

Lijana Šatavičiūtė

A Vilnius Diary: Lithuanian Fine Crafts during the First World War

Keywords: crafts during the First World War, Wilnaer Arbeitstube (House of Labour), sash-weaving workshops, St Zita Society of Maids, Antanas Žmuidzinavičius, Fr Pranas Bieliauskas.

The idea to present the development of Lithuanian fine crafts during the First World War in the form of a diary was inspired by the wartime diary of Fr Pranas Bieliauskas (1883–1957), in which he recorded not only his personal experiences but also important social events.¹ Some of these were related to the dissemination of the crafts. Fr Bieliauskas was a trustee of the St Zita Society of Maids, and of five orphanages in Vilnius for Lithuanian children. His diary is not the subject of this paper, but rather an inspiration to present the development of fine crafts during the war, which are not very well known.

During the First World War, the centre of the fine crafts industry in Lithuania was the capital, Vilnius. Cultural organisations that had not yet managed to emigrate were based there: the Lithuanian Art Society at the beginning of the war, and the Lithuanian Scientific Society during the war. Despite the extreme conditions, these societies organised annual meetings, at which urgent issues in cultural life were raised. On 11 August 1914, the Lithuanian Provisional Committee for the Endowment of Victims of War was founded, and in the same year it was reorganised into a society which became the focus of Lithuanian political and cultural life under the occupation.

What events would I have noted myself if I was writing a diary about the fine crafts during the war?

¹ P. Bieliauskas, *Vilniaus dienoraštis: 1915.XII.26–1919.XI. 26* (Vilnius Diary: 26 December 1915 to 26 November 1919), Vilnius, 2009.

January 15th, 1915. The board of the Lithuanian Art Society decided to organise a general meeting of the society. The question of the necessity to prepare designs for Lithuanian homesteads was raised. Artists, architects, engineers and agronomists were invited to submit designs.²

March 8th, 1915. The Lithuanian Art Society organised its annual meeting in the hall of the Bank of Lithuania. After celebrating the achievements of the prewar period, the decision was taken to organise the Ninth Lithuanian Art Exhibition in 1915 if the war had ended by then.³ The board of the society was authorised to continue the work on the homestead designs, and also to look at questions of the national architecture and the folk heritage.⁴ The Warsaw publishing house Gebethner & Volf promised to publish at their own cost a collection of model Lithuanian homestead designs.

Let us note slightly in advance that the collection of homestead designs with the long title 'Houses, their Importance, Place, Location, Style, Materials, Building, Decoration, Look and Plans' written by Prelate Povilas Januševičius, a great advocate of the crafts, was only published in 1917. The author explains the importance of the Lithuanian national style in local architecture and interior design, and exhorts people to respect their national heritage and look for distinctive Lithuanian features in handmade textiles, sashes and crosses.⁵

April 1st, 1915. The number of wagonloads of food (corn, flour, groats, meat) and fuel (wood, petroleum) used daily by the inhabitants of Vilnius is calculated. The overall number is 61 wagonloads of goods.⁶ This means that in wartime fine crafts become an important economic incentive which may help the people of the country to survive.

² Iš Lietuvių Dailės Draugijos (From the Lithuanian Art Society), *Lietuvos žinios*, 25 January/7 February 1915.

³ Dailės Draugijos susirinkimas (Meeting of the Art Society), *Lietuvos žinios*, 11/24 March 1915.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ P. Januševičius, *Namai. Jų svarba, vieta, padėjimas, stilius, medega, statymas, papuošimas, išvaizdos ir planai* (Houses, their Importance, Place, Location, Style, Materials, Building, Decoration, Looks and Plans), Kaunas, 1917, pp. 12-13.

⁶ Vilniaus gyventojai per dieną suvartoja (Inhabitants of Vilnius Use in a Day), *Lietuvos žinios*, 1/14 April 1915.

In 1915 (before the German occupation) some publications appeared popularising traditional small crafts, and exhorting people to practise these crafts, such as the art of making traditional religious sculptures, weaving and basketry, and the organisers were encouraged to look for financing opportunities, to found schools, workshops and warehouses,⁷ and also to take an interest in the experience of neighbouring countries. In the same year, the artist Adomas Varnas in Warsaw visited the Architectural Exhibition organised by the Central Citizens' Committee of Poland, which aimed to popularise the national style when rebuilding war-damaged architecture, and in which building designs, drawings, photographs and ethnographic works were exhibited. He published a detailed report of his experiences.⁸ The folk architecture of the Suvalkai area was also represented, though not in much detail.

Public societies concerned with the survival of citizens under the occupation perceived a great need for the development of crafts.

July 1st, 1915. At the general meeting of the Lithuanian Society for the Endowment of Victims of War in the parish hall of the Church of St Nicholas, Antanas Smetona, the future president of Lithuania, proposed to teach crafts to orphaned children in children's homes. 'It's not difficult,' he explained. 'It would be more difficult to open a special school under the conditions of war.'⁹

August 1915. The German army broke through the lines of the Russian Army of the Northeast, and at the beginning of August took Kaunas fortress.

October 2nd, 1915. The occupation of Vilnius. The German 10th Army was stationed there. Despite the wartime restrictions, its government was supportive to fine crafts, fascinated by Lithuanian folk art, and gave it wide press coverage (Figs. 1, 2).

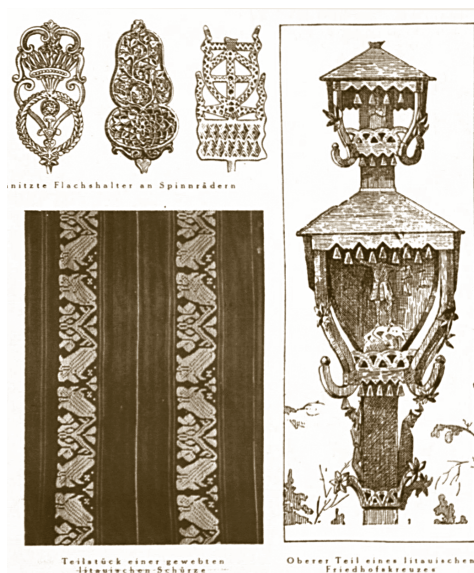
⁷ Audimo mokykla (Weaving School), *Lietuvos žinios*, 30 January/12 February 1915; G.K., Mažoji pramonė (Cottage Industry), *Lietuvos žinios*, 14/27 June 1915.

⁸ A. Varnas, Lenkų architektūros paroda (An Exhibition of Polish Architecture), *Lietuvos žinios*, 22 July/4 August 1915.

⁹ Visuotinis, Lietuvių Draugijos nukentėjusiems dėl karo šelpiti susirinkimas (The Meeting of the Lithuanian Society for the Endowment of Victims of War), *Lietuvos žinios*, 5/18 July 1915.



1. The local German government was fascinated by Lithuanian folk art and gave it wide coverage in the press. German artists depicted folk traditions, e.g. Gerd Paul, *Lithuanian Children Dancing in a Ring*. From the *Scheinwerfer* supplement to *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 20 October 1917



erfährt das Dach einen reichgestalteten Ausbau und endigt zumeist in einem eisernen Strahlenkreuz, das in seiner Vielseitigkeit und Reichhaltigkeit den litauischen Formenschatz um eine köstliche Eigenart bereichert. Hier war dem Volk Gelegenheit gegeben, seine Phantasie ungehemmt gestalten zu lassen. Infolgedessen trifft man bei diesen Kreuzen auf Formen von solcher starken Eigenwilligkeit, gepaart mit ungewöhnlicher Erfindungsgabe, daß man sich dem Zauber dieser Gestaltungskraft nicht entziehen kann. Bedauerlich bleibt, daß auch bei diesen Bauern der Einfluß der neuen Zeit mit ihren gesteigerten Bedürfnissen die gewerbliche Selbsterzeugung allmählich untergräbt, zumal die großstädtische Industrie das Land zu erobern beginnt.



2. An illustrated article on Lithuanian folk art in the *Scheinwerfer* supplement to *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 1916

January 3rd, 1916. The Vilnius daily *Dabartis* reprinted impressions of Lithuania by the war correspondent Wilhelm Duewell from the German press. 'The vast majority of the occupied country's economy was completely stopped,' Duewell wrote. 'The vitality of crafts and trade activities was suspended by the war. A great number of craftsmen were driven out of their workshops by the retreating Russians, they were banished to the depths of Russia and forced into a migratory life.'¹⁰

March 1916. The impoverished local population and 30,000 unemployed were sources of grave concern to the occupying government. Vilnius was not a large-scale industrial city in the prewar period; its industry declined due to the wartime conditions. Factories stood empty, there was an overall lack of supplies, and industrial equipment was taken away by the retreating Russians. The mayor gave an order to the national communities to create their own crafts workshops, producing 'all kinds of things particular to the Vilnius region: Lithuanian and Byelorussian sashes, aprons, towels, tablecloths, bedspreads, knitwear, cloth, woodcarvings, toys made on a lathe, and other objects.'¹¹ There were already several Jewish work support society sewing workshops. The Polish Society for the Endowment of the Victims of War had its own workshops. And the Lithuanian Society for the Endowment of Victims of War organised woodcarving workshops.¹² Vilnius' new government tried to encourage and expand the activities of these workshops, to make them join a single House of Labour (Wilnaer Arbeitstube), to organise centralised supplies, and to ensure the permanent exhibition and sale of works produced.

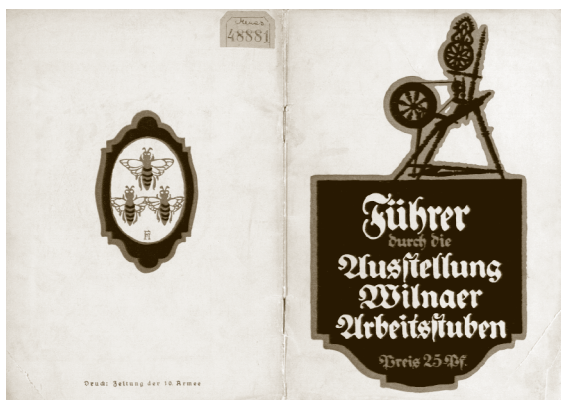
March 25th, 1916. The editorial board of the newspaper of the German 10th Army addressed the national communities, asking them to participate in the preparation of a fine crafts exhibition, to provide exhibits (textiles, sashes, mittens and toys) from their personal collections.¹³

¹⁰ Vilnius, *Dabartis*, 3/16 January 1916.

¹¹ Bedarbiams darbavietės Vilniuje (Work Places for the Unemployed in Vilnius), *Dabartis*, 1/15 April 1916.

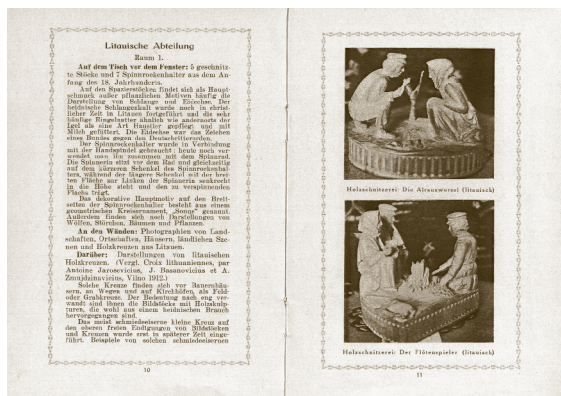
¹² Ibid.

¹³ Lietuvių dailės pramonės paroda Vilniuje (The Lithuanian Art Industry Exhibition in Vilnius), *Dabartis*, 25 March/8 April 1916.



June 1916. The former Pacas Palace (43 Große Straße, now 7 Didžioji St), which until the German occupation had housed the headquarters of the Russian army, was being renovated in order to make it a centre for educational and cultural activities. The city magistrate was responsible for the exhibition, and it was designed by the magistrate's architect Max Bühlmann. A reading room and a café were opened next to the exhibition halls.

Friday, June 30th, 1916. Half-past eleven. The celebratory opening of the exhibition of products of Vilnius' fine crafts workshops (Figs. 3, 4, 5). The general commander of the 10th Army, the sponsor of the exhibition Herman Eichhorn (1848–1918) and his wife, Kaiser Wilhelm's II son Prince Oskar of Prussia (1888–1958), the Vilnius burgomaster Robert (?) von Pohl, about 150 German



3. The cover of the catalogue of the exhibition of Vilnius fine crafts workshops. 1916

4. A double-page spread from the exhibition catalogue of Vilnius fine crafts workshops presenting Lithuanian folk art. 1916

5. A double-page spread from the exhibition catalogue of Vilnius fine crafts workshops presenting Polish craft products. 1916



6. The celebratory opening of the exhibition of Vilnius fine crafts workshops, and views of the exhibition. 1916



7. The opening of the exhibition of Vilnius fine crafts workshops, and views of the exhibition. 1916

officers, and local people were present at the opening. The children in national costume were especially noticed (Figs. 6, 7).

Fr Bieliauskas describes the opening in his diary:

The Jewish orchestra played the German national anthem. The children's choir conducted by Juozas Naujalis sang several Lithuanian folk songs. In the Polish section, two looms, one for textiles another for carpets, were set up. The biggest selection of works was in the Jewish section: tin objects, woodcarvings, knitwear. The Byelorussians exhibited folk objects from museum collections. The Lithuanian section covered five rooms. It looked modest, but all the objects were handmade. On the day of the opening, a demonstration of sash-weaving was given.¹⁴

¹⁴ Bieliauskas, op. cit., pp. 46–47.



8. Sash weavers of the St Zita Society of Maids, with their leader Marytė Strazdaitė (first from the right). 1916

July 15th, 1916. From Fr Bieliauskas' diary:

Great demand for Lithuanian folk sashes at the House of Labour. Sashes were woven in all five Lithuanian children's homes, woven by the members of the St Zita and the Temperance societies. Many Germans buy them to take home as gifts.¹⁵

August 16th, 1916. The St Zita Society of Maids declared the official opening of the sash-weaving workshop (Fig. 8). It was run by Marytė Strazdaitė, under the guidance of Fr Bieliauskas and Antanas Žmuidzinavičius.

¹⁵ Bieliauskas, op. cit., p. 50.

The exhibition of Vilnius handicrafts was visited both by soldiers and by local people. According to information from 19 August 1916 (one and a half months after the opening), the exhibition had been visited by 3,074 people. Works to a value of 4,000 German marks had been sold, and goods to a value of 6,000 German marks had been ordered.¹⁶ A warehouse of products by Vilnius craftsmen opened in Berlin, and the products were exhibited at the Leipzig Spring Fair, which opened in March 1917.¹⁷ Woodcarvings, embroidery and sashes were in great demand. Buyers from Germany, Austria, Holland and Poland ordered products by Vilnius craftsmen, thereby securing them work for a quarter of a year.¹⁸

June 1917. A year after the opening of the Wilnaer Arbeitstube exhibition, the results of the work were summarised. A German section, in which artists, soldiers in the German army stationed in Vilnius, could exhibit their works, was added to the four sections of Vilnius' national communities (Lithuanian, Polish, Byelorussian and Jewish). Exhibitions of work by German artists were held in the premises of the House of Labour. In one year, the craftsmen produced and sold products to the value of 222,685 German marks. Sixty-five adult craftsmen and 30 children worked in the Lithuanian section, another 20 adults and 15 children worked at home.¹⁹ The Lithuanians mainly wove sashes, made handicrafts, wood products and carvings (Fig. 9). Some orders for master craftsmen, sewing nets from hemp and flax, and sewing underwear, came from the German military government.

The weaving of sashes has been mentioned many times already, and it might create the false impression that only sashes were woven at the Wilnaer Arbeitstube. As we can see, the products were very different. But the sashes attracted the most attention. At the general meeting of

¹⁶ Vienas mėnuo Vilniaus parodos (One Month of the Vilnius Exhibition), *Dabartis*, 19 August 1916.

¹⁷ Paroda Vilniaus rankdarbių (The Exhibition of Vilnius Handicrafts), *Dabartis*, 4 October 1916.

¹⁸ Naminė Vilniaus pramonė didžiąjame Leipzigo prekymetyje (Vilnius Cottage Industry at the Leipzig Great Fair), *Dabartis*, 31 March 1917.

¹⁹ Jau metai, kai Vilniuje yra įsteigta naminių darbų paroda (It's Now One Year since the Exhibition of Homemade Artefacts in Vilnius was Established), *Dabartis*, 7 July 1917.



9. Patterns of traditional Lithuanian weaving. From the *Scheinverfer* supplement to *Zeitung der 10. Armee*. 1917

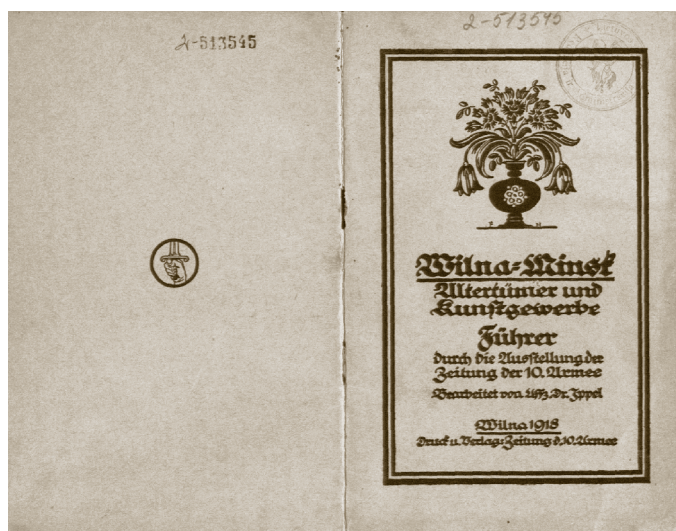
members of the St Zita Society on 1 December 1917, it was calculated that over a period of slightly over a year, 3,440 sashes were woven; 2,594 sashes were sold for a total of 10,445 German marks.²⁰ At the time in the exhibition there were 846 sashes. In the winter, up to 34 members of the society wove sashes, in the spring and summer slightly fewer.

The end of 1917. The Christmas fair organised by the Wilnaer Arbeitstube boasted plenty of handmade products. In the weaving section, the Lithuanian sashes were the most attractive, in the woodcarving section there were lamps, plates, calendar tablets, matchboxes, and various wooden toys, soldiers marching and playing the fiddle, and funny animals. Some products were packed in crates of

15 units, ready to send to Germany. The Wilnaer Arbeitstube provided this service: beautifully packaged goods were sent to the German soldiers' families at home. The Wilnaer Arbeitstube was closed at the end of 1918 due to a lack of supplies and demand.

The Wilnaer Arbeitstube exhibition was not the only cultural project of the 10th Army connected with the encouragement of the applied arts and fine crafts. On 8 June 1918, an exhibition of antiques and pieces of applied art from the Vilnius and Minsk governorates opened

²⁰ P. D., Lietuvių tarnaičių Šv. Zitos Draugijos visuotinis susirinkimas (General Meeting of the Lithuanian St Zita Society of Maids), *Dabartis*, 1 December 1917.



10. The cover of the catalogue of the Vilnius-Minsk exhibition of antiquities and applied arts from the Vilnius and Minsk areas. 1918



11. An entrance ticket to the Vilnius-Minsk exhibition of antiquities and applied arts. 1918

in the German army headquarters (6 St George's Avenue) (Figs. 10, 11). This exhibition, according to its organisers, was intended to present the historical heritage to a general audience, and to revive the applied arts in these regions.²¹ The exhibition included examples of work by Vilnius goldsmiths, religious paintings and sculptures of saints, expensive textiles, a warrior's armour and weapons, and antique maps (Fig. 12). The Minsk governorate was represented by Slutsk sashes and Urechye glass. In the folk art section, the clothes of Lithuanian and Byelorussian women were exhibited, skirts, vests, aprons and headgear, and also bedspreads, tablecloths and sashes. General von Falkenhayn, who opened the exhibition together with members of the military government, inspected the goldsmiths' section, compared the work to the work of Königsberg and Danzig craftsmen (Fig. 13), and was fascinated by the sashes and the

²¹ Vilniaus-Minsko paroda (The Vilnius-Minsk Exhibition), *Dabartis*, 11 June 1918.



12. Exhibits from the Vilnius-Minsk exhibition of antiques and applied arts in the *Scheinwerfer* supplement to *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 1918



13. Exhibits from the Vilnius-Minsk exhibition of antiques and applied arts in the *Scheinwerfer* supplement to *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, 1918

musical instrument the *kanklės*. The general expressed his wish for traditional crafts in Lithuania to be revived.²²

Among other exhibitions held during the First World War, we could mention that on 18 August 1918 the Lithuanian Exhibition organised by the Königsberg Goethe Society opened in Königsberg's Ostpreussische Heimatmuseum. This exhibition continued in some way the tradition of prewar Lithuanian exhibitions in Prussia. Master craftsmen

²² Vilnius. Paroda (Vilnius. Exhibition), *Dabartis*, 8 June 1918.

from the Lithuanian and German sections of the Wilnaer Arbeitstube participated in the exhibition, occupying the first of four museum buildings. Paintings and drawings by Žmuidzinavičius, Varnas and Daugirdas, and by German artists (Walter Buhe, Fred Hendrich, Koelling), were exhibited together with the Lithuanian national costume, sashes and woodcarvings.

What conclusions can we draw from this? This overview proves that artistic life in the capital during the First World War was not dead. Fine crafts, being the section of artistic creation that promised the fastest economic return, were the quickest to react to the changes in life. The combination of economic, cultural and national incentives created a completely new form of dissemination of traditional crafts through the founding of the multi-nation Wilnaer Arbeitstube. Favourable circumstances and the support of the occupying government allowed for the realisation of some tasks in the dissemination of the fine arts which were identified before the war.

L i j a n a Š a t a v i č i ū t ė

Vilniaus dienoraštis: Lietuvos dailieji amatai Pirmojo pasaulinio karo metais (1914–1918)

Santrauka

Straipsnio formą įkvėpė Vilniaus amatų globėjo kunigo Prano Bieliausko (1883–1957) dienoraštis, kuriame jis fiksavo ne tik asmeninius išgyvenimus, bet ir svarbius 1915–1919 m. visuomeninio bei kultūrinio gyvenimo įvykius. Straipsnyje pristatomi reikšmingiausi amatų raidos faktai, pradedant ekonominio gyvenimo sąlygomis, amatus skatinusių organizacijų veikla, baigiant dailiųjų amatų dirbtuvėmis ir jų produkcija.

Karo pradžioje vietos valdžia bandė tęsti ikikarinę amatų skatinimo politiką, kuri tapo dar aktualesnė prasidėjus karui. Iki vokiečių okupacijos pasirodė liaudies statybą ir tradicinius amatus populiarinančių straipsnių, raginimų imtis amatų. Nepaisant ekstremalių sąlygų, vyko visuomeninių draugijų narių susirinkimai, juose keltos aktualios ekonominės ir kultūros problemos. 1915 m. kovo 8 d. metiniame Lietuvos dailės draugijos susirinkime nutarta rengti 9-ąją lietuvių dailės parodą (jei karas baigtųsi 1915 m.), rūpintis tautinės architektūros ir liaudies paveldo apsaugos problemomis, išleisti pavyzdinių lietuviškų sodybų projektų rinkinį. Domėtasi kaimyninių kraštų patirtimi. 1915 m. Adomas Varnas Varšuvoje aplankė ir spaudoje smulkiai aprašė Centrinio Lenkijos piliečių komiteto surengtą architektūros parodą, skatinusią karo sugriautą architektūrą atstatyti tautiniu stiliumi.

1915 m. rugsėjo 19 d. Vokietijos okupuotame Vilniuje buvo dislokuota 10-oji vokiečių armija, kurios vadovybė rėmė dailiuosius amatus, domėjosi lietuvių liaudies menu ir plačiai jį pristatė savo spaudoje. Naujoji miesto valdžia, įžvelgusi dailiųjų amatų plėtros ekonominę ir etinę naudą, užsibrėžė centralizuoti stichiską amatininkų veiklą – jau veikusias dirbtuves sujungti į bendrus Darbo namus (*Arbeitsstube*), o amatininkus aprūpinti iš Vokietijos gabenamomis žaliavomis, surengti nuolatinę dirbinių parodą-pardavimą.

Buvusiuose Pacų rūmuose (dab. Didžioji g. 7) 1916 m. birželio 30 d. atidaryta visą okupacijos laikotarpį veikusi Vilniaus dirbtuvių dailiųjų dirbinių paroda, kurioje veikė keturių Vilniaus tautinių bendrijų (lietuvių, lenkų, gudų, žydų) skyriai. Po metų atidarytas vokiečių skyrius, kuriame darbus eksponavo Vokietijos dailininkų parodos. Suvenyrinių dirbinių paklausa tarp vokiečių kareivių skatino juostų, drožinių, žaislų, siuvinėtų dirbinių ir kitų gaminių plėtrą. Darbo namuose lietuviai daugiausia audė juostas ir kitus audinius, kūrė medžio dirbinius. Augant dirbinių poreikiui, juostų audimo ėmėsi Šv. Zitos tarnaičių draugijos ir Blaivybės draugijos nariai, juostų

dirbtuvėlės buvo steigiamos vaikų prieglaudose. Meistrai gaudavo užsakymų iš vokiečių karinės vadovybės nerti tinklus, siūti baltinius. Vilniaus meistrų dirbiniai buvo eksponuoti 1917 m. pavasarinėje Leipcigo mugėje ir 1918 m. rugpjūčio mėn. Rytų Prūsijos Goethe's draugijos Karaliaučiuje surengtoje Lietuviškoje parodoje.

1918 m. Vyresniosios armijos komandos būstinėje (Šv. Jurgio pr. 6) buvo atidaryta Vilniaus ir Minsko gubernijų senienų ir taikomosios dailės paroda, kuri supažindino su istoriniu dailės paveldu: Vilniaus auksakalių dirbiniais, bažnytine daile, audiniais, ginklais, Slucko juostomis, lietuvių ir baltarusių liaudies menu.

Apžvalga parodė, kad nors prieškarui puoselėta ir naują pagreitį įgaunanti dailių amatų plėtra buvo pakirsta, vis dėlto Pirmojo pasaulinio karo laikotarpio meninis Vilniaus gyvenimas nebuvo apmiręs. Dailieji amatai kaip labiausiai prie ekstremalaus gyvenimo sąlygų galinti prisitaikyti kūrybos sritis greičiau reagavo į karo pokyčius. Didelį dėmesį jiems skyrė karo metu veikusios lietuvių, lenkų, gudų, žydų visuomeninės organizacijos. Vokiečių valdžios domėjimasis liaudies menu buvo pasakojama jo raidai. Amatininkų veiklą koordinavusi ir jų produkciją skatinusi okupacinė valdžia, įžvelgusi amatuose ne tik ekonominę, bet ir socialinę bei etinę naudą, prisidėjo prie iki tol (ir vėliau) Lietuvoje neegzistavusios organizuotos daugiatautės amatininkų institucijos – Vilniaus darbo namų sukūrimo.