Наукові записки НаУКМА
Історія і теорія культури 8 (2025)

КУЛЬТУРОГРАФІЯ РОСІЙСЬКО-УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ВІЙНИ

NaUKMA Research Papers
History and Theory of Culture 8 (2025)

CULTUROGRAPHY OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

DOI: 10.18523/2617-8907.2025.8.30-42
UDC 008:[7-028.22:172.4](477)

Olesia Herashchenko
Researcher, The Mediation and Dialogue Research Center (MDRC)
National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (NaUKMA), Kyiv, Ukraine
https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8425-6581
olesya.shambur@gmail.com

Drawing the Invisible: Visual Reflections on War and Reconciliation in Ukraine*

Abstract

This article examines the role of visual art in addressing the layered experiences of Russia's war on Ukraine's social and emotional fabric, exploring its potential to facilitate the re-establishment of a new, commonly acceptable social agreement. It focuses on engaging adults from all regions of the country, including those in occupied and annexed territories, to create and anonymously share representations of the self and the other through visual forms (e.g., ad-hoc sketches and amateur artwork). The findings from a participatory art project, presented in this article, are used to assess the perceptions of individuals at the grassroots level regarding their own identity and that of their adversaries, as well as their emotional responses after revealing these perceptions through the artworks they produced.

While the visual data obtained from this participatory art project is recognized as a socially engaged form of qualitative inquiry, it also proves to be more accessible and comprehensive than traditional methods such as deep interviews and questionnaires, particularly in conflict settings where language becomes increasingly devoid of meaning and words are often reduced to inflammatory or clichéd expressions. The article posits that artistic self-reflection in conflict contexts provides a deeper understanding of the drivers and motives of both the self and the other, leading to inner transformation that may, in turn, facilitate future conflict transformation. Additionally, peace researchers can use such artistic practices to identify and resist the violence perpetuated through media and entertainment, as reflected in the non-artistic expressions of conflict participants.

Keywords: visual culture, sociocultural transformations, peacebuilding, imagery, iconology, identity, collective identity, collective memory, conflict transformation, interdisciplinarity.

Problem Statemen

In the context of Russia's war aggression against Ukraine and the crisis situations in the eastern part of the country, traditional conflict resolution methods, such as negotiations and political strategies, often prove ineffective due to the complexity of social, psychological, and political circumstances. At the same time, new methods, such as the use of visual art, open up new opportunities for restoring trust, understanding, and coexistence between different social groups. Visual art, due to its ability to communicate beyond verbal barriers, can influence the perception of the "Other," which is a crucial aspect of peacebuilding in divided societies. This research focuses on how artistic practices can contribute to self-reflection and changes in attitudes towards conflict, viewing this as an important component of social transformation.

* The images presented in this article are provided courtesy of the author.

© *Olesia Herashchenko,* 2025

Field and State of Research on the Topic

This article examines social conflict through the lens of subjective perceptions, drawing on Johan Galtung's triangular model of conflict, which identifies three interdependent variables: attitude (A), behavior (B), and contradiction (C). Attitudes encompass perceptions and misperceptions of the actors, often shaped by stereotypes and emotions such as anger and resentment. Contradictions refer to the structural and ideological incompatibilities between conflicting parties. Galtung suggests that these latent elements become manifest through a process of conscientization, inspired by Paulo Freire's pedagogy, where both internal and external dialogues facilitate the transition from subconscious knowledge to conscious awareness. This conceptualization highlights the interconnectivity between perception, cognition, and social action in the dynamics of conflict.

Building on these insights, Daniel Bar-Tal's work on intractable conflict explores the socio-psychological infrastructure that perpetuates violence. He argues that collective beliefs, attitudes, and emotions form a "sociopsychological repertoire" that reinforces conflict narratives, legitimizing hostility and violence. This perspective aligns with Henri Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, which explains how group identification fosters in-group favoritism and out-group derogation. Similarly, Vivienne Jabri examines how discourse shapes collective memory and the construction of the "Other," drawing on accounts from the Yugoslav wars. The gradual internalization of conflict through language, norms, and shared experiences underscores the role of identity in sustaining protracted disputes. The psychological dimension of conflict thus necessitates an examination of how entrenched perceptions and historical narratives inhibit resolution.

The interplay between cognition, emotion, and behavior in conflict settings is further elucidated through the works of Herbert Kelman and Ronald Fisher, who emphasize the role of fear in impeding change. Charles Horton Cooley's concept of the "looking-glass self" suggests that identity is shaped by perceived social judgments, a mechanism that can reinforce conflict-driven narratives (Cooley 1922). Antonio Damasio's research underscores the profound influence of emotions on cognition, suggesting that emotional responses can override rational decision-making. The creative arts provide non-verbal methodologies to uncover and articulate underlying emotions, making phenomenology a particularly useful approach for this study. As a philosophy and methodology, phenomenology prioritizes lived experience, allowing for a nuanced exploration of how individuals internalize and navigate conflict, thus offering valuable insights into processes of reconciliation and peacebuilding.

In this context, research in the field of using visual art for peacebuilding and conflict transformation, though remaining limited, is increasingly gaining attention in the scientific community, especially in the context of cultural diplomacy and peacekeeping. It is particularly the case when it comes to applying art in contexts where traditional reconciliation approaches are ineffective. Psychological and sociological theories, such as the concept of the "Ethos of Conflict" (D. Bar-Tal) and the ideas of moral imagination (J. P. Lederach), have already been applied to the analysis of intergroup conflicts, but using art as a tool for working with the internal self-perception of conflict participants requires deeper theoretical exploration. This article aims to fill this research gap by exploring the role of visual art in social transformation and peacebuilding processes in Ukraine.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to explore the role of visual art as a tool for restoring social understanding in the context of the Ukrainian conflict. Specifically, the article analyses how, through participation in artistic practices such as creating drawings and sketches, people from different regions of Ukraine — including temporarily occupied territories — were able to express their views the "Other" and reflect on their own place in the conflict.

While the participatory art project discussed in this article was conducted in 2019–2020 — prior to the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022 — its findings have not lost their relevance. On the contrary, the escalation of war has brought about even more acute internal displacement, fragmentation, and social trauma, making the question of civic coexistence and emotional reintegration more urgent than ever.

The article does not propose that art can replace political or military solutions in the face of armed aggression. Instead, it focuses on a different layer of peacebuilding: the internal civic landscape — where displaced people, host communities, and historically diverse regions of Ukraine must learn to coexist, understand each other, and rebuild trust. In this context, visual art emerges as a powerful and accessible method for facilitating self-reflection, processing emotion, and opening channels for intra-societal dialogue that verbal discourse alone may not achieve — particularly in moments of saturation, grief, or political overload.

The article thus positions visual art not as a universal remedy, but as a meaningful and underutilized resource for addressing internal fractures and fostering a culture of attentiveness, mutual recognition, and imaginative repair within a war-torn society.

Since 2014, Ukraine has been at the center of a protracted armed conflict. My work in the field of social reconciliation within Ukrainian communities, starting from the very onset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, has revealed that traditional Conflict Resolution practices have reached their limits in this context. This is due to the complex nature of the situation and the lack of political will to make difficult and unpopular decisions. Moreover, I contend that another key factor in the failure of the "liberal peacebuilding" model in Ukraine is the gap between the theories and processes of reconciliation, which originate in contexts significantly different from the realities of the conflict-affected societies. As Oliver Richmond notes, liberal peace is often a "virtual peace"—a concept that exists primarily within the discourse and imagination of the international community, rather than as an experience on the ground (Richmond 2012, 354). This observation led me to conclude that any imported reconciliation methodology must be adapted to the local environment. Furthermore, I suggest that alternative approaches and tools may be necessary to shift the conversation and reconciliation processes, as many of the established liberal peacebuilding methods have already been tested and found wanting.

This article examines some of the discourses and practices of conflict transformation within the realm of visual art. By analyzing images created by non-artists, it explores how visual art can engage with, and at times challenge, dominant narratives surrounding the ongoing war in Ukraine. The findings presented here are based on the 'So What Do You See?' project, conceived by colleagues from the University of Bradford, which I led from July 2019 to February 2020 across Ukraine. The project aimed to collect and analyze grassroots perspectives on self-identity, group identity, and the perceptions of the "other" in the context of the conflict. These insights were captured through the sketches and drawings of participants, offering a unique window into how individuals understand themselves and their adversaries in the current war.

Visual art, as part of the broader cultural process, offers a unique lens through which to interpret and construct meanings of peace. Art operates as a symbolic language, shaping collective narratives and fostering solidarities through shared experiences. While peacebuilding is often framed through political and legal mechanisms, visual art provides an alternative avenue—one that engages individuals emotionally, fosters empathy, and creates space for dialogue.

The early 21st century saw growing scholarly interest in the role of art in peacebuilding (Schirch 2008). However, the field remains under-theorized. While the power of the arts is often asserted, there is a need for a more systematic examination of how and when artistic interventions are effective, what they achieve, and how their impact can be evaluated. This paper seeks to move beyond broad claims about the transformative power of art to offer a structured analysis of its function in conflict transformation.

John Paul Lederach (2005) argues that the integration of artistic approaches into peacebuilding is not a minor corrective but a fundamental shift in perspective.

Conflict resolution has traditionally been framed as a rational, problem-solving exercise, yet intractable conflicts often persist due to deep-seated emotions, historical narratives, and identity-related fears. The inclusion of artistic methodologies expands the scope of peacebuilding by engaging with these affective dimensions.

Social identity theory provides a crucial framework for understanding conflict dynamics. Charles Horton Cooley's concept of the "looking-glass self" suggests that individuals shape their identities based not only on their self-perceptions but also on their assumptions about how others perceive them. In conflict settings, this dynamic can exacerbate tensions, as individuals and groups act based on perceived rather than actual threats.

Herbert Kelman (2010) highlights how entrenched conflicts create cognitive and perceptual constraints, limiting parties' ability to recognize opportunities for change.

Similarly, Daniel Bar-Tal (2000) describes the development of an "ethos of conflict"—a collective belief system that shapes how societies understand themselves, their adversaries, and the conflict itself. This ethos is reinforced through collective memory, further entrenching divisions.

Given these dynamics, peacebuilding strategies must engage with the psychological dimensions of conflict, addressing not only structural issues but also the deep-seated narratives and emotions that sustain hostility.

Phenomenology offers a useful methodological lens for exploring how individuals experience and make sense of conflict. Art-based research engages directly with lived experience, allowing participants to articulate perspectives that may be inaccessible

through conventional dialogue. This approach is particularly relevant in contexts where language has become politically charged or where certain voices have been marginalized.

The project **"So What Do You See?"** employs participatory visual art as a means of understanding intergroup perceptions in extreme conflict settings (Russian invasion). Recent scholarship highlights the potential of socially engaged art methodologies to challenge dominant narratives and create new spaces for dialogue (Wang et al. 2017).

By shifting the focus from verbal discourse to visual expression, the project seeks to bypass linguistic sensitivities that often reinforce entrenched positions. Participants are given the option to use up to ten words alongside their artwork, allowing for minimal but meaningful textual engagement.

The project operates on three levels:

1. **The individual artist** – Engaging in creative expression allows for personal reflection and meaning-making.
2. **The internal audience** – Viewers within the conflict context interpret the artwork through their lived experiences.
3. **The external audience** – Those outside the conflict gain insight into perspectives that might otherwise remain inaccessible.

Lederach (2005) describes how visual representation can facilitate new forms of understanding:

"If I can see it, I can understand it better. If I can understand it, I can find ways to shape and nudge it" (Lederach 2005, 73).

This highlights the potential of visual art to reveal hidden dynamics, enabling both creators and viewers to engage with conflict in ways that transcend traditional discourse.

Protracted conflicts often rely on rigid binaries — good versus evil, legitimate versus illegitimate. These narratives, as Jabri (1996) argues, are sustained through exclusionary discursive structures:

"Violent conflict is constitutively defined in terms of inclusion and exclusion, and any understanding of war must incorporate the means through which such systems are perpetuated" (Jabri 1996, 7).

The inclusion of marginalized voices through participatory art challenges these binaries, offering alternative narratives that can disrupt entrenched social divisions. Lederach's (2005) pyramid model of peacebuilding emphasizes the importance of engaging grassroots actors who are often excluded from formal negotiations. Art-based initiatives can play a crucial role in this process, providing a medium for those outside elite decision-making structures to express their perspectives and influence the discourse.

Jabri (1996) further argues that discursive structures shape and legitimize conflict. Expanding the space for new, creative expressions has the potential to interrupt these structures and introduce alternative ways of understanding and engaging with conflict.

The privileging of the visual over the verbal in artistic peacebuilding initiatives serves multiple purposes:

- It **bypasses linguistic sensitivities** that can reinforce divisions.
- It **creates space for non-verbal expression**, particularly for those who may not have the language to articulate their experiences.
- It **engages emotional and sensory dimensions of conflict**, offering new pathways for reconciliation.

Lederach (2005) describes how artistic processes can lead to deeper insights:

"This mapping out of one's thoughts and feelings, this piecing together of emerging fragments, can lead to a kind of resolution—an understanding that was previously hidden."

In the context of Ukraine, where the conflict cycle, caused by Russia's war aggression, is ongoing and multifaceted, visual art offers a means of engaging with these complexities in ways that traditional peacebuilding approaches may overlook.

This study explores the potential of visual art as an alternative to established conflict resolution methods that often exclude those without formal political influence. By shifting the focus from verbal negotiation to creative expression, it examines whether the arts can contribute to medium- and long-term peacebuilding processes.

The **"So What Do You See?"** project demonstrates how participatory art can challenge rigid conflict narratives, create space for marginalized voices, and foster new ways of seeing both the self and the "other." Through this exploration, the paper seeks to answer a fundamental question: **Can the creative arts contribute to sustainable peacebuilding, and if so, how?**

Methodology

The "So What Do You See?" project aimed to gather visual insights from grassroots perspectives on how people affected by Russia's war aggression, against Ukraine perceive themselves, their group, and their opposing group. Participants were asked to express their views visually (rather than verbally) to explore how non-verbal communication can break through the clichés and propaganda that shape the collective subconscious. This approach seeks to uncover new insights and shed light on how these biases affect perceptions of "the other."

Participants could choose from 16 prompts related to self-perception and perception of the other (e.g., "I see you as," "you see me as," "they see us as," etc.), as well as 8 aspirational prompts to explore their vision for a future where the war is over. a maximum of 10 words could accompany the image or be used as a title. Anonymity was preserved by asking participants to provide basic demographic information without their names.

Project Aims:

- To explore how people on opposing sides of a social conflict, caused by Russia's war aggression against Ukraine, view each other and how they think the 'other' perceives them.
- To explore the insights that can be gained through non-verbal communication, beyond the constraints of verbal language shaped by propaganda.

The project adhered to the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, ensuring consistent and ethical methodology across all interactions. Given the diverse ways people in Ukraine at that time perceived Russia's war aggression against Ukraine (e.g., internal civil conflict, war with Russia, etc.), participants were encouraged to express their views freely and without being confined to any particular label.

After the project, participants were asked to complete a follow-up questionnaire delivered via email, designed to assess emotional responses before, during, and after participation. While one-third of participants responded, those in occupied territories faced security concerns and were unable to provide contact information. In these cases, the survey was conducted in person by a local assistant.

Questionnaire:

- What were your thoughts when you were approached to take part in this project?
- Was it easy to choose a prompt to produce the sketch?
- Was it easy to come up with an idea for the sketch?
- Did the idea evolve during the sketching process?
- Did you learn something about yourself through this project?
- Did you feel better after participating?

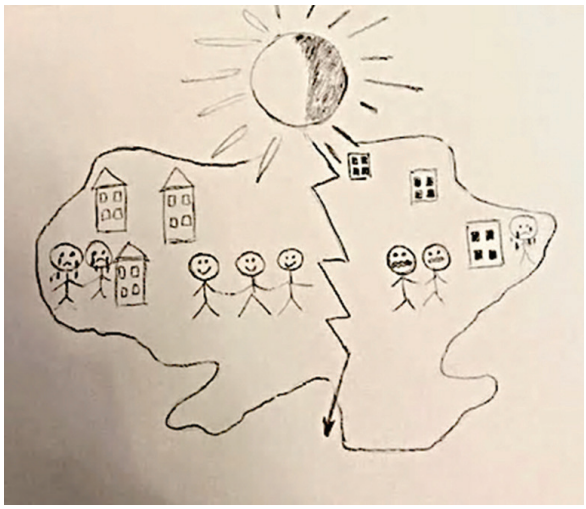
Data Storage and Security:

All sketches are stored in hard copy, though some from occupied territories are only available in digital form due to safety concerns when crossing the demarcation line. The project ensured anonymity by emphasizing that sketches would not be linked to personal identities.

This methodology offers a unique approach to exploring how art can facilitate conflict transformation, creating a space for people to express their views and emotions outside the constraints of traditional discourse.

I carried out this project in 16 locations across Ukraine, including territories not currently controlled by the Ukrainian government in Eastern Ukraine. a total of 334 participants were involved, producing visual representations of their perceptions regarding their own identities (both individually and collectively) within the Ukrainian conflict, as well as how they perceive or would like to perceive the "other side." The drawings were digitized, catalogued, and analyzed through the lens of Levinas's ethics of the Other, or what Levinas terms "ethics as first philosophy," which posits the primacy of ethics derived from the encounter with the Other. Additionally, the analysis incorporated Lederach's Moral Imagination approach, Daniel Bar-Tal's concept of the Ethos of conflict, and Cooley's "Looking-Glass Self" theory.

The sketches collected during the project varied in both complexity and emotional sensitivity. Nevertheless, they were subject to thematic categorization based on the key ideas participants sought to convey at the time of creation. This approach enabled the identification and analysis of recurring visual and emotional patterns, which were clear enough to allow for consistent grouping. The distinct tendencies that emerged provided a meaningful basis for interpreting the material and allowed me to develop a set of thematic categories reflecting the participants' perspectives and emotional states. An initial version of this idea was presented at the *International Scientific Conference "Current Trends in Art and Culture"* (April 3–4, 2024. Włocławek, Republic of Poland), and the corresponding conference paper was published in the *Conference Proceedings* (Herashchenko 2024).



In the present article, I offer an expanded and more detailed reflection on the research outcomes, including updated interpretations of the material. Below, I present the resulting thematic categorization of the drawings, which serves as the basis for the following analysis.

1. The Other

This theme aligns with the core aim of the project, which sought to navigate political clichés that, at best, cease to hold meaningful significance, and at worst, exacerbate the ongoing conflict. In addition, the project aimed to address the dynamics of "the Other" as conceptualized by Emmanuel Levinas, where his idea of "ethics as first philosophy" posits the primacy of ethical engagement emerging from the experience of encountering the Other (Nooteboom 2012, 162).

I analyzed which specific prompts participants chose to guide their drawings. The most frequently selected prompts were *"how I see you…"* and *"how I see myself…"*. When these data were cross-referenced with the geographical location of respondents, a notable pattern emerged: participants from Kyiv most often chose the prompt *"how I see you…"*. The drawings typically carried accusatory, aggressive, or contemptuous tones.

This suggests that, for these participants, it was especially important to visually express their attitude toward the Other—an Other whom they held responsible for what had happened.

In contrast, the prompt *"how I see myself…"* was most frequently selected by participants from temporarily non-government-controlled territories. These participants often depicted themselves as deprived of certain freedoms—of movement, of speech—drawing themselves with sealed mouths, bound hands, or surrounded by barbed wire. Clearly, for these participants, it was important to express a sense of themselves as victims or hostages of the situation.

While many participants approached the task as an opportunity to express their own feelings or to assign blame to the opposing side, there were instances where some participants exhibited a degree of relational reflexivity. Consequently, several images emerged that visualized the concepts of mirror and self-reflection and other strong metaphors. These visual representations depicted a mirror as a boundary, where "the Other" is shown either as a direct or distorted reflection of "the Self."

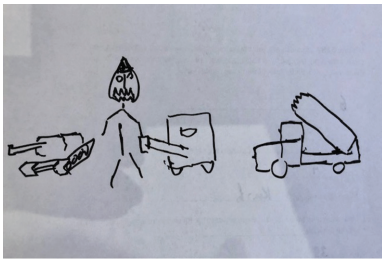


Fig. 1. Male, 39, Kyiv

Fig. 2. Male, 21, Kyiv

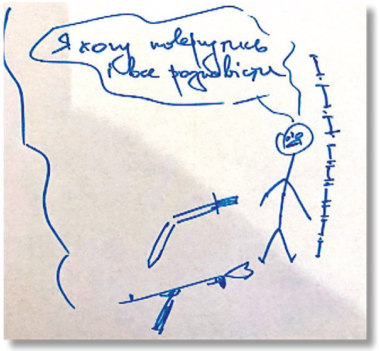


Fig. 3. Male, 40, Kyiv

Fig. 4. Female, 21, Rovenki

Fig. 5. Female, 53, Luhansk

Fig. 6. Male, 24, Donetsk

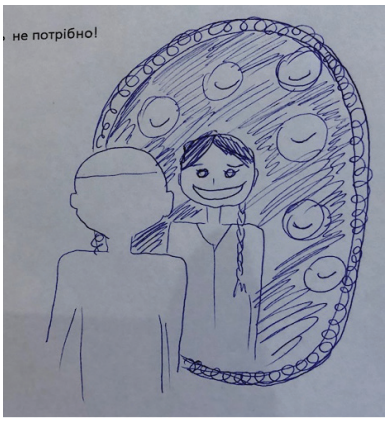


Fig. 7. Female, 36, Kharkiv

Fig. 8. Female, 24, Kyiv

Fig. 9. Female, 49, Poltava

2. Communication Dynamics (Narrative Fatigue, Propaganda, Comics as a Means of Telling Personal Stories)

Upon further reflection, the participants' sketches revealed a profound sense of "word-fatigue," as many visual responses illustrated how the struggle between competing narratives contributed to their anxiety. About a third of the sketches submitted by participants can be categorized as comics, as they portray action rather than offering a static snapshot of the situation. Ian Williams, a comics artist and co-founder of the Graphic Medicine movement, suggests that sequential art, combining visual elements and narrative structure, can facilitate a cathartic effect for the creator, enabling them to reframe and reauthor traumatic experiences in ways that simple narration cannot (Williams 2018, 34). In the context of conflict dialogue, it is a well-established fact that clichés fail to foster communication; however, personal stories—where individuals share how the situation has affected them on a personal level—are proven to be more effective in establishing mutual understanding. By submitting comics in response to the project's prompts, participants appear to express a willingness to share their stories, often personal and painful. This can be seen as a strong indication of their readiness for dialogue, as well as a desire to vocalize and visually articulate their inner concerns. Additionally, this approach suggests a potential openness to understanding the perspectives of the Other.

3. Maps and Borders

The graphic syntax of the collected illustrations supports the claim that the artistic intervention of the *"So, What Do You See?"* project functioned as a prism through which the questions posed could be viewed from an unexpected angle—namely, a geographical one. The drawings revealed a genuine polyphony of voices and experiences, distilled into a wide range of recurring symbols and visual motifs.

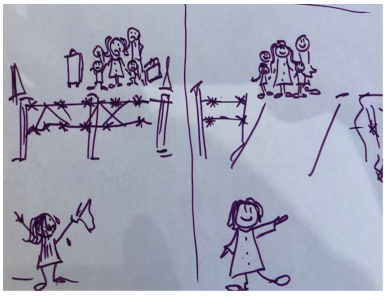


Fig. 10. Female, 32, Kyiv – Dovzhansk

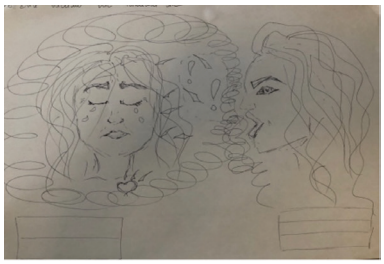


Fig. 11. Female, 18, Poltava

Fig. 12. Female, 35, Dovzhansk

Fig. 13. Male, 27, Otomanivka

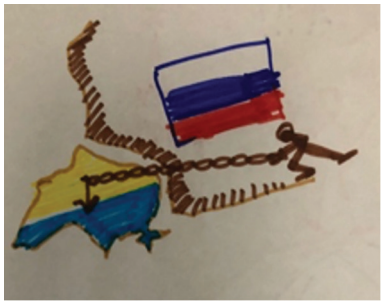


Fig. 14. Male, 62, Mariupol

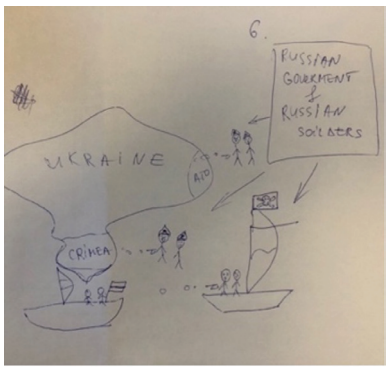


Fig. 15. Male, 20, Chernivtsi

Among these, the map of Ukraine emerged as the most frequently used pictogram for expressing participants' attitudes toward the unfolding events, appearing as a central element in over 20% of all drawings. Even this generalized image, however, carried distinct meanings in each individual case.

To explore these representations, I employed several methodological approaches that focused less on deconstruction and more on the presentation and contextual interpretation of selected sketches, which revealed identifiable thematic patterns. In a related study, I investigated the phenomenon of the appearance of the 1991 contour of Ukraine in the visual environment over the period from 2000 to 2023. This image has undergone a significant transformation in its social meaning—from kitsch to iconic—and now demonstrates a powerful massification effect within Ukrainian visual culture. The theoretical framework for that reflection was structured around three key conceptual axes: *visual archive*, *autotherapy*, and *nostalgia*.

In the section discussing internal dialogue and the autotherapeutic dimensions of visual expression (Heraszczenko 2023, 89), I drew upon some materials from the *"So, What Do You See?"* project, specifically participants' drawings, as part of the analytical basis.

It is important to acknowledge that the meaning of these drawings is inseparable from the specific context and setting in which they were created. The ongoing war in Ukraine has rapidly and visibly contributed to the reinforcement of individual and collective identities, shifting from a fragile to a more unified form. In this context, the map of Ukraine has become a powerful symbol of this evolving identity. As Anthony Cohen argues in *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, symbols like the map are "infused with timelessness" and acquire special significance during periods of intense social change, when communities must reassert their cultural foundations to resist the pressures of transformation (Cohen 1985, 102). In the case of the Ukrainian

Fig. 16. Male, 27, Otomanivka

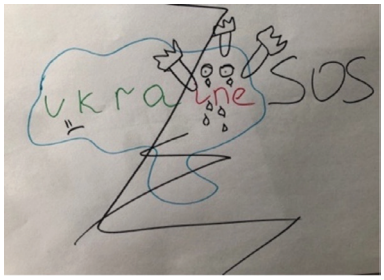


Fig. 17. Male, 62, Mariupol

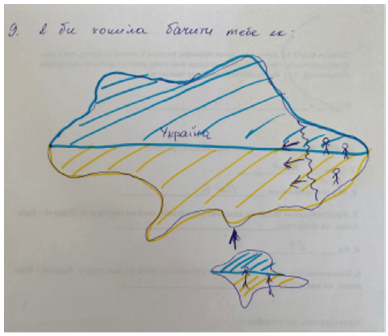


Fig. 18. Male, 20, Chernivtsi

community, the cognitive map that guides individuals' and groups' interactions has come to incorporate the physical map of Ukraine as it existed in 1991(Heraszczenko 2023). This image resonates deeply, becoming a central symbol around which collective identity is organized.

At the same time, the contour of map of Ukraine served as a medium through which participants documented their geopolitical perspectives and convictions regarding the attribution of responsibility for the occupation. In this context, the primary objective of the sketches was to creatively reconstruct the discourse that participants appeared inclined to endorse. Thus, the act of drawing does not merely function as an observational record of what an individual has witnessed; rather, it represents an effort to articulate a subjective interpretation of events—an expression that is either deeply emotional or strongly communicative in nature yet resists verbalization.

Ian Williams identifies several reasons that motivate individuals to engage in forms of expression that may be broadly considered autotherapeutic (Williams 2011). Among these is the need to construct a narrative and to shape a memory. Thus, a drawing does not necessarily function as a record of one's observation. Rather, it may serve as an attempt to externalize a personal perception of events that are either emotionally intense or significant in terms of the message they convey.

Beneath the regretful memory of loss lies both the search for and the appeal for relief from struggle, a reaffirmation of national identity, and an implicit, non-discursive sense of pride. This pride is encapsulated in the depiction of a landscape—one that is undergoing transformation yet remains sacred in its familiar form.

The process of reproducing this heterogeneous collective image becomes a site of both conscious and subconscious visual influence, shaping a visual culture that frames the territory of Ukraine as a "non-negotiable" point of unity for the community.

4. Reimagining a Positive Future

The fragmented and diverse social icons utilized by participants during their sketches suggest that for conflict transformation to be successful, a new set of social icons may be needed—one that reimagines peace. As Frank Möller, Professor at the Tampere Peace Research Institute, argues, global changes require shifts in the way we conceptualize the world. To facilitate political change, it is essential to transition from conflict-oriented thinking to peace-oriented thinking. However, popular culture predominantly emphasizes the visualization of conflict and violence (Möller 2020, 29), reflecting the reality of current events. In this context, visualizing peace becomes a challenge for observers.

Nevertheless, the visualization of peace has the potential to influence its understanding and pursuit. Social icons that embody the aesthetics of peace could support a shift in public consciousness toward seeing peace as a desirable goal. Participants in the study provided examples of social iconography aligned with the aesthetics of peace, such as images of bridges and handshakes, contrasting these with depictions of walls and barbed wire. The submissions revealed a roughly equal representation of "walls" and "bridges," speaking

Fig. 19. Male, 33, Dnipro
(In the upper-left corner reads: "Peace is good, but the border needs to be protected")

Fig. 20. Female, 31, Luhansk

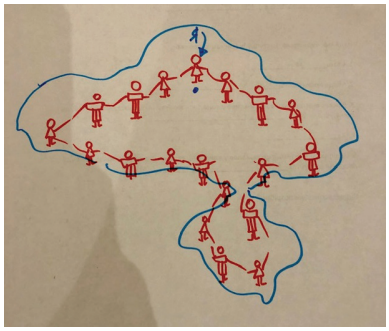


Fig. 21. Female, 37, Mariupol

Fig. 22. Male, 31, Lviv

Fig. 23. Male, 20, Donetsk

Fig. 24. Female, 17, Kyiv – Crimea

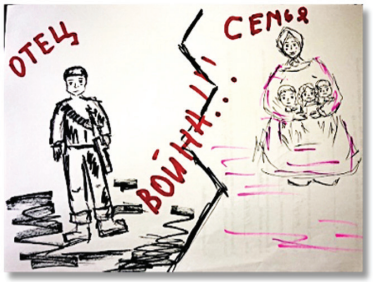


Fig. 25. Female, 17, Kyiv – Crimea

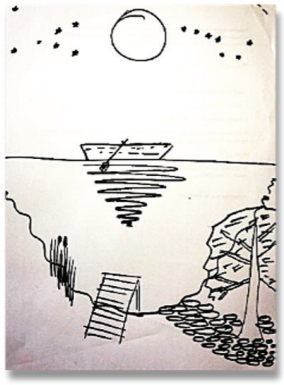


Fig. 26. Male, 18, Kyiv – Crimea

to the participants' stark perceptions. Other iconic images symbolizing peace included depictions of a re-imagined future characterized by love and harmony. These responses, primarily stemming from the second column of prompts (related to aspirational states), commonly feature symbols such as doves, hearts, suns, and happy families.

Among other observations that I consider important—though they do not fall neatly within the chosen approach to categorization—I would note the following: in Kyiv, women predominantly envisioned images of a safe future, while men more frequently drew guns and borders. I also received two nearly identical images from Lviv and Donetsk, and three drawings of a similar nature from participants in Kyiv. These works clearly reflect a deep sense of the duration, absurdity, and tragedy of the war, as perceived by certain individuals.

Drawings from southern Ukraine tended to be more neutral in character. This may indicate a general reluctance to take sides, and instead a prevailing mood of hoping for a swift resolution to the conflict. Participants from Luhansk and Donetsk depicted various forms of borders and restrictions, while drawings representing Crimea expressed strong feelings of nostalgia and separation.

Several weeks after participating in the project, respondents received a questionnaire designed to assess their feelings before, during, and after the experiment. The questionnaire was sent to the email addresses provided in the consent forms filled out prior to their participation. One of the key questions asked was, "Did you discover something about yourself as a result of participating in the project?" a total of 68% of respondents answered affirmatively. Notably, the responses varied significantly, making it difficult to generalize the findings. Some of the most insightful and revealing answers were as follows:

- "I didn't realize it would be so hard to do."
- "Our enemies want to see themselves just like we would like to see ourselves – free, strong, and prosperous."
- "Personal experience reflects my answer."
- "Generalization of the 'WE' concept and how we are, in reality, diverse within this framework of 'WE'."

The most poignant response was: "The process of choosing the prompt facilitated clarification of my own values and motivation in the conflict."

The insights gained from this project align with Adam Curle's assertion that self-awareness is the root of all change (Curle 1994, 98). Curle's perspective on peacebuilding emphasizes that meaningful transformation begins with an individual's internal reflection, which in turn influences their external relationships. This idea is particularly relevant in the context of conflict resolution, where a shift in one's understanding of the Other can catalyze more empathetic and constructive interactions. The art project provided a space for participants to engage in this process, facilitating a deeper understanding of both them and those they view as adversaries.

Therefore, the more our perception of the Other aligns with a deeper understanding of ourselves, the more likely our attitude toward the Other will change. Peacebuilding inherently involves social transformation, which requires shifts in people's perceptions of their local environment and their relationships with the Other. Self-awareness is a cornerstone of this transformation. Consequently, artistic experiences can provide new frameworks for interpreting conflict and relationships, potentially contributing to momentum in conflict transformation within communities.

Conclusion and Epilogue

The findings presented in this article underscore the transformative potential of visual art in addressing deep-rooted conflicts and facilitating peacebuilding. By engaging with the artistic practices of creating drawings and sketches, participants from diverse regions of Ukraine, including those from territories temporarily under occupation, were able to express their perceptions of the "Other" and reflect on their role in the ongoing conflict, caused by Russia's war aggression, against Ukraine. This exercise not only provided a means for participants to communicate complex emotions and narratives but also encouraged self-reflection, which is essential for peacebuilding.

Measurement of the participants' psycho-emotional state before the sketching stage and several weeks after the project showed identical average indicators of 3.51 and 3.51 (on a scale where 5 indicates empowerment and 1 denotes a non-resourceful state). However, when analyzing the dynamics of individual questionnaires, a clear trend emerges: emotional change did occur—often by as many as two points on the scale. This suggests that participation in the project had a significant emotional impact on the individual—either substantially positive or markedly negative. This fluctuation can be explained by the diverse experiences of individuals during the Russian military invasion. For those who directly encountered the war or suffered major losses, the act of revisiting and reflecting upon what had happened may have triggered re-traumatization. In contrast, for those who perceived the war as a painful background to everyday life, the opportunity to express their anger and personal stance may have led to an emotional uplift and a sense of release.

The outcomes of the project *"So, What Do You See?"* demonstrate that artistic experience can offer new frameworks for interpreting problems and the relationships surrounding them. This approach provides an impetus for mutual understanding within communities. Since our inner life is inherently invisible, visual art can serve as a means of expressing and externalizing what we feel—both to others and to ourselves. Artistic expression makes genuine emotions visible and specific, thereby contributing to a more holistic understanding of oneself.

As observed through the responses from the post-project questionnaire, a significant majority of participants (68%) reported a deeper understanding of themselves as a result of the experience. The responses were varied, reflecting the complexity and individuality of the participants' internal journeys. Many expressed newfound insights into the shared humanity of those on the opposite side of the line of contact, revealing that the process of creating art prompted them to reconsider preconceived notions and broaden their perspective on the conflict. As one participant noted, the act of choosing a prompt for their drawing helped clarify their own values and motivations in the conflict, highlighting the role of artistic practice in fostering critical self-awareness.

The project's emphasis on self-awareness also contributes to a broader understanding of peacebuilding as a social transformation process. It is not only the physical resolution of disputes that matters, but also the shift in individuals' perceptions of their environment and their relationships with the Other. Artistic practice, through its ability to evoke introspection and personal expression, offers a unique tool for this transformation. It provides an avenue for participants to reframe the conflict, moving away from entrenched narratives and toward a more inclusive, empathetic vision of peace.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that visual art can serve as a powerful tool for conflict

transformation. By fostering self-awareness and empathy, it enables participants to reimagine their relationships with others, contributing to a more profound and sustainable peace process. The project's success in engaging individuals across a wide range of regions, including those in occupied territories, highlights the potential of art-based interventions to support reconciliation efforts and restore social understanding. This approach holds promise for communities seeking to heal from the wounds of Russian war against Ukraine and move toward a more durable structure of social fabric.

References

Bar-Tal, Daniel. 2000. *Shared Beliefs in a Society: Social Psychological Analysis*. SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452204697.

Cohen, Anthony. 1985. *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, 98–118. Routledge.

Cooley, Charles Horton. 1922. *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Curle, Adam. 1994. "New Challenges for Citizen Peacemaking." *Medicine and War* 10 (2): 96–105.

Heraszczenko, Ołesia. 2023. "Mapa Ukrainy w środowisku wizualnym. Co kryje obraz?". *Konteksty. Polska Sztuka Ludowa* 4: 85–97. https://doi.org/10.36744/k.2541.

Herashchenko, Olesia. 2024. ""So What Do You See?" Project Findings. Visual Art in Reconciliation of Ukraine." In *International scientific conference "Current trends in art and culture": Conference Proceedings (April 3–4, 2024. Wloclawek, Republic of Poland)*, 32–40. Riga, Latvia: Baltija Publishing. https://doi.org/10.30525/978-9934-26-427-6-7.

Jabri, Vivienne. 1996. *Discourses on Violence: Conflict Analysis Reconsidered*. Manchester University Press.

Kelman, Herbert C. 2010. "Interactive Problem Solving: Changing Political Culture in the Pursuit of Conflict Resolution." *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 16 (4): 389–413. https://doi.org/10.1080/10781919.2010.518124.

Lederach, John Paul. 2005. *The Moral Imagination. The Art and Soul of Building Peace*. Oxford University Press.

Möller, Frank. 2020. "Peace Aesthetics, a Patchwork." *Peace & Change* 45 (1): 28–54. https://doi.org/10.1111/pech.12385.

Nooteboom, Bart. 2012. "Levinas: Philosophy of the Other." In *Beyond Humanism: The Flourishing of Life, Self, and Other*, 162–84. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Richmond, Oliver. 2012. "Beyond Local Ownership in the Architecture of International Peacebuilding." *Ethnopolitics* 11 (4): 354–75. https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2012.697650.

Schirch, Lisa. 2008. *Strategic Peacebuilding: State of the Field*. Women in Security Conflict Management and Peace.

Wang, Qingchun, Sara Coemans, Richard Siegesmund, and Karin Hannes. 2017. "Arts-based Methods in Socially Engaged Research Practice: a Classification Framework." *Art/Research/International Transdisciplinary Journal* 2 (2): 5–39. https://doi.org/10.18432/R26G8P.

Williams, Ian. 2011. "Autography as Auto-Therapy: Psychic Pain and the Graphic Memoir." *Journal of Medical Humanities* 32 (4): 353–66. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10912-011-9158-0.

Олеся Геращенко

Дослідниця,

Центр досліджень медіації та діалогу (The Mediation and Dialogue Research Center),

Національний університет «Києво-Могилянська академія» (НаУКМА), Київ, Україна

https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8425-6581

olesya.shambur@gmail.com

Малювання невидимого: візуальні рефлексії про війну та суспільне порозуміння в Україні

Досліджено роль візуального мистецтва в розбудові порозуміння в Україні через аналіз його потенціалу у формуванні нового соціального договору, прийнятного для різних суспільних груп. Дослідження, представлене у статті, спирається на результати проєкту «Отже, що ти бачиш?», який було проведено у 2019–2020 роках в Україні у співпраці з колегами з Університету Бредфорда (Велика Британія). Учасники проєкту, представляючи себе та Іншого через художні образи, відкривали нові рівні розуміння конфлікту. До дослідження було залучено дорослих з усіх регіонів України, включно з тимчасово окупованими територіями, з метою створення анонімних візуальних зображень себе та Іншого (ескізи та аматорські малюнки). Результати цього партисипативного мистецького проєкту було використано для аналізу сприйняття особистої ідентичності та образу ворога, а також емоційних реакцій учасників після створення та обговорення власних робіт.

Отримані візуальні дані є соціально залученою формою якісного дослідження, яка є більш доступною та виразною в конфліктних умовах, ніж традиційні методи глибинних інтерв'ю чи анкетування. Авторка статті стверджує, що художня рефлексія в умовах конфлікту сприяє глибшому розумінню мотивів як власних дій, так і дій супротивника, що може вести до внутрішньої трансформації та сприяти в майбутньому процесу порозуміння. Крім того, мистецькі практики можуть використовувати дослідники в галузі миротворчості для виявлення й протидії насильству, що відтворюється через медіа та розважальний контент, а також у побутових наративах учасників конфлікту.

Аналіз отриманих малюнків дав змогу виявити, що процес художньої рефлексії сприяє усвідомленню спільних рис із супротивником та перегляду стереотипних уявлень. Після завершення проєкту 68 % учасників повідомили про глибше розуміння власної ідентичності.

Мистецтво виявилось ефективним інструментом для зміни ставлення до конфлікту. Воно не лише надало можливість учасникам виразити емоції, які важко передати словами, а й сприяло особистій трансформації та формуванню нового бачення співіснування. Дослідження доводить, що візуальне мистецтво може бути дієвим засобом примирення, допомагаючи людям переосмислити свої стосунки з іншими та сприяючи глибшому і стійкому суспільному договору.

Ключові слова: візуальна культура, соціокультурні трансформації, миробудування, образність, іконологія, ідентичність, колективна ідентичність, колективна пам'ять, трансформація конфлікту, міждисциплінарність.

Manuscript received March 6, 2025
Матеріал надійшов 6 березня 2025 р.

© Олеся Геращенко (Olesia Herashchenko), 2025

olesya.shambur@gmail.com

https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8425-6581

Сфера наукових зацікавлень: культура примирення, візуальне мистецтво як інструмент суспільного діалогу, соціальні трансформації в постконфліктних суспільствах, роль мистецтва в осмисленні війни та формуванні етичної солідарності.

Main research fields: culture of reconciliation, visual art as a tool for social dialogue, social transformations in post-conflict societies, the role of art in interpreting war and fostering ethical solidarity.

Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0)