
Painting Ukraine

Authenticity, Identity, and Anti-Imperial Aesthetics in the Art of Ilya Repin

Maria Taroutina

 <https://devisu.inha.fr/histoiredelart/124>

DOI : 10.54390/histoiredelart.124

Référence électronique

Maria Taroutina, « Painting Ukraine », *Histoire de l'art* [En ligne], 91 | 2023, mis en ligne le 01 juin 2024, consulté le 04 octobre 2026. URL : <https://devisu.inha.fr/histoiredelart/124>

Droits d'auteur

La revue *Histoire de l'art* est mise à disposition selon les termes de la licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d'utilisation commerciale - Pas de Modification 4.0 International

Painting Ukraine

Authenticity, Identity, and Anti-Imperial Aesthetics in the Art of Ilya Repin

Maria Taroutina

PLAN

Malorossiianka as a national leitmotif

The Zaporozhian Cossacks as historical analogy and political metaphor

A painter both for and against the empire

TEXTE

- ¹ Since the closing decades of the 19th century, Ilya Repin (1844–1930) has been widely celebrated as a leading figure of the Russian national school of art. Hundreds of books, journal articles, and anthologies have been published on his long and prolific career. Many of these publications, such as the monographs *Russia on Canvas: Ilya Repin* (1980), *Ilya Repin and the World of Russian Art* (1990), and *The Russian Vision: The Art of Ilya Repin* (2006), as well as the exhibition catalogues *Ilya Repin: Russia's Secret* (2001), *Auf der Suche nach Russland. Der Maler Ilja Repin* (2003), and most recently *Ilya Répine (1844-1930). Peindre l'âme russe* (2021), have all specifically foregrounded the artist's Russian heritage.¹ Repin, however, was born and raised in Ukraine. Moreover, throughout his career, he repeatedly turned to Ukrainian themes and motifs in his work, several of which have been discussed in detail by the Canadian historian Thomas M. Prymak in his seminal article "A Painter from Ukraine: Ilya Repin" and in his recently published book, *Ukraine, the Middle East, and the West*.² Building on Prymak's foundational work, this article analyzes a number of Repin's paintings on the subjects of Ukrainian history, character, and customs. It argues that in addition to articulating a distinct Ukrainian identity in these works, the painter also expressed a subtle anti-imperial and anti-autocratic position in his art.

- 2 Repin was born on August 5, 1844, in the small Ukrainian town of Chuhuiv, near the Donets River about forty kilometers east of the city of Kharkiv—although this territory is part of present-day Ukraine, during Repin’s lifetime it was called “Malorossiiia” or “Little Russia” and was part of the Russian Empire. His father, Efim Repin (1804–1894), served in the Chuhuiv Uhlan Regiment for 27 years. The young Ilya first studied at the local Military Topographic School, before being apprenticed to the icon painter Ivan Bunakov in 1857. Repin was nearly twenty years old when he left the Sloboda Ukraine region for the first time, in 1863, and traveled north to Saint Petersburg, where he initially enrolled in the Drawing School of the Society for the Encouragement of Artists; he was subsequently accepted as a student at the Imperial Academy of Arts. Both during his student years and later in life, Repin enthusiastically read the works of prominent Ukrainian authors such as Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852), Mykola Kostomarov (1817–1885), and Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861). He also corresponded with notable members of the Ukrainian intellectual and cultural elites, including historian Dmytro Yavornytsky (1855–1940) and civic activist and collector of Ukrainian art Vasyl Tarnovsky (1837–1899).
- 3 From his numerous articles, memoirs, and correspondence, it becomes palpably clear that Repin maintained a deep emotional attachment to his Ukrainian homeland. Until the end of his life, he insisted that he was “a humble young Cossack soul who love[d] his Ukraine” and especially his hometown Chuhuiv, which he affectionately described as “a pure treasure” with its “white huts, sunlit cherry orchards, holly-hocks, shutters of all colors and ... the sonorous voices of sun-kissed girls.”³ In 1913, the artist actively worked toward opening a free art school in Chuhuiv, which would train local artists in different forms of arts and crafts with the goal of nurturing “a Ukrainian style in art and [in order to] begin the development of its direct folk creations that are spread so wide across this contented, beautiful, and happy land.”⁴ Due to the outbreak of World War I, the project never materialized, but its planning is nonetheless a testament to Repin’s deep commitment to the artistic and cultural life of his hometown.

Malorossiianka as a national leitmotif

- 4 Two of Repin's earliest paintings of Ukrainian subjects date to his student days in Paris, where he lived for three years, from 1873 to 1876, on a scholarship from the Saint Petersburg Imperial Academy of Arts. This period in Repin's career is typically associated with his enthusiastic embrace of modern French painting, and especially the works of Édouard Manet and the "Impressionalists," as he called them, and is dominated by depictions of urban scenery and plein-air views of Montmartre and Normandy.⁵ However, toward the end of his stay in France, Repin also painted two striking portraits of young women dressed in traditional Ukrainian costume: *Ukrainian Girl* (1875) (**fig. 1**) and *Ukrainian Girl by a Wicker Fence* (1876) (**fig. 2**). The former is a bust-length portrait of a young woman in three-quarter-view shown leaning against a wooden fence, deep in thought. Her delicately embroidered white shirt is offset by multiple strands of colorful, green, red, and white beads; her head is adorned with a dark kerchief and embellished with a wreath of white and red wildflowers. Her smooth luminous skin, pensive blue-gray eyes, and delicate lips invite the viewer to admire her fresh, simple beauty, while her averted gaze simultaneously communicates a sense of independence and aloofness.

1. Ilya Repin, *Ukrainian Girl*, 1875.



Oil on canvas, 73 × 60 cm, Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.

2. Ilya Repin, *A Ukrainian Girl by a Wicker Fence*, 1876.



Oil on canvas, 139 × 97 cm, The National Art Museum of the Republic of Belarus, Minsk.

- 5 Repin's second painting, *A Ukrainian Girl by a Wicker Fence*, was modeled after Zoya Ge (1861–1942), the 14-year-old niece of Repin's friend and fellow artist Nikolai Ge (1831–1894). It shows a teenage girl with her arms crossed across her chest, looking directly and confidently at the viewer. She wears the same white peasant shirt with red floral embroidery and blue, green, red, white, and black beaded necklace as the Ukrainian girl in the 1875 portrait. However, instead of flowers in her hair, the model here sports yellow, pink, blue, white, green, and red silk ribbons, which cascade down her back and across her shoulders in long, undulating strands. Instead of the lush green foliage that served as the background for the 1875 painting, the Ukrainian girl in the 1876 work is silhouetted against a bright gray-white sky in the top half of the image, while a dark gray wooden fence occupies the bottom half of the canvas. In a letter to the prominent

Russian art critic Vladimir Stasov (1824–1906), Repin wrote that he was intending to send the “knee-length study of the Malorossiianka [Ukrainian girl]”⁶ to be exhibited in London, which implies that he viewed this painting as one of his best works from the period, alongside the *Parisian Café* (1875) and *Portrait of a Black Woman* (1875–76), both of which he also submitted to be publicly exhibited in Paris, the former at the 1875 Salon.

- 6 In contrast to Saint Petersburg, where the availability of professional female models was fairly limited, in Paris, Repin had access to a large number of models from different parts of the world, especially as his studio on Rue Véron was in an area that included one of the city’s most racially and ethnically diverse populations.⁷ Thus, in addition to portraying different types of fashionable, upper-class Parisiennes, such as in his studies for *Woman Playing with an Umbrella* (1874), *Woman Leaning on a Chair* (1875), and *A Picnic* (1875), Repin also depicted a series of images showing racial minorities in exoticized clothing and settings such as his *Jew at Prayer* (1875), *Woman with a Dagger* (1875), *Head of an Indian Princess* (1875), and *Portrait of a Black Woman* (1875–76). The latter three paintings were most probably related to his ongoing work on the magnum opus, *Sadko in the Underwater Kingdom* (1876) (**fig. 3**), which was based on Slavic medieval folklore. It depicts the Novgorod merchant Sadko in the underwater realm of the Sea King, in the process of choosing a bride for himself from a pageant of beautiful sea princesses. Decked out in bright and exotic garments, embellished headdresses, and resplendent jewelry, the underwater maidens represent different racial and ethnic female types, ranging from the fiery, bare-chested “Indian princess” in the immediate foreground, to the brooding black-eyed “Persian princess” in the middle ground, and finally to the serene and graceful “African princess” in a feather crown in the background.

3. Ilya Repin, *Sadko in the Underwater Kingdom*, 1876.



Oil on canvas, 322.5 × 230 cm, State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg.

- 7 In the folktale, Sadko ultimately chose Chernava as his bride, the simple and “homely” daughter of the Sea King, whom Repin portrayed in the upper left-hand corner of the canvas. The name Chernava derives from the Russian word “chernyi” or the Ukrainian “chornii,” meaning “black.” Accordingly, the “devushka-chernavushka” whom Repin mentions in his correspondence about the painting literally means “the dark-eyed maiden” or “maiden with dark eyebrows” or “chornobryva.” As Prymak notes, this was a prevalent “Ukrainian national motif, just as famous as the dark eyes (*ochi chernye*) of the popular Russian song written by the Ukrainian poet Hrebinka.”⁸ Indeed, in the *Sadko* painting, Chernava’s dark eyes, jet hair, and prominent black eyebrows greatly resemble those of the celebrated Ukrainian beauty Sophia Dragomirova (later Lukomskaia by marriage; 1871–1953), whom Repin painted several years later (**fig. 4**). In the

portrait, Dragomirova wears a traditional, richly decorated green-and-red Ukrainian dress, white embroidered peasant shirt, glistening beaded necklace, and the distinctive Ukrainian floral wreath of delicate purple and lilac wildflowers. The meticulous painterly attention and obvious sensuous delight with which Repin rendered each minute detail of Dragomirova's attire evoke his euphoric assertion that "only Malorossiianki [Ukrainians] and Parisians know how to dress with taste! You won't believe how charmingly the [Ukrainian] girls dress ... theirs is a genuinely national, comfortable, and graceful costume, despite the huge boots. And what ducats, monists!! Headbands, flowers!! And what faces!!"⁹

4. Ilya Repin, *Portrait of Sophia Dragomirova*, 1889.



Oil on canvas, 98.5 × 78.5 cm, State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg.

8 Repin penned these appreciative words in 1876, from his hometown of Chuhuiv, where he spent almost a full year immediately upon

returning from Paris. This was the first of Repin's many extended stays in Ukraine, which, over the course of two decades, resulted in a plethora of charcoal drawings, watercolors, and oil sketches of the various landscapes, locales, inhabitants, and details of Ukrainian folk culture. Repin then reworked these studies into large-scale canvases, such as the *Zaporozhian Cossacks Writing a Letter to the Turkish Sultan* (1880–91) (fig. 5), *Vechornitsy* [Evening Gathering] (1881), *Cossacks from the Black Sea Coast* (1908–09), and *Hopak: The Dance of the Zaporozhian Cossacks* (1926–30), among others.

5. Ilya Repin, *Zaporozhian Cossacks Writing a Letter to the Turkish Sultan*, 1880–91.



Oil on canvas, 203 × 358 cm, State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg.

The Zaporozhian Cossacks as historical analogy and political metaphor

- 9 In the winter of 1878, Repin came across a letter written by the 17th-century Cossack leader Otaman Ivan Sirko (1610–1680), which described an event in 1676, when the Zaporozhian Cossacks repelled

the armies of Sultan Mehmed IV (1642–1693). In response to the sultan's threat of a repeat attack and a demand for submission, the Cossacks sent a scornful, mocking, and rather vulgar letter. Repin produced the first studies for this magnum opus in 1879, while staying at Abramtsevo, the country estate of the industrialist and art patron Savva Mamontov (1841–1918). He continued to work on the painting for over a decade, exhibiting it to the public for the first time only in 1891.

- 10 In order to assure historical accuracy, Repin made several study trips to Ukraine and consulted with Dmytro Yavornytsky, a renowned archaeologist and ethnographer, a professor at Moscow University and specialist in Ukrainian history. The final painting was thus a relatively faithful visualization of the dress, weaponry, appearance, and habits of the 17th-century Ukrainian Zaporozhtsy. For example, the figures are depicted wearing traditional embroidered shirts with *sharovary*, or baggy trousers, and brightly colored and intricately patterned *zhupany* or overcoats. Several Cossacks sport the distinctive *chub* or top knot on their heads, and the shirtless man in the painting's immediate foreground has a *kobza* on his lap, the national Ukrainian string instrument, which is somewhat reminiscent of a mandolin.
- 11 Repin modeled a number of his Cossacks after prominent Ukrainian personalities and cultural and civic activists. Thus, the Ukrainian army general Mykhailo Dragomirov (1830–1905) is portrayed in the center of the painting as the historical Cossack commander, Otaman Ivan Sirko. He is shown leaning forward over the scribe with a smoking pipe in his hand. To his left, stands musicologist and Ukrainian folksong specialist Oleksander Rubets (1838–1913) as the fictional Taras Bulba, dressed in red and throwing his head back in raucous laughter. Another Cossack depicted in profile, in a tall, black fur hat in the center left of the canvas, was modeled after the Ukrainian activist and art collector Vasyl Tarnovsky, while the scribe in the middle of the image was based on the historian Yavornytsky, who advised Repin on the material and historical details of the painting. The other Cossack figures in the image were based on the Ukrainian artists Mykola Kuznetsov (1850–1929) and Porphyry Martynovych (1856–1933), and on Repin's friends Ian Tsionglinsky (1858–1913), Alexander Zhurkevich, the opera singer Fyodor Strav-

insky (1843–1902), and the legal scholar and chief editor of the *Kharkovskie Gubernskie Vedomosti* (Kharkiv provincial gazette), Aleksandr Gradovsky (1841–1889).¹⁰

- 12 One of the most striking aspects of the *Zaporozhian Cossacks* is its boisterous, exuberant atmosphere and jovial pictorial humor. We can almost hear the resounding chorus of laughter rising above the heads of the jubilant Cossacks as they pen their irreverent letter to the Ottoman sultan. This effect is heightened by the vibrant color scheme and the rough, impasto handling of the paint, which is applied thickly and dryly, producing a raised texture in many areas. The large number of figures leaning, squatting, and moving—often-times diagonally across the surface of the canvas—also functions to augment the overall dynamism and vitality of the depicted scene. When compared with Repin's other major history paintings, which were produced at around the same time, such as *Czarevna Sophia at the Novodevichy Convent at the Time of the Execution of the Streltsy and the Torture of Her Servants in 1698* (1879) (**fig. 6**) and *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan. November 16, 1581* (1885) (**fig. 7**), the latter's pessimistic content and somber mood appear to be openly incriminating of Russia's repressive autocracy in contrast to the free and egalitarian spirit of the Cossacks.

6. Ilya Repin, *Czarevna Sophia at the Novodevichy Convent at the Time of the Execution of the Streltsy and the Torture of Her Servants in 1698*, 1879.



Oil on canvas, 202 × 145 cm, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

7. Ilya Repin, *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan. November 16, 1581*, 1885.



Oil on canvas, 199.5 × 254 cm, State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

- 13 In both *Sophia at the Novodevichy Convent* and *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan*, the scenes are set in poorly lit and claustrophobic spaces, which serve to create an ominous sense of foreboding. In the former work, Sophia Alekseevna Romanova (1657–1704), Peter the Great's half-sister, is shown standing full-length in the foreground of the painting, her arms folded across her chest in angry defiance, while her fiery, piercing gaze, full of hatred and bitterness, is directed straight at the viewer. Repin's convoluted title openly refers to Peter the Great's brutal crushing of the Streltsy rebellion in 1698, and the subsequent gruesome tortures and bloody, vindictive public executions that lasted for many months. It is worth noting here that the Streltsy regiments had fought alongside the Ukrainian Don Cossacks in the 1695 and 1696 Azov campaigns against the Ottoman Turks, as a result of which Peter the Great gained access to the Sea of Azov and

an entrance to the Black Sea. As with the *Zaporozhian Cossacks*, while working on this painting, Repin made extensive use of period documents and museum artifacts, and meticulously studied the historical locations, costumes, and accessories of the 17th century. Accordingly, he would have been intimately familiar with the historiographic tradition that interpreted the Streltsy as the hapless victims of Peter's uncompromising modernization and boundless political and imperial ambitions.

14 Although undoubtedly a confronting and unsettling painting, *Sophia at the Novodevichy Convent* was not nearly as shocking and explicitly critical of the czarist regime as *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan*, which portrays the dreadful moment when an enraged Czar Ivan IV (1530–1584) strikes and instantly kills his only son and heir to the throne. The lifeless body of the young czarevitch slumps to the ground as streams of scarlet blood flow from his shattered temple, pooling on the crimson carpets of the Kremlin's ornate palace interior. While Ivan the Terrible is overwhelmed with horror and remorse at his own barbaric act and the grave political consequences to come, the expiring czarevitch, casts down his sad, averted gaze, augmenting both the personal and national tragedy of the scene. As several scholars have observed, *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan* and *Sophia at the Novodevichy Convent* present a damning vision of Russia's history, one that is tragically propelled by a series of devastating seismic events, fueled by the greed, ambition, and excesses of the czars, ultimately resulting in the never-ending suffering and exploitation of the Russian people.¹¹

15 By contrast, Repin shows the Cossacks as courageous instigators of political resistance, who challenge the despotic, regressive will of the Ottoman sultan. In an 1889 letter to his friend, writer Nikolai Leskov (1831–1895), Repin explained that in his painting, the Cossacks represented “freedom,” “equality,” “brotherhood,” and “individualism”—all quintessential Western, Enlightenment values—that in the context of Czar Alexander III's reactionary regime would have carried significant political resonance, especially as the monarch had introduced multiple restrictions on Ukrainian culture and heritage in order to quash any possible separatist sentiment. This included an official ban on the appearance of the Ukrainian language in print.¹² Relying on visual metaphor, veiled allusion, and indirect analogy, Repin thus

subtly critiqued Russia's own archaic "Ottoman" political system—both past and present.¹³

A painter both for and against the empire

- 16 Despite its ostensible espousal of Ukrainian nationalism and its encoding of an anti-czarist message, the *Zaporozhian Cossacks* was not actively censored by the regime in the same way as *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan*, which was almost instantly removed from public view and barred from any further display. On the contrary, the *Zaporozhian Cossacks* was critically acclaimed and received widespread positive press coverage in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Czar Alexander III immediately purchased it for his new Museum of Russian Art in Saint Petersburg for the hefty sum of 35,000 rubles, which at the time was the highest price ever paid for a single Russian canvas.¹⁴ This suggests that the demarcations between tendentious and patriotic content and Russian and Ukrainian subject matter were not as rigidly defined in the 19th century as has often been presumed. On the contrary, the boundaries between them were porous and amorphous, much like the distinctions between imperial, national, and regional identities.
- 17 Thus, despite his multiple proclamations of love for "Malorossiiia" and its people, Repin nonetheless wrote in a letter to the Ukrainian publisher and cultural activist, Yevhen Chykalenko (1861–1929), that he "did not feel himself to be a Ukrainian" and "that it was his love for the Russian people (*russkii narod*) that lay at the foundation of his paintings on Ukrainian history such as his *Zaporozhians*."¹⁵ As Prymak emphasizes, Repin's letter was written in 1896, "during the darkest years of political reaction, when ethnic Ukrainians were still officially considered to be merely a southern variety of Russians and almost any expression of Ukrainian national sentiment not safely disguised as Russian patriotism was severely repressed."¹⁶ In addition, as a graduate, and later a professor, of the Saint Petersburg Imperial Academy of Arts, and an artist who enjoyed direct royal patronage and multiple official commissions, Repin would have been careful to not openly attack the regime by making anti-czarist and anti-imperial public statements.¹⁷ His paintings, on the other hand, are textured

and layered enough to sustain a plurality of possible meanings and valences, allowing different audiences and stakeholders—both during the imperial era and today—to engage with his art on its own terms and to mine it for new meanings and interpretative possibilities.

18 The duality of Repin’s art was astutely summarized by French art historian Philippe Dagen in his review of the recent retrospective exhibition, which was held at the Petit Palais in Paris, *Ilya Répine (1844–1930). Peindre l’âme russe* (October 5, 2021–January 23, 2022). Dagen described Repin as “a painter both for and against the imperial power.”¹⁸ This perceptive statement accurately reflects the artist’s competing regional, national, and imperial loyalties, and encourages us to think with more nuance about the complex hybridity of his 19th-century identity instead of simply subsuming one into the other. However, despite featuring several artworks on Ukrainian themes and subjects, including *Ukrainian Girl*, *Sadko in the Underwater Kingdom*, *Hopak. The Dance of the Zaporozhian Cossacks*, and the *Zaporozhian Cossacks Writing a Letter to the Turkish Sultan*, both in its title—the English subtitle was “painting the soul of Russia”—and organization, the show sought to primarily highlight Repin’s “Russianness.” Organized as a collaboration between the Petit Palais, the Ateneum Art Museum in Helsinki, the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, and the State Russian Museum in Saint Petersburg, it is not entirely surprising that on the part of the Russian institutions, one of the principle unspoken goals of the exhibition was to promote the country’s soft power in Western Europe by means of cultural exchange. In order for this ideological aim to be achieved, Repin had to be presented to European audiences as unequivocally Russian.

19 And yet, in the wake of Vladimir Putin’s unconscionable invasion of Ukraine—which began exactly one month after the Repin exhibition in Paris closed—a photograph (**fig. 8**) was widely circulated online showing a group of Ukrainian soldiers recreating Repin’s painting of the *Zaporozhian Cossacks*, only their letter was now presumably being addressed to the Russian president instead of the Ottoman ruler. This courageous and witty restaging of Repin’s iconic work not only actively and indisputably reclaimed it—and by extension Repin—for the Ukrainian canon, but it also highlighted the painting’s continued relevance and potency as a symbol of anti-authoritarian

and anticolonial resistance. It thus challenges us to think about the ways in which the aesthetic and cultural histories of nations such as Ukraine can be productively decoupled from those of the imperial center, while still acknowledging their historical entanglement and interconnectedness. In light of the recent calls to decenter and decolonize the history of Russian and Eastern European art, it seems especially important to reconsider persisting neo-imperial cultural paradigms in the post-socialist space and to productively highlight the contested nature of individual artworks and artists such as Ilya Repin.¹⁹

8. Ukrainian soldiers restaging Ilya Repin's painting *Zaporozhian Cossacks Writing a Letter to the Turkish Sultan*, [Ukraine], [2010s].



© Imgur Gallery, 3 déc. 2022, The Yorck Project, distributed by Direct Media Publishing.

NOTES

1 Fan Parker and Stephen Jan Parker, *Russia on Canvas: Ilya Repin* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980); Elizabeth Valkenier,

Ilya Repin and the World of Russian Art (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); David Jackson, *The Russian Vision: The Art of Ilya Repin* (Schoten: BAI, 2006); Henk van Os and Sjeng Scheijen, eds., *Ilya Repin: Russia's Secret* (exh. cat. Groningen: Groninger Museum, 2001); Angelika Wesenberg, ed., *Auf der Suche nach Russland. Der Maler Ilja Repin* (exh. cat. Saarbrücken: Saarland Museum, 2003); Christophe Leribault, ed., *Ilya Répine (1844–1930). Peindre l'âme russe* (exh. cat. Paris: Petit Palais/Paris Musées, 2021).

2 Thomas Prymak, "A Painter from Ukraine: Ilya Repin," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 55, no. 1–2 (March–June 2013): pp. 19–43; *Ukraine, the Middle East, and the West* (Montreal: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2021).

3 Ilya Repin, letter to Tatsiana Tolstaia, June 27, 1892, and letter to Dmytro Yavornytsky, April 26, 1925, reproduced in Iosef Brodskii, ed., *И. Е. Репин. Избранные письма в двух томах, 1867–1930* [I. E. Repin: Selected letters in two volumes, 1867–1930] (Moscow: Iskusstova, 1969), vol. 1, p. 433; vol. 2, p. 359. All translations from the original Russian are the author's unless stated otherwise.

4 Ilya Repin, "Деловой двор" [Business yard], *Русское слово*, November 27, 1913, quoted in Prymak, "A Painter from Ukraine," p. 37.

5 See for example Elena Terkel, "Репин в Париже" [Repin in Paris], *Tretyakov Gallery Magazine* 62 (2019): pp. 62–85; Ilia Doronchenkov, "Русский человек на randevu: Перов, Репин и Васнецов в Париже, 1860–1870-е годы" [A Russian at a rendezvous: Perov, Repin, and Vasnetsov in Paris, 1860–1870], in *Translations and Dialogues: The Reception of Russian Art Abroad, Europa Orientalis* 31, ed. Silvia Burini Fisciano (Salerno: E.C.I. Edizioni culturali internazionali, 2019): pp. 37–48; Allison Leigh, "Il'ia Repin in Paris: Mediating French Modernism," *Slavic Review* 78, no. 2 (2019): pp. 434–55.

6 In the 19th century, "Malorossiiia" or "Little Russia" was a term that was widely used to describe the modern-day territories of Ukraine. Ilya Repin, letter to Vladimir Stasov, March 26, 1876, in *И. Е. Репин. Избранные письма* [I. E. Repin: Selected letters], vol. 1, p. 77.

7 On the subject of models in the Russian art world, see Margaret Samu, "'Serving Art...': Artist and Model in the Nineteenth-Century Russia Art World" [in Russian], *Iskusstvoznanie* 3–4 (2014): pp. 434–47.

8 Prymak, "A Painter from Ukraine," p. 24, n. 11.

- 9 Ilya Repin, letter to Vladimir Stasov, November 11, 1876, in И. Е. Репин. *Избранные письма* [I. E. Repin: Selected letters], vol. 1, p. 185.
- 10 Sergei Gavriliachenko, “Былой, легендарный смех” [Erstwhile, legendary laugh], in *Ilya Repin, 1844–1930*, eds. Tatsiana Iudenkova et al. (Moscow: State Tretyakov Gallery, 2019), pp. 77–89: p. 84.
- 11 See for example, Molly Brunson, “Painting History Realistically: Murder at the Tretyakov,” in *From Realism to the Silver Age: New Studies in Russian Artistic Culture*, ed. Rosalind P. Blakesley and Margaret Samu (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press), 2014, pp. 94–110; Valkenier, *Ilya Repin and the World of Russian Art*, pp. 69–125; Kevin M. F. Platt, *Terror and Greatness: Ivan and Peter as Myths* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).
- 12 Prymak, “A Painter from Ukraine,” p. 32.
- 13 Ilya Repin, letter to Nikolai Leskov, February 19, 1889, in И. Е. Репин. *Избранные письма* [I. E. Repin: Selected letters], vol. 1, p. 359.
- 14 Jackson, *The Russian Vision*, p. 97.
- 15 Ievhen Chykalenko, *Сногади (1861–1907)* [Memories, 1861–1907] (New York: UVAN, 1955), pp. 191–92, quoted in Prymak, “A Painter from Ukraine,” p. 41.
- 16 Prymak, “A Painter from Ukraine,” p. 41.
- 17 See for example Tat’iana Iudenkova, “Картина И.Е. Репина ‘Не ждали’: Художественное самосознание общества 1880-х годов” [I. E. Repin’s “Nezhдали”: Artistic Self-Consciousness of Society in the 1880s], *Искусствознание* [Art history] 2 (1998): pp. 376–407; Jackson, *The Russian Vision*, pp. 142–81; Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier, “Politics in Russian Art: The Case of Repin,” *The Russian Review* 37, no. 1 (1978): pp. 14–29.
- 18 Philippe Dagen, “‘Ilya Répine. Peindre l’âme russe’ : au Petit Palais, les contradictions d’un peintre réaliste,” *Le Monde*, December 12, 2021: [online](#).
- 19 See for example Anu Allas and Beáta Hock, eds., *Globalizing East European Art Histories: Past and Present* (New York: Routledge, 2018); Galina Mardilovich and Maria Taroutina, eds., *New Narratives of Russian and East European Art: Between Traditions and Revolutions* (New York: Routledge, 2020); Joy Gleason Carew, Christina Kiaer, et al., eds., “Critical Discussion Forum on Race and Bias,” *Slavic Review* 80, no. 2 (2021): pp. 203–382.

RÉSUMÉS

Français

Considéré comme un peintre majeur du canon de l'art russe du XIX^e siècle, Ilya Répine est pourtant né et a grandi en Ukraine, dont il a fréquemment représenté les sujets dans son œuvre. À partir d'une série de tableaux ayant pour sujet l'histoire, le caractère et les mœurs ukrainiens, cet article analyse la manière dont l'artiste a exprimé une identité distincte de celle de la Russie impériale. Dans le contexte politique russe turbulent des années 1880 et 1890, marqué par les répressions du tsar Alexandre III à l'encontre de la culture et du patrimoine ukrainiens, dans le but d'étouffer tout sentiment séparatiste, cet article défend la thèse selon laquelle Répine a utilisé son art pour critiquer de manière subtile l'État russe, depuis un point de vue anticolonial et antiautoritaire.

English

Considered a major artist of the Russian artistic canon, 19th-century painter Ilia Repin was born and raised in Ukraine and frequently portrayed its subjects in his oeuvre. Focusing on a series of Repin's paintings of Ukrainian history, character, and customs, this article analyzes the artist's unique articulation of a distinct Ukrainian identity as separate and divergent from that of Imperial Russia. Within the context of Russia's turbulent politics in the 1880s and 1890s, and Czar Alexander III's repressions of Ukrainian culture and heritage in an effort to quash any separatist sentiment, this article argues that Repin used his artwork to subtly critique the Russian state and to express an anticolonial and antiauthoritarian position.

INDEX

Mots-clés

art ukrainien, art russe, peinture d'histoire, impérialisme, nationalisme, autoritarisme

Index géographique

Ukraine, Paris, Russie, Saint-Pétersbourg

Index chronologique

XIX^e siècle

AUTEUR

Maria Taroutina

Maria Taroutina is Associate Professor of Art History at Yale-NUS College in Singapore. Her first book, *The Icon and the Square: Russian Modernism and the Russo-Byzantine Revival* (2018), was awarded the 2019 USC Book Prize in Literary and Cultural Studies by the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies. Taroutina is also co-editor of *Byzantium/Modernism* (2015), *New Narratives of Russian and East European Art* (2020), and *Russian Orientalism in a Global Context* (2023).