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Intimism in Lithuanian Art during the Second World War

Keywords: interior painting, Intimism, Lithuanian Art, Nazi occupation, portraiture, Second World War.

The aim of the current paper is to analyse the reflections and expression in art of the moods and psychological states of Lithuanian citizens, the atmosphere that formed these moods, and the lifestyle dictated by the war in Nazi-occupied Lithuania.[1] Capturing and conveying the atmosphere of the Second World War in Lithuania is not a simple task. Until the 1990s, the image of this period was shaped by stories about Nazi crimes, heroic fighting by Soviet-backed Red partisans, and the victorious march of the Red Army through Lithuania to Berlin in 1944 and 1945. This vision was dictated by Soviet ideologists, created by historians, and accordingly illustrated in literature, art and cinema. In post-Soviet Lithuania, historians have above all sought to establish the factors that determined the fate of Lithuania's statehood in the great geopolitical games of the mid-20th century. They have also devoted a great deal of attention to the genocide of Lithuanians, tried to comprehend the tragedy of the Jews in Lithuania, and addressed the urgent issue of the transfer of Polish citizens to German cities that became part of Poland at the end of the war. However, there have so far been no historical studies on the daily life and private relations of people in Lithuania, and the cultural scene during the war period. This absence of research has created a strange relationship with the past. To the citizens of today's Lithuania, the war

[1] In Lithuania, the Second World War and the Nazi occupation are not the same period of time. Soviet historiographers counted the beginning of the Second World War in Lithuania from the German invasion of the territory of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. In fact, Lithuania was brought into the Second World War a year earlier, on 15 June 1940, when Soviet troops marched in and it was incorporated into the Soviet Union.

years are like a forbidden and inaccessible memory island, as any effort to reach it leads either to discussions of the world's great politicians of the mid-20th century, or into the fields of military action or sites of heinous tragedies: Stalin's and Hitler's prisons and camps, Jewish ghettoes, and the massacre sites of Lithuanian citizens of Jewish, Polish, Lithuanian or Russian origin. This gap in the historical memory is only getting deeper with the progress in the research into other periods that were forbidden in the Soviet years, above all the years of Lithuania's independence, 1918 to 1940, which are already quite familiar to a large part of society. Research into Lithuania's sovietisation after 1945 is also advancing. Thus, the question what happened between 1939 and 1945 is becoming more and more urgent.

In reconstructing life in Lithuania in the war years, particularly the daily life of civilians, artworks paradoxically acquire a great importance, as very few oral or written testimonies about the life of ordinary people in Nazi-occupied Lithuania have survived. A great deal of notes of this kind (letters and diaries) were lost or destroyed at the end of the war, as many of Lithuania's residents fled to the West from the approaching Soviets. Residents who remained in the country occupied by the Soviets tried to destroy testimonies of the Nazi occupation, as the new occupying authorities could turn not only Nazi symbols but also the press from the war period (German propaganda publications, Lithuanian novels and poetry, and even magazines for farmers or housewives published in the years of the Nazi occupation), photographs capturing the reality of the war, and certainly letters and diaries, into proof of sympathy with the Germans and hostility to the Soviet regime. Personal memories and stories about the period of the Nazi occupation which did not fit in with the official discourse circulated only in verbal form, and in very restricted private spaces. When in the 1990s, after the restoration of independence, people in Lithuania were allowed to tell and publish these stories, there were very few who had lived through the war as grown-ups and could relate their personal experiences to the political and social events of the time, and to particular personalities, and by doing so share the everyday life of the war period with the present day.

A considerable number of artworks were created in the war years, and have survived until today, but it is as if they were (and still are) invisible.[2] They are not included in the discourse of the history of Lithuanian art, and the isolated examples that are shown publicly are presented not as a reflection of the wartime reality, but as an example of the development of a particular artist's individual style. In this paper, an attempt is made to systematise a group of artworks from the war period, and discuss them as a certain visualisation of the reality of that time, a testimony of people's appearance, typical occupations and moods. It would undoubtedly be difficult to interpret these artefacts without a glimpse at the memoirs, letters and diaries of these artists and their contemporaries, and other written sources, which are rather scarce, as has already been mentioned, and also without drawing parallels with the situation in other countries which came to terms their wartime past some time ago.

All the works under discussion, be they paintings, sculptures or graphic art, have one more thing in common: the artists created them not for the public or for sale, but mainly for themselves, as a response to the wartime reality. Certainly, this does not mean that none of these works ever caught the public eye. On the contrary, almost all of them were included in wartime exhibitions, and several were reproduced in the periodical press and recognised by contemporaries, thus confirming the fact that, while expressing their private experiences, the artists managed to convey impressions, moods and feelings that were relevant to a large part of society. This may be another argument why today these works can serve as a visual source of the wartime reality.

When defining the goals of the paper and describing the artworks presented, it is important to draw attention to another characteristic of wartime art, revealing a feature of the collective psychology, which manifested itself not only in Lithuania, but also in other occupied countries. The war period in Lithuanian art can be considered as a golden age of landscape painting. It is not difficult to explain why: romantic views,

[2] An exception was paintings and sculptures that could be interpreted as illustrations of Nazi crimes in the occupied country, or proof of resistance to the occupation, but they are very few.

often filled with sunshine and flowers, helped to enliven the *grisaille* of everyday life, and added colour to the bleak reality. Looking at the statistics of artwork sales, we can see clearly that both local art lovers and German soldiers or civilians residing in Kaunas bought mainly landscapes painted by Lithuanian artists.[3] The preference of the local population for landscapes can be explained by two reasons: a love of nature and scenes of the motherland that was strengthened by the occupation, and a wish to escape from the gloom of the wartime reality. The Germans were fond of landscapes, first of all because of their hedonistic function; for them, these pictures were also artistic souvenirs, meaningful gifts for their wives, mothers and fiancées waiting for them back in Germany. Thus, the landscape was a genre of art that testified most distinctly to the mood of escapism and flight from the unpleasant and difficult reality. Alongside landscapes arose the hope that the war would end, the enemy would retreat, and life would come back to normal. However, in this case, we are interested in artworks with the opposite meaning, that is, art that emerged from the experience of the reality of the oppressive occupation, and artists' works that registered and retained traces of this reality.

There are some landscapes and still lifes that also meet these criteria, but traces of the reality of the war are especially visible in genres such as the portrait and interiors. This fact, along with the understated emotionality common to all the selected artworks, inspired the use of the term 'Intimism', which first appeared, as is well known, in the late 19th or early 20th century, as a description of the paintings of interiors by artists of the Nabis group, mainly Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947) and Edouard Vuillard

[3] The notebook, without dates, of the chief manager of the Dailė cooperative's magazine in Kaunas (Laisvės al. 25), belonging to Pranas Morkus, allows us to ascertain the names of the buyers of artworks and their prices. The author of this article would like to thank Pranas Morkus for the possibility to use this valuable document. Another testimony confirming the interest of German soldiers and civilians in the work of Lithuanian landscape painters is the presentation of work by the painter Jonas Mackevičius in the newspaper *Savaitė*. Vladas Vijeikis, the author of the article, notes: 'Today the painter lives in the most romantic corner of Kaunas, near Kaunas Castle. He is often visited by German soldiers and members of the civilian administration, who have sent many landscapes by Mackevičius to their relatives in Germany' (V. Vijeikis, Žydriųjų debesų tapytojas [A Painter of Blue Clouds], *Savaitė*, 25 July 1942).

(1868–1940). In this paper, the term Intimism is not applied in its strict historical sense, but more widely, though certainly in relation to the content of the historical term. The term Intimism is used to define the art of a different cultural period that appeared in different circumstances, and is characterised by the aim to depict the private lives of people in their private environment, while emphasising the closed physical space and the emotional experience of the characters, which was also typical of the work of the Nabis group. True, unlike the paintings of the Nabis group, asserting a silent joy of life, the artworks under discussion are permeated with tension, and manifestations of refined decorativeness are tainted and even marred by marks of undisguised poverty. Only for two of the artists presented in the paper did Bonnard's style represent a basic part of their artistic agendas. These were the painter of Polish origin Tymon Niesiołowski (1882–1965), and the Lithuanian Algirdas Petrulis (1915–2010). This fact might help better justify my use of the term Intimism.

I would also like to make another point in my approach. The work of Vilnius-based artists of Lithuanian and Polish descent who lived and worked in the city between 1939 and 1945 are analysed and interpreted for the first time as a unique artistic phenomenon. Until today, their artistic heritage has been explored separately by Lithuanian and Polish art historians, though both agree that at least in the period between 1939 (when the Nazis declared war on Poland and invaded its western part, while the Soviets occupied the eastern part of Poland and allowed Lithuania to reclaim its historical capital Vilnius which had been annexed by Poland in 1920) and 1945 (when Vilnius Poles were relocated to Poland, primarily to former German cities left empty after the war), these two groups of artists shared a common fate, and their lives often met, both socially and artistically. The above-mentioned attitude of art historians was, and still is, mainly determined by a nationalist outlook, which only recognises the influence of Western artistic culture on the national art, as well as by the argument that artists of Lithuanian and Polish origin did not mix in Vilnius between 1939 and 1945, because they were separated not only by a mutual enmity born out of political disagreements, but also by a language barrier. The facts, however, reveal a different picture. Some

contemporaries, such as the Lithuanian sculptor Petras Aleksandravičius (1906–1997), who started teaching at Vilnius Academy of Art in the autumn of 1940, recalled that certain colleagues, such as Mečislovas Bulaka (1907–1994), Adolfas Valeška (1905–1994) and Viktoras Vizgirda (1904–1993), influential Lithuanian artists of the then middle generation and active participants in the interwar art scene, who studied in Kaunas and started their careers there, spoke Polish quite fluently. Naturally, artists of the older generation who had studied in Poland before the First World War, such as Justinas Vienožinskis (1886–1960), Adomas Varnas (1879–1979) and others, had no problems with the language. At the same time, the town planner Jerzy Kobzakowski, a native of Warsaw, who let a room to the already-mentioned Petras Aleksandravičius in Vilnius, had quite a good command of Lithuanian.[4] When the Lithuanians closed down Stephen Báthory University, some Polish professors of art began to work at Vilnius Academy of Art, which opened in 1940, and joined in the activities of Lithuanian artists. The same can be said about Belarusians (not one artist of Jewish origin was among the staff of Vilnius Academy of Art, but they took part in the art exhibitions and participated in various artistic activities until the beginning of the Nazi occupation, that is to say 22 June 1941).

During the Nazi occupation, the public activities of Polish and Belarusian artists living in Vilnius were limited by the restrictions on citizens of Slavic origin, but some of these artists worked in Lithuanian institutions and companies, and were able to pursue their profession. This means that in fact the lives and artistic activities of Lithuanian and Polish artists had much in common. Their professional interests made artists forget about national tension and discord. Taking this into account, we should finally begin to approach the entire artistic heritage of Vilnius as a relevant part of our national heritage.

Another argument in favour of this view is the fact that since 1940, works by Polish artists were seen by some of their contemporaries as

[4] V. Jankauskas, *Aš pats sau neįdomus. Pokalbiai su prof. P. Aleksandravičiumi* (I am not Interesting to Myself. Conversations with Professor P. Aleksandravičius), Vilnius, 1996, pp. 62-63.

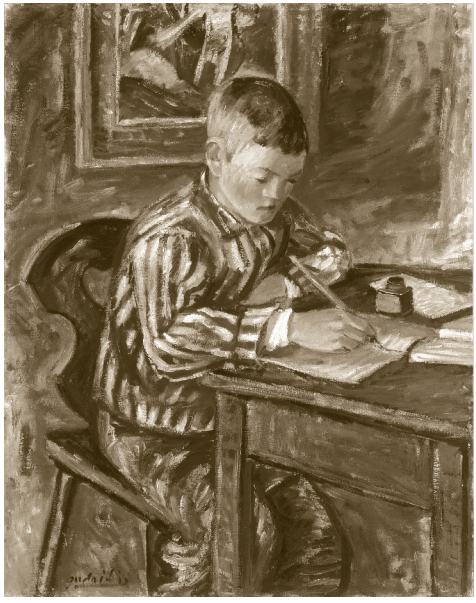
1. Antanas Gudaitis. *Wife's Portrait*. 1944

belonging to the Lithuanian cultural heritage: they became part of this heritage after being bought from various exhibitions for the collection of Lithuanian national art whose function was delegated to the Culture Museum in Kaunas until the end of the war.[5]

But let us return to Intimism in wartime art. As has already been mentioned, manifestations of Intimism are most distinct in two genres, portraits and interiors. If we exclude from the portrait gallery of that time several formal portraits of classics of 20th-century Lithuanian literature painted by classics of 20th-century Lithuanian art, such as Petras Kalpokas (1880–1945) or Justinas Vienožinskis, as commissions from the recently established Academy of Sciences, and a couple of portraits by Ludomir Sleńdziński (1889–1980), an artist of Polish origin and the leader of the school of Vilnius Classicism, which were also commissioned, it is obvious that most of the portraits from this period are quite homely and intimate. These are mostly small portraits of modestly dressed people, reserved, immersed in their thoughts, looking away from the viewer, and usually sad. These people, even teenagers and children, seem tired and apathetic. Many of them are members or close friends of the artists' families.

A young woman with a hairdo typical of the war period is sitting with her needlework. She is not looking at the viewer, and is not trying to attract attention or show off. She is deep in concentration, immersed

[5] G. Jankevičiūtė, *Po raudonaja žvaigžde. Lietuvos dailė 1940–1941* (Under the Red Star. Lithuanian Art in 1940–41), Vilnius, 2011, pp. 222-223; *Istorijos štrichai. Nacionalinis M.K. Čiurlionio dailės muziejus 1921–2011* (Historical Sketches. M.K. Čiurlionis National Art Museum 1921–2011), ed. by D. Kamarauskienė, Kaunas, 2011, pp. 68, 89.



2. Antanas Gudaitis. *A Boy Writing*. 1942

in herself and her work: it is an intimate, homely, domestic scene. This is the pastel *Wife's Portrait* (1944) by Antanas Gudaitis (1904–1989), one of the most recognised innovators in Lithuanian art of the interwar period, and a representative of the national Expressionism (Fig. 1). In this picture, it is only the background that is reminiscent of Expressionism: the homely look of the woman is offset by bright orange drapery.[6]

A boy in a striped shirt that looks like pyjamas is doing his homework at the dining-room table: this is a portrait of one of Gudaitis' young relatives who lived with his family, called *A Boy Writing* (1942) (Fig. 2). Behind the boy's back, on the wall, hangs one of Gudaitis' famous still lifes, painted in the 1930s. The part of this boldly coloured painting depicted in the portrait is perfectly familiar to all lovers of Gudaitis' work, and hints at times of modernist experiment and artistic argument that in 1942 were already a thing of the past. In the portrait of the boy writing, the painter is only interested in the simple and trivial present, the child's task, which has to be performed as well as possible, because tomorrow it will be checked by the teacher. There is a feeling of living a day at a time, caring only for everyday things, and refusing to make any long-term plans, because there is no belief in the possibility of achieving them.

It is very obvious that in the face of a tragedy that wrecked the fates of nations and states, the most ordinary joys and worries of everyday life

[6] Antanas Gudaitis painted another similar portrait in the war years: *Mother Mending Socks* (1942, oil on canvas, 92x73, Lithuanian Art Museum).

3. Antanas Žmuidzinavičius. *A Boy Sleeping* (a portrait of the artist's grandson Augis Gučas). 1942

acquired a special significance and value. The homely note was especially strong in winter, when people were confined to their houses. Even Antanas Žmuidzinavičius (1876–1966), the bard of national Romanticism, who during the warm seasons even in the war years managed to admire the wide expanses of the Baltic Sea and paint glorious views, with the last rays of the setting sun lighting up the shapes of his beloved pines against a background of sand and sky, during the long, cold winter of 1942 concentrated on the faces of his immediate family. One of the best of his later paintings is a portrait of his two-year-old grandson sleeping (the well-known architect Augis Gučas, born in 1940), painted in January of that year (Fig. 3).

Children's portraits were also painted by other artists in occupied Lithuania, irrespective of their ethnic origin. Vincas Dilka (1912–1997) and Jonas Vaitys (1903–1963), artists of Lithuanian origin, portrayed their teenage daughters (Fig. 19), and Tymon Niesiołowski, a Vilnius-based

4. Tymon Niesiołowski. *Dorota*. 1943

5. Tymon Niesiołowski. *Portrait of the Artist's Son (Krys)*. 1943

artist of Polish origin, painted his son and daughter. The portraits of the daughter of Niesiołowski, Dorota, painted in 1942 and 1943, depict a sad child (Fig. 4). Even sadder is the portrait of his teenage son Krys (Krzysztof), dressed in typical warm clothes of the war period, a rough sheepskin coat worn inside-out (Fig. 5). The portrait captures an adolescent growing up in a family of intellectuals, forced by the conditions of life to mature early. In the spring of 1944, the boy agreed to work as a woodcutter's helper, in the hope of providing his family with not only an extra income, but also the vitally necessary fuel, which was so difficult to get during the war.[7]

Characteristically, none of these children's portraits, except for Žmuidzinavičius' sleeping grandson, look at all optimistic. They convey the worries of the parents about the future of their children, their

[7] T. Niesiołowski, *Wspomnienia* (Memoirs), Warszawa, 1963, p. 128.

6. Petras Aleksandravičius. *The Painter Viktoras Vizgirda*. 1943

7. Petras Aleksandravičius. *The Graphic Artist Jonas Kuzminskis*. 1941

distress at wartime privations, and the fear of looming danger. The prevailing moods and thoughts are conveyed well by Justinas Vienožinskis' letter to his daughter Elena. The painter, probably motivated by parental concern, advises the young woman to forget her dreams of creating 'a family nest' for the time being, because 'the times are truly adverse', and therefore it is best 'to be free and not fear for the fate of your husband or children'.[8]

Having their personal space reduced to a room or a studio also made artists look closer at the people with whom they spent every day, to examine their surroundings: the interior, its furniture, other objects, and the views from the windows. In summer, professors at Vilnius Academy

[8] Justinas Vienožinskis' letter to Elena Vienožinskaitė of 11 February 1942, in *Justinas Vienožinskis. Straipsniai, dokumentai, laiškai, amžininkų atsiminimai* (Justinas Vienožinskis. Articles, Documents, Letters, Contemporaries' Memories), ed. by I. Kostkevičiūtė, Vilnius, 1970, p. 245.

of Art painted the scenes in the Old Town that they could see from their ground floor studios (painting on the street was forbidden by the Nazi authorities); and in winter, when confined indoors, they asked their colleagues to model for them. This situation inspired very good examples of psychological portraiture. Two portraits by Petras Aleksandravičius could be mentioned: these are the portraits of the painter Viktoras Vizgirda and the graphic artist Jonas Kuzminskis (1906–1985), both professors at Vilnius Academy of Art (Figs. 6, 7). Today, these portraits are considered to be not only some of the best works by Aleksandravičius, but also classics of Lithuanian portraiture. Often shown in exhibitions, they are now on display in the permanent exhibition of the National Gallery of Art, among the best examples of the artistic heritage of the 20th century. However, researchers into Aleksandravičius' work have not asked why both of his models, with no outward resemblance, are so similar in their mood: both seem to be completely lost in their thoughts, distanced from everything that is happening around them, and seem to look without really seeing anything. Certainly, in this way, the artist expressed not only the moods of the models depicted, but also his own state of mind. The poet Alfonsas Nyka-Niliūnas described this general mood in his diary at the end of the war. He wrote:

> As the 'orchestra' of the military action draws dangerously close, Vilnius is gripped by a strangely unreal mood. People seem to have lost their ties with their surroundings, and have become silent and reticent. They pass each other in the streets without saying a word, as if concentrating on distant worries, as if not seeing anything beyond themselves.[9]

The remark in the poet's memoirs about 'looking without seeing' and the lowered eyes, meaning distancing oneself and an unwillingness to make contact, is not a merely metaphorical expression. It can be understood as a reference to the psychological atmosphere in the occupied country, and a description of the population's mood. If we look through the portraits of the war years, we will probably see that the only

[9] A. Nyka-Niliūnas, *Dienoraščio fragmentai 1938–1975* (Fragments from a Diary), Vilnius, 2002, p. 76.

8. Algirdas Petrulis. *Self-Portrait*. 1943

9. Filomena Ušinskaitė. *Self-Portrait*. Ca. 1943

characters looking at the viewer are Niesiołowski's children, who are watching their father sitting behind the easel and painting them with the frozen look of their large, wide-open eyes filled with sadness. Another exception is the self-portraits created by very young artists. These are the *alter egos* depicted in the paintings by the Vilnius-based artist Algirdas Petrulis, and Filomena Ušinskaitė (1921–2003) and Vytautas Kasiulis (1918–1995) from Kaunas, whose characters look at the viewer (Figs. 8, 9). Of course, this can be explained by a purely technical reason: self-portraits are painted in front of a mirror. Thus, the artists capture their own reflections; or, in Kasiulis' case, an artist standing between two mirrors and painting himself as if on a stage (Fig. 10). However, such works are an exception and a curiosity.

A brief look at works of portraiture by young artists of the war years calls to mind another feature. The works of both Petrulis and Kasiulis are

11. Sofija Pacevičienė. *Portrait of a Young Artist* (Irena Pacevičiūtė?). 1943

10. Vytautas Kasiulis. *Self-Portrait*. Before 1943

noted for their Historicist orientation, which manifested itself in wartime art (here we could speak not only about Lithuania, but also about other countries occupied by Germany); to be more exact, a fondness for antique objects, details of historical costumes, and quotations from works by early masters, which kindled the imagination and distracted attention from the oppressive and often painful reality of the war. Kasiulis in particular was fascinated by this possibility of escape from reality provided by artistic work, as were some of his contemporaries. Sofija Pacevičienė (1893–1979), in her portrait of a young artist from 1943, probably her daughter Irena Pacevičiūtė (1918–2002), added another symbol of escape from reality to hint at a yearning for an idyllic past: railway tracks winding between hills, and a departing train which could take both the heroine and the painter of the portrait to some other place in the world, safe, peaceful, and full of art and beauty (Fig. 11).

12. Ludomir Sleńdziński. *Portrait of the Artist's Daughter in a Spanish Shawl.* 1943

13. Ludomir Sleńdziński. *Woman with a Coral Necklace.* Ca. 1944

Ludomir Sleńdziński, one of the great names of Polish art, managed to counterbalance the terrifying insecurity of the time by using accessories from a former life, peaceful, joyful and rich, in his portraits. His daughter Julita with a Spanish shawl (Fig. 12), a girl with a turban and a powder-box. Elegant clothes, small female toiletries belonging to normal life where there is room for luxury, dressing up and celebrations, are in stark contrast to the works by Gudaitis and Niesiołowski. However, all of Sleńdziński's wartime works, the allegorical polychrome wood reliefs (*Eos*, 1940; *Summer* and *Autumn*, both 1940; *Tais*, 1942), the series of paintings *The Day of the Princess* (1943), stylised compositions with abundant details conveying the decorative and cheerful atmosphere of an eternal feast, take the viewer to a world of light, happiness and harmony, where there is no suffering, blood or privation. In 1944, he painted *The Carnival* for the room of his 17-year-old daughter, complete with Baroque staircases,

14. Vytautas Kasiulis. *Running out of Firewood* (a self-portrait). Ca. 1943

ladies in hooped skirts and characters from *commedia dell'arte*.[10] The very Classical *Woman with a Coral Necklace*, reminiscent of the Dutch School of painting, is also dated 1944 (Fig. 13). The artist remained true to the principles of his art, but at the same time he probably tried to escape the oppressive reality. Since 1939, he had experienced a lot of bad luck: he lost his beloved job as an art professor at Vilnius University, was thrown out of his apartment, lost his studio, and spent some time in prison. Later, he found refuge in the house of his colleague Władysław Oskierka at the foot of Tauras Hill, on the then remote Pakalnės Street. The architect Antoni Forkiewicz and his family also stayed there, until the forced migration to Poland of Vilnius' citizens of Polish origin.

Sleńdziński was not the only one to look for relief in the culture of the past, in the great artistic tradition. The above-mentioned self-portrait in front of a mirror by Vytautas Kasiulis could also be very interesting in this respect. It transfers the character to a historic milieu, created with the expressed wish to distance oneself from the wartime reality and to escape.

[10] I. Suchocka, Spokój i harmonia. Twórczość Ludomira Sleńdzińskiego na przykładzie dzieł z kolekcji Galerii im. Sleńdzińskich (Peace and harmony. Creative Heritage by Ludomir Sleńdziński based on the Example of his Works from the Collection of Sleńdziński Family Gallery), *Galeria im. Sleńdzińskich w Białymstoku: Aleksander, Wincenty, Ludomir i Julitta Sleńdzińscy* (The Sleńdziński Family Gallery in Bialystok: Aleksander, Wincenty, Ludomir and Julitta Sleńdziński), catalogue, Białystok, 2004, pp. 52-53.

A confrontation with this reality was generally avoided. Only very young artists found enough strength for it. For instance, another self-portrait by Kasiulis, who was recognised by his contemporaries as a rising star, is called *Running out of Firewood* (1942), and it is not only auto-ironic, but also reveals one of the most urgent problems of wartime life, the permanent shortage of fuel and the persistent cold, which made life even harder and more bitter (Fig. 14).

The cold is a recurring subject in wartime letters and diaries. For example, it permeates Justinas Vienožinskis' correspondence with his daughter Elena. On 21 February 1942, the painter, who lived in Vilnius close to Vilnius Academy of Art, wrote to her:

> Nothing new to report. Nilė [the artist's second daughter, Nijolė Vienožinskaitė] is engrossed in books, I am finishing Boruta's [Kazys Boruta, a famous Lithuanian writer of the time] portrait. Haven't started Nilė's [portrait] yet, as my studio was not heated due to the lack of fuel. Yesterday the Academy [Vilnius Academy of Art] got some firewood and the heating will start again, so we'll be working.

After two weeks, he continued:

> Life in Vilnius and its environs is getting harder every day. People are hungry and cold, and offices are practically unheated. In my studio at the Academy there was no nude modelling this winter – too cold. And the difficulties with food and fuel are getting only greater. You, my dear, will have to forgo entertainment for a while – life is getting crueller with each passing day.[11]

Cold, squalor and the apathy they brought on appear constantly in the diary of Tymon Niesiołowski, another Vilnius-based painter:

> Towards the evening, it got even colder. During the day, the morning was spent cutting and chopping firewood. Wrist pains. Painted a little. Got 200 RM. Right away bought five kilograms of flour, two kilograms of sugar, two kilograms of onions – had to borrow 45 RM [13 January 1944].

[11] *Justinas Vienožinskis. Straipsniai, dokumentai, laiškai, amžininkų atsiminimai* (Justinas Vienožinskis. Articles, Documents, Letters, Contemporaries' Memories), ed. by I. Kostkevičiūtė, Vilnius, 1970, pp. 245, 246.

> Painted basically nothing this morning. On Karaliaučiaus Street took 135 RM for a future painting. In the afternoon returned my debt to Mr P. Went together with Tomkiewicz to the Dobrzyński family for high tea, Mrs Ada was also there. The day passed by as colourless as all other days. In the morning a gardener from Kwietnew came, bringing a letter from Bolek Bochwic. The gardener should have taken me there to visit them, but financial and other matters do not allow me to leave Vilnius even for a couple of days. There was a strong blizzard in the evening. The cold subsided a little. I'm yawning, so – off to the bathroom and to bed [14 January 1944].
>
> The pressure in my head and the din in my ears haven't stopped. To make sure we are really finished, they turned off the light. Water is supplied only at midday for a couple of minutes. Yesterday sold three watercolours to Mrs Szwejkowska (the dentist) for 400 RM. My wife bought some firewood, I bought a kilo of tobacco. It's five in the evening. I'm going out to avoid using light. Today paid 8 RM for a thin candle [9 February 1944].
>
> The first cold day, about seven degrees below zero. We torture ourselves using the carbide lamp – a hellish mood [16 February 1944].
>
> This morning it was ten degrees below zero. Sunny. I'm going out to get some money. There is nothing in the house for lunch. How can I think about painting? How can I think about anything except what to put in my mouth? [20 February 1944].
>
> I seldom open this diary now. Simply no time. In the evenings I'm too tired. The din in my ears stopped when I started eating better. But I'm completely dissatisfied with everything I have painted [23 March 1944].[12]

Cold and apathy are also permanent complaints in the diary of Olga Dubeneckienė-Kalpokienė (1891–1967), of Russian origin, an ex-ballet dancer and famous stage designer, who settled in Kaunas. The entry for 15 January 1942 begins:

> A spell of horribly cold weather. The windows are covered by silvery ice flowers. I practically never leave home. In the mornings, I light the stove, clean the room, make coffee [...] Then I knit, and read German magazines. Almost every day is like this. Bleak times, no creative force [...] I don't really even want to write.[13]

[12] T. Niesiołowski, *Wspomnienia* (Memories), Warszawa, 1963, pp. 120, 124, 126.

[13] Olga Dubeneckienė-Kalpokienė wrote her diary in Russian (*Дневникъ*, 1942). The author

Two weeks later, on 29 January 1942, neither the mood nor the subject had changed:

> A bright sunny day. The trees are dressed up in 'winter silver'. The snow is so white [...] It is cold, but not too cold. It is hard to get up, but I must light the stove soon: eight degrees in the room, not warm. I put on as many clothes as possible, and start lighting the fire. And every day is the same [...] I sit by the stove and keep thinking [...] Lately I've been thinking about this 'piece of beauty' that I live for, wherever it might appear ...[14]

To all this, we can also add Antanas Žmuidzinavičius' application to the board of the Lithuanian Artists' Union, which conveys even better the image of devastating and humiliating poverty that also sapped the spiritual strength: the retired artist, who was very popular in independent Lithuania and well known for the high prices his works commanded, asked for two pieces of leather for his own and his wife's wooden-soled shoes; such basic-care items as gloves, socks, combs and toothbrushes were distributed to artists also according to the list of the members of Artists' Union.[15] Proof of the almost universal shortage not only of clothes or toiletry accessories but also of foodstuffs is the requests by artists to allocate them some jam or spirits 'for representation purposes', which have survived in the archives of the Lithuanian Artists' Union.[16] These documents allow us to imagine vividly a situation not yet addressed by Lithuanian historians.

Certainly, it would be difficult to ignore the facts showing that the wartime reality was not dreary and miserable for all citizens of Lithuania, and not for every artist. In most of the occupied territories, an exception among artists was theatrical people, above all actors and directors who

of this article is grateful to the artist's heir Silvija Kalpokaitė-Vėlavičienė for the possibility to use this source, which since 2011 has belonged to the poet and antique dealer Edmundas Kelmickas.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Lietuvos literatūros ir meno archyvas (Lithuanian Literature and Art Archive), f. 33, apr. 5, b. 12, l. 38–39, 51–51 apv.

[16] Lietuvos literatūros ir meno archyvas (Lithuanian Literature and Art Archive), f. 33, apr. 5, b. 17, l. 19.

were popular with audiences, and artists who worked for drama, and especially opera and operetta theatres.

For instance, the letters from Gražina Matulaitytė-Rannit, the *prima donna* of the Kaunas musical theatre, to her sister Vincenta Matulaitytė-Lozoraitienė, who from 1940 was living in Rome as the wife of Stasys Lozoraitis, the ambassador in exile, about coming to Vilnius on a tour in January 1943, and about the first night of a new show in Kaunas in June of the same year, provide a sharp contrast to the memories quoted above. Staying at the St George Hotel in Vilnius, which was the most luxurious hotel at the time, she wrote about a visit to her brother Jurgis Matulaitis, the manager of the Vilnius Variety Theatre:

> I've already visited everybody in Vilnius. My first visit was to Jurgis. He has a cosy apartment, a maid, and, thank God, does not lack anything. He invited me and my friend for lunch. It was superb. Entrées, great soup, the main dish, perfect coffee with sweets and cakes, etc. How lucky that he has the energy to fight the reality, and I pray to God that it all continues like this.[17]

A letter from Gražina Matulaitytė-Rannit to her sister on 30 June 1943, in which she tells about her success at the first night of the operetta by Franz Lehár *The Merry Widow* (*Die lustige Witwe*) in Kaunas, testifies to a life adorned with signs of luxury:

> Now that I've had enough sleep after all these first nights (everybody was enchanted, got mountains of flowers, books, a box of various liqueurs from Gen. [eral] Velykis,[18] who has a liqueur factory and with whom we are great chums), I'll start writing back to everyone, but to you first, because I know how much you worry about me.[19]

A contrast between the artists' requests quoted above, and the content of Gražina Matulaitytė's letters, can be associated with what the

[17] Gražina Matulaitytė-Rannit's letter of 13 January 1943 from Kaunas to her sister Vincenta Matulaitytė-Lozoraitienė in Rome, Lozoraitis family personal effects.

[18] Transferred to the reserves, General Mykolas Velykis (1884–1955) owned the Stumbras distillery in Kaunas, and was also a famous art lover and patron.

[19] Gražina Matulaitytė-Rannit's letter of 30 June 1943 from Kaunas to her sister Vincenta Matulaitytė-Lozoraitienė in Rome, Lozoraitis family personal effects.

French social historians Gilles Ragache and Jean-Robert Ragache write about daily life in wartime France. In comparison, they write:

> In 1943 the corn harvest was good, and so the daily ration of bread was raised by 25 grams. Good news! Everything else, unfortunately, did not look optimistic. In 1943 Parisians had to get by on 200 grams of fat and 300 grams of meat a month. People fell ill, tuberculosis spread, and infant mortality grew [...] But the most luxurious restaurants in Paris, Maxim's and La Tour d'Argent, were still open. There one could get *foie gras*, chocolate mousse, and all kinds of roasts.[20]

The contrast between wartime misery and prosperity in Kaunas and Vilnius was obviously not as distinct as in Paris, but in neither of these two cities was art considered an inaccessible luxury in the war years. Under the conditions of occupation, literature, theatre and art, in addition to their hedonistic function, also acquired quite a strong aspect of support for one's own culture. In Lithuania, as in other occupied countries whose local cultural life was tolerated by the Germans, everyone who was able took an interest in the art scene and attended exhibitions. People did not allow the art market to decline: the less wealthy looked for cheaper ceramic artefacts, while the well-off bought or even commissioned paintings from artists, thus seeking not only to acquire an item of art, but also, being well aware of their support for artists, for the sake of their country's culture. Among the outstanding patrons of culture was the abovementioned General Mykolas Velykis, who did a great service to Kazys Varnelis (1917–2010), a young painter at that time, and later a famous Lithuanian émigré artist and art collector, who donated his collection to the Lithuanian state at the end of his life. The fee he received for the general's portrait enabled Varnelis to leave Kaunas for an apprenticeship in Vienna, and it was the general who, according to Varnelis, encouraged him to emigrate: 'Leave Lithuania!' The journey to Vienna helped Varnelis to decide to leave his country and emigrate to the West at the end of the war when the Soviets were approaching Lithuania. The portrait

[20] G. Ragache, J.-R. Ragache, *La vie Quotidienne des écrivains et des artistes sous l'occupation 1940–1944*, Hachette, 1988, p. 137.

of General Velykis painted by the artist in 1943 may be considered an example of Lithuanian New Objectivity. It expressed the anxiety and concerns of the war period as clearly as the artworks of Intimism.

After this short digression, which sheds some light on the main topic, let us return to Intimism again. Having briefly discussed examples of portraiture, we can look at works of the interior genre. In the 1930s, Lithuanian artists did not take a particular interest in interior scenes. Painters who experienced the influence of Fauvism (Viktoras Vizgirda) or those who admired Van Gogh (Antanas Samuolis) created some works in this genre. The daily life of war, which considerably narrowed the public space and either drove artists out of town or confined them at home or in their studios, made them concentrate on interior views. It should be noted that artworks from the war period whose subject is an interior, usually the environment of the artist's home or studio, also have distinct features of the self-portrait. This is only natural, since both in war and in peace the room where an artist spends a lot of time becomes like a self-portrait. And, of course, when an artist is forced to spend days and nights in the same space, the view of that space acquires a special meaning. Consciously or not, the majority of images of wartime interiors captured typical attributes of the daily life of the period. Traces of war are encoded above all in the poverty depicted by the artists. A very memorable painting in this respect is *My Room* (ca. 1943) by Jonas Vilutis (1908–1978). This very simple, almost school-like composition depicts the end of a metal bed covered with a quilt, and heavy leather boots, genuine wartime boots, standing on the floor by the bed (Fig. 15). We have seen similar images many times in photographs and films documenting the Second World War. Therefore, the painting can be interpreted as a symbol. The work is very intimate, and has distinct features of the self-portrait. In this case, we can clearly see that it is a room in which the artist spent a great deal of time, and which is full of its lodger's thoughts, moods, dreams and hopes.

The office in the Vilnius Art Museum depicted by the painter Algirdas Petrulis, where he worked as a custodian in the war years, is

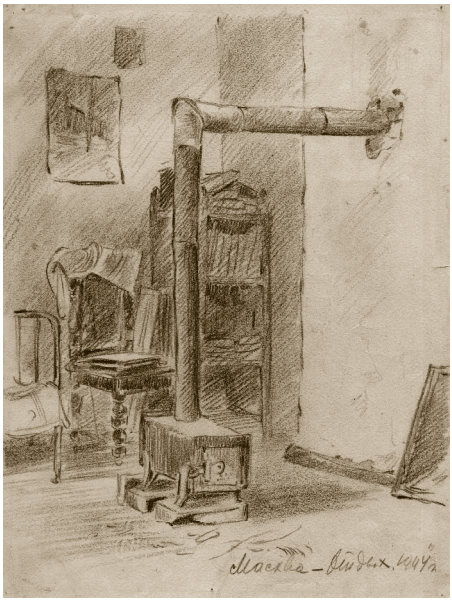
15. Jonas Vilutis. *My Room*. Ca. 1943

16. Algirdas Petrulis. *Armchair*. 1943

entirely different. At first sight, the composition seems quite cheerful: an armchair in Baroque forms in the centre, upholstered with colourful tapestry; paintings lined up next to the armchair on the floor; and several museum items scattered around (Fig. 16). However, behind the armchair stands an iron stove, a *burzhuika* (a little potbellied stove; the name *burzhuika* had come from their use by the 'bourgeois', *буржуй* in colloquial Russian, during the cold and famine of the years of the Bolshevik *coup d'etat*), a typical companion of meagre wartime life. The painter Antanas Žmuidzinavičius also installed this kind of stove in his studio in the war years. It has survived until today, and still stands in the artist's studio in his home in Kaunas, which is now a museum (Fig. 17).

These stoves were familiar to the majority of residents of Lithuania's cities. They were also used by left-wing Lithuanian intellectuals who fled

17. Antanas Žmuidzinavičius' studio in his house (now a museum). Kaunas



18. Stepas Žukas. *The Corner of the Room. Otdych near Moscow*. 1944

to the depths of Russia. The same stoves can be seen in refugees' rooms in displaced persons camps in Germany. A metal stove is an important attribute of a room in the drawings by Stepas Žukas (1904–1946), which document the life of left-wing Lithuanian artists and writers in the settlement called Otdych not far from Moscow (Fig. 18). Even though Žukas' works are not dated, they can be related to the war or to the early postwar period by referring to the stove.

To sum up what has been said, it should be stated that the use of the term Intimism to define a whole group of paintings created in the war period means that the ordinary, daily relationships of an artist's domestic life, his family, his room or kitchen, flowers in a vase on a table or a dresser, or a view from the window, that can be captured on canvas, acquire a special meaning when painted. There is no particular philosophical basis

19. Vincas Dilka. *Portrait of the Artist's Daughter Ritutė*. 1942

for this, but these paintings, celebrating banality and expressing its value and beauty, helped both the artists and the viewers to keep on struggling. We are talking about Intimism in the broadest sense, as was mentioned at the beginning of the paper. It is art born out of an enclosed life, and meant for enclosed use. It is related to the trend in French painting only by its intimacy and its particular genre structure.

Speaking of the use of Intimist artworks in the war period, it is obvious that art lovers preferred mainly still lifes and landscapes. Interiors, self-portraits and portraits of the artist's family were considered too intimate, and meant for the 'inner use' of their artists. In the eyes of contemporaries, these artworks were perhaps too personal, and lacked the decorative qualities necessary for the psychotherapeutic function which was so important in the war years. However, the audience and critics

regarded these works as important testimonies of that time, and as signs of the artist's ability not to yield to despair and apathy. Some of these works (such as Vincas Dilka's *Portrait of the Artist's Daughter Ritutė*, 1942) (Fig. 19) were purchased for the collection of the Vytautas Magnus Culture Museum.[21] Today, we, as members of the jury of wartime exhibitions, appreciate above all the aesthetic qualities of these pictures, but in them try to find traces of a bygone era.

The poverty and privations of the war period are also visible in the materials used to create these artworks, a fact that attracts our notice today. Rich layers of colourful paint sometimes hide a low-quality piece of plywood, cardboard or even waxed cloth, commonly used for covering a kitchen table. Algirdas Petrulis, for example, recalls that he painted his wartime picture *Woman with a Mirror* on a piece of canvas in which a parcel sent to him by his stepmother was wrapped.[22]

To summarise briefly all that has been said, we can conclude that the art characterised by features of Intimism represents the most intriguing part of the Lithuanian artistic heritage of the mid-1940s, and is an authentic and impressive expression of the wartime reality.

[21] *Istorijos štrichai. Nacionalinis M. K. Čiurlionio dailės muziejus 1921–2011* (Historical Sketches. M.K. Čiurlionis National Art Museum 1921–2011), ed. by D. Kamarauskienė, Kaunas, 2011, p. 95.

[22] *Algirdas Petrulis*, ed. by B. Patašienė, Vilnius, 2001, p. 10, Fig. 56.

Giedrė Jankevičiūtė

Intymizmas Antrojo pasaulinio karo Lietuvos dailėje

Santrauka

Straipsnyje siekiama apibūdinti Antrojo pasaulinio karo metų Lietuvos dailės ypatumus, perteikiančius nacių okupacijos realijas bei vietinių civilių gyventojų nuotaikas. Vizualinių šaltinių (dailės kūrinių) interpretacija grindžiama ikonografijos studijomis, taip pat rašytinių šaltinių (kritikos straipsnių, laiškų, dienoraščių, atsiminimų) informacija.

Straipsnio teiginiai remiasi išplėsta intymizmo samprata, padedančia apjungti į vieningą grupę skirtingų autorių ir skirtingos stilistikos karo metų dailės pavyzdžius. Tai kūriniai, pasižymintys klasikinio intymizmo (turima omenyje XIX a. pabaigos – XX a. pradžios prancūzų simbolizmo atmaina) ypatumais: nedideli formatai, interjero scenos arba dailininkų artimųjų, bičiulių atvaizdai, turtinga, tačiau subtili, prislopinta spalvų gama, rami nuotaika, paveikslo erdvė pabrėžtinai atribota nuo žiūrovo erdvės. Karo metų dailės pavyzdžiai retai pasižymi *Nabis* grupei priklausiusių intymizmo atstovų kūrybai būdingu rafinuotu estetizmu; karo kasdienybės žymės, skurdžios buities ženklai paprastai nustelbia tapybos grožį.

Žvelgiant į karo metais sukurtą dailę pro intymizmo prizmę, matyti, kad eilinis kasdieninis namų gyvenimas ir jo veikėjai – dailininko šeimos nariai, jo kambarys, dirbtuvė ar net virtuvė, gėlių vaza ant stalo ar komodos, pro langą atsiveriantis vaizdas, – įgijo išskirtinę reikšmę kaip vaizdavimo objektas. Jokios ypatingos filosofijos tame nebuvo, tačiau paveikslai, įprasminantys banalybę, atveriantys jos vertę ir grožį, padėjo kabintis į gyvenimą ir dailininkams, ir jų publikai. Antrojo pasaulinio karo metų intymizmas – dailė, kilusi iš uždaro gyvenimo ir skirta uždaram vartojimui. Su prancūzų tapybos kryptimi ją sieja tik nuotaikos bei vaizdo intymumas ir atitinkama žanrinė struktūra: portretas, interjero scena, natiurmortas, kamerinis peizažas.

Amžininkai šių kūrinių nepirko. Matyt, jiems tokie paveikslai atrodė ne tik pernelyg asmeniški, bet ir per mažai dekoratyvūs, kad atliktų karo metais itin vertintą psichoterapinę funkciją. Šiandien jie įgyja kitą prasmę. Neturėdami jokių vidinių barjerų, galime vertinti jų estetines savybes ir ieškoti juose epochos pėdsakų. Beje, karo skurdą ir nepriteklius išduoda ir tų kūrinių medžiaga, kas dabar vėlgi tampa savotišku kuriozu. Spalviškai turtingas dažų sluoksnis neretai slepia kiek išsibangavusios faneros lakštą, ne pačios geriausios kokybės kartoną arba net vaškuotę, naudotą virtuvės stalui pridengti. Straipsnio pabaigoje daroma išvada, kad intymizmo bruožų turinti dailė yra labiausiai intriguojanti, autentiškiausiai karo metų tikrovę perteikianti Lietuvos XX a. vidurio dailės paveldo dalis.