

**SOURCES OF THE FORMATION
OF KRAM'S COLLECTION:
39 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE
IN TURBULENCE**

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The article examines the history of the formation and development of the collection in Khmelnytskyi Regional Art Museum (KRAM) over the 39 years of its existence amid continuous socio-political and cultural turbulence. The study traces the transformation of the museum from a Soviet-type art institution to the first state museum of contemporary Ukrainian art in independent Ukraine. Special attention is paid to the shift in collection-building concepts, the decisive role of museum professionals in shaping the acquisition strategy, and the main sources of collection growth, including state purchases, inter-museum exchanges, exhibition projects, art residencies, symposia, and donations from artists and private collectors. The article highlights the significance of KRAM as a representative platform for the study and museification of Ukrainian art processes of the 20th and 21st centuries. It also analyzes the institutional modernization of the museum in the 2010s–2020s, focusing on digitalization, curatorial and educational practices, and the museum's operation during the full-scale war as a socio-rehabilitative and cultural hub. The research demonstrates that a consistent strategic vision, openness to change, and a clear focus on contemporary Ukrainian art have ensured the museum's institutional sustainability and professional authority.

Keywords: Khmelnytskyi Regional Art Museum, contemporary Ukrainian art, museum collection, collection building, museum strategy, regional museums, institutional transformation, exhibition practice.

The institutions that collect, study, and introduce Ukrainian contemporary art to the masses are few and far between in Ukraine. Among the state museums, the Khmelnytskyi Regional Art Museum (KRAM) is the first and, so far, the only institution of this kind. Sadly, it has yet to officially add the “of Ukrainian Contemporary Art” part to its name due to the current socio-political commotion. However, it houses a unique collection of 20th- and 21st-century Ukrainian art, continually expanding and refining it over the years, thereby supporting its credibility in our country’s art realm.

Over the years of its existence, museum professionals at KRAM organized exhibitions, festivals, events, symposia, art residences, and scheduled purchases, assembling an art collection that has already become an objectively integral part of the history of the 20th- and 21st-century Ukrainian art. Moreover, it is one of the most coherent and most representative museum collections in Ukraine (7000+ artworks by approximately 1200 artists).

Our art museum’s mission is to collect art and related information, preserving and securing it within museum vaults and exhibition spaces, studying, digitizing (85% of museum items have been digitized), and displaying them, and ensuring information dissemination and outreach, as well as presenting exhibits, archives, and research accurately and in full. Its activities focus on museum stock, exhibitions, and awareness building. This article explores how a local museum with utterly modest material and professional resources in turbulent times (the 39 years of its existence have not been exactly quiet, with constant change bringing about new challenges) managed to enlarge its collection, remain active, and assert its viability and institutional sustainability.

FROM FOUNDATION TO FINDING COLLECTION FOCUS

Compared to other Ukrainian museums, the KRAM is a relatively young institution. Its history follows the path of democratic change in our country. The museum was established pursuant to the Ukrainian SSR Council of Ministers Resolution No. 2 from January 2, 1986, which demonstrated the first tendencies toward the democratization of society. However, its creation can also be attributed to the Soviet formalism and bureaucracy: each oblast capital was supposed to have an art museum. Before that, the Khmelnytskyi Oblast had only a fairly modest fine arts department at the museum of local lore.

The museum’s path to building its collection was full of difficulties and controversy, which is understandable. Initially, the collection was planned according to the academic views, popular at the time: pre-Soviet fine arts, starting with icons (which KRAM has over 50 in its collection, all painted on wooden panels or canvas by professional painters and folk artists), followed by the Soviet-era pieces. Dating back to 1986, KRAM’s first purchases aligned with this direction.

At first, the following exhibition halls were planned for the museum:

“Hall 1: Works of ancient and medieval artists of Russia and Ukraine, e.g., portraits, icons, common pictures, wooden sculptures, engravings, and early printed books

Halls 2 and 3: Czarist- and Soviet-era Ukrainian and Russian decorative applied art, e.g., decorative needlework, traditional dress, ceramics, pottery, handmade rugs, tapestries, macramé lace, wood carving, porcelain, faïence, maiolica, glass art and blown glass, decorative painting, and pysankas

Hall 4: Holograms—3D images of ancient icon painting masterpieces, archeological artistic artifacts, and jewelry from the collections of Ukraine's top museums on glass

Hall 5: Thematic works of Soviet artists that depict the heroic fight of working-class people for the Soviet rule, visual Leniniana, the Great October Socialist Revolution, the civil war in Podolia, and the CPSU's leading role

Halls 6 and 7: Oil paintings and sculptures by prominent Soviet artists of the socialism-building period, Great Patriotic War heroics, and labor achievements of Soviet people (portraits, landscapes, still life)

Hall 8: Art pieces depicting ethnic solidarity by prominent artists from the fraternal countries

Hall 9: Art pieces by Soviet graphic artists dedicated to Vladimir Lenin, the CPSU, and Soviet modern life¹.

Such was the vision for the Khmelnytskyi Art Museum in 1986. Its implementation began immediately and continued until 1990, when the museum's researchers had to rethink their vision for the collection, as the situation in Ukraine's art world changed dramatically before their eyes.

Since the museum had no inventory items or basic historical collection as of the day of its founding, its management and first staff members drew on the collections of the Directorate of Art Exhibitions of Ukraine, the Directorate of Art Exhibitions of the National Union of Artists of Ukraine, graduation work repository of the Kyiv Arts Institute (presently the National Academy of Visual Arts and Architecture), and the collection of the Medzhibozh Art Gallery, managed by the Khmelnytsky Regional Museum of Local Lore and already dissolved at the time².

Eventually, as new proactive individuals (e.g., Iryna Alekseieva, Natalia Baydiuk, Alla Botanova, Halyna Hirnyk, Lyudmyla Zadorozhna, Olena Mykhailovska, Lyudmyla Rozhko-Pavlenko, Olena Skoruk, and Lyudmyla Tymofeieva) joined the collective and Anatolii Melnyk was appointed the Director of KRAM, the museum's staff began systematically attending exhibitions in Kyiv, Lviv, Odesa, Kharkiv, Uzhhorod, and Mykolaiv, as well as creative workshops, immersing themselves in the current situation in Ukrainian art. The scientific methodological council of KRAM formulated its collection-building

1. Згідно з архівним документом «Тематична структура експозиції Хмельницького обласного художнього музею», подання директора музею Л. В. Гасюка, затверджено начальником обласного управління культури М. С. Лебедевим у травні 1986 року. Особистий архів Алли Ботанової, науковиці ХОХМ (1988–1993).

2. Н. Байдюк, «Особливості комплектування фондів Хмельницького обласного художнього музею», в *Сучасний художній музей: проблеми і перспективи: матеріали науково-практичної конференції до 20-річчя Хмельницького обласного художнього музею* (Хмельницький, 2006).

strategy independently³ rather than adhering to the handed-down instructions, as was usually the case at the time. In one interview, Anatolii Melnyk said, “Perhaps, it would be somewhat indiscreet to say that on my part, but many believe nowadays that it’s Khmelnytskyi where the first museum of contemporary Ukrainian art was established”⁴.

The museum’s collection-building activity peaked in 1986–1992, when it still received state budget funds to purchase art in fairly large quantities. From 1993 onward, the process slowed down, even stopping for several years, and gradually gathered pace from the 2010s to 2022, though not as substantially as during the first six years of purchasing activities, which shaped the golden core of the museum’s collection.

As early as 1986–1988, it became abundantly clear that assembling a consistent representative collection of the 18th- and 19th-century art, much less the ancient and medieval one, is impossible amid the shortage of such items in the art market, while those available have little artistic value or a price tag prohibitively high for the museum’s art purchase budget. Meanwhile, awareness of the ongoing transformation in Ukrainian society and artistic environment grew, eventually prompting the idea to build a collection of contemporary Ukrainian art, unique and crucial to museifying these trends. As society democratized somewhat, several informal artistic groups emerged, e.g., Pohliad (The View, Kyiv), Shliakh (The Path, Lviv), and Mamay (Odesa), starting their vigorous exhibition activities in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

During the museum’s first year of existence, the Directorate of Art Exhibitions of Ukraine and other relevant organizations donated 185 artworks to KRAM. Meanwhile, the acquisition of works by artists from Khmelnytskyi Oblast and neighboring regions started, with 109 items purchased in total. The museum’s researchers visited Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kyiv, and Lviv on multiple occasions. Also, they began going on expeditions throughout the Khmelnytskyi Oblast. This is how KRAM’s collection of icons, antiquities, and ethnographic materials began.

As curators gained experience through professional, focused work with collectors from Kyiv, Lviv, and St. Petersburg in 1987–1990, 37 artworks by such classic Ukrainian painters as Oleksandr Murashko, Volodymyr Orlovskiy, Mykola Burachek, Ivan Yizhakevych, Mykhailo Berkos, Volodymyr Kostetskyi, and others were purchased. In 1990, *Garden* by Serhii Svitoslavskyi was acquired, becoming the last addition to the collection of classic Ukrainian paintings, as the museum’s collection vision soon changed. Besides, rarities became much more expensive, and funding for their purchase started to wane.

Eventually, KRAM had to cease ethnographic expeditions, too, as Khmelnytskyi Oblast already had two museums with robust ethnographic collections and active exhibits—the Khmelnytskyi Regional Museum of Local Lore and the Kamianets-Podilskyi State Historical Museum Reserve.

3. Протокол засідання науково-методичної ради КЗК ХОХМ від квітня 1990 р. Особистий архів Алли Ботанової, науковиці ХОХМ (1988–1993).

4. І. Грабович, «Анатолій Мельник: “Ми створюємо музей майбутнього”», Є 4 (2004).

Another source of KRAM's collection growth was inter-museum exchange. In 1989, the museum of the graphic artist Heorhii Vereyskyi (then part of the Khmelnytskyi Regional Museum of Local Lore) became a department of KRAM. KRAM thus acquired 1494 inventory items, retaining the department until 2014. In 1990, the Khmelnytskyi Regional Museum of Local Lore donated another 120 Soviet-era artworks (paintings, graphic art, sculptures), and the Lviv Museum of Ukrainian Art provided 7. It was the last time donations of this kind happened⁵.

Importantly, the idea of establishing a museum of contemporary Ukrainian art originated with KRAM personnel, as the exhibition projects and the acquisition of works of Ukrainian contemporary artists from Lviv, Kyiv, and Odesa were initiated by them. The Museum's activities became the answer to issues of Ukrainian art's identity, as they were, even at the time, way ahead of the ideologically charged Soviet art, which was gradually fading from the Ukrainian cultural environment. Once Ukraine became independent in 1991, heated discussions about and opposition to this vision for KRAM's collection (primarily on the part of the regional cultural administration) subsided. With the collection's future secured, the museum has been elaborating its mission and vision ever since.

BUILDING A COLLECTION OF CONTEMPORARY ART

The formation of KRAM's contemporary and decorative applied art collection began in 1987, eventually gaining a conceptual foundation. It quickly became clear that building a consistent and viable collection of classic art from the ground up was impossible. Therefore, the museum could find its niche only by collecting contemporary Ukrainian art. With this in mind, its researchers started frequenting artists' studios. By the end of the 1990s, these activities became the primary source for KRAM's collection-building. In 1991, the acquisition of contemporary art became systematic, and over 200 works of Ukrainian contemporary artists were bought over the next two years. When it turned ten, KRAM was Ukraine's only state museum built on such a concept⁶.

The year after Ukraine declared independence—on August 30, 1992—the renovated and reconstructed exhibits of Ukraine's first independence-era contemporary art museum opened to the public, spanning five halls, a museum gallery, an art parlor, and an art hall, with a total display area of around 700 sq m. From its very inception, the museum has been located on Khmelnytskyi's central street in the 1903 building of the former Proskuriv branch of the South-Russian Industrial Bank, a specimen of the so-called "brick style" (an informal flavor of architectural historicism), usual for the end-19th- and early-20th-century Proskuriv (the pre-1954 historical name of Khmelnytskyi).

5. Байдюк, «Особливості комплектування фондів».

6. Л. Жемайло, «Музею — 10 років», *Моя газета+*, 4, 2002.

After the information about the opening of KRAM was published, the stories in the local press lauded the museum: “the museum is a testament to the Khmelnytskyi residents’ aspiration to enrich their cultural life. Refreshingly, within just six years—the reconstruction of the former Soviet Podolia newspaper office started in September of 1986—builders, museum staff, and artists did a tremendous job. It’s a landmark event, and we, as the prominent Khmelnytskyi artist Mykola Mazur used to say, would like to congratulate you, ourselves, our children, and our remote descendants on this occasion”⁷.

In 1990, the museum began focusing its collection-building efforts on works by Ukrainian artists, buying them from collectors and even from the artists themselves. Authoritative specialized publications began writing about KRAM, which set out to collect, study, and popularize Ukrainian contemporary art. “Of the museum’s five halls on two floors, three are dedicated to exhibitions, and the two largest ones accommodate a permanent exhibition featuring the highlights of its collection”⁸. Over the years, the permanent exhibition evolved, but its core vision remained unchanged. Later, mass media would remark that “museum workers have refined the conception of their cultural (culturological even!) institution as the one that collects, studies, and promotes contemporary Ukrainian art and then started looking high and low for this art in Kyiv, Lviv, Odesa, Mykolaiv and other cities in Ukraine and abroad to study it, meet the artists, and estimate what KRAM can purchase and at which price. It’s a long, laborious, and often exhausting work!”⁹. The collection spans multiple generations of artists representing the Lviv artistic school of painting, graphic art, and decorative applied art (Roman Selskyi, Karlo Zvirynskyi, Margit Sielska-Reich, Danylo Dovboshynskyi, Andrii Bokotei, Iryna Levytska, Liubomyr Medvid, Zenovii Flinta, Petro Markovych, Mykola Andrushchenko, Volodymyr Rybotytskyi, Mykola Shymchiuk, Mykhailo Lishchyner, Oleksandr Korovay, Liuba Lebid-Korovay, Oleh Minko, Borys Buriak, Nina Buriak, Volodymyr Fedoruk, Alla Honcharuk, Roman Petruk, Yevhen Beznisko, Ihor Kovalevych, Yaroslava and Yaroslav Motyka, Inna Tumanova-Yershova, Uliana Yaroshevyh, Yurii Viktiuk, Halyna Zubchenko, and others), Zakarpattia artistic school (Josef Bokshai, Fedir Manaylo, Yurii Herts, Mykola and Edita Medvetskyi, Anton Kashshai, Havrylo Hliuk, Ernest Konratovych, Zoltan Šoltes, Volodymyr Mykyta, Andrii Kotska, and others), and a group of Odesa non-conformists (Volodymyr Tsiupko, Viktor Maryniuk, Lyuda Yastreb, Yevhen Rakhmanin, Valerii Basanets, Volodymyr Kabachenko, Oleksandr Stovbur, Oleh Voloshynov, Volodymyr Strelnikov, Serhii Savchenko, Svitlana Yusim, and others).

Nowadays, the museum’s collection spans around 7,200 inventory items, primarily fine arts (painting, graphic art, combine painting, collage, photography, and sculpture) and decorative applied arts: professional handmade and folk ceramics, glass and tex-

7. Л. Рожко-Павленко, «Відкрито художній музей», *Образотворче мистецтво* 1 (1993): 27–29.

8. Л. Рожко-Павленко, «Хмельницькому художньому музею — рік, а що за ним?», *Образотворче мистецтво* 1 (1994): 23, 31.

9. О. Климчук, «Такого музею Київ не має», *Час* 5 (1994): 4.



Fig. 1. The first permanent exhibition of art from KRAM's collection. Hall 4. 1992



Fig. 2. The opening of Roman Romanyshyn's (Lviv) personal exhibition of graphic art at KRAM. Hall 1. 1993.
From left to right: KRAM researchers Yuliia Zelska, Olena Mykhailovska, and Andrii Taranenko,
artist Roman Romanyshyn with his wife, and the KRAM researchers Alla Botanova and Olena Skoruk



Fig. 3. A permanent exhibition of art from KRAM's collection. The Lviv artistic school. Hall 2. 1994



Fig. 4. The opening of the exhibition of the Keramika '93 symposium results at KRAM. 1993. Left to right: Art historian Tamara Li (Kyiv), ceramist Oleksandr Milovzorov (Kyiv), KRAM curator and researcher Alla Botanova, and ceramists Yaroslava Motyka (Lviv) and Ihor Kovalevych (Lviv).



Fig. 5. The opening of *Khutir I*, a group exhibition of the National Association of Artists, at KRAM. Hall 4. 1994. Left to right: Artist Mykola Mazur, the KRAM researcher Lyudmyla Rozhko-Pavlenko, KRAM Director Anatolii Melnyk, and opening day guests



Fig. 6. The opening of the *Khutir II*, a group exhibition of the National Association of Artists, at the KRAM. Hall 4. 1996



Fig. 7. The opening of Art-Klub '96, a forum of independent creative associations, at the KRAM. In the foreground is the artist Viktor Martyniuk (Odesa). 1996



Fig. 8. Exhibition of Heorhii Vereyskyi's works at the KRAM. Hall 1. Early 2000s.

tile (needlework, weaving, decorative painting on fabric), decorative painting on paper, pysankas, metal and leather articles, and more.

The museum's collection-building activities peaked in the late 1980s—early 1990s, when it leveraged the still-existing Soviet state procurement system to purchase works by prominent Ukrainian underground and Ukrainian New Wave artists amid the post-Perestroika turmoil. In 1988, KRAM purchased the most inventory items in its 39-year history—881 exhibit items worth SUR 85,076 (USD 141,793 at the official exchange rate of USD 1 = SUR 0.6 as of November 1, 1990). The rock-bottom point—1 inventory item per year—was reached in 2005, 2009, and from 2011 to 2017. In 2022, funding for the KRAM's collection-building expenses ceased.

In addition to singling out specific personalities and works of artistic merit from the infinite variety of cultural phenomena, the museum's activities involved creating situations to catalyze processes across various fields of art and building a coherent picture of its development. To expand its collection, the KRAM held a range of major events, starting with the *Keramika '93* symposium—the first art residency in the history of independent Ukraine. Ten ceramists from Kyiv and Lviv were invited to spend a month working at the Polonne Porcelain Plant. Some of their works were exhibited and later donated to the museum's collection. Another successful foray into stimulating the artists' creative output was the 1st All-Ukrainian Exhibition of Contemporary Decorative Painting on Fabric *Prezentatsia '94*, which attracted 67 artists from Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv, Lutsk, Kropyvnytskyi, Donetsk, Cherkasy, Khmelnytskyi, and Chişinău. After Khmelnytskyi residents had the chance to enjoy it, the exhibition was displayed in Kyiv and a number of other locations. Ukrainian textile painting convincingly demonstrated its potential as easel art, as well as its integral place in Ukrainian contemporary fine arts and the directions in which they developed. In three years, the exhibition's second installment followed, titled *Prezentatsia '97*. Both were documented in their respective catalogs. However, they never grew into a full-on triennial of Ukrainian batik.

Among the largest events initiated by KRAM in the 1990s, *Art-Klub '96* is also worth mentioning. The museum assembled under the same roof the members of many Ukrainian independent creative groups (e.g., Lviv's Klub Ukrainskykh Myttsiv (Club of Ukrainian Artists), Shliakh (The Path), and Dzyga (The Spinning Top); Kyiv's Zhyvopysnyi Zapovidnyk (Pictorial Reserve) and Bratstvo Prepodobnolo Alipiya (the Brotherhood of Venerable Alypius); Odesa's Choven (The Boat); Ternopil's Khoruhva (The Banner); and the Sumy branch of Malevich Center). That exhibition became an intersection of many artistic positions in the creative space of the time. The idea for the next project emerged from the cooperation with the All-Ukrainian Artistic Association "Artaniya," which organized a plein air in Ochakiv in the summer of 1997. The 12 artists invited to participate (including Andrii Bludov, Mykola Zhuravel, Eduard Belskyi, and Serhii Hai) held their showcase exhibition titled *Robinsonade* (a name inspired by the atmosphere of vacation) in the Khmelnytskyi Regional Art Museum. Also notable were two major exhibitions—*Khutir I* (1994) and *Khutir II* (1996)—which showcased the creative work of members of

the National Association of Artists, established in Kyiv in 1993. Part of the latter exhibition was a scientific conference on the problems of Ukrainian contemporary art.

Over the following decade, KRAM collective focused on “probing” the Ukrainian creative space on an ongoing basis and documenting the dynamics of artistic life, with special attention to neighboring regions. The initiative culminated in a long-term exhibition project, titled *The Neighbors*, held over the 5 years from 2008 to 2012, each year zooming in on the art of a different region, adjacent to Khmelnytskyi Oblast. Over those years, creative works of the most prominent artists of Vinnytsia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Ternopil, and Volyn oblasts were exhibited in the museum’s halls. Its 2000–2010 exhibition policy was not limited to regional representation, though. KRAM invited other iconic artists, including the sculptor Vasyl Korchovyi, painter Petro Lebedynets, and graphic artist Serhii Yakutovych, a laureate of the Shevchenko National Prize.

TIME FOR RENEWAL

Ongoing rapid changes brought about challenges that prompted a rethinking of the museum’s image as a socio-cultural institution that does not focus solely on preserving the cultural heritage artifacts. After overcoming issues related to institutional stagnation and economic depression, KRAM established itself as a museum center and a modern cultural platform, undergoing agile modernization initiated after the renewal of its top management (Olha Dolinska became its new Director) and staff in 2017. Carried out in 2020 with the support of the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation, the project *A Rebranding Campaign for the Khmelnytskyi Regional Art Museum: Time for Renewal* updated the museum’s visual identity and helped formulate its current mission and vision after a series of brainstorming and training sessions for all museum personnel, from technical staff to top management¹⁰.

As the first Ukrainian contemporary art museum in the history of independent Ukraine, with the works of prominent 20th- and 21st-century artists at the core of its collection, the KRAM has a responsibility to the professional community and locals to continue pursuing its current strategy. Also, it explores, develops, and introduces new operational techniques and tools in such directions as financial diversification (boosting economic effectiveness, partnerships, fundraising, marketing, and more), digitalization (digitizing the museum’s collection, online presence, SMM, and more), curatorial and educational initiatives (conceptual exhibition projects focused on particular themes and/or problems, participatory practices, cross-cultural and social events, and more), and communications and information dissemination (networking, modern promotion and advertising techniques, and more).

10. «Про музей», Хмельницький обласний художній музей, дата звернення 8 травня 2025, <https://xoxm.art/about-us/>.



Fig. 9. The opening of the educational exhibition project *Art Intersection. Open Workshop. Yehorov. Roitburd. Husiev.* at KRAM. 2019. From left to right: artist Ihor Husiev (Odesa), artist and Director of the Odesa National Fine Art Museum Oleksandr Roitburd, the KRAM Director Olha Dolinska, and the KRAM curator and researcher Olena Mykhailovska



Fig. 10. The opening of Oleksandr Dubovyk's personal exhibition *Labyrinth of Meanings* at KRAM. 2018. The museum's Director, Olha Dolinska, with artist Oleksandr Dubovyk (Kyiv)

KRAM's collection-building and exhibition activity has started gathering pace, with the strategy for the latter transitioning from the geographical, chronological, or purely stylistic approaches to problem- and theme-focused ones.

The museum's present-day exhibition projects not only introduce their viewers to the best specimens of fine arts, foster appreciation of art, and broaden horizons, but also respond to the challenges of the time through creative approaches and modern exhibition techniques and instruments. Take, for example, the exhibition *Aqua Fortis. Graphic Art of Lviv and Kharkiv from the 1960s to the 1990s* (2019). Drawing on the art from the KRAM's collection, it convincingly demonstrated that, despite differences in the graphic art traditions of Lviv and Kharkiv, the artistic schools of these cities have much in common. The dialogue exhibition *Thirst for Painting. Women. / From the Life of a Woman. Men.* (2020–2021) addressed another present-day pressing issue—gender equality. It engaged the genders in an imaginary cross-cultural dialogue, providing an opportunity to understand the inner worlds and psychologies of female artists and their social standing in the 20th and early 21st centuries.



Fig. 11. The KRAM staff with participant certificates in the museum yard after the training session “Museum Rebranding in Action,” held with the support of the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation. 2020. Left to right: the KRAM employees Kostiantyn Zainchkovskyi, Oksana Frankiv, Marharyta Korolevska, Olha Alekseeva, Natalia Baydiuk, Yaroslava Oleksiv, Tetiana Moskovtseva, Svitlana Shemchuk, Anna Kravchuk, marketing trainer Olha Zaichenko (Kyiv), art director and marketing specialist Serhii Fashchuk (Kyiv), KRAM employees Olena Mykhailovska, Alla Botanova, Olha Nikitina, and KRAM Director Olha Dolinska

The 2019 *Inspired by Boychuk* project told the story of Boychuk's disciples, the tragic atmosphere of the 1920s and the 1930s, and contemporary artists who continue and develop the traditions of the artistic school established by Prof. Mykhailo Boychuk (1882–1937), a prominent artist, pedagogue, scholar, and founder of the National Academy of Arts.

Among the temporary exhibition projects of the latter years, the following stand out in view of their conceptual innovativeness and urgency of the issues raised: *Art Intersection: Open Workshop* (an inter-regional educational exhibition project dealing with the problems of generational interactions in Ukrainian art and an exhibition of art pieces by Yurii Yehorov, Oleksandr Roitburd, and Ihor Husiev (Odesa)), *Sunsets and ...of Blood and Earth...* (retrospective exhibition of art pieces by the Sixtiers Alla Horska and Viktor Zaretskyi from the private collections and those of the artists' families (Kyiv)), *Winged!* (a retrospective of works by Mykola and Lyudmyla Mazur from the collection of the artists' family (Khmelnyskyi), which recounted the story of local artists within their historical period), *Non/Random Pairs* (a multimedia retrospective of art pieces by Oleksandr Hnylytskyi from the collection of the artist's family curated by Lesia Zayats (Kyiv–Munich), which aimed to introduce locals to the works of a classic Ukrainian contemporary artist and continue the exploration of the end-20th-century and early-21st-century art).

As the writer and journalist Oleksandr Klymchuk (1942–2015) remarked in his 1994 publication, "... hopefully, these unique assets will be appreciated on the city and regional level. Hopefully, people will understand there is no museum like this in Kyiv or



Fig. 12. The façade of the KRAM building, 47 Proskurivska St., Khmelnytskyi. 2020



Fig. 13. Interactive night-time tour In Love with Art at KRAM. Hall 2. 2021

elsewhere in Ukraine”¹¹. In 2020, the Zruchno.Travel web portal echoed the sentiment, including KRAM, among the six private and four state cultural institutions of this kind, into its Top 10 Contemporary Art Museums in Ukraine rating: “The Khmelnytskyi Regional Art Museum is considered to be one of the first contemporary art museums in Ukraine. Founded in the early 1990s, it focuses specifically on highlighting the diverse directions in Ukrainian contemporary art and has many outstanding exhibits to show for it”¹².

OPERATION DURING THE FULL-SCALE WAR

When the full-scale invasion started, the museum’s staff secured the collection. Also, they quickly restructured museum activities and launched an art-based social rehabilitation platform. From March 2022 through the end of the year, the KRAM_Art_Hub platform remained open to internally displaced persons and residents of Khmelnytskyi without any days off and on a free-of-charge basis, with the museum’s all full-time personnel, as well as more than 80 volunteers, involved in its operation. This educational and rehabilitative project incorporated a wide-ranging program, including over

11. Климчук, «Такого музею Київ не має», 4.

12. «ТОП 10 музеїв сучасного мистецтва України», Zruchno.Travel, дата звернення 8 червня 2025, <https://zruchno.travel/News/New/4926?lang=ua>.



Fig. 13. A display from the *All Shades... White* exhibition from KRAM's collection. Hall 3. 2021

20 kinds of creative workshops, a library hub, training sessions with psychologists and rehabilitation specialists, art history lectures and discussions, thematic clubs (photography, literature, and ethnography), a cinema space for children and adults, amateur exhibitions, and performances by artists and creative ensembles. Artworks produced by visitors were sent to the defenders on the frontline, donated to charity auctions in support of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and distributed to hospitals and medical facilities. Meanwhile, administrative and operational measures were taken to sustain and develop the institutional infrastructure capacity of the Khmelnytskyi Regional Art Museum (with some support of local authorities and—particularly since 2022—international donors).

The KRAM has ramped up its inter-museum networking, particularly the communication with colleagues from museums relocated from combat zones to relatively safe areas. The past three years saw a series of projects in collaboration with staff from 15 museums in the Donetsk region. These include *Museum Digital Community: An Education, Practice-oriented Project on the Digitization of Museum Collections*, *Digital Community of Museums. Work in Progress*, and *The Price of Freedom. An Art Residency in Contemporary Painting*, supported by the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation and House of Europe. As a result of the art residency, three museums received approximately 100 works of contemporary art by 14 artists from across Ukraine, including internally displaced persons.

The museum's cooperation with private collectors has reached new heights, enabling it to launch high-profile exhibition projects that help expand its collection (e.g., with items from the collections of the families of Alla Horska and Viktor Zaretsky, Oleksandr Roitburd, Oleksandr Hnylytsky, Liudmyla and Mykola Mazur, and a symposium under the BIRUCHIY contemporary art project, among others). The museum's exhibition activities in 2022–2024 resulted in 450 works being donated to its collection. The museum not only fills the gaps in its collection for specific periods or to artists previously unrepresented there, but also artistically commemorates societal events during the full-scale war.

No matter the circumstances, the Khmelnytskyi Regional Art Museum sticks to its mission—to collect Ukrainian contemporary art and share the 20th- and 21st-century art with professionals and broader audiences, fostering connections among individuals with diverse experiences. The phrase “Time spent in the museum is time spent with meaning” has been on the museum's façade since 2020, and the institution seeks to affirm the principle through its daily activities. Its continually expanding collection of art serves as a record of dynamic phenomena and events at both local and global levels. The KRAM creates a space for communication, mutual inspiration, research, awareness, and reflection. It ventures beyond the conventional boundaries of museum activities and art, while consistently drawing inspiration from them.

CONCLUSIONS

The history of the Khmelnytskyi Regional Art Museum's collection-building and exhibition activities offers an opportunity to analyze the challenges that regional Ukrainian museums have faced over the past 40 years. The relatively effective operation of the Khmelnytskyi Regional Art Museum is due to a multitude of factors. E.g., as a museum of contemporary Ukrainian art, it consistently strives to remain aligned with its declared collection concept and its strategy for developing a contemporary multicultural platform. Also, it engages with pressing societal issues, prioritizes continuous professional development, and translates its accumulated experience into tangible outcomes. In summary, the dynamism, democratism, critical thinking, communicative openness, and creativity are all characteristic features of contemporary art. Indeed, contemporary art is the KRAM's very *raison d'être*. Accordingly, the museum's working methods correspond to the substance of its collection, which—paradoxically as it might seem—is both the cause and the result of the institution's development.



Fig. 15. The first donation to KRAM's collection since the start of the full-scale war: *Judith*, a polychrome sculpture by Lyubov Yakymenko (Kharkiv). Donated by the author. 2022



Fig. 16. Activities at KRAM_Art_Hub, Hall 4. 2022



Fig. 17. The façade of KRAM building, Khmelnytskyi. KRAM_Art_Hub banner. 2022



Fig. 18. Opening of the Shkoliar family exhibition (Khmelnytskyi). Hall 4. 2023



Fig. 19. The façade of KRAM building, Khmelnytskyi.
The banner of inter-museum cooperation projects. 2023



Fig. 20. A look at Oleksandr Hnylytskyi's retrospective exhibition Non/Random Pairs.
Hall 4. 2024

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