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Reclaiming Our Cultural Heritage

Created by
The Ukrainian National
Women's League of America



**Ukrainian National
Women's League
of America, Inc.**

**Союз Українок
Америку**

Why is decolonization important?

Ukraine's rich and diverse culture has a centuries-old history. From the times of Kyivan Rus to modern days, Ukrainian traditions were carefully preserved and passed through generations.

However, being located in the heart of Europe, Ukraine was often torn apart by its neighbors in local and global conflicts. Thus, Ukraine's cultural heritage has been molded by its interactions with Poland, Russia and the Soviet Union. These colonial forces exerted their influence on Ukraine's language, traditions, and social structures, often leading to the suppression of indigenous elements in favor of the colonizers' norms.

During the Russian war on Ukraine, the importance of decolonizing and reclaiming Ukrainian culture has become even more profoundly necessary. The ongoing conflict, fueled by Russia's desire to subjugate Ukraine entirely, has underscored the urgent need for Ukrainians to assert their cultural identity and preserve their heritage in the face of brutal aggression.

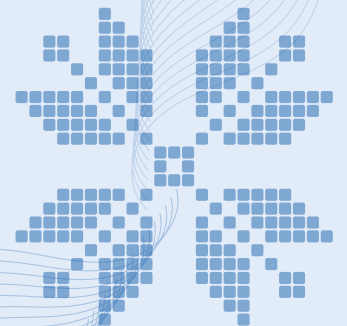


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Introduction

Welcome! Привіт!

With the war in Ukraine bringing new awareness of the russification of Ukraine's heritage, the Ukrainian National Women's League of America is escalating our efforts in the realm of cultural awareness. Now, like never before, we must aid Ukraine in correcting the misinformation and misappropriation promoted by Russia for centuries on Ukrainian fine art, literature, music, and theatre arts.

Using an initiative of the Ukrainian Institute in Kyiv as a jumping-off point, we are pleased to present to you this toolkit aimed at the Decolonization of Ukrainian Culture, which contains guidance on correcting misinformation in all areas of Ukrainian culture.

Looking forward to your collaboration in this important endeavor,

Oksana Piaseckyj
UNWLA National Culture Chair
culture@unwla.org
September, 2023

Ukraine starts with you.



Message from Romana

Cultural heritage shapes the perception of Ukrainian history and identity in the eyes of the international community. Since the start of the full-scale russian invasion, Ukrainian *art historians have **reclaimed*** some of the most famous pieces of Ukrainian art. Through this toolkit, we hope to contribute to this cause and make a step toward the decolonization of Ukrainian culture by providing you with some guidance on correcting the misidentification of Ukrainian art and promoting Ukrainian culture.

Strongly believing that change comes from collaborative action, our UNWLA community is committed to ensuring that the voices and stories embedded in our art continue to resonate with future generations. Together, we can make a difference.

Thank you for joining us in our advocacy for Ukrainian art and helping us to protect Ukrainian cultural identity from russian colonialism.

Warm regards,
Romana Mykhailevych
Intern in Culture at UNWLA
Yale University student from Ukraine
romana.mykhailevych@unwla.org

**Love Ukraine in dreams and waking hours, your
cherry Ukraine, its beauty forever living and new,
and its language of a nightingale.**

Volodymyr Sosiura



Visual Arts

Visual art allows for the expression of human creativity, emotions, and perspectives, enriching culture and fostering connections among diverse audiences. It is important to reclaim Ukrainian artists who have been mislabeled as Russian in museums since it serves to restore historical accuracy and cultural recognition. The misattribution of Ukrainian artists' works to Russian identity leads to the erasure of Ukraine's distinct artistic heritage and contributes to the marginalization of Ukrainian culture.



Mykola Pymonenko, *Yuletide Fortune Tellers*, 1888

What can you do?

1. Look through Oksana Semenik's **presentation** on decolonization.
2. Find your local museums in the **Database of Museums**.
3. Check if your museum contains artists from the **List of Reclaimed Artists**.
4. If incorrectly identified, reach out to the museum, asking for correction:
 - a. the best strategy is to connect with one person at the museum and conduct all communication through them
 - b. Draft your request
 - i. use an **example** from the toolkit
5. Use **postcards** with Ukrainian artists to promote decolonization on social media/via email.
6. Check if your museum contains artists from Ukraine/Russia/Russian Empire and verify them through the **Database of Artists**.
 - a. If incorrectly identified, reach out to the museum, asking for correction:
 - i. Use the "sources column" in the **Database of Artists** to prove that the artist is Ukrainian or do some additional research
 - ii. Use the **example** from Lisa Korneichuk
 1. note: your request can be straightforward and simple
 - iii. Reach out to Ukrainian **art experts** if you need help



Music

Classical music has long been a powerful form of artistic expression, and Ukraine has produced numerous composers who have made significant contributions to this genre.



For centuries, Russian authorities and institutions have inaccurately claimed Ukrainian composers as part of their own cultural heritage, distorting historical realities and denying Ukraine the rightful recognition of its artistic contributions.

What can you do?

1. Find a classical radio station in your area
 - a. use **myTuner** to look for radio stations in your state
2. Reach out to the station to promote Ukrainian composers
 - a. Draft an email
 - i. use an **example** of how to address a radio station
 - b. Suggest that the station plays the **recordings of Ukrainian composers**
3. Use **postcards** with Ukrainian classical composers to promote decolonization on social media/via email.



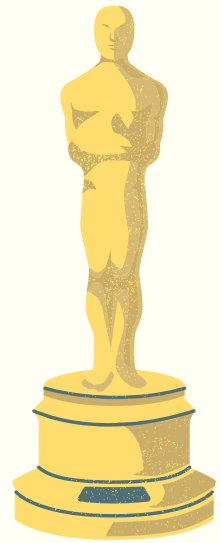


Filmmaking

Filmmaking is a medium for creative expression that offers artists a unique canvas to tell stories, convey emotions, and communicate ideas to a broad audience.

During periods of russification, Ukrainian culture, language, and history were suppressed in favor of russian dominance. By promoting Ukrainian films, the country can reclaim its cultural heritage, language, and stories, contributing to the process of derussification and reaffirming its unique place in the global cultural landscape.

Ukrainian filmmaking is a powerful medium to showcase the richness of the Ukrainian language, traditions, and history, and it can play a vital role in preserving and revitalizing Ukrainian identity in the face of historical attempts at cultural assimilation.

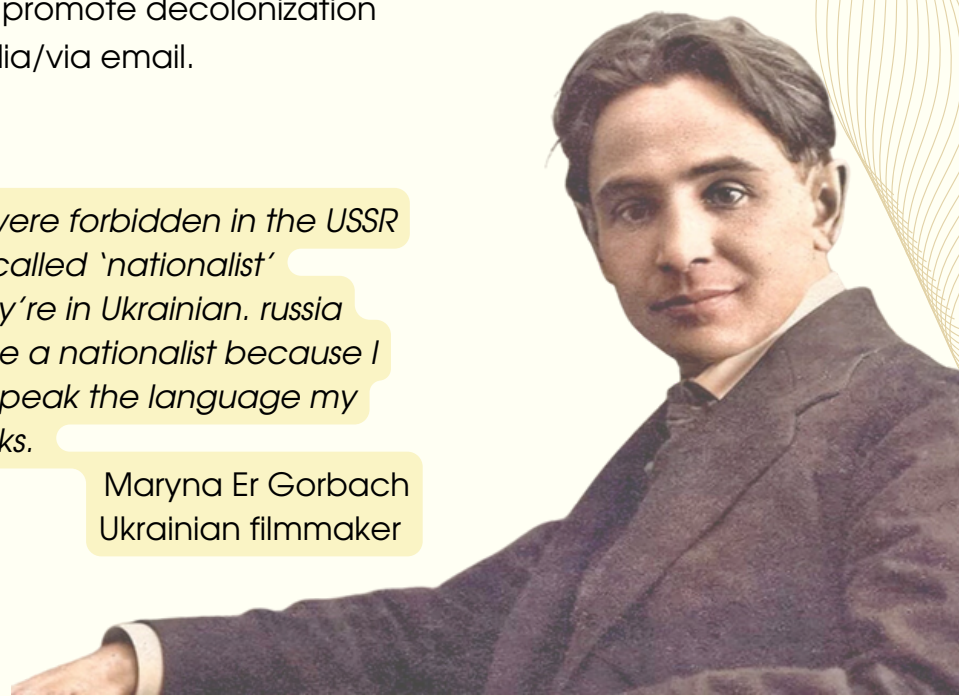
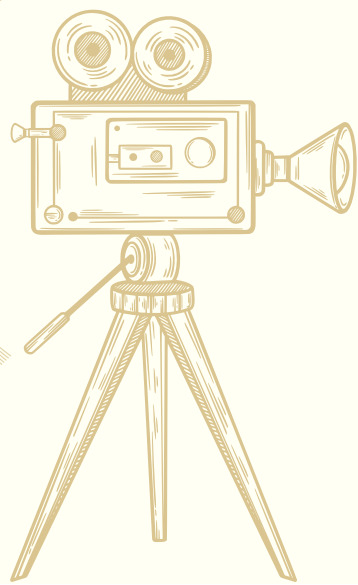


What can you do?

1. Familiarize yourself with the best Ukrainian films.
 - a. use the **Ukraine Films Platform**
2. Organize a screening using **the Screening instructions**
3. Use **postcards** with Ukrainian filmmakers and actors to promote decolonization on social media/via email.

Lots of films were forbidden in the USSR – they were called ‘nationalist’ because they’re in Ukrainian. russia would call me a nationalist because I just want to speak the language my mother speaks.

Maryna Er Gorbach
Ukrainian filmmaker



Cuisine

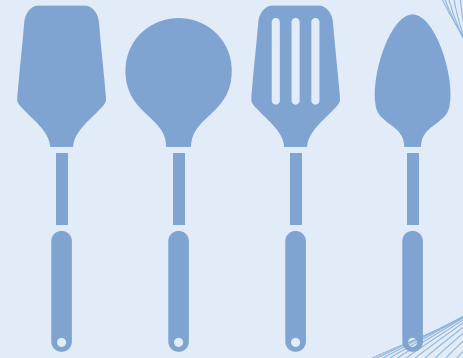


Ukrainian cuisine has a long and rich history, deeply rooted in the country's agricultural traditions and cultural heritage.

One of the most iconic dishes in Ukrainian cuisine is borsch, a hearty and colorful soup made with beets, and vegetables that is often served with sour cream. Borsch holds deep historical and cultural significance, symbolizing prosperity, unity, and resilience in Ukrainian society.

What can you do?

1. Find a restaurant in your area
 - a. Eastern European: **Yelp**, **FastBase**
 - b. Any restaurant of your choice
2. Reach out to the restaurant and encourage the introduction of Ukrainian cuisine
 - a. Draft an email
 - b. use an **example** from the toolkit
 - c. suggest that the restaurant add one of the dishes from **Ukrainian cuisine**
 - d. If the restaurant you reached out to is very responsive, you can try to negotiate with them and ask to send donations from the profit they receive from the Ukrainian meals to your favorite charitable organization (like UNWLA).
3. Spread the word about Ukrainian cuisine, recommending **Ukrainian cookbooks and blogs** to your friends.



Literature

Literature is a powerful form of art that influences the way people think and act by providing emotional resonance with characters and experiences. It challenges readers to critically examine societal norms and values, encouraging discussions about social issues.



We need to reclaim Ukrainian authors who have been mislabeled as Russian, restore their rightful cultural identity and acknowledge their contributions to Ukrainian heritage and art. Mislabeled artists as Russian erases their unique Ukrainian perspective, history, and traditions, leading to cultural appropriation and historical inaccuracies. Reclaiming their Ukrainian identity helps preserve and promote the richness of Ukrainian culture and ensures that their artistic legacy is properly recognized and celebrated both within Ukraine and on the global stage.



What can you do?

1. Find a library in your area
 - a. You can use **Library Technology** to find libraries in your state
2. Reach out to the library
 - a. Draft an email
 - i. use an **example** from the toolkit
 - b. Ask them to review their classification of Ukrainian writers using the **List of Writers** who are most commonly mislabeled
 - c. Suggest publishing **postcards** about the Executed Renaissance on their website or printing them as bookmarks for their library



Progress Updates


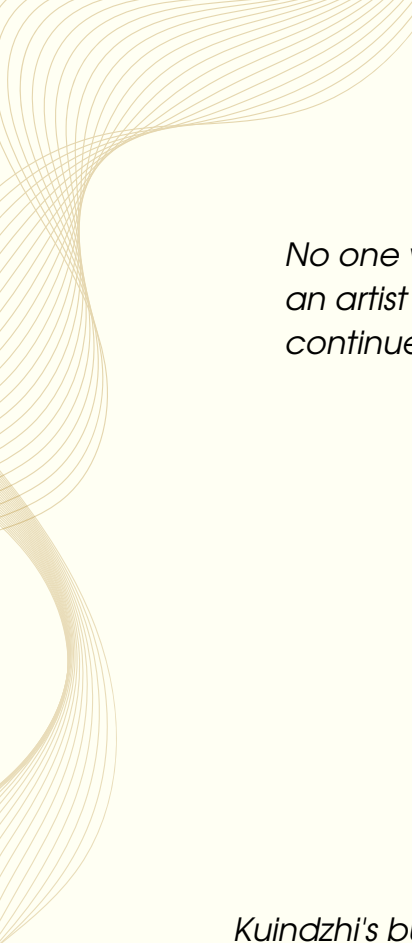
One key aspect of this mission is to keep a detailed record of the progress we make in our work. To facilitate this, we've established a **Google Form** that can be easily filled out by our members when they contact a museum or engage in any decolonization initiatives. All these responses are efficiently and systematically stored in a **Google Sheet**.

This dynamic system ensures that our dedicated members do not replicate efforts needlessly and allows us to maintain a clear, organized account of our collective progress toward our decolonization goals.

I hope you find this decolonization toolkit to be a valuable resource in your efforts to promote decolonization. Remember, you're not alone in this journey. If you ever need assistance or guidance or have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Thank you for your dedication to this important mission. Together, we can make a meaningful impact.





No one would call an artist from India “British” or an artist from Peru “Spanish,” so why do museums continue to label Ukrainian artists as “russian”?

— Lisa Korneichuk

Ukrainian culture has always been a part of world culture, and the only reason why the world did not know is because russia called these assets its own. We don't have to prove that we are different. We just need to get ours back.

— Catherine Taylor

Kuindzhi's bucolic Ukrainian landscapes are a stark contrast to the industrial devastation and plunder Moscow has unleashed, including on the artist's museum.

— Anna Neplii

The imperialist way of swallowing neighboring countries and rewriting their histories has been part and parcel of russia's attempts to justify its aggression against Ukraine for centuries.

— Oleg Sukhov

Davyd Burluk is often called “the father of russian futurism”, which means that russian futurism had a Ukrainian father.

– UA View





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**Союз Українок
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