

S. Havrylovych**THE EVACUATION EXHIBITION “IN THE EYE OF THE STORM” AS A
DISTINCT CULTURAL PRACTICE OF UKRAINIAN ART**

This article explores a distinct cultural practice of representing Ukrainian art internationally. This practice specifically combines the functions of a traveling exposition and the evacuation of valuable artworks from Ukraine due to the russian-Ukrainian war. The study aims to analyze the specific features of the international cultural practice of Ukrainian visual art, using the evacuation exhibition titled In the Eye of the Storm as a case study. Applying a qualitative case study method with source triangulation (incorporating official websites and press releases from hosting institutions in Madrid, Cologne, Brussels, Vienna, London, Bratislava, and Kyiv; UNESCO monitoring data; and reports from authoritative international and national media), the research conceptualizes a new form of art project: the evacuation exhibition.

The study institutionalizes this term as a distinct cultural practice. It defines the security (protection, defense, preservation), epistemic (contextual attribution), and diplomatic (rhetoric of solidarity, partnership, integration) conditions that drive the functioning of this international traveling exposition of Ukraine’s cultural heritage. Drawing on an interdisciplinary approach that draws on concepts from heritage diplomacy, museum diplomacy, decolonial museum studies, and mobility studies, the paper offers recommendations for ensuring transparency, public ethics, and decolonized cataloging.

The findings prove the importance of artifact metadata as a specific dimension of information that actively counters past colonial narratives. The analysis demonstrates that amid the russian-Ukrainian war, exhibition mobility functions as a complex cultural technology. It simultaneously preserves museum collections, fosters international diplomatic relations, and enhances knowledge about cultural and artistic heritage, particularly the distinct layer of Ukrainian modernism.

Ultimately, the evacuation exhibition concept institutionalizes the multifunctionality of this format. It enables researchers to transition from describing a single empirical case to forming a generalized analytical model for this type of exhibition practice.

Keywords: *evacuation, exhibition, cultural practice, cultural dialogue, attribution, decolonization, Ukrainian avant-garde, Ukrainian art, Ukrainian culture.*

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Relevance of the Research Topic. The advancement of digital technologies and their proliferation across various spheres of human life, combined with Ukraine’s defense against the full-scale russian invasion, fundamentally transformed the functioning of the state’s cultural processes, particularly its artistic events and museum operations. Risks of physical destruction and the dispersion of Ukrainian contemporary art and historical collections coexist with an urgent demand to reconceptualize recently dominant Soviet-imperial narratives within international exhibition and museum communication. UNESCO monitoring data as of March 11, 2026, confirms 523 damaged cultural sites in Ukraine, including museums and libraries.

This reality elevates the preservation of movable and immovable heritage beyond a mere practical management task, transforming it into an issue of cultural security and active international representation through cultural dialogue (UNESCO, 2026).

In this threatening environment, exhibition tours simultaneously rescue artworks from high-risk zones and revise epistemic (deriving from M. Foucault's *episteme* – the fundamental knowledge of a cultural period) attribution requirements that still harbor Soviet political narratives. Consequently, these tours emerge as exemplary cases of cultural studies in the contemporary wartime era (Foucault, 1994). Therefore, both the Russian military intervention and the demands of global cultural digitalization driven by leading museum institutions necessitate the study of these tours under complex conditions.

Traditional approaches to museum artifact evacuation typically describe the process as an internal management procedure (logistics, insurance, condition monitoring, temporary storage). However, the international project *In the Eye of the Storm* demonstrates a hybrid exhibition format, which we designate as an *evacuation exhibition*. The project executed the relocation of artworks as a public tour, transforming security protocols into visible elements that generated a diplomatic and representational effect (solidarity, partnership, canonization) for visitors, thereby reinforcing the goal of cultural dialogue.

Ukrainian institutions, notably the Art for Victory UA charitable foundation and the M17 Contemporary Art Center (Kyiv), initiated and organized the project *In the Eye of the Storm: Modernism in Ukraine, 1900–1930s* in partnership with leading Ukrainian state museum institutions (National Art Museum of Ukraine, Mystetskyi Arsenal, Oleksandr Dovzhenko National Centre). The Ukrainian Institute ensured the project's international presentation. The organizers realized the exposition as a traveling exhibition in collaboration with other European museum institutions, including the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza (Madrid), Museum Ludwig (Cologne), Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (Brussels), and Royal Academy of Arts (London). Additionally, the Slovak National Gallery (Bratislava) hosted a section of the project titled *In the Eye of the Storm. Secession in Ukraine*, which showcases early modernism and the formation of a national style in 20th-century Ukrainian art (Ukrainian Institute, 2022; M17 Contemporary Art Center, 2022; Slovak National Gallery, 2024).

The challenge in studying this international event stemmed from the lack of a cultural model for its interpretation—a model capable of explaining how the evacuation exhibition integrates security infrastructure, museum/heritage diplomacy, and the decolonization of museum knowledge (attribution, descriptive language, the narrative of modernism). Solving this problem yields practical value: it establishes recommendations for crisis tours, specifically targeting the transparency of public metadata, public ethics, and standards for modern cataloging under wartime conditions.

Analysis of Research and Publications. Contemporary research on cultural heritage threatened by armed conflict has evolved in several directions. For instance, J. Brosché, M. Legnér, J. Kreutz, and A. Ijla examined the military-strategic, symbolic, and economic motives behind an aggressor's attacks on cultural assets (Brosché *et al.*, 2016). Field studies documenting the scale of destruction at cultural sites underscore the urgent need to implement effective protection mechanisms, transform museum practices, and alter strategies for representing Ukrainian art (Shydlovskyi, Telizhenko and Ivakin, 2023; Moussienko, 2023; Denysova, 2022). Scholars have demonstrated that heritage science professionals should use Sentinel-1 SAR radar data to document destruction and assess damage as a mandatory stage of the discipline (Bachmann-Gigl and Dabiri, 2024).

Despite the significant results of theoretical developments and their practical applications in museum collection digitalization and monument safeguarding, questions remain regarding how to integrate these achievements into the evacuation exhibition model

and define criteria for its evaluation. Specifically, researchers must determine how to measure diplomatic impact, accurately record decolonial shifts in attributions, and identify the minimum public metadata required to ensure transparency in crisis tours. Using the project *In the Eye of the Storm* as a case study, this article identifies these problems and proposes ways to resolve them.

The research aims to analyze the specific features of the international cultural practice of Ukrainian visual art, using the evacuation exhibition titled *In the Eye of the Storm* as a primary example. To achieve this goal, the study sets several main objectives. First, it reviews recent research and publications concerning the scientific problem. Second, applying a qualitative case study method and source triangulation (incorporating museum materials, the exhibition catalog, and media reports), the authors analyze the content of the traveling exhibition *In the Eye of the Storm* to clarify the specific nature of cultural diplomacy—specifically museum and heritage diplomacy. Finally, the study demonstrates decolonial processes within museums and the art project’s overall mobility.

The scientific novelty lies in conceptualizing a new form of art project that emerged during the full-scale war: the evacuation exhibition. Furthermore, the study institutionalizes this term as a distinct cultural practice. The research defines the security (protection, defense, preservation), epistemic (contextual attribution), and diplomatic (rhetoric of solidarity, partnership, integration) conditions that drive the functioning of this international traveling exposition of Ukraine’s cultural heritage as a specific form of cultural dialogue.

Main Contents Presentation. The cultural analysis relies on a content analysis of institutional descriptions (objectives, rhetoric of solidarity, the protection discourse) and a discourse analysis of attribution decisions (terminology, national markers). The evacuation exhibition concept demonstrates the study’s theoretical framework, which intersects three analytical fields related to cultural dialogue: heritage diplomacy, museum diplomacy, and decolonial museum studies.

T. Winter introduced the concept of heritage diplomacy, which scholars now actively apply. This widespread application enables researchers to interpret exhibition tours as an infrastructure for international interaction within various cultural contexts (Winter, 2015; Lähdesmäki and Čeginskis, 2022).

The specific nature of museum diplomacy strengthens this function. Museum institutions utilize this diplomacy as a platform, turning museum collections into unique “tokens” of international relations. During wartime, this dynamic amplifies the moral dimension of institutional guardianship (Wang, 2018). In the evacuation exhibition case, the diplomatic effect remains inseparable from the security function of relocating cultural valuables, which requires researchers to expand existing theoretical models of heritage diplomacy (Winter, 2015).

Contemporary requirements of decolonization processes in museum studies and the critique of imperial narratives compel the museum—as an institution responsible for describing monuments—to verify labeling, professional vocabulary standards, transliteration, and artifact attribution (Demchuk and Levchenko, 2024). Museums are updating the paradigm of guardianship, transitioning to participatory models and increasing the ethical responsibility of institutions, particularly regarding the politicized meanings of artifacts or trauma within memory culture (Wali and Collins, 2023; Macdonald, 2010; Filevska and Blyzinsky, 2023; Betlii, 2022).

Mobility studies and exhibition journeys help researchers interpret exhibition traveling as a process of creating new meanings and significances, rather than merely the physical transportation of objects. In this context, these analytical approaches prompt scholars to view the exhibition as a dynamic form of cultural circulation and performance representation (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). We observe a similar trend in contemporary cultural mobility

studies: relocating objects alters not only their status but also the interpretive frameworks within which they function (Bennett, 1995; Wali and Collins, 2023; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998; Winter, 2015). Representing Ukraine's cultural and artistic heritage in other European countries serves another vital function: it actively combats the false propaganda of russian narratives in the information war (Honchar, 2023).

Organizers initiated the studied project, *In the Eye of the Storm*, as a traveling international exhibition of Ukrainian modernist artworks. Amid the full-scale war, this event acquired the significance of an institutional practice for preserving cultural heritage. It acted as a symbolic gesture of cultural solidarity from other European states.

The Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid hosted the inaugural presentation (November 29, 2022 – May 2, 2023) (Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, 2022). According to the museum's official data, the exhibition featured approximately 70 works in various media. Experts consider this one of the most comprehensive surveys of Ukrainian modernist art, as it successfully combines art representation with safeguarding practices during wartime. Reuters reports similar quantitative statistics for the artworks (Reuters, 2022). The Guardian lists 65 works (Cumming, 2024). Several media outlets provide refined quantitative figures. Notably, Artnet cites 69 works, specifying that organizers evacuated 51 of them from Kyiv (National Art Museum of Ukraine, Museum of Theatre, Music and Cinema of Ukraine) to Spain on November 15, 2022. They conducted this operation clandestinely as a "secret convoy" amidst intense shelling of the Ukrainian capital (Chow, 2022). According to The Art Newspaper, 51 works (approximately 75% of the exhibition) belong to two museum institutions in Kyiv, illustrating the scale and risks of the operation to relocate these cultural valuables (Kishkovsky and Jhala, 2022). Within the framework of heritage diplomacy, this creates a public infrastructure of guardianship: the technical evacuation operation becomes part of the cultural representation. At the same time, the museum narrative of protection serves as a display of international solidarity.

Researchers must interpret discrepancies in the number of artworks exhibited across sources, arising from differing counting and communication practices. Sometimes, museum institutions use rounded figures, whereas media outlets might record more precise numbers depending on their inclusion criteria (for instance, counting sketches or scenography projects as separate units). However, the opposite also occurs: to save broadcast time or publication space, media outlets present concise information for a broader audience without delving into statistical data. Consequently, this highlights the pressing need to standardize public metadata during crisis exhibition tours.

Following the Madrid showing, organizers relocated the evacuation exhibition to the Museum Ludwig in Cologne (June 3, 2023 – September 24, 2023) to present the collection within the "HERE AND NOW" format. The museum institution's official description mentions "some eighty paintings and works on paper." The museum emphasized that the war altered the approach to the concept of the "Russian avant-garde." A significant portion of the creators featured in this exhibition (Alexander Archipenko, Oleksandr Bohomazov, Mykhailo Boichuk, Volodymyr Burliuk, Alexandra Exter, Oleksandr Khvostenko-Khvostov, Borys Kosarev, Kazymyr Malevych, Vadym Meller, Viktor Palmov, Anatol Petrytskyi, Manuil Shekhtman, Maria Syniakova, Sarah Shor, Vasyl Yermilov) are modernist artists who developed their skills within Ukrainian artistic centers (Museum Ludwig, 2023).

The conceptual approach to displaying Ukrainian works in Cologne parallels the previous stage of the tour in Madrid. The curators combined the historical avant-garde collection with contemporary canvases reflecting the artists' personal responses to the russian-Ukrainian war (such as Daria Koltsova's work, "Zusammengesetzt (Tessellated)"). This arrangement vividly highlights the parallels between the avant-garde artists' traumatic

experiences of the 1930s Bolshevik repressions and the primary psychological traumas contemporary artists endure due to the current war with the russians.

Between October 19, 2023, and January 28, 2024, the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium in Brussels hosted the third stage of the evacuation exhibition. The exhibition's concept shifted the focus of its institutional rhetoric, adopting what we define as the protection-through-loan argument. The museum's official information lists the number of works as "more than sixty." The institution explicitly states that Ukrainian institutions provided the majority of the exhibits "to safeguard them," thereby emphasizing the crucial role of partner networks and the Museums for Ukraine initiative (Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, 2023).

Curators defined the traveling exhibition of the Ukrainian avant-garde during its Austrian stage (Belvedere, February 23, 2024 – June 2, 2024) as a polyphony of styles and identities. The presentation emphasized the cultural centers that birthed these works; however, the organizers deliberately omitted the exact number of exhibits (Belvedere Museum Wien, 2023). The withholding of the collection's quantitative parameters is of significant importance to our research. During crisis exhibition tours, institutions actively avoid disclosing detailed information, carefully balancing press release transparency against security considerations. This practice allows us to propose a division between public and operational metadata. Institutions must standardize public metadata at a minimum level (dates, institutions, number of works), while keeping operational metadata strictly confined to a limited circle of exhibition organizers (transportation routes, insurance details, etc.).

The London showing at the Royal Academy of Arts (June 29, 2024 – October 13, 2024) played a pivotal role in representing Ukrainian modernism. The Royal Academy of Arts press release announced 65 works and structured the exhibition into six thematic sections, without explaining the specific criteria driving this division (Royal Academy of Arts, 2024). A review in *The Guardian* also reported an exposition of 65 artworks (Cumming, 2024).

The subsequent stage of the exhibition tour manifested as a distinct project module: *In the Eye of the Storm. Secession in Ukraine* at the Slovak National Gallery (Bratislava, June 22, 2024 – September 22, 2024) (Slovak National Gallery, 2024). According to NAMU, the exposition included 38 works from its collection, whereas the Slovak National Gallery provided the figure "around 50 works." Different counting principles likely account for this discrepancy (National Art Museum of Ukraine, 2025). We assume the curators opted not to present the full exhibition, instead selecting specific works due to limited exposition space, strict security protocols, or other logistical constraints.

The project returned to Kyiv along two thematic trajectories. NAMU hosted the first trajectory, titled *In the Eye of the Storm. Secession in Ukraine* (opened on November 29, 2024), featuring 29 works from the museum's own collection alongside pieces from other Ukrainian institutions. The organizers positioned the event as a showcase of works that recently returned to Ukraine (National Art Museum of Ukraine, 2024). The media outlet Ukrinform estimated the international tour's audience reach at over 3,400,000 visitors, interpreting the exhibition's return as a direct achievement of cultural diplomacy (Ukrinform, 2024).

The second trajectory, the exhibition *In the Eye of the Storm: Modernism in Ukraine, 1900s–1930s* at NAMU (February 21, 2025 – April 6, 2025), presented more than 57 works by 27 artists, placing a strong emphasis on the decolonial reconceptualization of Ukrainian modernism (National Art Museum of Ukraine, 2025).

The updated attribution of artistic artifacts and the publication of the evacuation exhibition catalog play crucial roles in dismantling colonial narratives, primarily within Ukrainian museology. Thames & Hudson metadata defines the exhibition catalog as an

academically rich knowledge structure (248 pages, 221 illustrations). A dedicated team of specialists, notably editors Konstantin Akinsha, Katia Denysova, and Olena Kashuba-Volvach, achieved this comprehensive result (Thames & Hudson, 2023). The publication showcases collections from museum institutions in Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Odesa. The catalog is “fully illustrated,” functioning as a vital component of the evacuation exhibition. Scholars treat it not merely as a supplement, but as a primary representative of the latest knowledge framing Ukrainian modernism as an integral part of contemporary European creative processes.

Conclusions. Thus, the case study identifies the interconnected conditions for the functioning of the evacuation exhibition: security, diplomatic, and decolonial conditions, as well as metadata as a dimension for information improvement.

The security conditions for the exhibition tour ensure the protection, defense, and preservation of the artifact collection’s unhindered journey. This condition essentially functions as a legitimate temporary external deposit of cultural valuables. At the same time, the public discussion of the evacuation institutionalizes guardianship as a component of the museum’s mission during a military-political crisis.

The diplomatic condition manifests in institutional texts that systematically present the rhetoric of solidarity, partnership, and Ukraine’s integration into the Western European modernist narrative, aligning with the theoretical models of heritage diplomacy and museum diplomacy.

The exhibition tour accelerated efforts to clarify terms and attribution, particularly regarding the restoration of facts about the artists’ Ukrainian origins and their creative development within Ukrainian cultural institutions. Such actions demonstrate the initiative’s decolonial dimension.

Based on the analysis of the project *In the Eye of the Storm*, we conclude that during the Russian-Ukrainian war, exhibition mobility functions as a comprehensive cultural technology. It simultaneously preserves museum collections, fosters international diplomatic ties, and enhances knowledge of cultural and artistic heritage, particularly the distinct layer of Ukrainian modernism.

The proposed evacuation exhibition concept institutionalizes its multifunctionality and enables the transition from describing a single empirical case to forming a generalized analytical model for this type of exhibition practice. Scholars can use this model for comparative studies of cultural practices in armed conflicts and for developing institutional strategies and cultural policies amidst the risks of military actions. Future research should conduct a comparative analysis of evacuation exhibitions that emerged during various armed conflicts, compare their diplomatic effects, and evaluate the duration of these projects.

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ВИСТАВКА-ЕВАКУАЦІЯ «В ЕПІЦЕНТРІ БУРІ» ЯК ОСОБЛИВА КУЛЬТУРНА ПРАКТИКА УКРАЇНСЬКОГО МИСТЕЦТВА

Стаття присвячена особливій культурній практиці репрезентації українського мистецтва на міжнародному рівні, специфіка якої полягає в поєднанні функцій пересувної експозиції та евакуації цінних творів з України через російсько-українську війну. Метою статті є аналіз специфіки міжнародної культурної практики українського образотворчого мистецтва на прикладі виставки-евакуації «In the Eye of the Storm». Згідно з поставленими завданнями оглянуто останні дослідження та публікації стосовно культурної спадщини, якій загрожує знищення або пошкодження через збройні конфлікти, символічні, економічні мотиви агресора. Постали питання інтеграції національних надбань у модель «виставки-евакуації» та визначення критеріїв її оцінювання: як вимірювати дипломатичний ефект, як оптимально правильно фіксувати деколоніальні зміни в атрибуціях і які мінімальні публічні метадані потрібні для прозорості кризових турів. Проаналізовано контент цієї пересувної виставки задля з'ясування специфіки напрямів культурної дипломатії – музейної та спадщини; деколоніальних процесів у музеях; мобільності артпроєкту. Завдяки застосуванню якісного методу case study із тріангуляцією джерел (офіційні сторінки і пресрелізи інституцій, де репрезентовано виставку: Мадрид, Кельн, Брюссель, Відень, Лондон, Братислава, Київ); дані моніторингу UNESCO; матеріали авторитетних міжнародних і національних медіа) концептуалізовано нову форму мистецького проєкту – «виставку-евакуацію». Цей термін інституціалізовано як особливу культурну практику, де визначено безпекову (захист, охорона, збереження), епістемічну (контекстуальна атрибуція) й дипломатичну (риторика солідарності, партнерство, інтеграція) умови функціонування міжнародної пересувної експозиції культурної спадщини України. На основі міждисциплінарного підходу з використанням

знань з *heritage diplomacy*, *museum diplomacy*, *decolonial museum studies* та *mobility studies* запропоновано рекомендації щодо прозорості, публічної етики та деколонізованої каталогізації. Доведено важливість метаданих артефактів як специфічного виміру інформації, яка протиставлена колоніальним наративам минулого. Проаналізовано, що в умовах російсько-української війни виставкова мобільність функціонує як комплексна культурна технологія, яка одночасно забезпечує збереження музейних колекцій, сприяє формуванню міжнародних дипломатичних зв'язків і вдосконалює знання про культурно-мистецьку спадщину, зокрема про виразний пласт українського модернізму. Встановлено, що поняття «виставка-евакуація» інституціалізує її багатофункційність та уможливлює перейти від опису окремого емпіричного кейсу до формування узагальненої аналітичної моделі такого типу виставкових практик.

Ключові слова: виставка, евакуація, культурна практика, культурний діалог, атрибуція, деколонізація, український авангард, українське мистецтво, українська культура.