**Kyiv School of Economics**

# REPRESENTATION OF THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR IN A NON-THEMATIC CONTEMPORARY ART ARCHIVE

Thesis presented for the Master's degree in
Memory Studies and Public History

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# ABSTRACT

**The representation of war in visual art has long served as a powerful medium for expressing trauma, ideology, resistance, and remembrance. This research looks at how the Russo-Ukrainian war is represented in contemporary art available on digital platforms in the context of memory studies and public history. More than 700 annotated artworks created by artists from Ukraine and other countries are analysed using a system of tags grouped into key categories such as emotions, politics, history, etc. In addition to the general analysis, the reactions of the Ukrainian artists to the ongoing war are compared to the reactions of artists from other countries. The comparison reveals a number of differences between the artists' groups across the reaction categories, mostly in the emotions and politics, but also in other categories, and confirms certain assumptions, in particular regarding the usage of universal themes and global spreading of local cultural and political narratives. This work contributes to the attempts to understand how war is reflected in and ultimately memorised through art today and how this representation evolves over time, as well as to assess the differences between its representation by artists from war zones and safer locations.**



**Keywords: war, memory, contemporary art, digital art platforms, memorialisation, narratives, bundled messages**

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# INTRODUCTION

The representation of war in visual art has never been neutral. It has long served as a powerful medium for expressing trauma, ideology, resistance, and remembrance. With the advent of digital media, in particular digital art platforms, it has become more decentralised and democratic, often offering views and narratives that differ from the official ones or across regions. Comparing representations of war in artworks by artists from war zones and those from other parts of the world is important as it brings into focus questions of witnessing, authenticity, cultural form, aesthetic strategy, and the politics of memory.

The purpose of this study is to look at how the current Russo-Ukrainian war is represented in digital media, specifically SaatchiArt.com, which is the largest digital art platform hosting millions of artworks that are diverse in terms of themes, genres, and mediums. The analytical questions that are dealt with in this work are as follows: 1) How is the war represented on the platform that can be viewed as a non-thematic archive? and 2) Are there any differences in this representation between Ukrainian artists and artists coming from peaceful regions (and if yes, how can these differences be explained)? Therefore, in addition to general conclusions on the visual representation of the war on the platform, the artworks of Ukrainian artists and artists from other countries are compared across a number of categories based first and foremost on the textual messages that accompany them in the context of the bundled messages theory.

Although there is already a sizable scholarship on these matters, this is rather an exploratory research based on largely quantitative analysis. It mostly involves the analysis of the textual part of the bundles (artwork+annotation) with only limited references to the artistic content of the visual products. This is an important caveat and limitation; however, based on the bundled message theory, the texts are as, if not more, important for the viewers' perception than the artworks themselves so their analysis may lead to meaningful conclusions.

The thesis includes a brief overview of the evolution of visual representation of warfare in art with the associated literature, with a special focus on the current situation characterised by the proliferation of digital media and quick spreading of visual information and narratives. This overview is followed by an explanation of the data collection and cleaning process, then by the presentation of the results with a brief discussion and conclusions.

# BACKGROUND & LITERATURE OVERVIEW

## Representation of War in Art: Evolution

The representation of war in art has evolved during the history of humankind reflecting not only technological advancements, but also shifting aesthetic conventions and changing attitudes toward violence, heroism, suffering, and memory. Throughout its entire history, from cave paintings to contemporary art installations, the visual language of war has been a valuable tool for documentation, social commentary, propaganda, critique, and catharsis. The war depiction has never been neutral. As Margaret MacMillan writes, war has shaped societies and identities, and its representation in art helps make sense of both its horrors and its legacies (MacMillan, 2020).

In the earliest visual representations of war in prehistoric cave art found in the Levant, France, North Africa, and the Iberian Peninsula groups of people with arches or spears are fighting with each other. These scenes are not merely documentary but also symbolic, possibly associated with ritualistic functions or mythologized narratives of group conflict (Otto, Thrane, and Vandkilde, 2006). Here war is depicted as a communal, often heroic activity, which is closely linked to the survival and identity of early human groups.

In Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, depictions of war become more formalised and politically charged. A vivid example of this is the Stele of Naram-Sin (Akkadian, c. 2250 BCE) with a glorious king towering above his enemies demonstrating early uses of art as propaganda. In a similar vein, Egyptian battle scenes, e.g. in the temple of Ramesses II at Abu Simbel glorify the royal power and divine support. These artworks emphasize order over chaos, victory over barbarism—values central to early imperial ideologies (MacKenzie, 1998; Paret, 1996).

In the European Medieval art, such as illuminated manuscripts and tapestries, warfare is frequently depicted in religious contexts and martial images of crusades or significant battles are often infused with spiritual significance and presented as a fight between good and evil. The Bayeux Tapestry (c. 1070), which chronicles the Norman conquest of England, combines narrative continuity with stylized depictions of battle, creating a complex interplay between history and myth. It is not only a beautiful work of art, but also an incredible social document. It was also most likely made by women, perhaps the first female war artists in history (Brandon, 2007). Despite the brutal reality of medieval warfare, knights and chivalric ideals are often presented as moral benchmarks.

With the ensuing rise of individualism and humanism during the Renaissance, artists began to focus more on the human cost of war. While battles were still presented as heroic action, a new attention to emotion and anatomy from artists like Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and Albrecht Dürer made the depictions of war much more nuanced. Peter Paul Rubens' "Consequences of War" (1638–39), for example, illustrates the chaos and moral collapse unleashed by conflict, foreshadowing modern anxieties about war's destructiveness (Fransoni, 2024).

During the Napoleonic Wars and revolutions of the 19th century, the depictions of warfare started to acquire Romantic, but at the same time more realistic features. Picking up the tradition from Rubens and his early predecessors, artists like Franciso Goya dismissed the traditional glorification of armed conflicts. Goya's *The Disasters of War* (1810–20) series documents atrocities committed during the Peninsular War with an unsparing gaze. Goya's works stand as some of the earliest visual indictments of war's brutality devoid of heroic framing (Sontag, 2003).

At the same time, Romantic painters like Théodore Géricault and Eugène Delacroix dramatised the emotional side of warfare, while Realists like Édouard Detaille portrayed military scenes with documentary precision. War became both a metaphor for personal struggle and a site for empirical observation—two threads that would continue into modernity (Bourke, 2017).

A major turn in the representation of war occurred during and after World War I. Artists like Otto Dix, Paul Nash, and Käthe Kollwitz showed to the world the horrible reality of trench warfare and associated psychological traumas. Faced with the harrowing industrial-scale killing, they abandoned the pursuit of aesthetic beauty in favour of trying to tell the truth. In particular, Kollwitz's artworks, such as *The Mothers* (1922), challenge the romantic approach to war and symbolise the horrible loss, on both personal and collective levels (Charnow, 2020).

Unable to convey the chaos and horrors of the industrialised war, artists turned to the modernist toolkit, including abstraction, futurism, and surrealism. As Bazin argues, war and art become sites of ideological contestation, where representation is itself a political act: art makes war both visible and thinkable, allowing for a critical engagement with the passions it unleashes (Bazin, 2018).

The representability of violence became an even bigger challenge for artists during and after World War II, with the Holocaust and the atomic bomb. Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), which depicts in stark tones the aftermath of a bombing of the Basque town, remains one of the most powerful anti-war images in Western art. Its cubist disfigurements and monochrome palette express a universal scream against

violence without narrating any specific battle. “In Guernica, terror had a human face, but it was one detached not only from platitudes about science, but also from prior representations of warfare.”(Winter, 2017).

War imagery underwent further evolution during the Cold War reacting to the reality of mutually assured nuclear destruction and proxy wars. In the United States, this period was marked with the rising popularity of abstract expressionism, with more specific anti-war statements among realists like Nancy Spiro and Leon Golub, as well as pop artists like Andy Warhol who critiqued militarism through irony. At the same time, the Soviet Union was glorifying its military power through state-sponsored Socialist realism. In both contexts, the image of war was mediated by ideology and technology (Lindros and Möller, 2017).

The Vietnam War transformed the representation of war in a decisive and dramatic way. Live broadcasts during the "first television war," as it was often dubbed, and photographs from the war zone brought death and suffering into living rooms, challenging official narratives. Artists reacted with conceptual artwork, installations, and performances. However, repeated exposure to images of pain risks aestheticizing or anesthetizing their impact, raising ethical questions about the consumption of violence. As Susan Sontag notes, “the ultra-familiar, ultra-celebrated image — of an agony, of ruin — is an unavoidable feature of our camera-mediated knowledge of war” (Sontag, 2003).

The global war on terror announced after 9/11 brought about and inspired a new generation of artists who explored themes such as state violence, drone warfare surveillance, and displacement using, among other things, multimedia and performance. The works of artists such as Wafaa Bilal and Rabih Mroué operate within the post-truth aesthetic, in which images of war are simultaneously archived, manipulated, and contested (Cvoro and Messham-Muir, 2021).

In *The Politics of Artists in War Zones*, Cvoro, Messham-Muir, and Lukowska-Appel highlight how artists in Syria, Ukraine, and other conflict zones document war not as external observers but as embedded participants. These works challenge the binary of artist/soldier or civilian/combatant, collapsing distinctions between witness and actor (Cvoro, Messham-Muir, and Lukowska-Appel, 2023).

In recent decades, popular culture has played an increasingly significant role in shaping how war is imagined. From video games and films to graphic novels and social media, new media forms allow for immersive experiences of simulated conflict. The military itself engages with popular culture both to recruit and to

maintain public support, blurring lines between reality and representation (Ender, Reed, and Absalon, 2020).

Yet this gamification and commodification of war have been met with critical responses from artists who resist the spectacle. Ai Weiwei, for instance, has created installations using refugee life jackets, transforming objects of survival into haunting monuments. Such works speak to the human costs of geopolitical violence, pushing viewers beyond passive consumption toward ethical reflection (Jacob and Presiado, 2020).

## War in the Digital Age

The advent of digital media, the active development of online art platforms, and the proliferation of amateur, vernacular, and folk art forms led to profound changes in how war is represented in art. In addition to substantially expanding the circle of those who produce and disseminate images of war, these developments also dramatically transformed the visual aesthetics, politics, and audiences of war art. When it comes to the narrative part, digital platforms offer more fragmented, participatory, and sometimes contradictory visual experience in contrast to the more traditional modes of representation, such as history painting or photojournalism.

The blurring of the boundaries between professional and amateur image makers is one of the most significant shifts in recent decades. Digital media have facilitated a vernacular turn in war imagery, allowing everyday individuals including soldiers, civilians, and activists to circulate their own representations through blogs, Instagram, and YouTube (Cvoro and Messham-Muir, 2021). One of the defining features of this bottom-up approach is that it challenges the state or media monopoly on the visual representation of war, often presenting unfiltered images of violence, suffering, or resilience that contrast with the politically desirable or sanitised depictions and narratives that can be found in the mainstream journalism or official military products.

The rapid development of online platforms for the sale and exhibition of art is an important factor in this democratisation of image production. Digital marketplaces such as Saatchi Art, Artsy, or Etsy have enabled self-taught creators, as well as formally trained artists, to reach the global audience without any institutional mediation. These platforms have become an important outlet for artists from conflict zones or diasporic communities to share their war art that might never reach or be excluded from traditional galleries. Digital networks allow artists from Syria, Ukraine, Palestine, and beyond to bear witness from within and contest

dominant geopolitical narratives (Cvoro, Messham-Muir, and Lukowska-Appel, 2023). As a result of this decentralisation, the power of visual representation of war is shifting away from the traditional art centers and galleries towards more pluralistic forms of storytelling that often challenge the mainstream interpretations and narratives.

Another important development involves the medium and aesthetic changes in the digital context. To represent the sensory overload and algorithmic violence of modern warfare, contemporary artists increasingly turn to videos, GIFs, augmented reality (AR), and interactive installations. For instance, Harun Farocki's video installations, such as *Serious Games* (2009–2010), question the use of military simulation technologies and offer a critical view of how digital war is waged. The digitization of image production has introduced a post-representational regime, where images function less as windows onto reality and more as nodes in an operating system. As Hito Steyerl writes, "this establishes a new visual normality – a new subjectivity safely folded into surveillance technology and screen-based distraction" (Steyerl, 2011). And war art is no longer just about depicting violence in this system; it becomes part of the same visual reality with drone strikes, surveillance, and propaganda.

The modern representation of war is enriched not only by digital artworks, but also by the vernacular and folk responses. In particular, folk art often responded to conflicts with textile, woodwork, or mixed oral-visual products. With the advent of digital media, these practices are frequently digitised, remixed, and circulated in new ways finding a new and extended life online, as was the case with the embroidered war stories of Afghan women or the painted memories of Sudanese refugee children. Such production is often facilitated by NGOs or community art programs and ultimately contributes to the global archive of war testimony. Digital interfaces give these non-canonical voices a new platform for visibility and empathy, even as they risk being decontextualized or aestheticized (Drucker and McVarish, 2009).

In addition to giving voice and wider outreach to traditional communities, digital technologies have blurred the lines between art, documentation, and activism. The images which are stored in online repositories like the Syrian Archive or platforms such as Forensic Architecture and are often amateur-sourced, today can be used as evidence in legal and human rights contexts. Digital images of war are increasingly forensically activated, transformed from mere representations into tools of accountability (Schuppli, 2020). In other words, the act of representation becomes entangled in legal, political, and ethical networks.

But there are also certain downsides and challenges associated with this new ecology and economy of war representation. In particular, the abundance, quick spreading, and reproducibility of digital images can lead to misinformation, as well as emotional and aesthetic fatigue. Repeated exposure to violent imagery, especially when consumed through screens, can numb moral responsiveness rather than sharpen it (Sontag, 2003). We are thus faced with a paradox: although digital technologies expand the toolkit for representation and widen the access to it, they may at the same time dilute the gravity of its content through overexposure or algorithmic filtering.

The representation of war in the digital age has become more democratic, decentralised, participatory, and multimodal. However, contemporary artists are still faced with significant challenges in their attempts to depict war. Perhaps, the most important change is that today's artworks compel us to look much more critically not only at the human costs of conflict, but also at its political aspects. In doing so, they affirm the enduring relevance of art not only as a mirror to war but as a means of resistance against its normalization.

## Art as Memorial

In addition to being a visual commentary on conflict, the representation of war in art has long served as a form of memorialization, an act of remembering that transcends individual grief to engage collective memory. In a sense, war art functions as a site of memory (*lieu de mémoire*) according to Pierre Nora's theory, offering ways to process trauma, negotiate identity, and preserve narratives of violence and loss. The theoretical contributions of other authors such as Aleida Assmann and Walter Benjamin help us to better understand how artistic representations of war integrate in the cultural memory landscape transforming suffering into tangible signs.

Aleida Assmann distinguishes between *communicative memory*, which she defines as everyday and interpersonal recollection, and *cultural memory*, which is more formalised, institutionally anchored, and often mediated by symbols, rituals, and works of art. Cultural memory requires material carriers, such as texts, images, buildings, and monuments, and constitutes the cultural archive that transcends generations (Assmann, 2011). War art, from paintings and photography to installations and performance pieces, acts precisely as such an archive. On the one hand, it creates a snapshot of the reality freezing it in time; on the other hand, it invites reinterpretation across different time periods in human history.

A compelling example of this is Käthe Kollwitz's *Grieving Parents* (1932), a memorial sculpture installed at a German war cemetery in Vladslo. Although it was Inspired

by the loss of Kolwitz's son in World War I, the monument goes beyond personal mourning to reflect the collective trauma of the generation. The sculpture serves not only as a marker of individual grief but also as an artifact within a larger mnemonic regime, a media of memory that functions to embed war's consequences in public consciousness (Assmann, 2008).

It would be impossible to write about war art without remembering Walter Benjamin, particularly his notion of the "aura" and the Angel of History. In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1968a), Benjamin argues that modern technologies (e.g., photography, film) diminish the "aura" of art, the unique presence of a work in time and space. However, they also democratize access to representation. This plays a critical role in how wars are memorialised. For example, photographs of the wars in Vietnam, Iraq, or Syria received a wide circulation through the mass media actually shaping the collective memory and becoming part of the visual lexicon of conflict.

Benjamin also warns against the upbeat and politically sponsored trend of representing the past as a series of victories. He suggests taking an "allegorical gaze" at human history and seeing it through the lens of suffering. For the purposes of this study, war art that depicts civilian casualties, psychological trauma, or destroyed cities and landscapes is very much in line with this view and functions as countermemory to triumphalist narratives.

A vivid example of this is Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) that was created as a reaction to the cruel bombing of the Basque town. There are no heroes in this monochrome painting, only pure suffering and a frozen scream. It is not merely a reflection of historical reality; it is an interruption, a dialectical image that compels viewers to confront the ruins of progress and the cost of modern warfare.

How art is positioned in the public sphere is also important in the context of its relationship with memory. Memory sites including not only traditional monuments, but also museums, murals, performances, and media installations act as spaces where historical understanding and identity are negotiated. James E. Young's concept of the "counter-monument" refers to memorials that subvert traditional modes of heroism and permanence, often by being ephemeral, interactive, or deliberately unsettling (Young, 1993).

Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial (1982) is a well-known and compelling example of this approach. With its minimalist black granite walls bearing the names of the fallen soldiers, it offers rather a contemplative experience than a celebratory narrative. The polished granite reflects the visitor's faces incorporating them into

the memory and reinforcing the idea that remembrance is not passive reception but active engagement. As Assmann points out, cultural memory does not simply preserve the past but reconfigures it for contemporary understanding (Assmann, 2011).

This function of art becomes particularly important in postcolonial or formerly marginalized contexts. Artworks of this type, such as murals in Northern Ireland, often function outside of state-sanctioned narratives. These are expressions of what Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) calls "silences in history," where memory fills gaps left by archival or institutional omissions. War art, therefore, not only acts as a witness, but also corrects history.

As regards the witness function, the key paradox and challenge here is representing the unrepresentable. Visual culture at large was first faced with this challenge during and after WWI, but it became especially daunting in connection with the Holocaust. According to the famous claim of Theodor Adorno, "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric"; however, visual art continued to respond to trauma using abstraction, minimalism, and symbolic language. Images of suffering must not be consumed uncritically; instead, they should serve to disturb and provoke ethical reflection (Sontag, 2003).

The concept of "prosthetic memory" introduced by Alison Landsberg (2004) describes situations when individuals internalize memories of certain events without having firsthand experience of these events. This is particularly relevant for contemporary war art with its expanded range of mediums, from paintings and photographs to film, digital installations, and VR, which foster empathic identification. One important reservation that must be made in connection with this function of war art is that while it democratizes access to memory, this comes at the risk of aestheticizing violence or diluting historical specificity.

Artists working in contemporary conflict zones often resist this by embedding memory in localized, contextual forms. The post-conflict aesthetic is characterized by hybridity, irony, and resistance to closure. It challenges viewers to confront the ongoing nature of violence rather than relegating it to a concluded past (Cvoro and Messham-Muir, 2021).

One very important aspect to be understood in connection with the representation of war in art as memorialisation is that memory is not static but dynamic, negotiated across time and space. Therefore, war art functions as both archive and intervention. It can heal, but it can also preserve trauma; it may also question ideology and invite

reflection not only in regard to the events depicted, but also on how we remember and why.

In our age marked by hybrid wars, post-truth, and contested histories, war art remains a vital form of public memory. Regardless of its mediums, styles, and genres, it engages audiences in acts of remembrance, not only emotional, but also very often political. Thus, in addition to preserving the past, it is also about the future as it shapes our understanding of violence, loss, and humanity.

## Bundled Messages in Art

Not only war art itself, but also its presentation is rarely neutral. Today artworks displayed in museums and galleries, especially digital ones, are often accompanied by textual materials that frame interpretation and can be in the form of titles, wall labels, curatorial essays, catalogue entries, and digital interfaces. Scholars call these combinations of visual and verbal codes "bundled messages" as the viewer's perception by both the image and the text. The textual elements in such bundles play a critical role in constructing meaning, shaping emotional response, and embedding the work in historical, political, or aesthetic discourses.

As W. J. T. Mitchell argues in *Picture Theory*, the relationship between word and image is not hierarchical but dialogic, each influencing and destabilizing the other (Mitchell, 1994). This interdependence challenges the formalist view that artworks possess an intrinsic or "pure" meaning. In galleries and catalogues, such textual supplements often serve as some sort of interpretive scaffolding guiding not only the viewers' attention and gaze, but also and very often their emotional and political reactions. As a result of such mediated experience, the viewers' perception is aligned with institutional or curatorial narratives.

An attempt to explain this dynamic was made by Roland Barthes who proposed a distinction between the *studium* and the *punctum* in photography. While *studium* refers to the cultural, historical context that the viewer "reads" in an image, *punctum* is the affective detail that "wounds" the viewer personally (Barthes, 1981). Textual materials typically appeal to the *studium*, offering context that can guide the viewer toward a certain reading. However, they can also dull the *punctum* by overdetermining meaning and leaving less room for subjective interpretation. The bundled message thus involves a negotiation: it expands cognitive understanding while potentially constraining emotional spontaneity.

There is sizable scholarship of how labels and catalogues function in an environment with specific institutional politics. In particular, Carol Duncan explains

in *Civilizing Rituals* how museum narratives can legitimize particular ideologies under the guise of neutral presentation. According to her theory, exhibitions construct visitors as certain kinds of subjects through their organization of space and information (Duncan, 1995). The textual parts of the bundled messages are thus included in this ideological machinery: they do not simply inform but perform cultural authority.

Curators often exploit this function deliberately. When it comes to politically engaged art, the textual context is often indispensable. A compelling example of this is Alfredo Jaar's *The Rwanda Project* (1994–2000) created in response to the Rwandan Genocide. Jaar frequently uses text in this body of work to underscore the limits of visual representation in the face of atrocity. By doing this, he forces the viewer to confront not only the absence of images but also their failure to signify adequately. Therefore, the text here is not merely informative but becomes part of the conceptual structure of the artwork itself.

The role of bundled messages is also quite important in exhibition catalogues, where the texts added to the artwork can deepen understanding by offering critical, historical, or theoretical clarifications and implications that may not be immediately legible in the artwork itself. However, catalogues also risk subordinating the artwork to the discursive authority of the text (Bal, 1996). The essayist or curator becomes a mediator, translating the image into critical language. This act of translation can enrich interpretation but may also foreclose alternate readings.

As regards the viewers' reaction to bundled messages, it can be varied. Research in reception studies, such as the work of George Hein and Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, suggests that prior knowledge, social background, and emotional readiness all influence how textual and visual materials are processed together (Hein, 1998; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). The explanatory texts that accompany artworks help some viewers to better understand the content when it is opaque or unfamiliar. For others, they can feel prescriptive or even intrusive. Therefore, the ultimate effectiveness of a bundled message depends not so much on its composition as on its adaptability to diverse audiences.

In our today's digital world with the proliferation of digital exhibitions and virtual galleries, such bundled messages have acquired an even higher importance. Interactive media allows viewers to toggle between images and metadata, curatorial commentary, or artist interviews. With this increase in the volume and accessibility of interpretive content, the viewer has transformed from a passive observer into an active navigator. This shift represents a fundamental reconfiguration of visual

culture in the digital age, where meaning emerges through database logic rather than linear narration (Manovich, 2001).

Thus, the bundling of visual art with textual framing is a meaning-making practice central to how artworks are encountered, understood, and remembered.

## SaatchiArt.com as a Historical Archive

The advent and proliferation of digital art platforms in recent decades has significantly transformed how war is represented, shared, and remembered. Even though most of these platforms are non-thematic and accept artworks of various styles, themes, and genres, many of them have sizable collections of war art on display and therefore can be viewed not only as commercial venues, but also as valuable historical archives of contemporary visual memory of wars and conflict. One of the most prominent platforms of this kind is SaatchiArt.com that provides access to a vast range of artworks by emerging and established artists worldwide and to a certain extent functions as a repository of vernacular memory practices, non-institutional war narratives, and global responses to conflict. Through its archive-like structure, keyword tagging, artist self-curation, and accessible metadata, SaatchiArt.com allows researchers to trace evolving iconographies of war, trauma, resistance, and remembrance.

In order to view SaatchiArt.com as an archive, it would be necessary to revisit what constitutes an archive in the digital era. Archives are never neutral repositories; they are shaped by the politics of memory, the structures of authority that determine what is preserved and how it is accessed (Derrida, 1996). In this context, digital art platforms like SaatchiArt.com challenge the traditional paradigm of archival authority since they do not involve institutional gatekeepers and empower artists to upload and tag their works, often including personal statements that contextualize the meaning and motivation behind their art. Such decentralization makes them particularly suited for analyzing grassroots memorialization, including by artists from war zones.

A reference to Aleida Assmann's framework of storage or stored memory (the accumulation of information) and functional memory (the information actively in use by a society) (Assmann, 2011) would be warranted here. SaatchiArt.com contains both. It stores thousands of artworks tagged with keywords such as "war," "conflict," "veteran," "PTSD," "genocide," or "memorial," making it a rich repository for scholars. At the same time, it enables audiences throughout the world to browse, collect, and comment on these artworks, thus activating the functional memory and shaping how current generations encounter and process the visual memory of war.

Traditional museums and galleries often reproduce dominant or state-centered narratives about war. In contrast, SaatchiArt.com gives visibility to deeply personal accounts of conflict that may challenge the officially promoted versions of truth. Scholars such as Barbie Zelizer have emphasized the importance of vernacular memory in shaping public understanding of conflict, particularly through non-elite, community-based, or affective forms of representation (Zelizer, 1998). SaatchiArt.com functions as a venue for these narratives to be visualized and preserved.

Artists from conflict and post-conflict regions, such as Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan or Ukraine, upload works documenting personal loss, destruction, the struggles of refugee life, or symbolic gestures of healing. Since they also include their textual statements with keywords, it enables researchers to track the recurrent and emerging themes in the visual memory of war, from martyrdom and nostalgia to trauma and resilience. Such platforms support a growing ecosystem of non-institutional war art, where new kinds of witnessing and storytelling become possible outside the confines of national art histories or elite gallery circuits (Cvoro and Messham-Muir, 2021).

One of the most valuable features of SaatchiArt.com for historical research is its searchable metadata architecture. In particular, it enables scholars of war and memory to trace certain visual tropes across various, in particular geographical contexts, and run comparative analysis across regions, ideologies, and artistic languages.

Digital archives operate under a database logic, where meaning is constructed through combinations and recombinations of items rather than through linear narratives (Manovich, 2001). SaatchiArt.com is an example of such logic. Each artwork displayed on the website exists both as a discrete aesthetic object and as a node within a network of themes and tags. By treating the site as a living digital archive, one can study not only the visual representation of war, but also how users and algorithms organize and retrieve memory through the metadata system.

Platforms like SaatchiArt.com are also valuable for memory studies due to their potential to generate affective encounters with conflict. And this is where Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory, or intergenerational transmission of trauma through images and stories (Hirsch, 2012), comes into play. Many war-related artworks on the platform are produced by artists who do not have any firsthand experience of war but acquire its memory through mass media, social networks, or oral stories told by survivors. Although not inspired by the direct contact with war,

such artworks often carry a strong emotional charge that stimulates empathy and reflection.

The accessibility of the platform also facilitates public history practices. People engage deeply with history through personal and emotional connections, often preferring sources that are "authentic" or "felt" (Rosenzweig and Thelen, 1998). In this context, platforms like SaatchiArt.com offer a participatory form of war memorialization since viewers can not only observe, but also purchase and display the artworks in their own spaces. Although such commodification may raise certain ethical questions, it illustrates how war memory becomes integrated into everyday life, homes, and digital culture.

Despite their archival value, digital art platforms have certain limitations. Since they are commercial in nature, market forces influence which artworks gain visibility. The digital art world often favors works that align with consumer tastes or platform aesthetics, potentially diluting the political sharpness of war art (Bishop, 2012). In addition, the lack of curatorial selection may make it difficult to assess the historical accuracy or context of some artworks.

However, the evidentiary power of images in the digital age lies not in their institutional validation but in their capacity to circulate, accumulate, and provoke new modes of seeing (Schuppli, 2020). Platforms like SaatchiArt.com contribute to such circulation by offering a decentralized, user-driven archive where war is not only represented but memorialized in real time through visual, textual, and economic interactions. By expanding the boundaries of archival practice, it contributes to a richer, more pluralistic visual culture of war memory that complements, challenges, and expands upon traditional institutional archives.

**Comparing War Art from Conflict and Peaceful Zones**

In the age of digital technologies and global interconnectedness, it has become especially interesting and important to analyse how war is represented by artists from war zones compared to artwork produced by those in safer locations and in different political contexts. Such comparative approach allows to reveal not only differences in aesthetic strategies and emotional registers, but also critical tensions in authority, authenticity, empathy, and memory politics. Examining these discrepancies and overlaps enhances our understanding of how war is experienced, mediated, and memorialized across cultural and spatial boundaries.

Artists from conflict zones often draw on direct and embodied experiences of violence, displacement, and loss. Quite frequently their artwork functions as a form

of testimony or witnessing that challenges official narratives and archives. The artist can be positioned as a victim, survivor, observer, or dissenter, and this positionality shapes not only the content, but also the ethical resonance of their work. For example, works by Syrian artists such as Tammam Azzam or Khaled Akil combine the aesthetics of ruin with political urgency, whereas representations by Western artists often approach the same war through abstraction, satire, or distant empathy.

Moreover, art from war zones can bear what Marianne Hirsch (2012) calls "indexicality"— visual traces of personal or collective suffering embedded in material form. Such indexicality may be absent or reconfigured in art produced elsewhere. Comparing these artistic expressions allows scholars and viewers alike to approach the crucial questions such as who has the right to represent war, under what conditions, and with what cultural and emotional legitimacy.

The comparison between representations of war by artists from within and outside conflict zones also helps to discover how memory is shaped by temporal and spatial distance. Again, Aleida Assmann's distinction between *communicative memory* (based on lived experience) and *cultural memory* (mediated, institutionalized, or imagined recollections) is crucial here (Assmann, 2011). The key difference here is that artists who are actually living through war often engage in communicative memory and encode the immediate reality into their work, while artists in safer regions tend to reflect cultural memory shaped by media.

However, there is nothing bad in the latter fact as both groups complement each other in their representation of war. Artists from safer zones, while not being very much engaged in the workings of communicative memory, may still contribute to global solidarity or engage in critical reflection on their own nation's stance or complicity in war. The aestheticization of violence from afar can serve as either a form of complicity or resistance, depending on how artists navigate ethical representation and audience engagement (Jacob and Presiado, 2020).

The comparison of artists from different regions also allows to examine how aesthetic vocabularies differ according to context, media access, and cultural traditions. Artists from conflict zones often resort to hybrid forms combining folk art, documentary realism, and conceptual practices to navigate censorship, trauma, or resource scarcity (Cvoro and Messham-Muir, 2021). By contrast, artists from countries and regions may have a greater access to digital tools or archival resources, or more possibilities to create large-scale installations, which may influence how they frame war in relation to time, memory, and audience.

In some regions, folklore, symbolism, and religious iconography may be more prevalent than in others, and these elements often encode layers of historical meaning not immediately legible to outside viewers. Indigenous and vernacular traditions deeply influence how violence and resistance are visually articulated, especially in societies where oral or symbolic communication prevails (Hill, 2015). Comparative analysis allows to map these cultural specificities, as well as shared symbols like the soldiers in action, ruins, or fire, which function as transnational idioms of suffering and resilience.

Digital platforms like SaatchiArt.com or Instagram enable artists from both war zones and peaceful regions to share, circulate, and respond to each other's work. This global visibility blurs traditional hierarchies between center and periphery, allowing for new forms of vernacular memory in the form of personal, grassroots commemorations that challenge institutional narratives (Zelizer, 1998; Cvoro, Messham-Muir, and Lukowska-Appel, 2023). Comparing artworks from these platforms helps to understand how digital tools democratize memory-making, while also revealing disparities in reception, visibility, and translation. For instance, an emotional painting about war by an Afghan artist might receive much less engagement compared to a Western photographer's stylized image of conflict. Such asymmetries highlight global imbalances in cultural capital and media literacy.

Cross-regional comparisons also allow us to see the global aspects of memory-making through artists' response to shared themes such as trauma, mourning, and hope. Memory travels through images and metaphors that are transcultural and multilingual, allowing global publics to mourn, witness, and commemorate across borders (Winter, 2017). Therefore, it is important to compare artworks with a view to analysing not only differences between them, but also the dialogue about suffering, complicity, and historical responsibility, which they generate.

There is also an important pedagogical aspect in the comparative approach to war art. Who are the intended audiences of war art created in different contexts? How do these audiences interpret images of suffering, and what kind of conclusions do they draw? Today, popular culture and art often mediate war for civilian publics, shaping perceptions of heroism, sacrifice, and the "Other" (Ender et al., 2020). The juxtapositioning of artworks from different contexts can expose viewers to multiple perspectives, some of which may challenge their national narratives or personal assumptions.

Lastly, digital art platforms and the comparison of artworks displayed by them support the decolonisation of war memory, a goal that is becoming increasingly

central to the global art history. By giving voice to historically marginalised or war-torn communities, such platforms counteract Eurocentric or imperialist biases that have long shaped the art-historical canon. However, such comparative analyses must be done critically, not as an exoticisation of suffering, but as a relational inquiry into how wars affect the world unevenly yet interdependently (Bishop, 2012).

# METHODOLOGY

Saatchi Art is a prominent online art gallery established in 2006 and No.1 website for selling art according to various ratings.[1] Saatchi Art has over 1 million artworks from 90,000 artists and enjoys millions of visits each month, making it one of the best websites to sell art.

The art products are easily searchable by genre, style, theme, etc., which makes this website very convenient for the type of research.

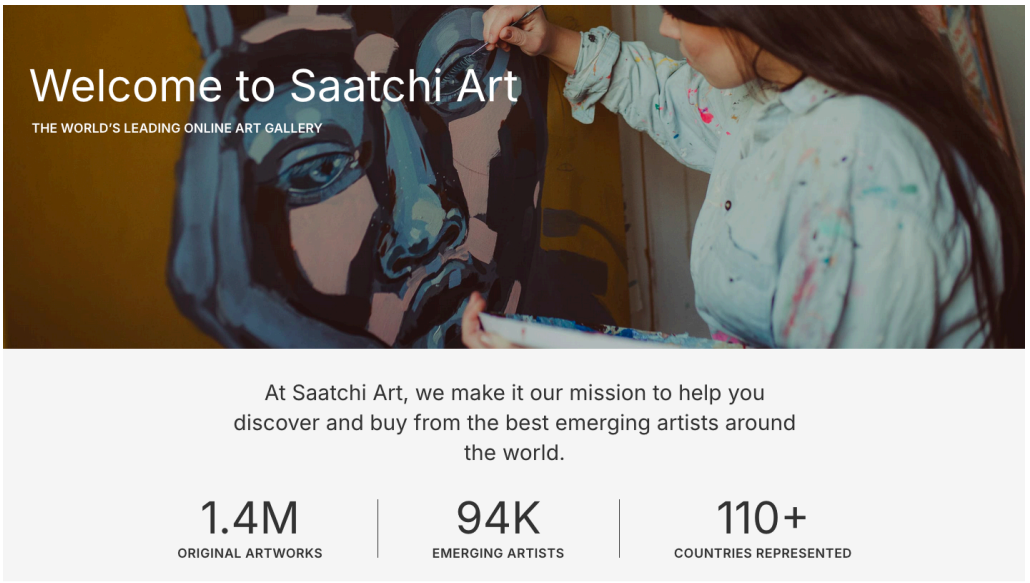



**Figure 1.** SaatchiArt welcome page with statistics

The platform requires artists to add textual description to their artworks thus providing for a deeper analysis of representation of wars and conflicts in the context of the bundled messages theory explained in the previous section

[1] https://www.webfx.com/blog/web-design/websites-for-selling-art/

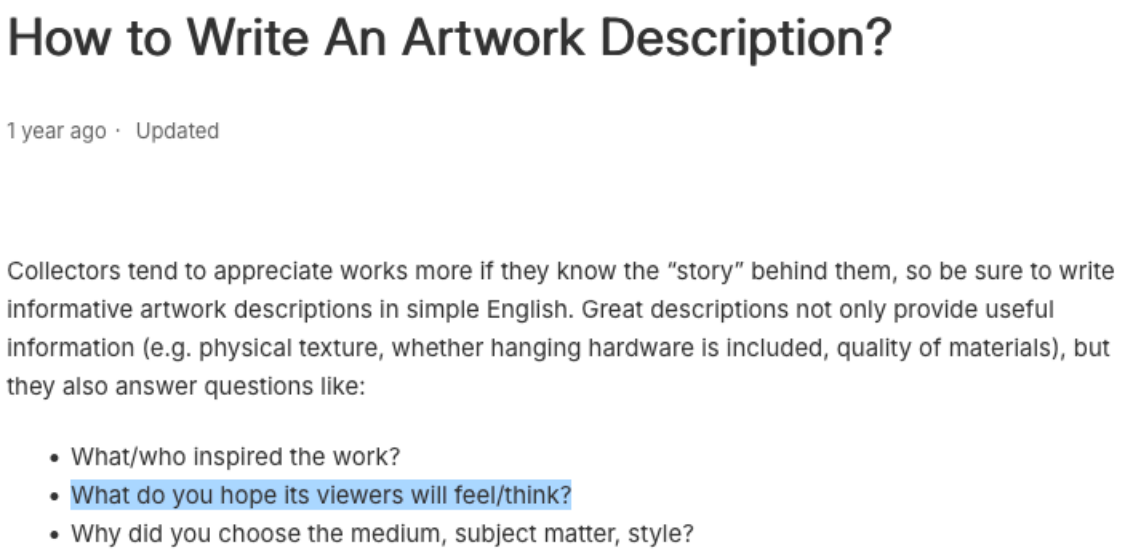
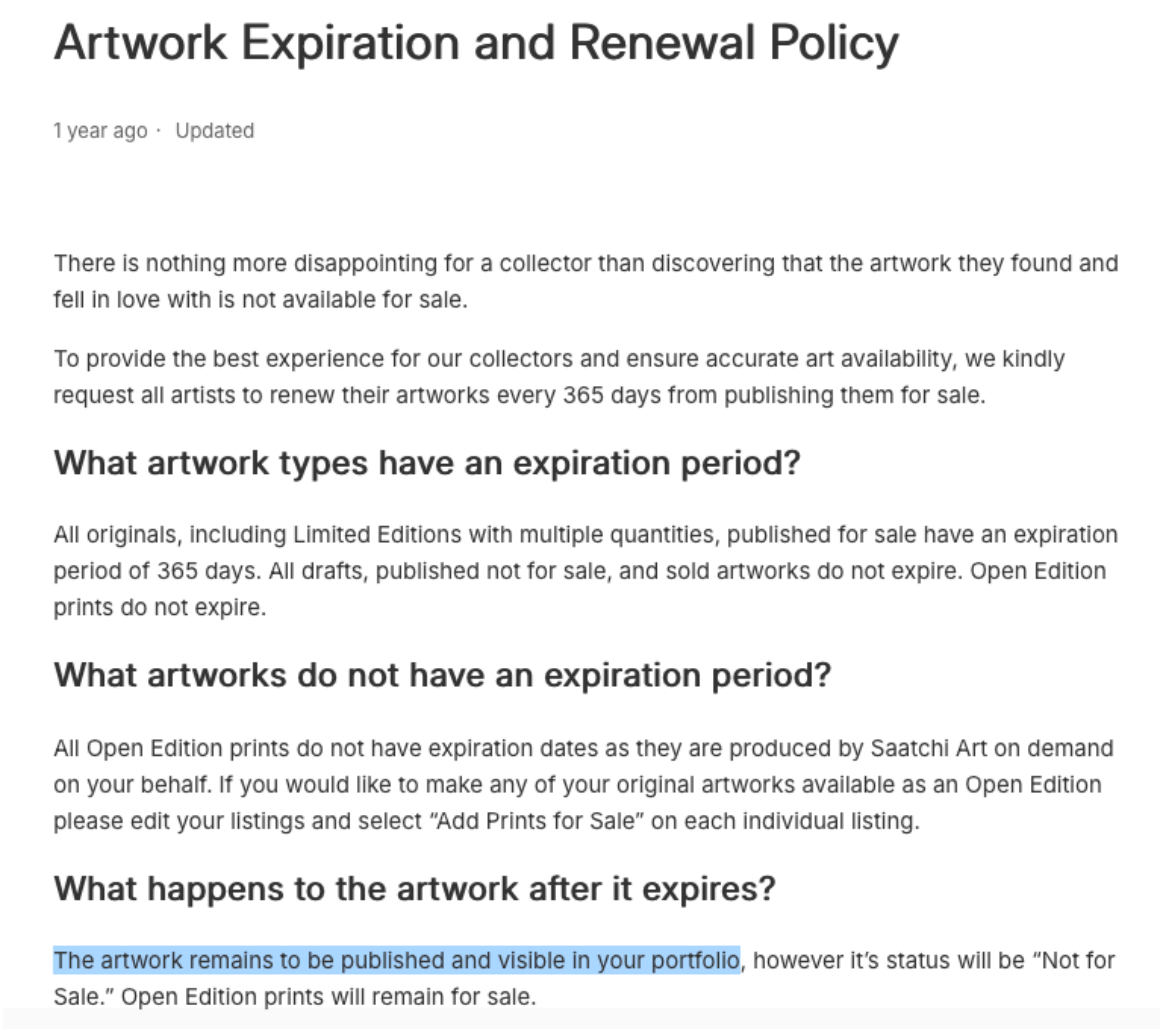



**Figure 2.** Requirements to artwork descriptions

In addition, the artworks remain on the platform indefinitely, even after they are sold (Figure 3), which effectively turns SaatchiArt into a historical archive for our purposes as explained in more detail in the previous section.



# Artwork Expiration and Renewal Policy

1 year ago · Updated

There is nothing more disappointing for a collector than discovering that the artwork they found and fell in love with is not available for sale.

To provide the best experience for our collectors and ensure accurate art availability, we kindly request all artists to renew their artworks every 365 days from publishing them for sale.

## What artwork types have an expiration period?

All originals, including Limited Editions with multiple quantities, published for sale have an expiration period of 365 days. All drafts, published not for sale, and sold artworks do not expire. Open Edition prints do not expire.

## What artworks do not have an expiration period?

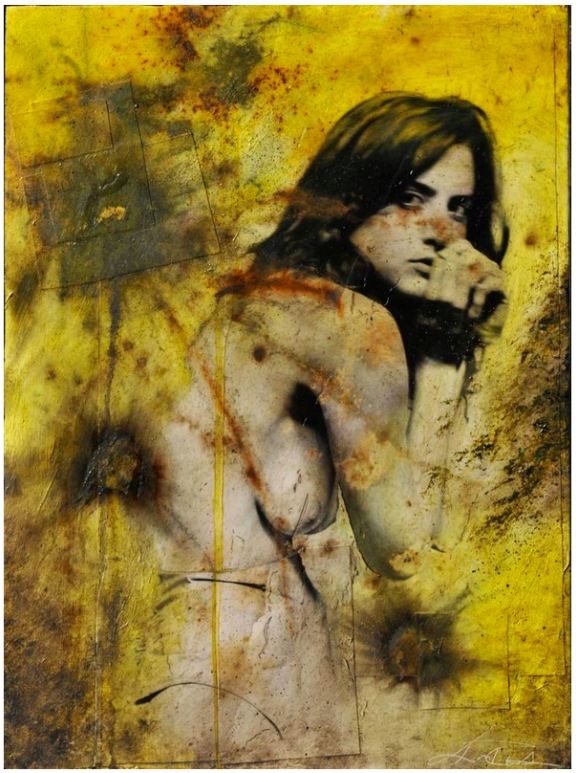
All Open Edition prints do not have expiration dates as they are produced by Saatchi Art on demand on your behalf. If you would like to make any of your original artworks available as an Open Edition please edit your listings and select "Add Prints for Sale" on each individual listing.

## What happens to the artwork after it expires?

The artwork remains to be published and visible in your portfolio, however it's status will be "Not for Sale." Open Edition prints will remain for sale.

**Figure 3.** Artwork expiration policy

As mentioned above, artwork pages contain not only artworks themselves and information about the artist, price, shipping, etc., but also textual descriptions which are displayed together with the images and shape the viewers' perception and understanding.



ORIGINAL PRINTS

**DONBAS Artwork**

Kevin Rolly

United States

Mixed Media, Acrylic on Wood

Size: 45.7 W x 61 H x 5.1 D cm

Ships in a Box

$2,060 Add to Cart

Make an Offer

✔ Shipping included

✔ 14-day satisfaction guarantee

★★★★★ Trustpilot Score

♡ 7 58 Views

See More Like This

**ABOUT THE ARTWORK**

From the new series 'The Spirit of Ukraine' Being over half Ukrainian and Russian I take the war in Ukraine personally. In this continuing series I hope to capture the both the strength and vulnerability of the Ukrainian people. And the toll of war. The textures were created by igniting gunpowder on the surface of the panel and burning into the print itself. It's an uncontrollable process and the explosion chooses its own direction. Just like war itself.

**DETAILS AND DIMENSIONS**

| | |
|---|---|
| Mixed Media: | Acrylic on Wood |
| Original: | One-of-a-kind Artwork |
| Size: | 45.7 W x 61 H x 5.1 D cm |

**SHIPPING AND RETURNS**

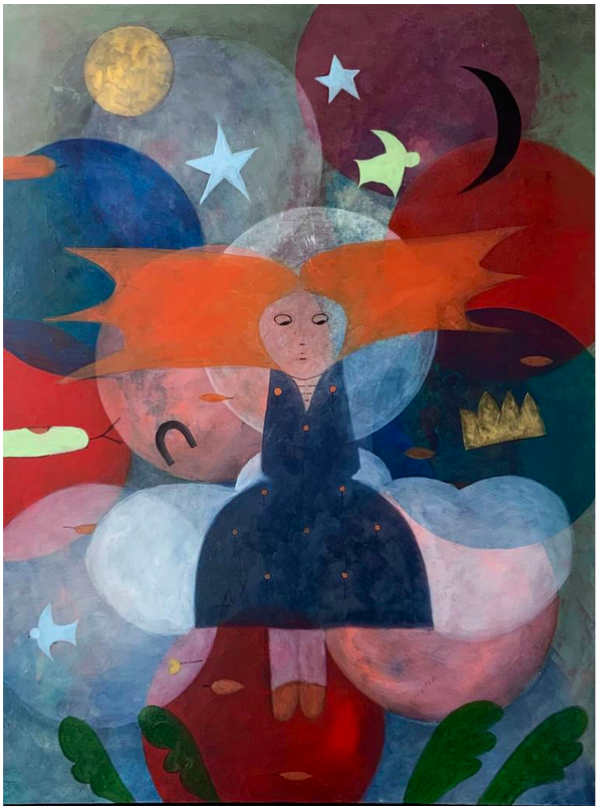
| | |
|---|---|
| Delivery Time: | Typically 5-7 business days for domestic shipments, 10-14 business days for international shipments. |
| Returns: | 14-day return policy. Visit our help section for more information. |
| Delivery Cost: | Shipping is included. |

Kevin Rolly

United States

View Profile

**Figure 4.** Example of artwork from SaatchiArt.com



ORIGINAL | PRINTS

**Children in Ukraine 2022 Painting**

Eva Hoffmann

Germany

Painting, Oil on Canvas

Size: 73.7 W x 99.1 H x 2.5 D cm

Ships in a Box

$1,160 Add to Cart

Make an Offer

✔ Shipping included

✔ 14-day satisfaction guarantee

★★★★★ Trustpilot Score

♡ 0 27 Views

Artist Recognition

Artist featured in a collection

See More Like This

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ABOUT THE ARTWORK | War in the Ukraine.....children are loosing home, friends, have to immigrate to other countries. Difficult, terrible time | |
| DETAILS AND DIMENSIONS | Painting: | Oil on Canvas |
| | Original: | One-of-a-kind Artwork |
| | Size: | 73.7 W x 99.1 H x 2.5 D cm |
| SHIPPING AND RETURNS | Delivery Time: | Typically 5-7 business days for domestic shipments, 10-14 business days for international shipments. |
| | Returns: | 14-day return policy. Visit our help section for more information. |
| | Delivery Cost: | Shipping is included. |

Eva Hoffmann

Germany

View Profile

**Figure 5.** Example of artwork from SaatchiArt.com

It is these textual parts that are in the centre of our analysis as they contain clear keywords that can be used for the comparison.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sparrows Have Arrived | Paintings | Anastasiia Grygorieva | Ukraine | The idea to create a painting titled "Sparrows Have Arrived" came to me before the war. I was convinced that, despite the tension between Ukraine and russia, no one would dare to commit such a horror as invading another country with war. Back then, in January-February 2022, I planned to create an artwork inspired by the title of famous russian painting "The Rooks Have Returned," thinking it would be a lighthearted, humorous response to the unfolding events. However, after the war began, it became impossible to continue working—because of the shelling and all the terror that drains the peace from the heart. Yet, after a year and a half of the full-scale invasion, in moments of silence and hope, I gradually finished the painting. For me, this painting represents a universe where there is no war, where peace and harmony reign. It is my symbol of hope that soon there will be no war in our reality either. Ironically, I gave it a new title: "Sparrows Have Arrived, and the Rooks Are Going... You Know Where," as a reminder of those we are no longer waiting for |
| War in Ukraine. | Paintings | Israel Da Costa | Brazil | I painted this picture based on the US-NATO-sponsored massacre in Ukraine. I hope that humanity becomes aware of the horror and destruction of war. I want peace and understanding to reign on the planet! |

**Figure 6.** Extraction of keywords from artists' statements - examples

Only in some (very few) cases the artist's description is not specific enough to put it into a specific reaction category. A more general category "Reaction to an event" is used for such cases.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  War Paintings, 110 W x 70 H x 1.8 D cm Gerd Kassühlke $670 Germany | War | Gerd Kassühlke | I saw a photograph that touched me, so I painted this one | Reaction to an event |

**Figure 7.** Categorisation of less specific statements

In total, 39 key reaction categories are identified based on the artist's statements. Some of them (e.g. Destruction) are more nuanced than others, while some (e.g. Anti-colonial) are mentioned explicitly very rarely, but in fact may include, or overlap with, other categories. These reaction categories are used for the general and comparative analyses presented below based on the frequencies of their appearance in the artists' statements.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Anti-corruption | Disruption of civilian life | Peace | Suffering |
| Charity | Fear | Politics | Sunflowers |
| Children suffering | Freedom | Power of art | Support |
| Courage | Genocide | Reaction to an event | Truth |
| Darkness | Glory | Recording of war | Victory |
| Death | Grief | Reference to past art | Woman metaphor |
| Destruction | History | Reference to past events | Women in war - soldiers |
| Destruction of cities | Hope | Refugee experience | Religion |
| Destruction of lives | Lies | Resilience | World's passivity |
| Destruction of nature | Memory | Spring | |

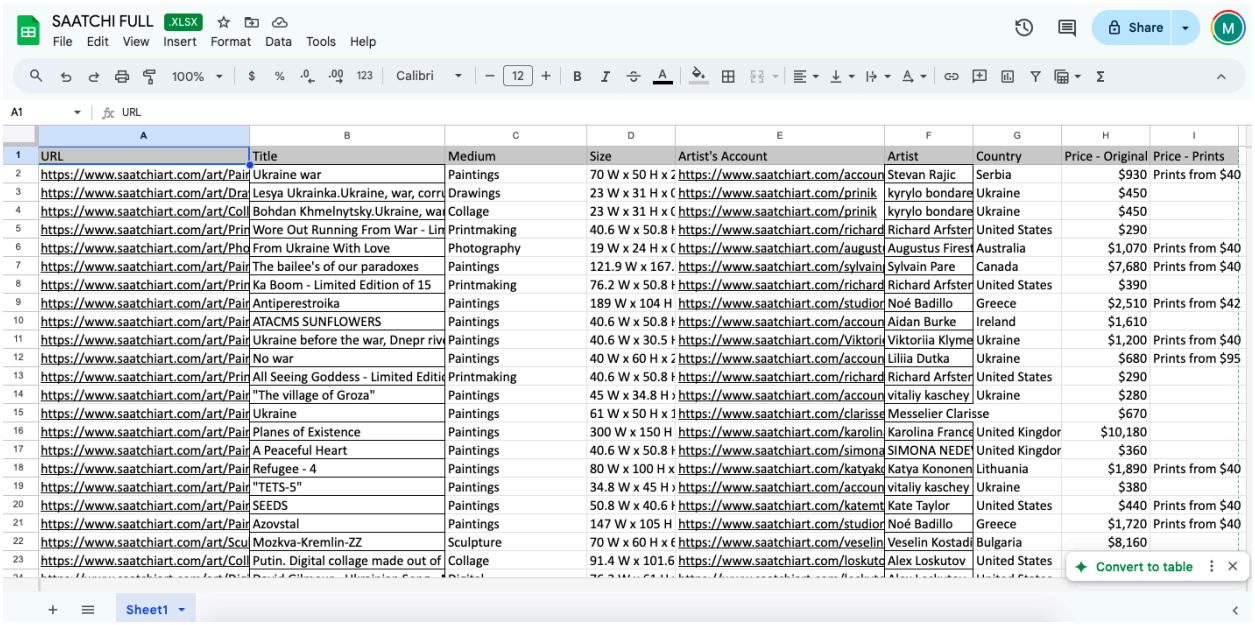
**Figure 8.** Categories based on the extracted keywords

For the purpose of this analysis, some of the tags are grouped into larger categories, the most important of which are Emotions and Politics as they collect the largest number of responses. The Emotions category includes the following reactions: children suffering, courage, darkness, death, destruction, disruption of civilian life, fear, grief, hope, refugee experience, resilience, spring, suffering, and support. The Politics category includes the following reactions: genocide, glory, freedom, lies, peace, politics, truth, victory, world's passivity.

Although this distribution is useful for the purposes of the analysis, it is quite provisional as some tags may fall into different categories at the same time or even be left to exist as separate categories. A large number of artists' statements and artworks (in particular those asserting Ukrainian identity) may also be viewed as anti-colonial even though this term itself is mentioned expressly in just one statement.

# RESULTS

The search brought a total of 891 artworks, which were collected in one spreadsheet with full information about each artwork.



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A1 URL

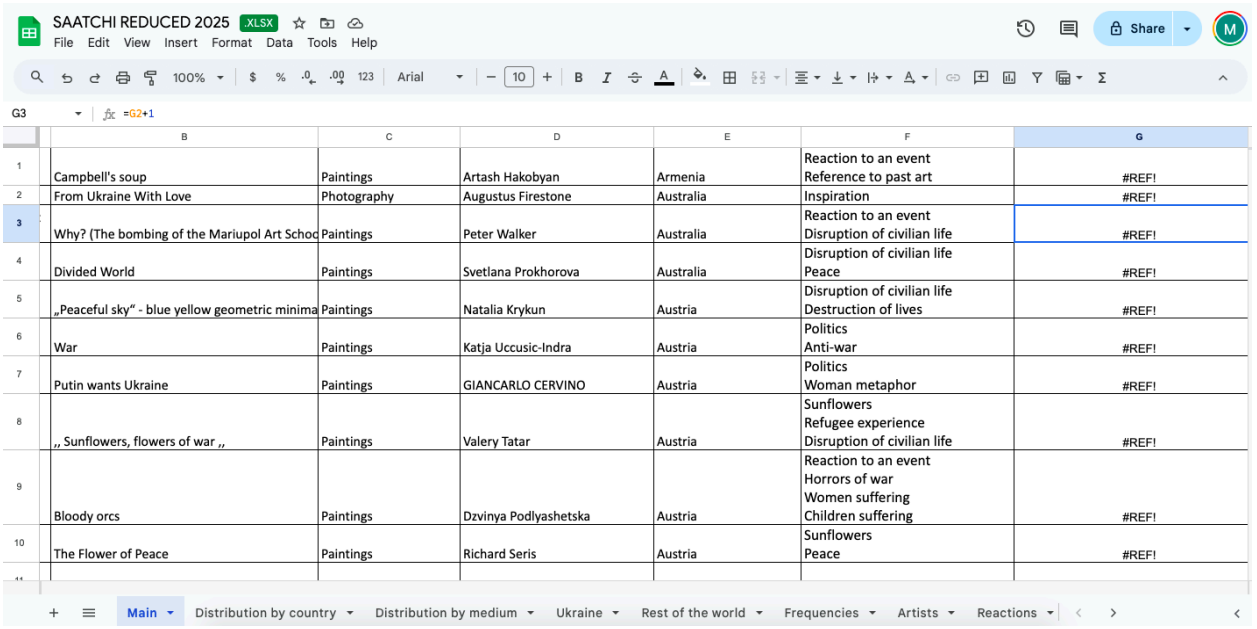
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | URL | Title | Medium | Size | Artist's Account | Artist | Country | Price - Original | Price - Prints |
| 2 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Pair | Ukraine war | Paintings | 70 W x 50 H x 2 | https://www.saatchiart.com/accoun | Stevan Rajic | Serbia | $930 | Prints from $40 |
| 3 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Dra | Lesya Ukrainka.Ukraine, war, corru | Drawings | 23 W x 31 H x ( | https://www.saatchiart.com/prinik | kyrylo bondare | Ukraine | $450 | |
| 4 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Coll | Bohdan Khmelnytsky.Ukraine, wa | Collage | 23 W x 31 H x ( | https://www.saatchiart.com/prinik | kyrylo bondare | Ukraine | $450 | |
| 5 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Prir | Wore Out Running From War - Lir | Printmaking | 40.6 W x 50.8 H | https://www.saatchiart.com/richard | Richard Arfster | United States | $290 | |
| 6 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Pho | From Ukraine With Love | Photography | 19 W x 24 H x ( | https://www.saatchiart.com/august | Augustus Firest | Australia | $1,070 | Prints from $40 |
| 7 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Pair | The bailee's of our paradoxes | Paintings | 121.9 W x 167. | https://www.saatchiart.com/sylvain | Sylvain Pare | Canada | $7,680 | Prints from $40 |
| 8 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Prir | Ka Boom - Limited Edition of 15 | Printmaking | 76.2 W x 50.8 H | https://www.saatchiart.com/richard | Richard Arfster | United States | $390 | |
| 9 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Pair | Antiperestroika | Paintings | 189 W x 104 H | https://www.saatchiart.com/studior | Noé Badillo | Greece | $2,510 | Prints from $42 |
| 10 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Pair | ATACMS SUNFLOWERS | Paintings | 40.6 W x 50.8 H | https://www.saatchiart.com/accoun | Aidan Burke | Ireland | $1,610 | |
| 11 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Pair | Ukraine before the war, Dnepr riv | Paintings | 40.6 W x 30.5 H | https://www.saatchiart.com/Viktori | Viktoriia Klyme | Ukraine | $1,200 | Prints from $40 |
| 12 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Pair | No war | Paintings | 40 W x 60 H x 2 | https://www.saatchiart.com/accoun | Liliia Dutka | Ukraine | $680 | Prints from $95 |
| 13 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Prir | All Seeing Goddess - Limited Editi | Printmaking | 40.6 W x 50.8 H | https://www.saatchiart.com/richard | Richard Arfster | United States | $290 | |
| 14 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Pair | "The village of Groza" | Paintings | 45 W x 34.8 H x | https://www.saatchiart.com/accoun | vitaliy kaschey | Ukraine | $280 | |
| 15 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Pair | Ukraine | Paintings | 61 W x 50 H x 1 | https://www.saatchiart.com/clarisse | Messelier Clarisse | | $670 | |
| 16 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Pair | Planes of Existence | Paintings | 300 W x 150 H | https://www.saatchiart.com/karolin | Karolina France | United Kingdor | $10,180 | |
| 17 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Pair | A Peaceful Heart | Paintings | 40.6 W x 50.8 H | https://www.saatchiart.com/simona | SIMONA NEDE | United Kingdor | $360 | |
| 18 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Pair | Refugee - 4 | Paintings | 80 W x 100 H x | https://www.saatchiart.com/katyako | Katya Kononen | Lithuania | $1,890 | Prints from $40 |
| 19 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Pair | "TETS-5" | Paintings | 34.8 W x 45 H x | https://www.saatchiart.com/accoun | vitaliy kaschey | Ukraine | $380 | |
| 20 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Pair | SEEDS | Paintings | 50.8 W x 40.6 H | https://www.saatchiart.com/katemt | Kate Taylor | United States | $440 | Prints from $40 |
| 21 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Pair | Azovstal | Paintings | 147 W x 105 H | https://www.saatchiart.com/studior | Noé Badillo | Greece | $1,720 | Prints from $40 |
| 22 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Scu | Mozkva-Kremlin-ZZ | Sculpture | 70 W x 60 H x 6 | https://www.saatchiart.com/veselin | Veselin Kostadi | Bulgaria | $8,160 | |
| 23 | https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Coll | Putin. Digital collage made out of | Collage | 91.4 W x 101.6 | https://www.saatchiart.com/loskuto | Alex Loskutov | United States | | |

Convert to table

Sheet1

**Figure 9.** Raw artwork data

After a visual verification, some artworks were deleted from the dataset as not relevant to the subject (i.e. had nothing to do with the Russo-Ukrainian war). Most likely, they were included in the list retrieved by the search due to glitches in the search algorithm. The columns which are not relevant to the purpose of the analysis were also deleted. Following the clean-up, the spreadsheet contained 704 artworks with the metadata including the title, artist, country, medium and artists' descriptions.



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G3 =G2+1

| | B | C | D | E | F | G |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Campbell's soup | Paintings | Artash Hakobyan | Armenia | Reaction to an event<br>Reference to past art | #REF! |
| 2 | From Ukraine With Love | Photography | Augustus Firestone | Australia | Inspiration | #REF! |
| 3 | Why? (The bombing of the Mariupol Art Schoo | Paintings | Peter Walker | Australia | Reaction to an event<br>Disruption of civilian life | #REF! |
| 4 | Divided World | Paintings | Svetlana Prokhorova | Australia | Disruption of civilian life<br>Peace | #REF! |
| 5 | „Peaceful sky" - blue yellow geometric minima | Paintings | Natalia Krykun | Austria | Disruption of civilian life<br>Destruction of lives | #REF! |
| 6 | War | Paintings | Katja Uccusic-Indra | Austria | Politics<br>Anti-war | #REF! |
| 7 | Putin wants Ukraine | Paintings | GIANCARLO CERVINO | Austria | Politics<br>Woman metaphor | #REF! |
| 8 | ,, Sunflowers, flowers of war ,, | Paintings | Valery Tatar | Austria | Sunflowers<br>Refugee experience<br>Disruption of civilian life | #REF! |
| 9 | Bloody orcs | Paintings | Dzvinya Podlyashetska | Austria | Reaction to an event<br>Horrors of war<br>Women suffering<br>Children suffering | #REF! |
| 10 | The Flower of Peace | Paintings | Richard Seris | Austria | Sunflowers<br>Peace | #REF! |

Main | Distribution by country | Distribution by medium | Ukraine | Rest of the world | Frequencies | Artists | Reactions

**Figure 10.** Artwork data after cleaning with added tags

As shown on Figure 11 below, there are artists from 46 countries in the dataset. The most represented countries are Ukraine, USA, and France followed by the UK and Germany. The total number of artists is 341 with some of them having more than one artwork in the dataset. There are 75 artists from Ukraine with 178 artworks and 266 artists from other countries with 527 artworks. The latter number includes 13 artists who did not indicate their countries. There are also artists (less than 10) with likely Ukrainian first and/or last names who indicated other countries in their artist's information section, but since no other information is available their countries are deemed to be as indicated on the portal.

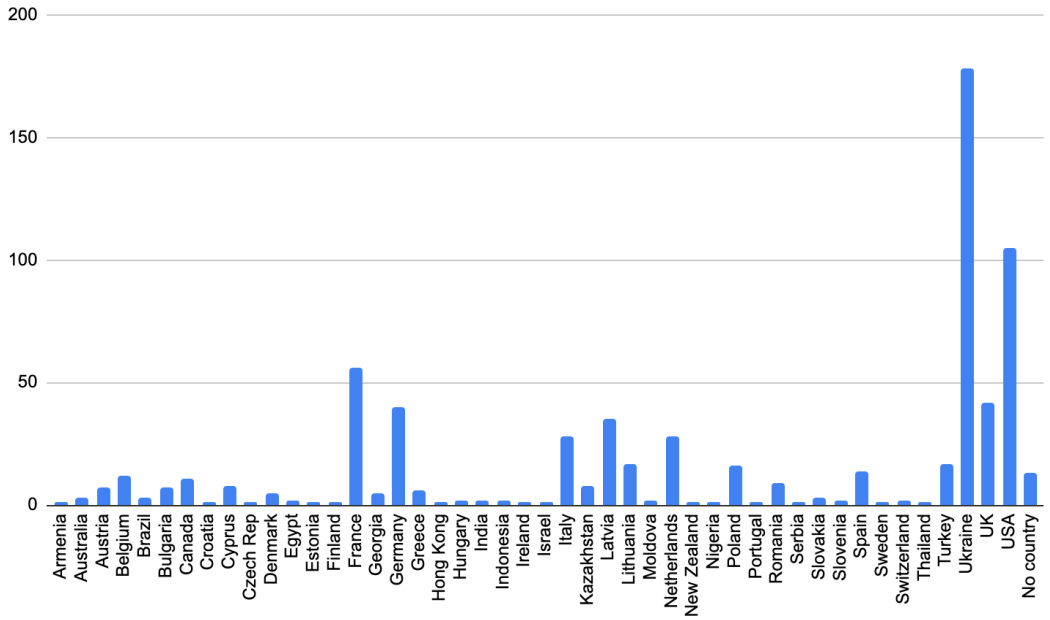


**Figure 11.** Dataset breakdown by countries

The distribution of the artworks by medium is shown on Figure 6 below. There are mostly paintings (465) in the dataset, but also photos (63), prints (56), drawings (34), mixed media (31), digital art (24), sculptures (22), collages (8), and one installation.

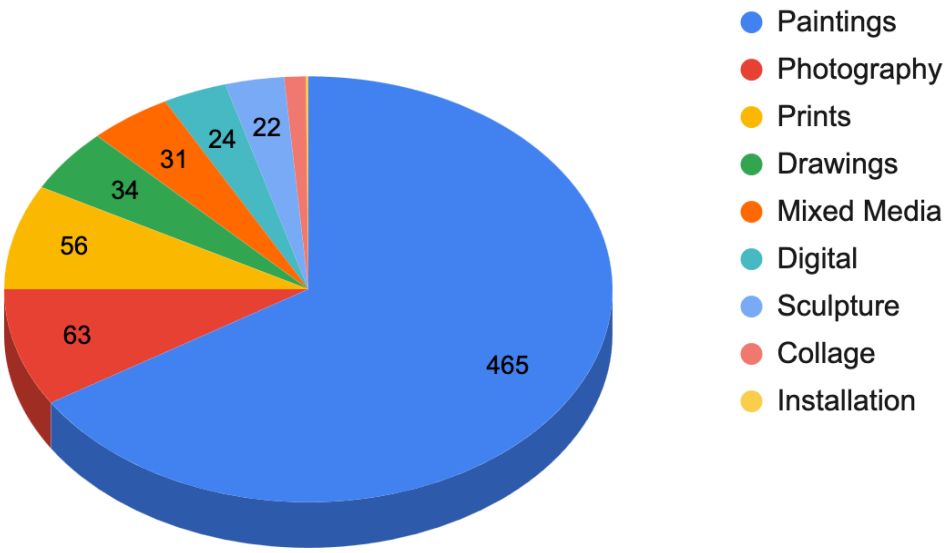


**Figure 12.** Dataset breakdown by medium - general (absolute numbers)

There is a slight difference in the use of mediums between Ukrainian artists and artists from other countries (Figures 13 and 14 below) which may be explained by both cultural traditions and different access to resources (see *Background & Literature Overview* section for more information on this).

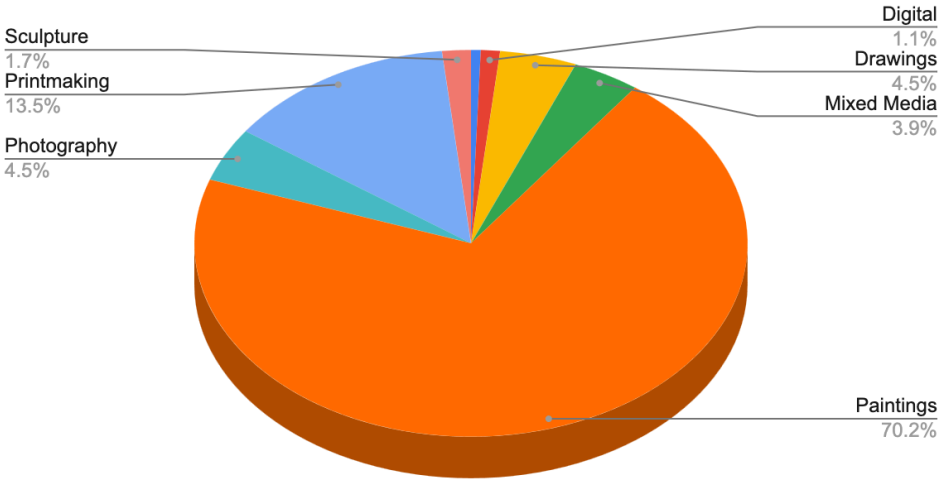


**Figure 13.** Dataset breakdown by medium - Ukraine (%)

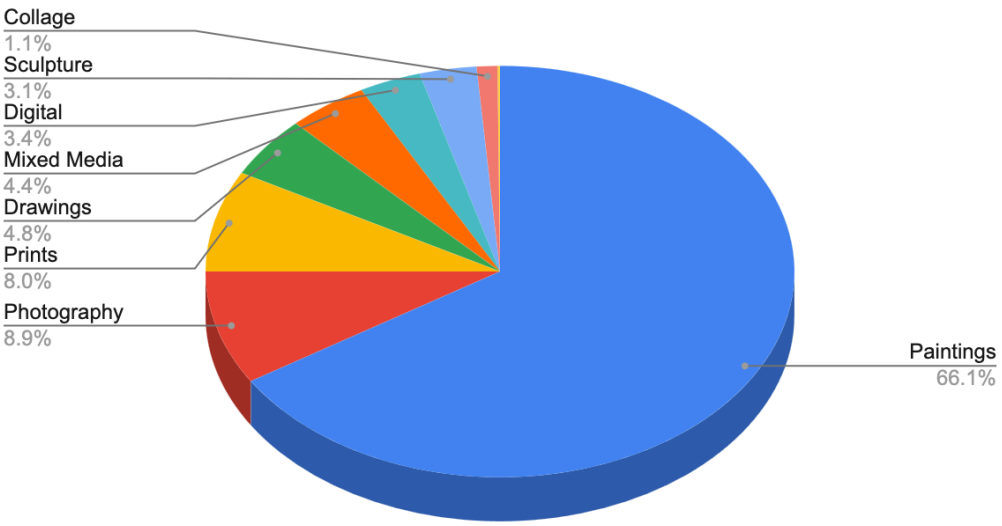


**Figure 14.** Dataset breakdown by medium - artists from other countries (%)

The frequencies of the key reaction categories are shown on Figure 15 below.

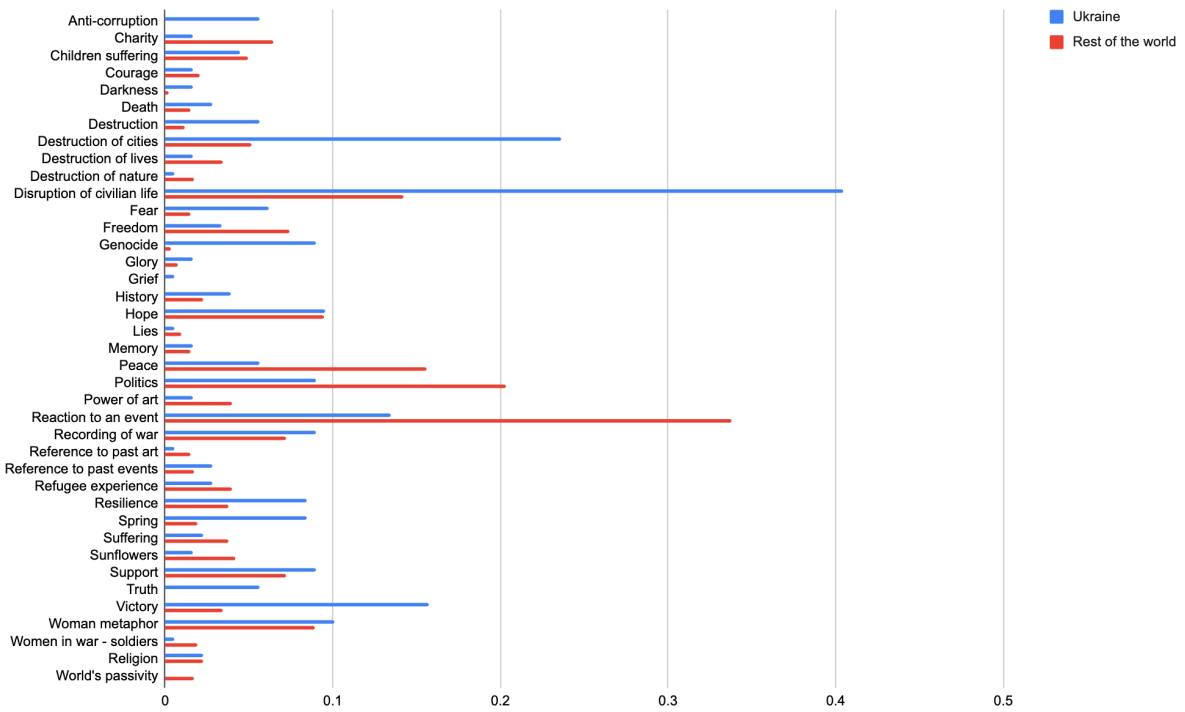


**Figure 15.** Tag frequencies - ungrouped

The frequencies of the reaction categories after their grouping into larger logical blocks for the purposes of this comparative analysis are shown on Figure 16 below.

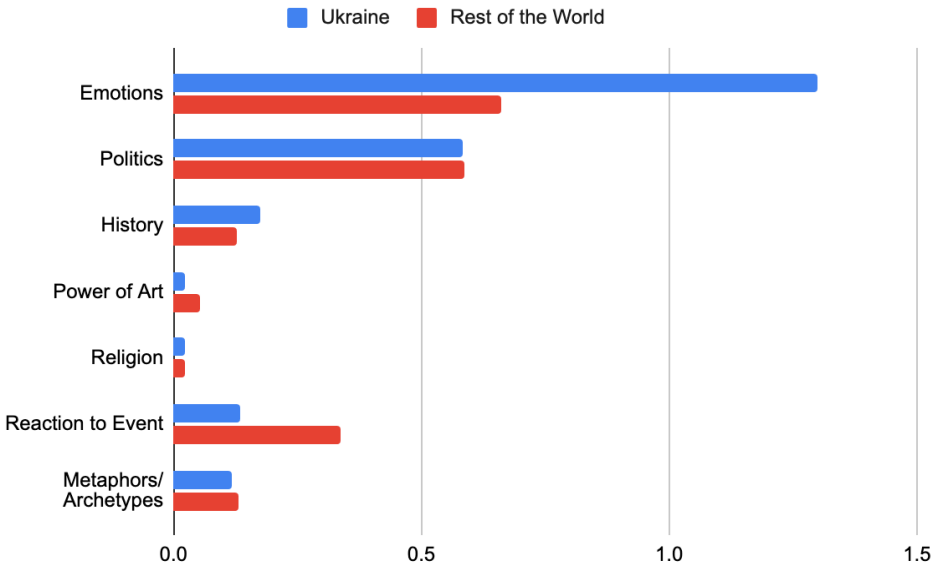


**Figure 16.** Tag frequencies - grouped

The most visible differences between the reactions of Ukrainian artists and artists from other countries are in the emotions (Figure 17) and politics (Figure 18) groups.

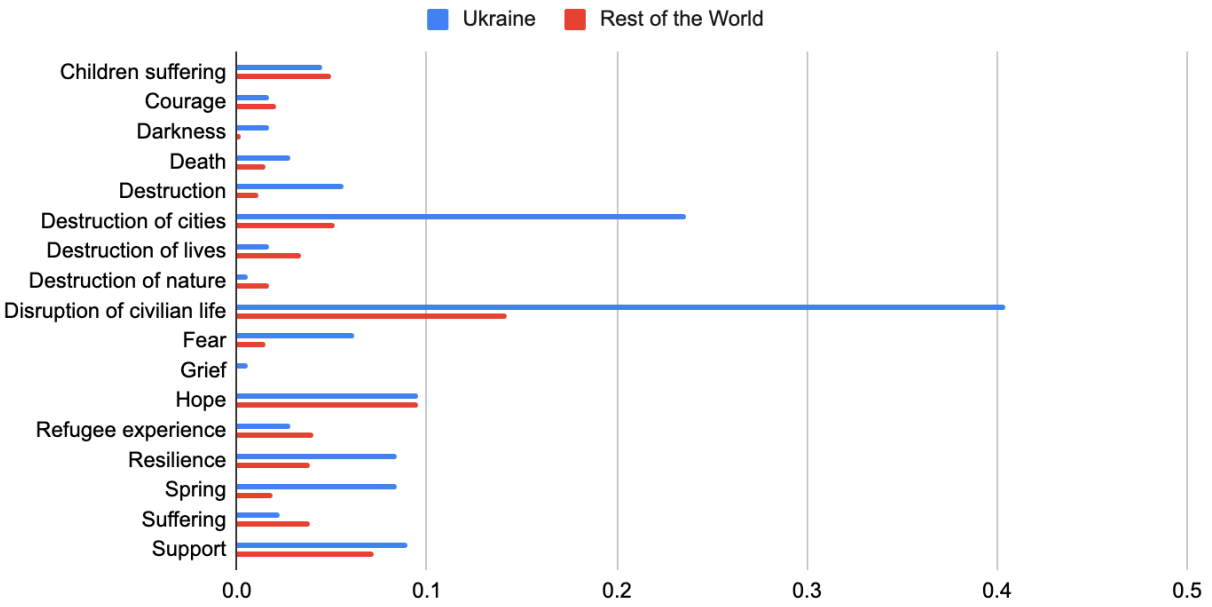


**Figure 17.** Tag groups - emotions

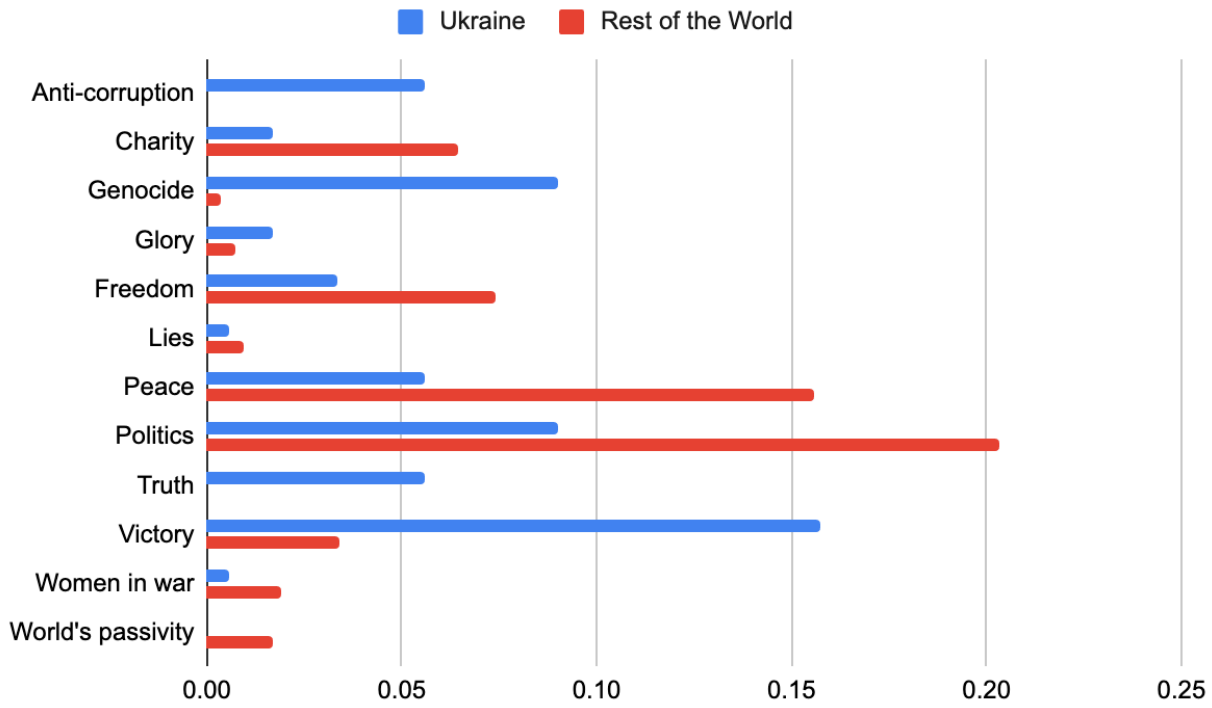


**Figure 18.** Tag groups - politics

# DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The analysis of the artists' reactions to the Russo-Ukrainian War allows to make a number of conclusions.

First of all, it is important that the war does find its reflection on the digital art platforms such as Saatchi Art, which are free (to the extent possible) from the institutional pressure or curatorial selection. Even though there are a lot of other themes represented on the platform, the war art category is quite sizable in absolute, if not relative, terms. It is also important to reiterate that since this is a commercial platform, the market forces are at play here and they do not necessarily favour war art.

Secondly, the artists' response is very diverse, from pure emotions to political statements and references to past art. Quite interestingly, some artists are unable to provide a specific verbal description of their reactions to the war.

Thirdly, the mix differs from the previous wars, even with the understanding that we are dealing with more "democratic" art posted on a digital platform. For example, and maybe because of the aforementioned lack of institutional or curatorial interference, some traditional representation themes are completely or almost completely missing here, such as, for example, soldiers' heroism, war economy efforts, or battlefield deaths and wounds.

There is also a slight difference between the reactions of Ukrainian artists and artists from other countries, mostly in that Ukrainian artists are more emotional (which is understandable given their firsthand experience of military activities, loss, and displacement) and that their reactions are more nuanced. In the political category, there is more pacifism in the foreign group.

Both groups react to specific events, such as the bombing of Ukrainian cities, and invoke the universal themes of loss, grief, and injustice. However, the themes of truth, resilience, and victory are more prevalent in the Ukrainian group whereas foreign artists mention peace more often. A lot of artworks in both groups refer to the Soviet and Cold War past, which may be a reflection of the prevailing anti- and decolonial narratives.

Some statements of artists from other countries challenge the mainstream narratives associated with the ongoing war, which may be explained by differences in the political contexts, as well as in the artists' personal outlook. In general, as in the case of previous wars, political and cultural narratives and local specificities penetrate into art. This also applies to certain archetypal images that spread internationally today due to the global reach of the mass media and social networks.

As a result, we see the traditional Ukrainian imagery, such as protective women in *vyshyvanka* or sunflowers in the artworks of the platform members from very remote countries.

Many artists also refer to the power of art and invoke continuity with the war art of the past. A number of artists expressly state their intention to register a particular event through their artworks so as to create lasting memory.

Furthermore, there is a difference in the breakdown of mediums used by these two groups of artists which can be explained by both different cultural traditions and unequal access to spatial and other resources in the war zone and peaceful regions. There is a higher percentage of paintings in the Ukrainian group, whereas the foreign group has a higher percentage of sculpture, digital art, and installations.

In conclusion, this work contributes to the attempts to understand how war is reflected in and ultimately memorialised through art today and how this representation evolves over time. In particular, it contributes to the understanding of cross-border and transcultural differences in the depiction of contemporary military conflicts, including from the anti-colonial viewpoint. Such research can be developed further by adding a more in-depth art analysis and repeating the artwork sampling throughout and after the war to understand the dynamic interrelations between events, politics, and artistic reactions. A comparative analysis between different digital art platforms may also be considered, as well as a comparison between digital art platforms and other environments with institutional or curatorial presence.

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