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The First World War and its Aftermath in Latvian Writing on Art

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War and Art

‘During the first weeks of the war, it seemed that art, literature and books had vanished from the face of the earth. Weapons and newspapers seemed to be the only things that mattered.’¹ Still, artistic life went on, proving that art could be ranked above life. ‘War as a turbulent phenomenon is transient. Art as a peaceful phenomenon is permanent.’² This was the conclusion of the Latvian poet and writer Linards Laicens,³ who studied at Alexander Shaniavsky People’s University in Moscow between 1913 and 1917, and reported on wartime cultural life in Russia. According to him, theatres and concerts were just as well attended, excluding works by Germans and Austrians. Also, the numbers of museum visitors improved, the smaller numbers of foreign tourists being replaced by soldiers and army officers. But such informative reports were by no means the only kind of pieces dealing with art and war in Latvian periodicals. Sifting through the index *Latvian Science and Literature*,⁴ which lists publications in all

¹ L. Laicens, Karš un māksla (War and Art), *Latvija*, 1915, no. 75, p. 5.

² Laicens, op. cit.

³ Linards Laicens (1883–1937) was a representative of Expressionist and Constructivist poetics, and an active left-wing politician in Latvia from 1919 to 1932, who moved to the USSR because of his ideological convictions in 1932, and was later executed during Stalin’s purges.

⁴ Work on the bibliographical index *Latviešu zinātne un literatūra: periodiskos izdevumos iespiesto rakstu sistematisks saturs un alfabētisks autoru rādītājs* (Latvian Science and Literature: Thematic Content Index and Alphabetical Name Index of Articles Published in Periodicals), which lists articles from 1763 to 1942, was started by the bibliographer Augusts Ģinters (1885–1944) in the 1920s, and carried on until the present day; some material is still not published.

fields, it is surprising to find a number of entries entitled 'Art and War' or 'War and Art', dealing with similar topics, and published from 1915 until the early 1920s. The complex warfare, involving Germans and Russians, the White Guards and Bolsheviks, from which the independent Republic of Latvia was to emerge, was conceived as running parallel with processes going on in artistic life. No comprehensive attempt has yet been made to analyse this subject in Latvian thinking on art. This article also does not intend to present the whole picture or definitive conclusions, but expects to provide an insight into the range of issues and some of the most illuminating examples.

It is known that a number of avant-garde trends made rather belligerent statements, seeing war as a positive process, allowing the shedding of the oppressive burden of the past. Perhaps the best known would be the Futurist example that '... passes from approbation of any vital human activity to the glorification of specific forms of bodily and intellectual exertion and agitation: conflict, violence, misogyny, anarchy and ultimately war, are welcomed as expressions of universal dynamism'.⁵ According to Marinetti, the Futurist leader, 'We will glorify war – the world's only hygiene – militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers ...'⁶ The English Vorticists also declared their principles in a similar vein, being 'highly aggressive in tone, celebrating movement and the machine',⁷ although the First World War was the event that put an end to this movement. Were there any echoes of such attitudes in Latvia? The painter, stage designer and book illustrator Niklāvs Strunke (Fig. 1),⁸ who later became famous for his interest in Metaphysical Painting and long-term contacts with Italian cultural circles, came closest to

⁵ M.W. Martin, *Futurist Art and Theory 1909–1915*. Oxford, 1968, p. 41.

⁶ F.T. Marinetti, The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism, *Art in Theory 1900–1990. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. by Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, Blackwell, 1995, p. 147.

⁷ Vorticism – Blast, <http://arts.jrank.org/pages/14218/Vorticism.html>

⁸ The Latvian artist Niklāvs Strunke (1894–1966) studied in St Petersburg at the Royal School of the Society for the Promotion of the Arts (1909–1911), Mikhail Bernstein's art school (1911–1913) and Wassily Mate's studio, and at Jūlijs Madernieks' studio in Riga (1913–1914). Between 1923 and 1927 he visited Germany and Italy. His art features synthesised elements of Cubism, Constructivism and Metaphysical Painting. He emigrated to Sweden in 1944.



1. Niklāvs Strunke in the 1920s

Futurism in his ardent, Marinetti-style manifestos of 1917 and 1918. Still, these were influenced by his stay in Russia, and probably by the Russian Futurists. In his statements, which were largely concerned with definitions of particular elements of the form of pictures, he also repudiated tradition and academic training, stating that art academies worked in close contact with funeral parlours, attempting to revive the dead in art.⁹ Strunke also stated in his article *The New Art* that this new type of art expressed the architectonic simplicity of the cannon, street noises and the motion of the motor car.¹⁰ A draft version of the article features the even stronger statement: ‘Art is anarchy’ (Fig. 2),¹¹

which is omitted from the printed piece. Still, no open glorification of war has yet been found in his ideas. War was more like a part of the modern reality that modern art had to deal with on equal terms, along with other topical issues. The search for contemporary forms in art was treated as a kind of realism. As social and economic life became ‘split and broken’, ‘the broken, piercing content is expressed in split and sharp forms.’¹²

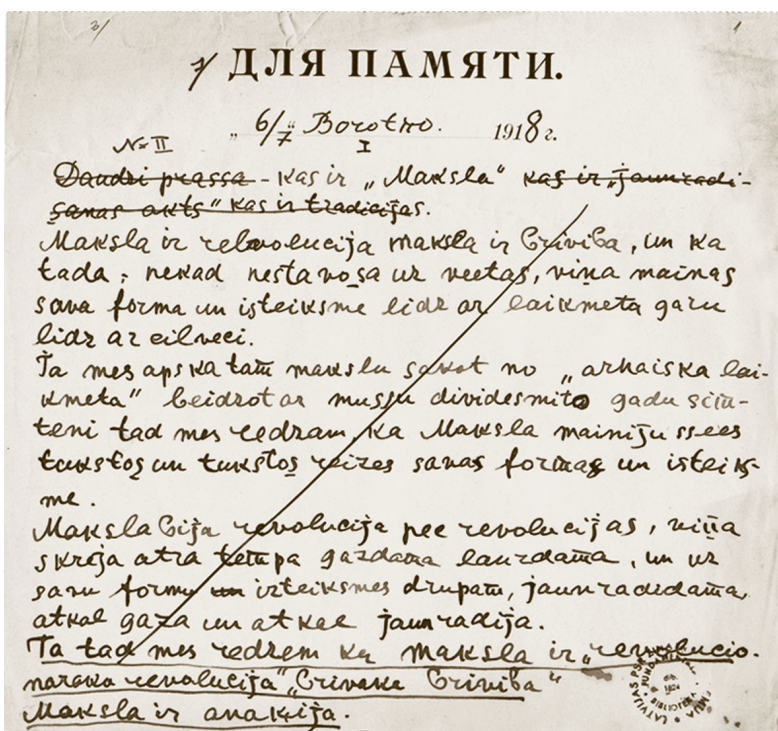
On the other hand, the experience of war in which the old world order had literally gone down, bringing unprecedented destruction and

⁹ N. Strunke, *Saturs un forma* (Content and Form), 1917–1918, Academic Library of the University of Latvia, Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Alberts Prande coll., inv. no. R.K. 2568, pp. 2, 14.

¹⁰ N. Strunke, *Jaunā māksla* (The New Art), *Taurētājs*, 1919, no.1/2, p. 54.

¹¹ N. Strunke, *Kas ir māksla* (What Art is), 1917–1918, Academic Library of the University of Latvia, Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Alberts Prande coll., inv. no. R.K. 2568, p. 1.

¹² N. Strunke, *Gleznieciskā forma + saturs* (Painterly Form + Content), 1917–1918, Academic Library of the University of Latvia, Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Alberts Prande coll., inv. no. R.K. 2568, p. 3.



2. The first page of Niklāvs Strunke's manuscript 'Kas ir māksla' (What Art is), 1918

suffering, could be cause for deep pessimism regarding the future of art, and culture in general. Were Latvian writers on art largely optimists or pessimists on these issues? This is one question to be borne in mind in attempting to structure reflections on the theme of art and war. But we have to admit that the spectrum of thought provoked by the subject in artists, art historians, critics and other authors is much wider.

In those days, one of the leading themes in writing on art was undoubtedly the negative attitude towards Germany, and German art and culture, as the Germans were, in modern terms, surely, the 'bad guys', whose oppressive behaviour throughout the centuries was brought to the fore. The image of German landlords as exploiters of Latvian peasants

had been increasingly developed since the national awakening in the 19th century, and now the Germans also became the enemies on the battlefield, and the reason why thousands of Latvians left their farmsteads and fled to Russia. Some authors, like the ceramic artist Augusts Julla,¹³ tried to keep a somewhat balanced opinion, and called on people not to dismiss ‘true and pure art’, such as the heritage of Wagner, Goethe or Bach. He was also critical of German military ideology and the reliance on brute force that had stupefied both the German army and the German people in general. Still, art as such was conceived as a kind of antidote to the evil of war. The author was not very resolute on the nature of war: ‘War may be an unavoidable evil, like an evil sport ... But it may well be that war is a necessary, indispensable operation on the body of humankind.’¹⁴ According to him, just as the Russian artist Vereshchagin’s war pictures do not arouse a thirst for blood, and Raphael’s Madonnas do not advertise Catholicism, true German art can also be ‘incense to mankind’s exhausted spirit’.¹⁵ It is also interesting to quote from the editorial note representing the newspaper publisher’s opinion:

One has nothing against true art, standing always far from any politics; however, it should be added that a strong reliance on and enjoyment of other peoples’ art harms the development of the nation’s own instincts in art [...] This is especially important at present, when the war imposes on nations a duty to develop their own national self-awareness.¹⁶

Julla’s inclusive opinion certainly seemed too vague, or cosmopolitan, for some, envisaging the later tendency between the wars to discover, or rather invent, an authentic national culture based on the ethnographic heritage.

¹³ Augusts Julla (1872–1958) was a ceramicist, sculptor and teacher. He studied at Benjamin Blum’s art school in Riga, and then at the Stieglitz Central School of Technical Drawing in St Petersburg (1906–1912). In the interwar period he taught crafts at a craft school in the town of Cēsis.

¹⁴ A. Julla, *Karš un māksla* (War and Art), *Dzimtenes Vēstnesis*, 1915, no. 159, p. 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*



3. Gustavs Šķilters. 1925

Other writers were much more uncompromising. The sculptor Gustavs Šķilters (Fig. 3),¹⁷ one of the most prolific writers on art throughout the first half of the 20th century, in his article *Art and War* in many sequels, condemned all the German elements dominant in Riga: Riga City Art Museum, filled with ‘worthless pieces and copies of minor German artists’,¹⁸ mean sculptures in public spaces, and apartments arranged according to German taste, from the plates and dishes to magazines and reproductions. Contrary to Julla, Šķilters asserted that German art was devoid of any value whatsoever. He

described the Germans as paupers in art, who ‘lack taste and a sense of beautiful forms and proportions, colours and harmonies. Their art exudes weight, clumsiness, gruesome dullness and mortal stiffness [...] We have become so accustomed to this German air that we do not notice it any more.’¹⁹ In stylistic terms, his stance was a conservative and retrospective one: ‘beautiful forms’ harking back to Neoclassical attitudes repudiate ‘exaggerated modern trends’²⁰ as just a pastime for wealthy idlers. Now, according to Šķilters, the time had come for a serious spirit and patriotic charity. The positive outcome of war, as can be guessed from

¹⁷ Gustavs Šķilters (1874–1954), one of the founders of Latvian professional sculpture. He graduated from the Stieglitz Central School of Technical Drawing in St Petersburg (1899), and perfected his skills in Paris and Rome. He was a follower of realist traditions, influenced by Auguste Rodin’s Impressionism and Art Nouveau. For more on Šķilters’ theoretical outlook, see: S. Pelše, *History of Latvian Art Theory: Definitions of Art in the Context of the Prevailing Ideas of the Time (1900–1940)*, Riga, 2007, pp. 49–52, 135.

¹⁸ G. Šķilters, *Karš un māksla (War and Art)*, *Ņevas Viļņi*, 1915, no. 1, p. 3.

¹⁹ Šķilters, op. cit.

²⁰ G. Šķilters, *Karš un māksla*, *Ņevas Viļņi*, 1915, no. 26, p. 4.

the article, had been the final unmasking of the Germans' truly evil nature. They had proved it by the declaration of war, and now, according to Šķilters, a war parallel with the battles on the front had to be fought at home, a war against all things 'German' around us and inside us.

Authors reflecting on the subject of war in art also tended to stress other aspects: for instance, the significance of the distance of time, stating that true creation would emerge only when the events were over, also criticising the report-style drawings and paintings from the front line as banal, vulgar and superficial.²¹ Some had even been provoked to reflect on the representation of war in world art since Antiquity. First taking up Greek art, one author concluded that 'the ancient battle was expressed in sculpture,'²² but the Romans had already approached a more painterly mode. The flourishing of painted battle-scenes in European art is said to have been conditioned by burning smoke-filled battlefields, beautiful costumes, and the development of perspective and the landscape in painting. However, advances in warfare itself are said to have brought about the decline of battle-scenes in painting: as the military commander no longer rode at the front of his regiment, soldiers wore camouflage uniforms and dug trenches, there was nothing visually attractive left. So the battle-scene migrated to literature, and set out to reveal what was going on in the soldier's inner world. This Hegelian-type evolution, in which the leading role was handed over from sculpture to painting to literature, concludes with a leftist zeal that the future would bring an epoch where no more wars, like the present one, would be possible. As is proven by the art itself, however, just the earth-toned paintings of trenches by the painter Jāzevs Grosvalds²³ have become canonised pieces of Latvian art, addressing the very idea of what constitutes painting and its available expressive means. Grosvalds, in his survey 'Latvian Art (The Young)'

²¹ B., Karš un gleznniecība (War and Painting), *Jaunā Dienas Lapa*, 1916, no. 184, p. 1.

²² K.K., Karš un māksla (War and Art), *Lidums*, 1916, no. 24, p. 3.

²³ Jāzevs Grosvalds (1891–1920) was a painter who knew both moderate and radical circles of the Paris Fauvists and Cubists from personal encounters; as the offspring of a wealthy family, he had a chance to study abroad, and later entered the canon of Latvian modernism with his war scenes.

first published in French²⁴ to promote the young national school of art abroad, and which was translated into Latvian only in 2002, interpreted the First World War first of all as a thematic source:

If prior to 1914 it was difficult to choose subjects for painting, now there is an abundance of great and splendid themes. What a magnificent task for national art, to sing the praises of the suffering of one's nation and land, destruction, fighting and victory!²⁵

He also stated that war had fostered the development of a national art in Latvia much more than in West European countries, where it failed to shatter the centuries-old roots of art harking back to Antiquity. The dramatic experience is said to have contributed to the abandoning of passive, descriptive, Impressionist-style art, to be replaced by a synthetic, creative attitude.

War in Art

With the founding of the independent Republic of Latvia in 1918 and the consolidation of modernist-oriented circles around the Expressionists' Group that was to become the Riga Artists' Group (Fig. 4),²⁶ wartime experience was transformed into a sort of catalyst for the genesis of the modern Latvian nation, and for modern art as well, carrying on the earlier anti-German pathos.

The Great War, with its unprecedented destruction, clearly emphasises that the period in our life when all potential was directed towards material ends has collapsed like a house of cards in the face of the fundamental changes. That great power, these great acts of heroism, that tremendous suffering endured by our nation, in the past and the present, demonstrate that there is something

²⁴ J. Grosvalds, L'art letton (Les jeunes), *La Revue Baltique*, 1919, no. 1, pp. 25-28.

²⁵ J. Grosvalds, Latviešu māksla (Jaunie) (Latvian Art [The Young]), *Latviešu mākslinieku teorētiskie raksti un manifesti*. Comp. by I. Bužinska, Rīga, 2002, p. 10.

²⁶ The most comprehensive overview of the Riga Artists' Group's creative evolution and achievements can be found in: D. Lambergā, *Klasiskais modernisms: Latvijas glezniecība 20. gs. sākumā* (Classical Modernism: Early 20th-Century Latvian Painting), Rīga, 2004. Also available in French: *Le modernisme classique: La peinture lettone au début du XXème siècle*, Riga, 2005, and Estonian: *Klassikaline modernism: Lāti maalikunst 20. sajandi alguses*, Tallinn, 2009.



4. Riga Artists Group. First row, from left: Niklāvs Strunke, Anna Hamstere, Aleksandra Beļcova, Valdemārs Tōne. Standing, from left: Jēkabs Kazaks, Konrāds Ubāns, Oto Skulme, Ģederts Eliass, Romans Suta, Eduards Lindbergs. 1920

primordially powerful in our unity. And that is faith running through the age of enslavement, faith in our truth, faith in our spirit and our feelings. This extraordinary, critical faith gained more strength in the age of enslavement, brought to a head by our enslavers with their brutal violence.²⁷

This statement comes from the manifesto *On our Painting* by the artist and theoretician Romans Suta,²⁸ the most active and polemical defender of modernism (Fig. 5). The above-mentioned ‘enslavers’, first

²⁷ R. Suta, *Par mūsu glezniecību II* (On our Painting II), *Latvijas Sargs*, 1919, no. 94, p. 3.

²⁸ Romans Suta (1896–1944) was a painter, graphic artist and teacher. He was educated at Jūlijs Madernieks’ studio (1913), the Riga City Art School (1913–1915), and the Penza Art School in Russia (1917). One of the most prominent representatives of Cubist and Purist influences in Latvian art, he later transformed into a more painterly type of Neo-Realism. Suta also designed porcelain and various interior decorations, developing a national style with a Constructivist flavour.



5. Romans Suta. *Funeral*. From the linocut publication *Expressionists*. 1919

meaning the German nobility in a wider sense, took on more specific artistic characteristics in 1920. That year, a scandal broke out between the traditional realists, trained according to academic principles, and the young modernists, whose education, interrupted by the First World War, consisted of a mixture of influences from various Latvian and Russian art schools and Old Master idioms to early 20th-century French art in the Shchukin and Morozov collections in Moscow. The clash actually started from the first exhibition of the Riga Artists' Group, which gained enough recognition to set off a negative reaction, exacerbated by the purchase of works by the young artists by museums.²⁹ In order to deride their enthusiasm for the latest trends, two academics, the figurative painter Jānis Roberts Tillbergs³⁰ (Fig. 7) and the graphic artist Rihards

²⁹ The exhibition ran from 7 to 28 March 1920. The Latvian State Art Museum bought 17 works, but the Riga City Art Museum bought only eight works (D. Lamberga, *Jēkabs Kazaks*, Rīga, 2007, p. 141).

³⁰ Jānis Roberts Tillbergs (1880–1972) was a painter and graphic artist, most noted for his introduction of a new academism in art teaching in Latvia. He was the head of the Figure Painting Studio (1921–1932), the Portrait Studio (1947–1957), and the Department of Painting and Composition (1952–1953) at the Latvian Academy of Art.



6. Jānis Roberts Tillbergs. *XXX*. 1920. On the reverse: *Portrait of Son*. 1921

Zariņš,³¹ arranged a fake exhibition of ‘Ballism’ (freely inventing yet another modernist *-ism*, typified by circular shapes, or ‘balls’, as a parody of Expressionism and Cubism) in late 1920, ascribed to a young, unknown artist called Reinholds Kasparsons, but in fact created collectively by a group of academics (Fig. 6). They then gave a lecture during which the trick was unmasked, and explained as proof of the worthlessness of modern art that it does not require any skill from the artist.³² The modernist wing felt offended,



7. Jānis Roberts Tillbergs. Ca. 1920

³¹ Rihards Zariņš (1869–1939) represented a conservative trend of national romanticism in Latvian graphic art; he contributed much to the field of applied graphics and art teaching.

³² Tillbergs’ and Zariņš’ statements attacking modern art were later recounted in the press. Tillbergs is said to have reflected mostly on the Russian avant-garde, especially Futurism, seeing it as complete nonsense, and also on Expressionism and similar trends derived from the ‘trash’ of Paris art life; while Zariņš recalled the short tale by Hans Christian Andersen ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’, describing the value of modern art as such ‘new clothes’ presented as real by artists, critics and editors, out of the fear of being called retrograde (J. Jaunsudrabiņš, ‘Plikais

to say the least,³³ and many writers and critics expressed their support, despite not being members of the group themselves. War-time rhetoric was used to describe and report on the event in the press: the shift was remarkable in comparison with earlier titles. Instead of ‘War and Art’, one saw ‘War in Art’, for example, in the title of an article by the art historian Jānis Dombrovskis,³⁴ who described the final event in the scandalous exhibition:

In the lecture on urgent issues in art on 22 October, the academics Tillbergs and Zariņš started a long-awaited and perfectly prepared general attack against our Expressionists. By avoiding hand-to-hand combat, in other words, a debate with them, their victory was only half a victory. It is a deplorable fact that the organisers did not give the floor to anyone from the opposite side, thus making the evening very unbalanced. Expressionism is an ideological and artistic movement, caused by the experience of the times, and it would be impossible to destroy it the way both lecturers intended to, with their all-purpose figure of Kasparsons. More authoritative personalities than Zariņš and Tillbergs have already recognised Expressionism. The true contribution of our Expressionists is that they have introduced more fresh air into local artistic life.³⁵

In his attempt to express a balanced position, Dombrovskis also criticised Suta, the main spokesman for the young artists, for his ill-mannered and exaggerated support for new tendencies, presented as some sort of miraculously original phenomenon.

karalis’ jeb liels joks latviešu mākslas dzīvē [The Naked King, or a Big Joke in the Art Life of Latvia]), *Jaunākās Ziņas*, 1920, no. 239.

³³ The most tragic consequence of this infamous event in Latvian art history was the untimely death of the modernist painter Jēkabs Kazaks (1895–1920). As the leader of the modernists’ group, he was not allowed to take the floor to defend the new art, voicing the modernists’ position in his last statement in the press (J. Kazaks, R. Tilbergs par aktuāliem mākslas jautājumiem [R. Tilbergs on Pressing Art Issues]), *Latvijas Kareivis*, 1920, no. 205, p. 4). His tuberculosis progressed rapidly after the furore that erupted on a cold autumn evening. For more on this theme, see: D. Lambergā, *Jēkabs Kazaks*, Rīga, 2007, pp. 169–171, 222–223.

³⁴ Jānis Dombrovskis (1885–1953) was an art historian and teacher, and author of the first overview of Latvian art history *Latvju māksla* (1925), in which he attempted to formulate the national specificity of Latvian art as being based on colouring.

³⁵ J. Dombrovskis, *Mākslas karš* (War in Art), *Brīvā Zeme*, 1920, no. 244, p. 3.

A much more confrontational position was taken by the poet Edvards Virza³⁶ in his article *Bermontians of Art*.

Now is a period of wonder and destruction, revolutions and counter-revolutions, not only in social life but also in spiritual life. Our painting, sunk in the blatant copying of life and nature in which we saw pictures, though the artist was nowhere to be found, was overhauled by the Expressionists [...] They did not strive to represent the outer appearance of things, but their essence, and this is why their works are so full of unusual movements and life [...] Their version of revolution in art has a convincing national overtone, and in this field they rise as true kings and leaders of the new painterly Latvia.

But suddenly, the Bermontians are standing at its gates, just like those at the gates of Riga last year! Just like them, the present ones, led by Tillbergs, the Bermondts of art, demand nothing less than the complete abolition of the new artistic Latvia, in the name of long-forgotten habits. These knights of painting, having emerged from the tombs of the prewar epoch, have lost their skills at handling brushes, and have started a war not with artistic means but with the hullabaloo of the marketplace. This attack, devoid of principles and ideals, and carried out in the name of counter-revolution, will crash on the threshold of the new Latvia, just like all other counter-revolutions. Ridiculed, they must vanish in the direction of either Berlin or St Petersburg, from where they got their odd energy and spiritual power.³⁷

Just to remind readers what these ‘Bermontians of Art’ referred to, Pavel Bermondts-Avalov (1877–1974) was the leader of the German-established West Russian Army (frequently known as the ‘Bermontians’) which was sent to fight the Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War, but, believing that the communists would be defeated without his help, Bermondts-Avalov decided to strike the newly independent nations of Lithuania and Latvia instead. He was one of the few anti-communist generals who openly propagandised monarchist ideals.

Virza continued to blame the ‘German-Russian order’ dominant in prewar Latvia, with its atmosphere of contentment, intimacy and

³⁶ The poet Edvards Virza (1883–1940) is known for both his interest in French culture and his later praise for the patriarchal peasant lifestyle supported by the authoritarian regime in the 1930s.

³⁷ E. Virza, *Mākslas bermondisti (Bermontians of Art)*, *Latvijas Kareivis*, 1920, no. 210, p. 4.



8. Sigismunds Vidbergs. *Landing in Daugavgrīva*.
From the series 'Bermondts Affair'. 1926

complete lack of artistic principles. Now that German sentimentality had been swept away by the heroic and manly actions of our nation, they could not find any popular support whatsoever.³⁸ This opinion seems to be somewhat exaggerating the modernist position of the general public, but the early 1920s can indeed be called the period in which 'new art' and the 'new state' were conceived as mutually conditioned and mutually supportive notions. However, the 'war in art' did not last longer than the mid-1920s, as

many modernist artists took up teaching positions at the Latvian Academy of Art,³⁹ and the fascination with geometric, abstract trends gradually waned, to be replaced by softer, more lifelike and realistic idioms, in line with the European-wide 'return to order'.⁴⁰ During the 1920s, and

³⁸ E. Virza, *op. cit.*

³⁹ Between 1923 and 1925, Ludolfs Liberts, Konrāds Ubāns, Valdemārs Tone and Gederts Eliass started their teaching careers at the Academy. The most critical of the very idea of academic training was Suta, who taught art at the left-leaning People's University, and after the nationalist coup d'état in 1934, at his private studio.

⁴⁰ 'Symptoms of exhaustion with the battle of the "-isms" and the imperative for artistic innovation could be observed throughout postwar Europe. In the early 1930s, the vital energy of the modernist movement, with its universalising ambitions and utopian visions of society, was clearly on the ebb.' (I. Kossowska, Introduction, *Reinterpreting the Past: Traditionalist Artistic Trends in Central and Eastern Europe of the 1920s and 1930s*, ed. by I. Kossowska, Warsaw, 2010, p. 10.)



9. *Battles with the Bermontians on the Iron Bridge*. A relief on the Freedom Monument in Riga by Kārlis Zāle. 1931–1935

especially the 1930s, references to the First World War and struggles for independence continued to surface in reflections on the national style and the national art.⁴¹ These events have now turned into milestones of the glorious past, leading to the flourishing present, protected by the nation-state and reflected in many works of art (Figs. 8, 9) as well.

⁴¹ For instance, the art historian Boriss Vipers described Jāzeps Grosvalds as the founder of the Latvian national epos in art, and his output as idea-based and thus deeply national, because he was able to find the inner sense of historic events and experiences. See: B. Vipers, *Jāzeps Grosvalds*, Rīga, 1938, p. 48.

Stella Pelše

Pirmasis pasaulinis karas ir jo atgarsiai Latvijas dailēs kritikoje

Santrauka

Latvijos spauldoje pasirodė nemažai straipsnių, skirtų meno ir karo santykiams 1915–1920 m. laikotarpiu. Tapytojas, scenografas, knygų iliustratorius Niklāvs Strunke, vėliau išgarsėjęs dėmesiu metafizinei tapybai ir ilgalaikiais ryšiais su italų kultūriniais sluoksniais, labiausiai priartėjo prie futurizmo savo aršiuose, artimuose Marinetti, manifestuose, paskelbtuose 1917–1918 metais. To laikotarpio straipsniuose apie meną viena svarbiausių temų, be abejonės, buvo negatyvus Vokietijos, jos meno ir kultūros vertinimas, nes vokiečiai, šiuolaikine terminologija tariant, buvo „blogiečiai“, kurių šimtmečius trukęs engėjiškas elgesys Latvijoje ypač iškilo prasidėjus Pirmajam pasauliniam karui. Nors kai kurie autoriai (pvz., keramikas Augusts Julla) laikėsi nuosaikesnės pozicijos ir kvietė neišsižadėti „tikro ir gryno meno“, Wagnerio, Goethe's ar Bacho palikimo, kiti buvo žymiai priešiškesni. Skulptorius Gustavs Šķilters, vienas produktyviausiai rašiusių apie meną XX a. pirmoje pusėje, straipsnyje „Menas ir karas“ daugeliu aspektų pasmerkė vokiškus elementus, dominuojančius Rygos kultūroje. Jis net tvirtino, kad vokiečiams trūksta skonio, gražių formų, proporcijų, spalvų ir harmonijos pojūčio. Kai kuriuos autorius karas paskatino apmąstyti karo ir meno santykius pasaulinėje dailės istorijoje nuo antikos laikų.

Kai 1918 m. susikūrė nepriklausoma Latvijos respublika, o modernistiškai nusiteikę dailininkai susibūrė aplink ekspresionistų grupę, pasivadinusią Rygos dailininkų grupe, karo metų patyrimas virto savotišku katalizatoriumi, paskatinusiu modernios Latvijos tautos ir modernaus meno raidą, paremtą ankstesniu antivokišku patosu. Tokias mintis plėtojo modernizmo tapytojas Jāzeps Grosvalds ir aktyviausias modernizmo gynėjas dailininkas ir teoretikas Romans Suta. 1920 m. įvyko skandalas tarp tradicinės realistinės, akademinės krypties dailininkų ir jaunųjų modernistų. Sumanę išjuokti jaunų dailininkų susižavėjimą naujaisiomis srovėmis, du akademikai, figūrinių paveikslų tapytojas Jānis Roberts Tillbergs ir grafikas Rihards Zariņš, surengė parodą-klastotę, pavadinę „ballizmu“ (dar vienu „-izmu“) su jauno, dar nežinomo dailininko Reinholdso Kasparsono kūryba, nors tokio nebuvo iš viso, o darbus kolektyviai sukūrė akademikų grupė. Savo sumanymą jie pristatė publikai viešojo paskaitoje, įrodinėdami moderniojo meno degradaciją. Šio įvykio refleksijai spauldoje pasitelkta karo metų retorika, ir netikėtai įvyko posūkis nuo temos „Karas ir menas“ prie temos „Karas mene“, – taip vadinosi dailės istoriko Jānio Dombrovskio straipsnis. Poetas Edvards Virza savo prieštaringose eilėse net pavadino akademikus meno „bermontininkais“, lygindamas su skandinavu monarchistu generolu Pavelu

Bermondtu-Avalovu, kuris kovojo prieš naujai įsikūrusias Latvijos ir Lietuvos valstybes. Trečiajame ir ypač ketvirtajame XX a. dešimtmetyje Pirmojo pasaulinio karo ir nepriklausomybės kovų temos išliko svarbios nacionalinio stiliaus kūrimo ir nacionalinio meno apmąstymuose, tik dabar jos tapo šlovingos praeities kelrodžiais, atvedusiais į dabarties suklestėjimą, saugomą nacionalinės valstybės.