

IMPERISHABLE: Deconstructing Ukrainian Embroidery Patterns

Entwined with beauty and mystique, Rob Gill's highly anticipated exhibition embodies a sense of reverence for an inextricable part of Ukrainian culture

By Ayah Victoria McKhail



Rob Gill stands near his artwork:

DESIGN02. 2023

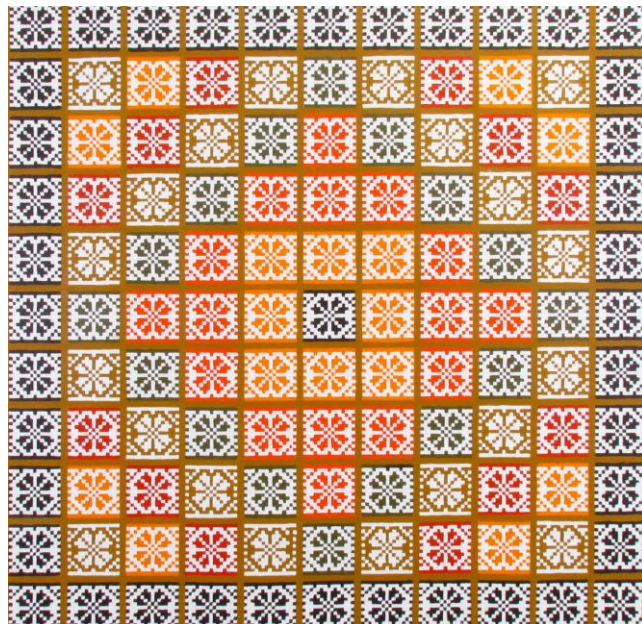
Acrylic on canvas, 65" x 50"

On November 7, 2025, a monumental exhibition of paintings and media art by Rob Gill opened amid much acclaim at the Shevchenko Museum. Spurred by a sense of intrigue over ancient Ukrainian geometric embroidery patterns and the meanings embedded in every stitch, which ultimately, form a composite whole, Gill has placed a spotlight on a celebrated tradition, which has endured throughout the generations; surviving largely through oral communication.

"What I'm seeking to do in this exhibition is to uncover some of the meanings and spiritual

content of the designs by applying various processes of my own making to the patterns. Many different media such as paintings, prints, computer animation, software design, and audio, work together to form a cohesive presentation,” explains the media artist.

With melodious sounds from the bandura, Ukraine’s national instrument, played by the renowned composer, Victor Mishalow, wafting through the gallery, the exhibition’s focal feature is comprised of six large scale, acrylic on canvas paintings. Striking aesthetically and proportionally, they’re exact replicas of authentic Ukrainian embroidery patterns. Painted with meticulous precision, the vast majority of time Gill spent preparing for the exhibition was devoted to completing the paintings. The process, which he found deeply meditative, provided him with a momentous opportunity to glean extraordinary perspectives into the designs. “I obtained many insights, and feel that it was only through reproducing the designs exactly as they are, that I would be offering a fitting tribute to the Ukrainian culture, and only upon their completion, be able to apply my own efforts and interests to them.”



Rob Gill
DESIGN06, 2025
Acrylic on canvas, 35" x 65"

Deeply inspired, Gill wrote a series of computer programs, which serve to deconstruct the designs in various ways. In the first version of the software, the animations in the exhibit that play in a continuous loop, replay the manual drawing of the designs. In the second version, Gill succeeded in playing back all of the designs being drawn simultaneously in the

same space. In turn, this created a new, interwoven amalgamation of all six paintings. “This hints at a deeper Ukrainian essence in the forms.” In the third version, Gill’s ingenuity led him to live remix the visual and audio materials. This created spontaneously formed visual and audio amalgamations, which can be activated through simple commands. “There are also some experiments in numerical analysis. For example, the number of pixels or squares between the different colours in the designs are not trivial, and I seek to reveal this through graphical representation.”

Gill’s presentation has been made all the more memorable because many of the animations are complemented by audio material sourced from the Ukrainian Art Song Project (UASP), which is based in Toronto. Operating under the auspices of the Canadian Ukrainian Opera Association, it endeavours to promote Ukrainian classical music in all of its forms, including through live performances and recordings.



Rob Gill
DESIGN04, 2021
Acrylic on canvas, 50" x 56.5"

According to Kasia Swintak, a board member with the UASP, the repository contains a treasure trove of masterpieces by cherished composers such as Mykola Lysenko, Yakiv Stepovyi, and Stefania Turkewich. “As someone with Ukrainian heritage, it’s truly meaningful to see how music from the Ukrainian Art Song Project is being incorporated in creative endeavours, just as Rob Gill has exemplified.”

Noting how the music Gill utilized added to the rhythmic effect emanating from his paintings, enhancing the overall ambiance of the exhibition, Doris Purchase found herself enamoured with the sense of harmony and unity flowing from Gill's paintings. "They're truly awe-inspiring, and the embroidery patterns are emblematic of the distinct regional varieties found throughout Ukraine."



Rob Gill
DESIGN01, 2021
Acrylic on canvas, 35" x 65"



Rob Gill
DESIGN03, 2024
Acrylic on canvas, 41" x 65"

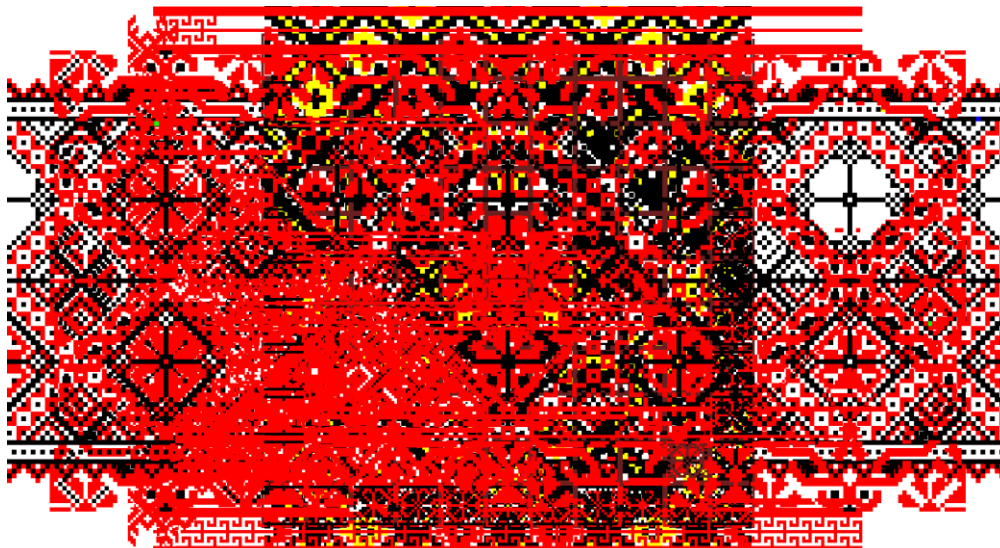
As Gaspar Magistar, an artist, absorbed the magnitude of the paintings on display, he marvelled at the symmetry of the vertical and horizontal patterns, noting their immutability. "The dimensional realms are perfect. Everything comes to life, transmitting a sense of activation."

Rob Gill's mother, Pauline Panczyszyn, has been heartened by the widespread interest Gill's exhibition has been garnering. Her parents were born in Ukraine, and seeing the personalized way Gill has honoured his heritage through this exhibition has been profoundly

moving. “It has been incredible to see how he has embarked on an odyssey of discovery by reconnecting with and reclaiming his Ukrainian roots. Clearly, he has revived his Ukrainian spirit.”

As someone with an interest in ancient sacred art who chose to focus on Ukrainian embroidery, the entire process of preparing for the exhibition, which was four years in the making, was deeply meaningful for Gill. It began during the pandemic, in the early part of 2021. At the time, news of Russia’s looming invasion into Ukraine, which occurred nearly a year later, was making headlines. As an established media artist who holds a Bachelor’s degree in Fine Arts, with a specialty in painting from Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario, Gill was propelled into action, “I wanted to do something that expressed solidarity, and celebrated Ukrainian culture and sovereignty.”

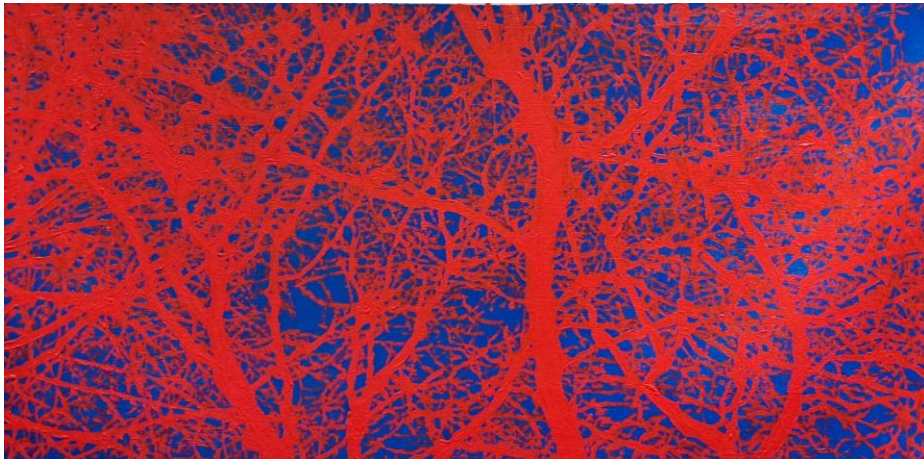
Bringing his vision to life at the Shevchenko Museum, which has historically held a special place in the hearts of generations of Ukrainian Canadians who have found a sense of continuity and connection with their homeland, has also been noteworthy. “I’m deeply honoured to be exhibiting in this beautiful museum.”



Rob Gill
AMALGAMATION 1-1,
2025
inkjet on paper

Teresa Ascencao, an interdisciplinary artist who teaches art and design for social change at the Ontario College of Art and Design University (OCADU) and at the University of Toronto (UofT), delivered the keynote address. She emphasized how exhibitions such as Gill’s are

powerful. Imbued with an inherently transformational capacity, they breathe life into seemingly inanimate objects. “Art becomes what it is by engaging with it, and by speaking about it.”



Rob Gill
TREES 2, 2020
Acrylic on canvas
33" x 18"

In addition to the paintings, which form the main exhibition, visitors to the museum also have a chance to delve into Gill’s other artistic works, which are interspersed along the museum’s stairwell and hallway. Done in a variety of mediums, with the purported aim of capturing noise fields, they reveal scenes of stark beauty, which can be found nearby in High Park, the neighbourhood he now calls home, as well as in Muskoka, Ontario.

The “IMPERISHABLE: Deconstructing Ukrainian Embroidery Patterns” art exhibition and sale can be viewed at the Taras Shevchenko Museum until **December 6, 2025**.

Original paintings and inkjet prints, in addition to limited edition giclee prints are available for purchase. Accompanying each painting is an audio album. Ten percent of all sales will be donated to an organization affiliated with Ukraine.



About Ayah Victoria McKhail

Ayah Victoria McKhail is the Shevchenko Museum’s visual arts reporter. She’s passionate about capturing stories about the artists who enrich the museum with their art exhibitions. In 2012, she travelled to Kyiv, Ukraine. Highlights include visiting the National Art Museum of Ukraine, Independence Square, and the Kyiv Monastery of the Caves.