

УДК 391 (477.87) «18/19»

Anastasiia **Simferovska**

PhD candidate, Lviv National  
Academy of Art (Lviv, Ukraine)  
PhD student, Northwestern University  
(Evanston, USA)

## The ethnic and the nationalist on Lviv portraits 1900-1939

© Simferovska A., 2018

<http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1313185>

**Анотація.** У цій статті досліджуються візуальні прояви етнічного та національного у львівських портретах (живопис, рисунок) першої половини ХХ століття. Увагу зосереджено на портретах авторства львівських художників українського, єврейського та польсько-вірменського походження, таких як Олекса Новаківський, Зигмунт Менкес та Антоні Стефанович. Стаття доводить наявність широкого кола етнічних та національних візуальних елементів, представлених через стилістику портретів, символи та атрибути.

**Ключові слова:** етнічний, національний, портрет, ідентичність, Львів, модернізм.

The ethnic and the nationalist themes were among the most popular ones in the turn-of-the-century East European art and literature. Polish, Jewish, and Ukrainian artists explored ethnic folklore and ethnic motifs using different genres, styles, and mediums. The representatives of Polish academism such as Jan Styka and Wojciech Kossak chose the monumental genre of panorama painting in order to depict the 1794 Kosciuszko rebellion, a key moment in Polish history of national resistance. A secession artists Kajetan Stefanowicz created the “Song of the Legionist” graphic series in the genre of the stylized book-prints [1, 7-13]. Lviv artists of different ethnic and religious background were passionately searching for and developing the specific “national minority” or “ethnic” styles in painting (Olexa Novakivsky), graphics (Efraim Moses Lilien), and architecture (Alfred Zachariewicz) [2]. These new nationalist styles reflected the new trends

in politics and culture of the early 20th century Eastern Galicia [10], particularly the mobilization of the masses for nationalist purposes.

The nationalist visual elements gained popularity in art and culture in Galicia due to the ethnic and cultural diversity of the region, above-all due to the ethnic diversity of the regional capital, Lviv (Lemberg for the Austrians, Lwow for the Poles). Around 1900, the urban population consisted of three main ethnic groups: Poles (45-50 percent), Jews (28 percent), and Ukrainians (25 percent) [7]. These different groups and their elites were competing for power and urban visibility in political, economic, social, and cultural spheres. Most of Lviv-based artists were studying in Krakow, Vienna, Munich, and Paris, the main centers of cultural and artistic cosmopolitanism in Europe. However, the artists' home-town to which they returned was brimmed with different nationalist political agendas making the artists look for ways to express these agendas in their artwork—or reject them altogether. Thus Lviv artists were facing a complex task having to choose between the nationalistic and the cosmopolitan approach to art. They also had to create their own artistic vocabulary for representing their ethnic identities among other nationalities and ethnicities within Lviv multi-ethnic milieu.

First and foremost, the ethnic elements in portraiture took form of facial features. The artist also introduced certain ethnic motifs into the image through the ethnographic elements of decor, cloths, interior, and entourage. Ethnic motifs were particularly popular in the late 19th – early 20th century during the European artistic quest for the exotic. The European Secession explored the “exotic other” and searched for inspiration in the decorative arts of what the painters considered the Orient adapting their exotic elements for local, eastern European purposes [3]. For Western Europe, the Eastern borderlands which included Galicia, Bukovina, Volhynia, and the Carpathian Mountains were not less exotic than Asia or Japan [6]. Thus, the so-called “Hutsul secession” (гуцульська сецесія) also known as “the Zakopane style” (Zakopiński styl) emerged as a separate trend in the movement of east-central European art-nouveau style [9].

Artists of the portraits often turned to ethnic motifs finding in them a useful tool for visual generalizations. One finds examples of this approach in portraits by Lviv-based artists such as Ivan Trush's “The Hutsuls,” Ivan Severyn's “Hutsul Schoolboy,” Stanislaw Debicki's “The Little Rabbi,” and Wilhelm Wachtel's “The Jewish Boy.” The

images on all these portraits bear expressively ethnic elements: Trush depicts his Hutsuls with the Carpathian Mountains in the backdrop, Severyn ethnographically reproduces the Hutzul ornaments, and Debicki and Wachtel meticulously follow the canons of the stereotypically Oriental or even racially Semitic (as they understood it) Jewish look of their images.

Zygmunt Menkes (1896-1986), a modernist Lviv-based Jewish painter, used such approach in his double portrait "The Father and the Son" (1934) (il.1). The faces of a man and a boy have clearly ethnic Jewish features reflecting the early 20th century visual stereotypes. The father, covered by a Jewish prayer shawl (Heb.: tallit) embraces his son who holds in his hands "the four species" (Heb.: arba minin), the key attributes of Sukkot (the Booths or the Tabernacle), the final part of the Judaic High Holidays. The four species in the boy's hands symbolize the four letters of the divine name that the Jew brings together in his imagination. Menkes organizes the composition of his portrait as if he is consecutively wrapping its images: the boy holds the religious attributes, the father embraces the boy, the prayer shawl covers the father's shoulders. Though such composition Menkes brings together all the elements of the portrait underscoring the symbolic attributes of godliness. He universalizes his images transforming the ethnic (Judaic) into the symbolic (religious and spiritual).

Several Lviv artists explored ethnic motifs in portraiture in order to express nationally-oriented ideas that captivated their minds. For example, Olexa Novakivsky's "Portrait of the wife" (il.2) shows how the artist transformed the ethnic/ethnographic elements into the nationalist/political [4]. Novakivsky juxtaposed the ethnic Ukrainian dress of his female image and the antique Hellenistic interior surrounding her. Novakivsky placed marble sculptures in the backdrop of the portrait, comparing and contrasting the universalistic concept of Hellenistic beauty and that of real modern-day woman. By placing a peasant-looking Ukrainian woman in her ethnic entourage against the Hellenistic backdrop, Novakivsky brought the two elements together. He seems to have suggested that the Ukrainian beauty is a direct continuity of the aesthetic ideals of the Classical era. If so, he makes a strong political statement proving that the ethnic Ukrainian is no less important than the ancient Greek.

The national aspect shaped Lviv portraiture of the early 20th century on various levels: from artistic style to visual narrative to the

image. In many cases the artists not only chose to portray the members of urban ethnic elites but also recreated their images as national heroes. To that end, the artists turned to different types of visual frames of references: historical, biblical, literary, and artistic. Consider, for example, the portraits of Andrei Sheptytsky, the metropolitan of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic (Uniate) Church. Sheptytsky played a crucial role in the Ukrainian religious, political, and cultural revival in Lviv and Galicia. Many Ukrainian Lviv-based artists portrayed Sheptytsky: Modest Sosenko, Mykhailo Boychuk, and most of all, Olexa Novakivsky.

Among other artists, Novakivsky was the one who conceptualized the artistic image of Sheptytsky through a strong nationally-colored visual narrative. In his "Portrait of Sheptytsky as Moses," Novakivsky created the image of his famous contemporary as a legendary biblical character (il.3). Biblical citations were very popular in Ukrainian culture, especially in literature. Such key Ukrainian poets of the 19th and 20th century as Taras Shevchenko, Lesia Ukrainka (Larysa Kosach-Kvitka), and Ivan Franko had repeatedly explored biblical themes and motifs in constructing the mythology of Ukraine as an independent nation and separate people<sup>1</sup>. This mythology enhanced the popularity of the idea of Ukrainians as the chosen people who had been enslaved and now are being redeemed from slavery. On Novakivsky's portrait, Sheptytsky is presented as a savior of the Ukrainian nation. By portraying Sheptytsky as a new Moses, Novakivsky placed the artistic image of a historical figure not only within the biblical context, but also within an important Ukrainian literary tradition. This portrait was also significant from a political and religious point of view, since it conceptualized the Greek-Catholic affiliation as an indispensable part of modern Ukrainian national identity.

Artists explored nationalist motifs to heroicise the person whom they portrayed. They could do so not only by turning to literary citations, but also by using certain iconographic elements. One can trace such principle of constructing the nationalist in Antoni Stefanowicz's "Portrait of a Warrior" (il.4). Stefanowicz created this portrait in 1920 after his son Kajetan Stefanowicz, a famous Lviv art-nouveau artist and an Uhlan in Jozef Pilsudski's legion perished in the 34 in the Polish-Bolshevik war. [8]

<sup>1</sup> For example, see Taras Shevchenko's poem "Mariia," Lesia Ukrainka's poem "Na ruinakh" (1904), and Ivan Franko's poem "Moisei" (1905).

The father and son, Antoni and Kajetan Stefanowicz' were ethnic Armenians who traced their family history in Bukovina region<sup>2</sup>. As most of Armenians on the former Polish lands, the Stefanowicz family was assimilated into the dominating urban Polish culture: they were Roman Catholic and identified themselves as both Poles and Armenians. Religious assimilating played a crucial role in forming the dual Polish-Armenian identity which was not self-contradicting and gave Armenians the opportunity to reify themselves in their ethnic Armenian and national Polish identity.

Let us consider the example of Antoni Stefanowicz, who portrayed his son Kajetan many times throughout his life. There are more than a dozen portraits depicting Kajetan from the age of 3-4 years old and up until after his death (Antoni created at least two posthumous portraits of this son). The "Portrait of the Warrior" was also a posthumous depiction, which Antoni created as a version of a *parsuna*, a unique east European, primarily Polish and Ukrainian, tradition of posthumous portraits usually placed on the coffins. In their iconography and stylistics, the *parsuna* portraits were reminiscent of icon paintings [5, 17-30]. Such portraits helped retain the memory of the visual image of the deceased and posthumously sanctified the image.

Antony Stefanowicz explored and reinterpreted the main iconographic principles of the *parsuna*. He depicted Kajetan almost enface with the main focus on his facial features. He meticulously reproduced both his characteristically ethnic Armenian features and his specific details such as the scar on his cheek. Although the face dominates the composition, the viewer can easily notice the distinguishing features of Kajetan's Polish military uniform. The portrayed image looks directly at the viewer, thus eliminating the distance between the portrayed and the viewer, creating an impression of the immediate presence of the person and transcending the genre of the *parsuna* portraiture.

Antoni Stefanowicz reinterpreted the canon of the *parsuna* portrait placing his "Portrait of the Warrior" into a round frame, and not into a classic six-corner frame of the early-modern *parsuna*, which was usually fixed onto the front side of a coffin. By introducing the round shape Antoni Stefanowicz radically changes the concept of his *parsuna*, since the round symbolizes unity and completeness, refers

<sup>2</sup> Antoni Stefanowicz with his family moved from Czernowitz (Chernivtsi) to Lviv in the 1890's.

to round-form icons, and sanctifies the image of the perished Uhlan Kajetan Stefanowicz. The artist indicated the date and place of the soldier's death, yet deliberately does not mention his name. Thus the "Portrait of the Warrior" becomes a nationalist and patriotic symbol.

The three case-studies discussed in this essay represent two key trends in Lviv portraiture and in the 20th-century Galician art in general: the ethnic and the ethnographic on one side, and the nationalist and symbolic on the other. Further historical, cultural, and artistic analysis of the ethnic and nationalist visual elements is crucial for our understanding of Lviv diverse socio-political and ethno-cultural milieu. It is particularly important to research the iconographical frames of references which Lviv artists used to create their images. The example of Menkes' portrait "Father and Son" represents how the artist perceived and reinterpreted the portrait genre within the symbolic religious context. Novakivsky's "Portrait of Sheptytsky as Moses" shows how the artist mythologized the historical image of the portrayed person by turning to biblical allegories and literary myths. And Stefanowicz's "Portrait of the Warrior" shows how the artist built a nationalist and symbolic image exploring a traditional ethnographic portrayal tradition such as the *parsuna*.

Lviv artists lived in the epicenter of the cultural life. They witnessed the members of different ethnic elites competing for the domination, urban visibility, and influence and often took active part in these competitions. Their artistic experiments with the ethnic and nationalist in the portraiture provide a unique source for our understanding of the role of artist in the multi-ethnic modern city at the intersection of cultures, languages, ethnicities, religions, and worldviews.

1. Антоні і Каєтан Стефановичі: два обличчя Львова епохи модерну: наук. кат. вист. / Львів. нац. галерея мистец.; [авт.-упоряд. Анастасія Сімферовська]. Львів: Колір ПРО, 2013. - 76 с.
2. Бірюльов Ю. Захаревичі: творці столичного Львова. Львів: Центр Європи, 2010. 336 с.
3. Бірюльов Ю. Мистецтво львівської сецесії. Львів: Центр Європи, 2005. 184 с.
4. Овсійчук В. Олекса Новаківський. Львів: Ін-т народознавства України, 1998. 332 с.
5. Тарасенко О. Ремінісценції парсуни в портретах українського модерну и авангарду // Мистецтвознавство України. 2007. № 8. С. 17-30.

6. Jankowska-Marzec A. Między etnografią a sztuką. Mitologizacja Hucułów i Huculszczyzny w kulturze Polskiej. Kraków: Universitas, 2013. 308 s. +50 il.
7. Mick Ch. Lemberg, Lwow, L'viv 1914–1947. Violence and Ethnicity in a Contested City. Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2016. 458 p.
8. Stefanowicz K. Życie i twórczość Kajetana Stefanowicza // Biuletyn Ormiańskiego Towarzystwa Kulturalnego, 2007. № 50/51. S. 42–61.
9. Tondos B. Styl zakopiański i zakopiańszczyzna. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 2004. 224 s.
10. Wolff L. The Idea of Galicia: Habsburg Lemberg: Architecture, Public Space, and Politics in the Galician Capital, 1772–1914. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2010. 357 p.

#### ANNOTATION

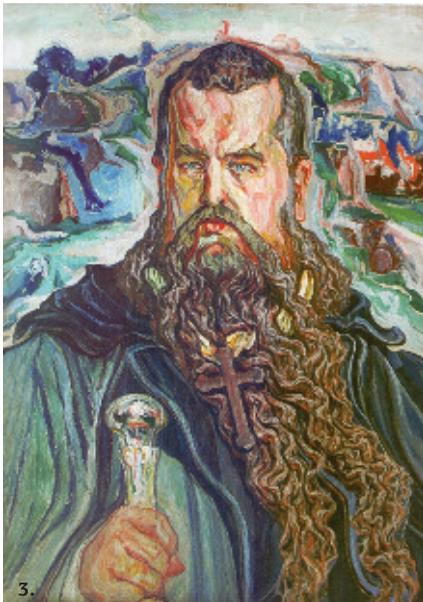
**Anastasiia Simferovska. The ethnic and the nationalist on Lviv portraits 1900-1939.** This article explores the visual manifestations of the ethnic and the nationalist aspects on Lviv portraits (oil paintings and drawings) during the first half of the 20th century. The article focuses on portraits by Lvivbased artists of Ukrainian, Jewish, and Polish-Armenian descent such as Olexa Novakivsky, Zygmunt Menkes, and Antoni Stefanowicz. The article proves the presence of a wide range of ethnic and nationalist visual elements represented through the portraits' style, symbols, and attributes.

**Key words:** ethnic, nationalism, portrait, identity, Lviv, modernism.

#### АННОТАЦИЯ

**Анастасия Симферовская. Этническое и национальное во львовских портретах 1900-1939.** В статье исследуются визуальные проявления этнического и национального во львовских портретах (живопись, рисунок) первой половины XX века. Внимание сосредоточено на портретах авторства львовских художников украинского, еврейского и польско-армянского происхождения, таких как Олекса Новаковский, Зигмунт Менкес и Антони Стефанович. Статья доказывает наличие широкого круга этнических и национальных визуальных элементов, представленных через стилистику портретов, символы и атрибуты.

**Ключевые слова:** этнический, национальный, портрет, идентичность, Львов, модернизм.



1. Zygmunt Menkes, The Father and the Son, 1934, oil on canvas, National Museum in Lodz, Poland
2. Olexa Novakivsky, Muse (The portrait of the Artist's Wife), 1910, oil on canvas, location unknown
3. Olexa Novakivsky, Portrait of Andrei Sheptytsky as Moses, 1915-1917, oil on canvas, The Andrei Sheptytsky National Museum in Lviv, Ukraine
4. Antoni Stefanowicz, Portrait of the Warrior (Portrait of Kajetan Stefanowicz), 1920, pencil on paper, Voznytsky Lviv National Art Gallery, Ukraine