

Current trends in the art book market in Ukraine

Tendencias actuales en el mercado del libro de arte en Ucrania

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Abstract

This paper examines the development and current state of the artbook market in Ukraine, focusing on its growth, audience, publishing practices, and cultural significance. The study analyzes key factors contributing to the increasing popularity of artbooks, including the expansion of pop-culture communities, the localization of internationally recognized editions, and the market state of original Ukrainian artbook projects, highlighting the importance of artbooks as cultural, educational, and collectible products that contribute to the development of contemporary visual culture and creative industries in Ukraine.

Keywords: artbook; Ukrainian book market; book localization; collectible books.

Ukrainian Book Market Statistics

The artbook market in Ukraine is gaining momentum, although it still remains niche and far from saturated. After the significant decline in 2022 caused by the full-scale Russian war invasion, Ukraine's publishing industry, despite undergoing major changes, has demonstrated continuous growth. For example, according to the State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting, the number of printed publications in 2023 increased by 73% compared to 2022, while print runs grew by 203%. In 2024, the book market grew by 31%, reaching 33,315 million copies, which accounted for 21% of the annual print circulation compared to the previous year. According to an analysis of Ukraine's publishing industry conducted by an analyst of the Ukrainian Book Institute, in the first half of 2025, 25% more new book and art publication titles were issued, while total print runs increased by 37%.

The number of publishing houses and printing enterprises had already begun to grow again in 2023: 302 publishing entities were added to the State Register of Publishers, Manufacturers, and Distributors of Publishing Products, of which 270 were newly established and 32 renewed their certificates. In 2021 there had been 293 such entities, while in 2022, due to the war and significant logistical, staffing, and security challenges, the number dropped to 152. During the first half of 2024, 41 publishing houses were opened, while in the same period of 2025, 50 new publishers appeared. Currently, approximately 350 publishing houses, over 800 offline bookstores, and around 80 online bookstores operate in Ukraine.

Compared to other segments of Ukraine's book market, the number of published artbooks remains limited. The market itself is quite narrow, though rapidly growing. This can be explained by the fact that such products often have exclusive print runs, high production costs per copy and appeal to a specific non-mass audience. However, this market situation creates favorable conditions for the creation and publishing of new projects, which, provided they maintain high production quality and a proper marketing strategy, can easily find their audience and niche.

Despite the fact that demand for books in Ukraine has been steadily increasing since 2022, the artbook market still lacks significant competition. The small number of publishers specializing in geek-oriented editions currently focus much more frequently on other products such as manga, manhwa and light novels, making artbook releases a relatively exclusive phenomenon.

Based on statistics from art publication competitions and exhibitions – for example, the annual «Best Book Design» competition organized by the Book Arsenal – it can be estimated that approximately 200-250 art publications of various kinds appear each year. However, this number also includes photobooks, publications by niche Ukrainian artists and architecture illustrated books. Compared to the overall book market, the artbook segment remains extremely small – perhaps around 300 publications per year at most versus 15,000 books

on the market overall with a total print run of approximately 24,6 million copies – yet it remains noticeable due to the visual uniqueness and marketing of these editions.

Over the past few years, artbooks have ceased to be isolated rare phenomena and have instead found their place as a distinct segment of the publishing market with its own audience and a stable, gradually increasing demand. Young modern readers increasingly perceive any publication not merely as a carrier of textual information, but as a comprehensive product capable of successfully combining visual artistry with high-quality content.

An important reason for the growing popularity of artbooks is also the fact that previously such publications were aimed primarily at a narrow audience of creative professionals – designers, photographers, stylists, and young film industry specialists, for example – whereas today the target audience has expanded significantly. It now includes fans of cinema, anime, video games, animation, as well as collectors. Artbooks perform not only an informational but also an emotional function, serving as objects of inspiration, collection, and aesthetic enjoyment. This contributes to market expansion and the formation of new consumer segments.

Another factor contributing to the growing popularity of artbooks is the additional immersion they provide into the worlds of cinema, games, animation, and other forms of contemporary art. Since these editions contain various types of illustrations – photographs, sketches, concept art, and other materials related to the creative process behind artistic products – they allow readers to better understand the artistic component of a chosen subject. In the Ukrainian context, this is especially relevant because global demand for all kinds of pop-culture-related products continues to grow, while artbooks have become one of the key means of representing pop culture in book format, surpassing photobooks and conventional printed books.

Important trend helping the artbook market develop is the growth of specialized publishing houses, events, offline and online stores focused on fan-oriented and niche products: comics, manga, anime merchandise, artbooks, and similar goods. The popularization of this focus owes much to the development of anime culture, which has become a significant cultural phenomenon over the past decade. This is reflected in the gradual growth of events, festivals, stores, and online communities, which in recent years have significantly broadened their interests – from exclusively Japanese culture to artbooks, American and European comics, and original publications by Ukrainian artists. The growth of such publishers, stores, and themed events also contributes to the development of collecting culture in Ukraine, which includes a large proportion of young audiences. In this context, artbooks represent an accessible entry point into collecting, as their pricing is justified by their high visual value, making these editions attractive to a wide range of consumers.

Examples of Modern Artbooks Available in Ukraine

Localized versions of English-language editions are especially popular in Ukraine (Figure 1). The most well-known modern artbooks have been published in Ukrainian, for example, artbooks based on the «Death Stranding» games, the «Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse» movie, and the show «Arcane». The popularity of those localized editions can be explained by several interconnected factors. First, global pop culture products already possess a large established fanbase in Ukraine due to the rapid spread of streaming platforms, gaming culture, anime communities, and social media fandoms. Readers who are emotionally attached to these franchises are highly motivated to purchase additional collectible materials connected to their favorite universes. Artbooks allow fans to extend their engagement with the fictional worlds they admire by exploring concept arts, unused designs, 3D-models, character and world visual development stages, environment sketches, interviews with creators, and behind-the-scenes production processes.

Another important reason for the success of localized artbooks is the increasing demand for high-quality Ukrainian-language content. Since 2022, Ukrainian audiences have demonstrated significantly greater interest in cultural products available in their own native language. Localized editions therefore fulfill not only an entertainment function, but also a cultural one, allowing readers to consume global media through Ukrainian translations and publishing standards. For many consumers, the availability of a Ukrainian edition becomes a decisive factor in choosing whether to purchase an artbook instead of importing an expensive English-language original. Also official Ukrainian editions are often more accessible in terms of pricing and distribution, making them attractive to a younger audience.

The popularity of artbooks based on video games is especially noticeable. Video games such as «Death Stranding» or «Clair Obscur: Expedition 33» have visually complex and highly developed stylish worlds, where environmental storytelling, costume design, architecture, and character concepts play a central role in



audience immersion. Fans are often interested not only in gameplay itself, but also in the artistic production behind the game. Artbooks satisfy this curiosity by revealing early visual experiments, unused concepts, and creative decisions made during development. This transforms the artbook into more than a supplementary publication: it becomes a collectible extension of the game experience itself.

Similarly, animated projects such as «Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse» and «Arcane» gained popularity largely because of their innovative visual styles. Both productions introduced distinctive artistic approaches that are significantly different from traditional mainstream animation. «Spider-Verse» combined comic-book aesthetics with experimental animation techniques, while «Arcane» merged painterly textures with 3D animation inspired by concept art and fantasy illustration. Their artbooks therefore attract not only dedicated fans, but also artists, designers, animators, and students interested in studying modern visual storytelling methods. Such publications are frequently used as educational references and sources of artistic inspiration, further broadening their audience.



Figure 1. Popular artbooks published in Ukrainian.
Source: <https://malopus.com.ua/> (MAL'OPUS).

At the same time, original Ukrainian artbooks occupy an important place inside the market. These editions are often illustrated by various many of young Ukrainian artists, while proceeds from sales may be directed toward charitable initiatives or funds supporting the Ukrainian army. This significantly increases the emotional and social value of such publications. In the Ukrainian context, purchasing an artbook can simultaneously function as gaining new information about the country, cultural participation, support for local artists, and civic contribution. As a result, readers often perceive these editions not only as entertainment products, but as meaningful cultural artifacts connected to national identity and contemporary Ukrainian creative industries.

One of the most notable examples is the artbook «Ukrainian Bestiary» (Figure 2), published in both Ukrainian and English. Around 100 artists participated in the project, collectively presenting 50 mythological creatures from Ukrainian folklore. Each spread was illustrated by two contributors who developed concept art, depictions of the creatures, details of their anatomy, habitats, and behavioral characteristics. The popularity of this artbook can be explained by the growing interest in Ukrainian mythology, folklore, and cultural heritage, especially during a period of strengthened national identity formation. By combining folklore research with contemporary visual aesthetics inspired by fantasy illustration and concept art traditions, the publication successfully appeals both to domestic readers and international audiences interested in Ukrainian mythology and culture.

Another reason why original Ukrainian artbooks attract attention is the strong role of community participation in their production. Collaborative projects involving dozens or even hundreds of artists create a sense of collective cultural creation. Readers often support such editions because they represent the work of the Ukrainian artistic community rather than a single author or publisher. This model also allows emerging artists to gain visibility and establish connections with audiences interested in illustration, animation, comics, and concept art.



Figure 2. Artbook «Ukrainian Bestiary», 2023.
Source: <https://malopus.com.ua/> (MAL'OPUS).

Publishers frequently enhance original artbooks with collectible supplementary materials such as stickers, postcards, pins, mini-booklets, bookmarks, posters, and limited-edition packaging (Figure 3). The inclusion of such merchandise reflects the growing influence of fandom and collector culture within Ukraine. Younger audiences increasingly value physical editions not only for their informational content but also for their aesthetic and collectible qualities. Deluxe editions transform the artbook into a premium object associated with exclusivity and emotional attachment to a particular franchise or artistic project. This tendency is heavily influenced by anime, gaming, and comic fandoms, where collecting merchandise is an important part of fan participation.

The deluxe edition of the artbook «Ukrainian Magical Academy» (Figure 3) demonstrates how Ukrainian publishers are adapting international collector-oriented publishing practices to local audiences. Such editions are designed to create a more immersive and memorable experience for readers. The additional materials increase the perceived value of the publication and encourage audiences to view artbooks as collectible cultural objects rather than ordinary books. Limited editions also stimulate demand through scarcity and exclusivity, which are particularly important factors within collector communities.



Figure 3. Deluxe edition of the artbook «Ukrainian Magical Academy», 2023.
Source: <https://malopus.com.ua/> (MAL'OPUS).

Scientific and educational organizations have also begun producing artbooks as a way to popularize knowledge through visually engaging formats. One notable example is the artbook «Zorevyr: Across the Universe» (Figure 4), which contains illustrations and introductory texts about constellations, planets, and other celestial bodies. More than one hundred Ukrainian artists contributed illustrations to the project, while the texts were prepared by the Clear Skies Foundation, an organization dedicated to scientific and educational initiatives supporting Ukrainian astronomy. The growing popularity of science-oriented artbooks can be explained by the increasing demand for educational content presented in accessible and visually appealing forms. Younger audiences are more responsive to image-centered and multimedia methods than to traditional academic formats. Artbooks successfully combine scientific information with artistic interpretation, making complex topics more approachable and emotionally engaging. In the case of «Zorevyr», the combination of astronomy and fantasy-inspired illustration creates a strong sense of wonder and discovery, encouraging readers to develop interest in science through visual immersion.

Such projects also demonstrate that the Ukrainian artbook market is no longer limited exclusively to entertainment or fandom-related products. Artbooks are increasingly being used for educational, cultural, and social purposes. They function simultaneously as visual art, informational publications, collectible objects, and platforms for collaboration between artists, researchers, and publishers.



Figure 4. Original artbook «Zorevyr: Across the Universe».
Source: <https://malopus.com.ua/> (MAL'OPUS).

In conclusion, artbooks in Ukraine have established themselves as a stable and gradually expanding segment of the publishing industry with a dedicated audience and increasing cultural significance. The market continues to grow due to rising public interest in visual culture, the development of pop-culture events, specialized niche publishers, geek-oriented stores, and online fandom communities. Localized editions of internationally successful franchises remain highly popular because they combine global cultural relevance with accessibility in the Ukrainian language. At the same time, original Ukrainian artbooks have become increasingly important as platforms for artistic collaboration, cultural preservation, education, charity, and the promotion of Ukrainian creative industries. As modern readers continue to value books not only as sources of information but also as aesthetic and emotional experiences, artbooks are likely to remain one of the most dynamic niches in contemporary Ukrainian publishing.

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