

Jane Eckett

The University of Melbourne

Cultural nationalism and the avant-garde: Teisutis Zikaras in Kaunas, Freiburg, Melbourne

Two conflicting forces shaped post-Second World War Lithuanian art in exile: cultural nationalism and School of Paris modernism. Cultural nationalism frames most post-war accounts of senior Lithuanian artists in exile, while younger artists who migrated to Paris or New York are more likely to be co-opted to a Lithuanian diasporic avant-garde. Teisutis Zikaras (1922–1991) felt the pull of both forces. The youngest son of sculptor Juozas Zikaras, he initially adhered to his father's academicism and nationalist romanticism. At Kaunas Art School, during successive Soviet and German occupations, he studied under Juozas Mikėnas and Vytautas Kašuba and with them retreated to the lyric poetry and neoclassical calm of Aristide Maillol and the interbellum 'return to order'. In post-war Freiburg, in Germany's French-occupied zone, Zikaras encountered modern French art – particularly that of Pablo Picasso and Ossip Zadkine. The impact of this encounter is registered in his final works made at Freiburg and, in the 1950s and 1960s, in distant Melbourne, Australia. This article argues that the antithetical forces of cultural nationalism and French modernism shaped the work of the younger Zikaras while also contributing to his subsequent obscurity in Lithuania and Australia. It also recoups a significant body of modernist work to the Lithuanian art historical narrative.

Keywords: émigré artists, exile, Lithuanian diaspora, sculpture, modernism, cultural nationalism

Accounts of émigré artists are frequently caught between two nationally circumscribed narratives: those of their birth countries and those of the countries in which the artists eventually settle. This duality is further complicated by changes that occur in an artist's oeuvre during – and often because of – the process of emigration, including changes that take place in any intermediary countries in which the artist might live for a few months or several years. Such is the case of the Lithuanian émigré sculptor Teisutis Zikaras (1922–1991), whose work was shaped by the opposing forces of cultural nationalism and School of Paris modernism. In this survey of his career, which traces his work in Lithuania, Germany, and

Australia, I contend that Zikaras's engagement with French modernism was a consistent strand that positioned him among the most advanced modernist artistic groups in each country, yet also eclipsed him from view in histories concerned with more nationalist imperatives.

Zikaras's eclipse from the Lithuanian art historical literature – published in, rather than outside, Lithuania – stems partly from the fact that at the time of fleeing the returning Soviets, in the summer of 1944, he had only just graduated from the Kauno meno mokykla (Kaunas Art School). He therefore did not have the sort of established reputation that would ensure his inclusion in narratives of Lithuanian interwar- and wartime-art. More crucially still, the circumstances of Soviet rule – from 1944 to 1990 – were scarcely propitious for recouping the reputations of artists who had fled west. During this period, Zikaras was virtually absent from the Lithuanian literature.¹ Since the 1990 declaration of Lithuanian independence, references to Zikaras's work have appeared with increasing regularity in the country of his birth, although again mainly in the context of the Lithuanian diaspora – particularly in connection to the short-lived *École des Arts et Métiers* in Freiburg, Germany, where he taught drawing and sculpture from 1947 to 1949.² None discuss his formative years in Kaunas, and few discuss his mature career in Melbourne beyond mention of just one or two works.

In Germany and Australia, in the immediate post-war years, Zikaras features more prominently in the Lithuanian and Latvian diasporic press (his marriage to a Latvian artist, Skaidrīte Veiss, in 1949, fuelling interest in his work among the Latvian community). In 1948 his work was represented by a single black-and-white photograph of the sculpture, *Po kryžium* (Under the Cross, c.1948), along with two and a half lines of biographic outline, in *Lithuanian Art in Exile*, which accompanied a touring exhibition of the same name in New York and Chicago.³ In

¹ The only exception to this appeared in 1987 in the context of an exhibition surveying Lithuanian diasporic artists: Sakalauskas, a. o. (1987): 127–128.

² Lubytė (2003): 215–216, 283–284; Andriušytė-Žukienė (2007): 70; Ramonienė (2007): 25; Banytė and Laukaitienė (2009): 72, 75–77.

³ Augius, a. o. (1948): 15, [71]. The publication preceded the touring exhibition: 'Lithuanian Art in Exile', New York Hall of Science, New York, 20 October–20 November 1949, and Chicago

Australia he was quickly recognised as an artist of note by the Lithuanian community, with profiles about him published regularly from 1952 onwards.⁴ His work was included in the first major exhibition of Lithuanian art in Australia, held in 1953 in Sydney, where his plaster *Rūpintojėlis – The Lord of Sorrows* (1953, fig. 1) was awarded second prize.⁵ The inclusion on the judging panel of non-Lithuanians (sculptor Anita Aarons, Hungarian émigré painter Desiderius Orban, and Polish-Ukrainian painter Michael Kmit) alongside Lithuanians (Jurgis Bistrickas and Vytautas Janavičius) ensured the exhibition was covered not only in the diasporic press but also in English-language Australian newspapers.⁶ This success



1. Teisutis Zikaras with *Rūpintojėlis, The Lord of Sorrows*, 1953, at the Victorian Artists' Society Galleries, June 1955, photo courtesy the artist's estate, Melbourne

Historical Society, Lincoln Park, Chicago, 14 August–1 October 1950. The same photograph was later reproduced in Vizgirda (1966): 100, where it is dated 1945. I have followed the 1948 date for three reasons. Firstly, the date given in the 1948 catalogue is more likely to be reliable than the 1966 encyclopaedia, being closest to the time of the work's execution. Secondly, Zikaras was largely itinerant between the summer of 1944 and November 1946 – when he is first recorded as being in Freiburg im Breisgau – and so would probably not have had access to a studio in which to work until late 1946. Finally, the work has more in common stylistically with Zikaras's work done in Melbourne in the early 1950s than his neoclassical period in the early years at Freiburg.

⁴ Landsbergis-Žemkalnis (19 November 1952): 2, 4; Vaičaitis (1953): 234; Sarma (16 February 1953): 1; *Mūsų pastogė* (16 September 1953): 3.

⁵ Janavičius (1953), catalogue no. 71, full-page illustration p. [1]: Teisutis Zikaras (1922–1991), *Rūpintojėlis – The Lord of Sorrows* (1953), plaster toned for bronze, 40 cm high approx., present whereabouts unknown.

⁶ Gleeson (7 September 1953): 20; *The Daily Telegraph* (7 September 1953): 12; *The Sydney Morning Herald* (8 September 1953): 2; *The Catholic Weekly* (10 September 1953): 23; *Meie*

was repeated in 1955, when Zikaras's *St Francis* (1955) won the Barnett McCutcheon Prize for Religious Sculpture at the annual Victorian Sculptors' Society exhibition; critics unanimously praised Zikaras's 'finely rendered interpretation [...] in the manner of Lithuanian peasant carving' for its 'dignity' and 'medieval rigidity'.⁷ During the 1960s, Zikaras was an active member of both the Victorian Sculptors' Society and a smaller group of sculptors who styled themselves as Centre Five, which I have characterised elsewhere as a local Melbourne avant-garde.⁸ However, by the mid-1970s Zikaras's star was on the wane, with references to his work becoming increasingly infrequent and retrospective in tone, punctuated only by a modest posthumous survey exhibition in 2009 at the McClelland Gallery and Sculpture Park in Langwarrin, Victoria.⁹ Given the relatively scant literature, a chronological synopsis of Zikaras's career, including some biographical background, is necessary in order to understand the influences that shaped his work.

Teisutis Zikaras was born in 1922 in Panevėžys, the second son of the renowned Lithuanian academic sculptor Juozas Zikaras (1881–1944). Zikaras senior is commemorated with two house museums to his memory in Lithuania, and his contribution to the interbellum Lithuanian national cultural revival is well documented.¹⁰ Trained in St Petersburg before the First World War, Juozas Zikaras practiced a form of Russian fin-de-

Kodu (10 September 1953): 2; *Mūsų pastogė* (16 September 1953): 3; *Le Courrier Australien* (10 September 1953): 5.

⁷ McCulloch (19 October 1955): 22 and Bow (November 1955): 15; see also Shore (18 October 1955): 9; and *The Age Art Critic* (18 October 1955): 2. Teisutis Zikaras, *St Francis*, 1955, plaster for bronze, 84 × 22 × 15.5 cm, with Sotheby's, 19 April 1994, lot 167, also bronze (cast 2008), no. 3 of an edition of 3, collection McClelland Gallery and Sculpture Park, Langwarrin, Vic., acc. no. 2008.13.

⁸ Eckett (2017); Eckett (2022): 11–50.

⁹ Scarlett, Borthwick, and Lindsay (2009). Other references to Zikaras since the 1970s are likewise retrospective in tone, the principal ones being: Vizgirda (1978): 325–326; Sturgeon (1978): 175–176; Scarlett (1980): 723–725; Kazokas (Kazokienė) (1997): 40–41; Stringer and Stanhope (2003); and Eckett (2019): 69–70, 84, 150.

¹⁰ Juozas Zikaras Museum, J. Zikaro g. 3, LT-44261 Kaunas, and Juozas Zikaras Memorial House, Paliukų kaimas, LT-38429 Panevėžio rajonas. For further reading on Juozas Zikaras, see Budrys (1960); Kezys (2004): 54–61, 66; and Banytė and Laukaitienė (2009).

siècle academicism inflected by Rodin, placed at the service of Lithuanian patriotism. This is evident in works such as *Mąstytojas* (Thinker, 1910), which combines academic naturalism with the sort of turbulent surfaces favoured by Rodin applied to a subject of central importance to the Lithuanian *dievdirbys* (or ‘God carvers’), namely: the *Rūpintojėlis*, the pensive or sorrowing Christ.¹¹ During the early years of Lithuania’s independence, this simmering patriotism became overt in his best-known works: *Liberty* (1921), an allegorical figure of a woman with cast-off shackles and free-flowing gown (an illustration of which featured on the modern 20-litu banknote, 1993–2014), and *Book Carrier* (1928), which celebrates the smuggling of Lithuanian language books formerly banned under Tsarist Russia.¹²

Kaunas

The Zikaras family moved to the new capital Kaunas in 1928, when Juozas Zikaras was appointed head of the sculpture studio at the Kaunas Art School. They were part of a wave of civil servants, artists, and intelligentsia to arrive in Kaunas in the interwar years. Their new home was directly opposite the newly built Čiurlionis Art Gallery and Kaunas Art School, which together represented the ‘symbolic home for Lithuanian art in Kaunas’ – a home that, as Steven Mansbach notes, was ‘of signal importance as so much of the national heritage remained in Polish-occupied Vilnius’.¹³

¹¹ Juozas Zikaras (1881–1944), *Mąstytojas* (Thinker), 1910, bronze, 47 × 57 × 49 cm, Vilnius: National Art Gallery, acc. no. S 2253; see Vilniaus miesto savivaldybės centrinė bibliotek (2021), <https://www.vcb.lt/virtuali-paroda-2021-iej-i-skulptoriaus-juozo-zikaro-140-osios-gimimo-metines/#1634025557405-acf9ccee-ec25> (accessed 28 August 2023).

¹² Juozas Zikaras (1881–1944), *Laisvės* (Liberty), 1921, cast in bronze 1927, 283 × 71 × 72 cm, erected in 1927–1928 in the Karo muziejaus sodelis / War Museum Garden, Kaunas; and *Iš Tilžės* (From Tilžė), 1906, since lost but later reworked as *Knygnešys* (Book Carrier), 1928, bronze, 40 × 15 × 17 cm, collection of the Panevėžio kraštotyros muziejų / Panevėžys Local History Museum. An enlarged version, 2 m high, was cast in 1939 and now stands on permanent display in the Karo muziejaus sodelis / War Museum Garden, Kaunas. Zikaras’ statue of *Laisvės* featured on the modern Lithuanian 20 litas banknote from 1993 until Lithuania’s adoption of the Euro in 2014.

¹³ Mansbach (1999): 94.



2. Teisutis Zikaras, *Karys, Warrior*, c.1939–1942, plaster of Paris with bronze patina, 43 × 49.5 × 5.5 cm, ZT-45

Teisutis first studied in his father's studio, learning from the outset to care for his tools and learn the properties of his various sculptural materials. During these years of apprenticeship, he adopted a similarly academic mode of working. His *Warrior* (c.1939–1942, fig. 2) shares many affinities with his father's *Arklių Tramdytojas* (Horse Tamer, 1933), which was modelled as a *supraporte* for the home of the Kaunas town mayor, Antanas Gravrokas, and represents the Lithuanian god of the skies, Dievas, whose twin sons assumed the form of horses.¹⁴ The athletic build

¹⁴ Juozas Zikaras (1881–1944), *Arklių Tramdytojas* (Horse Tamer), 1933, toned plaster, 79 × 95 cm, M. K. Čiurlionis National Art Museum, Kaunas, ref. MS 471, illustrated in Budrys (1960): 62, and Banytė and Laukaitienė (2009): 111.

of the men's figures in both works, as well as their short, forked beards and their wreaths of laurel, reflect a shared iconography. Yet where the father's work retains a sense of classical harmony and order, the son's work conveys a palpable sense of dramatic tension that is almost overwrought with its thrusting diagonals pushing beyond the confines of the rectangular relief. The two works seem to embody the polarities of age and youth, or equipoise and volatility.

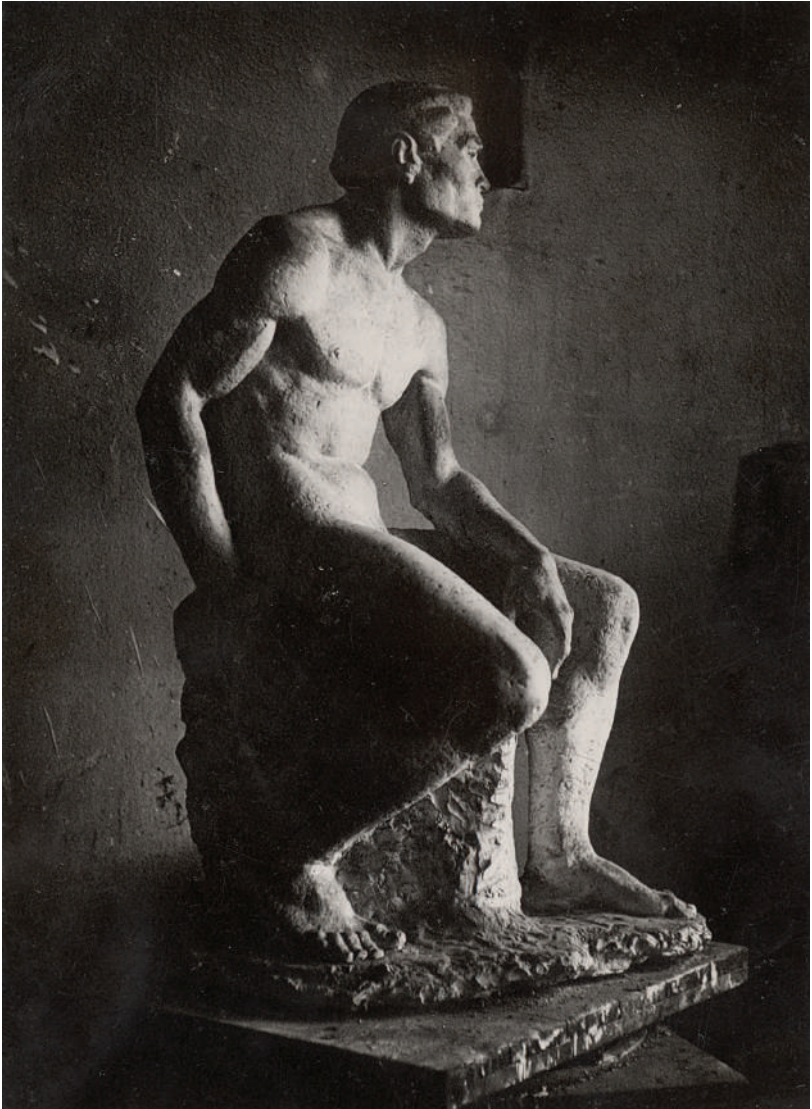
In October 1939, after completing secondary school in Kaunas, and having been coached for the entrance exams by Juozas Zikaras, Teisutis was admitted into the second year of a five-year sculpture course at the Kaunas Art School, where he worked initially under the watchful eye of his father. However, the advent of the first Soviet occupation in June 1940 saw Juozas Zikaras demoted to instructor of drawing for first year students, presumably owing to the overt nationalism of his best-known works.¹⁵ Teisutis thereafter studied under a succession of younger sculptors (all former students of his father's), of whom Juozas Mikėnas and Vytautas Kašuba were the most influential.

Mikėnas had studied in Paris in the 1920s with André Lhote and Charles Despiau. A great admirer of Maillol, his sculpture belonged to the so-called 'return to order' that characterised so much European art after the First World War, with voluptuously rounded yet quite static figures presenting a Lithuanian agrarian idyll.¹⁶ Mikėnas's preferred technique, of pressing small discs of clay over the surface of his sculptures, disrupted the illusionism of neoclassical sculpture and would be later adopted by Teisutis, but his overall approach can best be described as neo-traditionalist.

Vytautas Kašuba, who had just finished his studies at the Kaunas Art School when Teisutis enrolled, taught stone carving and plaster casting and from 1942 was head of the sculpture studio. Kašuba's study of a seated male nude, *Vyry aktas* (A Man's Act, 1938), made when he was still a student,

¹⁵ Zikaras' change in position is recorded in numerous sources, but the reason for the demotion is never stated; see, for instance, Vizgirda (1978): 325.

¹⁶ For further reading on Mikėnas's training and influences see Lubytė and Jankevičiūtė (2001): 98; on Mikėnas's neoclassicism and the broader European 'return to order' see Jankevičiūtė (2010): 105–120.



3, Teisutis Zikaras, *Sedintas vyras*, c.1942, photo courtesy Juozas Zikaras Museum ZA 348

shares much in common with Teisutis's study of the same subject (c.1942, fig. 3).¹⁷ Both conform to the expectations of academic sculpture, with the idealised athletic male body signifying moral virtuousness and intellect. However, Zikaras's work was made after the German occupation began in mid-1941. In this light, we might read the strong chiselled jaw and outward gaze as representing an Aryan ideal. Similarly, Kašuba's prize-winning relief, *Kalinių išlaisvinimas* (Liberation of the Prisoners, 1942), completed during the Nazi occupation, was framed at the time as representing noble Lithuanians breaking free of their Soviet bonds even while some critics protested that it had been conceived a year earlier as a pro-Soviet statement.¹⁸ Both works hover perilously on the brink of German acquiescence. However, other works of Kašuba's made during the German occupation adopt a tone of poetic reverie. Classicised female nudes, such as *Ramybė miega* (Peace Sleeping, 1942) and *Leda* (1943), embody the notion of the eternal feminine and recall Maillol's best-known work, *La Méditerranée* (1905).¹⁹ With their sense of quiet introspection, these arguably represent a sculptural analogy to the sort of 'intimist' interiors produced by many Lithuanian painters during the German occupation, when painting outdoors was fraught or forbidden and political subjects were deliberately shunned.²⁰

Many of Zikaras's student-period works likewise embraced ideals of feminine beauty and neoclassical calm. *Mergina* (Girl, c.1942, fig. 4) is a high relief figure of a crouching female nude; her eyes gaze blankly, recalling classical statuary, while her body is composed and partly contained by

¹⁷ Vytautas Kašuba (1915–1997), *Vyro aktas* (A Man's Act), 1938, clay (?), dimensions unknown, whereabouts unknown, archival photograph held Marijampolė Region and President Kazys Grinius Museum, MKM GEK 13218, <https://www.limis.lt/valuables/e/805716/58113587?menuIndex=0&digitalObjectId=58123520> (accessed 28 August 2023).

¹⁸ Vytautas Kašuba (1915–1997), *Kalinių išlaisvinimas* (The Liberation of Prisoners), 1942, plaster toned for bronze, dimensions unknown, Kaunas: Vytautas the Great War Museum, illustrated in Kostkevičiūtė (1997): 19. For discussion of its contested political interpretations see Jankevičiūtė (2007): 34–35.

¹⁹ Vytautas Kašuba (1915–1997), *Ramybė miega* (Peace Sleeping), 1942, marble, 25 × 25 × 5.5 cm, and *Leda*, 1943, wood relief, 34 × 18.7 × 1.5 cm, both works estate of Linas Broga, Vilnius, and illustrated in Kostkevičiūtė (1997): 22–23.

²⁰ Jankevičiūtė (2012): 246–272.



4. Teisutis Zikaras, *Mergina*, c.1942, photo courtesy Juozas Zikaras Museum ZA 347

the contours of the rectangular block. The dimpled surface reflects the adoption of Mikėnas's technique of pressing discs of clay over the entire surface of the sculpture. Similarly, a life-size allegorical figure holding a sheaf of flax, *Linas* (Flax, c.1942–1943, fig. 5), represents a centuries-old staple of Lithuanian agriculture and its associated cosmology. Her impassive gaze and immense volumetric forms clearly reference Mikėnas's

5. Teisutis Zikaras, *Linas, Flax*, c.1942–1943, plaster of Paris, 78 × 27 × 15,5 cm (with base: 98,5 × 35,8 × 17,2 cm), ZT-46 →



GINAS



6. Teisutis Zikaras, third from right, Kaunas Institute of Applied and Decorative Arts, c.1942–1943, photo courtesy the artist's estate, Melbourne

earlier figure of *Lietuva* (Lithuania) for the 1939 New York World Fair.²¹ Zikaras's work from his time at the Kaunas Art School thus appears primarily concerned with neoclassical beauty and nationalist iconography. Nevertheless, he later attested to both Mikėnas and Kašuba opening his eyes to modern French art.²² Under their tutelage he began to admire

²¹ Juozas Mikėnas (1901–1964), *Lietuva* (Lithuania), 1939, plaster, dimensions unknown, exhibited at the New York World Fair, 1939–1940, illustrated in Lubytė and Jankevičiūtė (2001): 15.

²² Teisutis Zikaras later reflected on the importance of Mikėnas and Kašuba during an interview with Elena Genovaitė Kazokas, which she drew on in Kazokas (1992): 180, published as Kazokas (2003): 126.



7. Teisutis Zikaras (second from left, standing) outside the Kaunas Institute of Applied and Decorative Arts, c.1942–1943, photo courtesy Juozas Zikaras Museum ZA 227

modern French sculpture, particularly the work of Picasso – the mention of whose name in his father’s presence was the ‘greatest sin.’²³

A small handful of photographs capture Zikaras and his fellow students posing in the sculpture studio and on the front steps of the Kaunas Art School (Figs. 6–7).²⁴ The casual bravura conveyed in these

²³ Zikaras and de Berg, 1965, tape 161, side 1.

²⁴ While the photographs do not identify the other students, they possibly include the now little-known painters Jonas Jukonis and Vytautas Viktoras Banaitis (1909–1990), graphic artist Mečislovas Markulis (1906–1970) and the ill-fated Jewish painter Dovydas Kapulskis (1921–

snapshots suggests they were taken towards the end of the students' course of study, once they had gained a measure of confidence in their own ability, circa 1942–1943. It is difficult to reconcile their apparently carefree attitudes with knowledge of what was happening at the time in the nearby Kaunas ghetto and Ninth Fort, where 30,000 Jews lost their life during the German occupation. How aware were the students of the mass murders taking place at close quarters? The discomfort implicit in the question perhaps explains Zikaras's later silence on these years, in interviews in Australia.²⁵

In 1943, when the Germans closed all tertiary institutions in reprisal for the lack of Lithuanian military recruits, Zikaras is believed to have joined Kašuba and four other students in a requisitioned studio in Jurbarkas.²⁶ The other students included Bronius Vyšniauskas (a future favourite of the Lithuanian Soviet regime) and Kašuba's soon-to-be-wife Aleksandra Fledžinskaitė (later renowned for her 'architectural environments' in the United States).²⁷ There he worked in relative calm until the return of the Soviets in the summer of 1944, whereupon Zikaras, Kašuba, and the others were among the 80,000 or so who fled west into Germany. Over the next few months, his father Juozas was repeatedly interrogated by the Soviets regarding the whereabouts of Teisutis and his two brothers, who had likewise fled west and would later settle in the United States.²⁸ On being released from one such interrogation, Juozas Zikaras wrote a note to his wife and daughter before taking an overdose of sleeping pills. He died in Kaunas, on the 10th of November 1944.

Teisutis's whereabouts over the next two years are unknown. His International Refugee Organisation migrant selection documents, completed in 1949, record him as having worked as a labourer in Germany,

1944), all of whom were among the ten students enrolled in the second-year course, in 1940, at the same time as Teisutis.

²⁵ Zikaras and de Berg (1965).

²⁶ Kašuba (1997): 203.

²⁷ Confusingly, Kašuba's memoir is contradicted by his wife's recollection; Aleksandra Kašuba says she never again saw Teisutis after her first year of art school in Kaunas in 1942 (personal communication with the author, 5 September 2014).

²⁸ Rasa Ruibienė, Juozas Zikaras Museum, Kaunas, conversation with the author, 27 July 2010.

though whether this labour was forced or simply expedient to survival is unknown.²⁹ Nevertheless, his vaccination records establish that by November 1946 he had arrived in the medieval university town of Freiburg im Breisgau, in the French-occupied zone of Germany.³⁰

Freiburg

Many Lithuanian exiles gathered after the war in Freiburg, where, under the leadership of the former director of the Kaunas Art School, Vytautas Jonynas, and with the official sanction of French authorities, they established the Fribourg École des Arts et Métiers (Freiburg School of Art and Crafts). The Fribourg École des Arts et Métiers has been described as the Lithuanian émigré community's 'single greatest visual art achievement of post-war cultural activity'.³¹ Indeed, some regard it as marking 'the establishment of a global movement for the survival of the nation' through its gathering of a critical mass of Lithuanian artists and intellectuals who would agitate in exile for the return of Lithuanian independence.³² The school operated within a *modus operandi* of cultural nationalism, which, to a certain extent, limited artistic experimentation. Indeed, Rasa Andriušytė-Žukienė believes the combination of the exiled community's need to demonstrate their cultural distinctiveness from that of Soviet Russia and the older teaching staff's allegiance to classicism inhibited creativity: 'the folk art traditions and neotraditionalism that had given so much creative impetus to Lithuanian art in the pre-war years [...] became a conservative phenomenon, a form of ethnically motivated withdrawal

²⁹ Zikaras Juosaz DOB 5 May 1922, International Refugee Organisation (IRO) resettlement form processed at Freiburg Haslach Bad, 1 March 1949, Canberra: National Archives of Australia, Migrant Selection Documents for Displaced Persons who travelled to Australia per *Skaugum* departing Naples 2 May 1949, NAA: A11628, 1224.

³⁰ Zikaras Juosaz DOB 5 May 1922, Gouvernement Militaire de la Zone Française d'Occupation (GMZFO) Fiche de vaccination de Personnes Déplacées, 14 November 1946, Canberra: National Archives of Australia, Migrant Selection Documents for Displaced Persons who travelled to Australia per *Skaugum* departing Naples 2 May 1949, NAA: A11628, 1224.

³¹ Kazokas (1992): 50.

³² Urbonavičiūtė and Ažubalis (2012): 25.

from, and resistance to, an alien world'.³³ While some younger students at the school, such as Antanas Mončys and Elena Urbaitytė, were stimulated by the presence of modern French art in Freiburg and would afterwards further their studies in Paris, their work would prove the exception to the rule at Freiburg.

Zikaras taught in the drawing and sculpture studios at the Fribourg École from 1947 to 1949. The book *Lithuanian Art in Exile* (1948) records that 'since 1947 he [Zikaras] is the head of the drawing class', while the École's own commemorative book, likewise published in 1948, lists him as 'Professeur de dessin 1947/48'.³⁴ Students also recall Zikaras as having taught in the sculpture studio at Freiburg.³⁵ His position on staff meant that he was elected to the newly established Lithuanian Institute of Fine Arts, which was also based in Freiburg and was dedicated to 'the preservation and cultivation of Lithuanian identity, cultural life and [...] cultural traditions under the conditions of exile in every way possible'.³⁶ The Institute was therefore likewise essentially conservative in nature: organising exhibitions and publications that stressed the uniqueness of Lithuanian culture and its longevity, with its roots in pre-Christian times.

Early works made in Freiburg show Zikaras to be working in a similar mode to that practiced in Kaunas, though the subjects reflected post-war concerns. His most notable work from these early Freiburg years was a prize-winning plaster relief *Taikos Siekimas* (The Pursuit of Peace, 1947, fig. 8), which was exhibited in Hanau, New York, and Chicago as part of the exhibition 'Lithuanian Art in Exile', and awarded the *Žiburių* (Lights) prize.³⁷ This depicted an allegorical figure of peace, embodied by a young female nude holding a bird – presumably a dove – standing

³³ Andriūšytė-Žukienė (2007): 78.

³⁴ Augius, a. o. (1948): 15; Jardot, a. o. (1948): 23.

³⁵ Kasuba Matranga (1984): 14; Goštautas (2011) http://www.old.lituanus.org/2011/11_3_05Gostautas.html (accessed 16 August 2023).

³⁶ Ramonienė (2007): 29; see also, Czerwonnaja (2010): 302.

³⁷ Zikaras's *Taikos Stekimas* (The Pursuit of Peace) (1947) was exhibited in 'Exiled Lithuanian Artists Exhibition', International Refugee Organisation, Hanau, Germany, June 1948; *Lithuanian Art in Exile*, New York Hall of Science, New York, 20 October – 20 November 1949; and *Lithuanian Art in Exile*, Chicago Historical Society, Lincoln Park, Chicago, 14 August – 1



8, Teisutis Zikaras, *Taikos Siekimas, Pursuit of Peace*, 1947, photo courtesy the artist's estate, Melbourne

beside a slightly smaller male nude who genuflects before the large, impassive mask of a helmeted soldier. The soldier's head was interpreted by Lithuanian critics as symbolising 'The East' – specifically Soviet Russia.³⁸ Stylistically the work conforms to the classical modernism of Mikėnas and perhaps also Bronius Pundzius, under whom Zikaras studied in Kaunas.³⁹ Compositionally, however, it shares much in common with the central figure of Kašuba's wooden relief carving, *Eglė, Queen of Adders* (1946), which Kašuba carved in a displaced persons camp in Munich and which was included in the same exhibition as Zikaras's *Taikos Siekimas*.⁴⁰ Both works are vertical reliefs, centred on a female nude who seems to float, as though in water, rather than stand on firm ground. Mikėnas and Kašuba evidently continued to be touchstones for Zikaras in emigration.

Within two years of arriving at Freiburg, Zikaras's sculpture became significantly more schematic, simplified, and stylised. *Liūdesys* (Sorrow, 1948), reduced the figure of a woman to an S-shaped series of cylindrical forms and evinced a generalised sense of suffering at once personal and universal.⁴¹ It is possibly the same work that Zikaras exhibited under the title *Trauer* (Mourning) at the *Ausstellung der Litauischen Kunst*, organised by the Lithuanian Institute of Fine Arts and held at the Augustiner-Museum in Freiburg in March 1949.⁴² In a similar vein, *Po Kryžium* (Under the Cross, c.1948) traced a serpentine curve with the

October 1950. At the time of its Hanau exhibition, it was awarded a prize by the Augsburg-based Lithuanian-language newspaper *Žiburių* (Lights); see Ramonienė (2007): 23.

³⁸ Landsbergis-Žemkalnis (1952): 2.

³⁹ A closely similar but more conservative version of the same female form can be found in Bronius Pundzius (1907–1959), *Prie šaltinio* (At the Source), 1938, plaster, 125 × 60 × 40 cm, Vilnius: National Art Gallery, reproduced in Lubytė and Kreivyte (2010): 7. The work was originally a feature of the Konradas Café, a favourite haunt of artists and literati in interwar Kaunas.

⁴⁰ Vytautas Kašuba, *Eglė, Queen of Adders* (1946), illustrated in Augius, a. o. (1948): 67.

⁴¹ Teisutis Zikaras (1922–1991), *Liūdesys* (Sorrow), 1948, terracotta, dimensions unknown, whereabouts unknown. Photo: Photopress Bilderdienst, Artur Hindrichs, Heidelberg-Schlierbach, collection of the artist's estate, Melbourne, Victoria, and illustrated in Scarlett (2009): 5.

⁴² *Ausstellung Der Litauischen Kunst*, Freiburg im Breisgau: Augustiner-Museum, 15–31 March 1949, catalogue no. 118, Teisutis Zikaras, *Trauer* (Mourning).

figure of a kneeling woman, head bent downwards, her hands on her lap facing palms-upward.⁴³ The Christian iconography of a mourner at the base of the cross is here conflated with a lament for the plight of Lithuania's people and an exile's sense of despair. While the subject matter was in keeping with much of the work produced at the Fribourg École, the simplification and stylisation demonstrate that Zikaras was less wedded to the ways of the past than most of the other teachers. This was possibly a factor of his youth: he was the equal-youngest instructor at Freiburg, with most of the teaching staff being his former teachers at Kaunas and more than a decade older than him.⁴⁴

His openness to new influences meant he was receptive to the succession of exhibitions from Paris shown at Freiburg in the post-war years. The most significant of these was 'Meister französischer Malerei der Gegenwart' (Masters of French Painting of the Present), which opened in the converted Konzerthaus at Friedrichsbau in October 1947.⁴⁵ Curated by Maurice Jardot, chief of the Bureau des Beaux-Arts in the military government at Baden, with loans orchestrated by Picasso's dealer, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, the exhibition presented modern French art as a continuum from Impressionism through to Cubism and the School of Paris – stopping short of abstraction – and featured the work of Braque, Chagall, Gris, Léger, Matisse, Picasso, and Rouault.⁴⁶ Over a period of four weeks, the exhibition attracted 10,000 visitors, including 3,000 students, among whom almost certainly were the students of the Fribourg École.⁴⁷

⁴³ Teisutis Zikaras (1922–1991), *Po Kryžium* (Under the Cross) (c. 1948), terracotta, dimensions unknown, whereabouts unknown, illustrated in Augius, a. o. (1948): 71; Sarma (1953): 1; and Vizgirda (1966): 100.

⁴⁴ Sculptor Juozas Bakis, who worked in the ceramics studio, was born in 1922 as was Teisutis Zikaras. Aleksandras Marčiulionis, who headed the sculpture studio, was eleven years older while others, such as Victoras Vizgirda and Vytautas Jonynas, were more than fifteen years Zikaras's and Bakis's senior.

⁴⁵ The exhibition ran 20 October – 23 November 1947. The catalogue was published the following year: Jardot and Martin (1948).

⁴⁶ Dossin (2015): 55–56.

⁴⁷ Office of Military Government for Württemberg-Baden, consolidated monthly reports for July to December 1947, 1 January 1948, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC, Records of United States Occupation Headquarters, World War II, Record

The impact of exhibitions such as this can be seen in a series of highly expressive figures made at Freiburg in 1948–1949. *Gimimas* (Birth, 1948, fig. 9), a three-quarters torso of a female nude, head resting on one arm, with a miniature version of herself at abdomen-level, presented both bodies as a series of decorative curves and abstracted forms. *Skausmas* (Pain, 1948) depicted the attenuated figure of a naked woman sitting in butterfly pose (with the soles of the feet touching), her hands raised to chin-level to support her tilted head.⁴⁸ The Latvian-titled *Sauskina* (Calling, c.1948–1949), was more crudely modelled and Expressionist than these two, recalling Picasso's *Guernica*-derived *Weeping Woman* series of 1937, with its silhouetted profile of an open-mouthed woman's head thrown back in despair. All three were transitional works that attempted to express the female body's capacity for endurance and reproduction.

This period of early experimentation was interrupted by emigration to Australia. In April 1949 Zikaras married a Latvian art student, Skaidrīte Veiss. They departed shortly afterwards for Naples from where, a month later, they embarked for Melbourne on board the S.S. Skaugum.⁴⁹ Officially registered as 'Displaced Persons' (DPs), they were first despatched to the Bonegilla migrant reception and training centre in remote northern Victoria. Zikaras then commenced a mandatory two-year labour contract, working in an army depot in Melbourne's north and in a variety of factory settings, the menial nature of the work failing to draw upon his qualifications as a sculptor. Subsequent to the birth of their first son, Rene, the young family moved from the city centre to Ivanhoe then, in January 1952, to the south-eastern suburb of Clayton.⁵⁰

Group (RG) 260, M1947, Records Concerning the Central Collecting Points (Ardelia Hall Collection): Wiesbaden Central Collecting Point, 1945–1952, microfilm roll 0053, 9.

⁴⁸ Teisutis Zikaras (1922–1991), *Gimimas* (Birth), 1948, white terracotta; and *Skausmas* (Pain) (1948), terracotta; dimensions and whereabouts of both works unknown; reproduced Eckett (2017), 869–70.

⁴⁹ Zikaras, Juozas – Nationality: Lithuanian – Arrived Melbourne per SS. Skaugum 31 May 1949, in Melbourne: National Archives of Australia, Alien registration documents, B78/5, control symbol 1956/ZIKARAS J, incoming passenger card and registration book no. 87122.

⁵⁰ Teisutis and Skaidrīte Zikaras lived firstly at 406 Queen Street, Melbourne; then, from July 1950, at 98 Maltravers Road, Ivanhoe; and from January 1952 at 8 Royalty Street, Clayton.



9, Teisutis Zikaras, *Gemimas, Birth*, 1948, photo: Photopress Bilderdienst, Artur Hindrichs, Heidelberg-Schlierbach, courtesy the artist's estate, Melbourne

Melbourne

On the 2nd of November 1952, from a small makeshift studio (1.2 × 2.4 metres in size) on the enclosed veranda at 8 Royalty Street, Clayton, members of Melbourne's Lithuanian community were invited to view Zikaras's work.⁵¹ This was one of a number of cultural events orchestrated by the diaspora community, spurred by the arrival in Melbourne of several Lithuanian artists including Viktoras Simankevičius (who had likewise been in Freiburg and arrived in Melbourne on the SS. Skaugum), Jonas Firinauskas and Gražina Firinauskienė (the latter having studied under Juozas Zikaras in Kaunas before the war), and Aldofas Vaičaitis.⁵² The modernist architect and fellow émigré Vytautas Landsbergis-Žemkalis profiled Zikaras for the Sydney-based newspaper *Mūsų Pastogė* (Our Haven) and, on the strength of the works exhibited, noted Zikaras now 'rejects theatricality, posturing; [and] avoids that restlessness' that characterised his work in Freiburg.⁵³

From the review it is apparent that two categories of work were shown. The first was a group of religious subjects, most noticeably *Smūtkelis* (Christ in Distress, 1951, fig. 10) and *Veidas* (Face, 1951).⁵⁴ With their air of brooding intensity and roughly chiselled features, these derived from the Lithuanian woodcarving tradition of the *Rūpintojėlis* (or Pensive Christ) but displayed a far greater expressiveness and degree of distortion than associated with folk carving. The second category was concerned with the female figure in various states of passivity and inward reverie. This included *Sėdinti Moteris* (Sitting Woman, 1951), *Klūpėjimas Mergina* (Kneeling Girl, 1952), and *Laukimas* (Waiting, 1952, fig. 11), a half-length figure of

Addresses and dates are from ZIKARAS, Juozas – Nationality: Lithuanian – Arrived Melbourne per *SS. Skaugum* 31 May 1949, registration book no. 87122.

⁵¹ The exhibition date and the size of Zikaras's studio are from Landsbergis-Žemkalis (1952): 4.

⁵² The influx of artists and the Melbourne cultural events were reported on in *Mūsų pastogė* (21 January 1953): 4.

⁵³ Landsbergis-Žemkalis (1952): 4: 'Jis atmata teatralumą, pozavimą; vengia to neramumo, kuriuo gyvenamasis laikotarpis taip smarkiai persunktas.'

⁵⁴ Teisutis Zikaras (1921–1991), *Veidas* (Face), 1951, plaster patinated green on wooden base, 30 × 16 × 8 cm, collection of Gabrielius Žemkalis, Melbourne, reproduced in Eckert (2017): 872.



10. Teisutis Zikaras, *Smūtkelis, Christ in distress*, 1951, photo courtesy the artist's estate, Melbourne



11. Teisutis Zikaras, *Motherhood*, 1952, plaster of Paris with shellac, 35.7 × 28.5 × 14.5 cm, Newcastle Art Gallery, gift of Dr Joseph Brown AO, OBE 1992, photo courtesy Newcastle Art Gallery

a woman cradling one arm protectively around her unborn child.⁵⁵ These share an emphasis on rounded curves and stylised and simplified features, recalling the works of Constantin Brancusi, Marino Marini, and Henry Moore. Included in this second category was a welded wire figure, simply titled *Kompozicija* (Composition, 1952), depicting a half-length female

⁵⁵ Teisutis Zikaras (1921–1991), *Sėdinti Moteris* (Sitting Woman), 1951, plaster toned for [bronze?], and *Klūpējimas Mergina* (Kneeling Girl), 1952, [clay?], dimensions and whereabouts of both works unknown, photographs held in the collection of the artist's estate, Melbourne, Victoria, and reproduced in Eckett (2017): 873–874.

figure with arms cradled around her abdomen. Landsbergis-Žemkalnis identified this as a new genre for Zikaras, while Aldofas Vaičaitis (reviewing the exhibition for *Aidai*), described it as ‘a kind of playful fantasy’ wherein welded wire is used to capture an ‘aesthetic decorative outline’.⁵⁶ Zikaras was quoted in the review: ‘In my works, I try to express the inner mood with simple means. My figures are closed in on themselves.’⁵⁷ His words reflect an attempt to push past academic conceptions of the figure by simplifying forms and suggesting interior emotions through the body, stopping short of abstraction.

In 1953, with this new body of work and his labour contracts completed, Zikaras focused on establishing himself in the broader Melbourne art world beyond the confines of the migrant community. He began attending the quarterly meetings of the Victorian Sculptors’ Society (VSS) in June and five months later debuted at the VSS annual exhibition, showing three works: *Prisoner* (1953), *Sitting Woman* (1953), and the previously-mentioned *Rūpintojėlis – The Lord of Sorrows* (1953, fig. 1) which had been awarded second prize at the ‘Lithuanian Artists in Australia’ exhibition in Sydney earlier that year.⁵⁸ The art critic for *The Age* newspaper noted that: ‘One of the most impressive professional works is *Lord of Sorrows* by T. Zikaras. Wrought with intensity, this tiny bronze [sic] has a timeless quality linking the art of past ages with that of the present.’⁵⁹ *The Herald* art critic Alan McCulloch, who would become a great supporter, likewise noted the ‘solid traditional core’ of Zikaras’s European training and the ‘sense of urgency’ with which he pushed beyond

⁵⁶ Landsbergis-Žemkalnis (1952): 4; Vaičaitis (1953): 234.

⁵⁷ Teisutis Zikaras cited in Landsbergis-Žemkalnis (1952): 4: ‘Savo darbuose aš bandau išreikšti vidujinę nuotaiką paprastomis priemonėmis. Mano figūros yra užsidariusios savyje.’

⁵⁸ VSS minutes, 26 June 1953, Melbourne: State Library Victoria, VSS papers, MS 8498, Box 1577/3 (b).d. Teisutis Zikaras (1921–1991), *Prisoner* (c.1953), which might tentatively be identified as the plaster half-length Christ-like figure with bound arms that was exhibited at the Zikaras retrospective at McClelland in 2009 as catalogue no. 4, *Composition, Lord of Sorrows*; and *Sitting Woman*, 1953, bronze, 96.5 × 29.0 × 40.5 cm, Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, accession no. 1976.18; see Eckett (2017), <https://www.monash.edu/muma/collection/100-works-of-the-monash-university-collection/100-works/teisutis-zikaras> (accessed 28 August 2023). Details of exhibits are known from *Mūsų pastogė* (20 January 1954): 4.

⁵⁹ The Age Art Critic (10 November 1953): 2.

his academic basis to add 'some words' of his own.⁶⁰ He was soon voted onto the VSS Council and continued to be active with the VSS until 1966.

Zikaras also exhibited at the inaugural Herald Outdoor Art Show, in Melbourne's Treasury Gardens, in December 1953, and over subsequent years would become a prominent exhibitor. For the show's second iteration, in 1955, he was photographed for the press sitting on a park bench alongside his *Sitting Woman* (1953), while a week later he appeared in *The Herald* standing beside his semi-abstract *Mermaid* (1955).⁶¹ The following year, at the invitation of Alan McCulloch and with the assistance of four engineers, he erected a 12-metre-high construction in Dexion steel strips as a temporary exhibit in the Treasury Gardens. Essentially an abstract arrangement of squares, rectangles, and triangular struts, the work was intended 'to animate and enliven' the surrounding parkland as 'a pleasing shape' without any moral or story.⁶² The project anticipated his involvement in several significant public commissions over the coming years.

Exhibiting success led to further opportunities. Stanley Hammond, a VSS stalwart and lecturer in sculpture at the Royal Melbourne Technical College (RMTTC), engaged Zikaras in early 1954 to execute the stone finishing work on the *Fallen Warrior Group* designed by George Allen for the Second World War Memorial at Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance.⁶³ This was a signal honour given that the monument's design competition had been open only to those who had served in the Australian armed forces; as noted in the Australian-Lithuanian press, Zikaras was 'the only exiled sculptor' invited to work on the monument.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ McCulloch (10 November 1953).

⁶¹ *The Herald* (8 March 1955): 1; *The Daily News* (10 March 1955): 12; *The Herald* (17 March 1955): 17.

⁶² Burke (1955), catalogue no. 1368 (as *Composition*, sculpture, not for sale); *The Herald* (6 March 1956): 15; McCulloch (7 March 1956): 20.

⁶³ George Henry Allen (1900–1972), assisted by Stanley James Hammond (1913–2000), Teisutis Zikaras and Max Lyle (b. 1935), *Fallen Warrior Group, Second World War Memorial*, 1951–1955, Footscray basalt, The Shrine of Remembrance, Melbourne. A photograph of Zikaras and Lyle working on the monument appeared in *The Age* (2 December 1954): 3. For details on the division of labour on this project see Linn and Lyle (2004): 9; also, National Trust of Australia (Vic.) Public Art Committee (2015): 18–20.

⁶⁴ *Mūsų pastogė* (21 July 1954): 4.

The experience resulted in Zikaras being appointed to the teaching staff at the RMTTC, where Allen and Hammond ran the sculpture studio, and where Zikaras would remain on staff for the next twenty years.⁶⁵

In June 1955, with the new-found stability of paid teaching work and the support of Melbourne's small sculpture community, Zikaras held his first significant solo exhibition at the Victorian Artists' Society Galleries in East Melbourne. Opened by the University of Melbourne's Professor of Philosophy Werner David Falk, the show comprised fourteen sculptures, including *Klūpējimas Mergina* (Kneeling Girl, 1952), *Rūpintojēlis*, *The Lord of Sorrows* (1952), *Lying Woman* (1952), the wire *Kompozīcija* (Composition, 1952), *Prisoner* (1954), and *Pieta* (1955), as well as twenty-five drawings.⁶⁶

Critic Arnold Shore found the simplicity 'convincing'; *The Age* art critic thought it 'impressive', with Zikaras's borrowings from Amedeo Modigliani and 'European folk art [...] assimilated and adapted to his purposes'; while Alan McCulloch rated the exhibition 'an event of major importance'.⁶⁷



12, Teistutis Zikaras, *St Francis*, 1955, cast 2008, bronze, 84.0 × 24.0 × 17.0 cm, McClelland, Langwarrin, 2008.13, commissioned by the Elisabeth Murdoch Sculpture Foundation, photo courtesy McClelland

⁶⁵ For further reading on Zikaras at RMTTC (later RMIT), see Eckett (2019): 69–71.

⁶⁶ *Mūsų pastogė* (15 June 1955): 4; Simankevičius (1955): 2.

⁶⁷ Shore (14 June 1955), 9; *The Age Art Critic* (14 June 1955): 2; and McCulloch (15 June 1955): 22.

Four months later, at the same venue, as part of the VSS annual exhibition, Zikaras's figure of *St Francis* (1955, fig. 12) won the Barnett McCulloch Prize for Religious Sculpture. McCulloch described it as 'a compact finely realised interpretation of St. Francis, in the manner of Lithuanian peasant carving' while fellow sculptor Ian Bow noted the sorrowful mood and 'almost medieval rigidity' of the work, which stood out amidst 'the fairly optimistic climate' of the exhibition.⁶⁸ Success in Australia thus came relatively quickly to Zikaras, particularly compared to the experience of other migrant artists.

From the outset, Australian critics associated Zikaras's work with traditional Lithuanian wood carving. Both McCulloch and *The Age* art critic, cited above, repeatedly claimed the importance of Lithuanian folk-art to Zikaras.⁶⁹ Following this lead, sculptural historian Graeme Sturgeon later attributed a debt to the 'carved folk art of his native Lithuania'.⁷⁰ Elena Kazokas has since attempted to disentangle this notion of influence, pronouncing the rigidity and frontal emphasis of *St Francis* and other examples of Zikaras's work 'an idiosyncrasy, as were other features such as distortion of limbs and figure' and noting that traditional Lithuanian woodcarving, though 'stylised, simplified, [and] disproportionate', was made to be seen in-the-round.⁷¹ Aside from the fact that Zikaras modelled most of his work in clay or *ciment fondu*, rather than carve in wood, it seems that Zikaras drew inspiration more from medieval niche statuary, designed to be viewed frontally, than from the Lithuanian *dievdirbys* whose works adorned roofed pole-top shrines. Furthermore, the radically stylised face of *St Francis* and other works of Zikaras's from this period, including *Sitting Figure* (1953), *Pieta* (1955), and *Motiniai* (Mother, 1955), with their large empty eye sockets, long narrow noses, and flattened heads, also speak of an engagement with the sculpture of Modigliani and the sorts of ancient Cambodian and

⁶⁸ McCulloch (19 October 1955); Bow (1955): 15.

⁶⁹ McCulloch (December 1955): 515; *The Age* Art Critic (14 June 1955): 2; *The Age* Art Critic (11 July 1956): 2.

⁷⁰ Sturgeon (1978): 175.

⁷¹ Kazokas (1992): 181.

Egyptian art that inspired him in Paris before the First World War.⁷² The cultural national lens through which some critics have viewed Zikaras's work arguably masks the myriad diverse influences at play in his work.

Zikaras increasingly resisted this sort of cultural nationalist framework and instead insisted on his modernist credentials. In April 1954 he exhibited at Tye's Gallery with the newly reformed Victorian branch of the Contemporary Art Society (CAS), showing three sculptures including the earlier *Klūpējimas Mergina* (Kneeling Girl, 1952) and welded wire *Kompozicija* (Composition, 1952). This was the Society's first exhibition in seven years and consequently something of a statement – with all the exhibits avowedly modernist. In 1956 Zikaras exhibited twice more with the CAS, this time at the Museum of Modern Art and Design (established that year in Tavistock Place by CAS heavy-weights John and Sunday Reed), and most notably in the Olympic Games exhibition that was held as an alternative to the officially sanctioned exhibition at Melbourne University's Wilson Hall (Zikaras demonstrating a commitment to both modernism and professionalism by showing in both Olympic exhibitions).

As Zikaras's profile rapidly grew, so too did opportunities for commissions. In 1955, the architect Roderick Macdonald from Eggleston Macdonald and Secomb invited Zikaras and two others to submit designs for an artwork for the new Beaurepaire Sports Centre at the University of Melbourne. Zikaras's submitted maquette, *The Swimmer* (1955, fig. 13), related to his Herald Outdoor Art Show exhibit, *Mermaid* (1955), in its use of semi-abstract organic forms that seem to relate as much to plant forms, such as sea kelp, as they do to the human figure.⁷³ The flattened pin-sized semi-spherical head, reminiscent of Henry Moore's

⁷² Teisutis Zikaras, *Sitting Figure*, 1953, bronze, 96.5 × 29 × 40.5 cm, Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, accession no. 1976.18; *Pieta*, 1955, plaster toned for bronze, 56 cm high, present whereabouts unknown; and *Motinai* (Mother), 1955, terracotta, 60 cm high approximately, present whereabouts unknown; illustrated in Eckett (2017): 879, 886–887 respectively.

⁷³ Teisutis Zikaras, *Mermaid*, 1955, plaster toned for bronze, dimensions and present whereabouts unknown; illustrated in *The Herald* (17 March 1955): 17, and Eckett (2017): 883.



13, Teisutis Zikaras, *The Swimmer*, 1955, cast 2009, bronze, 40.0 x 40.0 x 14.0 cm, McClelland, Langwarrin, 2011.51, donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Roderick Macdonald, 2011, photo Christian Capurro courtesy McClelland

figures, and the textured surface, a remnant of Mikénas's technique of pressing small discs of clay onto the surface, to disrupt any illusion of flesh, together mark the body as distinctly modern. The commission ultimately went to the painter Leonard French for a mural design that owed much to Fernand Léger and French Cubism. Nevertheless, the same firm of architects engaged Zikaras for another major commission at the University: a series of eight cast concrete panels for Union House (1957–1958, fig. 14). The architects required eight balcony panels that would screen the upstairs dining hall from sunlight while contrasting



14, Zikaras working on the cast concrete Union House Panels for the University of Melbourne, 1957–1958, photo Mark Strzic courtesy artist's estate, Melbourne

with the precision of glass and aluminium, and yet 'be in keeping with the Tudor quality of the original building'.⁷⁴ Zikaras's design entailed a series of interlocking abstracted figures with flattened heads and faceted bodies. It clearly stemmed from his private work while at the same time, in his words, gave 'the idea of unity of shape and form', in keeping with the building's function.⁷⁵

Throughout the later 1950s, Zikaras's work displayed a distinctly Cubist influence as seen in both the Union House panels and in his *Swimming Figure* (1957, fig. 15). This latter work was much more complex and ambitious than the earlier *Swimmer*. Gone is the curvaceous silhouette of the 1955 maquette; in its place are a series of articulated planes and forms that together convey a sense of movement. Like the Union House panels, *Swimming Figure* was more open and linear than earlier work; the

⁷⁴ University of Melbourne Registrar's Correspondence, file 1957/1381, letter from Roderick MacDonald to Sir George Paton, Vice-Chancellor, 11 Nov. 1957.

⁷⁵ Zikaras cited in *The Herald* (11 July 1958): 3.



15, Teisutis Zikaras, *Swimming Figure*, 1957, plaster toned for bronze, dimensions and present whereabouts unknown, photo: Visual Education Centre, Education Department of Victoria, courtesy the Visual Cultures Resource Centre, School of Culture & Communication, The University of Melbourne, VCRC 11.052.20

sculptural forms now fretted and pierced, with areas of negative space enclosed by the figure's limbs. Zikaras conceived *Swimming Figure* as a monumental work in bronze, to be scaled up to three metres in length to achieve its full expression of form.⁷⁶ Indeed, formal expression was of the utmost significance, as he explained:

The *Swimming Figure* (bronze) has a strong, unrestricted movement which is emphasised through distortion, and the forms have been so designed as to produce a circulatory movement. [...] [The figure's] legs and arms are distorted and they dictate new rules. In each case one can add or take away, but the formal significance remains. It is obvious then, that subject matter is

⁷⁶ Zikaras quoted in a pamphlet accompanying the *Six Sculptors* slide kit (1959): 3–4.

unimportant, and that the choice of the material determines a great deal of the new logic of the forms produced.⁷⁷

This emphasis on the formal qualities of sculpture – its material properties, its scale, and the relation of its parts to one another – effectively suppressed the significance of style. In this way, Zikaras could justify working in multiple different styles: sometimes Cubist, at other times Expressionist, and at other times entirely abstract. In a 1965 interview, Zikaras affirmed with an almost messianic certainty: ‘I believe in sculpture, I don’t believe in styles’, explaining that he changed his style according to his mood.⁷⁸

Formalism furthermore shifted attention away from subject matter, which risked being harnessed to purely cultural nationalist concerns. This tension between formalist and cultural nationalist readings is nowhere clearer than in discussion of Zikaras’s *Horseman* (1959, fig. 16). When the plaster version of this work was first exhibited at the Herald Outdoor Art Show in 1958, it was photographed for the newspaper with young interior designer, Gail Manning, gazing at it admiringly – one hand raised to stroke the figure’s torso, her knee resting on its plinth.⁷⁹



16, Teisutis Zikaras, *Horseman*, 1959 (from a plaster of 1958), cast aluminium, 134.0 × 78.0 × 32.5 cm, McClelland, Langwarrin, 2008.10, donated through the Australian Government’s Cultural Gifts Program by Frank and Yvonne Nicholls, 2008, photo courtesy McClelland

⁷⁷ Zikaras (1959): 3–4.

⁷⁸ Zikaras and de Berg (1965): 3.

⁷⁹ *The Herald* (5 March 1958): 21.

The work was presented as an unusual object of elegance and beauty such as would appeal to someone with an appreciation of modern design. Later that year, the then newly established Australian Galleries included it in a selling exhibition of paintings and sculptures ‘in settings of fine office furniture’, which again emphasised the work’s suitability for a modern interior.⁸⁰ In 1959, now cast in aluminium, *Horseman* was included in a major exhibition, ‘Six Sculptors’, at the National Gallery of Victoria – the first exhibition of contemporary sculpture ever held at the gallery. Zikaras’s written notes, which accompanied a set of slides prepared for the Victorian Department of Education, emphasised the formal qualities of the work:

The aluminium piece is a simple shape, and is stylised; its organic forms are restricted through the character of the material [...] Each piece, in itself, creates a new logic, and this logic is born through the fusion of forms. For example, in the aluminium sculpture the rider has no arms because they are unimportant in the order of the whole form.⁸¹

Such a formalist reading, as encouraged by Zikaras, prevailed when fellow countryman Vaclovas Ratas included *Horseman* in the book *Eleven Lithuanian Artists in Australia* (1967), where it was presented primarily as evidence of Zikaras’s ‘consummate command of formal tensions.’⁸² Three decades later, however, in her thesis on Lithuanian artists in Australia, and in subsequent publications, Elena Kazokas underscored connections between *Horseman* and the Lithuanian state emblem of the *Vytis* (or mounted knight).⁸³ This cultural nationalist interpretation, while arguably valid, mitigates against the purely formalist reading that Zikaras attempted to construct for his own work. The two readings sit uncomfortably side by side – both plausible, but with an abrasiveness that bears witness to the difficulties of the migrant artist’s negotiations between his country of birth and that of his eventual adoption.

⁸⁰ Australian Galleries (1958), catalogue no. 40 (as *Horseman*, plaster for aluminium, 80 guineas).

⁸¹ Zikaras (1959): 3–4.

⁸² Lynn and Ratas (1967): 7.

⁸³ Kazokas (1992) 1: 182–183; Kazokas (1997): 41; Kazokas (2003): 129.

Zikaras's formalist interpretation of his own work was reinforced by his showing in group exhibitions with sculptors of various nationalities who together represented the advance guard in modern sculpture. The aforementioned 'Six Sculptors' (1959) presented his work alongside that of fellow Lithuanian Vincas Jomantas, Julius Kane from Hungary, Inge King from Germany, Clifford Last from England, and the Australian-born Norma Redpath. These same sculptors later formed the core of the group Centre Five, which coalesced in Melbourne in January 1962 as a small cohesive group of modernists who were dissatisfied with some aspects of the VSS.⁸⁴ Zikaras would show with Centre Five for the rest of the decade and become known, with them, as a key member of the post-war Australian sculptural avant-garde. Throughout the 1960s, his work was therefore invariably presented in terms of its modernist credentials, rather than with reference to subject matter or Lithuanian origins.

Figure (1959, fig. 17) provides a case in point. The work depicts a female form that has been dramatically reduced to a central armless shaft, with protruding ribs and straddled legs. It was almost certainly included in 'Six Sculptors' and afterwards toured among regional Victorian galleries



17, Teisutis Zikaras, *Figure*, 1959, aluminium, cast and polished, 64.0 × 24.0 × 18.0 cm, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 72.40, purchased 1972, photo courtesy NGA

⁸⁴ For further reading on Centre Five, including their relationship with the VSS, see Eckett (2022): 16–19, 26–42.



18, Teisutis Zikaras, *ETA fountain*, (left), 1961, cast 2009, bronze, 340.0 × 87.0 × 64.0 cm, McClelland, 2009.01, bronze cast commissioned by Elisabeth Murdoch Sculpture Foundation, 2009, to commemorate the 100th birthday of Dame Elisabeth Murdoch AC DBE, and GPO fountain (right), 1964, bronze, 200 × 150 × 75 cm, McClelland, 1993.74, gift of Australia Post, 1993, photo Mark Chew, courtesy McClelland

as part of a Council of Adult Education and VSS exhibition, 'Sculpture Today' (1960), before featuring at the inaugural Mildara Prize for Sculpture at Mildura Art Gallery (1961), and finally being sent to the Musée Rodin in Paris as part of the Australian national representation at the '2e Exposition Internationale de Sculpture Contemporaine' (1961). *Figure* is a strangely totemic form; its single 'Cyclops' eye and semi-spherical halo create the aura of an object designed to be venerated and treated with some caution. However, these sorts of readings are absent from reviews at the time. In each instance, *Figure* was accepted simply as a work of high modernism, representing the most advanced sculpture then known in Australia.

Significantly, for his two main public commissions of the 1960s, Zikaras chose to work in an abstract idiom that further promoted a formalist interpretation (Fig. 18). The first of these was for the rear

garden of the ETA food factory in Braybrook, designed by the Swiss-trained modernist architect Frederick Romberg; the second for outside Melbourne's neo-classical General Post Office on the corner of Elizabeth Street and Little Bourke Street. Both works were envisaged as fountains, with fine sprays of water misting over the surface of the sculptural forms, though both have since been decommissioned and are now mounted as a pair of free-standing outdoor sculptures in the grounds at McClelland, Langwarrin. In both cases, Zikaras employed an essentially abstract language – though one suggestive of organic forms such as claws and carapaces. Figuration was clearly shunned. As he had witnessed in Kaunas during the war, figurative sculpture (such as Kašuba's *The Liberation of Prisoners*) risked being harnessed to one or other ideology and was therefore undesirable for post-war public commissions. Perhaps, too, Zikaras was never really a public sculptor at heart. He believed art was

a form of intimately personal expression that arose spontaneously from within the self, whereas public art must remain in the field of design and be able to communicate with wider audiences.⁸⁵

Despite the abstract idiom employed for public sculpture, throughout the 1960s Zikaras's studio work remained based on figuration. *Mecanus* (1960, fig. 19), which was first exhibited at the Herald Outdoor Art Show



19, Teisutis Zikaras, *Mecanus*, 1960, bronze, 148.0 × 38.0 × 37.0 cm, private collection, courtesy Menzies Art Brands

⁸⁵ Zikaras and de Berg (1965): 2–3.

of 1960, represented, in Zikaras's words, 'a fusion between mechanical and organic forms'.⁸⁶ The title may also be a discreet allusion to one of his first mentors, Juozas Mikėnas. The work's strong anthropomorphism supports Zikaras's slightly later claim that his approach was always figurative: 'I do not wish to depart from figure because I've got a feeling for humankind'.⁸⁷ *Mecanus* is typical of Zikaras's works from the 1960s in that it is roughly textured, combining areas of smooth with turbulent rough surfaces, and giving the impression of having been opened up to reveal a molten bronze interior. This 'rotting bronze' effect, as it is sometimes termed, was put to use by several modern sculptors working in bronze in the 1960s including Zikaras's Centre Five colleague Norma Redpath and such internationally renowned figures as Arnaldo Pomodoro. It characterised the post-war breakdown in surface legibility.

This strongly gestural approach could also be disconcertingly violent. In 1965, Zikaras described the technique by which he achieved this effect:

Recently I discovered an entirely new approach. I [have] come back to old-fashioned modelling when I get lumps of clay and so on [...] [combined] with carving, with battling, with trampling, [and] with [a] very expressive approach. I try to evoke something what is really behind what I do understand is sculpture.⁸⁸

Not only was clay being battled with and trampled, but so too – apparently – was the female figure. *Bride* (1965, fig. 20) is similarly pockmarked and mottled all over, in a manner reminiscent of Mikėnas's pressed discs of clay, but her hindquarters are sliced longitudinally, revealing dark cavities. There is an incongruity between the ripe rounded breasts and the deeply scored torso and abdomen. Sydney-based critic and fellow sculptor Elwyn Lynn noticed the latent violence in the work when it was exhibited in a major Centre Five exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales: 'Teisutis Zikaras, the archaeological realist of the group, gouges and lacerates in order to evoke the origins of sculpture as fetish and

⁸⁶ *The Herald* (1 March 1960): 3.

⁸⁷ Zikaras and de Berg (1965): 3.

⁸⁸ Zikaras and de Berg (1965): 3.



fertility objects. They are neither sexy or sexual, though they are obviously of one sex or the other'.⁸⁹ Visiting Zikaras's studio, in 1966, architect David Saunders noted the 'surgical treatment of the anatomical image' in much of Zikaras's recent work, which Zikaras described as 'more emotional'.⁹⁰ The implicit violence of this 'surgical treatment' would increasingly seem at odds with the awakening feminist zeitgeist of the late 1960s onwards.

If the 1960s were a decade of achievement for Zikaras in terms of commissions, exhibitions, and teaching at RMIT, the 1970s represent a crisis. In 1971 he divorced Skaidrīte and married Shulamith (Sue) Gurvich, with whom he had a further two children. However, they too separated in 1975. In that same year, Zikaras returned to Lithuania for the first time since fleeing during the war. In Kaunas he reunited with his sister, Alytė, who was then still living in the Zikaras family home that she would later donate to the state as a permanent museum to their father's work. Teisutis presented her with a bas-relief profile portrait head of Juozas, modelled from memory, again employing a roughly gestural technique with deep gouges particularly in the areas of the cheeks. Cast in bronze, it was mounted by the front door of the house where it remains to this day. But the return to Lithuania was evidently disturbing. Zikaras learnt further details of his parents' demise and witnessed at first hand the difficulties and necessary compromises of living in a Communist state. On returning to Melbourne, his mental health deteriorated, accelerated by growing alcoholism. After retiring from teaching at RMIT in 1978, he quietly slipped from the public limelight – living his final years alone and virtually destitute. He died in Melbourne in 1991.

Teisutis Zikaras is today remembered in Lithuania primarily as the son of Juozas Zikaras, while his engagement with French modernism and his subsequent career in Australia are little known. Meanwhile in Australia he is known as a post-war émigré sculptor whose European training was evident in his work and in his teaching at RMIT, and whose modernist credentials are reflected in his membership of the avant-garde Centre Five group. Yet Zikaras is absent from the majority of texts surveying

⁸⁹ Lynn (1965): 12.

⁹⁰ Saunders (1966): 134.

20th century art in both countries, his concerns too divergent from either Australian or Lithuanian nationalism to warrant inclusion. Nevertheless, his Lithuanian upbringing and education – both his academic training under his father and his introduction to French modernism via his instructors at Kaunas – were crucial to his later development. So too was his post-war experience in Germany, where his work evinced both a sense of sorrow and despair, shared by most other artists at the Fribourg École, and a receptiveness to the modern French art he encountered there in person. In Melbourne, he was quickly recognised by the Lithuanian diasporic community as a sculptor of repute, whose work bore the hallmarks of his engagement with French modernism. Zikaras also rapidly found success in the wider artistic world, as witnessed by his work on the Second World War Memorial in 1954 and subsequent teaching appointment at RMIT; his 1955 solo exhibition at the VSS; and a swathe of prizes and commissions from the mid-1950s to the early-1960s. As he did so, Zikaras consciously rejected a Lithuanian cultural nationalist framing of his work in favour of the international lingua franca of modernist formalism. These two conflicting frameworks largely shaped his work, his career, and his subsequent reputation and can be seen as the dual pillars of not only his but also many other post-war European migrant artists in the worldwide diaspora.

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Kultūrinis nacionalizmas ir avangardas: Teisutis Zikaras Kaune, Freiburge ir Melburne

Santrauka

Po Antrojo pasaulinio karo lietuvių meną išeivijoje formavo dvi prieštaringos jėgos: kultūrinis nacionalizmas ir Paryžiaus mokyklos modernizmas. Kultūrinis nacionalizmas būdingas daugumos lietuvių išeivijoje vyresnės kartos dailininkų pokarinei kūrybai, o jaunesnieji menininkai, emigravę į Paryžių ar Niujorką, dažniau priskiriami lietuvių diasporos avangardui. Teisutis Zikaras (1922–1991) jautė abiejų jėgų trauką. Jauniausias skulptoriaus Juozo Zikaro sūnus, jis iš pradžių laikėsi tėvo akademizmo ir nacionalistinio romantizmo nuostatų. Viena po kitos sekusių sovietų ir nacių okupacijų metais jis mokėsi Kauno meno mokykloje pas Juozą Mikėną ir Vytautą Kašubą, su kuriais palinko į Aristide'o Maillol'io lyrinį poetiškumą ir neoklasicistinę ramybę bei tarpukario „grįžimą prie tvarkos“. Pokario Freiburge, Vokietijos prancūzų okupacinėje zonoje, Zikaras susidūrė su moderniuoju prancūzų menu – visų pirma su Pablo Picasso ir Ossipo Zadkine'o kūryba. Šio susidūrimo poveikis atsispindi paskutiniuose Freiburgo laikotarpio kūriniuose ir tolimame Melburne, Australijoje, sukurtuose šeštojo ir septintojo dešimtmečio darbuose. Šiame straipsnyje teigiama, kad priešingos kultūrinio nacionalizmo ir prancūziškojo modernizmo jėgos suformavo jaunojo Zikaro kūrybą, tuo pačiu prisidėdamos prie vėlesnės jo užmaršties Lietuvoje ir Australijoje. Tokiu būdu reikšminga modernistinės dailės kūrinių grupė sugrąžinama į Lietuvos meno istorijos naratyvą.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: dailininkai emigrantai, egzilis, lietuviškoji diaspora, skulptūra, modernizmas, kultūrinis nacionalizmas