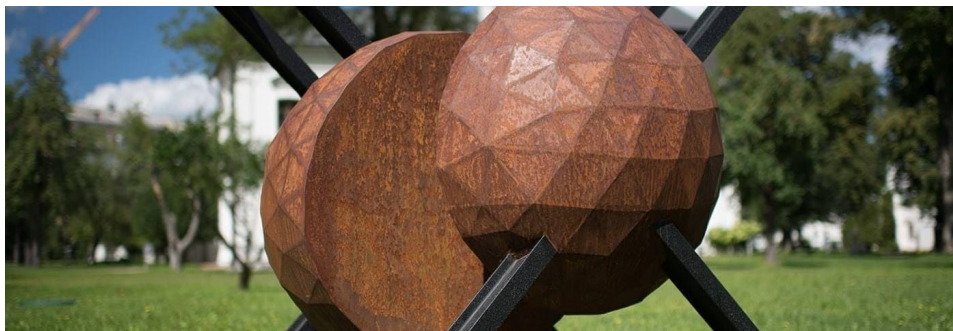


Steel art in Ukraine

In search of new solutions and unusual materials to create works of art, contemporary artists are increasingly turning to steel. They are attracted by the relatively low cost of steel for manufacturing art pieces, as well as its durability, versatility and visual characteristics.



Outstanding steel sculptures of the past

In the 20th century, steel sculptures were a real curiosity. The use of steel was rather outrageous; only the most daring artists decided to use this material. For example, the famous American modernist Alexander Calder surprised the public with monumental sculptures made of painted steel plates. Pablo Picasso used scrap metal to create his world-famous masterpiece, the Bull's Head statue. It was unprecedented that the steering wheel and saddle of a broken steel bicycle could be turned into an expensive sculpture.



In Ukraine, the first steel work of art was created in 1895. In 1900, it received the Grand Prix at the International Industrial Exhibition held in the capital of France. The famous "Mertsalov's Palm" was named after its creator, Alexey Mertsalov, a worker of the Novorossiysk Society of Coal, Iron and Rail Production (which later became Yuzovsky, and then Donetsk Metallurgical Plant). The artist used a sample of rails that were produced at the enterprise as a base material (today, we would say that the art piece was part of an advertising campaign to promote the metallurgical plant's products to foreign markets).

The palm tree, which is more than 3 metres high, with ten leaves and a corolla on the top, was created without the use of welding. The craftsmen managed to create a steel masterpiece using only hammer and chisel.

The original of Mertsalov's Palm was taken to the Mining Museum of St Petersburg, and, despite numerous requests from representatives of the Donetsk region, it was not possible to return the work of art to its homeland. Nevertheless, the palm tree has become a kind of symbol of the region's industrial power. The image of a steel tree adorns the heraldic symbols of the Donetsk region that were approved in 1999. In 2000, local activists developed cultural projects to install copies of the work of art in the capitals of the world and on mountain peaks. One copy of Mertsalov's famous steel palm is in Kyiv.



Another famous steel sculpture was installed on the Kyiv hills four decades ago. Despite the ambiguous emotions that the monuments of the Soviet era evoke today, the grandiose Motherland monument by Vasyl Borodai is still considered a symbol of Ukraine's capital. By the way, even in the days of the USSR, some art critics saw a visual similarity between the steel figure of the Motherland and the mosaic Mother of God Oranta from the St Sophia Cathedral, another symbolic monument of Kyiv.

Borodai brought his artistic ideas to life at the Paris Commune plant. The all-welded figure of the Motherland was assembled from two frames: a main one weighing nearly 300 tonnes and an auxiliary one weighing just over 100 tonnes.



At that time, there was practically zero world experience in the construction of all-metal sculptures. Through a series of experiments, the plant's specialists determined that steel sheets with a thickness of 1.5 millimetres were required to cover the steel frames. In all, the 27 sheets used had a total weight of 90 tonnes. Dneprospetsstal smelted the steel and Zaporizhstal produced the stainless steel sheet. A special welding method was developed by the Paton Institute of Electric Welding to be used for the installation of the monument. The length of the welding seams that give the Motherland its familiar form was 30 kilometres.

Modern steel sculptures and installations

Over the last decade, the ideas of Mertsalov, who used the products of his native plant to create steel sculptures, have been adopted in Dnipro, previously called Dnipropetrovsk. Some of the installations installed in the early 2010s at Interpipe Steel are also made of steel pipes from the company's product portfolio. An example is the work that its author, Danish sculptor Olafur Eliasson, called "Your Time Tunnel". The tunnel resembles a conglomeration of 11 arches placed at different angles to the earth's surface. Naturally, the structure changes its shape depending on the observer's position. The tunnel also has a purely practical application. This unusual gate is wide enough to allow two trucks entering and leaving the facility to pass each other.

The desire to introduce artistic aspects to production environments in Ukraine coexists with the gradual appearance of sculptural compositions in urban landscapes. Although the Kyiv artist Oleksii Zolotariov complains that there is a major shortage of worthy sculptures in Ukrainian cities, his metal art objects are already decorating the urban spaces of our country.

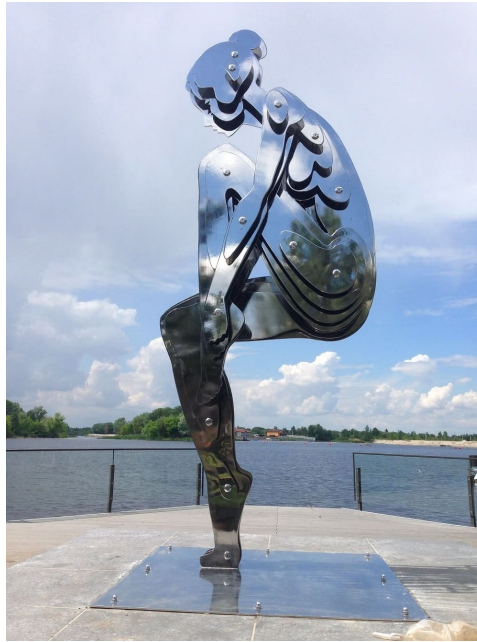
An example is the sculptural composition "Suprematism Movement", which is composed of rusty metal, concrete and stainless steel. Expressing the universe itself through simple geometric shapes, the artist sets in motion its heavy metal components, adding momentum to the surrounding urban landscape. The art piece was installed near Kyiv's Shulyavska metro station.



Visitors to the park in Kyiv's Poznyaki neighbourhood have the opportunity to admire its outlandish stainless steel fountain in the shape of a four-metre pear. The sleek, metallic shapes of the gigantic fruit catch the eye of onlookers. The spraying water sets off the steel texture of the fountain and gives the work a dazzling shine.

The artist seeks to experiment with a variety of materials, which help him to compose the shape of future sculptures, including wood and steel, plastic and feathers. They all have their own characteristics, both in the

creation of a work of art and in the further perception of the art piece by the viewer. It is striking that while the artist is inspired by steel, his best and most famous works are made from it.



Kyiv's streets are decorated with the street art of the experienced sculptor Oleksandr Lidagovskyi. His creativity is also characterised by trailblazing experiments with materials. To create his works, the author uses classical bronze, plaster, cardboard and even ... rubbish! However, steel art objects occupy a special place in his heritage. As a rule, these are volumetric figures made of stainless steel sheets that are loosely adjacent to each other, which are characterised by a mirror-like shine and smooth lines. The distance between the metal plates completely removes any bulkiness that the metal could impart to the artistic composition. Waves of air and light pierce the steel sheets, and different viewing angles can completely change the initial impression of an object. Material and volumetric figures suddenly crumble into fine steel lines before merging back into solid female forms moments later. From austere and cold metal, the author creates works that evoke warm and romantic emotions in bystanders.

Two of Lidagovskyi's works – “River-Love” and “Girl Trying on Clouds” – are installed in the residential community of Riviera Zolochy in the Boryspil district of the Kyiv region.

Odesa sculptor Kirill Maksimenko creates sculptures from scrap metal. A steel cat and a dachshund, a crab and a reading owl, a stork, a gorilla, a fish, a female cellist and a burly “maman” near the eponymous restaurant adorn the streets of Odesa, as well as other cities in Ukraine and around the world. Maksimenko willingly collaborates with various companies and brands. In addition to the “Maman” restaurant, a two-metre steel Belsta slipper is installed in Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyi, where footwear is produced under this trademark. Another surprise is the three-metre metal fish created especially for visitors to the Tuzla estuaries, the tail and body of which can be set in motion, which is what many tourists do.



Foto <https://m.itec.ua/>

The sculptor also made a noteworthy gift to the inhabitants of Nicosia. His five-metre metal bull was installed near Middle East University in the capital of Cyprus.

Sculptor Nazar Bilyk created his own metal work of art titled “Quotes” for an artistic residence on Byriuchy Island. The title of the work directly reflects its essence; visually, it is a large, flat pair of quotation marks. On Byriuchy, Bilyk placed part of the coast in quotation marks. This provided a new spin on a familiar landscape. Are the waves, sun and horizon the direct speech of the Creator?

A quote from his message to humanity?



Or perhaps this is an indication of a figurative, ironic meaning? In which case, the sea is just an attribute, the essence of which is not quite straightforward? The installation was later moved to Italy's Dolomites, where the artist placed the mountain range in quotation marks, giving new meaning to the snow-capped peaks.

As we can see, steel is perfect for monumental compositions that become calling cards for cities and countries. Sculptors create such works of art in collaboration with major steelmakers. Steel is also used to create relatively small objects. Born in artist's workshops, they decorate city streets, squares and parks with their steel glitter and noble lines.