

Preface

The current issue of *Studies on Art and Architecture* comprises a selection of articles originally presented in November 2009 at the conference *The Geographies of Art History in the Baltic Region* in Tallinn.¹ The idea for the conference, which was co-organised by the Institute of Art History at the Estonian Academy of Arts and the Estonian Society of Art Historians, emerged following the Society's annual day-conference in 2007. During the day-conference there emerged a critical debate regarding the history and current problematic of Estonian art historiography and some participants felt that it would be beneficial to extend the debate to a wider regional level, thus prompting the decision to invite colleagues from Latvia, Lithuania and also Finland. The main aim of such regional meeting was to generate an exchange of ideas about the historical and current geographical and disciplinary borders of art history as it is practiced in these cultures.

From a contemporary perspective, to treat the three contemporary nation-states – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – as forming a unified region of Baltic states may seem a redundant idea partly dependent on a common history of Soviet occupation (i.e. something the effects of which all three states and societies have sought to overcome during the past two decades). Also, the emergence of new political desires and cultural alliances has contributed to the gradual loosening of the previously strong ties, developed by the artists and art historians of the three Baltic states during the Soviet period. *The Geographies of Art History in the Baltic Region* did not consciously build upon the tradition of regular meetings of art historians from the Baltic republics that had convened during the Soviet era, although this history resurfaced during the conference as a positive memory that might serve to inspire more frequent professional exchanges in the future. More importantly, despite important historical and contemporary differences, the conference confirmed that the processes of writing (national) art histories in each of the Baltic states continue to share common concerns – whether determined by their link to the histories of national emancipation, cultural resistance or contemporary global identities. These common concerns and parallel – and sometimes intersecting – histories are evoked in several of the studies presented here.

1 See also M. Laanemets, *Geographies of Art History in the Baltic Region*. Reval (Tallinn), 27.–28. November 2009. – kunsttexte.de, Ostblick 2010, no. 1, pp. 1–6, <http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/kunsttexte/2010-1/laanemets-mari-8/PDF/laanemets.pdf>.

The local history of the emergence and development of the discipline is discussed in the two opening articles of this volume: Krista Kodres's 'Our Own Estonian Art History: Changing Geographies of Art-Historical Narrative' and Stella Pelše's 'Creating the Discipline: Facts, Stories and Sources of Latvian Art History'. Jolita Mulevičiūtė's article 'New Aims, Old Means: Rewriting Lithuanian Art History of the National Revival Period' examines the more recent transformation of the discipline in Lithuania, focusing on the case studies which have expanded disciplinary angles and methodologies of art-historical research.

Although emphasising a narrower sense of the Baltic region, the conference also undermined this 'closed geography' by including a Nordic dimension that is especially relevant to Estonian art history – via both its historical connections to the history of the discipline in Sweden and its contemporary exchanges with Finnish art historians. This dimension is exemplified by Visa Immonen's study 'Medievalisms with a Difference: Estonia and the Finnish Pre-War Tradition of Antiquarian Art History'. Discussing the role of medieval studies in Finnish art history as well as in the production of national identity, Immonen pays particular attention to the views of Estonian medieval heritage in Finnish scholarship.

The next two articles continue exploration of the impact of contextual studies in recent Lithuanian art history. In 'Writing the Art History of the City: From Nationalism to Multiculturalism', Laima Laučkaitė discusses the ideas and material she presented in her award-winning book *Art of Vilnius 1900–1915* (2008). Her research focuses on artistic life in Vilnius, revealing a dynamic multinational art scene that has generally been neglected by national histories of art. Giedrė Jankevičiūtė's article 'Writing the Art History of the Vanished States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the 1940s' invites us to consider the need for research that can reach beyond the borders of national culture; it also outlines some of the particular difficulties for such research with regard to the Baltic states.

The final three articles are united by their common concern with the ways in which art-historical knowledge is produced not only in academic discourse but in various other places: in national art museums, international exhibitions, curatorial work, art criticism and textual production by artists and architects. In 'Post-Soviet Writing of History: The Case of the National Gallery of Art in Vilnius', Linara Dovydaitytė presents an analysis of the new museum's permanent exhibition and argues that it forms a specifically post-Soviet narrative of history. Epp Lankots's case study 'History Appropriating Contemporary Concerns: Leonhard Lapin's Architectural History and Mythical Thinking', which deals with the textual practices of one of the leaders of the Estonian artistic avant-garde in the 1970s and 1980s, demonstrates how the specific use of the notions of history and the (neo-)avant-garde both resonated with and underlined differences from similar debates in the West. In her article 'Friends is olvais welcome to Lithuania': The Location of Contemporary Lithuanian Art', Alexandra Alisauskas focuses on the place of Lithuanian contemporary art in the framework of international exhibitions, with particular reference to one work by the contemporary Lithuanian artist collective Academic Training Group.

The review section of this special issue opens with an overview of the seminar *Thinking Art History in East-Central Europe*, which was organised jointly by the Clark Art Institute and the Institute of Art History in Tallinn in May 2010. Due to its focus on the history and current situation of art history in the Baltic states and Finland, as well as the overlap of certain issues (e.g. the prominence of national art history) and some presenters, this event appears to have provided a forum for further development of the ideas and debates formed at the regional *Geographies* conference. In order to further disseminate information about the academic and non-academic journals of art and art history currently published in this part of Europe, short overviews of relevant periodicals published in Finland, Latvia and Lithuania – both in English and in local languages – are included together with a review of a recent study of one of the leading Estonian art historians of the twentieth century, Voldemar Vaga.

As one of the convenors of the conference and as editor of this special issue, it is my hope that both will serve to help generate new (dis)agreements, interventions and transformations of the status quo – among national and regional communities of art historians and beyond.

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