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Kyiv Museums

In recent weeks I have made visits to two museums near the Lavra, both with potentially powerful messages for the foreign visitor. The first was the museum under the Holodomor Memorial. Both the stark sculptures outside and the display of blackened farming artefacts within tell their tragic story, but most of the wall displays and photographs would be wasted on any visitor ignorant of Ukrainian.

The nearby Honchara collection proved even more frustrating for the visitor. Despite having learned from its website that a recent edition of the 'Welcome to Ukraine' magazine had described the museum as an 'Oasis of Ukrainian Culture', I was to find that few of the displays were labelled in any language, and none in English. In response to protests in my own foul tongue, the no doubt well-meaning receptionist produced from her lower shelves a two-sided welcoming document written in immaculate English. The trouble was that it started with the claim that the world's erstwhile negative image of Ukraine had been swept away by the 'recent' Orange Revolution! Clearly the document was at least 5 years old.

A positive conclusion is that, despite their latently contentious messages, both museums have survived the political reversals that have happened in those 5 years; freedom of speech and publication does seem to be respected here. But until museum creators become more customer-oriented, what chance does the visitor have of forming such conclusion?

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