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Art and Politics: The Migration of Images and Ideas Between Weimar Republic and Interwar Lithuania

The article analyses the migration of works and ideas by left-wing artists from the Weimar Republic into the Lithuanian art scene between the wars. This perspective offers a deeper insight into the development of socially and politically engaged art in Lithuania, linked to the legacy of the young generation of leftist graphic artists who emerged in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The article examines the main ways and reasons for the dissemination of the creative legacy of leftist German artists, to highlight the complexity of this phenomenon and its problematic reception in the Lithuanian art field of the interwar period. By analysing the works of various Lithuanian leftist graphic artists, the aim is to show which artists and ideas were most widespread and how this correlated with the cultural, social, economic, and political changes in society at the time. It is equally important to highlight the problems of the dissemination of agitational art by leftist German artists in the Lithuanian art scene, focusing on its influence on the expression of socially engaged art and Soviet propaganda in Lithuania.

Keywords: Left-wing artists, interwar Lithuania, Weimar Republic, social criticism, Soviet propaganda

Over the past decade, research into the history of Lithuanian interwar art has increasingly focused on the artistic processes, phenomena, and personalities on the margins of the major narratives of the period. It is no coincidence that this article has chosen to focus on the migration of images and ideas between the Weimar Republic and interwar Lithuania, offering a broader discussion of the development of socially and politically engaged art in Lithuania, linked to the legacy of leftist artists.¹

The themes of social criticism were mainly taken up by the younger generation of printmakers who emerged in the late 1920s and early 1930s

¹ This article is in great part based on the author's research on the phenomenon of social criticism in Lithuanian art of the interwar period, see: Černiauskas and Radzevičiūtė (2022): 53–117, 147–158.

in Lithuania. Their legacy was perceived rather critically in the interwar period – some of them were not presented in exhibitions and their artworks were not included in the catalogues of the time. After the Second World War, however, these works were rediscovered as useful for the Soviet regime installed in Lithuania, especially in their efforts to reshape Lithuania's local historical memory. Examples of the 'left art' were used as an important part of the Soviet propaganda narrative, often ignoring and distorting the original intentions of the authors of the artworks, and some leftist artists also contributed to this by trying to fit in with the Soviet regime. With the change in Lithuania's political situation in the 1990s, this legacy was forgotten and in some ways marginalised, leaving some aspects of the history of Eastern and Central European modernism in a grey area. It is only in recent years that these works have been rediscovered, with a focus on the original intentions of the authors and the circumstances and contexts in which they were created. This rediscovery suggests that we should look first and foremost at the artistic legacy of Lithuanian graphic artists between the two world wars and their links with the German avant-garde scene, which was a major cultural influence in interwar Lithuania.

More in-depth research into the dissemination of the work of left-wing artists from the Weimar period in the modern Lithuanian art scene began several decades ago. The influence of late German Expressionism and the New Objectivity movement on the work of Lithuanian graphic artists was discussed by Lithuanian art historian Giedrė Jankevičiūtė in her monograph on the history of graphic art in the First Republic of Lithuania (1918–1940).² The aspects of this diffusion were also analysed in Jankevičiūtė's research on the development of Soviet visual propaganda during the first Soviet occupation of Lithuania (1940–1941), which presented for the first time how left-wing German agitational art was appropriated in Soviet Lithuania's propaganda.³ Research on this topic has also recently been extended by Jankevičiūtė in her publication analysing the influence of left-wing German artists on the imagery of the gas mask

² Jankevičiūtė (2008): 49–51.

³ Jankevičiūtė (2011): 122, 136–137.

in Lithuanian interwar visual culture.⁴ Thus, the need to return to this topic was prompted by my research into the legacy of leftist artists and the phenomenon of social criticism in the artistic life of the First Republic of Lithuania.⁵ The visual and documentary material that has come to light in recent years suggests that we should take a closer look at this complex phenomenon and try to grasp its scope and diversity in the modern Lithuanian art.

Therefore, the aim of this article is to examine the main routes of dissemination of the work of German leftist artists in the Lithuanian modern art scene and to identify the reasons that led to such a wide reception of their legacy. By analysing the works of Lithuanian leftist printmakers, it aims to show which artists, ideas, and aesthetic forms were most prevalent for them, and how this interacted with the cultural, social, and political changes in society. Equally important is to show the multilayered aspects of this phenomenon by analysing the influence of German left-wing agitational art on the development of the avant-garde scene linked to social criticism and visual propaganda in Lithuania.

The decay of society and veristic realism

The analysis of the characteristics and extent of the dissemination of German art in interwar Lithuania is inseparable from the long and complex history of relations between Lithuania and Germany. The import of German culture into Lithuania played an important role in this period of national revival. After Tsarist Russia banned the press, books were secretly distributed in Lithuania, not only in Lithuanian but also in German. As historian Alfonsas Eidintas notes, ‘for its part, the German government, which was not necessarily opposed to any political disruption of Russia, and which sometimes followed a liberal policy toward Germany’s national minorities, allowed the Lithuanians cultural expression within the confines of the German Empire.’⁶ German culture took deeper roots in Lithuania

⁴ Jankevičiūtė (2020): 265–271.

⁵ Radzevičiūtė (2021); Radzevičiūtė (2022).

⁶ Eidintas (1997): 12.

during the First World War, when the Germans occupied Lithuanian lands belonging to the Russian Empire. During this period, ideological propaganda was carried out based on the ideas of German nationalism and the introduction of German 'culture' in Lithuania.⁷ In 1918, after Lithuania's declaration of independence, official bilateral international relations were established, with Germany being the first country to recognise its statehood. The Germans living in Lithuania between the two world wars were also the fifth largest national minority, there were various German cultural organisations and schools, and there was a large Lithuanian expatriate community in Germany.⁸ The Klaipėda region was also an important link between the two countries, and although it was returned to Lithuania in 1923, German remained the dominant language in all spheres of life there and was actively supported by Germany until 1939. Thus, relations with Weimar Germany were of great importance to Lithuania in the interwar period, in terms of foreign policy, the economy, and cultural development. However, Weimar Germany did not become a destination for interwar Lithuanian artists in the same way as, for example, France or Italy, which raises the question of why the legacy of German left-wing artists had such a wide resonance in the Lithuanian modern art scene. What were the main ideas and aesthetic forms that influenced their artistic development in relation to the social, political, and cultural context of the time?

Lithuania, like other Central and Eastern European countries that suffered long periods of imperial oppression, experienced modernisation later than Western Europe. And the young state that emerged after the First World War had to rebuild not only its nation state, but also its social system in the face of the aftermath of war and economic and political instability. After the military coup in 1926, the authoritarian regime of President Antanas Smetona, who supported the policies of the ruling nationalists, was installed, and as a result citizens' political freedom and freedom of speech were restricted by banning the activities

⁷ Kaubrys (2015): 162–167.

⁸ Tauber (2015): 183–184.

of other political parties and introducing the law of censorship. From the restoration of Lithuanian independence until 1926, there was no state institution responsible for cultural policy, and after the establishment of Antanas Smetona's authoritarian regime, the Ministry of Education was entrusted with the management of these matters.⁹ Thus, culture became more institutionalised during this period – in official circles it was mainly seen as a representative of the state and the ideology of the ruling nationalists (Tautininkai). Official art was supposed to arouse patriotic feelings in the collective consciousness of the nation and spread the idea of a Lithuanian civic identity promoted by the state.¹⁰ For many artists, especially those of the younger generation, this approach to art and its role in society seemed too utilitarian or outdated, limiting creative self-expression and undermining opportunities for professional development and dissemination. The late 1920s and early 1930s were therefore marked by rapid artistic and ideological differentiation, as well as an increase in the social and political engagement of the artistic community. Artists were actively organising themselves into organisations and informal communities, coordinating exhibitions, and publishing manifestoes. These inter-related socio-cultural, economic, and political factors also strengthened the oppositional sentiments of the younger generation, especially the leftist artists' circle.

The fact that the young generation of graphic artists mostly adopted social-critical ideas in their work coincided with the development of Lithuanian art education and attempts to introduce examples of visual art into the popular mass culture. In 1920, Lithuania lost its historic capital, Vilnius, and Kaunas became the temporary capital. This shaped the situation of art education in the country. The Kaunas Art School, which was founded in 1922, became the only public institution of professional art education in Lithuania aside from technical schools for decorative art and crafts specialists. In 1926, the Graphic Art Studio was opened in Kaunas, which gave a strong impetus to the development of graphic art in

⁹ Mačiulis (2005): 13–54.

¹⁰ Jankevičiūtė (2003): 24–27.

Lithuania. Students of printmaking were influenced by Adomas Galdikas, a classic Lithuanian modernist artist who founded the Graphic Art Studio and headed it until 1940, when the School was transformed to the Kaunas Institute of Applied Art (Kauno taikomosios dailės institutas). Galdikas contributed greatly to the flowering of modern Lithuanian printmaking. Although his teaching fitted to the pattern of local neotraditionalism, he introduced his students to the most important trends of modernism, paying special attention to German Expressionism.

Galdikas's admiration for the work of the Expressionists was greatly influenced by his friendship with the members of the Lithuanian avant-garde literary group 'Keturi vėjai' (Four Winds, 1922–1928), who combined elements of Futurism, Expressionism, and Dada in their work.¹¹ The influence of the German avant-garde is clearly evident in the 1922 issue of the group's literary magazine, also named *Keturi vėjai*. The issue's Expressionist cover was designed by Galdikas, which even had features of Futurism, and which reflected not only the literary revolution, but also the innovative ideas that had emerged in the field of Lithuanian art. Thanks to Galdikas, the students had the opportunity to study the albums and exhibition catalogues of the artists of 'Die Bruecke' (The Bridge) group and issues of the magazine *Der Sturm*. It is also likely that many students were impressed by the 1929 exhibition of German graphic art at the Kaunas bookstore 'Mokslas', which featured prints by Expressionist and New Objectivity artists.¹²

Representatives of the Lithuanian avant-garde left-wing literary scene also contributed to the dissemination of left-wing art influenced by German artists through the close collaboration with Lithuanian graphic artists, who illustrated their magazines and books. In this context, it is worth mentioning two literary groups, 'Trečias frontas' (The Third Front, 1930–1931) and 'Darbas' (The Work, 1932), whose work promoted the proactive role of the artist in society and spread ideas of proletarian revolution. This is visible in the cover of the literary almanac *Darbas*

¹¹ Gudaitis (1986): 15.

¹² Jankevičiūtė (2008): 49.

darbas

laboro
работа
die Arbeit
le travail



The cover of the *Darbas* almanac by Mečislovas Bulaka. Kaunas, 1932



Reproductions of George Grosz's works
on the cover of *Kultūra* magazine (1934, no. 10 and 1935, no. 10)

(1932), in which the graphic artist Mečislovas Bulaka used a multiplied motif of a barge worker.

Graphic artists' relations with leftist avant-garde writers became one of the most important ways in which the leftist cultural press published in Weimar Germany reached the wider community of artists in Lithuania. In the early 1930s, various Lithuanian magazines, such as *Kultūra*, *Aušrinė*, *Naujoji romuva*, and others, began to widely publish reproductions of the works of left-wing German artists such as Käthe Kollwitz, Sella Hasse, and George Grosz.

The inventory books of the library of the Kaunas Art School confirm that albums and catalogues of these artists' works were easily accessible to the art students of the time.¹³

Lithuanian graphic artists were mainly inspired by the New Objectivity movement that emerged in the Weimar Republic in the 1920s, which distanced itself from the emotional imagery and individualism of the Expressionists in favour of a more realistic depiction of, and attention to, social issues. They were capturing the everyday life of post-war German society, challenged not only by war and an unstable political climate, but also by the powerful turbulence of urbanisation and modernisation. The concept of the 'cold persona,' as the German literary historian Helmut Lethen has associated it with the Weimar culture of shame,¹⁴ embodied the traumatic experiences of war and the moral decline of society, social struggles, political instability, and other issues. This must have felt somehow familiar to Lithuanian graphic artists, who were witnessing the enormous transformation of the former territory of the Tsarist Russian Empire into a modern European state. The legacy of left-wing German artists was reflected in the Lithuanian artists' need to speak about their social status and environment. Many of them, with a few exceptions, came from poor families and small villages in the Lithuanian provinces, and when they came to study in the country's fledgling metropolis, they had to adapt to the culture of modern urban life and at the same time face its polarised social reality, along with various social problems such as social inequality, unemployment, poverty, prostitution, vagrancy, and others. In this context, it is also important to note that social criticism in art was not common in Lithuanian art and was rather met with scepticism, so the work of likely left-wing German artists became one of the most important primary sources of artistic and ideological references due to its accessibility in Lithuania. Both the existing early works of Lithuanian leftist artists and their written legacy (almanacs, critical texts, diaries,

¹³ Kaunas Art School Library Inventory Books, f. 61, ap. 1, b. 217, Lithuanian Archive of Literature and Art, Vilnius, Lithuania.

¹⁴ *Wermester* (2023): 20.

epistolary works) show that they adopted from New Objectivity the ideas of veristic realism, which provoked new debates about the role of art and the artist in society, and which were supposed to expose the unmasked social reality for the masses.¹⁵

The migration of these ideas can be seen in the self-portraits of artists who expanded the concept of modern portraiture in Lithuania. It was the genre of the self-portrait that became a tool for consolidating one's artistic worldview – for expressing resistance to the norms of society and for taking a critical look at the cultural, social, and political climate of the time. The Lithuanian art historian Jolita Mulevičiūtė has linked this characteristic of many self-portraits by young artists in the 1930s to the desire to express the new self-consciousness.¹⁶ This is evident in the early series of self-portraits by the graphic artist Vytautas Jurkūnas. He experimented with the camera and later transferred the photographic images to the graphic plane on a large scale, where the artist's piercing and anxious gaze intensifies the feeling that we are under an observing eye.¹⁷

The concept of veristic realism, developed in a distinctive way by Lithuanian graphic artists, is also reflected in the album *Žingsnis* (The Step), published in 1934 by the left-wing students of the Kaunas Art School.¹⁸ The almanac was published in an edition of one hundred copies with twenty-one reproductions of prints, paintings, frescoes, and sculptures. Its title and the accompanying introductory text proclaimed the ideas of artistic renewal and criticised the outdated programme of the Kaunas Art School and its tendencies towards formalist art. Published in the almanac,

¹⁵ Michalski (2003): 19–20.

¹⁶ Mulevičiūtė (2001): 77.

¹⁷ Radzevičiūtė (2021): 52.

¹⁸ *Žingsnis* was edited by a group of Kaunas Art School students, Kaunas, 1934. The album contains reproductions of works by Vaclovas Kosciūška, Jonas Kuzminskis, Vytautas Mackevičius, Boleslovas Motuza-Matuzevičius, Marija Račkauskaitė-Cvirkienė, Irena Trečiokaitė-Zebenkienė, Liuda Vaineikytė, Stasys Vaitkus, Telesforas Valius, and Bronius Žekonis. The main editors of the almanac were Mackevičius, Motuza, and Žekonis. The album was published on the initiative of the Kaunas Art School student corporation 'Trys tulpės,' which aimed to legally consolidate the influence of the illegal Communist Party of Lithuania (Lietuvos komunistų partija or LKP), gather students for underground cultural work, and collect donations for the activities of the LKP. See: Radzevičiūtė (2022): 154.



Vytautas Jurkūnas, *Self-Portrait*, 1934, paper, woodcut, 16 × 10.3 cm,
M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art



Jonas Kuzminskis, *Portrait of Maušukas*, 1938, paper, lithography, 14.5 × 10.5 cm,
Lithuanian National Museum of Art

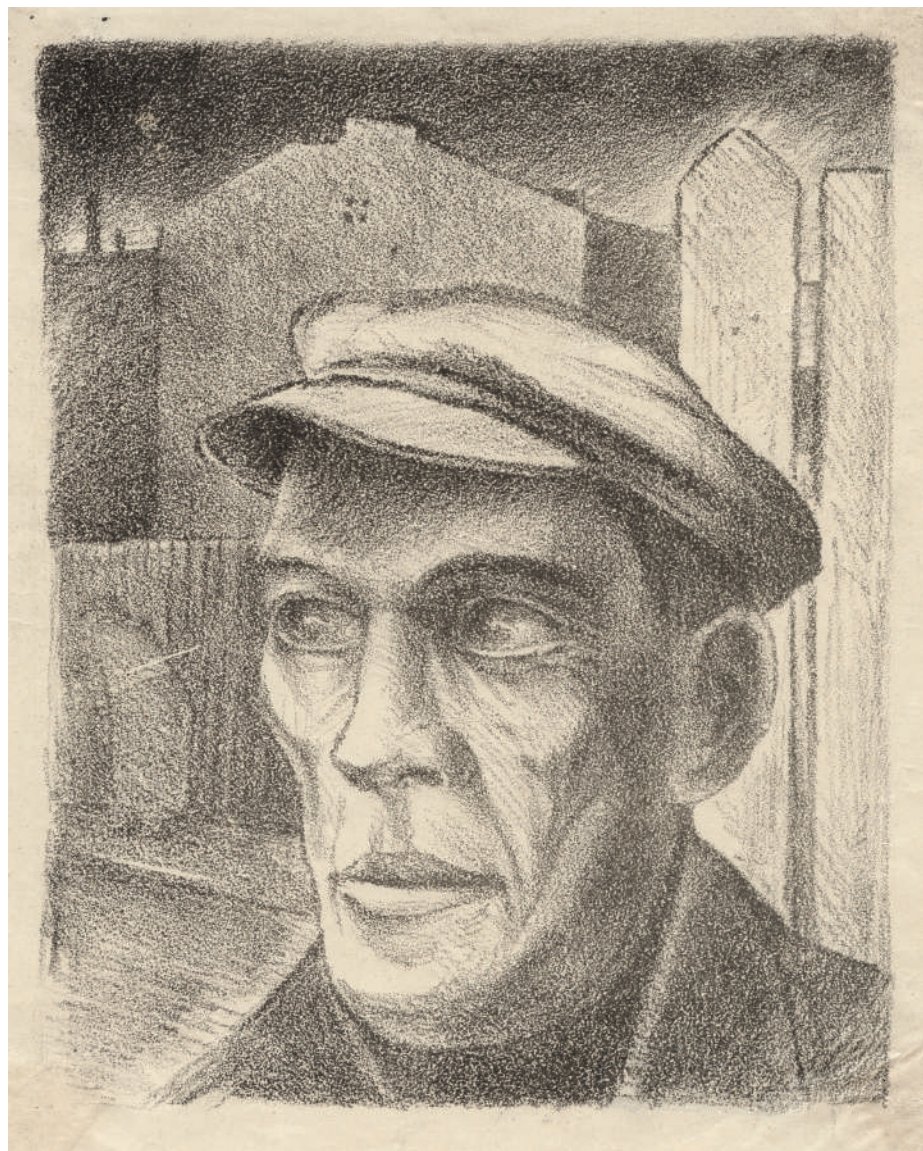
the works of the students of social realism depicted the everyday life of workers and peasants, and remain one of the most important testimonies to the ideological and artistic views of Lithuanian left-wing artists.

In the early 1930s, the work of these graphic artists focused on the social environment of the modern city and its representations of everyday life. For many of them, the myth of the temporary capital as a little Paris, a city of dreams and opportunity, was too far removed from the social reality of urban life. Many young artists, pressured by hardship, found shelter or employment in the cheapest and poorest suburbs of the provisional capital. Thus, alongside cosy still lifes and romantic scenes of Lithuanian nature or agrarian landscapes, works began to appear that depicted the life of the city's streets and its 'new' inhabitants – workers, the unemployed, beggars, prostitutes, vagabond children, and city dwellers looking for refreshment or an escape in the entertainment venues. One of the social problems most reflected in their work, and likely influenced by New Objectivity, was unemployment and the difficult living conditions of the working class. Their new concept of modern portraiture, which focused on the portrait as a social type defined by social class and occupation,¹⁹ can be seen in the portraits of workers by prominent leftist artist Jonas Kuzminskis, which feature the smokestacks of the Tillmanns brothers' metal factory in the background. Using elements of naturalistic imagery, Kuzminskis captures the workers as social types in the city, emphasising their social status through external markers.

New Objectivity artists also influenced another, less explored, visualisation of unemployment in the depiction of public works. In interwar Lithuania, the social insurance system was not yet sufficiently developed, so that public works became perhaps the most important means of rescue in the event of economic shocks, as well as the most important tool in the state's fight against unemployment.²⁰ With the introduction of permanent public works in Lithuania in 1933, the influx of this new imagery was widespread in the works of leftist graphic artists. The issue of

¹⁹ Jørgensen and Degel (2023): 8.

²⁰ Černiauskas (2014): 94–99.



Jonas Kuzminskis, *Portrait of a Worker*, 1930s, paper, lithography, 20,5 × 15,5 cm,
Lithuanian National Museum of Art



Liuda Vaineikytė, *Workers*, 1935, paper, linocut, 19 × 26.7 cm,
M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art

unemployment was powerfully conveyed by the communist graphic artist Liuda Vaineikytė, who combined expressive and naturalistic imagery close to New Objectivity to depict a crowd of unemployed people shuffling to the labour exchange, and public workers paving streets and roads.

The dissemination of New Objectivity is also important for studying the development of Lithuanian political satirical printmaking. George Grosz, who used realism as a tool of satirical social criticism, played an important role. The graphic style he developed, combining a highly



Stepas Žukas, *Women's Drawing-Room*, 1935, ink on paper, 32 × 47.8 cm,
Lithuanian National Museum of Art

expressive use of line with fierce social caricature, influenced the work of one of the most virtuoso Lithuanian caricaturists of the interwar period, Stepas Žukas, who collaborated with the illegal Lithuanian Communist Party. In 1939, Žukas published a collection of political and domestic cartoons entitled *Veidai ir Kaukės* (Faces and Masks), which consisted of his cartoons created between 1934 and 1938.

In them, he constructed a grotesque image of society, exposing the gap between rich and poor, social decadence, and political instability. The caricatures of clerics and bourgeois ladies with their puppies in Žukas's

cartoons resemble Grosz's caricatures both stylistically and thematically. Even the title of the collection and its general idea suggest that it was inspired by Grosz's collection of political cartoons, *Das Gesicht der Herrschenden Klasse* (The Face of the Ruling Class, 1921), which was published by Wieland Herzfelde's revolutionary, anti-war Malik-Verlag at the height of his involvement with the Berlin Dadaists.

Käthe Kollwitz and Marcė Katiliūtė

The dissemination of the work of Käthe Kollwitz, one of the most prominent German Expressionist artists of the 20th century, deserves special attention. At the beginning of the 1930s, the albums and catalogues presenting Kollwitz's works became a significant artistic benchmark for some socially committed artists, whose works are now considered part of the 'golden collection' of Lithuanian modern graphic art. Her works were not only reproduced in the Lithuanian left-wing cultural press, but also used to illustrate articles on social issues. Kollwitz's work *Bread!*, originally titled *Reflecting Woman* (1920), illustrated the article 'Karitas' by the Catholic priest Adolfas Sabaliauskas, a prominent Lithuanian public figure, in the journal *Naujoji romuva* in 1931.²¹ The tragic portrait of a woman crippled by the First World War vividly conveyed Sabaliauskas's thoughts on the problems of widespread poverty and the need to repent for the downtrodden in a society that was indifferent at the time.

Kollwitz's commitment to social advocacy in her work strongly influenced one of Lithuania's most prominent modern artists, Marcė Katiliūtė, who is considered a pioneer of feminist art and the emancipation movement of Lithuanian women artists in the 20th century. This is closely linked to Katiliūtė's tragic life story – she committed suicide at the age of twenty-four, which deeply shocked the artistic community and gave a strong impetus to the solidarity of women artists.²² Her rich creative and

²¹ Sabaliauskas (1931): 164.

²² In October 1937, the first Lithuanian women's art exhibition was opened, and a year later the Lithuanian Women Artists' Society was founded, with the aim of achieving equality, visibility, and independence for women in artistic activities. The Society actively promoted Katiliūtė's

KARITAS

*Oi, varge, varge.
Vargeli mano.
Kada aš tave,
Varge, išvargsiu?*

Vargas lydėjo žmoniją ligšiol, lydės jis ją, tur būt, ir iki pasaulio pabaigai.

Ivairiomis lytimis jis reiškiasi: tai padariniai proto nežinojimo ir valios palinkimo į piklą, tai, ką mes sakom gimtosios nuodėmės išdavos: ligos, senatvės vargai, iširusios šeimos — našlės, našlačiai; bukaprotystė, badas, aistrų padariniai — alkoholizmas, prostitucija, — vergija, išnaudojimas, šiaip nelaimingi atsitikimai.



Käfte Kollwite

„Duonės“

Ar vargą kenčiančius reikia palikti savo likimui ir leisti jiems žūti, sakant kad ir taip: gamta nekenčia atsilikėlių, išsigimėlių, silpnų ir laimina sveikuosius, stiprius, prirentus gyvenimo kovai; taigi, ir atsilikėlis žmogus težūna, o gyvena tegu sveikasis, stiprusis?

Ar reikia ištieti jiems ranką: nemokantį pamokyti, silpną paremti, ligotam palengvinti jo kentėjimą?

Jeigu vargšai jokių ryšių nebūtų turėję su tais, ką šiandien vadinam sveikais, stiprais, vienu žodžiu, laimingais, tai gal šie ir turėtų teisės nesirūpinti jais. Bet taip nėra.

Ne tik šeimos nariai, tėvai, vaikai, broliai, seserys, — sau artimi žmonės, bet, giliau pagalvojus, ir visi kiti, ne tik mūsų tautiečiai, bet ir žmonės kitos odos spalvos ir kita kalba kalbantieji. Jei tiktai pasižvalgytume po mūsų kambarį, pastebėtume, kad tiems daiktams padaryti ir atgabenti galvojo, dirbo ir vargo visų žemės kraštų žmonės. Taigi mes jiems turime būti dėkingi, meiliai juos paminėti. O ką bekalbėti apie žmo-

nes mūsų miesto, mūsų krašto? Neteik sveikatos, jos neteko mums dirbdami. Už tai mes turime atsilyginti.

Žmonės tarp savęs surišti tūkstančiais ryšių, vienas kitam daro įtakos, patys tarp savęs ir nesustikdami: tai iš tiesų vienas kūnas, kurio likimas pareina nuo visų narų veikimo. Ne tiesa, kad mes nekalti, jei mūsų tarpe yra vagių, alkoholikų, badujančių, ligonių. Pasakojai, kad vienas žmogus, sutikdamas kely vedamą kalinį, pakeldavęs prieš jį kopurę, sakydamas jog tai mes visi kalti, kad tas žmogus suklupo, nes per mažą mes meilės turim, neištariam rankos svyruojančiam, neapsviečiam nemokančio. Kiek tik pikto mūsų visuomenėje dedasi, mes visi daugiau ar mažiau kalti.

Dėl to tai, kad šiandien mūsų tarpe atsirado pavargęs žmogus, kurs savo jėgomis nebeapjėgia pramisti, apsvilkti, ar serga, tai, nors jis į tą skurdą būtų įkritęs dėl tinginavimo, dėl girtavimo, ar kitos aistros, nebeklauso ir pamoksių jam nebesakinėk, o eik ir duok jam duonos, ir drabužių, ir vaistų.

Vadinasi, pats teis ngumas reikalauja, kad mes pavargusį šelptume.

Bet būtų ir daugiau atžvilgių.

Žmogus savo uždaviniams atlikti reikalauja pagalbos kitų žmonių. Milijonai žmonių dirbo, galvojo, aukojos, kol patiekė mums tiek įrankių, daiktų, gyvenimo sąlygų, kad mes dabar lengvai patenkinam būtinus gyvavimo reikalavimus ir galim atsiduoti kurti naujas gėrybės. Kuo daugiau aplink mus žmonių sveiku, apsviestų, dorų, tuo geresnės mums gyvenimo sąlygos, tuo geriau mes galim savo darbais pasireikšti, pareikšti tuos D'vo Kūrėjo mūmyste sudėtus gėrio, tiesos ir grožio grūdus, tuo geriau, vadinasi, galim atlikti savo žmogišką pašaukimą.

Jei nors vienas iš mūsų artimųjų pavargsta, į ligą įpuola, pasičaro vergas aistros — alkoholio ir kitų narkotikų —, ar bado varginamas nebeturi jėgų ir laiko kurti naujoms gėrybėms, jau mums patiems daros mažiau paramos, jau visumos kūryba mažta.

O dar vėl į vargą įpuolę žmonės patys nesikenčia savo buitimi; nebegalėdami savo jėgomis apsiginti nuo bado ir mirties, savarankiškai eina ir ima gėrybės iš turinčių. Visos revoliucijos, nežiūrint kurstymų, turi pagrindę koki nors didelį skurdą, arba gal ir skriaudą.

Kad tokių sumaiščių visuomenėje nebūtų, Kristus liepia turintiems pertekliaus, sveikiems, stipriems protingiems eiti pagalbon kritusiems, ligotiems, paklydušiams, bukapročiams ir paduoti jiems ranką.

Bet čia šelpimo reikalo tik viena pusė.

Šelpimas reikalingas ir šelpiančiam.

Žmogaus laimė — būti tikru žmogui. Vadinasi, kad jame, kaip ir turi būti, visiškai viešpatautų grynai žmogiškosties galios: protas ir valia, o visos kitos, kurias mes turim ir kurios yra bendros visiems gyvuliams, klausytų jų. Todėl išsivaduoti iš tų žemesniųjų jėgų vergijos, išsilaisvinti, reškia būti žmogui.

Dalytis gi savo turtu su kitu tai ir yra priemonė pasidaryti nepriklausomų medžiagos: kas duoda, tas gyvenimo rodo, ir tikrumoje taip yra, kad jis ne vergas pinigų, drabužių, ištaigingos valandos: jis aukščiausias. Tuo būdu išmalda valo sielą ir stiprina. O kas viename dalyke moka nugalėti savanaudiškumą, tas mokės ir kitame. Šia prasme tur būt reikia suprasti Sventaraščio žodžiai: „Turėkite vieni kitems nuolatines meilės, nes meilė užgėnė daugybę nuodėmių“ (1 Petr. 4. 8).

written legacy (diaries, notes, and letters) remains an important source for studying the depiction of women's social struggle in modern Lithuanian art. The fact that Kollwitz was an authoritative figure for Katiliūtė was discussed by her contemporaries. Her close friend, the poet Aleksas Jasutis said in his memoirs published after her death:

Let Käthe Kollwitz speak for me. My words are so pale... – This was an annotated almanac of the works of the German artist Käthe Kollwitz. [...] Käthe Kollwitz's work, her technique (woodcuts, ink drawings, etc.), themes, ideas, influenced Marcė Katiliūtė a lot, but she couldn't use the theoretical side of things. So her sister or friends had to help her with her German. Katiliūtė was so fond of Käthe Kollwitz that, instead of a photo album, she gave her guests an almanac of her work to look through.²³

What Kollwitz depicted in her works before and after the First World War, and what Katiliūtė began to do almost several decades later, reflected important changes in the role of women in society. Although women had begun to participate more actively in political, social, and cultural life since 1918, society remained patriarchal and conservative in its gender equality policies. At the beginning of the 1930s, there were very few bold and open statements in Lithuanian art on the following related issues. However, the younger generation of female artists, through experimentation in their work, began to speak in new ways about the redefinition of traditional gender roles. This is evident in Katiliūtė's self-portraits, in which she constructs a new image of the emancipated woman, influenced by the concept of the New Woman. The artist's 'boyish' hairstyles, masculine clothing and attributes, and aggressively penetrating gaze challenged the traditional image of womanhood. As Katiliūtė wrote in her diary:

Isn't it time for a woman not to be a slave to her feelings, but to try to acquire as much knowledge as possible and to get on with her life – not to disappear from it without a trace. After all, many people give her more credit than a man. Why throw up one's hands in the face of a promising struggle? The idea

creative legacy, organising a survey exhibition of her work in 1940 and publishing a catalogue. See: Burbaitė (2016).

²³ Adalas (1937): 262.

← Reproduction of Käthe Kollwitz's *Reflecting Woman* (1920) in the magazine *Naujoji romuva* (1931, no. 7)



Marcé Katiliūtė, *Sketch of Self-Portrait*, 1933, pencil on paper, 20.4 × 13.5 cm,
M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art

that a woman's place is in the family, that she is incapable of anything else, that it is not meant for her, was bound to become outdated. New facts come to light.²⁴

Kollwitz's influence on Katiliūtė's artistic and ideological worldview unfolds to a greater extent in her diaries, notes, letters and other documentary material, where there is much criticism of the male-dominated and conservative art field, and of the various social issues that women had to face in their everyday lives. Such issues included the government's 'overly materialistic' attitude to marriage, gender roles in society, sexuality, prostitution, and women's reproductive rights. Katiliūtė also had close relations with some active women's rights activists from the liberal and social democratic women's movements. In Lithuania, they focused on women's role in the family and society, marriage, childcare, and prostitution, because these were the areas in which the patriarchal system exploited women the most. They also focused on the education of women from lower social classes, the improvement of working conditions, and sex education.

Kollwitz's work, which unfolded a complex spectrum of representations of women's struggle, became a model for the visualisation of these themes in Katiliūtė's work. This is most evident in her archive of drawings, which includes a variety of sketches of women on scraps, brochures, and leaflets. This poorly attributed archive resembles an unadorned chronicle of the lives of Lithuanian women in the 20th century. Katiliūtė primarily reflected on the social situation of women through the theme of motherhood, which was highly politicised in the official Lithuanian art scene. The depiction of pregnant women and mothers was intended to spread the values and ideals of the nation in the collective consciousness of society, based on the unshakeable foundation of the sacredness and continuity of traditions. However, Katiliūtė's sketches and works depicted pregnant women as dying martyrs, tormented by pain, loneliness, and helplessness.

²⁴ Brazauskas (2006): 47.



Marcė Katiliūtė, *Sketch of Lying Down Woman*,
1930s, pencil on paper, 21.8 × 18 cm, M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art



Marcė Katiliūtė, Illustration sketch for Ieva Simonaitytė's novel *Aukštųjų Šimonių likimas* [The Fate of the Šimoniai Family from Aukštujai]. 1936, pencil on paper, 21.8 × 16.8 cm, Šiauliai 'Aušra' Museum

The criminalisation of abortion was a very sensitive issue in Lithuania, and Katiliūtė spoke about it in her notes: ‘poor daughters, deceived by men, humiliated and abandoned without any help, who have decided to have an abortion, are handed over to the courts, to prison or even to the gallows.’²⁵ In interwar Lithuania, women who had abortions were sent to prison for up to three years. It was not until 1935 that a law made abortion legal if the woman’s life was in danger or if she was the victim of a crime.²⁶ It is likely that Katiliūtė, who had contacts with left-wing organisations, was familiar with the posters designed by Kollwitz for the German Communist Party, which campaigned for the decriminalisation of abortion in the Weimar Republic. At the time, it was the only party in the Weimar Republic to call for the legalisation of abortion, given the tragic living conditions of poor working women and their children.²⁷ Kollwitz’s style and her visual language of the body had a profound impact on Katiliūtė’s work. This is particularly evident in Katiliūtė’s use of an expressive naturalistic style, including contrasts of colour and shadow, and experimentation with rough and free line drawing, which helped to convey a range of emotions and experiences more deeply. In this way, Katiliūtė inscribed in the women’s bodies their daily anxieties, marked by apathy, shame, helplessness, frustration, worry, and exclusion.

Endless war and Soviet propaganda

The circle of leftist artists was a favourable platform for the illegal Lithuanian Communist Party to spread its ideological propaganda in society.²⁸

²⁵ Marcės Katiliūtės užrašai [notes], 1928–1932, f. 122-4, p. 46, Lithuanian National Library Rare Book and Manuscript Collection (LNB RRR), Vilnius, Lithuania.

²⁶ Mataitytė (2019): 181–183.

²⁷ Vangen (2017): 26–28.

²⁸ The Communist Party was banned in Lithuania, and those who collaborated with it were investigated, arrested, and prosecuted. Although only a small group of artists were active members of the Communist Party, a number of art students were indirectly involved in LKP activities through communists’ infiltration into various cultural organisations. Some of them contributed to the promotion of a favourable ideological background in the cultural field, others supported the activities of the LKP financially, took part in various demonstrations and strikes, helped to prepare, print, and distribute propaganda material, or assisted active communists in

The development of Soviet Communist visual propaganda in Lithuania coincided with the development of graphic art and mass culture in the late 1920s. A group of graphic artists created slogans, posters, photomontages, and published propaganda press in the underground. They looked to the propaganda magazines of the Soviet Union, Germany, Britain, France, and other countries for artistic inspiration. However, the Lithuanian leftist cultural press and existing visual material suggest that leftist German agitational art had a much more direct influence on Soviet visual propaganda in Lithuania, particularly on its development until the Second World War.

One of the most important sources showing the widespread dissemination of Soviet propaganda is the magazine *Kultūra*, published in Kaunas between 1930 and 1941. Initially, the magazine's editors and contributors were mainly social democrats, but when the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933, the content shifted to the more radical left. This is also evident in the design of the magazine, which from 1933 reproduced numerous works by Grosz and political cartoons from the German anti-fascist and pro-Communist illustrated magazine *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* or *A-I-Z*, which had been published in Berlin between 1924 and March 1933, then in Prague, and finally in Paris until 1938. In addition, *Kultūra* reproduced cartoons from the only German anti-fascist satirical magazine founded in exile, *Der Simpl*, which was published in Prague over a period of eighteen months in 1934 and 1935. Its name referred to and distanced itself from the famous magazine *Simplicissimus*, which was itself subject to the process of *Gleichschaltung* (synchronisation) imposed on the media in Germany under the Nazi regime. These left-wing German magazines had a strong influence on the graphic artists Bulaka and Kuzminskis, whose work illustrated articles in *Kultūra* magazine dealing with the horrors of the First World War, the threat of Nazism, imperialism, corruption, workers' struggles, and various social issues. Their work embraced the visual language of war that came out of left-wing

their daily tasks. Meanwhile, artists who belonged to the party or were active supporters of the party carried out anti-state activities and recruitment, mainly of students from the lower social classes. See: Radzevičiūtė (2022): 147–158; Ėmužis (2022): 135–145.

— Eit, šneki! Kur ėia mėtys bombas. Pirmiausia būtų į žmōnes pataikę.

— Ar jiems gaila žmonių?

— Daugiau, kaip stražnikams... Ar tu matei nors vieną bombą? Kur gi jas būtų padėję? Gal į varpinę?

— Cicilikų buvo pilnas šventorius. Jie laikė kišenėse bombas.

Važiudamas namo, net užmiršęs pirmąjį nuosavą peiliuką, aš visą laiką galvojau: kodėl nešaudė? Kodėl septyni galiūnai bijojo vieno paprasto, kad ir miestiečio, žmogaus? Ar tikrai jis turėjo daug pisislėpusių su bombom draugų?

Nuo tos dienos „stražnikai“ man jau buvo ne tokie baisūs. Ir keista, bet nustojau pavydėti Matui, kurs gyrėsi prieš mane savo jėga.

Praėjo 20 metų. Turėjau vargo, kol suradau miestelio gyventojus, kurie atsiminė tą įvykį. Vis dėlto pavyko tikrai nustatyti, kad tada agitatorius buvo atvykęs į miestelį vieniū vienas, pasiūstas atlikti paprastą pareigą.

Mįslė išspręsta: šandie viską lenkianti galybė, ryt gal bus lygi nukritusiam sausam lapui.



INVALIDAS

J. Kuzminskis

287

Reproduction of Jonas Kuzminskis's work *War Invalid*
in the magazine *Kultūra* (1934, no. 5)

German art – the mutilated, deformed, and crippled bodies of soldiers and bombers; the gas masks that conveyed the threat of modern weaponry in the world.

Another image influenced by German artists was the portrait of lonely, frightened, and struggling mothers with their children, the intention of which was to show the masses the atrocities of war and to

Aš mačiau, kad šitoji mintis juos kankino. Jie pradėjo suprasti, kad gyventi žemėje ir būti laimingu yra ne tik mūsų teisė, bet ir pareiga ir net idealas, kad visuomeniškas gyvenimas sukurtas tik dėl to, kad kiekvienam palengvintų jo asmenišką gyvenimą.

— Gyventi!

— Visiems gyventi!... Tau!.. Man!..

— Nereikia daugiau karo!... Nereikia!... Tai per daug kvaila!..

Miglotą mintis sužibo aiškiu žodžiu... Aš pamačiau pakeltą galvą, apvainikuotą purvu, ir lūpas, ištarusias:

— Dvi kovojančios armijos — tai viena didžiulė armija, baidanti savižudybę.



MOTINA KARE

M. Bulaka

371

Reproduction of Mečislovas Bulaka's *Mother in War*
in the magazine *Kultūra* (1934, no. 6–7)

express an anti-war position. This imagery of impending war was captured in the work *Mother in War* by Mečislovas Bulaka, which illustrates an excerpt from the novel *Le Feu* (The Fire), written by Adrien Gustave Henri Barbusse during the First World War.²⁹ Published in 1916, it was the

²⁹ Barbusse (1934): 371.

author's first literary work on the First World War, written on the basis of his experiences at the front and during the war. This was also powerfully conveyed by the artist Petras Tarabilda in his work *Madonna* for the cover of the magazine, sending the message that not even the saints can protect themselves from the horrors of the coming war.

Even if these works are not directly linked to propaganda of the Communist Party of Lithuania (LKP), it is important to point out how the same visual language that emerged from German leftist agitational art was used by radical leftist artists in Lithuania. This shift can be seen in the LKP poster *Fight Against Fascism, Fight Against Imperialist War* (1934) by communist artist Boleslovas Motuza-Matuzevičius.

Jankevičiūtė noted that this poster was most likely created to invite communists to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the 'Great Imperialist War' and to remind them of their greatest enemy.³⁰ The visualisation of this propaganda message probably leads us to the magazines *A-I-Z*, and *Die Rote Fahne* (The Red Flag), which was published by the German Communist Party between 1919 and 1933. Its influence can also be seen in the design of the Lithuanian political satire magazine *Šluota* (The Broom), published illegally by local communist artists with the support of the LKP between 1934 and 1936.³¹ It mainly published texts, drawings, and cartoons spreading communist propaganda, condemning the Nazi regime in Germany and the authoritarian regime in Lithuania. Seven issues of the magazine were published until 1936, mostly in print runs of 200–300, sometimes 500, and distributed throughout Lithuania, mainly among urban workers and peasants in the countryside. Although the magazine's design and printing were primitive due to the difficult conditions of working in the underground, it remains one of the most important examples of LKP visual propaganda in Lithuania. The magazine's design shows the influence of German Communist propaganda art, especially Grosz's caricature style and John Heartfield's political photomontages. From the giant hand

³⁰ Jankevičiūtė (2020): 268–269.

³¹ The magazine *Šluota* was initiated by Stepas Žukas, but Vytautas Mackevičius, Boleslovas Motuza-Matuzevičius (until 1935), Petras Vaivada, and Bronius Žekonis were the most active organisers, while Liuda Vaineikytė and Irena Trečiokaitė-Žebenkienė only contributed to the last issues. See: Radzevičiūtė (2022): 154–155.



P. Tarabilda
MADONA

Petras Tarabilda's *Madonna* on the cover of the magazine *Kultūra* (1934, no. 11)

**Į KOVA PRIEŠ
FAŠISMA.**



**Į KOVA
PRIEŠ
IMPERIALISTINIŲ
— KARA. —**



Cover of the illegal political satire magazine *Šluota* (1936, no. 1)

punching the Lithuanian president in the face, the enlarged boot sweeping everything off the ground, to the armed fat bourgeois fascist threatening to destroy the world – these kinds of parallels between left-wing German art and Soviet Lithuanian communist propaganda became more apparent during the first Soviet occupation in 1940–1941.

← Boleslovas Motuza-Matuzevičius, Poster *Fight Against Fascism, Fight Against Imperialist War*, 1934, rotary print on paper, 43 × 30.5 cm, National Museum of Lithuania

After the revival of *Šluota*, its contributors continued to use and appropriate the work of left-wing German artists. One of the most notable examples is Žukas's photomontage *Proletarian Hand*, accompanied by the agitational slogan 'Seize the bourgeoisie and there will be order!'. This was an obvious appropriation of Heartfield's famous photomontage *The Hand Has Five Fingers* (1928), although the verist style and merciless 'objective' eye were no longer in keeping with those of the Soviet regime.

After this brief overview of this migration phenomenon, it can be summarised that for left-wing Lithuanian graphic artists, the legacy of left-wing German artists was an important foundation in the search for a new self-consciousness of the artist and in the development of politically engaged art. The concept of veristic realism, rooted in the New Objectivity movement, became an important artistic reference point for capturing the social reality, or rather multiple realities, of Lithuanian post-war society. Left-wing German artists such as George Grosz, Käthe Kollwitz, and John Heartfield inspired Lithuanian artists thematically and aesthetically to capture the 'new' everyday experiences and struggles of a modern city, as well as the fears and threats of the impending war.

The need for further research on this topic is also related to the history of feminist art in Lithuania. This refers not only to the emancipation movement, but especially to the visual reflection of women's social struggle in Lithuanian modern art history, which has been studied more actively in recent years.

A closer look at the dissemination of the legacy of left-wing German artists in Lithuania broadens our horizons in the study of modern art and propaganda in relation to the history of the countries of the former socialist bloc. It is clear that left-wing German art propaganda had a strong influence on communist artists in Lithuania who collaborated with the LKP, and in some respects could be seen as an important factor in future studies of artistic life in Soviet-occupied Lithuania during the Cold War. Additionally, this exploration offers critical insight into the complexity of the perception and reception of the phenomenon of social criticism and the legacy of leftist artists in Lithuania, by revealing the heterogeneous relationship between art, ideology, and propaganda.



**PROLETARIŠKA RANKA,
ČIUPK BURŽUJŲ –
BUS TVARKA!**

The photomontage *Proletarian Hand* by Stepas Žukas
on the back cover of *Šluota* magazine (1940, no. 4)

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Dailė ir politika: idėjų ir vaizdų migracija tarp Veimaro Respublikos ir tarpukario Lietuvos

Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojama kairiųjų pažiūrų menininkų darbų ir idėjų migracija iš Veimaro Respublikos į tarpukario Lietuvos dailę. Ši perspektyva leidžia giliau pažvelgti į socialiai ir politiškai angažuotos dailės raidą nepriklausomoje Lietuvoje, plėtotą jaunosios kartos kairiųjų pažiūrų dailininkų, kurie pradėjo reikštis XX a. trečiojo dešimtmečio pabaigoje ir ketvirtojo dešimtmečio pradžioje. Straipsnyje nagrinėjami pagrindiniai vokiečių kairiųjų dailininkų kūrybinio palikimo sklaidos būdai ir prielaidos, siekiant išryškinti šio reiškinio sudėtingumą ir problemišką jo recepciją tarpukario Lietuvos meno lauke. Analizuojant įvairių Lietuvos kairiosios grafikos menininkų kūrybą, siekiama parodyti, kokie menininkai ir idėjos buvo populiariausi ir kaip tai koreliavo su to meto visuomenės kultūriniais, socialiniais, ekonominiais ir politiniais pokyčiais. Ne mažiau svarbu išryškinti kairiųjų vokiečių dailininkų agitacinio meno sklaidos Lietuvos dailės scenoje problemas, atkreipiant dėmesį į jo įtaką sovietų Lietuvos propagandiniam menui.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: kairiųjų pažiūrų dailininkai, tarpukario Lietuva, Veimaro Respublika, socialinė kritika, sovietinė propaganda