

Moldovan cultural values through the lens of the exhibition “100 Years of National Graphic Art”

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Abstract: On the occasion of the 85th anniversary of the founding of the National Museum of Art of Moldova (MNAM), the exhibition “100 Years of National Graphics” was inaugurated between 26 November 2024 and 23 February 2025. The National Graphic Arts collection at the MNAM was started in 1945 and continues to grow today. The collection includes over 11,500 works of easel graphics, book illustrations, posters and stage design, all created between 1886 and 2021. Among them are works by Bessarabian artists who contributed to the development of exhibition activities and the training of new generations of visual artists. Their art was influenced by various European art trends and movements. The visual arts in the Moldavian SSR bore the marks and traditions of socialist realism. Some artists could not withstand the ideological pressures and were forced to leave the country (I. Bogdesco, etc.). Others abandoned graphic techniques completely or partially in favour of easel painting, as was the case with artists such as V. Cuzmenco, V. Cojocar, E. Zavtur, E. Childescu, etc. The disappearance of the socialist paradigm generated a crisis of values, a period of transition marked by stylistic, aesthetic, plastic and ideological searches. The current exhibition presents the ensemble of “golden works” from the National Graphics Collection of the MNAM, by the most representative graphic artists (A. Baillayre, I. Bogdesco, T. Baillayre, E. Ivanovsky, I. Vieru, G. Vrabie, A. Colâbneac, R. Ocușco, T. Kiriacoﬀ, V. Ivanov, V. Covali, L. Grigorașenco, E. Childescu, Ș. Cogan, G. Fiurer, S. Tuhari, S. Zamșa, and others). The works of these masters reflect a wide range of themes (the peasant, women, family, work, the native village, etc.) addressed during the development of national graphic art over a period of more than a hundred years and encompassing several generations of artists.

Keywords: national graphic art, cultural values, national artistic heritage, metaphorical symbols, national value, peasant portrait, rural landscape, Moldovan village.

Introduction. The establishment of the national art school: prominent personalities and artistic processes.

Culture and tradition are inextricably linked, continuously perfecting the material and spiritual values of the people. Any artistic field as a phenomenon can be examined as a continuous interaction between tradition

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and innovative experimentation. The task of modern art and art schools is to promote national artistic heritage and pass on culture and tradition to other generations¹.

In Moldovan national art, we know many Moldovan artists who have addressed national themes and practised the field of graphic art: Auguste Baillayre², Lidia Arionescu-Baillayre, Tania Baillayre, Moisey Gamburd, Alexandru Plămădeală, Pavel Șillingovski, Rostislav Ocușco, Theodor Kiriacoff, Elizabeth Ivanovsky, Eugenia Maleșevschi, Moisey Kogan, Șneer Cogan, Gheorghe Ceglocoff, Grigori Fiurer, and others. In the post-war period, graphic art stood out in the work of artists such as Ilie Bogdesco, Leonid Grigorașenco, Victor Ivanov, Leonid Beleaev, Gheorghe Vrabie, Alexei Colâbneac, and others.

The evolution of national art in the field of Bessarabian graphics between 1887 and 1944 underwent rapid development. Many artists, descendants of Bessarabia, left the region and settled in Saint Petersburg, Moscow, Bucharest, Paris, etc. Thus, in 1932, the Bessarabian painter Tania Baillayre stood out in the field of graphic art.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Bessarabian graphic art was very modest (for example, the woodcuts signed by Gheorghe Ceglocoff (1904-1964), “Peasant from Rășinari. Sibiu” – 1940, etc.). The artistic and stylistic panorama during this period was varied. The Bessarabian national school evolved rapidly and abruptly, but it connected with the European styles of the time, simultaneously assimilating realistic and impressionistic trends.

The Baillayre family, who lived through a dramatic and contradictory era, produced an entire dynasty of artists (Auguste Baillayre³, Lidia Arionescu-Baillayre, Tania Baillayre). In the second half of the 20th century, the woodcuts signed by Leonid Beleaev, Grigore Fiurer, Leonid Grigorașenco, Victor Ivanov, Stepan Tuhari, Vasile Cojocaru, Ion Sfeclă, African Usov, Gheorghe Huzun, Ilie Bogdesco, Eudochia Zavtur, Simion Zamșa, Elena Karacentev, and the drawings by Tania Baillayre, among others.

The Soviet period in Moldova was fruitful in terms of the emergence of new creative talents who enriched the artistic atmosphere and local cultural space through the use of traditional techniques and national themes. During this period, artists were particularly active in the field of graphic art: Gheorghe Vrabie, Igor Vieru, Stepan Tuhari, Ion Tabârță, Vasile Cojocaru, Valentin Coreachin, Gheorghe Guzun, Miriam Gamburd, Emil Childescu, Dumitru Savastin, Semion Solonari, Filimon Hămuraru, Boris Poleacov,

¹ Tatiana Comendant (2020). *National themes – a natural attribute in the art of engraving*, “Study of Arts and Culturology: History, Theory, Practice”, no. 1(36), pp. 170-175.

² Tudor Stavilă (2004). *Bessarabian Masters of the 20th Century. Auguste Baillayre*, Editura Arc, Chișinău, p. 13.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 5-36

Alexei Colâbneac, African Usov, Vladimir Lavrentov, Ilie Bogdesco, and others.

The evolution of the artistic process⁴, the establishment of national graphic art and the continuity of Bessarabian art traditions in the post-war artistic environment were guaranteed by the work of artists with individual aesthetic concepts – Igor Vier⁵, Mihai Grecu, Rostislav Ocușco, Ilie Bogdesco, Gheorghe Vrabie, Alexei Colâbneac, Grigore Fiurer, Victor Ivanov, Liubomir Sobolevski, Boris Nesvedov, Moisei Gamburd, Ada Zevin, Emil Childescu, Victor Cuzmenco, etc.

The 1960s and 1970s stand out in the history of Moldovan visual arts as a prolific, rich and interesting period, highlighting the artistic level of graphic works, diverse both in terms of theme and in terms of the technical processes and means of expression used (L. Grigorașenco⁶, V. Ivanov, L. Beleaev, Gh. Huzun, Gh. Vrabie, A. Usov, St. Tuhari, V. Coreachin, I. Sfeclă, V. Cuzmenco, M. Gamburd, etc.).

The art of national graphics after the 1980s is complemented by new artists, who bring to the genre diverse subjects and approaches that have favoured experimentation with mixed technologies. Important representatives of this generation include E. Zavgur⁷, E. Childescu, S. Zamșa⁸, E. Caracentev, V. Zăbulică, and others.

After the 1990s, innovative conceptual compositions and a pronounced orientation towards abstraction became prominent, with artists such as S. Zamșa, A. Colâbneac and others producing such works. The traditionalism of Bessarabian visual arts and their anchoring in the trends and styles of the 19th century determined their adherence to the specific form of realistic and impressionist art. The influences of the avant-garde spread throughout the artistic space, but failed to disrupt the traditional themes and exclusion of symbolism in the artists' creations. Thus, in graphic art, the dominant genres are portraiture, landscape, nude, thematic composition, still life, interior and animal art.

A substantial contribution to the development of portraiture in Bessarabian graphic art was made by the artist Eugenia Maleșevski⁹ (1863-1942). Graphic artist Șneer Cogan and sculptor Alexandru Plămădeală created many portraits using various techniques (etching, charcoal, chalk,

⁴ Liudmila Toma (2018). *The Artistic Process in the Republic of Moldova (1940-2000): Painting. Sculpture. Graphics*, National Museum of Art of Moldova, Chișinău, pp. 151-152.

⁵ Iuliana Gherman (2023). *Igor Vieru – 100 years since his birth*, in Lucia Postica (coord.), “Annual Scientific Conference: Collection of papers: 2022, 2023 editions”, Chișinău, pp. 130-138.

⁶ Elena Grigorașenco (2024). *Leonid Grigorașenco: painting, graphics: [exhibition catalogue]*, National Museum of Art of Moldova, Editura Bons Offices, Chișinău, pp. 4-5.

⁷ Victoria Rocaciuc (2019). *Book graphics in the work of artist Eudochia Zavgur*, in Lucia Postica (coord.), “Annual Scientific Conference: Collection of papers: 2018, 2019 editions”, Editura Bons Offices, Chișinău, pp. 136-141.

⁸ Simion Zamșa (2017). *Album. Simion Zamșa*, Centrul Cultural „George Apostu” Bacău.

⁹ Tudor Stavilă (2005). *Eugenia Maleșevski. Bessarabian Masters of the 20th Century*, Editura Arc, Chișinău.

etc.). Theodor Kiriacoff created many costume sketches¹⁰, mainly in watercolour. During the Bessarabian and post-war periods, linocut was frequently used by artists such as Gheorghe Ceglocoff (*Portrait of an Old Man*, 1941), Tania Baillayre (*Portrait of a Peasant*, 1939; *Lotus*, 1967) and others.

The founding of the Moldovan National School had a beneficial impact on local artistic life, diversifying exhibition activities, stylistic approaches, plastic, technical and technological means, which contributed to the consolidation of the graphic arts field. The process of establishing Moldovan graphic art is due to a small number of artists who continuously promoted national graphic art throughout this period. The most significant works in the field of graphic art were created by artists Pavel Șillingovski¹¹, Șneer Cogan, Moissey Kogan, Gheorghe Ceglocoff, Theodor Kiriacoff, Grigore Fiurer, Rostislav Ocușco, Auguste Baillayre, Nicolae Gumalic, Alexandru Plămădeală, Moisey Gamburd and the artists Eugenia Gamburd, Miriam Gamburd, Eugenia Maleșevschi and others.

These artists, mostly painters and sculptors, use graphic language, exploring various techniques, which contributes to the evolution and further promotion of the field of graphics in the visual arts. Often, artists carried out commissions for publishing houses, participated in exhibitions with sketches and graphic book presentations¹².

Graphic artist Ilie Bogdesco (1923-2010), who left Moldova in 1992, was a full member of the Academy of Arts of the former USSR, an accomplished calligrapher and author of illustrations for about 100 books, which have become classics and are well known in European art. Thus, the artist left an important legacy for the Republic of Moldova – book graphics and calligraphy, defined by his own style and artistic vision, determined by the innovations of his works in the context of traditions and in the contemporary artistic spirit of the era.

The specificity of the painter's interpretation and the individual character of his work can be identified in his final year thesis at the Leningrad Academy of Art and Architecture (1952), when he illustrated Nicolai Gogol's "The Fair at Sorochinsk", an impressive work thanks to the faces and images created by the graphic artist. The scenes and portraits, executed daily on site in Sorochinsk, were included in the preparatory material for the thesis. In his prints, Ilie Bogdesco discovered the subtlety of Gogolian humour, the popular

¹⁰Tudor Stavilă (2004). *Theodor Kiriacoff. Bessarabian Masters of the 20th Century*, Editura Arc, Chișinău, pp. 32-33.

¹¹ Eleonora Brigalda-Barbas (2005). *Pavel Șillingovski. Bessarabian Masters of the 20th Century*, Editura Arc, Chișinău.

¹² Liudmila Toma, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-152.

character of the dialect and the Ukrainian colouring¹³. The painter rendered the image of everyday reality, being a master of psychological portraiture and genre scenes¹⁴.

The art of set designers is represented in the MNAM collection by set designs for films made at the Moldova Film studio. These include set designs for the films *Cântec de leagăn* (Lullaby), *Așteaptă-ne în zori* (Wait for Us at Dawn), *Ultimul freebooter* (The Last Freebooter), *Zece ierni pentru o vară* (Ten Winters for One Summer), *Poiana roșie* (The Red Glade), *Serghei Lazo*, *Riscul* (The Risk), etc. S. Bulgakov's graphic sketches are expressive and dynamic. Those by Aurelia Roman are decorative and colourful.

Set design is varied, both in terms of individual interpretation and thematic exposure. The most representative artists, professionals in stage design, are: Auguste Baillayre, Theodor Kiriakoff, Boris Nesvedov, Anton Mater, Anatolii Șubin, Konstantin Lodzeiski¹⁵, Nicolai Alentiev, Lazar Kaușanskii, Boris Piskun, Anatolii Jeludev, Petru Balan^{16,17} (Fig. 1), Constantin Balan, Adrian Suruceanu, Iurie Matei, Irina Gurin, Aurelia Roman, Stela Verebceanu, and others. The sketches presented by the artists at the exhibition are original, revealing the idea that decorations are indispensable elements in theatrical stage art¹⁸.



Fig. 1 Petru Balan, *The Death of Milescu-Spătaru*, Set design sketch for the play “Prolog” by V. Matei, 1987. Paper, gouache, 1987 (MNAM Collection)

¹³ Victoria Rocaciuc (2023). *Illustrations for sketches, short stories and novels in the work of artist Ilie Bogdesco*, in Lucia Postica (coord.), “Annual Scientific Conference: Collection of papers: 2022, 2023 editions”, Chișinău, pp. 21-25.

¹⁴ National Museum of Art of Moldova (2023). *Ilie Bogdesco: graphics*, National Museum of Art of Moldova, Chișinău, pp. 4-5.

¹⁵ Vitalie Malcoci (2022). *Set designer Constantin Lodzeiski – faithful promoter of theatrical art values*, “Art. Visual Arts”, New Series, Vol. XXXI, no. 1, Chișinău, pp. 83-87.

¹⁶ Petru Bălan (2021). *Set Design*, Editura Epigraf, Chișinău.

¹⁷ Vitalie Malcoci (2020). *P. Balan – new approaches and trends in stage design in the 1990s*, “Art. Visual Arts Series, Fine Arts, Architecture”, New Series, vol. XXX, no. 1, pp. 70-75.

¹⁸ MNAM (2021). *Scenographic Art: Exhibition dedicated to the centenary of the Mihai Eminescu National Theatre*, MNAM, Chișinău, pp. 5-9.

The theatre scenography collection of the National Museum of Art of Moldova includes works created by professional painters during the Bessarabian period¹⁹, post-war and contemporary periods (1921-2006). These are exhibited through set designs, costumes, theatre programmes, opera, ballet and music hall programmes. The theatre set design collection was formed between 1949 and 2006.

Twenty-eight sketches of sets and costumes, created between 1920 and 1932, were donated by Auguste Baillayre. They abound in styles (romanticism, impressionism, cubism, expressionism) and were executed during the harlequinade period (creative fantasies and original interpretations). Two set designs featuring Harlequins were created by E. Ivanovskaia and A. Baillayre. Among the costume sketches is Gheorghe Pojedaev's work of art, "Lady in a Kimono".

The collection of the National Museum of Art of Moldova also includes works by authors such as E. Ivanovskaia, N. Bragalia, M. Starcevskaia, V. Evers, N. Danilenco and others.

The works of these artists are graceful, laconic and expressive. Each work in the museum's collection representing the art of scenography in Moldova has its own individual value and is part of the universe whose name is theatre²⁰.

Examination of the exhibition "100 Years of National Graphics"

On the occasion of the 85th anniversary of the founding of the National Art Museum of Moldova, the exhibition "100 Years of National Graphics" was inaugurated (26 November 2024 – 23 February 2025).

The National Graphic Arts collection was established in 1945 and continues to be developed to this day²¹. The collection is estimated to contain over 11,500 works representing various fields and genres of art: easel graphics, book illustrations, posters, stage design, etc., created between 1886 and 2021.

The work of Bessarabian artists is reflected in the evolutionary process of the exhibition activity, which has contributed to the formation and training of new generations of local visual artists.

The examination and research of the exhibition "100 Years of National Graphic Art" involves a general analysis, carried out by describing the works created by the most representative graphic artists.

¹⁹ Vitalie Malcoci (2023). *Basarabian Stage Design*, Editura Generis, Chişinău.

²⁰ <https://mnam.md/colectia-arta-grafica-nationala?lang=en> (accessed: 07.06.2024).

²¹ Tatiana Raşchitor (2017). *Easel Graphics in the Visual Arts of the Republic of Moldova*, Doctoral Thesis, Chişinău.



Fig. 2 Exhibition “100 Years of National Graphics”, MNAM, 2024-2025 (Photo: Iu.Gherman)



Fig. 3 Auguste Baillayre, *Portrait of a Man*, paper, charcoal, pastel, 1921 (MNAM Collection)

One of the most illustrative personalities, who laid the foundation for Bessarabian national art, was Auguste Baillayre. Born on 1 May 1879 in Vernet, Languedos-Roussillon, France (died on 16 December 1961 in Bucharest, Romania), he was a professor at the School of Fine Arts in Chişinău and the first director of the MNAM. The artistic environment in which A. Baillayre evolved is worth outlining through his friendships and acquaintances in Russia and France (V. Mayakovsky, M. Larionov, N. Goncharova, M. Chagall, V. Tatlin, A. Lentulov, P. Picasso, A. Renoir, H. Matisse, etc.). He had remarkable achievements and managed to educate a brilliant group of artists, such as N. Bragalia, O. Hrşanovschi, E. Barlo, E. Ivanovsky, M. Gamburd, and others, who continued their specialised studies in European capitals – Paris, Dresden, and Brussels. The artist was married to the painter Lidia Arionescu, a prominent figure in Bessarabian artistic culture.

The work *Portrait of a Man* (Fig. 2-3), exhibited at the exhibition, presents a portrait of an elderly man, created in a realistic and very expressive style, with an emphasis on physiognomic features. The drawing was created using charcoal on paper, in brown and black tones, with white pastel, which gives the image a sober and profound appearance. The details of the face are highlighted by shadows and precise lines, placing emphasis on wrinkles, bone structure and skin texture, suggesting the passage of time, but also life experience. The man's gaze is slightly turned to one side, and his expression is rigid and strident, generating feelings of introspection, melancholy or even inner suffering. The contrast between light and shadow stands out, adding depth and emotion. The fact that the artist has rendered the imperfections and signs of age lends authenticity and extravagance to the portrait.

Tania Baillayre (1916-1991), daughter of the Baillayre artist couple and one of the most remarkable artists of the 20th century in Bessarabia, had a career marked by diversity and depth in her exploration of forms, colours and symbolism in art. Her

work *Lotus* (1967) (Fig. 4), donated to the museum²², fits into a broader context of her artistic evolution, being a clear example of her unique vision and profound sensitivity to human nature and divinity, combined with the influences of postmodernism. The context in which the graphic artist carried out her artistic activity is important, as she was influenced by the artistic movements of the time, but also by the socialist regime. Nevertheless, the artist had her own pursuits, with a very deep spiritual nuance. With specialised studies in the field and extensive experience, she integrated various cultural and aesthetic traditions, including European and Eastern ones, exploring several areas of plastic arts (sculpture, painting, *design*) with numerous graphic techniques.

The work *Lotus* presents an oriental-style landscape. In the foreground, the water mirror shines with three lotus flowers, and on the right, a dragonfly and palm trees. The background frames a round landing with four steps, on the pedestal of which a deity with closed legs is placed, and behind her, vegetation and human figures can be seen.

The work described reflects a unique symbolism, with references to the history of art and civilisations, as well as spiritual references (the lotus flower – the flower of Buddha and other deities).



Fig. 4 Tania Baillayre. *Lotus* 20.9 x 29.8 cm. 1967, (MNAM Collection)



Fig. 5 Tania Baillayre, *Portrait of a Peasant*, paper, linocut, 1939, (MNAM Collection)

With a modernist and symbolic approach, the work *Lotus* reinterprets an ancient Eastern symbol, signifying purity, inner enlightenment, life and rebirth.

The work *The Fairy of Dreams* (Fig. 6), signed by Elizabeth Ivanovsky, is a costume sketch that harmoniously combines various elements of clothing. It depicts a tall, slender lady dressed in blue, white and black, with red decorative elements. The headdress is crowned with a fan-shaped element. The long dress is covered with a transparent scarf. In her left hand she holds a decorative umbrella, a parasol accessory with references to Eastern culture.

²² The work was donated by Andrei Iliescu in 2005.



Fig. 6 Elizabeth Ivanovsky, *The Dream Fairy*,
Costume sketch, paper, pencil, ink,
watercolour, 1927 (MNAM Collection)



Fig. 7 Theodor Kiriacoff, *Costume sketch*,
for the play *Bluebeard* by
M. Meaterlinck, paper, watercolour, 1922
(MNAM Collection)

The work *Greek Myth* by Miriam Gamburd presents a dynamic composition, consisting of a cluster of human figures imagined in a fascinating tense interaction. The composition is fluid, with sinuous lines that guide the gaze across the entire surface of the plastic space. The artist uses a free composition, based on intersections of diagonals and curved lines, which creates an organic rhythm, subordinated to the sensation of controlled chaos.

There is a certain drama, with expressions and influences of Renaissance-style graphics in the anatomical treatment of the characters. The colour palette is reduced, dominated by monochrome tones of ochre and sepia, which gives the work an archaic patina, evoking ancient frescoes.

Combining the refined technique of engraving with the tense pulsations of the composition, the artist creates an image that transcends classical mythology, transforming it into a contemporary visual expression of eternal ideas about life, death, sacrifice and transformation.

M. Gamburd is recognised for her contributions to the fields of graphic art and sculpture. Her works often explore intimate and provocative themes, offering an essential perspective on the human condition.

An important figure in Bessarabian culture, especially in the national visual arts, was the painter Rostislav Ocuşco. Born on 23 March 1887 in Saint Petersburg (died on 14 January 1966 in Chişinău), the painter completed his studies in 1922 at the School of Fine Arts in Chişinău and in 1934 at the Academy of Fine Arts in Iaşi. In 1944, he became a member of the Society of

Fine Arts of Bessarabia, and in 1963 he was awarded the title of Master Emeritus of Art of the Moldavian SSR.

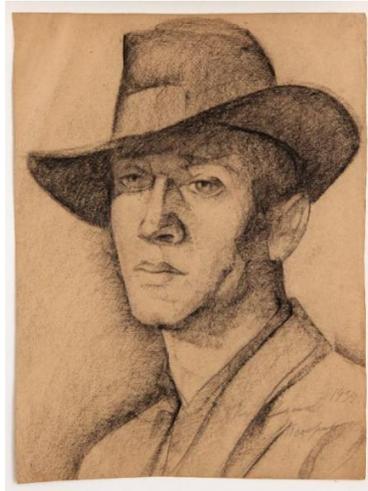


Fig. 8 Rostislav Ocuşco, *The Painter M. Petric*, paper, charcoal, 1939 (MNAM Collection)

The work *Portrait of the painter M. Petric*, exhibited at the exhibition “100 Years of National Graphics”, is a portrait of a man with a melancholic, slightly pensive facial expression and an ephemeral sadness covering his gaze (Fig. 8). A wide-brimmed hat defines the subject's membership in the generous artistic elite.

We notice some differences in his practice, such as the application of the clear contour method for portraying characters or the precise expression of the silhouette to achieve the most visible expressiveness. Sometimes the lines and hatching are precise, other times they are thickened and overlap, transforming into a valuable stain of the silhouette. The silhouette, the properties of the chosen material, the vibration of the line, the variety of drawing techniques as a whole – all have a suggestive character and express the figure of interest to the artist beyond the individual features of the character.

We notice the artist's preference for using the broad side of the graphite or charcoal pencil, which allows him to achieve broad, transparent hatching. This highlights the texture of the paper, creating a vibration of tonal patches, which gives the drawing a painterly quality. Thus, we can associate the drawing with watercolour – transparent, fresh, with the instantaneous and diaphanous character of the strokes used. These techniques allow for the rapid modelling of the plastic form by expressing the relationship between shadow and light. One of the advantages of the technique proposed by the artist is the rapid execution of sketches.

The work *Costume Sketch* (1924), by Theodor Kiriacoff, reflects the artistic refinement of the interwar period and the attention to detail in theatre

costume design (Fig. 7). This work illustrates a sketch of a costume, through which the aristocratic character and solemnity of the character are highlighted. Th. Kiriacoff, called the “magician of the stage,” worked as a set and costume *designer* in the first half of the 20th century, contributing significantly to the aesthetics of the entire Romanian theatre. The artist had a significant impact on the field of set design. Through his work, he managed to combine historical influences with modern trends, bringing a unique style to the set design of the time. He worked at theatres in Chişinău, Iaşi and Bucharest, distinguishing himself through his faithful representation of period costumes and stage sets.

The interwar period was one of the most dynamic in Romania from a cultural, historical and artistic point of view. The accelerated modernisation of society led to an unprecedented artistic effervescence, in which theatre, cinema and the visual arts developed considerably. Bucharest, nicknamed “Little Paris”, had become an important European cultural centre. In the first decades of the 20th century, theatre costumes evolved from the realistic simplicity of naturalist theatre to the opulence of avant-garde performances. Costume design became a key element in defining the characters and atmosphere of the play, emphasising the expressiveness of the actors and contributing to the overall aesthetics of the performance.

His artistic studies helped Th. Kiriacoff develop a distinct style, influenced by both international trends and local traditions. The graphic artist worked with important theatres of the time, creating costumes for historical plays and dramas. He managed to create spectacular costumes that highlighted the social status of the characters and contributed to the atmosphere on stage.

The work “Costume Sketch” (done in pencil and watercolour) reflects elements of 19th-century aristocratic fashion, combining tradition with modern influences. The costume was not just a simple decorative element; it was designed to accentuate the actor's expressiveness and suggest the character's high rank. The materials used (velvet, blockart) and the detailed accessories contribute to creating an impressive stage presence. Thus, Kiriacoff's contribution to set design was significant, having a valuable effect on the development of Romanian theatre costume, promoting the use of luxurious materials. Compared to other set designers of the time, Kiriacoff stood out for his attention to the authenticity of historical details and artistic refinement.

The work *Căsuță din Cornești* (1951) by Grigori Fiurer is a remarkable example of Moldovan visual art from the post-war period. This pencil drawing on paper reflects not only a special artistic sensitivity, but also a deep connection with traditional cultural values and the Moldovan rural landscape. Grigori Fiurer, born in 1886 and active until 1962, was an artist who constantly explored themes related to village life and created images that evoke the authenticity and simplicity of everyday life.

In the 1950s, Moldovan art was going through a period in which socialist realism had become the official style promoted by the authorities. During this

period, the emphasis was on depicting workers, peasants and landscapes in order to glorify the daily life of the people. However, *Căsuță din Cornești* differs from the clichés imposed by the ideology of the time, retaining an intimate and personal touch. This work is a testament to Fiurer's connection with the Moldovan village landscape, where traditions and nature intertwine harmoniously.

The village of Cornești, a typical locality in central Moldova, becomes a source of inspiration for the artist's work. The house with a thatched roof depicted in the drawing appears as a symbol of vernacular architecture in the local tradition. In a subtle way, Fiurer captures the atmosphere of the village through details such as the abundance of vegetation or the textures of the roofs, which suggest the passage of time and the durability of traditions.

The work is done in pencil, which gives it a special expressiveness. The contrast between light and dark tones creates visual depth, giving the viewer a sense of intimacy and tranquillity. The delicate lines and fine hatching highlight the structure of the house and the surrounding nature, emphasising the simplicity of rural architecture. The artist carefully renders every detail of the landscape, from the textures of the leaves to the way the light falls on the surface of the thatched roof.

The traditional house in the foreground dominates the main register, while the vegetation and trees in the background complete the frame in a natural way. This compositional arrangement suggests a harmonious relationship between man and nature, a theme often found in Moldovan art.

Căsuță din Cornești is more than just a representation of a rural landscape; it is an evocation of traditional values and cultural identity. Through this work, Fiurer manages to convey emotional messages, inviting the viewer to reflect on the beauty of simple things. In a period dominated by industrialisation and rapid social change, the artist turns his gaze to the past, to traditions, reminding us of the importance of preserving our roots and our connection with nature. This work is invaluable not only from an artistic point of view, but also as a visual document of the era. It reflects how Moldovan artists managed to preserve their authenticity in a complex political and cultural context. Through this work, the artist pays tribute to the Moldovan village, highlighting the beauty of folk architecture and the rural landscape. At the same time, the work demonstrates the author's dedication to the national cultural heritage.

A remarkable representative of contemporary art in Moldova, with a strong influence from Romanian cultural traditions, was Ion Tabârță (1930-2012), who studied at the Kiev Institute of Fine Arts in the class of the renowned professor V. Casian, under whose guidance he studied various graphic techniques: linocut, lithography, woodcut, etching, engraving on cardboard, etc.

The work *Dragoș Fighting the Aurochs* (1984), selected for the exhibition "100 Years of National Graphic Art," depicts the main heroes of Moldova's founding, according to legend. The work is executed in an expressive manner,

with a dynamic composition and a strong black-and-white contrast that emphasises the drama of the scene.

The composition of the work is well balanced, capturing a moment of maximum tension: the confrontation between Dragoș and the Aurochs. The image is organised in such a way as to suggest movement and conflict, and the two characters – man and beast – are placed centrally, in direct opposition, which amplifies the drama of the scene. The central element of the composition is the moment of attack, illustrated by Dragoș's firm gesture as he thrusts his spear into the powerful bison's body. The lines are energetic, emphasising the tension of the confrontation. There is a dynamic use of diagonals, which creates a visual effect of force and danger. Dragoș is shown in an attacking position, with his body leaning slightly forward, suggesting his determination to defeat the beast. The spear aimed at the aurochs becomes a central element in the narrative of the image, symbolising man's triumph over wild nature. The bison is depicted in an aggressive posture, with its head lowered, its horns pointed towards Dragoș, and its body tense, emphasising its struggle for survival. The background is stylised and reduced to the essential elements, so that the viewer's attention is focused exclusively on the scene of the fight.

The strong contrast between black and white contributes to the drama of the image, highlighting the shapes and dynamics of the scene. Black dominates the aurochs, suggesting danger, while white accentuates Dragoș's silhouette, signifying the light of victory and the power of civilisation. Thus, the composition conveys a symbolic struggle between man and nature, between order and chaos, between civilisation and the untamed forces of the world. The work is made using a technique specific to traditional graphics – linocut. The engraving technique allows for a strong play of chiaroscuro, which intensifies the drama of the composition. The lines are characterised and incised with precision and variation in thickness, creating an effect of rhythm and movement. The strong contrast between the shaded and light areas gives depth and relief to the image. Hatching is used strategically to suggest the texture of the bison's fur. The graphic expressiveness is amplified by the compact composition and the use of simplified but energetic forms, which give the work a special visual power. The technique of engraving on a flat surface allows for clear and strongly contoured details, which gives the work an almost sculptural character.

Through these major elements, the artist manages to create a dynamic, expressive and deeply symbolic work, highlighting the narrative power of graphic art. Thus, Ion Taburță's work is not only an artistic interpretation of a legend, but also a work with multiple meanings, which speaks of origins, power, confrontation and destiny. Ion Tăbârță's creation was appreciated for its ability to combine personal expressiveness with collective themes, making him a renowned artist within the artistic movement in Bessarabia.

The work *Reflections* (1998) by Karacentev Elena presents a work that explores the inner thoughts and feelings of the main character, with an

introspective and melancholic tone in a narrative style. Her work is an experiment with mixed techniques, combining classical engraving with computer technology, testing the limits of printmaking.

The artist experiments with textures, using materials such as wallpaper as a print, giving the sheet a varied and tactile texture. The graphic artist meticulously combines elements of abstract and figurative art, forming imaginary spaces and worlds between realism and surrealism, distant from the principles of linear perspective or volume.

Reflections depicts a landscape rendered predominantly in cool colours. At the top, we see an almost black stripe, interrupted below by a lighter shade representing the cloudy sky. Below this is a dark strip that ends at the bottom with a shade reflecting the ground/land. The focal point of the work is a patch of red, located on the left, between the sky and the earth. Examining the graphic artist's work, we can conclude that she will not cease to experiment with contemporary graphic techniques and will continue to preserve the particularities of her poetic vision of art.

The work *Peasant from Rășinari*, Sibiu by graphic artist Gheorghe Ceglocoff, an artist concerned with the authentic representation of the Romanian village and peasants, depicts an old peasant dressed in traditional clothes, with a penetrating gaze that conveys wisdom and tenderness.

The colours used by the artist are warm, dominated by shades of brown and ochre, suggesting the simplicity of village life. The background of the composition is minimalist, with a few elements reminiscent of the mountainous landscape of Transylvania. The old man's face is not just a simple interpretation of the portrait, a physical image of the peasant, but also a representation of his values: work, modesty, patriotism, love for his country, and a close connection with nature.

Gh. Ceglocoff managed to transform the simplicity of the message and traditional elements into a successful portrait that clearly reflects the national and cultural values that define us.

Stepan Tuhari (1928-1978) was represented at the exhibition with two graphic works: *Shepherd* and *Agachi Gheorghii*. This graphic artist was well known for his contributions to the field of graphic art in the post-war and contemporary periods. In the 1950s and 1960s, he produced a series of notable works such as *People are the wealth of Moldova* and *The rhythms of our life*.

The works *Shepherd* (Fig. 9) and *Agachi Gheorghii* (Fig. 10), from the series *People are the wealth of Moldova* (1961) reflect the main motif in the artist's work – the theme of representing peasants, workers, simple people from the countryside, with rural landscapes in Moldova, with rich harvests, highlighting national identity, cultural and traditional values.

The ripe, large melons in the linocut *Agachi Gheorghii* are held by the old man, pressed tightly to his chest, as a result of his hard work, symbolising both

his love of peasant life and hard work, as well as the pride, wisdom and spirituality of the Romanian peasant.

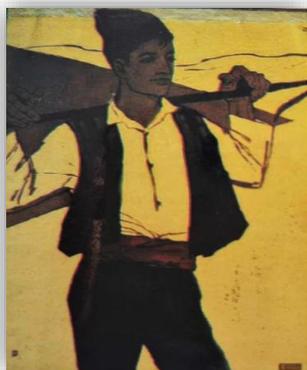


Fig. 9 Stepan Tuhari, *Shepherd*, the cycle *People – the wealth of Moldova*, colour linocut, 1961 (MNAM Collection)



Fig. 10 Stepan Tuhari, *Agachi Gheorgh*, the cycle *People – the wealth of Moldova*, colour linocut, 1961 (MNAM Collection)



Fig. 11 Leonid Grigoraşenco, *The First Printers*, watercolour, paper, 1959 (MNAM Collection)

The watercolour painting *The First Printers in Moldova* (1959), created by the remarkable artist Leonid Grigoraşenco (1924-1995), presents an image that depicts an important event in the history of Moldova. It depicts the first attempts to implement printing in Moldova (Fig. 11). The work shows a printing workshop where the characters are producing the first printed sheets. The importance of the work lies not only in its technical perspective, but also in its ideological one.

Shades of ochre, brown, burgundy and maroon dominate the colour scheme, contrasted by accents of blue and red in the clothing. It is a balanced,

two-dimensional composition, with diagonal lines guiding the viewer towards the centre of interest – the group of workers.

The architectural details and objects in the interior – books, tools, etc. – create a medieval atmosphere. The warm light that filters into the workshop highlights the textures of the surfaces and creates a play of soft shadows, emphasising the depth of the scene unfolding in the room.

The realistic and finely detailed rendering of tools and clothing contributes to an authentic atmosphere, as the elements themselves are characters in the visual narrative. This work can be read as a tribute to Moldova's cultural past, emphasising the role of print in preserving knowledge.

The work *Larma Boemiei Ion Rogaci* (1987) by artist Leonid Grigoraşenco, created using watercolour, captures the vibrant and tumultuous atmosphere of bohemian life. Through his expressive technique, the artist manages to convey not only the image of an effervescent moment, but also the deep emotion that accompanies this artistic world. The use of watercolour allows for subtle transparencies and overlaps, which give an impression of movement and spontaneity.

The outlines of the characters are sometimes blurred, suggesting a dynamic environment, full of energy and intense interaction. In the context of the 1980s, when the work was created, it can also be interpreted as a reflection on the condition of the artist in a changing society. It may be a tribute to creative freedom, but also a commentary, a subtle protest against the difficulties faced by artists in a rigid and controlled system under Soviet pressure.

The work *Spring* (1980), created by graphic artist Vasile Cojocaru, presents a landscape with panoramic views of the Moldavian countryside. The entire surface of the painting is arranged with trees and hills with sinuous but rhythmically structured lines (Fig. 12). The sky maintains an abundance of clouds, grouped according to a certain cadence and profiled in pastel shades of white, blue and pink.



Fig. 12 Vasile Cojocaru, *Spring*, pastel, tempera, paper, 1980 (MNAM Collection)



Fig. 13 Simion Zamşa, *Papamobil*, woodcut, 2008-2018 (MNAM Collection)

The work *Papamobil* (2008-2018) by Simion Zamșa is made using the woodcut technique. In this work, the artist addresses several subjects and themes, such as the impact of religion on contemporary society, mobility, spirituality, etc. At the centre of the composition is a vaguely outlined human silhouette, which appears to be seated in a vehicle (Fig. 13).

The compositional and chromatic organisation, together with the lines and textures used by the graphic artist, contribute to creating an effect of mystery and timelessness that provokes meditation, morality and other states of mind. The blurred background and neutral tones accentuate this atmosphere. The plasticity of the forms suggests the idea of an abyssal space, somewhere between reality and dream.

The sides of the work are marked by abstract structures, which can be interpreted either as figurative expressions or as architectural elements. These details suggest a broader context in the interpretation of the main message, through the contrast created between modernity and the past, offering the viewer a unique perspective on the relationship between the sacred and the profane.

Conclusions

Artistic creation is a suitable way to preserve, conserve and promote cultural values. Addressing national themes through engraving techniques remains relevant today because, by multiplying the image, these technical processes make it easier to understand and disseminate an artistic message. Here, engraving techniques, as educational and spiritual attributes, have a notable impact on the knowledge and promotion of national cultural heritage.

Despite the role and importance of national art and culture, the arts in Bessarabia at the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century remain a little-known chapter to this day.

Insufficiently studied in the 1950s-1970s, being appreciated and labelled by Soviet officials as “bourgeois” and “formalist” art, interwar Bessarabian art was excluded from the cultural values of modern art for about 50 years. In reality, this era was a link between late medieval and contemporary art – A. Baillayre, Th. Kiriacoff and others continued their activities in the post-war period, which changed priorities and requirements in line with the needs of “socialist realism”.

After the occupation of Bessarabia in 1940 and 1944, the situation in the arts changed radically. Among the requirements imposed on artists, priority was given to the realistic art of the Russian “perdvijnici” of the mid-19th century, subjects and motifs dedicated to work, patriotism, the “new life”, collective farming, and the construction of communism. Among visual artists, even though they were forced to comply with “state orders” in the arts, many graphic artists (I. Vieru, A. David, etc.) remained true to their previous artistic positions, and their work constituted the true values of national art.

The 1960s and 1970s in Soviet Moldova were prolific in the emergence of new creative talents who substantially enriched the artistic atmosphere and local

cultural space. During this period, visual artists were particularly active in the field of graphic art. In this regard, applying traditional techniques with new approaches to national themes, the following graphic artists stand out: Gheorghe Vrabie, Igor Vieru, Stepan Tuhari, Ion Tabârță, Vasile Cojocaru, Valentin Coreachin, Gheorghe Guzun, Miriam Gamburd, Emil Childescu, Dumitru Savastin, Semion Solonari, Filimon Hămuraru, Boris Poleacov, Alexei Colâbneac, African Usov, Vladimir Lavrentov, Ilie Bogdesco, and others.

Thus, the exhibition “100 Years of National Graphic Art” with graphic works signed by prominent artists from Moldova who faced moral dilemmas under the totalitarian regime offers us an accurate picture of Moldovan visual art, especially national graphic art in a contemporary context. The graphic works by Pavel Șilingovscki, Alexandru Plămădeală, Eugenia Maleșevschi, Auguste Baillayre, Tania Baillayre, Moisei Gamburd, Miriam Gamburd, Șneer Cogan and others find their rightful place in the gallery of Moldovan national graphic art.

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