

Original article

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French Graphics of the 1920s–1930s: Theoretical Foundations and Practice

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Abstract. The article is devoted to a comprehensive analysis of French printed graphics from the 1920s–1930s as a socio-cultural phenomenon of the era. The work examines the theoretical foundations of graphic art in the context of profound socio-political transformations caused by industrialisation, economic crises and the ideological polarisation of society.

The focus is on analysing graphics as an "open structure", whose form, content and meaning were transformed under the influence of industrialisation, economic crises and ideological polarisation. The scientific novelty of the study lies in the interdisciplinary synthesis of graphics as a unified semantic field that integrates political propaganda, Art Deco aesthetics and avant-garde practices.

The author systematises the factors driving the development of the school — from the integration of the creative heritage of the Russian emigration to the impact of the philosophical concepts of the era. The research methodology is built on a synthesis of classical and modern approaches: source studies and comparative analysis, formal stylistic and iconological methods are complemented by tools of hermeneutics, semiotics and socio-cultural analysis.

The research findings prove that French graphics of the 1920s–1930s reflected historical turning points, shaped the visual codes of society, mirrored the deep societal crisis and, later, the looming threat from Germany, as well as conveyed ideological attitudes in the context of the confrontation between left-wing and right-wing forces.

The practical significance of the study lies in the fact that its results can be useful for examining historical mechanisms of influencing society through images, thus providing an understanding of contemporary strategies of visual impact.

Keywords: printed graphics, France, visual communication, Popular Front (Front Populaire), Art Deco, Surrealism, ideology, semiotics of art, artistic emigration.

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Французская графика 1920–1930-х гг.: теоретические основы и практика

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Резюме. Статья посвящена комплексному анализу французской печатной графики 1920–1930-х годов как социокультурного феномена эпохи. В работе исследуются теоретические основы графического искусства в контексте глубоких социально-политических трансформаций, вызванных индустриализацией, экономическими кризисами и идеологической поляризацией общества. В центре внимания – анализ графики как «открытой структуры», чьи форма, содержание и смысл трансформировались под влиянием индустриализации, экономических кризисов и идейной поляризации. Научная новизна исследования заключается в междисциплинарном синтезе графики как единого смыслового поля, объединяющего политическую пропаганду, эстетику ар-деко и авангардные практики. Автор систематизирует факторы развития школы: от интеграции творческого наследия русской эмиграции до влияния философских концепций эпохи. Методология исследования построена на синтезе классических и современных подходов: источниковедческий и сравнительный анализ, формально-стилистический и иконологический методы дополнены инструментами герменевтики, семиотики и социокультурного анализа. Результаты исследования доказывают, что графика 1920–1930-х годов во Франции отражала исторические переломы, формировала визуальные коды общества, отражала как глубокий кризис в обществе, и позже, нависающую угрозу Германии, а также отражала идеологические установки в контексте противостояния «левых» и «правых» сил. Практическая значимость исследования состоит в том, что его результаты могут быть полезны для изучения исторических механизмов воздействия на общество через изображения, что обеспечивает понимание современных стратегий визуального воздействия.

Ключевые слова: печатная графика, Франция, визуальная коммуникация, Народный фронт, ар деко, сюрреализм, идеология, семиотика искусства, художественная эмиграция.

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Introduction

In the first half of the 20th century, graphics underwent a radical

transformation, ceasing to be merely a sphere of elitist or museum art. Thanks to industrialisation, the development of

printing, rising literacy rates and intense ideological struggle, it became a significant instrument of mass communication.

In an era dominated by visual communication – from advertising graphics to political posters and digital memes – the mechanisms of influence developed in the mass printed graphics of the past prove to be extremely relevant. The article demonstrates in detail how visual coding techniques – such as radical simplification of forms into signs (e.g., the symbolic depiction of the bourgeois or the worker), typically clichéd images (such as depictions of Hitler and Stalin in French graphics), the use of aggressive colour contrasts (like the combination of black and red in Popular Front agitation), and typographic emphasis – worked to create instantly recognisable and emotionally charged images that influenced public perception.

Tools of Semiotic Analysis of French Graphics of the 1920s–1930s

The analysis of French graphics of the 1920s–1930s as a semiotically open system provides key tools for critiquing contemporary media practices. The decoding methods identified in this work can be directly applied to the analysis of modern digital propaganda, infographics and even viral content. The source study analysis undertaken ensures the examination of a corpus of graphic works, periodicals of the era (art journals, newspapers, almanacs), archival documents, artists' memoirs and contemporary accounts, allowing for the separation of reliable facts from subjective interpretations. As Hopkins (2023, 2) notes, "The principal difficulty was the apparent

inability, then and even today, of stating with certainty the provenances of all the Palladio drawings located in Britain, the main issue discussed here". This quotation from A. Hopkins's study on the provenance of Palladio's drawings underscores the central problematic of art historical source studies – the difficulty of reliably establishing the origin and authorship of graphic artefacts.

To identify the internal logic of graphic development, typologisation and classification are employed, which help group works according to stable stylistic (Art Deco, Surrealism, Neoclassicism), thematic (industrial utopias, political satire, everyday scenes) and functional (commercial advertising, political propaganda, book illustration) characteristics.

The method of comparative analysis allows French graphics to be removed from national isolation, comparing them with parallel processes in other national schools, for example, with the work of Russian émigré artists in France, revealing unique features and points of mutual influence. At the level of analysing a specific work, the method of art historical hermeneutics is applied, aimed at interpreting individual artefacts.

Formal-stylistic analysis focuses on identifying the artistic language of the work: compositional principles, the plasticity of line, work with spot and texture, as well as the specifics of graphic technique. Iconographic and iconological analysis (in E. Panofsky's interpretation) moves the study into the semantic plane: iconography allows for the identification of subjects, themes, allegories and symbols,

while iconology reveals their deeper cultural and historical meaning. The synthesis of these approaches is semantic analysis, which traces the inextricable relationship between form, content and meaning.

At the level of interpretation and synthesis, methods are employed that allow artistic phenomena to be placed within a broad context and generalising theoretical conclusions to be drawn. Socio-cultural and contextual analysis examines graphics not as an autonomous aesthetic object but as a product of its era and the specific social function it performed. Semiotic analysis decodes graphics as a system of signs, revealing how the visual codes of the era – for example, metaphors of progress in Art Deco, images of the "new man" in Popular Front posters, symbols of power or protest in caricature – were formed, transmitted and perceived. As Ozgen (2015, 416) asserts, "the language constitutes the basis of culture and identity and each language creates its own culture".

Fundamental Understanding of Graphic Art

According to the definition proposed by A.M. Muratov in the Great Russian Encyclopedia, graphics¹⁴ (from Latin *graphice* – drawing, drafting; from Greek *γραφικὴ ἡ τέχνη* – the art of writing or drawing) is a type of fine art based on drawing technique, encompassing completed drawings, preparatory artistic works such as sketches, studies and drafts, and reproductive techniques such as engraving. The relative cheapness ensured

by the availability of paper endows graphics with valuable reproductive and auxiliary properties.

The specificity of materials, techniques and technologies gives graphic works their aesthetic distinctiveness. Depending on technological features, graphics are subdivided into unique and printed. Unique graphics are created by hand by the artist using graphic and painterly materials. Printed graphics are created through impressions from an original, using various techniques such as engraving, lithography, etching, or using high-performance printing presses. This art form encompasses both completed drawings and preparatory artistic works.

The transition from technological description to substantive analysis of graphics was carried out within the framework of the exhibition "Graphic Art in the USSR. 1917–X–1927" (VKhUTEIN, Leningrad). Its catalogue not only offered an exhaustive sectoral classification, presenting a comprehensive systematisation of all branches of applied graphics – from state and book graphics to posters and industrial graphics. The article by M. Roslavlev published in the exhibition catalogue introduced the term "industrial graphics" into scholarly circulation (Glinternik, 2023, 166–187).

For the most complete analysis of graphic works and the evolution of graphic art, it is necessary to turn to the triad "form – content – meaning", a concept that traces back to ancient philosophy, particularly to Aristotle's ideas about form

¹⁴ Muratov, A. M. (2007). Graphics. In Great Russian Encyclopedia (Vol. 7, pp. 637–640). Moscow. (In Russian).

as an organising principle (Asmus, 1976, 11–12). In the art historical analysis of graphic works, the triad "form – content – meaning" allows for the structuring of the interpretive process.

In particular, "form" in graphics encompasses the technique of execution, compositional solutions, graphic means of expression, as well as the textural features of the impression. The "content" of a work is manifested in its figurative structure, narrative fabric and presented objective world. The "meaning" of a graphic sheet is revealed through the idea embedded by the author, the message being conveyed, as well as the emotional and ideological subtext that shapes the overall impression of the work. The disclosure of meaning, as mentioned earlier, becomes an act of co-creation, when the viewer's perception of form and content occurs within the context of the era (Kalugina, 2018, 333–338).

The classical philosophical tradition, from Hegel to Russian thinkers of the early 20th century, establishes a fundamental principle for the analysis of any art, including graphics: the indissoluble unity of form and content. As Hegel (1999, 119) noted, the task of art is to mediate the idea (content) and its sensual, figurative embodiment (form), creating a "free, reconciled whole". Belinsky (1948, 138) developed this idea, emphasising their organic connection, where form, being an adequate expression of content, becomes inseparable from it.

The specificity of graphics as an art form lies in the particular way this principle is realised. Its content is revealed through a strict and economical set of formal means: line, stroke, spot, contrasting with the

surface of the paper. Colour here is usually subordinated to drawing. A critically important element of form becomes the background – the "air of the white sheet", in V.A. Favorsky's definition, which is not a passive empty space but actively participates in the construction of image and meaning, forming a unique relationship between the depicted object and space (Semenova, 2008, 5–6).

This economy of means translates into semiotic richness. As Uspensky (1995, 60) demonstrates, graphics possess the unique ability to convey not only the image but also the very process of its creation, the energy and intention of the artist. The character of the stroke – its "rapidity and nervousness" – can directly transmit to the viewer the dynamics of the depicted object (for example, the flight of a bird), involving them in the "creative process" of perception and interpretation.

Florensky's concept adds ontological depth to this analysis. He defines graphics not through material but through the principle of "linearity" and "motor space". For Florensky, the line is the trace of a volitional gesture, an act of constructing reality. Thus, graphics appear as a philosophical category – an active, volitional construction of space through the semantics of the trace-gesture (Gerchuk, 2000, 10). Although this approach remains debatable, it substantially enriches the theoretical toolkit, allowing the graphic work to be viewed as a fixed act of creative will and thought.

Historically, the most ancient form of graphics is drawing, whose origins can be traced back to primitive cave paintings and

ancient vase painting, where line and silhouette dominate. Despite the closeness of the tasks of drawing and painting, the boundaries between them can be mobile and conditional, which is confirmed by the use of techniques such as watercolour, gouache, pastel and tempera, which can be employed both for creating graphic and painterly works. Lacking the fullness of possibilities of painting in creating a spatial illusion of the real world, graphics vary with great freedom and flexibility the degree of spatiality and flatness (Semenova, 2008, 5–6).

This conventionality and semantic concentration of graphics is developed by Polevoy (1981, 10), closely linking it with drawing but indicating a departure beyond its framework. He emphasises that graphics encompass methods of reproduction, and its essence lies in the "primacy of artistic perception of life", the direct and immediate embodiment of nature. In comparison with painting, a graphic work creates a "self-sufficient artistic world" which, however, "does not pretend to absolute completeness of representation". This laconicism and openness of form allow the graphic image to resemble a "short, clear phrase, an aphorism", becoming a capacious sign, as in emblematics. Thus, from drawing to graphics as an independent art form, there is a transition from direct recording of nature to sign representation, where the economy of means translates into maximum semantic concentration. As Van Gansen (2017, 214) explains, analysing the advertising function of poetry in the typographic journal *Arts et métiers graphiques*, "the contents of the poems in

Arts et métiers graphiques do not directly laud a product; the poems as a whole are advertisements, by means of their material quality".

Thus, the theoretical line under consideration finds its completion in Sarabyanov's (2024) concept, which shifts the emphasis from the author's "message" to the very act of creativity as the materialisation of an internal state. In his view, the artist is not so much striving to "say" something as recording what lives within – in feeling, in gesture, in the movement of the hand. This idea directly resonates with the understanding of graphics as a trace of volitional effort in Florensky's interpretation and the transmission of the energy of the process in Uspensky's expression. A simple line or stroke becomes the bearer of this impulse, and the viewer receives complete freedom of interpretation. Thus, the viewer's task is not to seek a single "correct" authorial intention but to engage in individual interaction with the graphic work, which establishes the graphic work as a fundamentally open, unfinished structure. Its semantic fullness is formed in the dialogue between the recorded gesture of the artist and the personal experience of the perceiving subject.

In summary, it should be clarified that creativity cannot be reduced merely to the execution of an intention. The artist's inner world (personal experience) plays a role no less significant than external sources of inspiration. Sudden illuminations and spontaneous discoveries often arise at the intersection of the artist's inner and outer worlds. The traditional understanding of information expands: in the context of

creativity, information includes not only external objects but also internal experiences, bodily experience, intuition (Ruotsalainen, Late & Kumpulainen, 2025).

Adaptation of Journalistic Graphics to Socio-Political Tasks

In the context of the 1920s–1930s, in its functional aspect, journalistic graphics serve as an aesthetic means for solving extra-aesthetic tasks. Graphics not only retain their basic characteristics but also adapt to the tasks and requirements of the new era. A quotation from D.S. Moor's personal diaries — "Not art for art's sake, but art as a means of struggle" — serves as vivid evidence that the art of this period, including graphics, was often not an exclusively self-valuable phenomenon but was used as an instrument for achieving socio-political goals (Abramsky, 1977). In capitalist countries, graphics not only accompanied market processes but also shaped the very environment of mass consumption: they set taste standards, formed consumer demand and embedded in viewers' consciousness the values of the capitalist way of life. This orientation had a profound influence on the themes, stylistics and functions of graphic works, and must be taken into account when interpreting and evaluating the artistic heritage of this period.

In the theory of graphic art, there is a phenomenon concerning printed graphic works whose classification as an original authorial work or a work of mass reproduction raises ambiguity. In the traditional approach to graphics, characteristic of easel engraving and lithography, each impression is considered an independent artistic work with its

inherent uniqueness. However, newspaper, magazine and poster graphics represent a qualitatively different phenomenon.

According to Polevoy (1981, 10–11), the specificity of printed drawing lies in the fact that it is initially created as a work intended exclusively for mass reproduction. In this case, there is no classical original in the traditional sense, since the work may be executed directly on the printing plate and its artistic value is realised only in printed form, as the independent existence of the original (initial) drawing is not assumed. Printed graphics are created with consideration for the specifics of the publication; their form and content are designed for printing reproduction, and their artistic value is manifested exclusively in the multiple print run.

The chronological framework of the study covers a period of radical social and political transformation in France. The post-war economic boom and the deep crisis of the 1930s defined the context in which printed graphics existed and developed.

The material examined within the framework of this article comprises works originally created for reproduction and mass distribution: political and advertising posters, satirical magazines, book illustrations. Reproductions of classical art in periodicals, while fulfilling a cultural-educational function, remain outside the scope of analysis, as they do not reflect the specifics of the formation of a new visual language of the era.

At the intersection of traditional humanistic values, avant-garde

experiments, acute socio-political issues and technological progress, a unique layer of French graphic art was formed. In the graphics of France during this period, the heritage of the national school – in particular, the traditions of book illustration, the poster art of Toulouse-Lautrec – intertwined with avant-garde experiments of styles such as Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism, as well as the commercial aesthetics of Art Deco (Petukhov, 2020).

Russian Graphics in the Process of Cultural Integration

During this period, Paris was the world centre of Russian émigré culture. The exhibition of Russian art in Brussels in 1928 became the largest manifestation of the art of the Russian emigration. The exposition of the contemporary Russian art section comprised works by over 60 artists (Krasnoslobodtsev, 2021, 118–129).

Integration occurred not only through exhibition activities but also through professional unions and private galleries, whose owners actively exhibited Russian authors. Interaction with Western gallerists allowed artists not merely to "live in emigration" but to transmit their plastic school, which, in combination with the Parisian school of painting, produced new forms.

As Efros (cited in Uryadova, 2019) noted, the central moment in the process of cultural integration was the realisation that the Russian artistic heritage was not a closed phenomenon but represented an organic component of the general European artistic process. The term "peintres français d'origine russe" in relation to Russian artists indicates a high

degree of assimilation: Russian artists came to be perceived as bearers of quality who enriched the local environment.

Soviet criticism of the first half of the 20th century often relied on ideologically conditioned narratives in its evaluation of the work of émigrés, emphasising the break with the "national soil" (Koptseva, Zamaraeva & Menzhurenko, 2024). However, life in emigration became for many masters a period of professional rebirth, caused by adaptation to a new social and commercial reality. The rethinking of artistic language and strategies in emigration led not to a loss of identity but to the formation of a synthetic artistic consciousness while preserving national identity. As Lobodenko-Senani (2013, 3) states, "we examine press drawing as a meticulous chronicle of the journey of the White Russians in France, capable of responding with laughter to social and personal anxieties. [...] We suggest for it the role of an identity mirror, this 'poetic rhetoric of integration and difference'".

Although existentialism as a formed system crystallised later, its basic motifs – the absurdity of existence, existential anxiety, "freedom as burden" – were already penetrating the artistic consciousness.

Gordon (1987) interprets expressionism as a symptom of the socio-psychological crisis of the era, where art becomes an instrument of psychic survival. He defines its key vectors: the alienation of the individual in the metropolis, generating existential anxiety (Angst); nihilism; flight into the irrational (mysticism, theosophy, the primitive); and artistic practice as therapy through deformation of form and

aggressive colour. According to Arnold's (2023) research, the intuitive expression of feelings through artistic materials helps people who have experienced loss and grief to cope with the feeling of loss. The capacity of art to heal personal loss transformed individual experiences into artistic manifestos of the time.

Neo-Thomism, whose key representative was Jacques Maritain, formed the philosophical foundation of the Catholic intellectual revival of the 1920s–1930s. This direction offered a response to the challenges of secular modernism through a creative reinterpretation of the heritage of Thomas Aquinas. Within its framework, a synthesis of theology and rational metaphysics was carried out, creating the theoretical prerequisites for the search for spiritual stability in conditions of the value crisis of the era (Maritain, 1922). This movement fit into the broad cultural tendency of *retour à l'ordre* ("return to order") that succeeded the radicalism of the avant-garde, acting as its religious-conservative wing, while its secular analogue was Neoclassicism¹⁵.

In the sphere of religious graphics, a return to the use of traditional symbolism and allegory, Gothic fonts and ornaments, as well as the application of restrained colour schemes, is noted¹⁶. In secular graphics, as seen in the example of A.M. Cassandre's posters, clear silhouettes, balanced compositions, elements of Neoclassicism and strict classical fonts were used. A similar principle of "noble"

simplicity and order can be traced in publishing, for example, in the typography and design of the elite journal *Nouvelle Revue Française* (NRF) and the religiously oriented journal *L'Art Sacré*¹⁷.

Socialist ideas of class struggle, based on Marxism-Leninism, were actively materialised in visual agitation. Posters and caricatures of the Popular Front period (1936), published in French Communist Party organs such as *L'Humanité* and *Les Lettres Françaises*, employed laconic slogans, contrasting colours and dynamic compositions to criticise fascism, the bourgeoisie and colonialism, creating heroicised images of workers and anti-fascists (Polevoy, 1981, 296–299).

Secular humanism and rationalism in French graphics, ideologically represented by figures such as the critic Benjamin Crémieux, found expression in the striving to visualise the universal values of reason, freedom and human dignity through laconic, informative posters dedicated to education and public health, for example, campaigns against tuberculosis or for personal hygiene, where the clarity of the message was placed above decorativeness. Compositions were generally balanced, forms clear and generalised, and typography legible and functional. In contrast to the agitational function of the Soviet poster, French graphics of secular humanism performed a predominantly educational mission aimed at informing (Uler, 2002, 661–688). At the intersection of the philosophy of progress, technological determinism and the

¹⁵ Whittet, S. (2021). *Retour à l'Ordre: The Return to Order in French Art, 1918–1929*. [S. l.].

¹⁶ Schmitt, J. (1990). *L'Art sacré en France, 1919–1939*. [Paris]: Documentation française.

¹⁷ Art sacré (L'Art sacré) [Digitized journal collection]. (n.d.). Available at: https://archive.org/details/pub_art-sacre-revue-mensuelle (accessed on: 22 May 2026).

modernist worldview in France during this period, a visual phenomenon was formed that embodied the aesthetics of technicism. In contrast to Soviet technicism, subordinated to the tasks of social utopia, the French variant was oriented towards the market and mass culture, receiving its fullest expression in the commercial graphics of the Art Deco style. Posters and advertising promoting the achievements of industry and transport (the railways "Paris – Lyon – Mediterranean", Air Union airlines, transatlantic liners) actively used modernist techniques: geometrised and dynamic forms, the ziggurat motif (stepped compositions), alternating stripes (chevrons) and expressive, often modernised antiqua, creating a visual metaphor for speed, power and technological optimism. This aesthetics, despite its external closeness to Constructivism, remained within the bounds of decorative stylisation and lacked the social-transformative pathos (Golan, 1995).

Thus, French graphics of the 1920s–1930s developed under conditions of interaction and competition among various social, philosophical and artistic programmes, which determined its broad spectrum of visual solutions, the diversity of its communicative tasks and its significant role in the cultural landscape of the interwar period.

Agitational-Journalistic Forms of French Graphics

The graphics of France actively performed the functions of ideological influence, satirical criticism and mass communication – from Popular Front posters to advertising images of the new consumer culture (Polevoy, 1981, 299). As

Persson (2024, 849) indicates, "indeed, wrapped up in the inveterate axiom that France, plagued by plummeting birthrates, was on the verge of becoming depopulated, the image of the infant occupied charged territory in Third Republican France (1871–1940) and was extensively and repetitively disseminated in political as well as popular discourse".

In the 1920s–1930s, the ideological confrontation in France had a direct impact on visual culture. Here, in the words of Sokolov (1967, 174), "the first cell of socialist culture within bourgeois society" is realised on a national scale. This led to the formation of two opposing campaigns, reflecting the positions of opposite political camps.

Socialist ideas had a significant influence on the graphics of this period, mainly through agitational-journalistic forms: posters, caricatures and illustrations in the left-wing press. The influence manifested itself in the activation of the satirical tradition, tracing back to Daumier and Gavarni, when caricaturists used grotesque and hyperbole to denounce bourgeois morals, corruption and the hypocrisy of the political elite, turning satire into an instrument of class struggle. In parallel, in posters and illustrations of left-wing publications, the image of the "new man" was formed, based on the ideals of solidarity, labour and internationalism, with typical motifs: the muscular worker, collective labour, handshakes and red banners. An important role in the dissemination of these images was played by the party press and publishing houses associated with the French Communist Party and other socialist movements, such

as Clarté and Monde, where a particular style of newspaper drawing was created – laconic, eye-catching, with clear social accents. With the growth of the fascist threat in Europe, especially after Hitler's rise to power, anti-fascist themes became a key direction, expressed in images of resistance, for example, Marianne as a symbol of free France, as well as in satire on fascist leaders and Popular Front posters of 1936, calling for the unity of the population against reaction. French artists of socialist views also maintained international ties, which was reflected in the publication of Soviet posters and caricatures in Parisian publications (Cheblakova & Timofeeva, 2017).

The French Communist Party and trade unions used graphics to disseminate their programmatic theses. During the Popular Front election campaign (1936), posters with slogans such as "Bread, Peace, Freedom" were distributed, featuring images of workers and peasants, as well as red banners. In underground publications of the Resistance period, such as L'Humanité and Les Lettres Françaises, caricatures were published depicting collaborators and German occupation officials, as well as symbols such as Marianne breaking chains (Pisarenko, 2013).

The right wing also exerted significant influence in the field of intense ideological competition, including the monarchist Action Française, nationalist leagues and pro-fascist groupings, which used a different visual language in their propaganda. Their materials featured monarchical symbols such as golden lilies (fleur-de-lis) on posters, as well as images

of torches, swords and Celtic crosses, and Nazi symbolism. In periodicals of the far right, such as Gringoire and Je suis partout, certain population groups, such as adherents of communist ideology, Jews and Freemasons, were depicted using satirical negative stereotypical images (Polevoy, 1981, 296–308).

The analysis of satirical graphics in France during the period under consideration (1920s–1930s) allows for the identification of a number of key artistic means that determine its specificity and evolution in the context of acute political and social struggle:

1. *Narrative method and symbolic metaphor.* French satire often used an expanded narrative approach, saturated with recognisable symbols. Masters created complex allegories where political figures or phenomena appeared in the form of animals, monsters or destructive forces of nature, for example, fascism in the image of an octopus or a mechanical idol.
2. *Grotesque portrait as a weapon.* The political portrait-caricature experienced a flourishing, becoming a central element of anti-fascist and anti-militarist graphics. Artists sought to convey not only external resemblance but also the psychological, moral essence of dictators (Mussolini, Hitler, Franco), hyperbolising their aggressive, predatory or ridiculous features.
3. *Dynamic expressionism and contrast.* Under the influence of German Expressionism and the tragedy of the First World War, many

satirical works, especially from the late 1930s, abandoned the smooth lines of Art Deco in favour of "torn", nervous drawing, sharp chiaroscuro contrasts and deformation of space.

4. *Photomontage as documentary witness.* The insertion of real photographs of destruction, politicians' faces or marching troops into a drawn satirical context created a powerful effect of authenticity, blurring the line between artistic fiction and frightening reality.
5. *Synthesis of visual and verbal impact.* Laconic, often ironic or caustic captions, slogans or dialogues in "bubbles" were an obligatory element. The text not only explained the image but also reinforced the sarcasm.

The types and themes of satirical graphics in France included:

1. *Newspaper and magazine caricatures (operational satire).* The left-wing press (Le Populaire, L'Humanité), as well as independent satirical weeklies (Le Canard enchaîné, Le Crapouillot), responded with caricatures to events in domestic and foreign policy, ridiculing both fascist leaders and the inconsistency of French politicians.
2. *Poster appeals and placards (mass satire).* Anti-fascist and anti-war organisations used a combination of satire and agitation. A striking example is the poster by Métral "Young Workers, Destroy the Military Boot! United Front!" (1932).
3. *Thematic cycles and series.* Artists created series of graphic sheets on one theme, published in newspaper

graphics and individual albums. Examples include J. Barbier's illustrations for Henri de Bréau's book (1930), as well as a number of portraits of famous French writers and bibliophiles by the artist P.-E. Bécot for collector's editions (1920s–1930s).

4. *Allusions and parallels.* Satirists drew parallels with visual clichés and typical subjects, for example, the puppeteer controlling a puppet (Yo Mich's poster "Tous les pays d'Europe ont vaincu le communisme. La France reste seule menacée", 1936) or the octopus extending its tentacles, depicting new dictators in the image of historical tyrants.
5. *Socio-political drawings and international solidarity.* A significant layer of graphics was devoted to support, for example, solidarity with Republican Spain. Satire was combined with the pathos of sympathy and calls for unity (J.-F. Grandjouan, "International Women's Week", 1928–1930).

French Graphics of the Third Republic Period

In the 1930s, France experienced a protracted economic crisis, which differed from the dynamics of other Western countries: a late start, exceptional duration combined with political instability due to frequent changes of government and the polarisation of forces. The authorities' inability to quickly transition to active state regulation, the contradictory nature of anti-crisis measures (for example, protectionism without demand stimulation, cartelisation without

modernisation, and colonial reorientation without technological advancement), as well as diplomatic isolation and the loss of external sources of financing, led to deep stagnation: industrial production had not recovered to its pre-crisis level by 1939, unemployment rose, and investment activity declined (Prostakov & Barsukova, 2021, 140–155).

Economic instability and social polarisation in the Third Republic stimulated artistic journalisticism and experimental searches. Mass printed forms and visual languages ranging from modernism to Neoclassicism turned art into an arena of ideological clashes and the strengthening of the democratisation of culture. At the same time, economic constraints stimulated the development of cheap printed forms such as posters, magazine graphics and mass printing. Drawing on Sigmund Freud's ideas about the unconscious, Surrealism, formulated by André Breton, established itself as a significant artistic challenge.

Surrealists and followers of Freud shared a keen interest in dreams and the unconscious, but their goals differed radically. Freud viewed the dream as a cipher to be deciphered in order to understand the patient's past traumas. The Jungian approach was fundamentally different in its emphasis on the autonomy of the creative process and its connection to the deep, archetypal layers of the collective psyche (Lakh, 2025). Surrealists saw in dreams and "psychic automatism" a source of creative freedom and new, unpredictable images for art, rather than material for therapeutic analysis. According to the memoirs of Philippe Soupault, the key idea

of automatism for the movement was borrowed from the work of psychologist Pierre Janet even before acquaintance with Freud's theories. This intersection of ideas and the fundamental divergence in goals created a unique dialogue between art and science, where, as Freud himself admitted in a letter to André Breton, their worlds often remained mutually incomprehensible (Pinkovsky, 2008). Metaphor in graphics acts as a connecting link, translating the hidden impulses of the unconscious into a visual code accessible to aesthetic comprehension. It is through plastic metaphor that the artist finds an instrument for structuring the chaos of psychic experiences, transforming internal anxiety into a meaningful and visually expressive artistic fact (Van Lith et al., 2025).

Representatives of this movement, such as M. Ernst, used methods such as collage, photomontage, automatic drawing and frottage in creating graphic works. The result was the formation of paradoxical dreamlike images that were applied in posters, placards and book illustration to depict surreality (Domaratskaya, 2002). Collage, borrowed from the Dadaists, became an instrument for creating shocking visual paradoxes. This led to the widespread use in graphics of alogical combinations, biomorphic forms, ghostly overlays and poetic grotesque.

Thus, Surrealism significantly expanded the formal and content repertoire of French graphics, contrasting the utilitarianism of the political poster and social caricature with the deeply personal, irrational world of inner visions (Breton, 1986).

During this crisis period for France, the Art Deco style became a significant cultural

phenomenon. Art Deco (art déco), which formed in France in the 1920s–1930s, represents an aesthetic synthesis that emerged as a direct response to the socio-historical and cultural transformations of the post-war era. Its institutional consolidation is associated with the International Exhibition of Decorative Arts and Industry of 1925 in Paris, which became a programmatic demonstration of a new artistic language (Petukhov, 2020, 239–247).

According to Petukhov's (2020, 286–302) research, several key factors influenced the formation of the style. On the one hand, Art Deco offered post-war society a visual manifesto of order, stability and creative revival, responding to the psychological need to overcome the trauma of the First World War. On the other hand, rapid technological progress and industrialisation created a demand for a new visual language – laconic, technological and dynamic – that could visually embody the era of the automobile, aviation, radio and cinema. The Art Deco style is a synthesis of modernist and Neoclassical forms, folk and exotic traditions. It developed in both elitist and mass directions: the former, represented by unique graphics for magazines and jewellery houses, cultivated luxury and refined forms.

In parallel, there existed a democratised, mass version of the style, aimed at the middle class, workers and employees. Examples of this are widely represented in collections of posters and advertising archives of the period: posters for

department stores, transport companies (SNCF) and tourist destinations, cinema and popular cabaret placards, magazine graphics and posters for mass consumer goods (cosmetics, beverages). The visual language here was adapted to the tasks of effective communication and was distinguished by simplified geometric forms, contrasting colour solutions, dynamic compositions with clear diagonals and an emphasis on the functionality and accessibility of the image (Hillier & Escritt, 2005, 26–55).

Consequently, French Art Deco graphics did not represent a single monolith but were a flexible system capable of transmitting the values of prestige and luxury to the elite while simultaneously creating a modern, attractive and functional visual world for the masses. This capacity for adaptation became one of the reasons for its wide dissemination and influence. Graphics were an instrument of public dialogue and a means of recording historical turning points.

Based on the analysis, French graphics of the 1920s–1930s appear as a multi-layered, internally contradictory but integral system that reflected the drama of the era under consideration.

Conclusion

This work extensively presents the theoretical framework of graphic art, drawing on the fundamental definition of A.M. Muratov¹⁸, adapted to the realities of the period under consideration, the theory of the "open structure" of V.M. Polevoy (1981), and the philosophical-theoretical

¹⁸ Muratov, A. M. (2007). Graphics. In Great Russian Encyclopedia. Moscow. (In Russian).

foundation encompassing the concepts of Aristotle, G.W.F. Hegel, P.A. Florensky, B.A. Uspensky and others. The content of the article convincingly and substantively defines the boundaries between "unique" and "printed" graphics. The research methodology is built on a synthesis of classical and modern approaches: source studies and comparative analysis, formal-stylistic and iconological methods are complemented by tools of hermeneutics, semiotics and socio-cultural analysis. The study reveals the specificity of graphics as an instrument of mass communication, ideological influence and the construction of symbolic images of the era, as well as the graphic materials, techniques and expressive means through which these tasks are realised.

The study has revealed the influence of multiple factors on printed graphics, making them a complex and multifaceted phenomenon of the era. The evolution and transformation of graphics were directly influenced by philosophical currents and ideas, for example, Freud's theory of the unconscious, Neo-Thomism and Maritain's ideas, the heritage of Thomas Aquinas and the tendency of *retour à l'ordre*, as well as secular humanism and rationalism promoted by ideologues such as the critic B. Crémieux. Since printed graphics respond well to the goals of propaganda and are also effectively used for mass influence, they were widely used for political purposes. Ideological influence is also reflected in the context of the confrontation between the "left" (Popular Front press, magazine graphics of *L'Humanité*, *Monde*, *Clarté*) and the "right" (graphics of *Action Française*,

magazines *Gringoire* and *Je suis partout*). The socio-economic situation within the country contributed to a deep stylistic rupture: while Art Deco style graphics transmitted ideas of technological optimism and social stability, Expressionism and Surrealism in graphics focused on recording social contradictions. The protracted economic stagnation caused a rejection of expensive techniques in favour of printed forms — posters and magazine illustrations — turning graphics into an instrument of operational social criticism.

The study of printed graphics of the 1920s–1930s confirms the thesis that art in general, and printed graphics in particular, in crisis eras ceases to be "art for art's sake", transforming into a fundamental instrument for the formation of collective identity and public consciousness. As Mateo (2023, 45) notes, analysing similar strategies in 19th-century Spanish culture, "this comparison poignantly encapsulates not only Pérez Villaamil's own assumption of the role of historian-politician, but also the objective, meaning, and agency of the imaginary church within a project of national regeneration". Developing this idea, Farhat (2025, 15) asserts: "les images dues au topographe étaient aussi celles d'un historiographe." This observation indicates that in any turning-point era, the visual image not only records reality but consciously (or unconsciously) participates in the creation of historical narrative, the legitimization of power and the mobilisation of society. Hammond (2023, 2) further reinforces the thesis that visual art (both portraiture and printed graphics) in critical eras becomes an instrument of propaganda

and the construction of social hierarchy: "what becomes apparent from the analysis below is that Vasari is, in some sense, often not talking about the portrait at all, but is actually promoting the sitter. The idea of empirically 'true' portraits supports the stated aims of portraiture (memorial and moral instruction) and also endorses the unstated and somewhat self-aggrandising nature of the genre: it suggests that the sitters are indeed outstanding members of society who embody praiseworthy values". As Galardi (2023, 35) indicates, "entangled with contemporaneous art theories and art discourses, Die byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen reveals that the thinking of figures such as Adolf von Hildebrand, Heinrich Wölfflin, and Alois Riegl informed examinations of artworks beyond the canonical West. It thus invites a careful reconsideration of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century foundational studies across the discipline". This assumption finds confirmation in the creative fate of Russian émigré artists in France. As Zvonareva and Zvonarev (2024, 77) note, analysing A. Alexeev's path, "an analysis of A. Alexeev's creative activity during the first fifteen years of his Parisian

life leads one way or another to the conclusion: he, like many other representatives of the creative intelligentsia of the first wave of Russian emigration, preserved in his heart the image of his Homeland, Russia, which he sought to visualise in his works. [...] A. Alexeev remained a patriot of Russia, deeply and devotedly loving his Homeland, preserving in his heart a piece of the Russian world". The integration of Russian artists into France made Paris the centre of Russian émigré culture. In this environment, a specific artistic synthesis emerged: while preserving national expression, artists adapted it to the formal explorations of the French avant-garde. The status of "peintres français d'origine russe" established in criticism clearly demonstrates that the Russian diaspora ceased to be an isolated phenomenon, becoming an organic part of the Parisian school.

In the future, the results of this study may be useful for examining historical mechanisms of influencing society through images, thus providing an understanding of contemporary strategies of visual impact.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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