

# Chapter 5

## Monuments Broadcast

Even before the advent of the Internet, the most important objective of both monument construction and destruction was often to send a message that was mediated by images. The cultural historian Aaron Tugendhaft has pointed out that even the earliest known perpetrators of iconoclasm in the ancient Near East aimed not so much to obliterate all images of a certain kind as to depict themselves destroying particularly important exemplars.<sup>1</sup> Iconic images of well-known monuments being toppled often convey the impression that all monuments of a certain type are being removed, even where that is very far from true.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, monuments are often deliberately built so as to look impressive in photos and drawings—this was certainly the case of war memorials in the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> Thus images of monuments have always been at least as important as monuments themselves.

Additionally, in an era of social media, the number of people interacting with even the largest memorial on site always pales in comparison with those whose experience of it is mediated by images. As discussed above, many modifications to monuments as well as ceremonies surrounding them were clearly staged by the occupiers for the purposes of producing propaganda images.

In 2022–23, photos of monuments destroyed, modified, or reconstructed played an important role in the propaganda wars accompanying the fighting. On both the Ukrainian and the Russian sides, some pic-

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<sup>1</sup> Tugendhaft, *The Idols of ISIS*.

<sup>2</sup> See Leonie Beiersdorf, *Die doppelte Krise: Ostdeutsche Erinnerungszeichen nach 1989* (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2015) for a detailed discussion of the East German context.

<sup>3</sup> One example is the Krasnodon (now Sorokyne), Donetsk region, monument to the Youth Guard resistance group mentioned later in this chapter.

tures and videos showing monuments in war went viral, often stripped of their context to become generic symbols. Among Ukrainians and their supporters, examples are videos of the Russian shelling of the tank monument in Bucha (as a symbol of Russian military ineptitude); of a Russian armored vehicle ramming the ATO memorial in Enerhodar (symbolizing irreverence for Ukrainian war heroes); and of the reconstruction of the Lenin monument in Heniches'k (symbolizing re-Sovietization). Internet users have also circulated images and videos of the Glory Monument in Kherson against the background of reeds being burned along the banks of the Dnipro, presenting this as a symbol of war even though such reed fires are common in the region.

Conversely, the Russian side has also circulated photos and videos of war memorials in Ukraine through Telegram channels, news sites, and television, usually as symbols legitimizing the Russian presence by suggesting continuity between the World War II-era Red Army and present-day Russian troops. In addition to online media, photos of war memorials and other monuments also feature copiously in newspapers distributed both in Russia and in the occupied territories. These print media are much more important than it may seem: as Internet access was curtailed in occupied parts of Ukraine, the new Russian-produced papers found eager audiences there. Almost every issue of publications such as *Naddneprianskaia Pravda* or the special issues of *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* for “the liberated territories” has featured amply illustrated articles about monument decay and reconstruction.

Given this importance of visual representations of war memorials, in this chapter we explore how they are framed, drawing on the systematic analysis of the hierarchical and alienating or familiarizing effects of camera angles proposed by visual semioticians Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen.<sup>4</sup> Our application of the term “propaganda” to supporters of both Russia and Ukraine should not be seen as equating the two sides; we use the term not in opposition to “truth” but to describe efforts at spreading information widely in a desire to influence emotions and behavior.

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4 Gunther R. Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2020), 114–53.

## PICTURES AND VIDEOS OF WAR MEMORIALS IN RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA

War memorials inside Russia had served as décor for propaganda videos well before the 2022 invasion. In 2017, Duma member Anna Kuvychko recorded a music clip set at the famous Mamaev Kurgan memorial in Volgograd in which underage members of various local cadet corps sang that “if the commander-in-chief calls us to the final battle, then, Uncle Vova, we are with you,” using a diminutive form of Vladimir Putin’s name.<sup>5</sup> In 2022, Great Patriotic War memorials were not the only ones used in this way. In November 2022, Russian Telegram channels circulated a video shot at Vladivostok’s Monument to Primor’e Residents Who Died in the Course of Local Wars and Military Conflicts. The video showed a sending-off ceremony for young men presented as Cossacks who had volunteered to fight in Ukraine, including an oath, speeches, and interviews.<sup>6</sup> In these and other cases, the purpose was to illustrate a narrative about patriotism and a fighting spirit being passed on from hallowed ancestors to their worthy heirs.

However, the main focus of Russian propaganda was on war memorials inside the newly occupied lands. In the initial months of the invasion, roughly until the end of June 2022, many of the depictions of war memorials in Ukraine circulating in Russian offline and online media were specially orchestrated and produced by professional photographers and camera operators embedded with the Russian army or specially dispatched from Russia to report from Russian-occupied territories. Once the initial wave of propaganda abated and the commemorative season in May and June was over, amateur shots came to constitute a larger share of the pictures circulating in Russian social media, though the composition and angle of these images often emulated the professional ones.

The cast of the scenes differed, including Russian officials or proxy administrators, camouflaged soldiers, or local residents. However, war memorials were very rarely shown without people in front of them, and thus most images included one or several persons placed nearer to the viewers than the memorials themselves. These people mediated the mean-

5 Original video: GSVG-ZGV. Garnizon Rekhlin, Lerts, “‘Diadia Vova, my s toboi’—pesnia o Putine. Volgograd. Mamaev Kurgan,” Youtube video, 4:20, November 14, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3j1ZDtHEpbk>.

6 <https://t.me/majorselivanov/7150>, November 8, 2022.

ing of the monuments for them and, in turn, drew their authority from their proximity to the hallowed memorials.

In the early stages of the invasion and in particular around commemorative dates, pro-occupation propagandists used Soviet war memorials as prime locations for interviews, speeches, and announcements, both concerning the monuments themselves and wider political plans and assessments. By placing speakers in front of memorials, such videos endow them with an authority derived from war memory. In addition, they also place them in an expert position, since usually some renovation activity is seen in the background, and the speaker implicitly represents the work being done (see figure 5.1).<sup>7</sup>

Another use for war memorials in visual propaganda was as locations for the destruction—often by immolation—of symbols understood as representing Ukrainian Nazism. Such acts were reminiscent of offerings to revered and sanctified ancestors, proving that the descendants faithfully watch over the tradition they represent. For example, in a video posted in early March 2022 but supposedly recorded on Victory Day the previous year, pro-Russian activists Ihor Telehin and Hennadii Shelestenko are seen burning a flag with the insignia of the 14th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS, known as the Galician division, beneath a bust of Soviet war hero Mykola Subota in Kherson.<sup>8</sup>

More generally, Russian videos often use monuments as backdrops and anchors (that the camera keeps returning to after panning over the surrounding landscape) for discourse about a region's quintessentially Russian character. This type of décor was prized as an alternative to the other main setting for videos of official pronouncements, the office desk. A video from late July 2022 showed Russian-appointed Kherson regional governor Volodymyr Sal'do in front of a war memorial in Heniches'k, speaking about the region's imminent rebirth under Russian rule and referring to the location as "a place sacred to all of us" due to its role in the Great Patriotic War.<sup>9</sup> In another video shot at the same location on November 10, during Russia's withdrawal from Kherson, Sal'do and the leader of Russia's puppet Liberal Democratic Party proclaimed that despite this "difficult decision," Russia would return to the city, implicitly sug-

7 Example: [https://t.me/rentv\\_news/45362](https://t.me/rentv_news/45362), April 27, 2022.

8 Khersonskii vestnik, "9 maia 2021 goda. #Kherson, #patrioty Ukrainy #protiv fashizma," Youtube video, 2:13, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9H704iPyyNI>.

9 [https://t.me/VGA\\_Kherson/2619](https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/2619), July 26, 2022.



**Figure 5.1.** Interview with an anonymous “soldier of the Russian National Guard” during maintenance work at the Memorial Sign to the Skadovs’k Airborne Formation at the entrance to Skadovs’k (a KS-1 cruise missile mounted on a pedestal). Interviews with masked soldiers against the background of a monument were frequently broadcast from the occupied parts of Ukraine. Screenshot from a video posted to the Telegram channel REN-TV, April 27, 2022, [t.me/rentv\\_news/45362](https://t.me/rentv_news/45362).

gesting a parallel to victory in World War II after the initial Soviet retreat.<sup>10</sup> Other messages from the same day sugarcoating the Russian retreat also used war memorials as backgrounds.<sup>11</sup> Prior to the retreat, the use of monuments, and especially Second World War memorials, had spiked in September 2022, during the runup to the sham referendums on the occupied territories joining Russia.<sup>12</sup> Sal’do continued to use war memorials as locations for many of his videos after his flight from Kherson; thus, on Victory Day 2023, he recorded a Ukrainian-language message calling upon Ukrainian soldiers to lay down their arms, while standing below a famous Civil War monument located on a mound in Kakhovka, Kherson

<sup>10</sup> LDPR, “LDPR posetila Khersonskuiu oblast’,” VK video, 1:04, November 10, 2022, [https://vk.com/video-433349\\_456242467](https://vk.com/video-433349_456242467).

<sup>11</sup> For example, see [https://t.me/alexandr\\_malkevich/10903](https://t.me/alexandr_malkevich/10903), November 10, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> For examples, see Chornobaïvka, Kherson region: [https://t.me/VGA\\_Chernobaevka/277](https://t.me/VGA_Chernobaevka/277), September 20, 2022; Donetsk: <https://t.me/dnrdonetsk/43186>, September 21, 2022; Bilovods’k, Luhans’k region: <https://t.me/luganskallnews/9529>, September 22, 2022; Markivka, Luhans’k region: <https://t.me/luganskallnews/9536>, September 22, 2023; Milove, Luhans’k region: <https://t.me/luganskallnews/9539>, September 22, 2022; Kherson: [https://t.me/VGA\\_Kherson/3506](https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/3506), September 23, 2022.

region, known as the Legendary Machine-Gun Cart, interspersed with tilting shots moving toward the memorial.<sup>13</sup>

Armed and masked soldiers are almost invariably present in pictures or videos of war memorials. In general, low-angle shots, suggesting hierarchy, authority, and awe, were among the preferred ways of presenting such memorials (see figure 5.2).

Such angles were used, for example, for statues of soldiers to make it seem as if these soldiers were watching over the legacy of their victory in the Great Patriotic War. In one photo from May 6, 2022, the Victory Statue from Kherson's Park of Glory rises over Russian (and DNR) officials and soldiers, elevating their victory and justifying their control over the landscape surveyed.<sup>14</sup> Another common motif was reenactment. Many low-angle photos show members of the Russian army or National Guard standing at the foot of soldier statues and copying the soldiers' poses (see figure 5.3).<sup>15</sup> In one notable case in Starobil's'k, Luhans'k region, a group of young people in 1940s-style clothing posed on an improvised pedestal next to a war memorial.<sup>16</sup> They were copying the poses of the Young Guard anti-German resistance fighters represented in a famous monument from 1954 in Sorokyne (formerly Krasnodon), in the same region, called *The Oath*. The authors of the monument had deliberately created a silhouette that they thought would look impressive in school textbooks, and indeed images of the monument were widely reproduced in print in Soviet Ukraine and beyond.<sup>17</sup>

Other low-angle shots of soldier statues or reliefs are taken through eternal flames to cloak the soldiers in the fire of Victory, thus stressing the sanctity of the memorial.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> [https://t.me/SALDO\\_VGA/782](https://t.me/SALDO_VGA/782), May 9, 2023.

<sup>14</sup> <https://t.me/wargonzo/6870>, May 6, 2022.

<sup>15</sup> For example, see <https://storage.lug-info.com/cache/f/2/2f37dfo1-529e-47cc-a793-dcbee-ac8b061.jpg/w1000h616> (from: "Torzhestvennoe zazhzhenie."); Snezhanna Belova, "Voennyi memorial v raione goroda Izium na Ukraine priveli v poriadok spetsnazovtsy iz Novosibirska," *vn.ru*, May 4, 2022, <https://vn.ru/news-voennyi-memorial-v-rayone-goroda-izyum-na-ukraine-ubrali-k-9-maya-spetsnazovtsy-iz-novosibirska>; [https://t.me/v\\_and\\_z/454](https://t.me/v_and_z/454), May 1, 2022 (final scene in the video).

<sup>16</sup> "Torzhestvennoe otkrytie."

<sup>17</sup> See the transcript of the meeting of the Architecture Council of the Board of Architecture, Council of Ministers, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, July 22, 1946. Central State Archive of the Highest Organs of Government and Administration of Ukraine (Ts-DAVO), f. 4906 o. 1 spr. 2194 a. 5–6. See also Gabowitsch, "Visuals in History Textbooks."

<sup>18</sup> "Vozvrashchenie domoi.," [https://t.me/yug\\_plazdarm/8642](https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8642), June 22, 2022.

**Figure 5.2.** A photographer taking pictures from a low angle at a ceremony at the Common Grave War Memorial in Melitopol', Zaporizhzhia region, involving cadets from the A.S. Makarenko Melitopol' State University swearing an oath of loyalty to Russia. Screenshot from a video posted to the Telegram channel *Vezhlyvye liudi*, November 4, 2022, [https://t.me/v\\_and\\_z/3067](https://t.me/v_and_z/3067).



Low-angle shots were also used to show living people during commemorative events, typically to underline the authority of the people shown and the gravitas of the ceremony. This reverence can refer to a person's status, for example in the case of pro-Russian officials speaking at such ceremonies or soldiers carrying wreaths to a monument.<sup>19</sup> In photos and videos that show elderly people or children, it can also denote respect for old age and the transmission of Great Patriotic War memory between generations. Thus, a video from a small ceremony on May 1, 2022, in Dniprorudne, Zaporizhzhia region, uses low-angle shots to show the local soldier statue, an elderly lady with a rollator looking up at it, and a grandfather and grandson lighting the eternal flame together.<sup>20</sup> A RIA-Novosti video from a May 9, 2022, ceremony in Chornobaïvka, Kherson region, provides a low-angle shot of a preschool girl in a Red Army uniform singing a Russian song about war against the backdrop of a large memorial complex atop a communal grave;<sup>21</sup> a video from a later date by the same news agency, shot in the same location and from similar angles, shows a Russian soldier giving the girl a present, pinching her cheek, and congratulating her parents on having raised a good daughter who will "be our future."<sup>22</sup> In some cases, entire interviews are filmed using low-angle shots that visually place the speakers below a war memorial.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> For example, at a ceremony for the Day of Remembrance and Mourning in Kyrylivka, Zaporizhzhia region, on June 22, 2022: [https://t.me/yug\\_plazdarm/8661](https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8661), October 31, 2022.

<sup>20</sup> [https://t.me/v\\_and\\_z/454](https://t.me/v_and_z/454), May 1, 2022.

<sup>21</sup> "V Chernobaevke Khersonskoi oblasti deti prochitali stikhi o geroiakh," *RIA Novosti*, May 9, 2022, <https://ria.ru/20220509/pobeda-1787650274.html>.

<sup>22</sup> "Rossiiskie voennye dostavili adresnyi podarok devochke iz Chernobaevki," *RIA Novosti*, May 31, 2022, <https://ria.ru/20220531/podarok-1792012946.html>.

<sup>23</sup> For an example, see <https://t.me/luganskallnews/8355>, May 8, 2022.

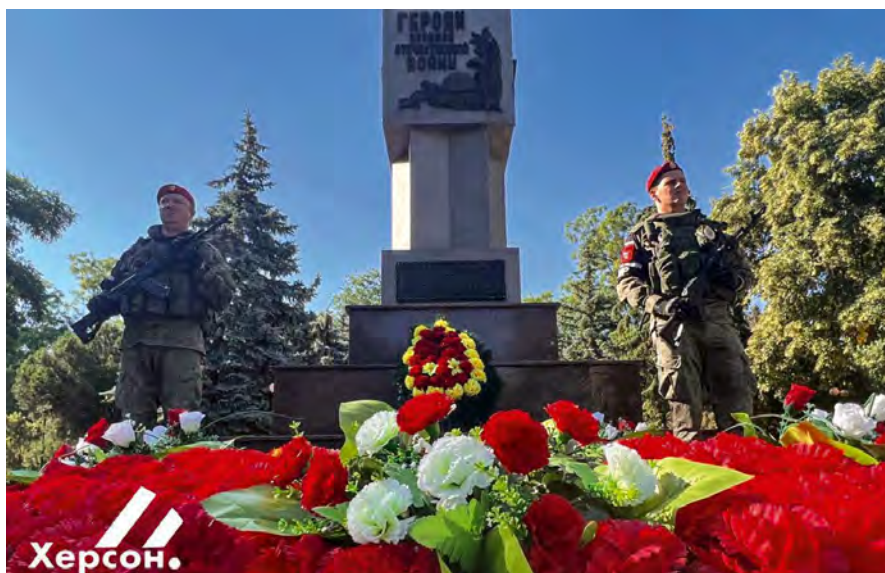




**Figure 5.3.** Low-angle shot showing Russian soldiers copying the pose of a soldier statue in Starobil'sk, Luhans'k region. Image source: <https://lug-info.com/news/torzhestvennoe-zazhzenie-priveznogo-iz-moskvy-vechnogo-ognya-sostoyalos-v-starobel-ske>, May 9, 2022.



**Figure 5.4.** A Russian National Guard soldier participating in monument maintenance, photographed using the golden ratio to position the Z symbol. Image source: Telegram channel *Khersonskaia narodnaia respublika*, April 12, 2022, <https://t.me/herson.respublika/403>.



**Figure 5.5.** Low-angle shot of Russian soldiers in front of a Great Patriotic War memorial in Nova Kakhovka, Kherson region, on the 81st anniversary of the German attack on the Soviet Union. Source: [https://t.me/herson\\_rus/1787](https://t.me/herson_rus/1787), June 22, 2022.



Other motifs shown using low-angle shots that convey special reverence and continuity between military heroism in the Great Patriotic War and the 2022 campaign include a list of the names of fallen heroes seen above a person respectfully cleaning a monument;<sup>24</sup> armed soldiers guarding a monument;<sup>25</sup> a sky with balloons exemplifying the Soviet trope of gratitude to war veterans for “clear blue skies;”<sup>26</sup> helicopters filmed in the sky as if they were being sent into battle by a soldier statue;<sup>27</sup> or a staged scene of a Russian soldier laying his hand on a monument to those who fell in 1941–1943.<sup>28</sup>

In the one case we found where Russian propaganda used selfie shots that left the top part of a memorial invisible, the video ended with a low-angle shot of the soldier statue against whose background it was filmed.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to low-angle shots, wide angles were also used in a number of photos and videos. With large memorials in particular, this was often done in order to convey awe and respect by contrasting them with the small figures of soldiers or participants in commemorative ceremonies, as in a *Komsomol'skaia pravda* photo of armed soldiers gazing up at the monumental Attack monument built in 1985 atop Kremenets' hill in Izium, Kharkiv region (see figure 5.7).<sup>30</sup> Even in the case of smaller memorials not built around a central statue, wide shots were used to express respect and a military-hierarchical relationship between the living and the dead, as in a *Zvezda* TV channel video from Bilohorivka, Luhans'k region, that shows a Russian soldier standing at attention and saluting plaques with lists of local residents who died between 1941 and 1945.<sup>31</sup> Another use of wide shots is to show the crowds at commemora-

24 “V preddverii Dnia Pobedy.”

25 See <https://t.me/nkPravda/3710>, May 9, 2022, and a low-angle shot from the same event whose source we are no longer able to ascertain.

26 [https://t.me/yug\\_plazdarm/8661](https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8661), June 22, 2022.

27 <https://t.me/donezkiy/2313>, September 12, 2022. Military expert Chris Owen interprets this video as an example of a flashy report sent by Russian commanders to their superiors to mask the dearth of training and resources on the ground: ChrisO\_wiki (@ChrisO\_wiki), “Did a culture of institutionalised lying contribute to Russia's recent disaster east of Kharkiv, by giving its senior commanders a distorted and false picture of the true situation on the ground? A [thread] reviewing the evidence,” Twitter, September 14, 2022, 11:55pm, [https://twitter.com/ChrisO\\_wiki/status/1570169288849326082](https://twitter.com/ChrisO_wiki/status/1570169288849326082).

28 [https://t.me/rentv\\_news/45362](https://t.me/rentv_news/45362), April 15, 2022, at 2:13.

29 <https://t.me/iamKherson1/170>, February 23, 2023.

30 <https://s16.stc.yc.kpcdn.net/share/i/4/2332614/wr-750.webp>, embedded in Aleksandr Kots, “Bezhtentsy Iziума: Nam by tol'ko v Rossiui!,” *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, June 4, 2022, <https://www.kp.ru/daily/27376/4569036/>.

31 <https://t.me/zvezdanews/84600>, July 3, 2022.



**Figure 5.6.** A Russian soldier wiping a list of World War II participants with a piece of cloth. A common motif in videos and photos from the first months of the invasion. Image source: Telegram channel *Khersonskaia narodnaia respublika*, April 12, 2022, [https://t.me/herson\\_respublika/403](https://t.me/herson_respublika/403).

tive ceremonies,<sup>32</sup> though in some cases the purpose seems to be simply to show the entire group rather than the memorial itself.<sup>33</sup> A related mode of wide-angle presentation was to show Russian soldiers guarding memorials from imaginary attackers while they were being renovated.<sup>34</sup> In April 2022, the proxy administration of Kherson posted a set of professional photographs showing masked soldiers in full assault gear in front of a memorial, with the caption “The special operations forces of the Russian National Guard in Kherson defended a memorial to those who fell in the Great Patriotic War.”<sup>35</sup>

Wide shots of memorials with soldiers are also used to graphically express the achievement of conquest, especially when monuments on elevations are involved.<sup>36</sup> Finally, Russian propaganda sometimes employs wide shots of an entire memorial to show its dilapidated state, as in a photo of an obelisk atop a communal grave from 1947 in Kakhovka, Kherson region, circulated with the caption “Under Ukraine.”<sup>37</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, videos about monument maintenance sometimes artificially created a semblance of disrepair under Ukrainian rule.<sup>38</sup>

To reinforce the contrast, Russian media also display manipulated before-and-after pictures of supposedly restored monuments in territories

<sup>32</sup> [https://t.me/yug\\_plazdarm/8644](https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8644), June 22, 2022; [https://t.me/yug\\_plazdarm/7834](https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/7834), May 29, 2022, at 00:18.

<sup>33</sup> As in a set of pictures of people with St. George's Ribbons posing for a group photo in front of a memorial in Rozivka, Zaporizhzhia region, on June 22, 2022, in which the upper half of the memorial's statue is cut off: [https://t.me/yug\\_plazdarm/8665](https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8665), June 22, 2022.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, the final shot in [https://t.me/yug\\_plazdarm/6256](https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6256), April 26, 2022.

<sup>35</sup> [https://t.me/VGA\\_Kherson/977](https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/977), April 15, 2022.

<sup>36</sup> Egortsev, *Den' Pobedy na Dnepre*; 12:30.

<sup>37</sup> [https://t.me/herson\\_respublika/389](https://t.me/herson_respublika/389), April 9, 2022.

<sup>38</sup> Kokhanyi, “Na osvobozhennykh territoriiakh.”

**Figure 5.7.** A wide-angle shot of armed soldiers gazing up at the Attack monument of 1985 atop Kremenets' Hill in Izium, Kharkiv region. Image source: [www.kp.ru/daily/27376/4569036](http://www.kp.ru/daily/27376/4569036).



Russia occupied in 2014. Thus, a May 2022 special edition of the Russian newspaper *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* for the “liberated territories” showed a soldier-and-sailor statue in Sevastopol', Crimea, in the background of a photo showing the ruins of an unfinished building. The “after” photo simply showed the same monument from a different angle, providing no evidence that it had been in need of, or undergone, renovation, and omitting to mention that construction of the monument, initiated in 1982, had been completed in 2007 in independent Ukraine.<sup>39</sup> Wide shots of supposedly untended war memorials were also shown—*pars pro toto*—to illustrate general narratives about Ukrainian decline. Thus, one feature from the TV channel *Zvezda* showed a Great Patriotic War memorial on the territory of the long-abandoned Kherson Machine Building Plant, surrounded by uncut grass and debris, to exemplify the supposed decline of industry in the region under Ukrainian rule.<sup>40</sup>

Another mode of presentation employs close-up shots of individual elements of memorials to show that they are being restored and honored again after years of supposed neglect by Ukraine. Details shown at close range include red carnations;<sup>41</sup> candles lit for June 22;<sup>42</sup> eternal

39 Aleksandr Grishin, “Esli by Krym ostalsia ukrainskim...,” *Komsomol'skaia pravda. Spetsial'nyi vypusk—Osvobodzhennye territorii*, May 2022. For the history of the monument and photos from 2011 showing it in excellent condition, see “Mys Khrustal'nyi,” *Putevoditel' po Krymu*, April 3, 2011, <https://aipetri.info/севастополь/мыс-хрустальный>. While the Russian-appointed administration of Sevastopol' had announced plans to add a memorial complex to the statue, work on its construction had not begun by the time of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. See Aleksandr Kurbatkin, “Memorial'nomu kompleksu na Khrustal'nom byt'!,” *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, February 28, 2022, <https://www.sevastopol.kp.ru/daily/27369/4552258/>.

40 Mamsurov, “Put' k miru.” 8:58.

41 [https://t.me/yug\\_plazdarm/8671](https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8671), June 22, 2022.

42 [https://t.me/yug\\_plazdarm/6589](https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6589), May 3, 2022.

flames,<sup>43</sup> sometimes followed by a zoom out to a wider angle of an entire ceremony;<sup>44</sup> models or sketches of planned memorials as evidence of monument-building activities;<sup>45</sup> lists of names or the head of a soldier statue to personify the presence of the past;<sup>46</sup> or the white glove on the hand of a soldier cleaning a list of names.<sup>47</sup> Other close-up shots of ceremonies around memorials showed participants' military distinctions and religious or commemorative symbols.<sup>48</sup>

Lastly, Russian TV channels have employed aerial shots, or shots from tall buildings, especially to provide a full view of large-scale commemorative symbols such as giant Victory Banners being unfurled<sup>49</sup> (see figure 5.8) or hoisted<sup>50</sup> or the words "For Victory" shorn into a lawn near a memorial to the local Great Patriotic War dead in an unnamed village in the Luhans'k region.<sup>51</sup> The intended effect here appears to be to stress the magnitude of Russian commemorative efforts but also the smallness of each individual in contrast with monuments or flags symbolizing collective heroism. Similar to closing scenes in Hollywood blockbuster films, aerial shots set to bombastic music were also used to signify a happy end after unavoidable carnage. The closing scene of a feature on the Russian "patriotic" channel *Zvezda* in late May 2022 about the "liberated" territories was an aerial shot of two Russian soldiers standing guard in front of a burning eternal flame at the Victory Monument in Kherson's Park of Glory. Symbolically linking the flame with the Russian presence, the speaker closed by referring to residents' "hope that Russia will never leave this place again."<sup>52</sup>

The ubiquitous use of war memorials to visually frame war propaganda was paradoxical. On the one hand, the memorials clearly appeared to

43 [https://t.me/yug\\_plazdarm/8661](https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8661), June 22, 2022.

44 [https://t.me/yug\\_plazdarm/8658](https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8658), June 22, 2022.

45 [https://t.me/yug\\_plazdarm/7834](https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/7834), May 29, 2022, 1:00.

46 [https://t.me/yug\\_plazdarm/6754](https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6754), May 6, 2022.

47 "V preddverii Dnia Pobedy." 0:18 in the embedded video.

48 For Afghan war medals, see [https://t.me/yug\\_plazdarm/8644](https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/8644), June 22, 2022; for various commemorative medals, see [https://t.me/yug\\_plazdarm/7821](https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/7821), 0:08; May 28, 2022; for an icon, see [https://t.me/yug\\_plazdarm/7834](https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/7834), May 29, 2022, 0:01; for a St. George's Ribbon, see [https://t.me/yug\\_plazdarm/6665](https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6665), May 4, 2022, 2:04.

49 [https://t.me/yug\\_plazdarm/7834](https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/7834), May 29, 2022, 2:20.

50 Anastasiia Gus'kova, "Znamia Pobedy podniali nad alleei Slavy v Khersone," *Izvestiia*, April 19, 2022, <https://iz.ru/1322862/2022-04-19/znamia-pobedy-podniali-nad-alleei-slavy-v-khersone>.

51 [https://t.me/yug\\_plazdarm/6733](https://t.me/yug_plazdarm/6733), May 6, 2022, 3:28.

52 Mamsurov, "Put' k miru." 10:44.

Russian soldiers and administrators as familiar markers in a terrain that otherwise proved unexpectedly and disconcertingly foreign—as Soviet beacons in the Ukrainian steppe. Thus propagandists made efforts to use war memorials as props in a story about a certain location’s historically rooted Russian identity or its role in the Great Patriotic War. In Kherson, a billboard advertising the short-lived pro-Russian *Tavriia* local TV station showed the local statue of the city’s founder, Grigorii Potemkin, alongside a Russian flag, proclaiming that “Kherson is Russia.”<sup>53</sup> In Melitopol’, Zaporizhzhia region, the soldier figure from the Soviet war memorial in Berlin’s Treptower Park was used instead as a generic illustration of the claim that “Russia is memory.”<sup>54</sup>

On the other hand—as this recourse to a generic rather than local image attests—the way in which the images circulated often betrayed the Russians’ lack of familiarity with Ukraine—unsurprisingly so, as the soldiers and even administrators typically involved in monument-related activities came from Russia. Especially in propaganda materials destined for a domestic Russian audience, some of the villages whose war memorials were presented in Russian pictures and footage remained unnamed while others were mislabeled.<sup>55</sup> In some cases, Russian soldiers appearing in propaganda videos talking about “our ancestors” seemed confused as to where they were and simply spoke of “this monument in this locality.”<sup>56</sup> One Moscow-based TV channel trumpeted the return of a Lenin statue in Nova Kakhovka, the second-largest city of Kherson region, by calling it a “village” where locals had supposedly hidden the statue in a “kolkhoz” to protect it.<sup>57</sup>

Lack of familiarity also thwarted attempts to employ another mode of visual presentation deeply rooted in late Soviet and post-Soviet tradition: making images of monuments symbolize their cities.<sup>58</sup> The areas that came under Russian control in 2022 do contain a few widely known war memorials, primarily the above-mentioned Legendary Machine-Gun

53 Mykola Homanyuk’s photo.

54 “‘Khodim pod strakhom’: Kak zhivet okkupirovannaia chast’ Zaporozhskoi oblasti v ozhidanii ‘referenduma,’” *Novosti Donbassa*, September 13, 2022, <https://novosti.dn.ua/ru/article/8143-hodim-pod-strahom-kak-zhivet-okkupirovannaya-chast-zaporozhskoj-oblasti-v-ozhidanii-referenduma>.

55 In this video, for example, Lazurne is mistakenly presented as Skadovsk’: [https://t.me/VGA\\_Kherson/1674](https://t.me/VGA_Kherson/1674), May 5, 2022.

56 [https://t.me/shot\\_shot/39151](https://t.me/shot_shot/39151), May 4, 2022.

57 “V novoi Kakhovke vernuli pamiatnik Leninu,” *Moskva 24*, May 1, 2022, <https://www.m24.ru/videos/za-rubezhom/01052022/457233>.

58 On this tradition, see Gabowitsch, “Visuals in History Textbooks.”



**Figure 5.8.** “Cossacks from Melitopol’ and Enerhodar,” Zaporizhzhia region, unfurling a 200-meter Victory Banner near the Memorial to Local Warriors in the Great Patriotic War in the village of Rozivka, Zaporizhzhia region, during a ceremony for the 799th anniversary of the “tragic battle of the Kalka River.” The inscription on the Victory Banner contains several mistakes. Screenshot from a video posted to the Telegram channel *luzhnyi platsdarm*, May 25, 2022.

Cart (Tachanka) in Kakhovka, Kherson region, and the Memorial of Glory for the Great Patriotic War on Kremenets’ hill in Izium, Kharkiv region. However, due to their semi-rural positions, these memorials are known for their silhouettes rather than their location. In 2021, a photo of Kakhovka’s Tachanka monument was erroneously used on a banner in the Russian city of Rostov-on-Don to symbolize love of the city, instead of Rostov’s own similarly named but stylistically different Tachanka monument.<sup>59</sup>

The only regional capital with well-known landmarks that the Russians managed to occupy was Kherson, and even that city remains foreign to the vast majority of Russia’s population. In May 2022, posters started appearing on large billboards across Kherson to proclaim its Russianness (“Kherson—A City with a Russian History”) or, later, to advertise a new Russian propaganda TV channel (“The People of Kherson are the Pride of Russia”). Some of these displayed local monuments as their main motif or in the background, but they do not appear to have had any impact locally and failed to gain traction outside the city.

In general, it is difficult to gauge whether the use of images or videos of war memorials and associated ceremonies in Russian propaganda did anything to sway anyone in favor of the invasion and occupation. One unintended effect, however, was to produce evidence of collaborationism

59 “Tsentr Rostova ukrasili bannerom s ukrainskoi tachankoi,” *Sait goroda Rostova-na-Donu*, August 23, 2021, <https://www.1rnd.ru/news/3186970/centr-rostova-ukrasili-bannerom-s-ukrainskoj-tacankoj>.



for the Ukrainian side. Thus, the Telegram channel “Database of traitors in Kherson and the South of Ukraine” reposted images of commemorative ceremonies and identified Russian proxy officials who appeared in them.<sup>60</sup> In order to preempt punishment and retaliation, Russian propaganda channels often showed Russian soldiers and their collaborators appearing camouflaged or with their faces blotted out, sometimes making them seem more anonymous than the statues visible in the same pictures.<sup>61</sup>

## PICTURES AND VIDEOS OF WAR MEMORIALS IN UKRAINIAN PROPAGANDA

(Pro-)Ukrainian media likewise circulate images of war memorials in order to establish continuity between the Second World War and the ongoing conflict, though here the focus is on defending the fatherland against invaders. In addition, memorials are often shown as evidence of the destruction wrought by Russia and as symbols of Ukraine’s unbroken fighting spirit, including photos taken after liberation. Finally, footage of Holocaust and Second World War memorials and associated commemorative ceremonies is used in international media to counter Russian claims about a supposed ultra-nationalist government in Kyiv.<sup>62</sup>

Whereas on the Russian side even amateur photographers tend to use the hierarchical low angles employed by professional propagandists, in Ukraine the situation is reversed. Even professional (pro-)Ukrainian media prefer more “democratic” eye-level shots reminiscent of (sometimes selfie-style) images produced by citizen reporters. They frequently resort to panning video shots that establish equality between the object of the recording and the viewer by placing them on the same level, even if this means that a statue’s head remains invisible. One example is a selfie video shot by Ukrainian presidential adviser Oleksii Arestovych in front of a Second World War memorial in Novoselivka on the outskirts of Chernihiv on April 6, 2022, showing the surrounding destruction (see figure 5.9). In the video, Arestovych points out a wreath placed on the memorial to honor those killed by the Russians in the recent onslaught

60 For an example, see [https://t.me/Kherson\\_kolaborant/3143](https://t.me/Kherson_kolaborant/3143), December 5, 2022.

61 For example, see <https://t.me/YunarmiaHerson/56>, February 16, 2023.

62 See, for example, this report by a Prague-based Russian-language TV channel: *Nastoiashchee vremia*, “Voina Rossii s Ukrainoi. Den’ 34. Chast’ 1,” Youtube video, 2:03:26, March 29, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcXyGJyndag>, starting at 1:36:37.

**Figure 5.9.** Panning shot with the head of a statue cut off. Screenshot from a video shot in Novoselivka, Chernihiv region, posted to Facebook by then Ukrainian presidential adviser Oleksii Arestovych, [www.facebook.com/alexey.arestovich/videos/5303446713008025](https://www.facebook.com/alexey.arestovich/videos/5303446713008025), April 6, 2022.



and draws a line from those who defended Ukraine in World War II to those who did so in 2022.<sup>63</sup> In Luk'ianivka (Kyiv region), a correspondent for Radio Liberty's Ukrainian service filmed himself and a Ukrainian soldier against the backdrop of a World War II soldier statue surrounded by recently destroyed Russian armored assets. Though placed on a pedestal, in the video the statue never appears larger than either of the two men.<sup>64</sup>

As these videos show, World War II memorials often appear in Ukrainian and Western reporting as backdrops to the effects of the Russian onslaught. One widely circulated photo by *New York Times* photographer Lynsey Addario shows rescuers attending to the bodies of civilians shot dead by Russians in Irpin' near Kyiv, with the statue of a Soviet soldier kneeling in mourning visible in the background.<sup>65</sup>

The visual principle that people are at least as important as monuments, if not more, is also at work in an image selected as "photo of the year" by the Ukrainian photography website Bird in Flight. Taken by Hungarian photographer András Hajdú, it is a close-up shot of a twelve-year-old boy in Kherson's Freedom Square immediately after the city's liberation. Seen

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/alexey.arestovich/videos/5303446713008025>, April 6, 2022; Olena Burkalo, "Arestovich: Chernigov i Sumy spasli Ukrainu," *Korrespondent.net*, April 6, 2022, <https://korrespondent.net/ukraine/4466095-arestovych-chernyhov-y-sumy-spasly-ukraynu>.

<sup>64</sup> "Voyna Rossii s Ukrainoi. Den' 34. Chast' 1," 00:56:42–00:57:38.

<sup>65</sup> Andrew E. Kramer, "What Happened on Day 12 of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," *New York Times*, July 3, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/07/world/ukraine-russia-war#a-ukrainian-family-s-dash-for-safety-ends-in-death> (published in the March 7, 2022, print version under the headline "Zelensky Urges Resistance as Shelling Halts Evacuations").



**Figure 5.10.** High-angle shot to survey scenery of destruction and to juxtapose a Soviet-era tank monument with an ineffective present-day Russian vehicle. Trostianets', Sumy region. Photo: Efrem Lukatsky / AP / picturedesk.com, March 26, 2022. Reprinted with permission.

in the background, Kherson's main memorial to the Heavenly Hundred and the ATO is blurred and cut off.<sup>66</sup>

Another common type of photo or video is the high-angle shot, taken from windows or balconies either by professional photographers or by private citizens. In contrast with the aerial shots common in Russian propaganda, such angles are used, on the one hand, to survey a scenery of destruction, as in an Associated Press photo showing a tank monument still standing on its pedestal amid a ravaged urban landscape in Trostianets', Sumy region (see figure 5.10),<sup>67</sup> or a scene of conflict, as in the brutal clampdown on participants in an anti-Russian demonstration in Kherson on March 21 who were trying to remove Russian graffiti from its central ATO memorial.<sup>68</sup>

On the other hand, the same images are also used to juxtapose Soviet tank monuments and other war memorials well-maintained by the Ukrainian authorities with the remnants of ineffective present-day Russian tanks.<sup>69</sup> The accompanying articles also openly or implicitly draw parallels with iconic photos of monuments damaged yet standing tall amid ruined cityscapes in World War I (Arras Cathedral) and World War II (Calais, Coventry, Dresden, or Nuremberg). The implication of all of these uses is to place Russia in the continuity of past aggressors, especially Nazi Germany.

66 L'olia Hol'dshtein, "Bird in Flight nazvav svitlynu 2022 roku," *Bird In Flight*, December 29, 2022, <https://birdinflight.com/nathnennya-2/crytyka/bird-in-flight-nazvav-svitlinu-2022-roku.html>.

67 "Istoriia odnogo foto. Tank-osvoboditel' i tank-okkupant," *Salidarnasts'*, April 1, 2022, <https://gazetaby.com/post/istoriya-odnogo-foto-tank-osvoboditel-i-tank-okkup/184415/>.

68 t.me/hueviyherson/14803, March 21, 2022.

69 "Istoriia odnogo foto."

Lastly, Ukrainian media sometimes use wide-angle shots showing a memorial empty of people to illustrate the Russian threat to normal commemorative activities, as in a photo from Pervomais'kyi, Kharkiv region, where events for May 8/9 were cancelled for fear of provocateurs.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, more frequently than in Russian propaganda, memorials in Ukrainian media are shown without accompanying people, establishing a direct, unmediated relationship between the viewer and the monument.

One genre in which this unmediated presentation came to full bloom consists of reinterpreted, decontextualized, or modified photos (as well as drawings, animated films, and other artwork) of Soviet war monuments and their use in illustrating Ukrainian resilience or Russian aggression. Compared to Russian propagandists, Ukrainians found it much easier to use monuments as landmarks for such purposes. The prime motif, since 2014, has been the Motherland Monument opened in 1981 atop what is now the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War—a gigantic allegorical statue of a woman that is a widely known symbol of Kyiv and its skyline.<sup>71</sup> Artistic reinterpretations of the statue proliferated so much in 2022 that the museum organized a thematic exhibition that displayed over a hundred of them.<sup>72</sup> Conversely, Ukrainian artists sometimes reimagined monuments located in Russia or important to Russian propaganda as symbols of Russian aggression and looting. The Motherland Calls monument in Volgograd from 1967 was the most frequent motif used in this way: the huge female figure was shown, for example, asking Russian soldiers to bring her back lace underwear<sup>73</sup> or calling them to their death,<sup>74</sup> even though one Kyiv designer reinterpreted

70 "V gromadakh Khar'kovskoi oblasti otkazalis' ot prazdnichnykh meropriiatii 8 i 9 maia," *Kharkiv Today*, May 5, 2022, <https://2day.kh.ua/ru/kharkov/v-gromadakh-kharkovskoy-oblasti-otkazalis-ot-prazdnichnykh-meropriyatii-8-i-9-maya>.

71 For the use of this monument in the entangled commemorations of the Second World War and the war in Donbas, see Hellbeck, Pastushenko, and Tytarenko, "Wir werden siegen."

72 Aleksandra Klitina, "'Motherland. Redefining'—Monument Inspires Ukrainian Artists in New Exhibition," *KyivPost*, August 25, 2022, [https://www.kyivpost.com/post/7200;Volodymyr Zahrebel'nyi and Oleksandr Bekker, "U stolytsi prezentuvaly novyi vystavkovyi proiekt 'Bat'kivshchyna-maty. Pereoznachennia,'" \*ArmiaInform\*, August 20, 2022, <https://armyinform.com.ua/2022/08/20/skulptura-bat'kivshchyna-maty-yak-znak-sprotyvu-rosijskij-agresiyi/>. Online exhibition: "Bat'kivshchyna-maty. Pereoznachennia," National Museum of Ukraine in the Second World War, August 2022, \[https://warmuseum.kyiv.ua/\\\_ua/\\\_presentations/bm/ua.php\]\(https://warmuseum.kyiv.ua/\_ua/\_presentations/bm/ua.php\).](https://www.kyivpost.com/post/7200;Volodymyr Zahrebel'nyi and Oleksandr Bekker, 'U stolytsi prezentuvaly novyi vystavkovyi proiekt 'Bat'kivshchyna-maty. Pereoznachennia,')

73 [https://warmuseum.kyiv.ua/\\_ua/\\_presentations/bm/ua.php#gallery-13](https://warmuseum.kyiv.ua/_ua/_presentations/bm/ua.php#gallery-13).

74 [https://t.me/hetmans\\_brushes/105](https://t.me/hetmans_brushes/105), March 2, 2022.

the two statues of women as sisters fighting each other.<sup>75</sup> Other memes reimagined Soviet soldier statues as looters carrying a toilet bowl, a carpet, or even a raccoon, such as the one stolen from Kherson's zoo during the Russian retreat from that city.<sup>76</sup> It is noteworthy that Ukrainian photographs and other depictions of even gigantic statues such as the Kyiv Motherland Monument, which is over 100 meters high, typically show them from a horizontal angle or in close-up shots of her head rather than the hierarchical low angles prevalent in Russian photographs. While no less intently than the Russian side in enlisting Soviet war memorials in a narrative of continuity between the defense of the fatherland both in the Second World War and today, it seems that the Ukrainian imagination does so in a mode of equality and repetition between historical eras rather than the hierarchical relationship common in Russia, in which today's warriors must prove themselves worthy of their ancestors. This is epitomized in an anime clip by musician Sasha Scherbakova and artist Artem Biryukov titled *The Sword* and shown as part of a museum exhibition, in which the Motherland statue becomes a swordfighter with youthful features who allies with a Cossack statue to fight a snake, Putin.<sup>77</sup>

In 2022, the Ukrainian Defense Ministry marked Victory over Nazism in World War II Day by posting an image of the statue's head covered with a red poppy wreath and the English-language comment: "The Motherland Monument in Kyiv is facing russia [*sic*] as a symbol of understanding our existential threat over the centuries. As a symbol of our future victory. Never again. 1939–1945. Again."<sup>78</sup>

The Ukrainian far-right designer and self-declared "wartime propagandist"<sup>79</sup> Denys Lytvynov, who became widely known in 2022, has

75 pryadya, Instagram post, March 3, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CapisCONL6a>.

76 Mordorskie novosti (@duremarik), Twitter, April 21, 2022, 5:12am <https://twitter.com/duremarik/status/1516978227817992192>; "[A monument to a Russian soldier holding stolen things: a carpet, a washing machine and a microwave]," SUCHO Meme Wall, no date, [https://memes.sucho.org/#13k1ZOH4BFFL3jm27uPtyED6h\\_Eysdwa2](https://memes.sucho.org/#13k1ZOH4BFFL3jm27uPtyED6h_Eysdwa2); "[The Treptower Park Soviet monument's soldier holding a raccoon instead of a saved child]," SUCHO Meme Wall, no date, [https://memes.sucho.org/#1jGHSnj\\_vxqBY8aMr9vCLj5aMxqPHC4ix](https://memes.sucho.org/#1jGHSnj_vxqBY8aMr9vCLj5aMxqPHC4ix).

77 Sera Sheer, "Sera Sheer—Mech (Feat. KINERO)," Youtube video, 2:50, July 22, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkzAeh-WaVE>.

78 Defense of Ukraine (@DefenceU), "The Motherland Monument in Kyiv is facing russia as a symbol of understanding our existential threat over the centuries. As a symbol of our future victory. Never again. 1939–1945. Again," Twitter, May 8, 2022, 11:20am <https://twitter.com/DefenceU/status/1523231432172179456>.

79 Self-description on his Instagram channel: [https://www.instagram.com/dennis\\_litvinoff](https://www.instagram.com/dennis_litvinoff), accessed in October 2022 and no longer online in March 2023.

**Figure 5.11.** Sticker with the silhouette of the Bakhmut monument honoring students of the Artemivs'k Flying Club who participated in the Great Patriotic War along with the inscription "Bakhmut is Ukraine." Kyiv, Prorizna Street. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, May 2023.



repeatedly used such monuments in the propaganda posters he has produced in great numbers, which mix a Soviet aesthetic with that of twentieth-century nationalism and early twenty-first-century science fiction.<sup>80</sup> One of them shows the silhouette of the Motherland Monument as the central element in a Kyiv skyline threatened by Russian missiles,<sup>81</sup> another places it in the background of a poster for a dystopian political project Lytvynov calls "Nuclearchy."<sup>82</sup> A poster calling for donations to the army ("Your contribution to Ukraine's victory") places a hand holding currency notes next to the Motherland Monument's sword-wielding hand.<sup>83</sup> Conversely, another poster shows Putin climbing the sword of the Motherland Calls statue from 1967 in Volgograd, which, as the caption says, "calls to die."<sup>84</sup>

Other posters by Lytvynov use monuments to symbolize cities. Thus, in one image that claims the Russian city of Belgorod for Ukraine, the city is symbolized by a statue of Prince Vladimir of Novgorod and Kyiv erected there in 1998 to mark the 55th anniversary of the city's liberation from German occupation.<sup>85</sup> In another poster, a 1972 monument to the eighteenth-century builders of Russia's Black Sea fleet stands for the city of Kherson, whose coming liberation is symbolized by a Ukrainian sword bisecting a double-headed snake.<sup>86</sup> In yet other posters, the silhouette of

<sup>80</sup> Lytvynov has also publicly supported the removal of monuments to Russian cultural figures. See B.V., "Hetmans'ki Penzli: viina, natkhnennia, hetmanat, borotba z radians'kymy pam'iatnykamy," *Telegraph*, July 24, 2022, <https://telegra.ph/Getmanski-penzli-vijna-natknennya-getmanat-borotba-z-radyanskimi-pamyatnikami-07-24>.

<sup>81</sup> [https://t.me/hetmans\\_brushes/544](https://t.me/hetmans_brushes/544), October 11, 2022. Another poster uses the statue from Kyiv's Independence monument in a similar position to symbolize Ukraine. See [https://t.me/hetmans\\_brushes/312](https://t.me/hetmans_brushes/312), May 9, 2022.

<sup>82</sup> [https://t.me/hetmans\\_brushes/452](https://t.me/hetmans_brushes/452), July 16, 2022.

<sup>83</sup> [https://t.me/hetmans\\_brushes/203](https://t.me/hetmans_brushes/203), April 4, 2022.

<sup>84</sup> [https://t.me/hetmans\\_brushes/105](https://t.me/hetmans_brushes/105), March 2, 2022.

<sup>85</sup> [https://t.me/hetmans\\_brushes/197](https://t.me/hetmans_brushes/197), April 2, 2022.

<sup>86</sup> [https://t.me/hetmans\\_brushes/387](https://t.me/hetmans_brushes/387), June 7, 2022.





**Figure 5.12.** “Welcome to Kharkiv, city of heroes,” route E105. Photo: Mykola Homanyuk, December 2022.

the equestrian statue of Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi in Kyiv from 1888 stands for the defense of Kyiv or Ukrainian revenge.<sup>87</sup>

While the Motherland monument was by far the most frequent motif in the iconography of defiance, other statues of national, regional, or local significance were also used in similar fashion. During the drawn-out battle for Bakhmut, Donetsk region, a local memorial in the form of a MiG-17—a post-World War II military airplane installed in memory of members of the local aviation club who fought in that war—became a frequent backdrop for selfie shots symbolizing the city's Ukrainian identity and

<sup>87</sup> [https://t.me/hetmans\\_brushes/67](https://t.me/hetmans_brushes/67), February 25, 2022.

an emblem reproduced on stickers throughout Ukraine (see figure 5.11); it was destroyed on March 10, 2023, presumably by the Russian forces.<sup>88</sup>

In addition, Ukrainian propaganda has also drawn on the international iconography of World War II memory. Thus, in December 2022, a roadside billboard welcomed drivers to “Kharkiv, city of heroes,” using the silhouette of Joe Rosenthal’s famous 1945 photograph of six United States Marines raising the US flag on Iwo Jima (also immortalized in the United States Marine Corps War Memorial near the gate to Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia), replacing the US flag with a Ukrainian one (see figure 5.12).<sup>89</sup>

While such images attempt to illustrate the liberation of previously occupied or embattled territories with reference to a war-themed visual canon, in practice the most varied landmarks could become liberation monuments. Thus, in November 2022, following the liberation of Kherson and some of the surrounding areas, Ukrainian soldiers and many others took selfies against the background of a Monument to the Kherson Watermelon in Osokorivka, Kherson region, to mark the departure of Russian troops.<sup>90</sup>

88 For the monument as a visual symbol, see Vadym Petrasiuk, “‘Shche zh ne povne peklo!’: Istoriitnykh, khto zakhyschaie Bakhmut, i khto v n’omu zalyshaetsia, popry vse,” *Ukrains’ka pravda*, accessed July 18, 2023, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2023/01/20/7385552>; “Liutyi. Biznesmen ide na viinu,” *Forbes.ua*, n.d. Its destruction: “U Bakhmuti znyshcheno pam’iatnyk litaku MiH-17, iakyyi stav symvolom oborony mista,” *Liga*, October 3, 2023, <https://news.liga.net/ua/politics/video/v-bahmute-unichtojen-pamyatnik-samoletu-mig-17-kotoryy-stal-symvolom-oborony-goroda-video>.

89 Photograph in Mykola Homanyuk’s collection.

90 Telekanal Inter, “Simvol osvobozhdeniia Khersonskoi oblasti—pamiatnik arbuzu,” YouTube video, 2:06, November 10, 2022, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WI\\_oucBNkw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WI_oucBNkw).