

FEATURES OF THE GRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF MILITARY LIFE DURING THE FIRST AND SECOND WORLD WARS AND IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD

Yaryna Horichko

Lecturer, Assistant Professor at the Department of Design and Fundamentals of Architecture,
Lviv Polytechnic National University, Ukraine
e-mail: andreevaarina430@gmail.com, orcid.org/0000-0002-9471-4228

Summary

The work examines the issue of the peculiarities of the graphic representation of military life during the First and Second World Wars and in the interwar periods. The impact of military conflicts on art and the graphic reaction to the events of that time is analyzed. Accordingly, the purpose of the work is reduced to a comprehensive comparative analysis of the graphic representation of military life during the First and Second World Wars and in the interwar periods. The article reflects a variety of techniques for the visual transmission of military life, including drawing, painting, posters, and photographs. The desire for conventional forms of conveying images of war is due to the importance of symbolic subtexts. The role of art in the transmission of emotions, moods and messages about war events, as well as the influence of these representations on public opinion and consciousness, has been studied and defined.

Changes in the graphic representation of military life during the period of the First and Second World Wars, from realistic images to more abstract and symbolic approaches, are studied. Due to this, the role of artists, photographers, and other creative personalities in shaping the image of military life is identified and it is shown how these changes reflect the social, political, and cultural changes of that time. The interaction of various ways of generalizing this problem with conventional methods of expression and innovations in stylistics is emphasized. Features of the Soviet poster, which characterized the development of this art form in the post-war period, are systematized. In general, the article offers an in-depth analysis of the graphic representation of military life during the First and Second World Wars and the interwar period. It promotes understanding of the importance of art and graphic images in reproducing historical events and reflecting the moods and emotions of the time.

Key words: periodical publication, printed products, graphic design, agitation, propaganda.

DOI <https://doi.org/10.23856/5834>

1. Introduction

1.1 Relevance of the subject

Speaking about the First and Second World Wars in the language of facts, authentic documents, including letters, official documents, and images (posters, brochures) play a special role and importance in recreating key events. It was printing products and periodicals that remained the main and most powerful propaganda medium during the war and interwar periods. Both posters and caricatures of the first half of the twentieth century were fully consistent with the general and special functions of journalism, which eventually led to the use of graphic images as the most successful of the potentially possible tools for forming a new information space.

Accordingly, before and during the First and Second World Wars, the widespread use of graphic products in ideological confrontation contributed to the spread and consolidation of values, the formation of historical consciousness, and the emergence of a new model of world perception. In addition, this trend led to the dissemination of information that actively influenced the recipients, providing them with examples to follow or, conversely, encouraging them to take action or inaction.

2. Literature Review

A significant amount of this product, which is still known throughout the world today, is of foreign origin. The American and European press was perhaps the most responsive to the events and phenomena that took place in the world. Against this background, domestic examples (in particular, those of artists from Western Ukraine) are quite contrasting both from a content point of view and in terms of the overall visual image. This issue was directly or indirectly in the circle of scientific research of such researchers as Bondar (2014), Koliada, Maievskiy, (2012), National University of Ostroh Academy (2007), Orlyk (2022), Skrypnyk (2020), Tykhonenko (2017). However, the works of these authors include only a certain historical period, without studying the comparative component. That is why the purpose of our study is a comparative analysis of the graphic representation of military life during the First and Second World Wars and in the interwar periods.

3. Summary of basic information

The facts of information influence on the general population have been known since ancient times. With the development of civilization, they have been systematically improved, adapted to new requirements and realities, and in the twenty-first century are actually characterized by a high degree of proactivity. Information openness actually serves as a bridge through which communication processes, including in the geopolitical sphere, are reflected. Analyzing the emergence of the information society as a new reality of the twenty-first century, which actually combines systemic elements of local cultures with communication factors, it should be noted that its development causes both positive changes and potential disasters in the information sphere. These disasters can be of a technical and man-made nature, as well as humanitarian ones, associated with the destruction of ethical and social norms that contribute to the harmonious development of society. Technological advantages are becoming one of the prevailing means of political domination and coercion in the geopolitical sphere.

This is especially evident with the outbreak of the First World War. Radio was not yet such a popular means of broadcasting information, loudspeakers were primitive, which is why printed materials were chosen as a reliable and no less effective propaganda tool. The main types include fake ration cards, newspapers, posters, leaflets, brochures, and letters from prisoners of war. The artistically designed and ideologically aligned works were published in large editions and distributed throughout all regions of Ukraine (Tykhonenko, 2017, p. 42).

Posters were especially popular: bright, large-scale symbolic images with a catchy text slogan, made for propaganda or agitation purposes. The pre-war poster was exclusively advertising or charitable, while the editions dated from 1916, dedicated to the country's military position, became the first posters that were at the intersection of advertising and political, and predicted the post-revolutionary flourishing of the Ukrainian political poster.

A considerable amount of this type of graphic production is contained in the archives of the Scientific Library of Ivan Franko National University of Lviv. Both of them have a clear goal: to glorify the role and importance of Polish legionnaires. Given the territorial affiliation of Western Ukraine at the time of World War I, almost all posters were distributed in Polish. The front side of the sheet is conditionally divided into two horizontal parts, with one depicting a soldier with a rifle, a symbol of a brave warrior fighting to restore Poland's independence; the other a large text fragment: «*Narod polski pokazał, że pomimo długiej niewoli żyje i umie walczyć o swoją przyszłość niezależną. Po raz pierwszy od dziesięciolecia stanął na równie z innymi narodami przez stworzenie Legionów Polskich...*» (“*The Polish people have shown that despite their long captivity, they are alive and able to fight for their independent future. For the first time in ten years, it (the country) was on a par with other nations, creating Polish legions...*”).



Fig. 1. Poster «Legiony polskie», 1915



Fig. 2. Poster «Do krwi, ostatniej kropli z żył», 1920

Figure 2 shows a small black-and-white poster (35×24.5 cm) with the life-affirming, stimulating slogan “To the blood, the last drop from the veins”. We can see a fairly typical visual motif with two (often more) soldiers sitting on their haunches close to a machine gun, ready to fight. The other is not far away, as the rear and support of a fellow soldier. The poster is a lithograph from a drawing by the famous Polish painter, artist, and caricaturist Kamil Maciej Mackiewicz. Realizing his labor potential for the benefit of the Central Propaganda Committee, he created posters, posters, and banners calling for participation in the Polish-Bolshevik war. Most often, these posters are based on quick pencil drawings, dominated by emotional visuals and slogans.

The image in Figure 3 shows a brave Polish lancer preparing to strike at the enemy with his sword. At the bottom of the image is an inscription: “Bij bolszewika”. The lithograph was produced in Lviv in 1920 at the Adolf Hegedius art and lithographic establishment located on St. Michał Street (now Yu. Drohobych Street). The dimensions of this poster were 68×43 cm, not quite impressive in size.

This image demonstrates how the means of the influence of a political poster were formed: a close-up figure with clearly defined facial features, simulating a situation of close communicative contact with each of those who see it. An important compositional technique is the use of a frame or framing of the poster field. Speaking of the perception of two-dimensional images,



Fig. 3. «Bij bolszewika», 1920

in this case, the pronounced visual emphasis on the frame is a technical means of organizing a “window” into another reality, which the poster tells about, and a tool for “adjusting the gaze” (later this technique was used by television). The leading compositional principle is to emphasize the center through the interaction of two or three spatial plans and an active color dominant.

Compositionally, the propaganda posters contained an open or hidden call to action, put in the mouths of famous, ordinary people or symbolic characters. They openly encouraged people to fulfill their civic duty to the state, to be brave, to voluntarily join the army, not to give valuable information to spies, etc.

It was during the First World War that photographic technology improved significantly, leading to the proliferation of compact cameras and making photography accessible to the general public. Therefore, for soldiers in the “occupied” armies, photography was not something out of the ordinary or out of reach. In addition, the German army often used photographs for military purposes, especially for reconnaissance. Enemy positions, towns, and villages were periodically photographed from the air. Many soldiers, having cameras, could capture not only scenes of military life but also the life of the local population, as well as create landscapes and natural images. Today, a significant number of photographs taken by amateur military photographers are unique documents that allow us to see disappeared architectural monuments and reveal unknown pages of the history of the First World War.

In addition to amateurs, there were, of course, many professional photographers who worked in field publishing houses and printing houses of military units. They used the photographs they obtained in the field to create a large number of postcards that were later sent to their soldiers, and often these postcards were distributed free of charge. The publishing house “Verlag Gebrüder Hochland” of the Hochland brothers from Königsberg should be noted for its special skill in this matter. The photographer A. Külevindt, who worked for this publishing house, showed extraordinary professionalism and an unsurpassed ability to choose interesting subjects and convey dynamics in his photographs. Even ordinary marshes or fields looked fascinating on postcards thanks to his skill in choosing an angle and using a dynamic subject. A significant number of images were taken on the territory of Volyn.

The First World War and the defeat of the Ukrainian People's Republic triggered a new wave of Ukrainian emigration. During this period (1919–1929), the Austrian capital Vienna became the center of the Ukrainian publishing movement (*National University of Ostroh Academy*, 2007, p. 437).

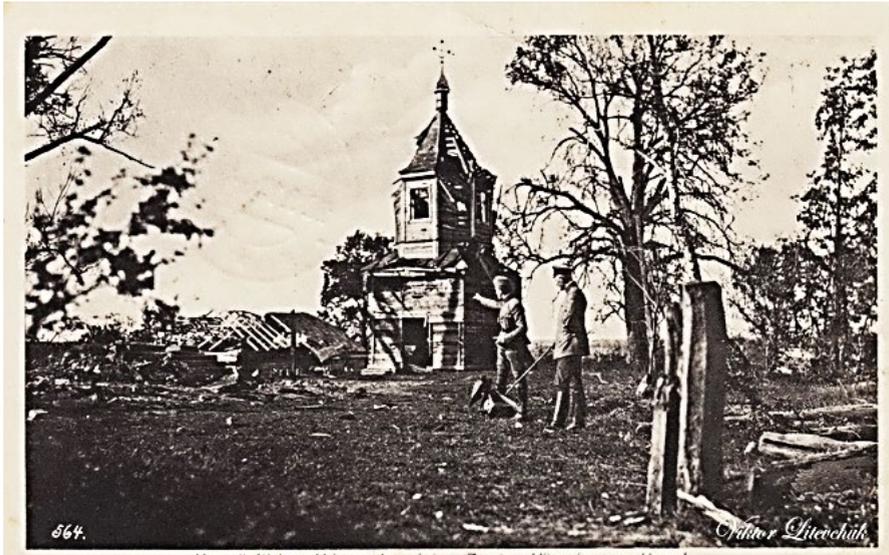


Fig. 4. Resting near the church in the village of Stobychva (now Kamian-Kashyrskiy district). Hochland Brothers Publishing House, Königsberg, 1917

Many well-known publishing houses that had previously operated in Ukraine moved to Vienna, such as Dniprosyuz, Dzvin, Vernyhora, and the Katerynoslav Publishing House. Since 1926, the Ukrainian Scientific Institute in Berlin has become a center where the best scientific and educational forces of the Ukrainian emigration have gathered. After the First World War, dozens of Ukrainian newspapers and magazines were published in Germany, with a total circulation of about one million copies.



Fig. 5. Lutsk street in Kovel. Karl Harbauer's publishing house, Vienna, 1916

Karl Harbauer's publishing house (1912-1929) published the largest number of postcards on Volyn topics. During the First World War, this company produced postcards for the Austro-Hungarian army, which was a significant part of their activities. By order of the military publishing house, which was associated with the field bookstore of the 4th Guards Army of the 340th Field Post, a large series of photo postcards was created in 1916–1917. This series consisted of several thousand postcards depicting the landscapes of towns and villages located almost along the entire line of the eastern front, from Western Galicia to Northern Polissya. A large number of these postcards were presented by Volyn.

The “publishing front” was hot during the Second World War. The peculiarity of the types of propaganda printed materials was their target audience. Posters and posters were for their own people, leaflets were for the enemy (*Bondar, 2014, p. 3*). The rhetoric of such graphic products changed significantly, as Western Ukraine (in the sense of the current territorial boundaries) was annexed to the USSR (September 1939). In particular, the pathos of victorious offensives gradually disappears, and manipulation by its customers almost ceases. The Ukrainian poster, developing in close contact with the posters of other republics, retains its uniqueness. It has a unique palette of literary and folklore heroic symbols and images of the native land and the unbreakable historical spirit, as noted by Koliada and Maievskyyi in their article on the national essence of the Ukrainian poster (p. 2).

From a poster like an advertising speech, the World War II war poster directly addresses each individual. The chronology of historical events embodied in the graphic reflects an important trend: that the poster is a sincere call to unite, defend, work, liberate, and be proud of your country. It appeals to the deepest human values, which include the defense of one's freedom, dignity, native land, preservation of life, and native language. This allows us to assert that within the framework of a strict regime during the war, the artist gains inner freedom. Unlike the posters of the pre-war period, which were almost entirely politically motivated, the posters of the war show creative “freedom in choosing the theme, plot, and image” (*Hladun, 2018, p. 41*). In this context, the artists' desire to create coincides with the national task of mobilizing to fight the enemy. The uniqueness of the war poster as an artistic phenomenon lies in its high content of the theme and the unity of content and form. The realism of the final image, understandable to everyone, becomes a sincere, patriotic call to fight.



Fig. 6. Poster “Shevchenko's anger is a weapon of victory” by V. Kasiyan, 1942

Let's take, for example, a poster created by V. I. Kasiian, an artist born in Mykulintsy village, Ivano-Frankivsk region. Figure 5 shows a portrait of the national symbol, the majestic poet Taras Shevchenko, in ink (though watercolor often appears in the artist's series of thematic

posters). The quote from Shevchenko below corresponds to the events depicted in the background (a picture of the struggle against fascist rule). In this way, laconicism, patheticism, and systematization of the main idea are achieved. At the same time, duality as a strategic technique allows us to show the close relationship between the past and the present. This work vividly reflects belonging to the ethnic basis, as the content and form of the work is reduced to the integration of national heroes, the transformation of signs, and passionate lines of Ukrainian poetry.

From 1952 to 1975, eleven Ukrainian publishing houses operated in West Germany, ten of them in Munich and one in New Ulm. There were also five Ukrainian printing houses. The State School of Oriental Languages in Paris, now called the Institute of Oriental Languages, was a source of various documents related to the modern history of Ukrainian emigration after 1917. In the postwar period, a new non-periodical printed organ appeared in Paris, the Ukraine magazine. In general, the language of the graphics of the victory poster of the postwar years and the Soviet era was significant for everyone in our country, as Soviet symbols and attributes dominated the information space (Fig. 6).



Fig. 7. The winning poster, 1946

Firstly, the Soviet poster had a bright style and characteristic aesthetics that distinguished it from other art forms. Bright colors, expressive contours, solid shapes, and dynamic compositions were often used. This created the effect of attracting attention and fixation and contributed to their mass appeal. Secondly, the Soviet poster had a strong ideological orientation. It was a universal means of communication that conveyed political, social, and ideological messages of the Soviet regime. Poster graphics served as a means of mobilizing and supporting the population, spreading the ideas of socialism, and promoting communist values and Soviet ideology. Thirdly, the Soviet poster used a wide range of graphic techniques and styles, including photorealism, constructivism, socialist realism, and others. This made it possible to convey a variety of themes and moods that ranged from heroism and patriotism to social criticism and political commentary. The graphic solutions of the poster gracefully expressed the artist's idea and conveyed a powerful emotional charge.

The modern language of mass communication requires new approaches to the transmission of poster images and other methods of presenting the theme of war and victory. In considering the dynamics of the development of the means of expression of the political poster (which previously included the military-patriotic poster) - ideological, figurative, compositional, and graphic - one should rely on the national tradition of the Soviet period when the political poster demonstrated the greatest diversity in development and received state support.

4. Conclusions

Thus, based on the results of the study, we can conclude that the graphic representation of the wartime (interwar) period of the twentieth century was reflected in newspapers, posters, postcards, brochures, and letters. The most popular are posters, the content of which during the First and Second World Wars was filled with patriotic, emotional, and truthful ideas that were conveyed in a concise and expressive manner. These posters had a realistic form of expression that used images and was understandable and accessible to a wide audience. The harmonious combination of content and form ensured the Ukrainian posters' informational success in achieving their objectives. They not only effectively facilitated communication, but also became works of art. The main requirement for this type of graphic is that it should be large enough to be visible from a distance, easy to read, and well perceived by the viewer. Artistic techniques often used in posters include artistic metaphor, images of differently scaled figures, contour markings of objects, and the simultaneous combination of photographs with drawings and paintings. A special role is played by the font, its color, and location. As prospects for further scientific research, we consider it relevant to study the issue of a comprehensive analysis of graphic forms of agitation characteristic of Hitler's Germany and Putin's Russia.

References

1. Bondar, Yu. (2014). *Posters, posters, and leaflets in the context of social and political communications. Bulletin of the Book Chamber*, 7, 1-7 [in Ukrainian].
2. Hladun, O. (2018). *Ukrainian Poster of the Second World War: Content and Form. Art History of Ukraine*, 18, 39–45 [in Ukrainian].
3. Skulysh, Ye. D. ed. (2012). *History of Information and Psychological Confrontation: a textbook / Ya. M. Zharkov, L. F. Kompantseva, V. V. Ostroukhov, V. M. Petryk, M. M. Prysiashniuk, Ye. D. Skulysh; edited by Ye. D. Skulysh K.: Scientific and Publishing Department of the National Security Service of Ukraine. [in Ukrainian].*
4. Koliada, I. A., Maievskiy, O. O. (2012). *National Images in the Ukrainian Poster of the World War. Ukraine in the ethnocultural dimension of the centuries: a collection of scientific works. Kyiv: Drahomanov National Pedagogical University*, 2, 357–367 [in Ukrainian].
5. *National University of Ostroh Academy (2007). Proceedings of the Second International Scientific Conference “Ukrainian Diaspora: Problems of Research”. Ostroh: Publishing House of the National University of Ostroh Academy [in Ukrainian].*
6. Orlyk S. (2022). *Posters and leaflets in propaganda of war loans in the russian empire during the first world war. Society. Document. Communication*, 1(13), 208–228. <https://doi.org/10.31470/2518-7600-2021-13-208-228> [in Ukrainian].
7. Skrypnyk, P. (2020). *Posters as a Source of Research on Socio-Political Processes in Ukraine in the 20s of the XX century. Scientific works of the National Library of Ukraine named after V.I. Vernadskyi*, 60, 137–157 [in Ukrainian].
8. Tykhonenko, O. (2017). *The Second World War in Fine Arts Publications: From the Collections of the Book Chamber of Ukraine. Bulletin of the Book Chamber*, 1, 42–49. [in Ukrainian].