistant. In his anniversary article of 1938, H. Radionov wrote that Beketov held Krychevsky's abilities in such high regard that he entrusted him with the development of facade decorations for nearly twenty buildings, from the projects which his architectural bureau was working on. Moreover, Beketov was still alive at that time († 1941), and if it were a falsehood, both Radionov and Krychevsky would not have escaped a scandal regarding the "audacious appropriation of authorship rights." Therefore, a comparative study of the architectural forms of all Kharkiv works by Beketov-Krychevsky is in line, which will allow, based on the semantic comparison of these forms, to find common compositional features ("style") in the design methods of Beketov, the "planner," and Krychevsky, the "facade artist." Additionally, if we recall that in Krychevsky's Kyiv works, at least in the Serhii Hrushevsky Municipal School at Kurenivka and the tenement house of Mykhailo Hrushevsky at Pankivska Street (destroyed by the Bolsheviks in February 1918), the planning was carried out by his co-author, architect Eduard Bradtman (1856–1926), then the claim of Krychevsky's "greater inclination" toward the development of facade decoration rather than planning will not be subject to significant doubts. See: [24, c. 84].

year, he quit his job at the railway because the chief of the technical department, engineer Bondarevsky, kept on refusing to grant him a leave to visit exhibitions of English, Russian, and Finnish painters in St. Petersburg. Despite all the impediments, Krychevsky managed to make it to the "Northern Palmyra," getting acquainted with new exhibitions and showcasing his own works at the Academy of Fine Arts. Professors recognized the high level of his works, advising him against entering the Academy and encouraging him to continue to work and improve independently.

From the autumn of 1898, Krychevsky attended lectures at Kharkiv University for at least three years, studying art history under Professor Yehor Riedin, Ukrainian history and archaeology under Professor Dmytro Bahalii, and ethnography under Professor Mykola Sumtsov. The cooperation with the University lasted for several more years, and during that time the level of teaching there was significantly different from the present, as well as the level of curiosity to obtain knowledge. Without an official higher education certificate[1], Krychevsky acquired the highest education available in Kharkiv at the time. In the family of Serge Zahoskin, whom Krychevsky acknowledged as his teacher and second father, he read Kant and Schopenhauer, learned about Heinrich Schliemann's Troy excavations, discovered the ideas of John Ruskin and William Morris, and began to communicate with Hryhory Pavlutsky, Dmytro Yavornytsky, and Mykola Biliashivsky [31]. Undoubtedly, such a high-level home education was more important than formal one.

So, his "golden hour" in 1903, when Krychevsky's project was preferred over formidable rivals (including Zholtovsky) and served as the foundation for the famous and controversial building of the Poltava Local Administration, the young thirty-year-old architect approached with fifteen years of experience in architecture and construction, several won competitions, and a series of eye-pleasing architectural objects in various styles — from Gothic to Art Nouveau — adorning the central streets of the big Ukrainian city (fig. 5).

Contemporaries agreed that it was exactly the ornament design to be the main attraction of the new building in Poltava, but discussions about it continued throughout the years of construction and several decades thereafter. In particular, they pointed out the

fig. 5. The Poltava Zemstvo building, 1903–1908.
https://vufku.org/names/vasyl-krychevskyi/

inconsistency between the interior and exterior decorations, the transfer of ornamentation from woodcarving and embroidery into stone or ceramics, and the mechanical replication of wooden structures and forms in stone. They should have first tried it themselves to surmount in a unified decorative manner such a massive range of tasks, the solution of which was undertaken by one person, resisting the incompetent contractors and subcontractors (such as Eugeni Saranchov), — and then criticize.

But those were the living, concerned voices of contemporaries that Krychevsky heard and emotionally responded to, refining his professional creed and geometric skill of the architectural line.

For example, in his 1912 article the art critic Dmytro Antonovych writes:

"In architecture itself, Krychevsky primarily works as a painter. Some significant weight in his buildings lies not in the lines and proportions, not in the division of masses, but in ornamentation, and specifically in coloristic ornamentation.

Sometimes, he even shows a certain indifference towards architectural unity, being attracted only to certain details of ornamentation <…> Krychevsky, in neglecting completeness and in his love for details, reaches a true wildness, admissible only to an extraordinary, unique talent" [1].

In that same year of 1912, the extraordinary and unique talent of Krychevsky as a decorator is emphasized by Lviv painter Ivan Trush: "No one has been able

[1] Frank Lloyd Wright, Adolf Loos, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier also did not have such education in the 20th century.

to transform the primitive, modest folk ornament into a more intricate architectonic entity as he did, enriching it while retaining its original character; few can gather folk motifs from various objects and harmoniously fuse them into a complete whole, full of character and refined taste, like Krychevsky did. — The talent of the artist, like novelty of the Ukrainian style itself, has its effect, and architectonic beauty, from its very foundation, gains more and more admirers, preparing the rising popularity of the emerging style, and perhaps even a bright future. Some architects in Kyiv began to emulate Krychevsky's approach to construction and ornamental elements, but their attempts fell short and were far from successful. This gives rise to his school in Kyiv, for which, ultimately, the artist cannot be lauded" [30].

In 1913, the poet Mykola Voronyi praises the "gentle, soft, pleasing to the eye" brushwork of Krychevsky, but criticizes the artistic incompleteness and evident contouring of the drawing:

"However, his 'Interieur', which reveals an inner corner of a nobleman's house, simply enchants the eye with its richness of colors, the beauty of Ukrainian ornamentation, and the splendor of national decorations. As a true arbiter elegantiarum [arbiter of elegance] of our folk art, Krychevsky brilliantly displays taste and skill here" [7].

In 1914 the already familiar Dmytro Antonovych revisited the painful issue of establishing a school of Krychevsky's followers. He writes about "two movements, one from the Krakow Academy and the other from the St. Petersburg Academy," which have been transformed into Ukrainian artistry and characterize contemporary Ukrainian artistic painting, but do not exhaust it.

"Between these two movements, and independently of them, another one emerges that stems not from the academy or artistic centers but from the old Ukrainian industrial art. The initiator of this movement is undoubtedly Vasyl Krychevsky, who basically still represents it himself. Not that he lacks followers; he has many. However, this movement is less apparent in painting than, for example, in architecture or industrial art. Moreover, the creativity of Krychevsky's followers is overshadowed by the power of the leader's talent and originality, as seen in the works of [Kostiantyn] Moshchenko, which are cheap imitations of Krychevsky with no single drop of originality <…> At the Poltava exhibition, this third current of Ukrainian contemporary painting is represented weakly, partly because Krychevsky himself now hesitates before a certain synthesis that is meant to complete his work. In fact, Krychevsky the painter was never entirely integrated with Krychevsky the ornamentist-decorator till this day. He seemed to oscillate between original, brilliantly talented decoration and a more conventional, yet still talented landscape. At present Krychevsky is trying to amalgamate the two <…> the very process of his work reveals that Krychevsky's robust and fresh talent still has space for new achievements. A group of young artists is timidly following in Krychevsky's footsteps but striving to remain closer to purely decorative tasks in the field of graphics" [2].

The Poltava Local Administration is the same strong and reliable foundation for geometric search for visual harmony in a grand architectural form, based on ethnic tradition, the revelation of artistic mystery which Krychevsky will strive for throughout his life.

The leading Kharkiv architect of the 1930s, Oleksandr Molokin considers the building of the Poltava Provincial Administration as one of the most outstanding works of that period, which can be attributed to the Ukrainian "Art Nouveau," as a result of the sincere creative explorations of a prominent artist: "The details of the museum are crafted with love and attention. The material used is very valuable and interesting. The building is faced with special bricks, covered with glazed tiles; artificial stone and majolica are used in the details.

However, <…> many decorative forms characteristic of 'Art Nouveau' are falsely expressed in another building material. For example, the purely wooden forms of brackets supporting the roof slope are made of stone. The same essentially wooden form is present in the 'hexagonal' portal of the main entrance with the angles slanted at the top" [23].

Contemporaries pointed out in a critical manner that even the interior was adorned with an excessively rich ornamentation. Although this ornamentation was executed and arranged by renowned artists Mykola Samokysh and Serhii Vasylkivsky, it mostly reproduces motifs from Ukrainian embroidery in the wall paintings. Such a transfer of artistic motifs from one medium to another was characteristic of the era. It draws inspiration from these motifs to become original, reflecting

(like few other styles in the history of art) exactly the ethnic component of various European states in their visual distinctiveness: Lviv or Krakow Secession differs from Viennese Secession almost as much as German Jugendstil differs from Italian Liberty.

Truth be told, the author himself was aware of these imperfections and overcame them in his subsequent works of the 1920s and 1930s. This was facilitated not only by design practice but also by the artist's theoretical understanding of ornamental problems during his teaching at various educational institutions.

In his developed program (1922) for the Industrial Workshop at the Kyiv Institute of Plastic Arts[1] first-year students were initially trained to develop their skills and enhance their visual acuity through simple compositions. Then came the "Impromptu tasks on uncomplicated compositions", exercises in placing simple ornamental spots on various themes: lettering design, posters, vignettes, and so on. Following this, the students were expected to acquaint themselves with folk ornamentation and engage in drawing from life [19].

In the second year of study, the students learned about the optical laws: balance in symmetry and asymmetry, movement and stillness in sketch, the interrelationship of lines and forms, rhythm in drawing and composition. All of this was simultaneously accompanied by practical tasks in various materials, including textile design, furniture arrangement with minimal decoration, and book design. In the case of book design, the entire ensemble was considered, including format, font, "playing with font sizes" for display face typing of titles, wrapper design, end-papers, vignettes, headpieces, and tail-pieces.

The third year dealt with the interrelationships of form, line, and color in different materials and techniques. The history of ornamentation was traced in connection with various forms of art and architectural objects of different functional purposes in the West and the East, alongside the concept of similarity but not identity between artistic and industrial creativity was developed. From the very first year, practical acquaintance with folk art in museums (sketches and material collection) was introduced.

This well-thought-out cycle of learning stages progressed from propaedeutics to more complex tasks with the inseparability of practical and theoretical aspects.

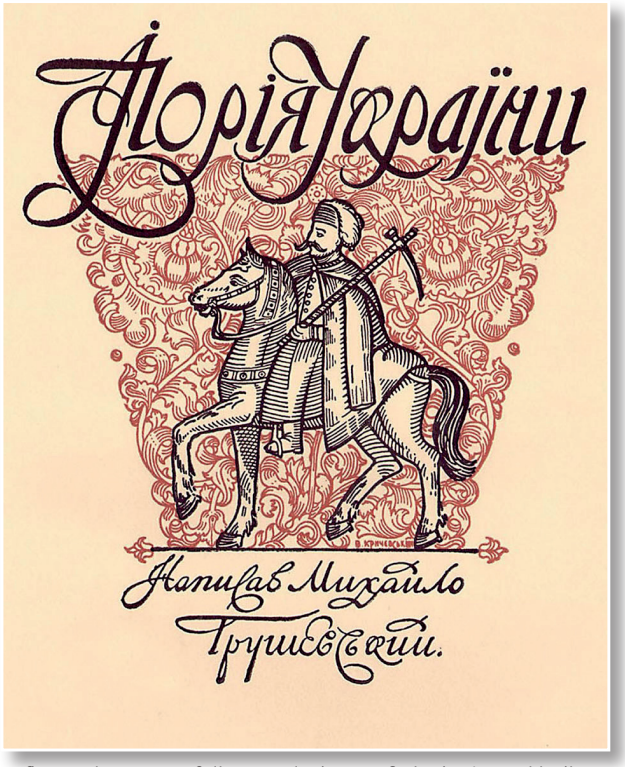

fig. 6. The cover of *Illustrated History of Ukraine* by Mykhailo Hrushevsky. Kyiv: Printing House S. V. Kulzhenko, 1915. https://www.mkdu.com.ua/kolektsiia/pershyj-poverkh/

Had anyone paved such a preceptorial way before Krychevsky?

It is worth noting that the educational materials revolved around ornamentation and patterns, as if they were the central projection of the visual onto the designed object. Such teaching methodology largely reflects the author's experience in adapting Ukrainian ornamentation for the design of contemporary printed products. Krychevsky actively engaged in polygraphy throughout his life (fig. 6).

The mentioned above *Chrestomathy* includes the first chronological example, the cover for the book *Drawings by P. D. Martynovych for "Eneida" by Kotliarevsky* (Poltava, 1903). Here we see a twining "flowerpot" composition similar to the motifs used in kilkovyi rushnyks of Left-Bank Ukraine [kilkovyi (from "kilok" — a peg) — the richly embroidered rushnyk, usually hung on a peg in the corner, decorating icons and paintings]; the composition is complemented by finer details in the pottery painting style.

The design of Mykhailo Hrushevsky's book *Our Politics* (Lviv, 1911) showcases Krychevsky's fascination

[1] At present: National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture.

with linearity, typical of the Carpathian metalwork at that time, in all its elements: cover, drop caps, head and tail-pieces. In the next cover for the publication *About Ukrainian Language and Ukrainian School* (Kyiv, 1912) by the same author, there is a captivating reinterpretation of ornamentation from woodcuts in Ukrainian Baroque old prints [22].

The polygraphic ornaments by Krychevsky during the First World War and the early 1920s were mostly stylized in the spirit of Baroque, classicism, and Art Nouveau, featuring traditional embroidered or woven patterns. Under the influence of constructivist aesthetics from the mid-1920s, the ornamentation of books increasingly gives way to the ornamentality of typographic compositions (mostly using monoweight typefaces) and rhythmic multicolored panels, as seen in the covers of the 1928 publications *The House-Museum of Taras Shevchenko in Kyiv and Ukrainian Cinematography*.

The cover title of *Ivan Mazepa* by Liudmyla Starytska-Cherniakhivska (Kyiv, 1929) is ingeniously composed in the outline of a truncated pyramid. In the same year, Krychevsky designed the poetry collection *Buildings* by Mykola Bazhan. The cover features "concrete" rhythms of structures in axonometric arrangement, overlapping monoweight letters, and within this brutalist stylistic context and visually heavy black-gray-green back-ground, it is not easy to notice the Gothic tracery pinnacle, which is inspired by the theme of the work being designed.

However, the end-paper clearly reveals the ornamental mastery of the author: the scrumptious outlines of motifs harmonize with each other in a recognizable manner, developed through decades of Vasyl Krychevsky's experiments. This includes the expressive interplay of bright elements and darker background, which maintains an active role in the creation of artistic form; the luminiferousness inherent in the graphics, which is created due to significant areas of unprinted white paper; and extremely complex variations of glide and translational symmetry.

The unrealized cover sketch for the *Anthology of Ukrainian Poetry* (1930, vol. 1, editor V. Atamaniuk) serves as an example of Krychevsky's elegant and virtuosic mastery in ornamentation of typographic composition, transforming it into a cohesive and resonant artistic form. Attention is drawn to various typefaces on the cover and spine of the forgery fiction *Master of the Ship* [Майстер корабля] by Yurii Yanovskyi (Kharkiv, 1928). It seems that such a way was considered acceptable at that time, in contrast to the following decades. In accordance with the stylistic tendencies of the epoch, there is a gradual increase in the proportion of laconically executed and naturalistic elements in the book design of the 1930s, while preserving the leading role of typography.

Landscapes and especially portraits in Krychevsky's book graphics appear somewhat dry in an architect's manner, with a touch of stage setting, sometimes significantly less expressive than his typographic ornamental works.

It cannot be said that "tradition" prevailed: the effort to rise above the material of tradition, to direct the variety and different temperatures of its sources into one unique channel necessary to Krychevsky distinguishes this master among the ornamentists of printing in the first quarter of the 20th century, somewhat apart from the general movements of both constructivism (V. Yermilov, M. Sokolov, V. Meller) and Neo-Baroque ("national romanticism") styles (H. Narbut, D. Mitrokhin) [26]. The ornamentation created by Krychevsky still appears contemporary, and modern covers of Ukrainian books are also made in such manner, while the works of other artists reflect the "visual taste" of their time and have become "museum-like" art pieces in it, the modernity of Krychevsky's ornamentation and, to some extent, its timelessness have a remarkable influence on the present-day consumer of his graphic products.

This realistic tendency is most pronounced in the design of approximately 400 head and tail-pieces for the book *Ukrainian Folk Song* (Kyiv, 1936), where Krychevsky already didn't stylize much but primarily repainted the ornamentation of individual classical samples of pottery, carpet weaving, embroidery, adapting them to the format of the page layout.

While in printing, the artist mostly reduced the size and scale of the image in relation to the preferred original, a fundamentally new solution is observed in the interior design of the Historical Section of the All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in 1927. Here, the ornament serves not just for decorating cornices or pilasters, as in pre-revolutionary Krychevsky's projects. Now, the ornament geometric compositions, reproduced using the technique of woodblock printing on rustic cloth, have become the main ideological focal

fig. 7. Meeting Hall of the Historical Section of the All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, 1927. Kyiv, Volodymyrska Str. 35; the interior was destroyed. Photo from 1929. Fine Arts Department in the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine

fig. 8. Office of the Head of the Historical Section of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, 1927; the interior was destroyed. Photo from 1929. Fine Arts Department in the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine

point, while the portraits of scientists and politicians, made by Fedir Krychevsky (the younger brother), hanging against such background are perceived as additional optional applications, despite their high pictorial quality (fig. 7–8).

Architect Kostiantyn Kunytsia, the author of an exceptionally diligent 1930 study, gave it the highest praise and recognized it as an object "worthy of attracting the attention of wide artistic and architectural circles, and even our entire society." It concerns Vasyl Krychevsky's discovery of an alternative between two types of decoration, the so called "bourgeois" and the "worker-peasant":

"The architects of old adorned the walls and ceilings of premises with heavy stucco and gilded passementerie and geisons in certain classical styles. Painters decorated the remaining space with landscapes. Then everything was filled with equally expensive, way too often uncomfortable furniture in extravagant styles.

The more ornamentation, fretwork, stucco, and gold, the better it characterized both the craftsmen and the owner. The transitional period of revolution in our country was marked by naive national romanticism. The desire to decorate public buildings in a national style led to painting the same walls and ceilings with motifs from carpets, embroidery, ornamentation borrowed from woodcarving or needlework. Without understanding the true spirit of the folk, who competently executed specific ornaments and designs in the appropriate material, combining their structure with the structure of the object, the craftsmen mindlessly copied these ornaments with oil paint on the walls. <…> Finally, the latest trends of proletarian architecture rightly advocate for the ascetic simplicity and practicality of interior decoration and furnishing. However, in this direction, that is fully in line with modern ideological requirements, significant mistakes may occur when implementing it in practice because the most difficult task is to create precisely the simplest yet artistically valuable things. There's a thin line between simplicity and Arakcheyev's barracks" [21].

It should be noted that in his own articles Krychevsky also demonstrated a similar understanding of "architecture of the new era" [9] and implemented it in his practical work on the design and decoration of the Shevchenko Memorial Museum on Taras's Hill in Kaniv from 1934 to 1938 (together with architect Petro Kostyrko). In this second after the Poltava Administration building major work, he approached the optimal application of traditional ornament forms in contemporary architecture [12]. If he had not been hindered, the Shevchenko Museum in Kaniv could have visually resonated as loudly as the Poltava Administration building, about which Serhii Vasylkivsky said, "the house is like thunder."

The peak of his ornamental creativity seems to have fallen exactly on the time of interior decoration for the Historical section of VUAN (Ukrainian Academy of Arts). It was incarnated exactly how Krychevsky had wanted to — an interior completely designed by him (excluding the interior of his own residence in Mykhailo Hrushevsky's tenement house on Pankivska

fig. 9. Cabinet of Primitive Culture of the Historical Section of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, 1927 (interior destroyed). Photo from 1929. Fine Arts Department in the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine

Street, where Krychevsky and his family had almost died during the Bolshevik shelling in February 1918). At least, surviving photographs and drawings give an idea of this work, especially its "sweeping" large-scale ornamentation, consistent with Latin American patterns. Is this not an echo of the widespread fascination in the 1920s with the new muralism that had just been born on that continent? Be that as it may, Krychevsky's creative paths are paved with home exercises, searching for fresh decorative combinations in the hope that one day he will be able to come across a similar large-scale commission (fig. 9).

So, what was the main method of Krychevsky's work on creating ornament compositions? Without the opportunity to delve into even the typical techniques (which can be done by future researchers), it can be asserted that the main geometric technique employed by the author is known as dynamic symmetry. This technique has been known since ancient times as a means of creating not only linear patterns but also as the "grammatical basis" of architectural proportions (according to Jay Hambidge) [33] (fig. 10–11).

However, Krychevsky developed it to such a degree of refinement and "engineering," that he demonstrated it graphically: the smallest fragment of interdependent elements can be extended to any plane of any size, even, one might think, in any scale, without losing visual persuasiveness, the characteristic features of the author's stylistics, and the internal emotional qualities inherent in the rich morphological lexicon of Ukrainian ornament [29].

The main instrument of achieving dynamic symmetry is the geometric *principle of phyllotaxis*, a botanical phenomenon that has become, in recent decades, through the research of Lviv professor Oleh Bodnar (1947–2023), a systematic principle for creating geo-

fig. 10. Ornamental composition, 1926. Kharkiv Art Museum

metric forms in the practice of architectural composition [25; 32].

But, as Bodnar demonstrates, with minimal initial information (a basic element), the mutual arrangement of various primordia, emerging on the cones of shoots, is characterized by spiral symmetry, precisely what we observe when examining Krychevsky's pattern. Analyzing the structural and numerical properties of the phyllotaxis grid (examples include the 'architectonics' of a cedar cone, cactus, or palm stem), one can understand the general, technically uncomplicated movement of elements translated from 3D dimensions to a 2D plane. This helps answer the question of how symmetry changes occur. Not to burden the humanities reader with the intricacies of the analytical geometry lexicon, it should be noted that a series of grids (equivalent in metric properties) illustrating the sequence of symmetry changes in phyllotaxis form an infinite system of parallelograms (and their transformations), equal in area.

"Preservation of area is the first notable property of the dynamic transformation of a parallelogram. The second property lies in the preservation of parallelism of lines: parallelogram remains a parallelogram at any stage of transformation. Hence, the key insight of the research: the preservation of area and parallelism are properties of hyperbolic rotation" [4].

Bodnar visually demonstrated the exact manner, in which hyperbolic rotation is inherent in the symmetry transformation of ornamentation which exhibits an infinite degree of variation. Thanks to this model (and its transformations corresponding to certain pattern cases) one can develop an understanding — retrospectively — of the method employed by Krychevsky while working on those "algebraic tasks" he admitted to his wife when creating the ornament [4, pp. 241–243].

fig. 11. Publisher Oleksandr Savchuk and Librarian Larissa Obernikhina during the selection of ornamental compositions by Vasyl Krychevsky for reproduction in the Kharkiv Art Museum. 2022

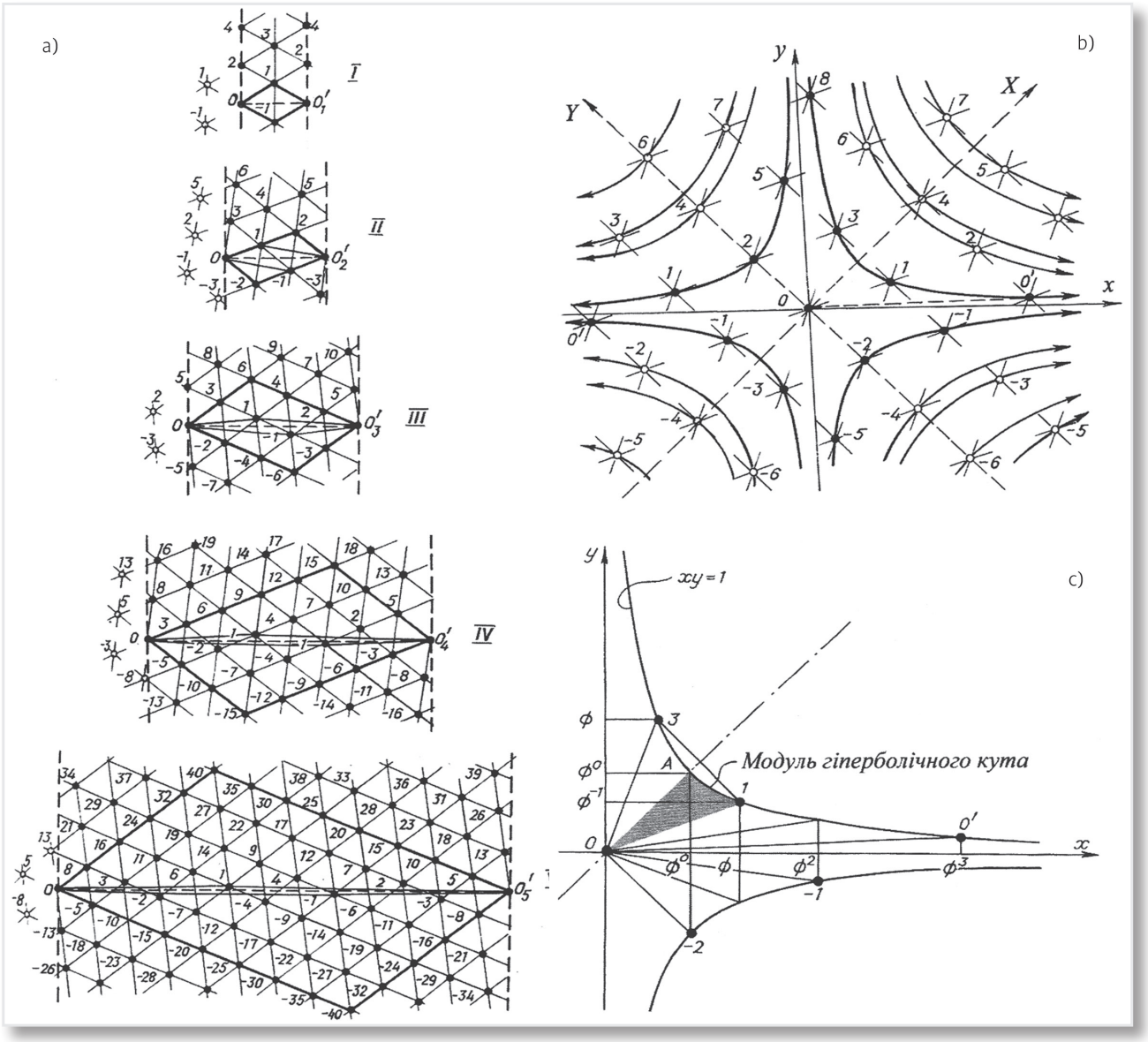

fig. 12. a) A series of sweeps illustrating the successive stages of a symmetrical transformation of cylindrical lattices (in all schemes, the parallelogram is 010'1'). Oleg Bodnar
b) Grid transformation scheme by hyperbolic rotation. Oleg Bodnar
c) Determination of the modulus of the hyperbolic angle. Oleg Bodnar

The discovery made by Oleh Bodnar, a corresponding member of the National Academy of Arts of Ukraine, first published in 1989 [3], allows us to assert that the phenomenon of phyllotaxis embodies geometrical laws of non-Euclidean (more precisely, pseudo-Euclidean) geometry known as Minkowski geometry. On the one hand, the geometry of phyllotaxis and its trigonometric apparatus reflect the specific nature of mathematics in living organisms, where the "golden ratio" plays a fundamental role. On the other hand, this understanding helps us comprehend the intricate patterns created by the greatest ornamentists of the 20th century (fig. 12).

If we meticulously examine the ornament composition techniques not only of Krychevsky but also of two of the most prominent representatives in this field, his younger comrades in-art, predominantly the Dutch artist Maurits Cornelis Escher (1898–1972) and to a lesser extent the French Artist Victor Vasarely (1906–1997), using Bodnar's toolkit, we can establish a typology of applying the dynamic symmetry principle in the patterned realm belonging to a specific ornamental artist. Regarding Krychevsky's ornamentation, we can discuss the unity of general laws governing natural forms and created patterns (like arti-

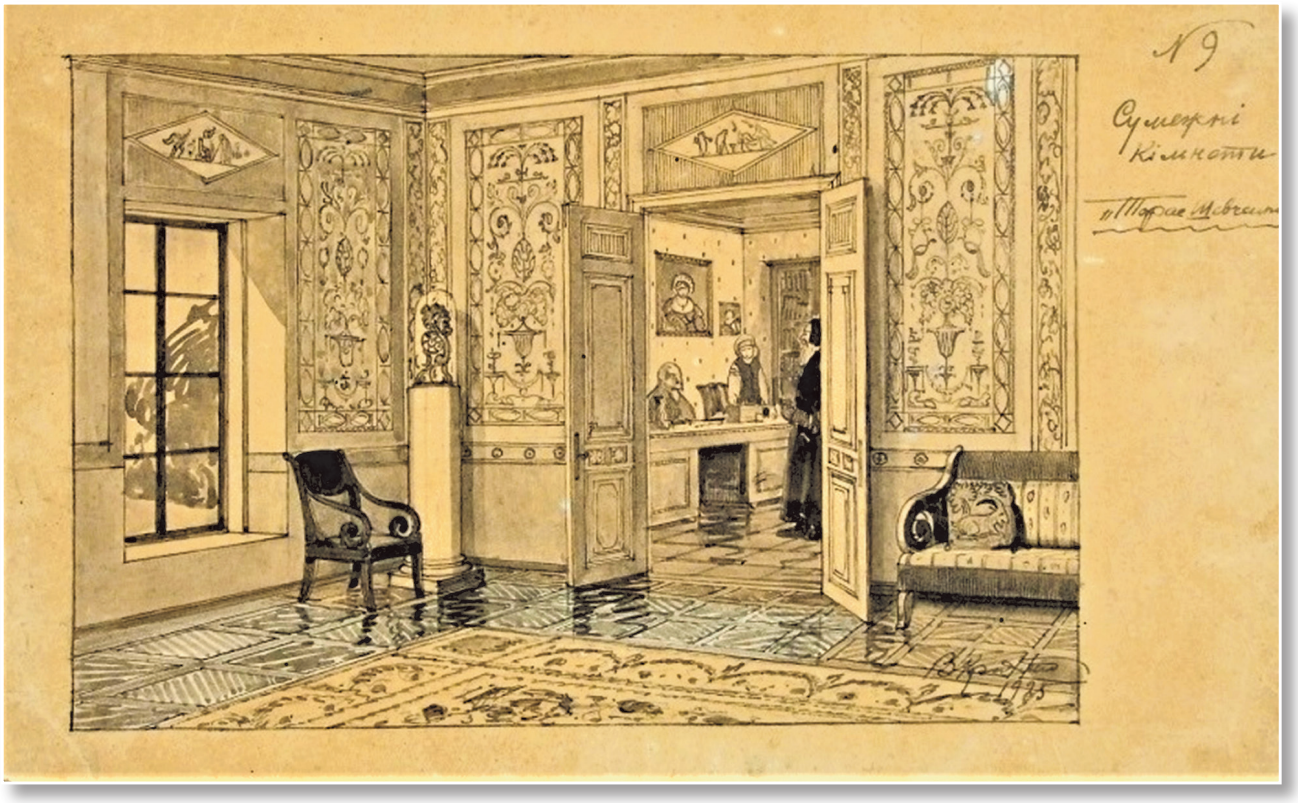

fig. 13. Ornamental compositions, storyboard for the film *Taras Shevchenko*, 1925.
https://vufku.org/names/vasyl-krychevskyi/

ficial "natural" forms as well), where the naturalness itself — this new artistic quality — reflects the visual achievements of the Ukrainian ethnos over a significant historical period. In the artistic works and persona of Krychevsky himself, these achievements found their spokesperson and advocate.

During the 1910s, Krychevsky actively participated as a member of the judging committee for the competition for the monument to Taras Shevchenko in Kyiv and published a series of polemical articles, providing arguments against the deficiencies of commonplace projects that garnered support from the majority of powerful individuals [11; 14; 15; 17]. At the same time, he provided reviews for academic works [10] and pointedly ridiculed illustrated publications that clumsily exploited the "Little Russian" stylistics, essentially debasing it [13].

By substantiating the distinction between the concepts of "Ukrainian style" and "Ukrainian Baroque," Krychevsky defends the existence of the "Ukrainian Empire style" as well. He did not hesitate to criticize renowned authorities such as George Lukomsky, though somewhat unfairly accusing him in the heat of the polemical fervor of 'pen dexterity' coupled with superficiality [20].

In-depth knowledge and practical experience in the use of various styles of ornamentation in architecture, decorative arts, and printing led to Krychevsky's successful work in the cinematography during the 1920s [18] (fig. 13). There is a noticeable departure from ornamentocentrism under the subtle influence of dominant constructivist aesthetics of the 1920s, followed by its reintroduction in a reduced form, under the conditions of official "folkness" and classicizing tendencies of the mid-1930s to the 1940s [8]. Krychevsky wrote about how circumstances forced him to refrain from depicting crosses and svargas in the Soviet era works, as they were then considered as veiled symbols of hostile ideology. He had to avoid resorting to the archaic pysanka [the painted Easter egg] in favor of more "modern" murals.

Conclusion. Vasyl Krychevsky's wife Eugenia Krychevska aptly referred to his ornament exercises as "fugues" recalling Bach. Regarding these, it is difficult to trace explicit dynamics of changes in motif repertoire, rhythm, and meter of the compositions, except for the larger-scale sketches of the 1920s and 1930s. These sketches avoided the outlines of crosses and svargas in the works from the Soviet era, and the use of lined paper with squares, rectangles, and diagonals began in 1945.

fig. 14. Textile ornament, 1933. Vasyl Krychevsky Poltava Museum of Local Lore

fig. 16. Ornamental composition, 1933. N. Onatsky Sumy Regional Art Museum

fig. 15. Ornamental composition, 1951. Private collection

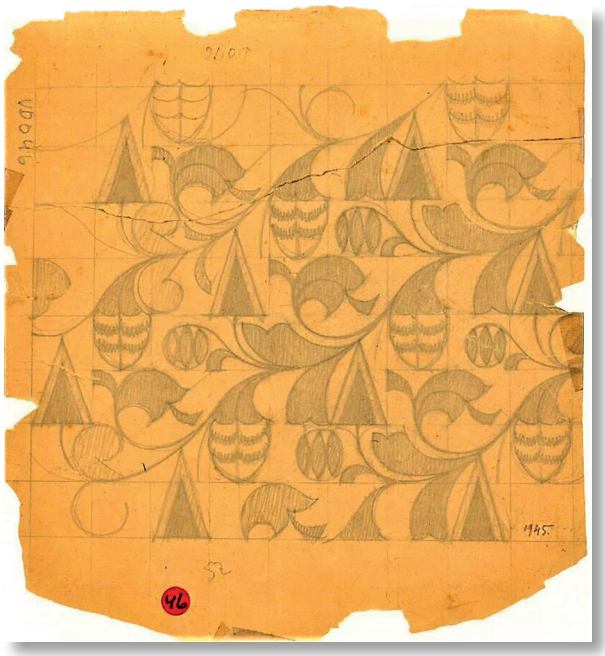

fig. 17. Sketch of an ornament, 1945. National Museum-Reserve of Ukrainian Pottery in Opishna

Most sketches are built on the contrast between sharp and rounded forms, with geometric shapes arranged according to different types of dynamic symmetry or solely with curvilinear outlines. The elements of patterns are often connected by wavy lines. Frequently, there are sketches of geometricized floral motifs reminiscent of carpet weaving. Sometimes, Krychevsky places two different compositions on a single sheet, as if in a rush to capture the continually emerging ideas. In the 1950s works, colored pencils are increasingly used, resulting in boundless variability (fig. 14–17).

However, it is impossible not to notice that the patterns of the 1920s–1930s, created in Ukraine, are more geometrically serene, balanced, and meticulously crafted. In contrast, the patterns of the 1940s–1950s, created abroad but with a memory of Ukraine, are more nervous and expressive, characterized by the pervasive presence of spring-like parabolas, hyperbolas, exponentials, lines of unrestful, sinusoidal, audacious nature.

Krychevsky emancipated ornament, just as the Impressionists liberated light and color from the subordination to subject and nature, and symbolists transformed the symbol into an independent category, as did the expressionists with expressiveness. But were they always guided by good taste rather than group tendencies or personal bias?

The ornaments in Krychevsky's sketches are so active and self-sufficient that it is sometimes difficult to imagine their practical application in the design of the environment, textiles, printing products, and so on. These are works "without purpose," created for their own sake. Their expressiveness and compositional virtuosity far exceed what is typically required of a contemporary decor.

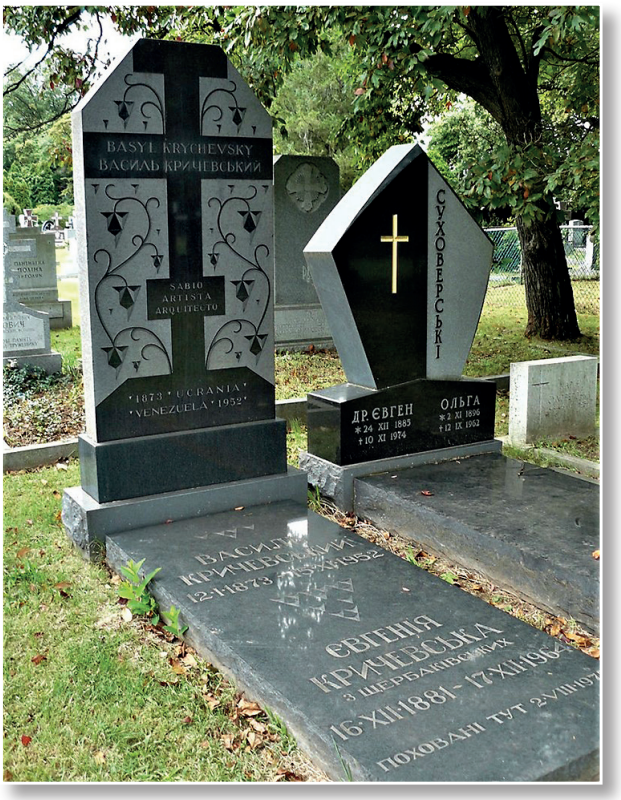

fig. 18. The grave of Vasyl and Eugenia Krichevsky at the cemetery of St. Andrew in South Bound Brook (USA). https://localhistory.org.ua/texts/chitanka/ostrivki-pamiati-spogadi-pro-vasilia-krichevskogo/

Therefore, we maintain the opinion that Vasyl Krychevsky, on the one hand, relied on historical heritage, responding to the demands of the present, and on the other hand, sought not to betray himself for the sake of stylistic preferences of the time. Therefore, the full comprehension and practical assimilation of his extensive artistic legacy in ornamentation are yet to be achieved (fig. 18).

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Орнаментні композиції Василя Кричевського: джерела, напрями, графеми

Анотація. Мета роботи. Попередня рефлексивна систематизація орнаментних композицій Василя Кричевського (1872–1952) в контексті всієї його мистецької творчості; впровадження в науковий обіг і візуальний тезаурус художньої культури кінця XIX — першої чверті XXI століття нової інформації про графічні надбання майстра як важливого історико-культурного джерела. Методологія. Використано передусім історико-порівняльний метод, що дозволив визначити спільне й відмінне в естетичних підходах до створення орнаментів у різних видах мистецтва протягом XX століття. Іконографічний і стилістичний аналіз застосовано для уточненої характеристики засобів естетичної виразності творів майстра. Наукова новизна. У статті вперше проаналізовано цілісний комплекс орнаментної спадщини майстра з акцентом на творах, які передала його родина на початку XXI століття до музеїв України. Висновки. Кричевський емансипував орнамент, як імпресіоністи вивільнювали світло й колір із підпорядкованості сюжету та натурі, як символісти перетворювали символ на самоцінну категорію. Орнаменти Кричевського настільки активні й самодостатні, що іноді важко уявити собі їхнє практичне застосування: виразність і композиційна віртуозність значно більші, ніж це вимагається від декору. В. Кричевський відштовхувався від історичної спадщини, відповідаючи на запити сучасності, проте намагався не зраджувати себе на догоду стильовим преференціям доби. Повноцінне осмислення та практичне освоєння його велетенського доробку в орнаментиці ще попереду.

Ключові слова: орнамент, орнаментальність, орнаментація, стилістика, українська графіка; українська діаспора, музеї, приватні колекції, Василь Кричевський, Олег Боднар

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