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INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION PRACTICES OF CONTEMPORARY UKRAINIAN ART: NEW FUNCTIONAL DIMENSIONS IN THE CASE OF THE EXHIBITION “UKRAINE. UNDER A DIFFERENT SKY”

The cultural analysis of the exhibition of contemporary Ukrainian art Ukraine. Under a Different Sky (Warsaw, 2022–2023) reveals a complex phenomenon of the archive of memory and the theme of decoloniality. The study aims to identify the phenomenon of exhibition practices in contemporary Ukrainian art that embody the functions of a memory archive, decolonial expression, and cultural interaction, as exemplified by the exhibition Ukraine. Under a Different Sky. The research demonstrates that the exhibition operates as a documentary project of visual art and as a form of international engagement with performative elements. It seeks to comprehend the collective memory of tragic events and to represent Ukraine's independent cultural subjectivity within the global context of creative processes.

The methodological foundation integrates established principles of systematism, historicism, universal interconnection, and objectivity; cultural, art historical, and historical approaches; general scientific methods such as analytical, phenomenological, and explanatory; and methods of observation, comparison, and modeling. These approaches define the specifics of postcolonial and decolonial studies as well as the concept of soft power in cultural relations. The study employs a qualitative case study and discourse analysis of curatorial texts, artistic statements, and critical reviews. A comparative analysis considers other exhibition projects in London, Berlin, and Kaunas, which collectively illustrate a network-based strategy of Ukraine's international representation through art exhibition practices.

The research novelty lies in interpreting the exhibition as a mechanism of decolonial affirmation through cultural interaction, which helps the international community comprehend the ongoing Russian–Ukrainian war and express solidarity with the Ukrainian nation. For the first time, the study demonstrates that the dynamics of displaying antiwar artworks—beyond their educational, ideological, aesthetic, and social-regulative roles—also activate communicative, psychotherapeutic, suggestive, informational, modeling, and prognostic functions, while evoking catharsis and fascination. This dynamic reveals the interplay between the traumatic experience of war and active cultural and creative self-expression.

The study concludes that the analyzed international exhibition Ukraine. Under a Different Sky, by Ukrainian artists, emerged not only as an artistic event but also as a representative form of cultural self-expression of the nation—a call from Ukraine to the global community to stop the Russian terrorist state. Through artistic means, each work in the exhibition contributes to forming a shared narrative about the Ukrainian people's national liberation war against the occupier while simultaneously serving as a testimony to this struggle.

Key words: exhibition practices, visual art, cultural interaction, cultural dialogue, decolonial representation, memory and trauma, war.

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МІЖНАРОДНІ ВИСТАВКОВІ ПРАКТИКИ СУЧАСНОГО УКРАЇНСЬКОГО МИСТЕЦТВА: НОВІ ФУНКЦІОНАЛЬНІ ВИМІРИ НА ПРИКЛАДІ ЕКСПОЗИЦІЇ «УКРАЇНА. ПІД ІНШИМ НЕБОМ»

Культурологічний аналіз виставки сучасного українського мистецтва «Україна. Під іншим небом» (Варишва, 2022–2023) допоміг виявити комплексний феномен архіву пам'яті й тему деколоніалізму. **Мета дослідження** – виявлення феномену виставкових практик сучасного українського мистецтва, де проявилися функції архіву пам'яті, деколоніального висловлення та культурних взаємин, на прикладі виставки «Україна. Під іншим небом». Доведено, що експозиція функціонує як документальний проєкт візуального мистецтва та форма міжнародних взаємин з елементами перформансу, спрямована на осмислення колективної пам'яті про трагічні події та репрезентації самостійної культурної суб'єктності України у глобальному контексті творчих процесів.

Методологічна основа дослідження поєднує усталені принципи системності, історизму, всезагального зв'язку, об'єктивності; культурологічний, мистецтвознавчий, історичний підходи; загальнонаукові методи (аналітичний, феноменологічний, пояснення) та методи спостереження, порівняння, моделювання, які визначають особливості постколоніальних і деколоніальних студій, а також концепцію «м'якої сили» культурних взаємин. Використано метод якісного кейс-стаді та дискурс-аналіз кураторських текстів, художніх висловлювань і критичних відгуків. У компаративному аналізі розглянуто інші виставкові проєкти у Лондоні, Берліні та Каунасі, що загалом ілюструють мережеву стратегію міжнародної репрезентації України завдяки виставковим практикам мистецтва.

Наукова новизна полягає у трактуванні виставки як механізму деколоніального утвердження завдяки культурним взаєминам, що сприяє міжнародній спільноті осмислити теперішню російсько-українську війну й виявити солідарність із українською нацією. Уперше показано, що динаміка експозиції художніх робіт на антивоєнну тематику, окрім просвітницько-ідеологічної, естетично-виховної, соціально-регулятивної, компенсаторної функцій, активізує комунікативну, психотерапевтичну, сугестивну, інформаційну, моделюючу, прогностичну функції, катарсис, фасцинацію, і проявляє взаємодію травматичного досвіду війни та активного культурно-творчого самовираження.

Висновок дослідження полягає у тому, що проаналізована закордонна виставка «Україна. Під іншим небом» вітчизняних митців постала не лише мистецькою подією, а й репрезентативною формою культурного самовираження нашого етносу, зверненням-закликом України до світової спільноти зупинити російську державу-терориста. Засобами художнього вираження кожен твір колекції виставки долучився до формування спільного наративу про національно-визвольну війну українців проти окупанта й водночас став свідченням цієї боротьби.

Ключові слова: виставкові практики, візуальне мистецтво, культурна взаємодія, культурний діалог, деколоніальна репрезентація, пам'ять і травма, війна.

Relevance of the Study. By the end of the first quarter of the twenty-first century, humanity had been witnessing profound transformations across nearly all spheres of life. These shifts are evident in political, economic, and cultural domains, but they become most striking against the backdrop of contemporary wars. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, confirmed the ongoing and relentless struggle of the Ukrainian nation against Russian aggression—not only as a military conflict but also as a confrontation unfolding across informational, ideological, symbolic, cultural, and, ultimately, existential dimensions.

Amid the current Russian–Ukrainian war, which has become a battle for Ukraine's survival, contemporary Ukrainian art has emerged as a robust visual response to the war terrorism of Putin's regime. It has evolved into a crucial instrument for documenting the occupier's crimes, reflecting the heroic resistance of the Ukrainian army, and establishing itself as a significant medium of international communication

(Gavryliuk et al., 2025). Artistic projects that respond to the war stand out not only for their aesthetic qualities but also for their documentary, commemorative, and intercultural functions (Biedarieva, 2021; Lee, 2022). They create a visual archive of the present that captures tragic events and, as Foster observes, serves as a mechanism for rethinking and interpreting them within the global cultural context (Foster, 2004).

A special place in this process belongs to international exhibitions of Ukrainian artists, which have become vital platforms for cross-cultural dialogue. Among recent exhibition practices, one event stands out for its profound philosophical dimension: *Ukraine. Under a Different Sky*, presented in Warsaw from November 4, 2022, to May 14, 2023, at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, the former residence of Polish King Augustus II (Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, n.d.).

The academic significance of studying the exhibition *Ukraine. Under a Different Sky* is driven

by several key factors. First and foremost, it lies in the importance of the chosen location, which carries profound symbolic meaning. Poland, having accepted the most significant number of Ukrainian refugees and become a prominent political and military ally of Ukraine, has demonstrated an unprecedented level of public and governmental solidarity (Demchuk & Krayevska, 2023). Hosting a large-scale exhibition of contemporary Ukrainian art on the theme of the current Russian–Ukrainian war at one of Warsaw’s leading state cultural institutions signifies more than an artistic collaboration—it stands as a clear act of bilateral cultural diplomacy (Bharti et al., 2024).

The complex history of Polish–Ukrainian relations continues to resonate in the development and growth processes of these two neighboring nations (Zhurzhenko, 2024). However, the tragic events following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 have led to positive transformations in bilateral relations as a response to shared threats (Pietrzak, 2024; Rad, 2024). The exhibition *Ukraine. Under a Different Sky* at the Ujazdowski Castle has established itself as a culturally oriented event within the new geopolitical reality, where creative and intellectual products serve as tools for strengthening strategic partnerships among democratic societies.

The scale and representativeness of the exhibition are remarkable: more than 200 works by 32 artists. This scope enables us to assert that the exhibition comprises one of the most comprehensive collections of contemporary Ukrainian wartime art (Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, n.d.). Based on these considerations, a need emerged for a comprehensive cultural analysis of the themes, imagery, and artistic techniques employed by Ukrainian artists to comprehend the traumatic experience of war and to represent it through their works.

Despite the broad media coverage of *Ukraine. Under a Different Sky* has not yet received an in-depth scholarly examination (PolskieRadio, 2022; Destination City Guides By In Your Pocket, n.d.; Bernat, 2022; Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, 2022). Existing publications remain informational or popular in nature, while a comprehensive cultural study that could reveal their artistic, political, and socio-psychological dimensions is still lacking. This article presents selected results of such an analysis,

focusing not on the concept of static artwork placement but on the complex form of creative and exhibition communication within international exhibition practices and processes of cultural interaction.

Analysis of Recent Research and Publications. A comprehensive analysis of the exhibition *Ukraine. Under a Different Sky* required an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that enabled the integration of memory studies, the theory of cultural diplomacy, poststructuralist concepts of the archive, and decolonial studies.

To understand the role of art in processing collective trauma, it was essential to refer to works examining the cultural mechanisms of commemorating historical memory (Assmann, 2008). In times of war, art serves as a form of emotional expression and documentation, providing testimony, support, and rehabilitation for those affected by trauma (Diatel et al., 2025). Researchers emphasize the therapeutic function of art in alleviating psychological stress resulting from war experiences (Spiegel et al., 2006). Therefore, antiwar exhibition practices represent a form of engagement with collective memory, inviting viewers to participate emotionally and intellectually through “empathetic vision” and a shared connection with the witnesses of tragic events (Bennett, 2005).

To grasp the significance of *Ukraine. Under a Different Sky*, within the context of international representation, it was also necessary to explore the mechanisms of cultural diplomacy and the effectiveness of soft power. Cultural diplomacy serves as an instrument of foreign policy, promoting national culture and expressing a nation’s identity to foster mutual understanding and strengthen international cooperation (Cummings, 2003). Exhibition practices in the visual arts serve as an effective mechanism of soft power, shaping a positive image of the state, promoting cultural values, and countering hostile narratives (Nye, 2017). Under the conditions of the Russian–Ukrainian war, cultural and artistic events—particularly exhibition practices—serve as powerful channels of communication that expose political crimes, critique governmental and institutional passivity toward military aggression, and, conversely, promote intercultural understanding to prevent future conflicts (Maftai & Popa, 2021; Toukan, 2021).

Michel Foucault's concept of the archive provides a valuable framework for interpreting exhibition practices as a form of constructing memory. According to Foucault, the archive is not merely a repository of documents but a structure that defines the limits of cultural articulation and meaning, requiring deliberate preservation (Foucault, 2003). The selection, interpretation, and representation of materials never occur neutrally; various factors shape them and, in turn, influence the formation of collective memory (Lohvinenko, 2025). Considering the exhibition as a curatorial project—an intentionally constructed “archive”—makes it possible to analyze which version of historical memory about the war it produces (A. Jones et al., 2022).

The theoretical framework of this study draws on the concept of the “decolonial turn” in contemporary Ukrainian art (Mignolo, 2007; Tlostanova, 2012). This research follows Svitlana Biedarieva's argument that postcolonial and decolonial approaches require a clear distinction. The postcolonial condition refers to the geopolitical reality that emerges after the end of colonial rule, necessitating a reevaluation of that experience. According to Biedarieva, Russia's full-scale aggression has accelerated decolonial processes in Ukrainian culture (Biedarieva, 2022). As Oksana Semenik notes, decolonial practices now go beyond reactive responses—they form an active strategy of redefinition that generates new knowledge through reattribution, revision of museum descriptions, and the restoration of Ukrainian cultural subjectivity within international institutions (Vovk, 2023). Other scholars also observe that after 2022, both academic and artistic practices have shifted from postcolonial studies toward an active decolonial discourse (Foley & Unkovski-Korica, 2025). The exhibition in Warsaw thus emerges as one of the most significant and large-scale international manifestations of this decolonial turn.

The study aims to identify the phenomenon of exhibition practices in contemporary Ukrainian art that reveal the functions of the memory archive, decolonial expression, and cultural interaction, as exemplified by the exhibition *Ukraine. Under a Different Sky* as a case study. Particular attention focuses on how artistic imagery represents Ukraine's public image during the war.

Presentation of the Main Research Material. “Under a Different Sky”: The Curatorial

Framework and Symbolic Space. The analysis of any exhibition practice begins with its conceptual framework—the title, curatorial text, and spatial context. The title *Ukraine. Under a Different Sky* carries strong metaphorical potential. As noted by the Ambassador of Ukraine to Poland, Vasyl Zvarych, it directly points to the rethinking of a familiar symbol: the sky, traditionally associated with peace, has in the wartime context acquired the opposite meaning—as a source of “mortal danger” (Vogue Ukraine, 2022). At the same time, the expression “under a different sky” can be interpreted as an image of forced displacement experienced by a large part of Ukraine's population.

In the curatorial text prepared by Victoria Burlaka, Beata Lupinska-Rytel, and Marcel Skierski, the authors proposed a central analytical idea crucial for interpreting the exhibition: the period of wartime oppression became for the artists a moment of “artistic enlightenment.” This formulation deliberately shifts the focus from the artist's position as an observer to that of an active subject who finds creative strength even in the midst of destruction. The declared goal of the exhibition—to present documented crimes committed by the Russian armed forces and to appeal to the international community—defines its dual function: to bear witness and to persuade (Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, n.d.).

The Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw holds a significant representative role in international exhibition practices. As a historical monument tied to Poland's past and an original architectural and fortification structure, it adds symbolic depth to the event. Presenting a Ukrainian exhibition in this prestigious state institution exemplifies intercultural interaction and symbolizes Poland's support for its neighboring state (ACCR, n.d.). This act goes beyond providing exhibition space—it signifies institutional recognition of the Ukrainian narrative within Poland's official cultural sphere, amplifying the exhibition's diplomatic and cultural resonance.

The Aesthetics of Trauma: Exhibition Practices as Archive and Testimony. One of the key functions of the exhibition is to document and archive the visual evidence of war. In this respect, the exposition reflects the concept of the archive as a system that shapes and structures memory (Foucault, 2003). By selecting more than 200 works by 32 artists,

the curators intentionally constructed a coherent narrative of wartime reality (Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, n.d.). This “archive of trauma” engages viewers on an emotional level while serving as a documentary witness that represents wartime events through the language of visual art.

Photographic works play a crucial role in preserving archival memory. A striking example is the photograph by Oleksiy Furman depicting 76-year-old Volodymyr Tykhonov opening the door of his bullet-ridden garage in the village of Zahaltsy (Artmap, n.d.). The image embodies the concept of war by focusing not only on destruction but also on the resilience of the human spirit in the face of profound adversity. A similar message resonates in Roman Bordun’s photograph capturing the interior of an apartment in Irpin after the Russian artillery shelling of the city (Dreams & Design, 2022). The image powerfully asserts that, despite the loss of home and personal space due to the violence of war, the unbroken faith in victory endures.

The exhibition’s installation pieces extend the viewer’s experience of witnessing, shifting perception from a two-dimensional observation to a spatial and immersive engagement. For instance, Yuriy Bolsa’s installation features sharp metal airplanes resembling paper ones that surround the figures of a man and a child. The angular forms and expressive lines evoke a sense of confinement and anxiety for the fate of these figures (The Warsaw Voice, 2022, p. 22). Visitors do not merely observe the scene from the outside; they find themselves within the work, sensing danger and emotionally reliving the tense, fearful moments experienced by Ukrainians during the war.

From Testimony to Resistance: Visual Markers of Decolonial Subjectivity. One of the most striking features of the exhibition *Ukraine. Under a Different Sky* lies in its representation of the decolonial process in Ukrainian culture. Many works illustrate a transition from the passive experience of observing the inevitable to active resistance against destructive realities—a search for self-determination in how to live in the present and shape the future. These artworks do not merely appeal to empathy; they call for action, envisioning a victorious future and asserting the inevitability of overcoming the aggressor.

Within this exhibition, Oleksiy Sai’s series *Bombed* powerfully conveys the theme of

resilience. The artist transforms already completed paintings through deliberate physical destruction—he rubs, sands, and drills holes into them—turning the works into abstract compositions that resemble aerial photographs of cratered landscapes (Dreams & Design, 2022; Sutton, 2023). This method of intentional mechanical damage to something once beautiful symbolically directs the viewer toward reflection on trauma, endurance, and the unbroken will of the Ukrainian nation.

While Sai’s works represent restrained resistance, Kharkiv sculptor Dmytro Iv’s installation *Застрелися* (“Shoot Yourself”) embodies open confrontation and emotional defiance toward aggression (RBC-Ukraine, 2022). The title issues a radical message to the aggressor—the leader of terrorist Russia—and becomes a symbolic counterattack calling for his self-destruction. The work marks a shift from defensive expression to active visual resistance, one of the defining characteristics of the anti-colonial struggle (see Figure 1).

The participation of Maria Kulikovska, who presented ceramic works (Vinnichenko & Kulikovska, n.d.), demonstrates the chronological continuity of the decolonial process. A displaced artist from Crimea, Kulikovska connects her works thematically to two pivotal moments—the beginning of Russian aggression with the annexation of the peninsula in February 2014 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Through her art, she emphasizes that the current Russian–Ukrainian war is part of a continuous historical trajectory.

The Exhibition as an Act of Cultural Relations. The exhibition *Ukraine. Under a Different Sky* exemplifies the practice of cultural diplomacy in action. Its curatorial design creates a communicative environment that integrates aesthetic, ethical, and emotional dimensions—each inviting the viewer to engage deeply with the wartime experience of Ukrainians. As Eliza Garnsey argues, exhibition practices within cultural diplomacy serve as instruments of symbolic mediation, shaping international perceptions of a nation through visual narratives that merge aesthetic and political meaning (Garnsey, 2019).

The themes and imagery of the works counter disinformation spread by Russian propaganda by presenting visual evidence of aggression. At the same time, the exhibition’s collection introduces



Fig. 1. Застрелися installation by sculptor Dmytro Iv, exhibited during Ukraine. Under a Different Sky at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, Warsaw.

(Photograph by Serhiy Havrylovych, January 7, 2023.)

the international community to a multidimensional image of Ukraine. This nation unites the experience of loss with the resilience of its ethnocultural identity amid armed resistance. Beyond this, the exhibition by Ukrainian artists also sought to strengthen emotional and cultural ties with Poland, particularly within the broader cultural and social context of Polish–Ukrainian relations.

Comparative Context: Strategies of International Representation. The exhibition *Ukraine. Under a Different Sky* became part of the growing network of cultural interactions that emerged across Europe following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Analyzing contemporary high-profile projects reveals different yet interconnected strategies of international representation of Ukrainian culture.

While the Warsaw exhibition of Ukrainian artists focused on documenting first-hand wartime experiences and exposing the terror inflicted by the Russian Federation, the exhibition *In the Eye of the Storm: Modernism in Ukraine 1900–1930s*, presented in several Western European capitals, including London, employed the idea of cyclical actualization and a retrospective strategy (Royal Academy of Arts, n.d.; Museo Nacional

Thyssen-Bornemisza, n.d.). This approach enabled curators to trace, on the one hand, the integration of Ukrainian avant-garde art into the broader European modernist movement, and on the other, to highlight the distinctiveness of Ukraine's artistic tradition, particularly in contrast to Russian culture. The evacuation of valuable twentieth-century Ukrainian artworks from Kyiv museums during missile attacks and their subsequent display in major European museums added profound symbolism to the project, turning it into a gesture of international solidarity (Cumming, 2024). The retrospective exhibition *In the Eye of the Storm* demonstrated the continuity of Ukraine's national culture, which, despite the destructive challenges of today's war, remains an integral part of shaping the shared history of democratic Europe.

A distinct curatorial strategy defined the project *Timeless: Contemporary Ukrainian Art in Wartime*, presented at the Bode Museum in Berlin (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, n.d.). The exhibition presented artworks from 2014 to 2022 as photographic reproductions placed alongside classical examples of European art. This juxtaposition integrated the Ukrainian wartime experience into a broader

dialogue on universal human themes—suffering, conflict, and resilience—depicted by artists from different eras and cultures. At first glance, this eclectic composition appeared multidirectional. However, the exhibition ultimately revealed the “timelessness” of human emotions, actions, traumas, and experiences, confirming the historical continuity of meanings and visual archetypes.

The triennial Ukrainian Cross-Section: UKRAINE! UNMUTED in Kaunas (Lithuania) introduced an entirely distinct curatorial approach. The project explicitly addressed decolonial processes that have continued since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The title UNMUTED symbolically expresses the central goal—to restore Ukraine's cultural voice after centuries of suppression by imperial Russian narratives (Ukrainian Cross Section, n.d.). Acting as a translator of Ukrainian art for an international audience, the project emphasized that the war embodies the price Ukraine pays to make its voice heard (European Capital of Culture, 2022).

These curatorial concepts highlight the distinctive nature of Ukraine. Under a Different Sky, whose strength lies in its focus on contemporary antiwar creativity and its dual narrative—documenting trauma and manifesting resistance. The London exhibition revisited the historical past, the Berlin show reflected on the universal human condition, and the Kaunas triennial articulated decolonial theory in the present. In contrast, the Warsaw exhibition served as a dynamic platform for interpreting the lived wartime experience in real time through multiple artistic and communicative dimensions.

Conclusions and Prospects for Further Research. The exhibition Ukraine. Under a Different Sky emerged as a significant cultural

phenomenon, utilizing the language of art to document, interpret, and communicate the Ukrainian experience of war. It demonstrates that in the context of armed conflict, artistic practice has shifted its thematic focus and redefined several of its functions. In addition to its traditional epistemological, didactic, aesthetic, social-regulative, and compensatory roles, it has deepened its communicative, psychotherapeutic, suggestive, informational, modeling, and prognostic functions, along with its capacity for catharsis and fascination. One of the key functions—the communicative one—has strengthened international cultural interaction by merging resistance to evil with diplomatic mediation through the *soft power* of art presented in exhibition form.

The exhibition's narrative weaves together the themes of trauma and resistance, fostering empathy among international audiences for those affected by the war. Compared with other exhibition projects in London, Berlin, and Kaunas, the Warsaw exposition highlights distinct yet interconnected dimensions of cultural interaction—from historical reconstruction to decolonial manifestation. Its uniqueness lies in portraying war as an immediate, lived experience, enabling direct cultural communication between Ukraine and the world.

Future research should expand the comparative analysis of Ukrainian exhibition practices centered on antiwar themes within the broader framework of global cultural interaction. An essential task involves exploring how such exhibition practices contribute to shaping international cultural memory of the Russian–Ukrainian war. Continued studies in this field will deepen understanding of the role of contemporary art in fostering cultural dialogue and enhancing Ukraine's positive international image.

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