

KHERSON, 2022: A MUSEUM EMPTIED IN FIVE DAYS

In the last two weeks before Russian forces withdrew from Kherson, people working for the occupation authorities loaded the city's museums, archive and cathedral relics onto trucks. From the Oleksii Shovkunenko Regional Art Museum alone more than 10,000 works left between 31 October and 4 November 2022 for a museum in occupied Crimea. Russia called it evacuation. Ukraine's Prosecutor General has named two suspects; the EU and the US have sanctioned the people in charge.

UKRAINE EVIDENCE HUB
VERIFIED RECORD
OCT 2026

DRAFT — not published. Draft for the editor. Figures checked against the Office of the Prosecutor General as reported by Ukrainska Pravda (10 Feb 2026), Human Rights Watch (20 Dec 2022), UNESCO's verified list (29 Sep 2026) and the EU / US sanction records as summarised by US Art News (Jun 2023). The PGO notice itself and the EU Official Journal entries still to be linked directly before release. Photos: Commons coverage of the museum is thin; the GUR 'stolen objects' catalogue is used for links only, not images.

10,223+

exhibits taken from the Kherson Regional Art Museum between 31 Oct and 4 Nov 2022, to the 'Central Museum of Tavrida' in Simferopol

B

Office of the Prosecutor General, suspicion notices (reported 10 Feb 2026)

~10,000
of
~13,500

artworks removed by about 10 'art specialists' and 30+ helpers with two trucks — most of the collection

C

Human Rights Watch, 20 Dec 2022

4

Kherson institutions pillaged in two weeks: the art museum, the regional museum (24–26 Oct), St Catherine's Cathedral (26 Oct) and the regional archive (30 Oct – 4 Nov)

C

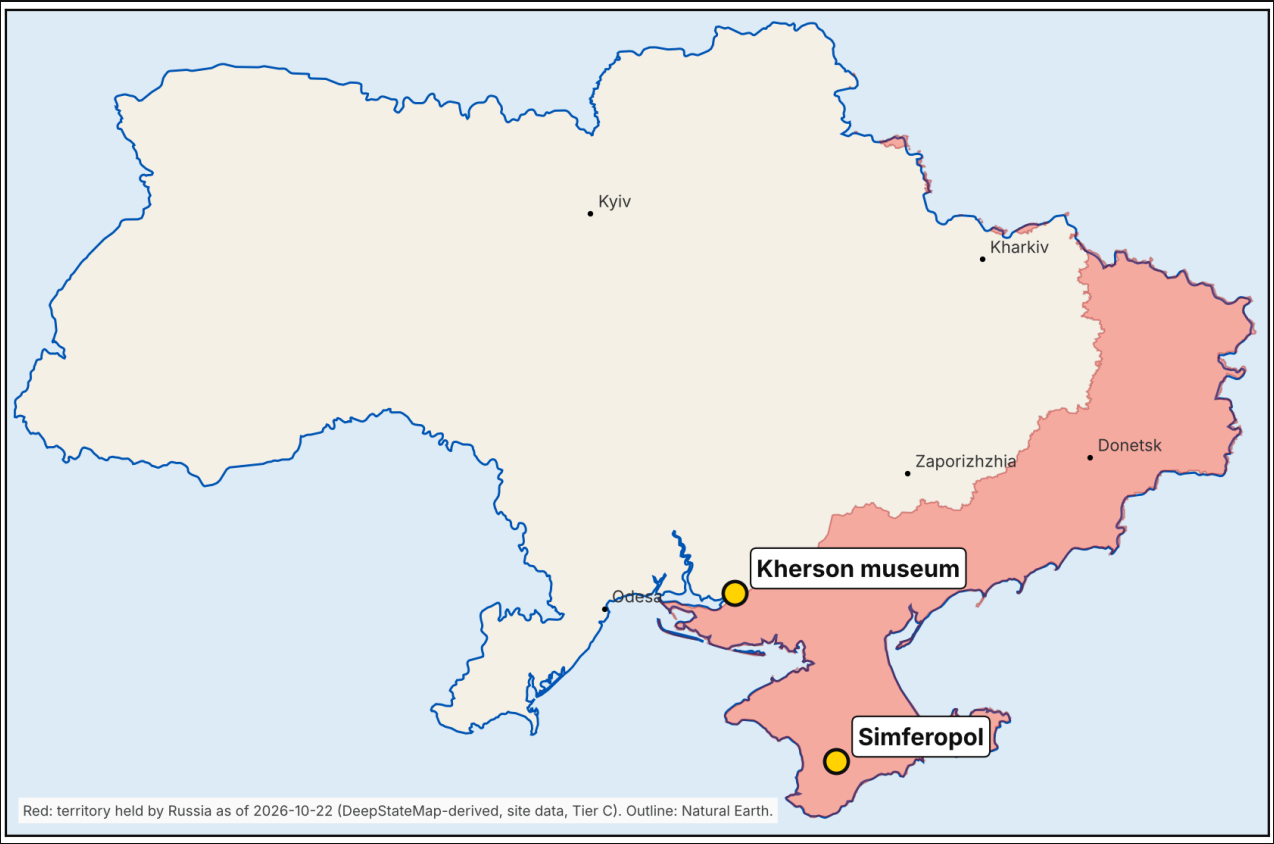
Human Rights Watch, 20 Dec 2022

563 · 43

cultural sites in Ukraine with damage verified by UNESCO · of them museums

A

UNESCO, figures as of 29 Sep 2026



BOTTOM LINE

Organised removal, not evacuation. Witnesses told HRW that Russian-appointed staff, 'art specialists' from Crimea and dozens of helpers packed the collection over five days, guarded by Russian forces. The works went to Simferopol — into another occupied territory, not to safety for their owners.

Named and sanctioned. Ukraine's Prosecutor General has served suspicion notices on the Russian-appointed museum director and on the occupation administration's acting first deputy culture minister (reported 10 Feb 2026). The EU and Switzerland sanctioned the director of the Simferopol museum holding the works (June 2023); the EU and the US sanctioned the Russian-appointed Kherson director.

Part of a pattern. HRW documented the same practice in Mariupol, Melitopol and Nova Kakhovka. Taking cultural property from occupied territory is prohibited by the 1954 Hague Convention's First Protocol, to which both Russia and Ukraine are party.

LEGAL QUALIFICATION IN THREE LAYERS

REMOVAL OF >10,000 WORKS TO CRIMEA, 31 OCT - 4 NOV 2022 — ESTABLISHED (PGO; HRW; SANCTIONS RECORDS)

LOOTING OF MUSEUMS UNDER OCCUPATION: MARIUPOL, MELITOPOL, NOVA KAKHOVKA, KHERSON — PATTERN (HRW)

PILLAGE, A WAR CRIME — POSITION (HRW; UKRAINE, ART. 438 CCU)

Established. The removal of more than 10,223 exhibits from the Kherson Regional Art Museum to Simferopol between 31 Oct and 4 Nov 2022 is documented by the Prosecutor General's suspicion notices and by HRW's witness interviews; EU, Swiss and US sanctions name the officials involved. **Pattern.** HRW: the same practice in at least five other southern institutions (Mariupol, Melitopol, Nova Kakhovka). **Position.** HRW qualifies the looting as war crimes; Ukraine charges it as violation of the laws and customs of war. No international court has yet ruled on it.

WHAT WE ASK

Check provenance of any Ukrainian art offered on the market; enter the Kherson works in national and Interpol stolen-art registries; make return of looted cultural property a term of any settlement; align sanctions with the EU listings.

FIVE DAYS, TWO TRUCKS, ONE COLLECTION

The art museum held one of southern Ukraine's richest collections — Ukrainian, Russian and Western European painting of the 18th–20th centuries. In the week before the retreat it was packed and driven across the Dnipro and on to Crimea.

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VERIFIED RECORD

OCT 2026

Mar 2022	Russian forces occupy Kherson; the Regional Art Museum's staff hide part of the collection. C — HRW, 20 Dec 2022
Jul 2022	Occupation authorities appoint a new director of the art museum. C — EU sanction record via US Art News
24-26 Oct 2022	About 70 people strip the Kherson Regional Museum; HRW identifies at least 450 missing objects, among them Scythian gold and Greek vases. C — HRW, 20 Dec 2022
26 Oct 2022	About 50 soldiers remove the remains of Prince Grigory Potemkin from St Catherine's Cathedral; occupation officials speak of 'evacuation' and 'safe storage'. C — HRW, 20 Dec 2022
30 Oct - 4 Nov 2022	Trucks remove most of the regional archive's 18th- and 19th-century documents. C — HRW, 20 Dec 2022
31 Oct - 4 Nov 2022	More than 10,223 exhibits taken from the Kherson Regional Art Museum to the 'Central Museum of Tavrida', Simferopol. B — Office of the Prosecutor General (reported 10 Feb 2026)
11 Nov 2022	Ukrainian forces return to Kherson; staff find the art museum's halls empty. C — HRW; Kyiv Independent
21-27 Jun 2023	EU and Switzerland sanction the director of the Simferopol museum holding the works. C — EU sanction record via US Art News
Jan - Feb 2026	Prosecutor General serves suspicion notices on the Russian-appointed museum director and an occupation 'culture ministry' official. B — Ukrainska Pravda, 10 Feb 2026
29 Sep 2026	UNESCO's verified list reaches 563 damaged cultural sites in Ukraine, 43 of them museums (removal of collections is not counted). A — UNESCO

WHAT WITNESSES AND INVESTIGATORS ESTABLISHED

HRW interviewed museum staff and witnesses: about 10 Russian 'art specialists' and at least 30 others removed roughly 10,000 of about 13,500 works over 31 Oct – 4 Nov 2022, using two trucks; they told staff the aim was to save the collection from 'looting or destruction by the Ukrainian Armed Forces'.

The Prosecutor General counts more than 10,223 exhibits and traces them to the 'Central Museum of Tavrida' in Simferopol; two suspects named (reported 10 Feb 2026).



The Kherson Art Museum building, the former City Duma on Soborna Street, before the full-scale invasion (2009). Photo: Павло Подобєд · Public domain · via Wikimedia Commons

WHAT WAS TAKEN

From the art museum: most of the collection — paintings, graphics and decorative art, including works by Ivan Aivazovsky and Ukrainian painters of the Kherson school (HRW; GUR catalogue).

From the city: Scythian gold and ancient Greek pieces from the regional museum, documents from the regional archive, and the remains of Prince Potemkin from St Catherine's Cathedral (HRW).

Sources: A — UNESCO, Damaged cultural sites in Ukraine verified by UNESCO (figures as of 29 Sep 2026); 1954 Hague Convention and First Protocol (treaty texts). B — Office of the Prosecutor General, suspicion notices (reported by Ukrainska Pravda, 10 Feb 2026); GUR, 'stolen objects' catalogue (war-sanctions.gur.gov.ua). C — Human Rights Watch, 'Ukraine: Russians Pillage Kherson Cultural Institutions' (20 Dec 2022); US Art News (EU, Swiss and US sanctions, Jun 2023); Kyiv Independent, Artnet, The Moscow Times (Nov 2022). RU — Russian-installed Kherson administration statements, 26 Oct 2022 (via HRW). All accessed 24 Oct 2026.



WITNESSES, SUSPECTS, SANCTIONS

There is no UN finding specific to Kherson's museums. The record rests on Ukraine's criminal case, an independent investigation with named witnesses, and the sanction decisions of the EU, Switzerland and the United States.

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VERIFIED RECORD

OCT 2026

ESTABLISHED BY BODIES WITH A MANDATE

UNESCO, verified list of damaged cultural sites (figures as of 29 Sep 2026): 563 sites, 43 museums — physical damage only; looting of collections is outside the count. A

1954 Hague Convention, First Protocol, para. 1: an occupying power must prevent the exportation of cultural property from occupied territory (treaty text; both states party). A

UKRAINIAN INVESTIGATION

Office of the Prosecutor General: more than 10,223 exhibits removed 31 Oct – 4 Nov 2022; suspicion notices to the Russian-appointed director and an occupation 'culture ministry' official (reported 10 Feb 2026). B

Kherson Art Museum staff accounts as quoted by Ukrainian officials and media, Nov 2022 B

Defence Intelligence of Ukraine (GUR), 'stolen objects' catalogue: individual works from the Kherson collection with descriptions. B

INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATIONS

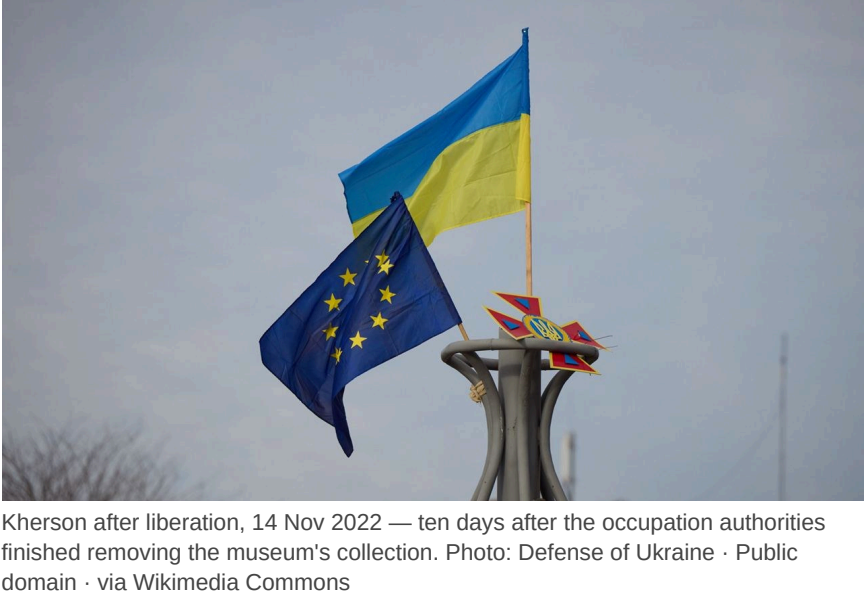
Human Rights Watch, 20 Dec 2022: two museums, a cathedral and an archive pillaged; ~10,000 of ~13,500 works; names of witnesses withheld. C

EU and Swiss sanction records (Jun 2023) and the US State Department (as summarised by US Art News). C

Kyiv Independent, Artnet, The Moscow Times (Nov 2022): contemporaneous reports of the trucks leaving the museum. C

THE NUMBERS — EVERY SOURCE, AS PUBLISHED

Figure	What it counts	Source · date · tier
10,223+	exhibits removed from the art museum	PGO · B
~10,000 of ~13,500	works removed	HRW · C
450+	objects missing from the regional museum	HRW · C
~180,000	objects held by the regional museum before the looting	HRW · C
5 days	31 Oct – 4 Nov 2022	PGO; HRW
563 · 43	UNESCO-verified damaged sites · museums	UNESCO · A



The PGO's 10,223 and HRW's ~10,000 describe the same removal from different inventories. Russian sources describe the works as 'evacuated' and held in Simferopol — which confirms where they are.

Sources: A — UNESCO, Damaged cultural sites in Ukraine verified by UNESCO (figures as of 29 Sep 2026); 1954 Hague Convention and First Protocol (treaty texts). B — Office of the Prosecutor General, suspicion notices (reported by Ukrainska Pravda, 10 Feb 2026); GUR, 'stolen objects' catalogue (war-sanctions.gur.gov.ua). C — Human Rights Watch, 'Ukraine: Russians Pillage Kherson Cultural Institutions' (20 Dec 2022); US Art News (EU, Swiss and US sanctions, Jun 2023); Kyiv Independent, Artnet, The Moscow Times (Nov 2022). RU — Russian-installed Kherson administration statements, 26 Oct 2022 (via HRW). All accessed 24 Oct 2026.



A DIRECTOR, AN OFFICIAL, A RECEIVING MUSEUM

The Kherson case is one of the few in this archive where the people who carried out the act are named in criminal and sanction records. The commanders who provided the trucks and the guard are not.

UKRAINE EVIDENCE HUB
VERIFIED RECORD
OCT 2026

Who	Role in the case	Proceedings	Sanctions · courts
Russian-appointed director, Kherson Regional Art Museum appointed Jul 2022	Oversaw the removal of the collection with Russian security forces (EU, US)	PGO suspicion notice (2026); EU and US sanctions	EU, US
Acting first deputy 'culture minister', occupation administration of Kherson region	Organised the transfer to Crimea (PGO)	PGO suspicion notice (2026)	—
Director, 'Central Museum of Tavrida', Simferopol	Holds the works under his control (EU)	EU and Swiss sanctions, Jun 2023	EU, CH
Russian forces in Kherson, Oct – Nov 2022	Guarded the loading; soldiers removed Potemkin's remains (HRW)	Not identified in public records	—

CHAIN OF RESPONSIBILITY

Occupation administration (decision and 'evacuation' framing) → Russian-appointed museum director and 'art specialists' from Crimea (packing) → Russian forces (guard and transport) → receiving museum in Simferopol (custody).

Russian-installed officials spoke publicly of saving monuments 'even at the cost of evacuation' (26 Oct 2022), placing the operation under the administration's authority.

THE RUSSIAN STATE'S OWN ACTS

Occupation officials announced the 'evacuation' of monuments and relics on 26 Oct 2022 (HRW).

The works are held by a state museum in occupied Crimea; Russia has not offered their return.

Names of the two PGO suspects appear in the Ukrainian media report; the hub uses positions only until the PGO notice is linked.

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'EVACUATION' TO ANOTHER OCCUPIED TERRITORY

The Russian line is that the art was evacuated to protect it from Ukrainian shelling or looting. The works went not to a neutral store or back to their owners but to a Russian-run museum in occupied Crimea, where they remain four years later.

UKRAINE EVIDENCE HUB
VERIFIED RECORD
OCT 2026

EKATERINA GUBAREVA, DEPUTY HEAD OF THE RUSSIAN- INSTALLED KHERSON ADMINISTRATION · 26 OCT 2022

"[The monument] must be saved at any cost, even at the cost of evacuation."

Human Rights Watch, 20 Dec 2022

RUSSIAN 'ART SPECIALISTS' AT THE KHERSON ART MUSEUM · 31 OCT - 4 NOV 2022 (AS TOLD TO STAFF)

"[The aim is to save the collection from] looting or destruction by the Ukrainian Armed Forces."

Human Rights Watch, 20 Dec 2022

EVACUATION FRAMING FOR REMOVAL

Days later more than 10,223 exhibits left the art museum for Simferopol (PGO); HRW calls the removals pillage.

What the claim concedes: That the occupation administration itself ordered the removal of Kherson's cultural property.

NOT SUPPORTED

No Ukrainian strike on the museum or looting by Ukrainian forces is on record; the works were taken out of Ukraine's control to Crimea and have not been returned.

What the claim concedes: That the removal was planned and staffed, not a spontaneous rescue.

FAIR TO SAY

Some museums do move collections for protection in war — Ukraine did so itself in 2022. The test is who decides, where the works go and whether they come back: here the occupying power decided, the works left the owner's control, and none has been returned.

HRW's witnesses are anonymous for their safety; the PGO's case is not yet tried. The hub labels both accordingly.

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AN OCCUPIER MAY PROTECT A MUSEUM, NOT EMPTY IT

Under the law of occupation the occupying power must safeguard cultural property and prevent its export. Removing a museum's collection to another territory it controls, without the owner's consent and without return, is the conduct the 1954 Hague Convention's First Protocol was written to stop.

UKRAINE EVIDENCE HUB
VERIFIED RECORD
OCT 2026

ESTABLISHED — BY BODIES WITH A MANDATE

Removal of more than 10,223 exhibits to Simferopol, 31 Oct – 4 Nov 2022 (PGO; HRW).

Sanctions by the EU, Switzerland and the US against the officials responsible (2023).

PATTERN — WHAT THE RECORD SHOWS

Looting of museums under occupation in Mariupol (Apr 2022), Melitopol (Apr 2022), Kherson (Oct – Nov 2022) and Nova Kakhovka (Nov 2022) — HRW.

Removal framed as 'evacuation' or 'safe storage' each time.

POSITION — UKRAINE'S QUALIFICATION

Human Rights Watch: the looting amounts to war crimes.

Ukraine: violation of the laws and customs of war (Art. 438 CCU); return of all works as a condition of any settlement.

THE RULES THAT APPLY

1954 Hague Convention arts. 4(3) (prohibits pillage of cultural property) and 5 (occupation); First Protocol paras. 1 and 3 (prevent export; return at the close of hostilities).

Hague Regulations 1907 arts. 47 and 56; Rome Statute art. 8(2)(b)(xvi) pillage; art. 8(2)(b) (ix) cultural property.

WHAT WE DO NOT KNOW

The full inventory of what reached Simferopol and what may have been moved further into Russia.

Which commanders provided the trucks and guard.

Whether any works have appeared on the art market.

WHAT WE ASK

Check provenance. Require auction houses and dealers to check any 18th–20th-century painting with a southern-Ukrainian history against the GUR catalogue and the Interpol stolen works database.

Register the works. Enter the Kherson collection in national stolen-art registries and support ICOM emergency red lists for Ukraine.

Make return a term. Write the return of looted cultural property, including the Kherson collection, into any settlement or ceasefire text.

Align sanctions. Mirror the EU's 2023 listings of the Simferopol museum director and the Russian-appointed Kherson director.

Sources: A — UNESCO, Damaged cultural sites in Ukraine verified by UNESCO (figures as of 29 Sep 2026); 1954 Hague Convention and First Protocol (treaty texts). B — Office of the Prosecutor General, suspicion notices (reported by Ukrainska Pravda, 10 Feb 2026); GUR, 'stolen objects' catalogue (war-sanctions.gur.gov.ua). C — Human Rights Watch, 'Ukraine: Russians Pillage Kherson Cultural Institutions' (20 Dec 2022); US Art News (EU, Swiss and US sanctions, Jun 2023); Kyiv Independent, Artnet, The Moscow Times (Nov 2022). RU — Russian-installed Kherson administration statements, 26 Oct 2022 (via HRW). All accessed 24 Oct 2026.

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2 photographs from official sources, as shown on the live page. Each image is credited and openly licensed; videos are linked to the official post (scan the code). No image shows the dead; graphic aftermath is blurred in print. The downloadable pack on the live page holds the full-size files and their SHA-256.

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VERIFIED RECORD
OCT 2026



The Kherson Art Museum building, the former City Duma on Soborna Street, before the full-scale invasion (2009)

Павло Подобєд · серпень 20 · Public domain

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Miska_ratusha_kherson.jpg



Kherson after liberation, 14 Nov 2022 — ten days after the occupation authorities finished removing the museum's collection

Defense of Ukraine · 2022-11-14 · Public domain

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ukrainian_and_EU_flags_in_Kherson.jpg



Live page and evidence pack (ZIP): ukraine-evidence.org/#cases/hist-kherson-museum-2022/media. This appendix is not an evidence repository: original material is held by the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine (warcrimes.gov.ua) and the ICC Office of the Prosecutor.