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SUPPORTING DECOLONISATION IN MUSEUMS:

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Part 1: Guide
Part 2: Essays

Published 2025

How to cite this publication

Ukrainian Institute, **ICOM UK**, **ICOM Ukraine**, **Museums Association**
and **British Council** (2025) Supporting Decolonisation: Focus on Ukraine.

Website addresses

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Essays

The essays are the work of individual authors based on independent research and do not necessarily represent the views of the partner organisations.

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INTRODUCTION

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The Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko National Museum of Arts (The Khanenko Museum), Kyiv
https://perma.cc/86W4-P5SB

This publication is the result of an international partnership project initiated by the Ukrainian Institute and developed in collaboration with ICOM UK and ICOM Ukraine (the United Kingdom and Ukraine national committees of the International Council of Museums) and the Museums Association (MA), supported by the British Council.

It consists of two parts, available to download for free from the project partners' websites.

Part 1: Guide
Contextual and practical information about Ukraine, with case studies and useful resources.

Part 2: Essays
Specially commissioned articles that further develop some of the key themes.

The purpose is to explain why and how Ukraine should be included in decolonisation practice. As well as offering new perspectives on the rich cultural heritage of this major European country, harmful colonial narratives are challenged to convey more accurate and nuanced interpretations.

Reliable information equips readers with the knowledge and confidence required to identify potentially mislabelled and misidentified cultural heritage from Ukraine. The Guide also contributes to wider debates about Ukraine's historical entanglement with Russia. By acknowledging the complex and sometimes difficult processes involved in unlearning and relearning about the past, the Guide positions Ukraine in solidarity with a global network of decolonisation struggles.

Although parts of modern-day Ukraine were claimed by different states — including the Austro-Hungarian empire, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Poland and Romania — this Guide focusses on the impact of the Russian empire and the USSR. This is because, unlike other countries coming to terms with imperial pasts, Russia has yet to embark on its own decolonisation journey. Its colonial narratives are not widely exposed or understood. Moreover, Russia continues to use the appropriation, manipulation and destruction of culture and heritage as weapons in its current neo-colonial war against Ukraine.

Who is this Guide for?

The Guide has been written primarily for professionals and students of cultural, heritage and memory institutions globally, who may have limited knowledge about Ukraine but who champion diversity and inclusivity. It is for those who may not be experts in decolonisation but who acknowledge the importance of such work and who recognise the role played by museums, galleries, archives, libraries and universities in redressing — or perpetuating — structural inequalities. As well as being tools of empire, such institutions may act as powerful instruments for communicating particular versions of history.

The Guide has been developed by experts and practitioners from Ukraine and internationally to bring together a range of perspectives. Decolonisation is a perpetual process and, since the field is developing fast, the Guide should be considered a snapshot in time and part of the journey. As research and understanding grow, and as resources allow, the Guide may be revised and updated.

Museum terminology

The word 'museum' is used throughout to refer to an array of cultural, heritage and memory-based organisations covering a vast range of subjects and collections. We focus on museums because

they are our area of expertise. However, the Guide is also relevant to the wider cultural sector and to those involved in public communication. Case studies and examples of good practice have been drawn from a variety of fields — including academia, archives, galleries and libraries as well as museums — to show how learning can be shared across the cultural sector.

Inspiration

Inspiration for the Guide comes from two key sources: the Museums Association's groundbreaking publication, *Supporting Decolonisation in Museums* (2021); and *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums: A Guide with Global Examples*, by Csilla Ariese and Magdalena Wróblewska (2022).

We hope that, in turn, the guidance contained here might also be relevant in other global contexts and different colonial settings, inspiring the publication of more guides to explain the rich and diverse cultural heritage of peoples and regions of the world.

Reading this Guide, you can replace the word 'Ukraine' with 'Latvia' or any of the other Baltic states and it still makes sense.

Kristīne Milere,
Latvian National Museum of Art /
Art Museum RIGA BOURSE

What makes this Guide different?

Whereas the MA publication focusses largely on colonial practices at the time of the British empire, this Guide addresses the knowledge gap around Russian colonialism through the lens of Ukraine. Imperial ambitions under the Russian empire, Soviet Union and Russian Federation are often unrecognised or misunderstood, partly because they are about inland rather than overseas expansion. The Guide reveals how Russian narratives masquerade as anti-imperialist and anti-colonial while obscuring the hostile nature of the nation's conquests, global expansion and suppression of dissent.

Whereas the MA publication addresses museums within a colonising power confronting its past, this version speaks to those dealing with the legacy of having been colonised. It reveals the insidious history of colonial practices that continue to reverberate across generations. For many Ukrainians, this means coming to terms with decades of indoctrination and violent erasures. It can mean a painful process of relearning what was lost through enforced Russification and rediscovery of Ukrainian heritage and identity.

This Guide has been written during wartime. Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2014 when it occupied and illegally annexed Crimea and provoked violence in Donetsk and Luhansk. Since Russia's full-scale attack in February 2022, public interest in Ukraine has increased.

Approach

To test the concept and generate support for this Guide, experts from the Ukrainian Institute and ICOM UK offered seminars and workshops for museum professionals in the UK and USA, while experts from ICOM Ukraine held workshops in Ukraine. The feedback demonstrated a growing desire for reliable information about Ukraine.

In developing this Guide, we followed the approach taken by the MA, with content stemming from a series of workshops and then tested and developed with focus groups. Initial themes and key messages were generated during a weekend of in-person workshops hosted by ICOM Ukraine in Kyiv in November 2023. Content was developed during four online workshops on the themes of art, history, language and contested heritage. Workshop participants consisted of a core group of Ukrainian experts, with international subject specialists invited to help explore specific themes.

An early version of the Guide was tested in May 2024 at an in-person workshop at Vienna's Belvedere Museum, supported by the ERSTE Foundation. Participants from Austria, Germany, Latvia, Poland, Switzerland, the UK and Ukraine took part and provided feedback, which was used to compile a second version.

An international open call for focus group participants was issued in July 2024. This generated over 100 applications, from which 21 cultural heritage professionals were invited to contribute. Their work was complemented by participants from the original workshops as well as invited experts in decolonisation studies. Together, they represented a diverse range of backgrounds, knowledge, lived experiences and perspectives from as far afield as Bangladesh, Canada, India, Ireland, Kenya, Latvia, Pakistan, Poland and the USA as well as the UK and Ukraine. Perspectives from Afghanistan, Belize and Indigenous Canadian (Métis) further diversified their contributions. This feedback was used to test and develop the version you see today.

Cultural exchange

During the writing and testing of this Guide, the value of cultural exchange in fostering international understanding and cooperation became increasingly evident. Although the theme of the project was decolonisation, many focus group participants requested additional information about what makes Ukrainian cultural heritage special. To address this, each chapter is introduced by a photograph and brief overview of a different museum. These offer a sense of the wealth of collections and subject specialisms held within museums across Ukraine.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Csilla Ariese and **Magdalena Wróblewska** (2022) *Practicing Decoloniality in Museums: A Guide with Global Examples*, Amsterdam University Press
https://perma.cc/E9EK-JCAW

Tetyana Filevska and **Maria Blyzinsky** (2023) 'A Global Approach to Decolonizing Ukrainian Cultural Heritage', *Museum and Society*, 21 (2) 65-71. (Part of a special edition dedicated to Ukraine)
https://perma.cc/9LAS-4G9V

ICOM, Museum Definition
https://perma.cc/JE76-TERG

ICOM, ICOM Codes of Ethics for Museums
https://perma.cc/UQ3U-SLH8

Museums Association (2021) Supporting Decolonisation in Museums
https://perma.cc/6MXT-WMYQ

Museums Association, Code of Ethics of Museums
https://perma.cc/2MSD-24B4

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WHY THE GUIDE IS NECESSARY

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Mariupol Museum of Local Lore, Mariupol. Mariupol is currently under temporary occupation, so the museum has relocated to Kyiv. https://perma.cc/35C5-WQNV

© photo Mariupol Museum of Local Lore

Ukrainian cultural heritage is often mislabelled or misrepresented in cultural, heritage and memory institutions globally. Russian voices have dominated the international cultural sphere for centuries, as if all the peoples of the former Russian empire and the republics of the former Soviet Union — including Ukraine — had no identity of their own. This perspective did not arise from a lack of expertise, creativity, virtuosity or connoisseurship among these peoples, but instead from their being misrepresented as simply being 'Russian' or part of a broader imperial, Soviet or 'Eastern bloc' identity. Their local stories and perspectives, including those from Ukraine, were frequently overlooked or erased from the global narrative.

Ukraine is often misrepresented

Ukraine and Ukrainians have long experienced negative stereotyping and marginalisation. At university level, Ukrainian studies have often been presented globally through the lens of Russian scholarship. Although it is slowly changing, this approach has filtered down to museums, galleries, libraries and archives, which, in turn, have influenced public understanding.

Memory institutions hold a privileged position, being widely considered as trustworthy sources of public information. It is our responsibility to convey nuanced stories about diversity and representation and to question whose perspective is being conveyed and how it relates to power.

The question we need to ask ourselves in the curatorial rooms of galleries and museums, in academia, in think tanks, on political advisory boards, is why, until Ukraine was attacked, had we not thought of securing mandatory in-house expertise on the largest country in Europe? Why had we thought of a nation of over 40 million as small and insignificant? Why had we chosen to dismiss its culture as minor? Why had we decided that learning the Ukrainian language was pointless because 'they all speak Russian there anyway'? The answers to these questions are likely to be uncomfortable. They are likely to speak to our own prejudices, and conscious and unconscious biases.

Olesya Khromeychuk (2022)
'Where is Ukraine?',
RSA Journal

https://perma.cc/6RN8-ZZ8T

Cultural heritage as a weapon

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, many reports have emerged of prominent Russian museums and curators playing an active part in complying with the war effort, supporting illegal archaeological excavations and facilitating the looting of museums in areas of Ukraine under military occupation (please see **Section 7**, **Step 4** for case studies). Such actions flout museum ethics and contravene the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

Cultural obliteration is a typical feature of wars, along with killing people and seizing land. Ukraine has been on the receiving end of cultural devastation before, notably during the Second World War (1939-45), when it became a battleground between Germany and the Soviet Union. It is vulnerable again. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of 24 February 2022, UNESCO has maintained a list of damaged Ukrainian cultural sites, including historic buildings, churches and ancient monuments as well as museums, libraries and archives.

USEFUL RESOURCES

UNESCO, 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict
https://tinyurl.com/fbvrhxaz

UNESCO, Damaged Cultural Sites in Ukraine Verified by UNESCO
https://perma.cc/8NFX-CP85

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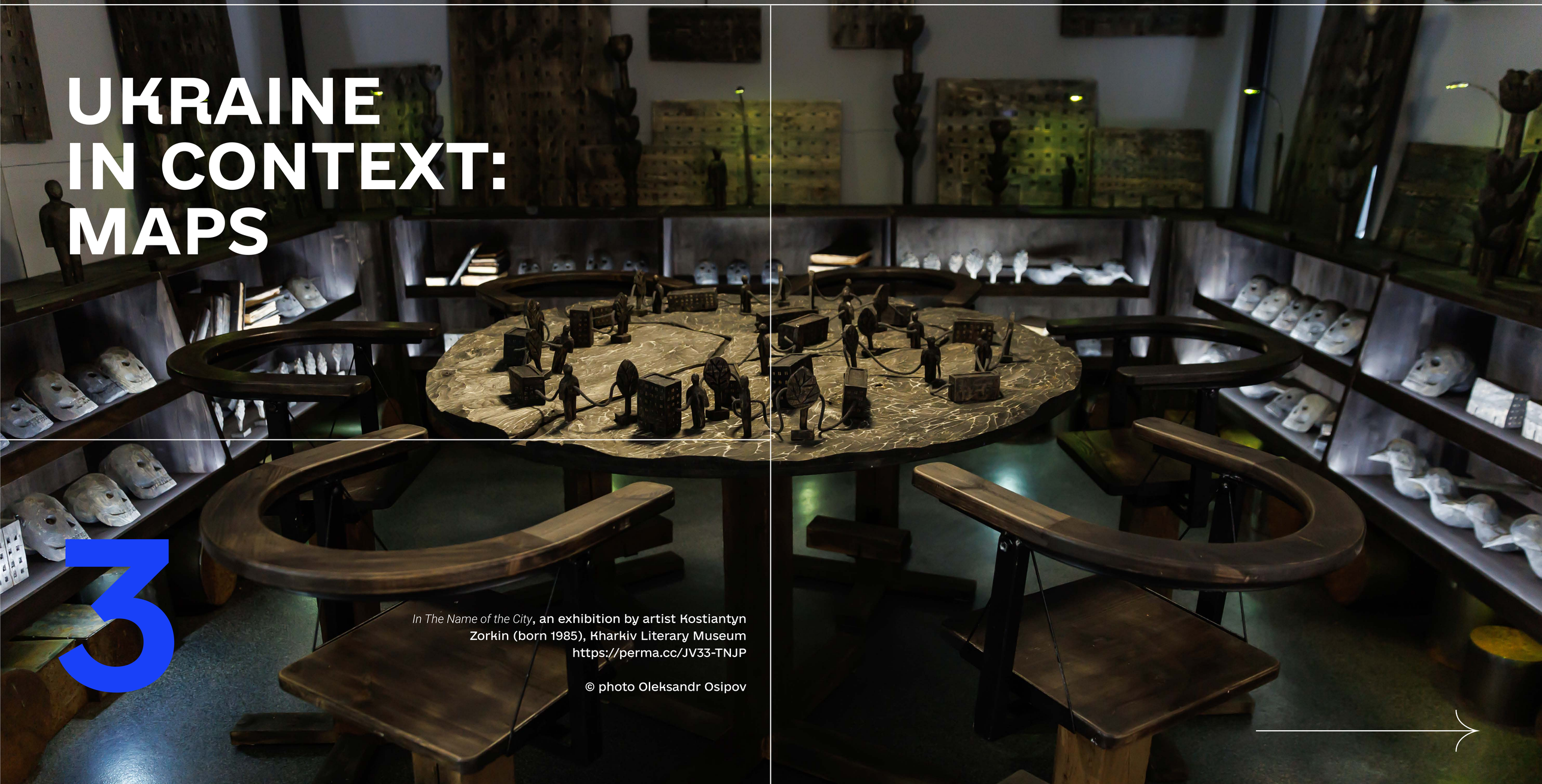
UKRAINE IN CONTEXT: MAPS



3

In The Name of the City, an exhibition by artist Kostiantyn Zorkin (born 1985), Kharkiv Literary Museum
https://perma.cc/JV33-TNJP

Ukraine shares borders with seven countries (Belarus, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Moldova and Russia). It is divided into 27 administrative divisions: 24 oblasts (regions), two cities with special status (Kyiv and Sevastopol), and one Autonomous Republic (Crimea). The Dnipro is the largest river in Ukraine and the third largest in Europe.

Ukraine's oblasts and UNESCO World Heritage Sites

At the time of writing, Ukraine is home to eight UNESCO World Heritage sites, with others listed as being under enhanced protection.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Guillaume Le Vasseur de Beauplan (1648) *Delineatio generalis Camporum Desertorum vulgo Ukraina: cum adjacentibus provinciis*, **Library of Congress. (The first ever full map of Ukraine to be published).**
https://tinyurl.com/3tnprn5r

Harvard University, MAPA Digital Atlas of Ukraine
https://perma.cc/UF82-8YXR

UNESCO, Ukraine: Properties Inscribed on the World Heritage List
https://tinyurl.com/459m823c

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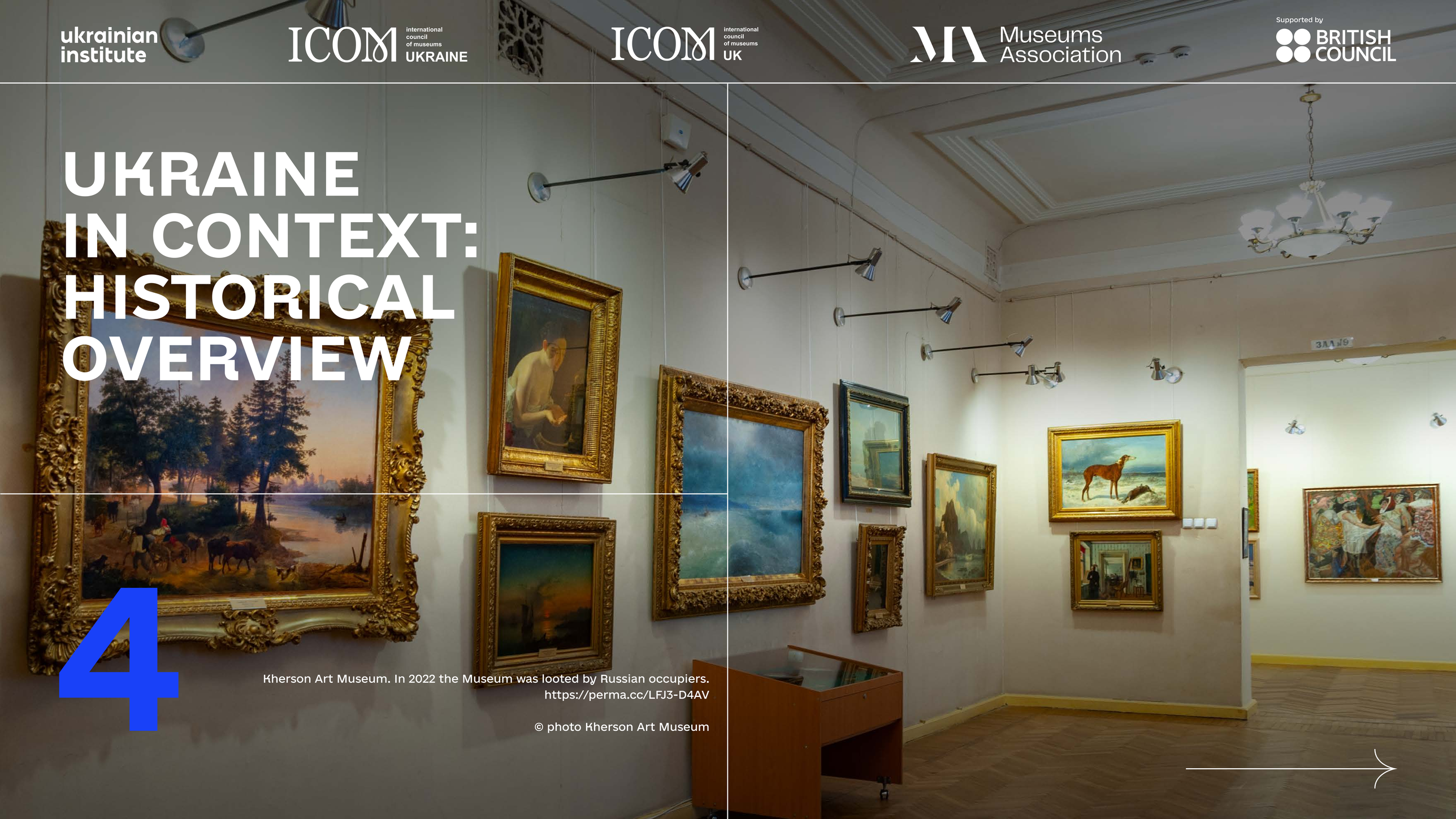
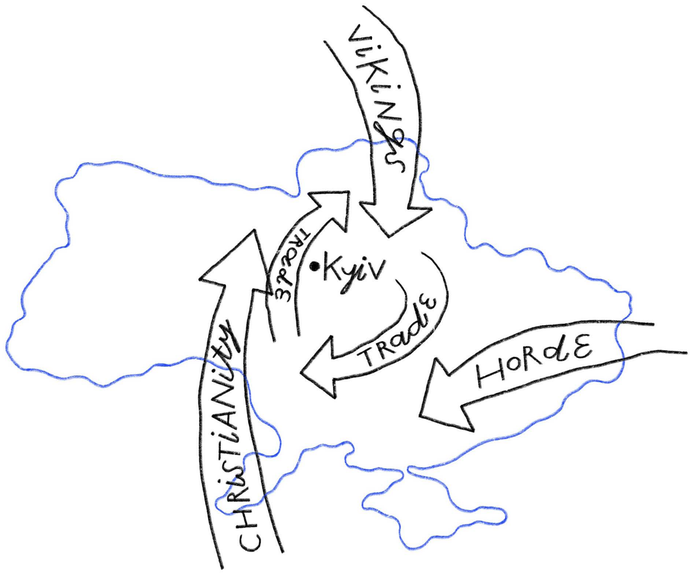
UKRAINE IN CONTEXT: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

4



Kherson Art Museum. In 2022 the Museum was looted by Russian occupiers.
https://perma.cc/LFJ3-D4AV

Ukraine has a long cultural and intellectual history thanks to encounters between diverse civilisations and cultures. Learn more in this specially commissioned overview compiled by Oksana Dudko of the University of Manitoba.



Before the 9th century
Ancient Greek Colonies and Steppe Nomads

Traces of human activity in the area date back to 700,000 BCE. From the 7th to 3rd centuries BCE, Greek colonies along the northern Black Sea coast wove the territories of present-day Ukraine into Mediterranean trade and culture. Homer (about 8th century BCE) and Herodotus (about 484–425 BCE) produced the first written accounts of the Cimmerians (about 1,500–750 BCE) and the Scythians (about 750 BCE–250 CE), two of many nomadic societies that inhabited the Ukrainian steppe.

9th to 13th centuries
Rus', a Byzantine-Fashioned Medieval State

The Slavic people, initially under the influence of a formidable commercial empire — the Khazar Khaganate (mid-7th to mid-9th centuries) — were instrumental in establishing Rus' as one of the most powerful medieval states in Europe. Centred on Kyiv, Rus' developed through frequent — often violent — encounters, exchanges, and transfers of knowledge and goods between Slavs and Vikings. The famous north-south trade route between the Varangians (Vikings) and the Greeks (the Byzantine empire), along the Dnipro River played a crucial role in the formation of Rus'.

In 988, Prince Volodymyr (about 958–1015) adopted Eastern (later known as Orthodox) Christianity from Byzantium and introduced elaborate Byzantine religious traditions, court customs, architecture and aesthetics to Rus'. The latter are still visible in Ukrainian landmarks such as St. Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv (established 1037). In 1187, during the Rus' period, the first recorded mention of the name 'Ukraine' appeared in historical chronicles.

The Mongol invasion of the 13th century hastened the disintegration of Rus' but also introduced a period of relative stability known as *Pax Mongolica*. Crimea — particularly the port city of Kaffa (now Feodosiia) — emerged as the western terminus of the Silk Roads and a key hub in the trade network between the Caspian, Black and Mediterranean Seas.

14th to 18th centuries
From Medieval Rus' Principalities to the Modern State of the Cossack Hetmanate

From the 14th century onward, the shattered Rus' principalities of present-day Ukraine gradually came under the control of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland, which united to form the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1569. Despite integration, the Rus' lands preserved their elites, social structure, Church Slavonic language, law and Orthodox religion, exerting significant political and cultural

influence on the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Commonwealth, in turn, introduced a political culture of so-called 'Golden Liberty' (parliamentary governance) which some scholars consider a precursor to modern democratic principles. Following the Mongol empire's decline, Crimean Tatars formed their own state, the Crimean Khanate, in 1441.

One of the major developments of the 16th to mid-18th centuries was the emergence of the Zaporozhian Cossacks, a unique military society. Rising tensions between the Commonwealth and the Cossacks, and peasant discontent over serfdom, escalated into the Great Revolution of 1648–57, led by hetman Bohdan Khmelnytskyi (1595–1657). This gave rise to the creation of the Cossack state, later known as the Hetmanate. Some of the hetmans (military and political leaders) referred to their state as Ukraine. Today, many historians consider the Hetmanate the foundation of modern Ukraine.

Under Ivan Mazepa (1639–1709), the Hetmanate enjoyed political stability and a cultural revival. He commissioned the restoration of 20 churches and the construction of 12 new ones while also establishing Baturyn as the Cossack capital, a city later sacked and levelled by the Romanov empire in 1708. This period of architectural revival later became known as the Cossack Baroque, blending local traditions with Western European Baroque. Under Mazepa, the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra (Monastery of Caves) flourished as a major intellectual, cultural and religious hub.

In 1710, Hetman Pylyp Orlyk (1672-1742) drafted the *Treaties and Resolutions of the Rights and Freedoms of the Zaporozhian Host*, a document that anticipated many features of modern written constitutions, such as those of America and France. Orlyk's constitution introduced the principle of separation of powers and explicitly warned against autocracy or 'влада самодержавна' (absolute power). However, it was never implemented as the Cossack Hetmanate was soon fully absorbed into the Romanov empire. The original document, written in early modern Ukrainian, was rediscovered in a Russian archive in 2008.

The Cossack legacy had a profound impact on the formation of Ukrainian identity and is memorably reflected in the writings of Panteleimon Kulish (1819–97) and Ukrainian Russophone author Mykola Hohol' (Nikolai Gogol, 1809–52), among others.

Late 18th to early 20th century
Ukrainian Society under Habsburg and Romanov Rule

From the late 18th century to 1918, Ukrainian society was forged through interactions with two imperial powers — the Habsburgs and the Romanovs. In 1772, the Habsburgs annexed Galicia, establishing the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria (now part of eastern Poland and western Ukraine) as a model of Enlightenment governance with efficient bureaucracy and rational administration. Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (1836–95), now widely known for his masochistic-themed work *Venus in Furs* (1870), and Olha Kobylianska (1863–1942), who gained popularity for her modernist feminist novels, were among the most prominent representatives of the multilingual German and Ukrainian literatures of Habsburg-ruled Galicia and Bukovyna (now southwest Ukraine).

Both the Habsburgs and the Romanovs used violence to pursue their aims, yet the latter implemented more severe and repressive policies. The period of Romanov rule was marked by imperial conquest, the denial of political sovereignty and top-down unification, resulting in the suppression of the Cossack Hetmanate

and the Crimean Khanate. In 1764, Catherine II of the Romanov empire abolished the Hetmanate and, in 1775, ordered the destruction of the Zaporozhian Sich, the last stronghold of Cossack political and military autonomy, an event of major political and symbolic significance. The Romanovs also promulgated harsh laws (among them the 1863 Valuev Circular and the 1876 Ems Ukase) for the Russification of the Ukrainian population, viewing them as 'Little Russians' and denigrating the Ukrainian language to a 'Little Russian' dialect.

Despite losing political sovereignty, the Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar populations retained a strong sense of political awareness and vibrant cultures that incorporated elements from the diverse societies that had inhabited the region over the centuries. Along with scientists, intellectuals and artists, Ukrainian writers, exemplified by Taras Shevchenko (1814-61) and Lesia Ukrainka (1871–1913), delivered pointed critiques of Russian imperialism and created powerful literature, envisioning Ukraine as an autonomous entity. Crimean Tatar intellectual and reformer İsmail Gaspıralı (1851-1914) promoted educational reforms and cultural modernisation among Turkic Islamic communities, shaping similar movements across the Turkic world.

1914 to 1923
An Anti-imperial Drive and the Ukrainian Revolution

At the turn of the 20th century, Ukraine, like much of Europe, was inspired by ideals of social, political, women's and national emancipation. These ideals fuelled struggles against imperial rule and demands for national self-determination. In 1914, a national volunteer unit, the Ukrainian Sich Riflemen (including a few Riflewomen) was formed within the Habsburg army, with the goal of fighting for Ukraine's independence from the Romanov empire. The year 1917 marked the start of revolution in Romanov-ruled Ukraine. After the February Revolution in Petrograd (now Saint Petersburg), the Ukrainian revolutionary parliament – the Central Rada – was established, signalling Ukraine's push for secession.

The result was the emergence of two independent Ukrainian states in 1918: the Ukrainian People's Republic, formed from Romanov-ruled Ukrainian territories and based in Kyiv, and the Western Ukrainian People's Republic, which claimed the former Habsburg lands of eastern Galicia, northern Bukovyna and Transcarpathia, with its capital in Lviv. The Crimean Tatars briefly declared the Crimean People's Republic in December 1917.

The two Ukrainian republics united in 1919, but their statehood proved fleeting. In 1922, following a violent takeover, Soviet Ukraine became a founding member of the Soviet Union. Then, in 1923, eastern Galicia's status as part of the Second Polish Republic was formally ratified and recognised internationally, marking the end of this revolutionary era.

Even though Ukrainian sovereignty was short-lived, it allowed time to test versions of liberal democracy and socialism. A novel result was progressive legislation on minority rights and the establishment of national institutions such as the Academy of Fine Arts, the Academy of Sciences and the State Drama Company — achievements that were unimaginable under Romanov rule.

1917 to 1991
Soviet Ukraine

As a significant part of the Soviet Union, Ukrainians participated in and were subjected to one of the most radical and ruthless modernity experiments under dictator Joseph Stalin (1878–1953). His violent modernisation and terror, along with the assault on Ukrainian identity, which was deemed a 'nationalist deviation',

turned many Ukrainians into critics of the Soviet regime. The murder of Ukrainian artists and intellectuals, known as the Executed Renaissance, and the horrific Holodomor (death by hunger), a man-made famine of 1932-33 which claimed the lives of approximately four million people, still reverberate in Ukrainian society today.

The devastation of Ukraine continued during the Second World War, when about eight million civilians and soldiers died or were killed in action and another 2.3 million Ukrainian citizens were sent as Ostarbeiters (enslaved labour) to the Greater German Reich. The Nazi Holocaust of between 800,000 and 1.6 million Soviet Ukrainian Jews and more than 24,000 Soviet Ukrainian Roma, and the Soviet forced deportations of approximately 200,000 Crimean Tatars in 1944, became symbols of civilian suffering as well as a tragic loss of Ukraine's multiethnic make-up.

Tattered by violence, ongoing persecutions and deportations to the gulags (forced labour camps), Ukraine nevertheless emerged as a vibrant modern state. It developed a strong military-nuclear complex, excelled in cybernetics and natural sciences, and fostered a dynamic Soviet Ukrainian popular culture, as epitomised in Volodymyr Ivasiuk's (1949–79) love songs. It also sustained robust networks of Ukrainian dissidents, known as the Sixtiers generation, who sought to liberalise and democratise the Soviet regime into 'socialism with a human face'. The human rights advocacy of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group (established 1976), the art of Alla Horska (1929–70), literary criticism exemplified by Ivan Dzuiba's (1931–2022) *Internationalism or Russification* (1965), and the Kharkiv School of Photography, among many others, laid the foundations for social activism.

1991 to the present
Contemporary Ukraine

Ukrainian society demonstrated strong grassroots solidarity and activist movements that led to the country's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Ukrainian eco-activism, along with political and economic demands to decide Ukraine's own fate, accelerated the Soviet Union's collapse by criticising Soviet secrecy surrounding the mismanaged 1986 Chornobyl nuclear catastrophe.

After gaining independence, Ukraine endured a series of harsh economic crises as it transitioned from a Soviet command economy to capitalism. Yet it also built a powerful civic society that has consistently opposed human rights violations, oligarchic rule and Russian interference. Peaceful mass protests (the 1990 Revolution on Granite; Ukraine without Kuchma in 2000–01; the Orange Revolution of 2004; and the Revolution of Dignity in 2013–14) illustrate a drive for civic engagement and collective action.

Despite Russia's unrelentingly violent invasion of Ukraine, which began in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and a proxy war in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, Ukraine's resistance remains steadfast. Its survival stands as a testament to the Ukrainian peoples' commitment to freedom, human dignity and the right of every nation to self-rule.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Volodymyr Dibrova (2017) 'The Valuev Circular and the End of Little Russian Literature', *Kyiv-Mohyla Humanities Journal*, 4 123-138
https://perma.cc/DT3C-GCUM

Oksana Dudko and **Anna Hájková** (2025) 'Teaching Eastern Europe in the Age of Russia's Imperial Invasions: A Conversation on Being Postcolonial When No One Takes Any Notice', History Workshop Journal, 99, 150–77
https://tinyurl.com/336bsumj

Michael S. Flier and **Andrea Graziosi** (2017-18) 'The Battle for Ukrainian: An Introduction', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 35 (1-4) 11-30
https://perma.cc/35GL-AX2K

Internet Encyclopedia of Ukraine (2001) Ems Ukase
https://perma.cc/PK9R-HS7A

Olena Palko and **Manuel Férez Gil**, editors (2023) *Ukraine's Many Faces: Land, People, and Culture Revisited*, New Europes vol 1, Transcript Verlag
https://perma.cc/9BJV-34LW

Serhii Plokhy (2015) *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine*, Allen Lane
https://perma.cc/2M7D-HKXA

Timothy Snyder (2022) *The Making of Modern Ukraine* lecture series
https://perma.cc/FV8Z-WPWB

Ukrainian Institute, 10 Things Everyone Should Know About Ukraine
https://perma.cc/KSK9-MM86

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WHAT DOES DECOLONISATION MEAN FOR UKRAINE?

5

Odesa National Fine Arts Museum, 2021. Today, the main collection has been evacuated due to Russian air strikes, even though Odesa's historic centre is a protected UNESCO World Heritage Site.
https://perma.cc/KEL6-422G

Decolonisation means protecting, restoring and advocating for Ukrainian culture and identity by campaigning against their erasure. Examining Ukrainian colonial history is a necessary step towards accountability and justice. It allows us to recognise signs of oppression and abuse and to realise that events such as the Holodomor (an artificially created famine of 1932-33 that killed almost four million Ukrainians), or the Executed Renaissance (the mass murder of Ukrainian artists and intellectuals in the 1930s), were neither accidental nor isolated incidents. Joseph Stalin, the dictatorial leader of the Soviet Union, initiated both. Similar attempts at eradication have occurred throughout history and across the world, causing subjugated peoples to lose all or a significant part of their national identity. These processes continue to shape the world even after their effects are normalised. This is part of the complex history of colonisation.

In the 1930s, Russia killed our historians and artists. When there is no one to speak about it, culture loses its own voice, its own way of speaking. The colonial power defines you – they create a narrative about you and then they spread that narrative around the world... Ukrainians have had to explain to the world why we were a colony because Russia has never admitted it.

Olena Chervonik, University of Oxford

Russian colonial strategies

Whereas European colonisers focussed on overseas conquests and maintained a sense of distance and difference between themselves and those they ruled, Russian imperial and Soviet authorities viewed their overland conquests as part of the imperial core. Racism was a common aspect of both forms of colonialism. This can be seen, for instance, in Russia's depiction of Ukrainians as 'Malorussians' (a pejorative term meaning 'Little Russians').

The Russian empire and Soviet Union used multiple strategies to subjugate people and erase their identity. Although such strategies are common to many colonial powers — and similar aspects of colonialism are common in other parts of the world — the following are some of the most prominent used by Russia in Ukraine.

Settler colonialism

This process of transferring settlers onto colonised land subjugates local populations through violence, forced assimilation and erasure of language and cultural identity. For Ukrainians facing Russian settlers, this meant the erasure of national memory through the destruction of archives, looting of museums, closure of academic institutions and the re-education of their children under a Russian curriculum.

Enforced economic dependence

Colonising powers extract valuable raw materials and exploit local people. The Soviet Union built its education system, labour market and manufacturing production, as well as supply and demand chains, in a way that made the economies of the colonies — including Ukraine — dependent on each other and the colonising power.

Hierarchical structures

With the imposition of a rigid power system based on race, ethnicity and social standing, artificial hierarchies falsely positioned Russia as superior and Ukraine as inferior. This misconception was spread globally through propaganda and manipulation. Museums remain an important mechanism for constructing and maintaining such artificial hierarchies, which is why decolonisation is essential.

‘Civilising’ Mission

Colonial powers often legitimise their interventions by claiming to ‘civilise’ peoples through the imposition of ‘superior’ cultural norms and values. This ignores the rich cultural heritage of colonised populations by forcing locals to switch allegiance from the so-called ‘lower’ culture to the supposed ‘higher’ one, often in the name of modernisation. In fact, modernity and colonialism are directly related, as colonial powers impose a new worldview to justify their actions. For many Ukrainians, the imposition of Russian culture led to generations being ignorant of their own language and heritage. The central role played by museums — in the past and today — in supporting or dismantling the ‘civilising mission’ cannot be underestimated.

Epistemic violence

This method of oppression silences dissent. Ukrainians were deprived of their values, beliefs and traditions, with independent scholarship and cultural practices being forcibly replaced by Russian versions. The extent of such epistemic violence is still being studied today. It is an uncomfortable and painful process, as generations of Ukrainians seek to understand their true identities and origins.

Physical violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide

In 1953, human rights lawyer and Holocaust survivor Raphael Lemkin described the Soviet goal of destroying Ukrainians and forcibly assimilating them into a single Russified nation as a genocide. He identified three main routes of attack: extermination of thinkers, artists, teachers, political leaders and spiritual figureheads; mass deportations of entire villages to forced labour camps, with families separated and children being re-educated; and the starvation of farmers and smallholders. The Holodomor of 1932-33 is widely recognised as a genocide. The 1944 mass deportation of Crimean Tatars from the Crimean Peninsula to Central Asia is considered an act of ethnic cleansing as well as genocide.

Russification

This term refers to policies designed to spread Russian culture and language, obliterating local heritage and identity. Under the Russian empire, this included banning the Ukrainian language and rewriting the history of Ukrainian people. Under Soviet rule, it meant that Russian became the official language of privilege, reducing Ukrainian to the status of a peasant dialect. This was particularly prevalent in the east of Ukraine. Many Ukrainian families switched to speaking Russian and adopted Russian traditions to secure better opportunities for their children. Today, many Ukrainians are relearning Ukrainian to reclaim their heritage.

Resistance

Over the centuries, Ukrainians have preserved themselves as a nation, often at great sacrifice. Resistance, whether overt or covert, has kept Ukrainian traditions and culture alive. It has long been used to slow imperial expansion, challenge exploitative practices and undermine those in power. For some people, acts of resistance may represent survival under repressive and violent circumstances, especially when other means of protest are unavailable or punishable.

Cultural resistance encompasses both tangible and intangible practices. Discreet acts — such as speaking Ukrainian at home when Russian is the language of school, work and bureaucracy — are important ways to protect personal identity while apparently fitting in. More overt acts — such as graffiti or wearing the yellow and blue of the Ukrainian flag — can attract danger while also conveying a message of hope. Resistance also manifests as disinformation campaigns, sabotage and physical combat. Among the better-known cultural resistance movements are the Ukrainian Modernists (1890-1910s), the Executed Renaissance (1920s) and the Sixtiers (1960s). Underground art and cultural movements of the 1970s and 80s were anti-totalitarian as well as anti-colonial.

Why decolonisation applies to Ukraine

Debates over whether colonial and decolonial narratives and strategies are applicable to Ukraine have been ongoing since the country regained independence in 1991. Such perspectives were marginalised in favour of dominant Russian narratives and scholarship that framed Ukraine's history.

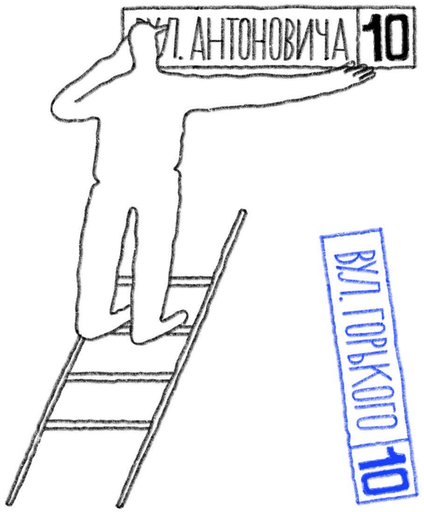
For centuries, Russian narratives sought to undermine Ukraine's need for independence by promulgating a myth of brotherly nations. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 revealed to the world Russia's neo-colonial ambitions, making decolonisation a crucial part of Ukraine’s fight for survival. The decolonisation movement has grown, with academics and artists leading the way. In turn, museum professionals have been sharing decolonisation practices with local communities. Museums are essential for reclaiming and reconstructing ancestral knowledge which is a powerful tool for healing the deep psychological trauma of colonialism.

Decommunisation and decolonisation

Since 2022, the Ukrainian government has passed laws prohibiting public symbols of Russian imperial rule. Similar laws were adopted in 2015 regarding symbols of Soviet rule. These recognised that the names of streets, squares, parks and other sites that previously memorialised Russians were more about marking political territory than about honouring cultural achievements. The replacement names celebrate prominent Ukrainians and international cultural figures. Rekindling memory and celebrating Ukrainian identity, the act of renaming is itself a form of decolonisation.

Archives reopened

For centuries, archives and cultural collections held by museums, libraries, government organisations and centres for academic research in Ukraine were censored, restricted, looted, hidden or destroyed. Access was only reinstated when Ukraine regained its independence in 1991. Scholars and researchers are still filling gaps in memory and understanding today.



Russia's war on Ukraine, 2014 onwards

At the time of writing, Ukraine remains under attack. Russia has justified its war in terms of regaining a lost empire and has deployed imperialistic tactics to undermine Ukraine and global support for Ukrainians. Although the full-scale invasion of February 2022 provided impetus for this Guide, experts in Ukraine are keen to point out that decolonisation should not be associated solely with resisting military assault. As the **Historical Overview** demonstrates, the need for decolonisation existed before the current war and it will remain after it ends.

We still don't know what we will find when we work in our own archives and diaspora archives. There are Ukrainian artefacts in Russia that were looted at some point and remain inaccessible. Ukrainian culture and its history could expand enormously.

Tetyana Filevska,
Ukrainian Institute

LEARN MORE

In a paper written for New York's Museum of Modern Art, Svitlana Biedarieva takes works by contemporary Ukrainian artists to explain why there should be no misunderstandings surrounding the nature of the entangled relationship between Ukraine and Russia.

Svitlana Biedarieva (2022) 'Decolonization and Disentanglement in Ukrainian Art', *MoMA Post Notes on Art in a Global Context*
https://perma.cc/PJ5G-A467

Download Essay 1

Read how Ukrainian archives were restricted and manipulated under the Russian empire and USSR in this specially commissioned essay, available as a separate download, in Part 2 of the Guide.

Overcoming Imperial Legacies in the Archives: The Experience of the Central State Historical Archives of Ukraine. Yaroslav Fayzulin, Director of the Central State Historical Archives of Ukraine, Kyiv.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Holodomor Museum
https://perma.cc/YK44-2SY5

Oksana Koshulko, editor (2025) *Humanity and Ukraine: Resistance through Language, Culture and the Taking Up of Arms*, **Lexington Books**
https://tinyurl.com/yncu45cd

Elżbieta Kwiecińska (2023) 'The Russian "Civilizing Mission" and the Russian War against Ukraine: the 19th-Century Colonial Origins', *TRAFO Blog for Transregional Research*
https://perma.cc/4QHW-JNZA

Raphael Lemkin (2020) *Soviet Genocide in Ukraine*, Markо Melnyk Publishing House
https://perma.cc/7ZVK-8FQ3

Kvitka Perehinets (2022) 'Executed Renaissance: The repressed generation of Ukrainian intellectuals', *We are Ukraine: Opir*
https://perma.cc/473F-WYRC

Ukrainian Animation Association and **Ukrainian Institute** (2021) 60s: The Lost Treasures
https://perma.cc/S76K-YGY7

ukrainian institute

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UKRAINIAN IDENTITIES

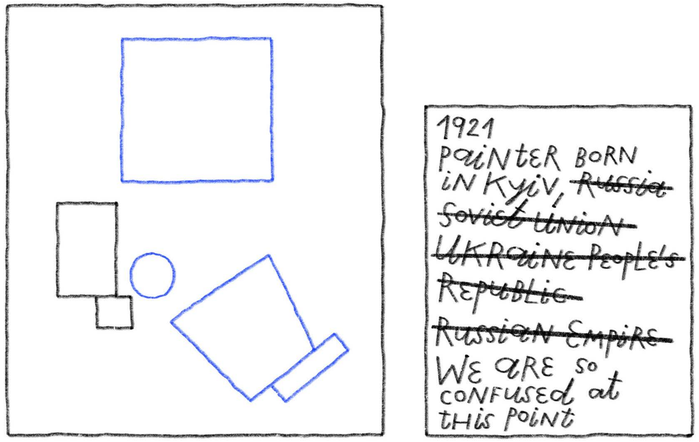
6

Modernism in Ukraine: National Version, an exhibition at National Art Museum of Ukraine, Kyiv
https://perma.cc/VU7T-6TNW

Contemporary Ukraine is a diverse, multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-faith society with a strong national identity and sense of democracy. Throughout history, its territory has been home to peoples and cultures that formed close ties, informing and influencing each other. Putting a strictly ‘Ukrainian’ label onto cultural phenomena, especially in a historical context, is often challenging. It is not in the interest of Ukrainians to create a homogenised view of their nation as this would merely reflect and perpetuate Russia’s colonial appropriation strategy. Ukrainian identity is rooted in a shared commitment to freedom, dignity and resistance to tyranny. Ukrainians identify with the values of democracy and independence, forming a political nation unified by a common vision for the future.

Multicultural Ukraine

Ukraine is a pluralistic nation with people of various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Crimean Tatars, Karaites and Krymchaks are legally recognised as Indigenous peoples. Their homeland is the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia has occupied since 2014. Ukraine is also home to several ethnic Ukrainian communities with their own dialects and traditions — for example, the



Boikos, Hutsuls and Lemkos from the Carpathian Mountains. Many different languages are spoken throughout the country, including Crimean Tatar, English, Hungarian, Polish, Russian and Yiddish as well as Ukrainian.

How to describe Ukrainian identity in an object label?

Accurately describing someone’s identity, nationality or political affiliation can be challenging without knowing how they would describe themselves. This can be especially difficult for people living under an oppressive regime or during a period of violent upheaval, with shifting national borders and changing political allegiances. Such descriptions might attract unwanted attention or lead to segregation or punishment. Consequently, the way people might describe themselves in private might differ from information in official documents such as passports.

With Ukraine, using nationality as a descriptor can be especially challenging. Take, for example, people from Lviv, a historic city in the west of Ukraine. Control of this region changed hands at least eight times between 1914 and 1945, sometimes overnight. The city’s name was rendered differently according to the language of its rulers. It was known as Lemberg under Austro-Hungarian rule, Lviv under the West Ukrainian People's Republic, Lwów under Polish rule, Lvov under Soviet Russia, then Lemberg again under the Nazis, before reverting to the Ukrainian name of Lviv.

Untangling national affiliations and exact dates can be challenging even for experts. When compiling museum records or object labels, many people choose the easy, and often incorrect, option of using ‘Russia’, ‘Russian’, ‘USSR’ or ‘Soviet’ as blanket terms to describe a range of

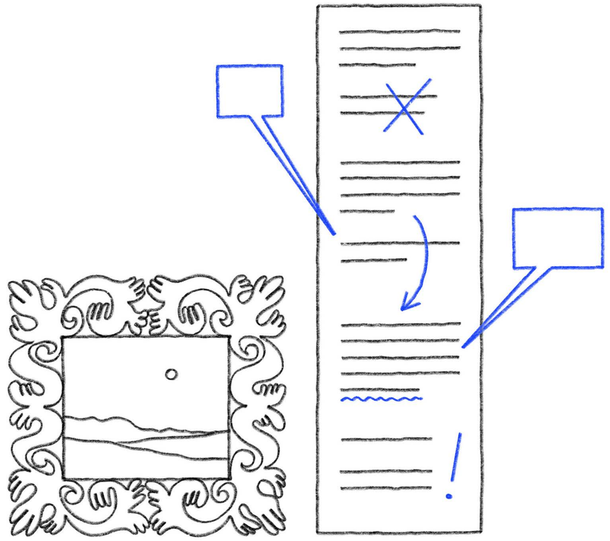
nations and nationalities. By doing this, they obliterate differences, introduce ambiguity and support colonial structures.

Rather than using nationality as an adjective, good practice is to use place names to define locations of birth, death and other key events relating to a person's life. The same applies to geological or archaeological findspots. This approach sidesteps the need to untangle the historic record, relying instead on verifiable information, with place names being attributable to internationally recognised borders and laws.

Taking the artist Kazymyr Malevych (1879-1935) as an example, good labelling practice would be to describe him as being born in Kyiv (then part of the Russian empire; now Ukraine) and having died in Leningrad (then in the Russian USSR; now Saint Petersburg in the Russian Federation). Better practice would also include place names of where he studied and worked.

The Russian empire and USSR do not equal Russia

Because of its breadth, the Russian empire and USSR consisted mainly of people who were not Russian and whose mother tongue was not Russian. Some of those who spoke or wrote in



Russian may have done so to assimilate. Russian authorities recognised that national identity was an issue they had to confront, and they did so brutally. Many Ukrainian scholars, artists, writers and others could only find opportunities for education and work if they moved to Russia, obtained official Russian documents and learned to speak Russian. This typical colonial approach extracts resources and talents from a colony, rendering it economically and culturally dependent on the ruling power. Nevertheless, many Ukrainian figures retained a strong cultural identity, their works being deeply informed by local traditions and visual languages as well as by relationships to other artists and contexts.

Early emigration from Ukraine

Learning the early history of emigration from Ukrainian territory is particularly important to social history museums. The first Ukrainians who migrated to Canada and North America in the late 18th and early 19th centuries came from western Ukraine, which was then under the Austro-Hungarian empire. They were variously described as Galicians (after Galicia, a historic region that straddled Ukraine and Poland), Ruthenians (Slavic people from the Carpathian Mountains), Austrians and sometimes Poles. Ukrainians living in the east, under the Russian empire, were less likely to be allowed to leave. Early German-speaking immigrants from the south-east of Ukraine are often described as 'Russian Germans'. They were in fact descendants of Dutch and German people (often Mennonites) who were settled in Ukraine as part of the colonial strategy of Catherine II of Russia.

There have been waves and waves of migration from Ukraine — including artists, poets and makers — but their work is often buried in collections and mislabelled. Check your databases, dig through the layers and find out who those people really are, where they come from and their true heritage.

Olena Chervonik, University of Oxford

LEARN MORE

Under Soviet rule, the official policy of equality was contradicted by the realities of national hierarchies, racism and social stereotypes. The idea of the 'brotherhood of nations' — with Russia as the 'older brother' who enabled the development of 'lesser', non-Russian nations — emerged to bind Soviet states together. Read how such beliefs severely impacted the Crimean Tatars.

Maksym Sviezhentsev and **Martin-Oleksandr Kisly** (2021) 'Race in Time and Space: Racial Politics Towards Crimean Tatars in Exile, Through and After Return (1944-1991)', *Krytyka* https://perma.cc/47BQ-2VXP

Download Essay 2

Read about Ukrainian Jewish identity in this specially commissioned essay, available as a separate download in Part 2 of the Guide.

Where are the Ukrainian Jews?
Vladyslava Moskalets, Center for Urban History of East-Central Europe, Ukrainian Catholic University, Lviv

Download Essay 3

Read how the category of 'Russian culture' was constructed by the Russian empire in this specially commissioned essay, available as a separate download in Part 2 of the Guide.

An 'Imperial' or a 'Russian' Avant-Garde?
Oleh S. Ilnytzkyj, Professor Emeritus, University of Alberta, Canada

USEFUL RESOURCES

Centre for Urban History, Lviv (2024) 'City in the Suitcase: Saved (Family) Archives. Project Results'
https://perma.cc/BZR5-UQ32

Ukrainian Institute, Crimea: History and People, *Udemy*. (An online course on the past and present of Crimea and Crimean Tatars, Indigenous people of Ukraine)
https://tinyurl.com/ypax92vz

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YOUR DECOLONISATION JOURNEY

7

Poltava Museum of Local Lore, one of the oldest museums in Ukraine, is located in a Ukrainian Art Nouveau building. https://perma.cc/T68Y-XGKE

The following principles complement those listed in the MA's *Supporting Decolonisation in Museums* and can guide your own journey of discovery about Ukraine.

- **Take responsibility:** Decolonising Ukrainian cultural heritage constitutes resistance against Russia's colonial and imperial ambitions, past and present.
- **Show respect:** Speak up for equality, inclusivity and diversity. Make it clear that voices from Ukraine and other formerly colonised countries should be heard and celebrated equally.
- **Be brave:** Museums should be spaces for open dialogue, new perspectives and reflection, even during uncomfortable conversations.
- **Consult the right people:** Invite Ukrainians to interpret their rich cultural heritage. Work with peer institutions in Ukraine or with experts from Ukraine.
- **Be patient:** Introducing new ways of thinking about Ukraine might be a slow process. Some people will be nervous about making mistakes, but the important thing is to try.
- **Be timely:** Museums should replace unacceptable and potentially damaging colonial narratives in a timely manner.
- **Support mental wellbeing:** Offer everyone a welcoming and caring environment. Allow yourself and others time to reflect on difficult information and to process traumatic events. Seek help if you feel vulnerable; reach out if you see others struggling.
- **Find joy:** Ukraine should be celebrated and remembered for its amazing people, culture and history. It should not be defined by centuries of Russian oppression.

Five-step approach

Being mindful of how resources in the cultural heritage sector can be overstretched — and being alert to the fact that the decolonisation process takes time — we have devised a five-step approach to including Ukraine in your daily practice. Each step includes recommendations for good and better practice, with easy-to-follow actions.

Step 1:
Learn about Ukraine and commit to change

Adding Ukraine to your decolonisation practice will have a ripple effect and help others to feel confident to follow, bringing positive change throughout the sector.

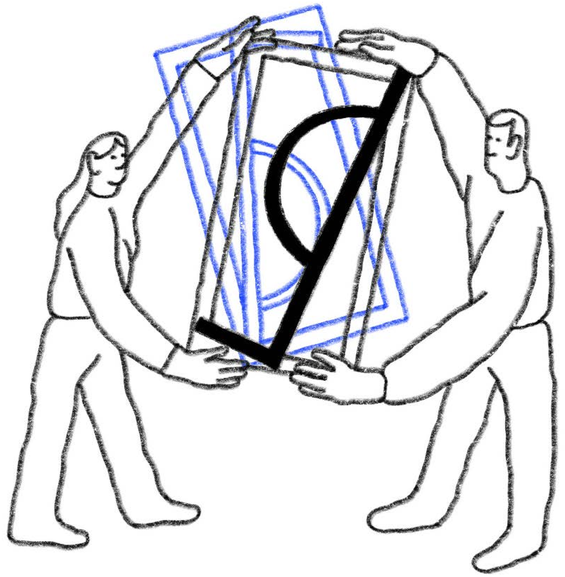
Cultural institutions and experts in Ukraine are open to consultation — your national ICOM branch and the Ukrainian Institute can help to identify potential partners. With deep cultural ties and a strong sense of heritage, the Ukrainian diaspora also serves as an important bridge between Ukraine and international communities.

Be aware of who is providing information about Ukraine and speaking on behalf of Ukrainians. Many academics and curators have been educated through the Russian lens, have lived in Russia or have worked with Russian scholars, and may therefore be unaware of the need to decolonise their thinking. Always question whose perspectives are being presented and empowered. Russophone research and publications have often been prioritised over those in Ukrainian or by scholars and curators with close ties to Ukraine.

Good practice	Better practice
Read this Guide and seek out other sources of reliable information to understand why Ukraine and other former colonies of Russia should be added to your decolonial practice.	Ensure your museum has a decolonisation policy that allows for perspectives from Ukraine, including the territory of Crimea.
Share this Guide with colleagues and plan how to put it into action in your organisation. Set longer term goals, accountability measures and ways to track progress in your decolonisation journey.	Incorporate voices from Ukraine, Central and Eastern Europe, the Baltic, Caucasus and Central Asia into collections, displays, public programmes and online. Be sensitive to the fluidity and multiplicity of Ukrainian identity.
Attend talks or watch online presentations to expand your understanding of Ukrainian cultural heritage.	Support museums in Ukraine with funding applications to facilitate research exchange, knowledge sharing and skills development. The war has caused a great loss and affected the museum workforce. Training the next generation of curators will be crucial to the preservation of Ukrainian cultural heritage.
Listen to people from Ukraine. They may be sharing lived experience or scholarship which bring accurate nuances and perspectives to your collections and interpretation.	Collect examples of good practice in decolonisation from other cultures and consider how they might be applicable to Ukrainian collections and cultural heritage, and vice versa.

Good practice is to seek several reliable, informed and critical sources of information for comparison and to value the lived experience of those with Ukrainian heritage. Wartime conditions require additional layers of consideration to ensure international events or meetings are equitable. At the time of writing, Ukrainians are subjected to martial law with severe travel restrictions. Ukrainian men between 18 and 60 are not allowed to leave the country except under special circumstances. Women wishing to travel require an invitation from a professional organisation to support their visa application.

When organising conferences, online events or meetings, be transparent about who might be involved, be aware of potential power imbalances, establish processes to manage potential disruption and protect the vulnerable. Don't be surprised if people withdraw if faced by those with Russian connections. We recommend against encouraging Ukrainians to enter debates about post-conflict healing while violence is still being inflicted.



CASE STUDY:
An upside-down painting at MoMA

The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York holds an important work by Kharkiv Constructivist artist, Vasyl Yermylov (1894-1968), titled *Composition Number 3*. In 2017 it was part of the exhibition *A Revolutionary Impulse: The Rise of the Russian Avant-Garde*. Since then, leading Ukrainian art historians reached out to MoMA with several concerns. First, the artist had been labelled as Russian although he was born and worked in Kharkiv, Ukraine. Second, the work was hanging upside down. This was apparent in a photograph of the artist standing beside the painting. It was also obvious to anyone with knowledge of the Cyrillic alphabet because the composition represents an oversized letter Б for Борис (Borys), after the artist's friend, Borys Kosariev. Numerous attempts to reach MoMA, including official letters and photographic evidence, received no response. Only after Russia's full-scale invasion of 2022 did MoMA acknowledge the voices of Ukrainian scholars and correct the work's orientation.

MoMA (2016-17) A Revolutionary Impulse: https://tinyurl.com/mt2kpew4

This is why this Guide is so important. It can save decades of research by institutions around the world that might not be aware of how many of its works are mislabelled or wrongly displayed.

Tetyana Filevska, Ukrainian Institute

CASE STUDY:
Sensitivity training at the Royal Academy of Arts, London

In preparation for hosting the international touring exhibition, *In the Eye of the Storm: Modernism in Ukraine, 1900-1930s*, the Royal Academy of Arts (RA) organised sensitivity training for staff who have direct contact with the public, including Welcome Hosts, Security, Ticketing, Press and Communications, Marketing and Retail. The brief was to equip staff across the organisation with confidence to talk about Ukrainian history, language and culture appropriately and equitably. The workshop shared practical information as well as insights from lived experience to raise awareness and answer questions.

The shift in perspective that I gained from the workshop enabled me to prepare my teams to provide a more nuanced visitor engagement.

Kenzie Larsen,
Royal Academy of Arts, London

USEFUL RESOURCES

Baltic Worlds, Voices from Ukraine
https://perma.cc/L4ST-3GR4

Sasha Dovzhyk (2022) 'Who is Lesia Ukrainka?'
Ukrainian Institute London
https://perma.cc/X5V9-BA4R

Step 2:
Review your collections, catalogues and object labels

Many objects relating to Ukraine are hidden in museum collections, perhaps because they are unrecognised or incorrectly catalogued. This might be due to records being completed by people with insufficient knowledge of the Ukrainian language and history, or it could reflect a deliberate attempt to obscure the provenance of an object during its journey to the museum.

In some museums there are old labels which are clearly from a different era. If you don't go through these systematically and actively update the text, you are leaving colonial structures in place.

Robin Schuldenfrei, Courtauld Institute

Good practice	Better practice
Compile guidelines for writing catalogue entries and object labels with references to Ukraine. This will ensure records are accurate and consistent, going forward.	Devise a strategy and a timetable for reviewing the language used in historic records — such as collections databases, catalogue entries, object labels and online content. Historic records should not be deleted because they represent a moment in time, but inaccurate or insensitive terminology should be contextualised.
Draw up a longlist of existing object labels and catalogue entries to review for accuracy and sensitivity. This could be a good project for a volunteer or an intern, ideally with an interest in Ukraine and knowledge of the Ukrainian language and culture. The list will act as a starting point for prioritising changes.	Involve Ukrainian experts in your decolonisation work. Curators, art historians, scholars and other specialists in Ukraine and its diaspora are available to share knowledge and experience. With language skills, access to local archives and knowledge of historical contexts, they can provide the groundwork for accurate representations of Ukrainian cultural heritage. At the same time, consultations must be conducted ethically, with people being properly recompensed for their knowledge.
Establish a transparent process for people to contact you with corrections or additional information about your collections and interpretation. Ensure the process is properly managed and regularly reviewed, with corrections made in a timely manner. Acknowledge people for their effort and support.	Designate a member of staff as the main point of contact for visitors wishing to suggest amendments. Proactively seek out corrections or additional information rather than waiting for mistakes to be pointed out.

Things which might indicate that an object or maker is from Ukraine:

- Places of origin within Ukraine, such as Kyiv, Kharkiv, Lviv or Odesa.
- Letters which are unique to the Ukrainian Cyrillic alphabet: Ґ, І (or lowercase i), Ї and Є.
- ‘Russia’, ‘Russian’ or ‘Soviet’ being used as blanket terms to describe all peoples and cultural heritage from the former Russian empire or USSR.

A practical piece of advice for museums? Look through your documentation. Every time you see the word ‘Russian’, treat it with suspicion. It could be an umbrella term used for a whole range of cultures.

Olena Chervonik,
University of Oxford

CASE STUDY:
Decolonising the library catalogue at Cambridge University Library

Librarians at the University of Cambridge have been addressing colonial legacies relating to Ukraine in their catalogue and beyond. Their approach is straightforward and easy to transfer to museums, galleries and archives. For example, they have been differentiating ‘Russophone’ literature from ‘Russian’ literature. The Cambridge University Library (CUL) blog, *Languages across Borders*, offers many insights and is worth checking for advice.

Mel Bach (2022) ‘Decolonisation and Russia’s War against Ukraine’, *Cambridge University Libraries: Languages Across Borders*
https://perma.cc/V2WR-V5GF

We recognise that while the primary colonial legacy in Cambridge libraries relates to the British empire, Cambridge also holds material relating to other colonial powers, past and present, and this is also part of our decolonisation focus.

Mel Bach,
Head of Collections and Academic Liaison, Cambridge University Library

CASE STUDY:
Ukrainian graffiti in a London air-raid shelter

After the Second World War, a former deep-level air-raid shelter in London was used as a hostel. Today, its walls still bear writing left by some of those who slept there. Two pieces, dated 1949 and 1951, were recently identified as being in Ukrainian, with one featuring the tryzub, the trident from Ukraine’s coat of arms. They represent an earlier wave of refugees who found sanctuary in the UK.

Maria Blyzinsky (2022) ‘A Powerful Reminder’, *London Transport Museum*
https://tinyurl.com/3dj5eazs

CASE STUDY:
Renaming works by Edgar Degas

In 2022, the National Gallery, London, updated the title of a work in its collection from *Russian Dancers* to *Ukrainian Dancers*. It depicts performers with yellow and blue ribbons in their hair, the colours of the Ukrainian flag. The pastel is one of a series which Edgar Degas (1834-1917) drew in Paris in 1899, when Ukraine was still part of the Russian empire. Other works from the series are held by the Metropolitan Museum, New York, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Ben Quinn (2022) 'National Gallery Renames Degas' Russian Dancers as Ukrainian Dancers', *The Guardian*
https://perma.cc/97QV-Q9TC

Ukrainian Dancers (about 1899)
Hilaire-Germaine-Edgar Degas (1834-1917)
Pastel and charcoal on tracing paper, mounted on paper and mounted on board, 73 × 59.1 cm

Presented by the Sara Lee Corporation, Chicago, through the American Friends of the National Gallery, London, 1998
© The National Gallery, London

USEFUL RESOURCES

Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, Internet Encyclopaedia of Ukraine
https://perma.cc/2C9D-JJSV

Harvard University Ukrainian Research Institute, HURI's Special Collections
https://perma.cc/Z3LZ-MENM

Oseredok Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre (2023) 'Decolonizing Ukrainian Art with Oksana Semenik'
https://perma.cc/TB69-Z3Z8

Ukrainians in the United Kingdom Online Encyclopaedia, The history of Ukrainians in the United Kingdom to 2021
https://perma.cc/W2B4-XLH3

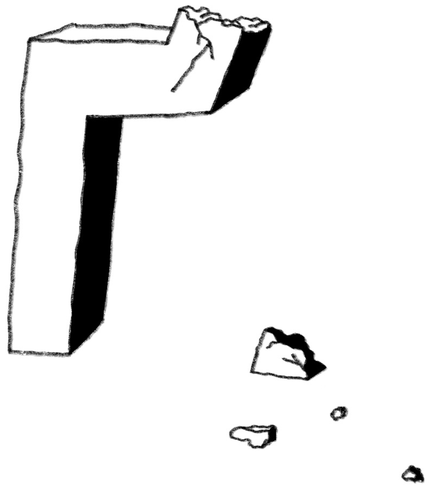
Step 3:
Use correct language, spellings and terminology

Beware of vague or ambiguous language when describing the former Russian empire or Soviet Union as well as the current Russian Federation. Confusion arises when different terms are used interchangeably or when ‘Russia’ is used to describe the whole empire or constituent republics of the Soviet Union. This plays into the hands of the colonising power, helping to eradicate the distinct identities of colonised peoples. It is vital for museums to use accurate terminology. It sends an important message about recognising difference and tells your audience that you care.

Good practice	Better practice
Use sensitive and accurate terminology to describe the heritage of various peoples under Russian rule. Vague, generalised or ambiguous terms sow doubt regarding who or what counts as being Ukrainian. This doubt is exploited by Russia to discredit Ukraine and to undermine global support for Ukrainian people during the war.	If you provide materials in different languages, review your Access and Inclusivity Policies to offer provisions for visitors who speak — or are learning to speak — Ukrainian. These could range from a simple handout to a guided tour or a bespoke audio guide. This will help to boost Ukrainian as a recognised and popular European language.
The Ukrainian Cyrillic alphabet has 33 letters. Even if you are unfamiliar with Cyrillic, there are four letters to look out for that could indicate you are looking at Ukrainian text: Ґ, І (or lower case i), Ї and Є.	Encourage staff to become more familiar with the Ukrainian language and alphabet. English speakers will find familiar sounding words such as museum (музей) and gallery (галерея). Knowing how to say ‘hello’ and ‘thank you’ in Ukrainian can make visitors feel welcome and included. Language tools are freely available on the internet.
When unsure about a particular phrase or description, look for analogies that may help. For example, Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) was born in India when it was part of the British empire, but he would not be described as British. Similarly, it might not be appropriate to describe people born within the Russian empire or Soviet Union as Russian.	Establish an advisory panel with native Ukrainian speakers to provide guidance on attributions, terminology and spellings.

Things to watch out for

Have ƴou ever wondered how Peter the Great and Catherine the Great earned their grandiose titles? The reason is connected to Russian colonialism and the ideologƴ of the ‘civilising’ mission. As neither of these people was particularlƴ ‘great’ for Ukraine, it is more accurate — and sensitive — to use their official names: Peter I and Catherine II of Russia.



Ukrainian alphabet and pronunciation guide					
А а	[a]	like **a** in st**a**rt	**Н н**	[en]	like **n** in **n**o
Б б	[be]	like **b** in **b**est	**О о**	[o]	like **o** in p**o**rt
В в	[ve]	like **v** in **v**an	**П п**	[pe]	like **p** in **p**ark
Г г	[he]	close to **h** in **h**ike	**Р р**	[er]	close to **r** in **r**ug
Ґ ґ	[ge]	like **g** in **g**o	**С с**	[es]	like **s** in **s**top
Д д	[de]	like **d** in **d**og	**Т т**	[te]	like **t** in s**t**op
Е е	[e]	like **e** in t**e**st	**ƴ ƴ**	[u]	like **oo** in p**oo**l
Є є	[je]	like **ƴe** in **ƴe**t	**Ф ф**	[ef]	like **f** in **f**at
Ж ж	[zhe]	like **s** in vi**s**ion	**Х х**	[kha]	like **ch** in lo**ch**
З з	[ze]	like **z** in **z**oo	**Ц ц**	[tse]	like **ts** in lo**ts**
И и	[ƴ(i)]	close to **i** in d**i**d	**Ч ч**	[che]	like **ch** in **ch**ess
І і	[i]	like **ee** in m**ee**t	**Ш ш**	[sha]	like **sh** in **sh**ort
Ї ї	[ji]	like **ƴie** in **ƴie**ld	**Щ щ**	[shcha]	like **shch** in fre**sh ch**erries
Й й	[jot]	like **ƴ** in **ƴ**es	**Ь**		ƴmbol for a soft sound
К к	[ka]	like **k** in **k**ey	**Ю ю**	[ju]	like **ƴou** in **ƴou**
Л л	[el]	like **l** in **l**emon	**Я я**	[ja]	like **ƴa** in **ƴa**rd
М м	[em]	like **m** in **m**other			

The letter Ґ (pronounced like ‘g’ in ‘go’) was officiallƴ banned under the Soviet Union in 1933 to force the Ukrainian language to be closer to Russian. The sound was incorporated into the similarlƴ looking letter г (pronounced like ‘h’ in ‘hike’), so one letter represented two sounds.

Ukrainians who opposed the Russification of their language risked being punished. Ґ was reinstated in 1991 when Ukraine regained its independence.

- Pejorative or offensive terms such as Malorussians (малоросійський) or Khokhol (хохол) have been used by Russians to describe Ukrainians. It may not be possible to avoid such terms in a historical context, in which case please adopt best practice for using any racist language.

- It is incorrect to say 'the Ukraine' just as we would not say 'the France' or 'the India'. Ukraine's name without a definite article is clearly stated in the declaration of independence and the constitution. 'The' might be a small word, but using it might suggest that the speaker does not care that Ukraine is independent.

- Place names should be transliterated from Ukrainian rather than Russian spellings. For example, Kyiv (Київ) not Kiev; Kharkiv (Харків) not Kharkov; Lviv (Львів) not Lvov; Odesa (Одеса) not Odessa. Once you become familiar with Ukrainian spellings, you will be surprised by how many catalogues, books and online sources adopt Russian conventions.

- Referring to Russia's full-scale invasion as 'the war in Ukraine', 'the Ukraine conflict' or 'the Ukrainian war' loses sight of the aggressor. The Russo-Ukrainian War started in February 2014 when Russia occupied and illegally annexed Crimea. It escalated in February 2022 with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Transliteration guidance

To assist with transliteration from the Cyrillic to the Latin (or Roman) alphabet, most anglophone libraries worldwide use Library of Congress guidance. Different rules may apply when transliterating into languages other than English.

Your institution's transliteration rules may differ from the standard. This is acceptable so long as you are transparent about the scheme being used and apply it consistently. Errors arise when transliterating Ukrainian Cyrillic using rules for Russian Cyrillic, for example 'Kiev' instead of 'Kyiv'.

In the past, Crimean Tatars used both the Arabic and Cyrillic alphabets. Today, they mostly use the Latin alphabet.

Ukrainian names

Personal names are often spelled and pronounced differently in Ukrainian than in Russian. Examples are Oleksandr (Олександр), not Alexander; Oleksandra (Олександра), not Alexandra; Volodymyr (Володимир), not Vladimir; Vasyl' or Vasyl (Василь), not Vasiliy or Basil; Mykola (Микола), not Nikolai. Many surnames (family names) are gendered in Ukrainian, with masculine and feminine endings. An example is Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and First Lady Olena Zelenska.

Historical spellings

Under the Russian empire, the Russian language was often the only option open to Ukrainian scholars, writers, artists and others to advance their careers. Questions can therefore arise in relation to spellings from the past, especially when familiar cultural figures are better known globally by Russian names. For example, the Ukrainian-born writer Mykola Hohol' (1809-52) is better known internationally by his Russian name, Nikolai Gogol. Official documents such as passports were issued in Russian, by Russian authorities. If Ukrainians emigrated, the Russian spelling of their name often stayed with

them, especially if that was the easiest way to assimilate.

Today, some scholars campaign to reclaim original Ukrainian names and spellings, while others believe that it is better to accept these historical differences. Best practice is to be clear about the choice of spelling being used in catalogues and object labels. One approach is to use the Ukrainian spelling followed by the Russian in brackets, for example: Mykola Hohol' (Nikolai Gogol, 1809-52).

Crimean Tatar place names

Following the mass deportation of Crimean Tatars in May 1944, Soviet authorities began removing every trace of Crimean Tatar historical, cultural and linguistic heritage from the Crimean Peninsula. They destroyed cemeteries, mosques and archives. The names of cities, towns and villages were erased. A wave of Crimean Tatars returned to their homeland in 1989, and again in 1991 when Ukraine regained its independence. Yet today, Crimean Tatars face persecution under Russia's occupation and illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula.

UNESCO reports that the Crimean Tatar language is under serious threat of extinction, so the Ukrainian government is devising preservation strategies and has pledged to restore historic place names following the de-occupation of Crimea.

The International Committee for Crimea has produced an index and a map of original Crimean Tatar place names to help people locate the homes of their ancestors:
International Committee for Crimea, Crimean Tatar Place Names
https://perma.cc/T39G-PKJE

Almost all the place names in Crimea have been changed in a violent way. For me, decolonisation is about restoring the natural order of things, about coming back home, restoring place names to their original communities, the returning of memory and historical narratives and the return of physical objects.

Pavel Gol'din,
National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine

CASE STUDY:
A Ukrainian conservation dictionary

Katya Belaia-Selzer is a UK-based fine art conservator with Ukrainian heritage who promotes collaborations between Ukrainian and British conservators. With support from the International Institute for Conservation, she has compiled the first professional English-Ukrainian conservation dictionary, useful when liaising with lending institutions from Ukraine, available to download from her website.

Katya Belaia-Selzer Studio, Ukrainian Heritage, Conservation Dictionary
https://perma.cc/42VY-SXRZ

CASE STUDY:
Ukrainian audioguides

Olena Zelenska, First Lady of Ukraine, supports an initiative to promote Ukrainian language audioguides in museums worldwide. Venues include Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum in Japan, the Nobel Prize Museum in Sweden and the Place of Memory, Tolerance and Social Inclusion in Peru. You can listen online to the audioguide of the Gallen-Kallelan Museum in Finland.

Gallen-Kallelan Museo, Audioguide
https://perma.cc/MKQ4-5ZVJ

Download Essay 4

Read about the challenge of accurately interpreting and describing artefacts from Crimea in this specially commissioned essay, available as a separate download in Part 2 of the Guide.

The Challenges of Exhibiting Museum Objects from Crimea
Denys Yashnyy, Leading Researcher, National Preserve 'Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra'

USEFUL RESOURCES

Library of Congress, Romanization Tables
https://perma.cc/7DG6-NEB2

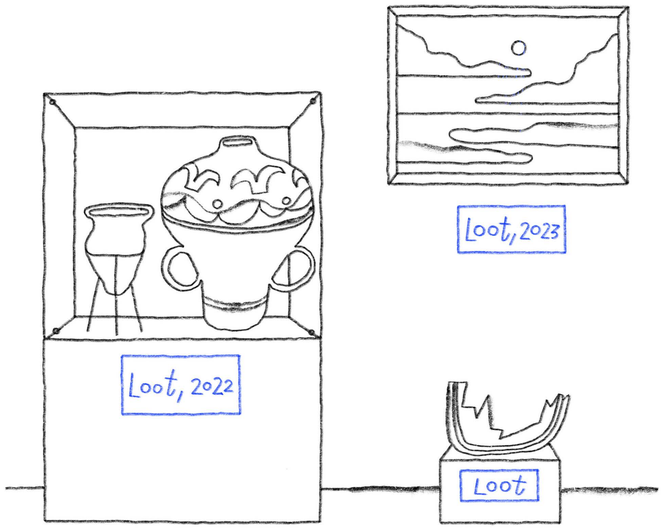
Anna Ohoiko (2020) 'How Similar or Different are Ukrainian and Russian Languages? History, Numbers, Examples', *Ukrainian Lessons*
https://perma.cc/M58Y-RV6Z

Ukrainian Institute, Online Resources to Help Learn Ukrainian
https://perma.cc/942D-93KA

Step 4:
Check the provenance

Checking the provenance of objects that might be traced back to Ukraine is an important step towards protecting Ukrainian cultural history. The process may yield surprises, with paths leading from Ukraine via Russia or showing Russian involvement.

In the UK, provenance research often prioritises objects potentially looted by the Nazis between 1933 and 1945. Ukraine was also subject to spoliation during this period and earlier, but by Russians. Such pieces are often overlooked. More recently, reports have emerged of the looting of Ukrainian museums and archaeological sites under Russia's military occupation. Many stolen artefacts are transferred to Russian museums or sold abroad, offered to unscrupulous or unsuspecting curators and collectors with false provenance information. If you come across artefacts that you suspect of having been looted or illegally trafficked, alert the relevant legal authorities in your country.



LEARN MORE
Looting supported by museum professionals

The intelligence service of Ukraine's Ministry of Defence has compiled a list of museum and heritage professionals who have taken part in the deliberate looting, illegal excavations and destruction of cultural heritage during Russia's current war on Ukraine. The list is available in English, Ukrainian and Russian. It shows the widespread nature of the looting and some of the steps being taken by the Ukrainian government to raise awareness of the problem.

War Sanctions, Stolen Heritage
https://perma.cc/F8Q6-D4BM

Good practice	Better practice
Become familiar with the ICOM Red List for Ukraine. To raise awareness, share the link within your network, including colleagues, collectors, auction houses and law enforcement specialists.	Appoint a specialist to research the provenance of collections from Ukraine, the Russian empire, Soviet Union and Russian Federation. You may be surprised and shocked at what you find.
When undertaking provenance research, record sources of information with dates accessed, names of researchers and the reason for undertaking the work. This will be an important resource for future researchers.	Just as language can be vague, the identities of artists, makers and artefacts from Ukraine can be obscured. Proper research will help with identification and ensure proper, ethical attribution.

LEARN MORE
ICOM Red Lists of cultural objects at risk

ICOM Red Lists are practical tools to curb illegal traffic in cultural objects. They help to identify objects at risk. The Red Lists do not include individual stolen items, but they illustrate categories of cultural artefacts most vulnerable to illicit trafficking, past and present. They are available to download in different languages and contribute towards the identification, recovery and restitution of thousands of artefacts worldwide. *The Emergency Red List of Cultural Objects at Risk — Ukraine* is available in Ukrainian, English and Swedish.

ICOM, Red Lists Database
https://perma.cc/V83L-72UP

CASE STUDY:
Treasures from ancient Kyiv in international museums

Many medieval hoards discovered in Kyiv during the 19th century were 'disappeared', sold to collectors or melted down. Some of these pieces had extraordinary journeys and can now be found in major museums in the UK and USA.

Ludmila V. Pekars'ka (1997) 'Treasures from Ancient Kiev in The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Dumbarton Oaks', *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, 35 65-75
https://perma.cc/F9DW-PMS9

CASE STUDY:
Legal ownership of ancient Ukrainian treasures

In 2023, a collection of ancient Scythian and Sarmatian treasures was returned to Ukraine after a legal battle over ownership. The artefacts had been lent to an exhibition at Amsterdam's Allard Pierson Museum of Antiquities in 2013. Some of the objects were from museums in Crimea and, after the occupation and illegal annexation of 2014, Russia claimed ownership. The Ukrainian government countered that they did not belong to Russia. The Dutch courts ruled in favour of Ukraine and the objects were returned to Kyiv for safekeeping.

BBC (2023) 'Ancient Ukraine treasures returned after court battle'
https://perma.cc/PF6H-QJVT

The golden helmet belonging to the treasury of Scythia.
© photo Monique Kooijmans (Allard Pierson)

Download Essay 5

Two sets of medieval silver gates from the National Preserve 'Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra' (Monastery of Caves) are currently housed at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Read how the Museum has collaborated with specialists from the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra to research the provenance of the gates in this specially commissioned essay, available as a separate download in Part 2 of the Guide.

Gates from the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra: a case study of curatorial practice at the V&A
Alice Minter, Senior Curator, the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Download Essay 6

Natural history collections contain layered stories of colonisation and reappropriation, whether as materials that were stripped from the land, as looted artefacts or as sources of scientific advancement, without recompensing local communities. Learn more in this specially commissioned essay, available as a separate download in Part 2 of the Guide.

Decolonisation of natural history collections: The Perspective from Ukraine
Pavel Gol'din, Professor of Zoology, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine

USEFUL RESOURCES

Blue Shield International, Countering Trafficking
https://perma.cc/UJ7U-2FBN

Blue Shield United Kingdom
https://perma.cc/5GPB-BWW2

Human Rights Watch (2022) 'Ukraine: Russians Pillage Kherson Cultural Institutions'
https://perma.cc/PCS5-PWVM

Serhiy Kot (2020) *The Return and Restitution of Cultural Property in the Political and Cultural Life of Ukraine (20th — Early 21st Century)*, **edited by** V.M. Danylenko, Institute of History of Ukraine. (Free to download but currently only available in Ukrainian)
https://perma.cc/M558-M38Z

Step 5:
Communicate with your audiences and diversify public programming

Museums play a vital role in raising awareness and changing perceptions of colonialism. In the UK where narratives relating to British colonialism and empire are more familiar, it is important to explain why and how decolonisation is also relevant to the cultural heritage of other countries, including Ukraine. For museums that serve communities with an affinity for Russian narratives, it may be necessary to explain why Ukrainian perspectives are important and why descriptions on labels and in databases are being changed to accurately reflect new learning.

Museums and their staff also play an important role as researchers, keepers and conveyors of memory. This is especially important in the case of tangible and intangible heritage from places that have been colonised, such as Ukraine, because associated memories may have been systematically erased. Making space for displaying and exploring Ukrainian cultural heritage in museums worldwide will help to restore and protect memories for future generations.

Good practice	Better practice
A frequent question is whether it is acceptable and sensitive to celebrate Ukraine during a time of war. The answer is yes – please include Ukraine in your public programmes and celebrate the joy of Ukrainian cultural heritage. Ukrainians do not want to be defined by Russia's war or colonial ambitions.	Loans are available from Ukraine to plug into your exhibitions programme. As well as promoting the rich cultural heritage of Ukraine, they allow museums around the world to act as temporary safe havens for collections at risk, using internationally recognised loan agreements.
Provide guidance for researching Ukrainian cultural heritage in your collections and databases. This might include key words and alternative search terms as well as an explanation of why certain words and spellings might have been used. Review the guidance regularly to reflect the most current thinking.	Ukrainian scholars are researching and gradually filling knowledge gaps. Where they still exist, one way to address such gaps is to collaborate with Ukrainian artists and curators to create a nuanced approach to interpretation.

This is not about cancel-culture.
This is a much-needed step towards acknowledging the rich cultural heritage of Ukraine and diversifying the voices represented in museums and galleries.

Tetyana Filevska,
Ukrainian Institute

CASE STUDY:

Khanenko Museum icons in Paris

In June 2023, a collection of rare Byzantine icons from the Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko National Museum of Arts (also known as the Khanenko Museum) in Kyiv were displayed at the Louvre in Paris. It presented unique and earliest-known examples of Eastern Christian religious iconography. Such exhibitions reveal the importance of international partnerships in both protecting Ukrainian culture under threat and promoting Ukraine as a nation with a rich and unique artistic heritage and the highest standards of scholarship.

Musée du Louvre (2023) The Origins of the Sacred Image. Icons from the Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko National Museum of Arts in Kyiv. https://perma.cc/9HM8-9B6T

Saints Sergius and Bacchus Icon

© Khanenko Museum

CASE STUDY:

Kyiv National Art Gallery in Basel

Representatives of the Kyiv National Art Gallery sought options for sheltering works from their collection in 2022. Rather than merely removing the works from harm's way, they wanted to share them with new audiences. They approached the Kunstmuseum Basel about an exhibition of prominent artworks featuring Ukrainian artists of different cultural backgrounds. Some had Ukrainian heritage but studied in Russia, later becoming cultural exponents of the Russian empire or Soviet Union. Others were born in Ukraine with Jewish, Polish, Armenian or Greek heritage.

Kunstmuseum Basel (2022) Born in Ukraine: the Kyiv National Art Gallery in Basel https://perma.cc/E778-6PBK

USEFUL RESOURCES_

Kharkiv School of Photography https://perma.cc/MFP7-SPBH

UNESCO, Ukraine, Elements on the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage https://perma.cc/AL5V-YHJ4

ukrainian institute

ICOM international council of museums UKRAINE

ICOM international council of museums UK

Museums Association

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LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

8

State Museum of Natural History of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Lviv
https://perma.cc/2KNH-GBX2

What we are doing with this Guide is a moment in history. In 20 years, people will criticise what we said because we only took it so far. The process never ends. With decolonisation, we can never resolve all those contested moments and we should not erase, forget or abandon previous ideas because we now think it's incorrect. We need to understand what came before. It's a constant process of reconciliation which can never finish.

Olena Chervonik,
University of Oxford

Decolonisation is a never-ending process that takes time. While museums outside of Ukraine should use this Guide to tackle misidentified objects and learn about Ukrainian cultural heritage, museums inside Ukraine are untangling centuries of colonial rule and developing new ways to change old mindsets. They are also thinking about how to recover objects and lost memories for future generations.

It is important to reflect on the extensive damage that has been done and to acknowledge that some losses can never be recovered.

One person in Frankfurt gave me stickers from an exhibition of Alla Horska's works on view in Kyiv. This was my second sticker pack for the same mosaics which aren't there anymore because Russia destroyed them... So, we are in this state where we are just sharing stickers with images of works that are either occupied or destroyed. Sometimes there is nothing left to decolonise, nothing left to undo.

Lia Dostlieva,
artist and cultural anthropologist

Digitising collections

Ukrainian museums have been digitising their collections. Not only is this an important step towards proving existence and ownership if collections are damaged, looted or destroyed, but it also creates a critical database for international research.

CASE STUDY:
Digitising collections at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra

A project to digitise collections at the National Preserve 'Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra' received funding from SAREC, the ICOM Strategic Allocation Review Committee. This was a collaborative effort between the National Preserve and ICOM UK, ICOM Ukraine and the University of the West of England. The National Preserve houses over 72,000 objects and is part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Maria Blyzinsky (2024) 'ICOM UK and Solidarity Projects for Ukraine: Digitising Collections under Threat', *ICOM UK*
https://perma.cc/5YL2-YVSM

Working with trauma

Ukraine is working hard to support growing numbers of military veterans and others impacted by war. Due to the proliferation of war injuries, museums in Ukraine are challenged to accommodate increasing numbers of visitors with disabilities. This could be an area for knowledge-sharing because museums worldwide play a vital role in rehabilitation and inclusivity. In the UK, for example, the Equality Act of 2010 protects people with physical or mental impairments from discrimination. The Act requires public spaces — including museums, galleries, libraries and archives as well as transport, shops and workplaces — to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate all visitors. Examples of adjustments include Braille texts and tactile exhibits for those with sight impairments; wheelchair ramps, lifts and seating for those with physical impairments; and quiet spaces for those with sensory needs.

CASE STUDY: Developing resilience tools in response to war

In 2023, staff from 25 small and mid-size museums in eastern and southern Ukraine participated in online training to develop resilience tools to support local communities responding to the trauma of war. The project resulted from a partnership between ICOM's Disaster Resilience Management Committee, ICOM Canada, ICOM Ukraine and the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience.

Taking examples from museums around the world — such as the War Childhood Museum in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Women's Active Peace Museum in Japan — the project gave opportunities to understand how others have responded to trauma while creating solidarity between Ukrainian museum professionals and international colleagues. The project also reinforced the need to engage with all museums in Ukraine, not just those in major cities, in efforts to promote recovery and resilience.

International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (2023) Building Resilient Museums and Communities in Ukraine
https://perma.cc/7Z3X-5HZ7

CASE STUDY: Trauma-informed practice at the Royal Armouries

Recognising the potential role in perpetrating violence played by many of the objects in its collections, the Royal Armouries in Leeds is developing a trauma-informed approach to engaging audiences, including those from Ukrainian communities. The work is part of a phased project to support those who may have experienced violent crime, war or conflict, including military service personnel and veterans, refugees, asylum seekers, emergency service workers and medical teams as well as civilians. Museum staff are being trained to encourage conversation, invite reflection and create safe spaces to deal with trauma. A mental health and trauma support specialist will be present for additional support and safety. Building upon the UK Government's six principles of trauma-informed practice of Safety, Trustworthiness, Choice, Collaboration, Empowerment and Cultural Consideration, the Museum will use its arms and armour collections to engage meaningfully and respectfully with audiences. Learning from the first phase will be shared with the wider heritage sector.

Reconstruction, restitution and justice

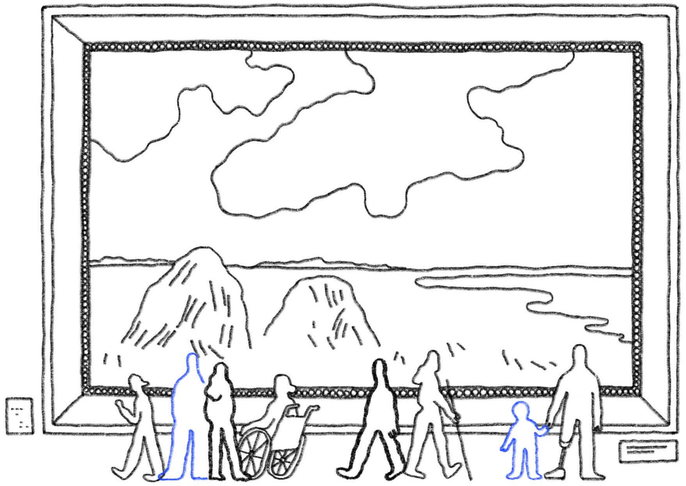
Considering Russia's current war, many people feel that justice and restitution should be an aim for museums in Ukraine. A first step towards achieving justice is to ensure existing collections are thoroughly documented, condition-checked and photographed. This will make it easier to prove what has been appropriated, looted, damaged or destroyed.

As museums in Ukraine build ever-stronger international networks, shared experience and expertise will assist with provenance research at home and abroad. Such collaborations will also help when building repatriation cases and negotiating with institutions holding looted artefacts. Many repatriation campaigns are difficult and protracted, although emerging case studies offer models of positive collaboration aimed at building trust and fostering knowledge exchange. In due course, museums could take steps towards developing restorative exhibitions that display reclaimed artefacts and convey narratives of healing and cultural resilience.

CASE STUDY:
110,000 artefacts from Ukraine found in Russian Museums

A study of online collections of the Hermitage and the State Historical Museum in Russia revealed that 110,000 artefacts were taken from Ukraine to Russia before the current war. Ranging from everyday tools and ceramics to priceless treasures, the artefacts have been used to demonstrate a fictitious connection between modern Russia and historical Ukraine. The study was nominated for a European Press prize in 2024.

Inna Gadzynska, **Nadia Romanenko**, **Nadia Kelm** and **Yevheniia Drozdova** (2023) 'The Stolen Treasures: the 110,000 artefacts from Ukraine found in two Russian museums', *Texty.org.ua* https://perma.cc/7YQL-8VVN



Ukrainian expertise in the UK

Ukrainian Institute London
https://perma.cc/GX6U-4J4N

University of Cambridge, Cambridge Ukrainian Studies
https://perma.cc/E355-E3X7

University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies
https://perma.cc/FSV6-RXS8

University of St Andrews, Centre for Global (Post) socialisms, Southeast, Central and East European Studies
https://perma.cc/236F-8HAK

Ukrainian expertise in North America

Harvard University Ukrainian Research Institute
https://perma.cc/U3B7-QJ99

University of Alberta, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies
https://perma.cc/9AG5-RGJV

Ukrainian expertise in Ukraine

ICOM Ukraine has an excellent network of cultural heritage specialists. Your national branch of ICOM should be able to contact ICOM Ukraine on your behalf.

The Ukrainian Institute promotes better knowledge and understanding of Ukraine internationally, and develops cultural relations between Ukraine and other countries.
https://perma.cc/D26K-NX9U

USEFUL RESOURCES

GOV.UK, Equality Act 2010: guidance
https://perma.cc/MG4R-UJMV

Yasemin Koçak Bilgin and **Eda Hazarhun** (2023) 'The Cultural Heritage Impact of The Russia-Ukrainian War', *Tourism Academic Journal*, 10 (2) 307-321
https://perma.cc/NL2A-MRV7

International Council on Archives and **ALIPH** (2023) Practical Guide to Emergency Digitization of Paper-Based Archival Heritage
https://perma.cc/9VV9-CE22

Museum of Contemporary Art / MOCA NGO (2025) Navigating the War as Artists in Ukraine: A Practical Resource
https://perma.cc/NF2J-5V7U

Mykola Starinskyi, **Zhanna Zavalna**, **Yurii Chalyi**, **Kateryina Skrynnikova** and **Artem Tsyban** (2023) 'Modernization of the Regime for the Return of Cultural and Historical Objects: administrative and legal aspects', *University of Western Australia Law Review*, 51 (2) 133-145
https://perma.cc/WK9P-9P2S

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GLOSSARY

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Military uniforms and insignia, 1990s and 2000s, from the Ukrainian National Museum of Military History, Kyiv.
https://perma.cc/LDM8-Z364

While this Guide is not intended to provide an overview of decolonisation in general, an understanding of certain terms is helpful. Although some of these words can be understood in different ways according to context, the following broad definitions might be useful.

Colonialism

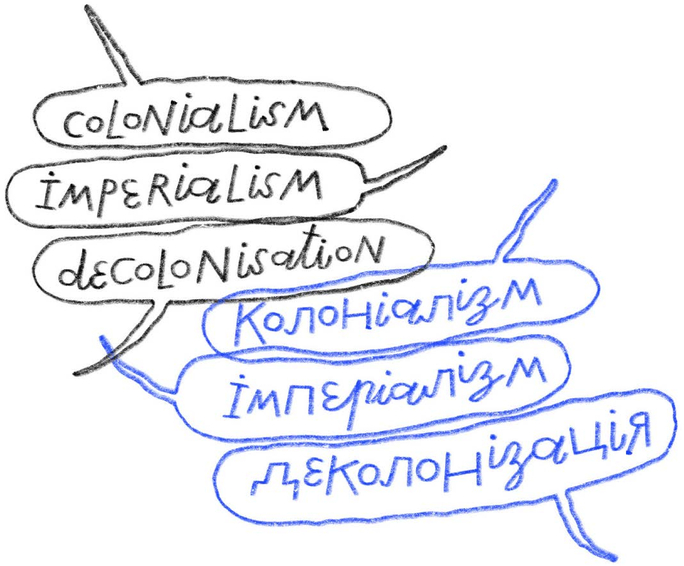
The practice of dominating another country or people by creating settlements (colonies) to impose direct rule. The United Nations has denounced colonialism as an abuse of human rights.

Imperialism

The driving force behind colonialism, a policy of controlling another country or people by force or coercion, in order to build an empire.

Decolonisation

The act of interrogating and dismantling dominant narratives to identify potential colonial privilege, oppression or discrimination. Minimising or removing the influences or effects of colonialism. Colonialism affects various communities in different ways, so decolonisation requires a unique approach in each case.



Holodomor (death by hunger)

This man-made famine of 1932-33 was the result of Soviet policies to subjugate Ukraine. Artificially high grain quotas were imposed on Ukrainian farmers and villagers, leaving them with nothing to feed themselves and leading to the deaths of about four million people.

Neo-colonialism

This term refers to colonialism by means other than direct rule, often through economic dependency. Neo-colonialism exploits unequal power relationships that continue to exist between colonial powers and their former colonies. In a broader sense, it may refer to interference by one powerful country in the affairs of another.

Rus' or Kyivan Rus'

In this Guide, we have used the term Rus' to describe the medieval empire centred on Kyiv. Some historians prefer the term Kyivan Rus' to make it clear that the area under discussion falls within the borders of contemporary Ukraine and does not refer to Rus' in its entirety.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Ukrainian Decolonial Glossary
https://perma.cc/BP2Y-CBJE

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THANKS

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Wooden church from the village of Kryvka, 1763, at the Museum of Folk Architecture and Folkways in Lviv named after Klymentii Sheptytskyi (also known as Lviv Skansen). https://perma.cc/Z7ST-NL4X

A publication of this scope could be achieved only with the valuable support and expertise of multiple individuals and organisations as well as numerous participants, advisors and specialists globally, many of whom gave their time and expertise freely. This Guide is an attempt to capture and distil their knowledge into a practical framework. Almost three years in the making, it is truly a work of co-creation and international collaboration.

We would like to express humble thanks and admiration to colleagues in Ukraine who have contributed while working under unimaginable wartime circumstances. The Project Partners would particularly like to thank the following colleagues for their unflagging support throughout the project: Tetyana Filevska and Anastasiia Manuliak of the Ukrainian Institute; Christian Baars and Maria Blyzinsky of ICOM UK; Anastasiia Cherednychenko of ICOM Ukraine; Sharon Heal of the Museums Association; Claire de Braekeleer, Anna Bubnova, Jonathan Morley, Daria Stokoz, Ilya Zabolotnyi and Lucy Zoria of the British Council.

Co-creation project team:

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Additional thanks for support are due to **Dana Andrew**, **Anna Bezpala**, **Katie Hardgrave** (ICOM UK), **Ihor Hrynda**, **Aaron Jones** (ICOM UK), **Olesya Khromeychuk** (Ukrainian Institute London), **Kenzie Larsen** (Royal Academy of Arts, London), **Oksana Semenik**, and **Kate Topham** (Royal Academy of Arts, London) as well as Atlas Translations, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna and ERSTE Foundation.

The main typeface used in this Guide is called **e-Ukraine Head**. It was developed in 2019 by **Dmytro Rastvortsev** at the Fedoriv design agency and is used by Ukrainian government and official agencies as part of the state's visual style online (Roboto typeface has been used for italics).

Good and better practice framework inspired by **Alicia Chilcott** (2019) 'Towards protocols for describing racially offensive language in UK public archives', *Archival Science,* 19 359-376. https://perma.cc/5E2P-L66T

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