

AN 'EVACUATION' TO ANOTHER OCCUPIED TERRITORY

In the last fortnight of the occupation of Kherson, Russian-installed officials said monuments and relics had to be saved 'even at the cost of evacuation', and the people packing the art museum told staff they were protecting it from the Ukrainian army. More than 10,000 works went to a museum in occupied Crimea and have not come back. Three claims, the record, and what each concedes. The facts of the removal are in the Hub's Kherson museums dossier; this fact-check follows the claim.

UKRAINE EVIDENCE HUB
VERIFIED RECORD
OCT 2022

10,223+

exhibits taken from the Kherson Regional Art Museum to Simferopol, 31 Oct – 4 Nov 2022

B

Office of the Prosecutor General (reported 10 Feb 2026)

0

works returned to Kherson since November 2022

B

Office of the Prosecutor General; HRW

4

Kherson institutions pillaged in two weeks — art museum, regional museum, cathedral, archive

C

Human Rights Watch, 20 Dec 2022

2

Ukrainian suspicion notices; EU, Swiss and US sanctions on the officials involved

B

PGO (2026); EU, Switzerland (Jun 2023); US

BOTTOM LINE

The destination answers the claim. An evacuation protects property for its owner. The Kherson collection went from one occupied city to another occupied territory, into the custody of a Russian-run museum in Simferopol, and has stayed there for four years (PGO; HRW).

The officials said who decided. 'Even at the cost of evacuation' (Gubareva, 26 Oct 2022) places the operation under the occupation administration — the authority the 1954 Hague Convention obliges to prevent the export of cultural property.

No threat from Ukraine was on record. The 'protection from the Ukrainian army' line was given to staff while the collection was being packed; no Ukrainian strike on the museum or looting by Ukrainian forces has been reported by any source.

Fair to say. Moving collections for safety is lawful and common in war — Ukraine itself evacuated museum holdings in 2022. The test is the owner's consent and return. Neither applies here; the hub's sources for the removal are a pending Ukrainian criminal case and HRW's anonymous witnesses.

THE 3 CLAIMS

Ekaterina Gubareva, Russian-installed Kherson administration · 26 Oct 2022	"[It] must be saved at any cost, even at the cost of evacuation."	Evacuation framing for removal
Russian 'art specialists' at the Kherson Art Museum · 31 Oct – 4 Nov 2022 (to staff)	"[The aim is to save the collection from] looting or destruction by the Ukrainian Armed Forces."	Not supported
Volodymyr Saldo, head of the Russian-installed Kherson administration · 26 Oct 2022	"[The remains were moved] to an undisclosed location east of the Dnipro."	Secrecy, not safekeeping

WHAT WE ASK

Answer every 'evacuation' claim with the destination and the four years without return · check provenance of southern-Ukrainian works on the art market against the GUR catalogue and Interpol's database · align sanctions with the EU's 2023 listings · write the return of looted cultural property into any settlement text · cross-reference the Hub's Kherson museums dossier for the timeline.

WHO SAID IT, WHERE, AND TO WHOM

Where each claim was made, who made it, how the others in the room answered, and what the statements left out.

UKRAINE EVIDENCE HUB
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THE OCCASION AND THE RECORD

Occasion	Russian-installed authorities announce the 'evacuation' of residents, monuments and relics from Kherson's right bank ahead of the Russian withdrawal (completed 11 Nov 2022)
Where the claim was made	Statements of the Russian-installed Kherson administration, 26 Oct 2022 (deputy head Ekaterina Gubareva; head Volodymyr Saldo), as reported by HRW; statements by Russian 'art specialists' and the Russian-appointed director to museum staff during the removal, 31 Oct – 4 Nov 2022 (HRW)
Record	Human Rights Watch, 20 Dec 2022; Office of the Prosecutor General suspicion notices (reported 10 Feb 2026); EU, Swiss and US sanction records (2023)
What happened next	Ukrainian forces return to Kherson (11 Nov 2022) and find the art museum's halls empty · EU and Switzerland sanction the director of the Simferopol museum holding the works (Jun 2023) · PGO names two suspects (Jan – Feb 2026)
Status of the claim	Never withdrawn; the works remain in Simferopol

THE SPEAKERS

Ekaterina Gubareva	Deputy head of the Russian-installed Kherson administration (2022)	Said on 26 Oct 2022 that a monument 'must be saved at any cost, even at the cost of evacuation'; spoke of moving monuments to 'a safe storage'
Volodymyr Saldo	Head of the Russian-installed Kherson administration	Said on 26 Oct 2022 that Potemkin's remains had been moved 'to an undisclosed location east of the Dnipro'
Russian 'art specialists' and the Russian-appointed museum director	Carried out the removal from the art museum	Told staff the aim was to save the collection from 'looting or destruction by the Ukrainian Armed Forces' (HRW)

WHAT OTHERS SAID

European Union	Sanctioned the director of the Simferopol museum holding the Kherson works and the Russian-appointed Kherson director (2023).
Switzerland	Aligned with the EU listing of the Simferopol museum director (Jun 2023).
United States	Sanctioned the Russian-appointed Kherson director; the State Department said she oversaw the theft of about 10,000 items.
Human Rights Watch	Qualified the looting of Kherson's museums, cathedral and archive as war crimes (20 Dec 2022).

WHAT THE STATEMENTS LEFT OUT

- Where the works went: not to a neutral depository or third country but to a Russian-run state museum in occupied Crimea (PGO; EU sanction record).
- That the removal went far beyond protection: Scythian gold, Greek vases, archive documents and Potemkin's remains were taken in the same fortnight (HRW).
- That no inventory or receipt was given to the museum's legitimate staff and no return has been offered (HRW; PGO).

HOW IT TRAVELS

Russian state media reported the removals as the 'evacuation' of cultural values from Kherson alongside the civilian 'evacuation' announced for the right bank in October 2022. The Simferopol museum has presented the works as held for safekeeping.



CLAIM, RECORD, CONCESSION

Each claim as made, with the date, the venue and a link; the record it runs into, with the tier of the evidence; and what it concedes. Words in square brackets are the Hub's.

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CLAIM 1 · EKATERINA GUBAREVA, RUSSIAN-INSTALLED KHERSON ADMINISTRATION · 26 OCT 2022

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

Human Rights Watch, 20 Dec 2022

www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/20/ukraine-russians-pillage-kherson-cultural-institutions

EVACUATION FRAMING FOR REMOVAL

Evidence B C

Within days more than 10,223 exhibits left the Kherson Regional Art Museum for Simferopol (Prosecutor General, reported 10 Feb 2026); Human Rights Watch qualifies the removals from two museums, a cathedral and an archive as pillage amounting to war crimes (HRW, 20 Dec 2022).

What the claim concedes: That the occupation administration itself decided on and announced the removal of Kherson's cultural property.

CLAIM 2 · RUSSIAN 'ART SPECIALISTS' AT THE KHERSON ART MUSEUM · 31 OCT - 4 NOV 2022 (TO STAFF)

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

Human Rights Watch, 20 Dec 2022 (witness accounts)

www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/20/ukraine-russians-pillage-kherson-cultural-institutions

NOT SUPPORTED

Evidence B C

No Ukrainian strike on the museum and no looting by Ukrainian forces is recorded by any source. The works were driven out of Ukraine's control to the 'Central Museum of Tavrida' in Simferopol (Prosecutor General); none has been returned (HRW; PGO).

What the claim concedes: That the removal was planned and staffed by specialists sent for the purpose, not a spontaneous rescue.

CLAIM 3 · VOLODYMYR SALDO, HEAD OF THE RUSSIAN-INSTALLED KHERSON ADMINISTRATION · 26 OCT 2022

"[The remains were moved] to an undisclosed location east of the Dnipro."

Human Rights Watch, 20 Dec 2022

www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/20/ukraine-russians-pillage-kherson-cultural-institutions

SECRECY, NOT SAFEKEEPING

Evidence C

About 50 soldiers removed Prince Potemkin's remains from St Catherine's Cathedral on 26 Oct 2022 (HRW). An undisclosed location under the occupier's control is the opposite of the inventory and notification the 1954 Hague Convention expects of a protecting power.

What the claim concedes: That Russian forces, on the administration's orders, removed relics from a place of worship.

Sources: HRW, 20 Dec 2022 · Office of the Prosecutor General via Ukrainska Pravda, 10 Feb 2026 · EU, Swiss and US sanctions via US Art News, 2023 · UNESCO verified list, 29 Sep 2026 · 1954 Hague Convention and First Protocol · Ukraine Evidence Hub, Kherson museums dossier · full list on page 6

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WHAT RUSSIA SAYS, WHAT THE RECORD SHOWS

Each line sets a Russian statement against the finding of a mandated body or, where none exists, an independent investigation. Tiers are marked on every source.

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THE RECORD

QUESTION	WHAT RUSSIA SAYS	WHAT THE RECORD SHOWS	SOURCE
What happened	Evacuation of cultural property for its protection	Removal of >10,223 exhibits from the art museum and objects from three other institutions to occupied Crimea	PGO (reported 10 Feb 2026); HRW, 20 Dec 2022
Threat	Ukrainian looting or shelling	No Ukrainian strike on the museum or looting by Ukrainian forces on record	HRW; PGO
Destination	Safe storage	'Central Museum of Tavrida', Simferopol — a Russian-run museum in occupied territory	PGO; EU sanction record
Return	Implied	None in four years; suspicion notices and EU, Swiss, US sanctions instead	PGO; EU; Switzerland; US

FAIR TO SAY

Moving collections away from fighting is lawful and Ukraine did it too. What turns removal into pillage is who decides, where the works go and whether they come back — the hub's verdict rests on those three facts, not on motive.

The Prosecutor General's case is at the suspicion stage and HRW's witnesses are anonymous. The removal itself — numbers, dates, destination — is not disputed by Russia, which describes it as evacuation.

Sources: HRW, 20 Dec 2022 · Office of the Prosecutor General via Ukrainska Pravda, 10 Feb 2026 · EU, Swiss and US sanctions via US Art News, 2023 · UNESCO verified list, 29 Sep 2026 · 1954 Hague Convention and First Protocol · Ukraine Evidence Hub, Kherson museums dossier · full list on page 6

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ESTABLISHED, PATTERN, POSITION

What mandated bodies have established, what the record shows as a pattern, and what is a position — kept apart. Then the lines to take and the questions to expect.

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THE LAW

1954 Hague Convention, art. 4(3): parties must prohibit, prevent and stop any form of theft, pillage or misappropriation of cultural property. **Art. 5:** an occupying power must support the competent national authorities in safeguarding it.

First Protocol (1954), paras. 1 and 3: the occupying power must prevent the exportation of cultural property from occupied territory and return it at the close of hostilities. Both Russia and Ukraine are party.

Hague Regulations 1907, arts. 47 and 56: pillage is formally forbidden; seizure of works of art is forbidden and should be made the subject of legal proceedings.

Rome Statute art. 8(2)(b)(xvi): pillaging a town or place is a war crime; Ukraine's Criminal Code art. 438 covers the same conduct.

LINES TO TAKE

1. "An evacuation protects property for its owner. Kherson's collection went to Russian custody in occupied Crimea and has stayed there four years."
2. "Russia's own officials announced the 'evacuation'. That tells us who decided."
3. "Ten thousand works in five days, two trucks, no receipt, no return."
4. "The 1954 Hague Convention binds Russia to prevent exactly this export — and to give the works back."

Q&A

"Russia saved the art from shelling."

No strike on the museum is recorded before or after. And protection would mean an inventory, notice to the owner and return — none of which happened.

"Ukraine also moved museum collections."

Yes — its own collections, within its own control, for return. The Kherson works were taken by the occupying power out of the owner's control.

"These are Russian paintings anyway."

They belong to a Ukrainian state museum, whatever the painter's nationality. Ownership, not origin, is what the Hague Convention protects.

WHAT WE ASK

Answer every 'evacuation' claim with the destination and the four years without return · check provenance of southern-Ukrainian works on the art market against the GUR catalogue and Interpol's database · align sanctions with the EU's 2023 listings · write the return of looted cultural property into any settlement text · cross-reference the Hub's Kherson museums dossier for the timeline.



WHERE EVERY LINE COMES FROM

All sources were checked on 21 October 2026. Russian statements are listed as the position under review, not as evidence.

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VERIFIED RECORD

OCT 2022

SOURCES		
Human Rights Watch	Ukraine: Russians Pillage Kherson Cultural Institutions, 20 Dec 2022 https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/20/ukraine-russians-pillage-kherson-cultural-institutions	C
Ukrainska Pravda (Office of the Prosecutor General)	Over 10,000 items stolen from Kherson art museum by Russian-backed authorities in 2022, two suspects named, 10 Feb 2026 https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2026/02/10/8020362	B
US Art News	Crimean museum director sanctioned by EU and Switzerland, 2023 https://usaartnews.com/news/crimean-museum-director-sanctioned-by-eu-and-switzerland/	C
UNESCO	Damaged cultural sites in Ukraine verified by UNESCO (figures as of 29 Sep 2026) https://www.unesco.org/en/ukraine-war/damaged-cultural-sites	A
The Moscow Times	Kherson Museum Art Collection Looted Ahead of Russian Retreat, 10 Nov 2022 https://themoscowtimes.com/2022/11/10/kherson-museum-art-collection-looted-ahead-of-russian-retreat-a79342	C
Artnet News	Russian troops loot Kherson museum, Nov 2022 https://news.artnet.com/art-world/russian-troops-loot-kherson-museum-2209777	C
Kyiv Independent	Empty Kherson art museum in despair after entire collection stolen by Russia https://kyivindependent.com/national/empty-kherson-art-museum-in-despair-after-entire-collection-stolen-by-russia	C
Defence Intelligence of Ukraine	Stolen cultural objects catalogue — Kherson Art Museum items https://war-sanctions.gur.gov.ua/en/stolen/objects/1772	B

METHOD

Claims are taken from statements of the Russian-installed Kherson administration of 26 Oct 2022 and from what Russian specialists told museum staff during the removal, as recorded by Human Rights Watch; words in square brackets are the Hub's.

Each claim is checked against the Prosecutor General's suspicion notices, HRW's investigation, the sanction records of the EU, Switzerland and the US, and the text of the 1954 Hague Convention and its First Protocol. No UN body has issued a finding specific to the Kherson museums; the hub says so.

The facts of the removal and the timeline are in the Hub's Kherson museums dossier and are not repeated here.

Tiers: **A** — UN-mandated bodies, international courts and organisations (OHCHR/HRMMU, Commission of Inquiry, ICC, ECtHR, IAEA, OSCE, OPCW, Security Council record); **B** — Ukrainian official bodies, marked "according to Ukraine"; **C** — independent investigators and media; **RU** — Russian official statements, the position under review. Tiers are never combined in one figure.

Sources: see table above

