

УДК 745.52.071.4.072.2/.3.04:27-526.62]:004-028.22](477.83)"20"
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.30970/vas.27.2025.9-15>

**THE PAINTING CYCLE
THE CREATOR'S GAZE BY OLENA KHOMENKO (2021–2022):
PROJECTIONS OF THE PAST AND THE PRESENT**

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Olena Khomenko is a Lviv-based artist and educator known for her art projects situated at the intersection of painting and traditional tapestry. Her artistic practice integrates the decorative art traditions of the past with the forms and media of contemporary visual expression. This critical review focuses on one of the artist's most recent cycles, *Creator's Point*, initiated in 2021 as an intuitive prefiguration of the dramatic events that unfolded in Ukraine in February 2022.

The artworks created between 2022 and 2024 are based on iconographic material derived from folk religious imagery, the material qualities of fabric as a traditional medium, and the expanded possibilities offered by contemporary technologies for copying and reproducing visual images. In this way, Olena Khomenko's project articulates a comprehensive dialogue between tradition and innovation in contemporary Ukrainian art.

The cycle is analyzed through an interdisciplinary methodological framework employing the concepts of intermediality and intertextuality. This approach allows for the identification of relationships between elements transposed from different visual art techniques, as well as for tracing references among various "texts" of visual culture from both the past and the present.

Keywords: contemporary Ukrainian art, painting, tapestry, religious imagery, intermediality.

Biographical Information

Olena Khomenko was born in 1972 in Lviv. In 1990, she graduated from the Ivan Trush Lviv College of Applied Arts, specializing in textile weaving. In 1999, she completed her studies at the Lviv Academy of Arts.

Over the past two decades, she has been affiliated with the Department of Art of Weaving at Ivan Trush College, as well as with the Department of Graphic Design and Book Art at the Ukrainian Academy of Printing (now incorporated into Lviv Polytechnic National University). Her artistic practice encompasses both artistic textiles and painting, and she actively participates in Ukrainian and international exhibitions. Recent exhibitions include the *Silver Square* Triennial of Painting (Przemyśl, 2021–2022),

the 4th Ukrainian Triennial of Artistic Textiles (Kyiv, 2021), the 1st Ukrainian Triennial *Abstract Art* (2022), and the *Silver Square* Triennial of Painting (Przemyśl, 2024).

Olena Khomenko also co-organized the exhibition *Axiology of Tapestry* at the Andrew Sheptytsky National Museum in Lviv (May 2024). She regards tapestry as an organic component of architectural space and as a medium intrinsically related to painting.

This article aims to summarize and analyze Olena Khomenko's art cycle *Creator's Point (Pink Halo)*, which emerged against the background of an intensifying sense of impending catastrophe in Ukraine in early 2022. The role of the visionary artist or artist-guide was consciously assumed by artists of earlier periods, such as the Romantics of the nineteenth century or the Futurists of the twentieth century (Mathieu 1990). Numerous modern artists anticipated cultural transformations that were still in the process of maturation and had not yet fully materialized (Głuchowska 2022, 75). Contemporary art likewise functions as an expression of social crises and ruptures, through which individuals and communities seek meaning and existential support.

Olena Khomenko does not claim the role of a prophet or visionary; however, she notes that the first images of the *Creator's Point* cycle began to take shape in her imagination as early as 2021. A diffuse sense of anxiety—whose cause and meaning were not yet clear to the artist herself—became fully articulated only after February 24, 2022, with the onset of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

During the early stages of the war, the artist expanded the cycle with new works reflecting a pulsating sense of anxiety and anticipation of the inevitable (for example, one version of *Pink Halo*). At the same time, this anxiety is permeated by a metaphysical presence – something unknown and incomprehensible – which may be interpreted as a Higher Force or the presence of the Demiurge. Allowing her emotions and intuitive insights to guide her creative process, Olena Khomenko continued to develop the cycle throughout 2022–2023.

The *Creator's Point* cycle consists of eight individual artworks that may function either independently or as a polyphonic “message in many voices.” Each canvas can be perceived as a distinct visual statement, while the cycle as a whole reveals a deeper, more complex meaning. From the perspective of conventional art historical analysis, these works may be examined through formalist, iconological, and structuralist approaches (including the concept of the index) (Freeland 2001, 116–117). These methodologies may also be synthesized, with particular attention paid to the symptomatic features of both “modernity” and “timelessness” in Khomenko's work – features manifested as artistic projections from the past into the present.

From this perspective, it becomes possible to discuss the intertextual and intermedial dimensions of Olena Khomenko's artworks within the broader discourse of contemporary Ukrainian art. In the context of this cycle, intertextuality denotes an infinite and temporally unrestricted dialogue of cultural messages (Savchuk 2019, 15–16). The artist herself understands intertextuality as a potential interaction between texts of civilizational development, technology, and mass communication, on the one hand, and texts rooted in folk tradition, religious culture, and the sacred, on the other.

Modern religious (Christian) art has long moved beyond figurative and narrative modes of representation. From Barnett Newman's cycle *The Passion of Christ: Lema Sabachthani* to contemporary Ukrainian interpretations of sacred themes – such as Olha

Fedorova's *Tablets of Rage* (2022) – religious imagery increasingly follows the principles of a specific modern “iconoclasm.” This tendency is likewise evident in works produced during recent iconographic plein airs in Novytsia, where artists consciously avoid mimetic representation. Examples include the diptych *Mother / Son* (2023) by Borys Fiodorowicz and *Nativity* (2014) by Krzysztof Sokołowski.

These and similar works interpret spiritual entities as existing beyond the embodiment of tangible forms and beyond the normative figurativeness of anthropomorphic imagery. Drawing on the research of Jonathan Anderson (2023, 22–23) and Rowena Loverance (2007, 13–14) on the (in)visibility of religious experience in contemporary art, it may be argued that Olena Khomenko's cycle – imbued with religious references – possesses pronounced intertextual qualities. As the artist herself notes, her work engages simultaneously with the present – uncertain, disturbing, and disorienting – and with tradition as a stable framework that offers a sense of “sustainability” guaranteed by the Creator.

The concept of the “Creator,” articulated in the title of the project, explicitly implies religious references, which are visually echoed in the composition *Golden Halo*. This work may be compared to the imagery of the nimbus as interpreted by the Przemyśl-based artist Małgorzata Dawidiuk, who works with modern Christian iconography and creates deliberately impersonal icons (Dawidiuk 2018, video). In both cases, the image of the Creator is revealed as an emanation of light – manifested as a golden halo – serving both as a tribute to ancient cultural traditions and as a dialogue between contemporary and archaic religiosity. The halo thus functions as an indexical sign of holiness.

However, in Khomenko's work the white rectangular background is no less significant than the halo itself. This white field is not merely a sign of absence or emptiness; it also signifies presence – albeit invisible presence – thereby activating a metaphysical dimension of perception (Silvashi 2020, 173–175).

Within the *Creator's Point* cycle, halos appear in graphic, achromatic, and chromatic forms, including gold and vivid pink. It is notable that the cycle was initially entitled *Pink Halo*. This intense pink hue, dominant in many compositions, immediately captures the viewer's attention. Rather than being interpreted simply as part of the artist's preferred palette of blue-violet-pink tones, this color evokes associations with so-called “Instagram pink” – a glamorous shade linked to luxury, commercialization, and the everyday consumerization of the sacred. Such color is often encountered in provincial rural churches. According to the Pantone classification, it is described as an “audacious saturated pink with a purple tint,” radiating passion and delight while simultaneously signaling danger. In Khomenko's work, this pink appears to warn against the devaluation of fundamental spiritual constants.

When analyzing Olena Khomenko's cycle within the broader Ukrainian context of “working with color,” further parallels become evident. The artist acknowledges the influence of Tiberii Silvashi, whose practice is associated with neo-formalism. Silvashi explicitly declares his departure from figurative painting, presenting the image not as a “window onto the world,” but as a surface where color, texture, and form interact autonomously (Silvashi 2020, 194).

A similar approach can be observed in the work of Anatoliy Kryvolap, who employs highly saturated colors both in narrative and abstract painting – as seen in his

exhibition *Pershoobrazy* at the M17 Contemporary Art Center (April 2024) – and in sacred art, notably in the church murals of the village of Lypivka near Kyiv (2014–2022).

The prominent role of pink in Khomenko's compositions (for example, *Pink Day*) aligns her work with religious compositions by other Ukrainian artists, including Olena Smaha's icon *Revelation of Christ* (2016), created within the Novytsia workshops, as well as icons by Khomenko's student Yaryna Movchan, such as *Stigmata of St. Francis* (2023). By employing the language of contemporary color, these artists appeal to mass religious visual culture while simultaneously achieving deliberate figurative and emotional intensification.

In the unfolding analysis of the *Creator's Point* cycle, the concept of intertextuality – both in its direct and indirect manifestations – acquires particular significance. Since a point or dot is the most elementary graphic symbol, it functions as a highly capacious communicative sign. In visual culture, its representation carries powerful symbolic meaning. For instance, in Sokołowski's icon *Nativity*, the point appears as a metaphor for the Incarnation. A point marked on a surface – paper, canvas, or wall – signals creative impulse and concentrated energy. Moreover, a point may be understood as the projection of a line or a ray, epitomizing both “beginning” and “end” within the theory of expressionism, as articulated by Wassily Kandinsky (1946, 44–45). This recalls medieval scholastic imagery of the Creator as a builder wielding a compass, positioned at a specific point as the pivot of the universe.

Should the viewer seek such points in Olena Khomenko's cycle? Indeed, they are present in two forms: drawn as graphic signs and manifested as perforated holes. The artist notes that her experiments with perforation began as early as 2014. Her work *Light of Every Day* developed interactively through the daily addition of a new hole, forming over time. Meanwhile, *Blue Light*, composed of a constellation of golden dots, reflects projections of light rays and refers to the metaphysical essence of light.

The concept of intermediality is likewise essential for interpreting Khomenko's works and analyzing their morphology and figurative structure. The term “intermedia,” introduced by Dick Higgins in 1965, denotes the fusion of multiple art forms, though intermedial practices have a long history in art and craft traditions (Higgins 2001). Today, intermediality – understood as the interaction of different artistic media, techniques, and genres – has become increasingly prominent in contemporary art (Savchuk 2019, 16).

An illustrative example is Borys Fiodorowicz's work *VeroNika*, which demonstrates the comprehensive potential of intermediality by referencing Christ's sacrifice and redemption through the imitation of fabric resembling a bloodstained tablecloth. The title itself operates as a wordplay, simultaneously invoking the Gospel narrative and alluding to the ongoing war in Ukraine, with its daily civilian casualties and the implicit message that “truth will prevail.”

In contemporary artistic practice, intermediality may entail:

- the use of material and technological capabilities drawn from diverse media, beyond classical artistic models;
- the combination of different techniques and materials within mono-media or multimedia cultural texts;
- the “translation” of conventional artistic languages into non-conventional forms.

As a trained textile artist, Olena Khomenko deeply embeds references to weaving and stamp printing—two fundamental textile techniques – within her artistic language. Tapestry and textile art, rooted in the Latin *texere* (“to weave”), may themselves be understood as a form of “text” that imposes rhythmic and ordered narration. The specific manifestations of intermediality in Khomenko’s work can be further elucidated through Virginia Postrel’s study of fabric (Postrel 2024), which argues that textile technologies underpin systems of calculation, trade, and even digital networks – the World Wide Web itself being a conceptual extension of weaving.

These textile processes and modes of “thinking with thread and canvas” resonate throughout Khomenko’s cycle. First, this is evident in the consistent flattening of three-dimensionality into planar form, from her early textile works of the 1990s to her recent paintings. She employs either expansive white backgrounds or densely imprinted surfaces composed of repeating elements and interwoven lines reminiscent of threads. Second, a pronounced thread-like structure emerges in her latest paintings, visible in tangled linear motifs and the textured surfaces of the canvases themselves.

Driven by the necessity of technological transformation, Khomenko seamlessly merges printing and painting techniques. She combines stamp printing on fabric, photocopying technologies of the 1990s, and contemporary digital image processing and printing. The composition *Everyday*, for instance, functions as a hybrid of traditional stamp printing and modern digital reproduction. Using black-and-white reproductions of Ukrainian folk glass icons (such as Crucifixion imagery), the artist digitally transforms and multiplies these motifs. As with the halo – both a sign and an image of holiness – this repetition reflects the convergence of ancient tradition and contemporary practice.

The phenomenon of duplication in contemporary art may be interpreted through various theoretical lenses, ranging from Walter Benjamin’s concept of mechanical reproduction to the strategies of Pop Art. Nearly a century ago, Benjamin warned of the dangers inherent in endless replication, highlighting its technical and ethical limitations (Benjamin 2008; Mitchell 1995, 209–210). While replication was initially seen as an index of the loss of the artwork’s “aura,” in Khomenko’s project it signals the erosion of the aura of the sacred itself.

At the same time, repetition as an artistic strategy draws upon craft traditions characterized by the monotony of mechanical actions such as stamping and weaving. This monotony possesses a calming, stabilizing effect—particularly significant in times of war and social turbulence. Visual and verbal repetition also enhances expressive intensity. Umberto Eco emphasized repetition as a means of highlighting what is most important, noting its affinity with recitative forms used in ritual contexts (Eco 2009, 48–50).

Such formal strategies are evident in the works of Ostap Lozynskyi and Borys Fiodorowicz’s diptych *Our Lady of Częstochowa*, which resonate with Khomenko’s work in their meditative and metaphorical character. Repetition also evokes temporal duration and the cyclical nature of human existence. Khomenko has noted that *Everyday* embodies a symbolic calendar of wartime experience, referencing the daily reports of soldiers’ burials in Lviv. Though its elements appear identical, each bears subtle variations and individual character.

Structurally, this composition resembles a modular calendar grid – another manifestation of intermediality. In this respect, it may be juxtaposed with Sasha

Bychenko's *Calendar* (2024), created using a manual office stamp, where dates and months "float" within a disrupted grid. Both works convey subjective experiences of time – time as structured order and time as fluid, unpredictable presence.

Olena Khomenko's technique, which at first glance resembles traditional painting, in fact integrates sketching, digital processing, printing on fabric, and hand painting. She also employs transformed collage techniques, creating multilayered surfaces that oscillate between transparency and density. The relationship between image and technique – between meaning and form – is fundamental to her practice. Unlike classical oil painting, which conceals the structure of the canvas, Khomenko deliberately reveals the underlying framework, merging the essence of weaving (fibers, threads, interlacing) with schematic markings of lines and dots.

In conclusion, Olena Khomenko's *Creator's Point* cycle may be understood as a metaphorical projection from the past into the present. This projection unfolds through references to ancient Ukrainian art, dialogues between modernity and tradition, and the synthesis of archaic imagery with contemporary technological tools. The forms and media employed in Khomenko's work, together with her distinctive artistic language, are grounded in an intermedial approach to painting. As the artist herself observes, digital processing has become one of the tools that expands artistic possibilities, yet she remains deeply committed to the handmade dimension of her practice, valuing her experience in artistic textile as an essential foundation.

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ЦИКЛ ЖИВОПИСУ “ПОГЛЯД ТВОРЦЯ” ОЛЕНИ ХОМЕНКО (2021–2022): ПРОЄКЦІЇ МИНУЛОГО ТА ТЕПЕРІШНЬОГО

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Олена Хоменко – львівська художниця та педагогиня, відома своїми художніми проєктами, розташованими на перетині живопису та традиційного гобелена. Її художня практика поєднує традиції декоративного мистецтва минулого з формами та засобами сучасного візуального вираження. Цей критичний огляд зосереджений на одному з найновіших циклів художниці – “Точка творця”, започаткованому у 2021 році як інтуїтивне передвіщення драматичних подій, що розгорнулися в Україні у лютому 2022 року.

Твори мистецтва, створені між 2022 та 2024 роками, базуються на іконографічному матеріалі, отриманому з народних релігійних образів, матеріальних якостях тканини як традиційного засобу та розширених можливостях, що пропонуються сучасними технологіями для копіювання та відтворення візуальних образів. Таким чином, проєкт Олени Хоменко артикулює всебічний діалог між традицією та інноваціями в сучасному українському мистецтві.

Цикл аналізується через міждисциплінарну методологічну рамку, використовуючи концепції інтермедіальності та інтертекстуальності. Такий підхід дозволяє виявити зв’язки між елементами, транспонованими з різних технік візуального мистецтва, а також простежити посилання серед різних “текстів” візуальної культури як минулого, так і сьогодення.

Ключові слова: сучасне українське мистецтво, живопис, гобелен, релігійна образність, інтермедіальність.

Стаття надійшла до редколегії 29.09.2025 р.

Прийнята до друку 24.11.2025 р.