

Help Protect Ukrainian Cultural Heritage

We often sit and wonder what tangible actions we can take to help during times of great peril. Despite the world witnessing reports of the devastation in Ukraine, including the destruction of a local museum in Ivankiv being burned down by Russian forces (BBC, 03.03.22), we have also heard exhilarating stories of the Ukrainian people rising up, fighting back, and working together to protect their state and cultural heritage. The invasion of Ukraine is not just a military assault and destruction of property. It is an annihilation of the Ukrainian cultural identity. A nation's shared cultural identity is rooted in its language, history, and art forms. Ukrainian museums, architecture, monuments, and culturally significant sites are being targeted amid this catastrophe. This attack on their cultural heritage is a very personal, very deliberate assault on the history and identity of the people of Ukraine.

In the middle of this crisis, anxiety and fear can be crippling. Even so, Save Culture UA has stepped up and is racing to preserve Ukrainian cultural heritage in their war-torn home country. They are urgently working to protect the art and cultural heritage of the Ukrainian people from being decimated by the Russian invasion. Amid this horrifying conflict, at a time UNESCO has stated it is 'gravely concerned' for cultural heritage sites in Ukraine, Save Culture UA needs immediate help

from the international community to support their efforts. They are asking for aid to sustain those remaining in the country to do the vital work of saving the cultural heritage of Ukraine.

This week, *AP News* highlighted the efforts of staff at the Andrey Sheptytsky National Museum in Lviv as they work to secure its collections of national heritage art and sculptures. In



addition to the efforts of museum staffs, average citizens are stepping up to protect artifacts and art of a shared Ukrainian identity, but they desperately need our help. As seen in the image at right, citizens have wrapped the Poseidon with Trident statue in Lviv in plastic. Unfortunately, this does little to secure the piece from the Russian bombardment. More supplies are needed to properly and successfully safeguard the arts, artifacts, and heritage of the resilient Ukrainian population.



On February 24th, 2022, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) released a statement that affirmed the condemnation against the violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty, and more specifically, the threat to cultural heritage during the armed conflict. ICOM also stated it encourages “members of civil society to reach out to their local museums to assist them, if possible, with the ways and means to protect their buildings and collections” because they are crucial to the community. Additionally, UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) released a statement calling for all parties to respect “international humanitarian law, notably the 1954 Hague Convention...to ensure the prevention of damage to cultural heritage in all its forms” (UNESCO statement). Both international institutions appeal to states to abide by the 1954 Hague Convention, which addressed the large-scale destruction of cultural heritage post-WWII. The convention recognized the importance of universal protections for cultural heritage in this multilateral treaty, established to protect multiple forms of cultural heritage, like monuments, historically and scientifically important collections, art, manuscripts and books, architecture, and more.

The conflict and response in Ukraine are reminiscent of another assault on cultural heritage seen during WWII. At that time, the Nazis looted about 600,000 pieces of art and culturally significant objects from Europe. In response, a group known as the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives section (composed of professors, historians, architects, and museum professionals) was embedded with the Allies. More commonly known today as the Monuments Men, this assemblage worked to recover and preserve the looted cultural heritage.

UNESCO has announced that they will meet with Ukrainian museum professionals to explore how to safeguard cultural property at risk in the country and hold a meeting on March 15th to discuss the damage already inflicted, but that is days away. Save Culture UA and their



determined compatriots are reaching out to the world for urgent assistance today. Please consider donating to the cause of Ukrainian cultural heritage protections by supporting these tenacious modern-day ‘Monuments Men.’

To help support Save Culture UA as they protect their cultural heritage:

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/preservation-of-cultural-heritageartsartifacts>

Save Culture UA: <https://m.facebook.com/SaveCultureUA/>

Resources and additional reading:

<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/unesco-world-monuments-fund-ukraine-heritage-sites-1234621092/>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-60603406>

<https://www.dw.com/en/threatened-by-war-ukraines-unesco-world-heritage-sites/g-61011791>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/01/cultural-catastrophe-ukrainians-fear-for-art-and-monuments-amid-onslaught>

<https://icom.museum/en/>

<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unescos-statement-recent-developments-ukraine>