

The Picture of the Period 1890–1915 in Latvian Art-Historical Writing: Ethnocentric Distortions and Ways to Correct Them

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Since the turn of the twentieth century, when Latvian art began to emancipate itself from the general cultural scene of the Baltic provinces, its rising national self-awareness has permeated most art-historical writing about this period, giving rise to a strong ethnocentric tradition, which has managed to prevail in all phases of Latvia's history throughout the past century and still exists as a peculiar 'default setting' for the way Latvians envision their country's art on both popular and academic levels. The focus on phenomena identified as ethnic Latvian involved an art-historical uprooting of non-Latvian (basically German) aspects of the local art scene and distorted the general picture. This article examines the Latvian ethnocentric narrative in its various stages of development in order to determine what should be changed on the way to a possibly all-inclusive, many-layered and reliable representation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the most multicultural episode of Latvia's artistic past.

The period between 1890 and 1915 is considered to be the most extensively described segment in the time-line of Latvian art history. In this, it contrasts to the preceding span of the nineteenth century, figuratively compared by our academic authority Eduards Kļaviņš, in a review of the large-scale exhibition *19th Century Portrait in Latvia* (Rundāle Palace Museum, 2008–2009) to 'a lost Atlantis': 'In more recent times for a wider circle of interested audience, it meant ... an emptiness hidden behind fragmentary exhibits. Even to professional art historians the 19th century was, in general, a *terra incognita* whose further exploration was inhibited by the inertia set by the politically ideological and aesthetic taboos (Baltic German art, naturalism, a lack of 'stars').'¹

Nevertheless, every venture, from published interpretations down to sources, can leave one surprised at the large proportion of turn-of-the-twentieth-century art-historical evidence that has so far not been used or has been insufficiently used as material for investigations. This inadequacy is largely (but not exclusively) due to the deep-rooted ethnocentric tradition that has prevailed and unwittingly keeps prevailing as

1 E. Kļaviņš, *Portreta atlantida Rundāles pili / Portrait Atlantis at Rundāle Palace*. – Studija 2008, no. 61, p. 2 (Latvian), p. 92 (English). The exhibition was curated by the art historians Inta Pujāte and Dainis Brūģis.

a 'default setting' for the way we envision our country's art on both popular and academic levels.

With the rise of the new national professional art in the late nineteenth century, most twentieth-century writers and curators shifted from a territorial view to a focus on phenomena that they identified as ethnic Latvian, disregarding or marginalising non-Latvian (basically German) aspects of the local art scene. This approach is perfectly illustrated by the once famous, standard art album *Latvian Painting: Pre-Soviet Period*,² which was edited by the art historian Miķelis Ivanovs (1927–1991) and first published quadrilingually in a print run of an immediately sold out 25,500 copies in 1980 (another 20,000 copies were printed in 1981). As a child, I used to peruse this practical visual guide to our occupied country's artistic past and, as time went by, I grew increasingly puzzled by the fact that the display began with a series of eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century German names, such as Friedrich Hartmann Barisien (1724–1796), Carl Gotthard Grass (1767–1814) and Johann Heinrich Baumann (1753–1832). Then they suddenly left the scene, as if the great resettlement of the German population from the Baltic countries had taken place not on the eve of World War II but in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the activities of the first ethnic Latvian artists and the start of developments later cemented into the concept 'national school of professional art'. This discrepancy seemed both puzzling and profoundly integral as an exception to the rules of my native language, or – in the same volume – the difference between the printed caption line 'J. Valters' under images of paintings signed with *W.-K.* or *Walter-Kurau* for reasons undisclosed in the respective entry of the album's biographical appendix.

To a certain extent, taciturn acceptance of, or inhibition about inquiring about, such puzzles was part of the normal cultural maturing into twentieth-century Latvianness, whether during the inter-war independence, Soviet occupation or post-Soviet transformations in the country. Even now, readers of books or visitors to museums and exhibitions most often receive no hint that Latvia's artistic culture was for a century, until the outbreak of World War I, more multicultural than ever before or after, with artists' new initiatives gaining strength from both interaction and rivalry with their counterparts. The scene then was changing, indeed, but obviously more in the way it was described in the liberal German *St. Petersburger Zeitung* by the journalist Oskar Grosset reporting about a visit to his Baltic *Heimat* in 1909.³ He was no longer sure whether an unbiased observer could keep seeing Riga, 'the old stronghold of Germanness in the Baltic provinces', as a predominantly German city. Having outlined Latvian achievements in either opening new commercial, financial and industrial enterprises, or in taking over old ones from the hands of their former German owners, Grosset wrote that 'also in the area of architecture and fine arts the Latvian is lately competing with the German, so that such men as Pēkšēns, Zariņš, Purvītis, Rozentāls

2 *Latviešu glezniecība: Pirmspadomju periods / Латышская живопись: досоветский период / Latvian Painting: Pre-Soviet Period / Lettische Malerei: Die vorsowjetische Periode.* Ed. M. Ivanovs. Riga: Liesma, 1980 (1st ed.), 1981 (2nd ed.).

3 O. Grosset, *Reiseeindrücke aus Kurland.* – *St. Petersburger Zeitung* 5 (18) July 1909.

et al. have come to rival all the Neumanns, Gaehtgenses, Krauses and Rosens, at least on equal terms'.⁴

Latvian readers today would unmistakably recognise the journalist's random selection of the Latvian 'team': the architect Konstantīns Pēkšēns (1859–1928), the graphic artist Rihards Zariņš (1869–1939), and the painters Vilhelms Purvītis (1872–1945) and Janis Rozentāls (1866–1916). However, only a very limited number of experts would be able to avoid pausing uncertainly at the quoted names of the architect and art historian Wilhelm Neumann (1849–1919) (even though important aspects of his work have been discussed in a number of articles in various publications since 1991⁵), or the artists Ernst Hermann Gaehtgens (1872–1938), Theodor Kraus (1866–1948) and Gerhard von Rosen (1856–1927). Why then do the first group mentioned now have hardly anybody to compete with in Latvian art-historical writing, and why do their counterparts remain abstract and obscure? The art historian and curator Dace Lambergā, in her introduction to the exhibition *Symbolism and Art Nouveau in the Art of Latvia* (2001, State Museum of Art⁶), which was one of the first art events in contemporary Riga to reintroduce a number of early-twentieth-century Baltic German artists to the Latvian public,⁷ mentioned a series of authors whose 'water colours, linocuts, lithographs and wood carvings ... obviously combine their Germanic spirit with the native nature of Latvia' and then concluded: 'Nevertheless the names of these artists, who had some importance in Baltic cultural life until World War I, are lost for the discourse of art history'.⁸ Did they simply fail to stand the test of time or does their oblivion have partly or entirely different grounds?

In a way, Latvian art history throughout the twentieth century never stopped performing the same national propaganda functions as the limited deluxe edition of ornamented hand-bound albums containing photographic reproductions of Latvian art

4 O. Grosset, *Reiseeindrücke aus Kurland*.

5 The Latvian part of the literature on this key figure of Baltic art history from around 1900 consists of publications by Elita Grosmane, Edvarda Šmite and Janis Krastiņš: E. Grosmane, Vilhelms Neimanis *Latvijas mākslas vēsturē* [Wilhelm Neumann in the history of art of Latvia]. – Doma 1991, vol. 1, pp. 7–21; E. Grosmane, *Kur meklējami mākslas vēstures pirmsākumi Latvijā?* [What was the genesis of the art history of Latvia?]. – *Latvijas mākslas un mākslas vēstures likteņgaitas* [The destiny of Latvian art and art history]. (Materiāli Latvijas mākslas vēsturei.) Ed. R. Kaminska. Riga: Neputns, 2001, pp. 7–15; J. Krastiņš, *Vilhelms Neimanis un muzeja arhitektūra* / Wilhelm Neumann and the Architecture of the Museum. – *Valsts Mākslas muzejs* [State Museum of Art]. Ed. M. Lāce. Riga: Jumava; Riga: Valsts Mākslas muzejs, 2005, pp. 17–30 (Latvian), pp. 324–328 (English); E. Šmite, *Māksla ienāk Rīgas pilsoņu dzīvē: 18. gs. beigas – 20. gs. sākums* / Art Comes into the Lives of the Citizens of Riga: From the End of the 18th to the Beginning of the 20th Century. – *Valsts Mākslas muzejs*, pp. 38–48 (Latvian), pp. 331–334 (English); E. Grosmane, *Vilhelms Neimanis un viņa iedrošināšanās avoti muzeja izveides gaitā* / Wilhelm Neumann and the Sources of his Inspiration during the Formation of the Museum. – *Mākslas muzeju vieta kultūras procesos: Vēsture un perspektīvas*. Starptautiskā zinātniskā konference Latvijas Nacionālā mākslas muzeja simtgades programmas ietvaros 2005. gada 14.–15. septembrī / The Place of Art Museums in Cultural Processes: History and Prospects: International Scientific Conference in the Framework of the Centenary Program of the Latvian National Museum of Art, 14–15 September, 2005. Ed. G. Gerharde-Upeniece. Riga: LNMM, 2008, pp. 18–25; E. Šmite, *Rīgas pilsētas mākslas muzeja tapšana un muzeja darbības pirmais posms Vilhelma Neimaņa (1849–1919) vadībā* [The evolution of the Riga City Art Museum and the first period of its activity under Wilhelm Neumann (1849–1919)]. – E. Šmite, *Latvijas mākslas vēstures epizodes: 18. gs. beigas – 20. gs. sākums* [Episodes of Latvian art history: late 18th – early 20th century]. (Muzeja raksti 3.) Riga: Latvijas Nacionālais mākslas muzejs, 2011, pp. 131–153. On Neumann's 160th anniversary in 2009, a special conference was held by the Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation, with papers by the three above-mentioned researchers and the restorer Ronalds Lūsis. Nevertheless, a comprehensive monograph or collective work on Neumann's life and work still cannot be expected.

6 Renamed the Latvian National Museum of Art in 2005.

7 An earlier precedent was the exhibition *Landscape of Latvia* (1992–1993, curated by Velga Opule), with works of Baltic German artists from the collections of prints of the now Latvian National Museum of Art.

8 D. Lambergā, *Pirms gadsimta* [A century ago]. – *Studija* 2000, no. 10, p. 60.

works that were commissioned by the Latvian Provisional National Council in 1918 (or 1917–1918) for the purpose of convincing the Western political elite of the young nation's cultural maturity and readiness for statehood⁹. The urgency of such ideological aims had a similar background for the south of Latvia, where '[t]he main discourse of Lithuanian twentieth-century research has been the national one'¹⁰ and for the north, in the Estonian part of the former Baltic provinces (*Ostseeprovinzen*), where, too, 'the existence of national art was an integral part [of nation-building], necessary for the historical (and often mythological) self-representation of any nation aspiring to be considered cultured and civilised'¹¹. Certainly I share the hope of Anna Brzyski and Adrienne Kochman in their introduction to the 'Parallel Narratives' issue of *centropa* that 'perhaps we are more aware of – if not always more willing to acknowledge – the ideological nature of art historic conceptions'¹² than our predecessors were before our century. It would be, of course, unnecessary and even unjust to blame the art society of the past for any of its motivations and purposes, which must instead be diagnosed and carefully analysed to better understand their authentic historical scene. It is, however, a rather deplorable situation if twenty-first-century professionals keep going along the same old lines without enough critical awareness to realise that the battle they are about to fight is long since over.¹³

During the years of work on the biography of the owner of the mysterious W.-K. signature – Johann Walter (in Latvian – Johans (Jānis) Valters, 1869–1932) a. k. a. Walter-Kurau since 1906, a Baltic-born painter of a mixed German-Latvian origin,¹⁴ – I had many opportunities to grasp the surprising extent to which many Latvian authors and readers throughout the twentieth century believed in the ethnic homogeneity of the country's artistic modernisation. Actually, they shared the elation of the Latvian art historian Jānis Siliņš (1896–1991), who described the appearance of the three undisputed key figures of the turn of the twentieth century as a victorious national 'thunderstorm of creative joy and daring', for 'these masters stirred the Baltic German provincial languor by their freshness, the healthy vigour drawn from the unspoilt reserves of the new peasant nation.'¹⁵ The total absurdity of such eagerly multiplied national patriotic 'stormy landscapes' lies in the very constellation of the 'Great Triad' of

9 All copies of the album are reportedly lost. For more about this diplomatic gift, see K. Ābele, *Out from behind the Fireplace: The Progress of Latvian National Emancipation in the Art Life during the First World War*. – *Dailēs istorijos studijos / Art History Studies* 2012, vol. 5: *Art and Artistic Life during the Two World Wars*. Eds. L. Laučkaitė, G. Jankevičiūtė, pp. 30–31.

10 L. Laučkaitė, *Writing the Art History of the City: From Nationalism to Multiculturalism*. – *Kunsteiteaduslikke Uurimusi* 2010, vol. 19 (3/4), p. 72.

11 K. Kodres, *Our Own Estonian Art History: Changing Geographies of Art-Historical Narrative*. – *Kunsteiteaduslikke Uurimusi* 2010, vol. 19 (3/4), p. 22.

12 A. Brzyski, A. Kochman, *Introduction*. – *centropa* 2008, vol. 8 (3), p. [210].

13 The paradoxical disposition of contemporary Latvian intellectuals to regulations and propaganda can be illustrated by a variety of examples, including the exaggerated cultural political importance attached to the state-commissioned project *Latvian Cultural Canon (2007–2009)*, see <http://www.kulturaskanons.lv/en/1>, which I find essentially controversial despite my personal collaboration as one of the appointed experts in the Visual Arts area, together with Māra Lāce, Imants Lancmanis, Eduards Kļaviņš and Laima Slava.

14 K. Ābele, *Johans Valters*. Rīga: Neputnis, 2009. In English, see K. Ābele, *Johann Walter (Walter-Kurau), 1869–1932*. Summary of the Doctoral Dissertation. Rīga: Latvijas Mākslas akadēmijas Mākslas vēstures institūts, 2010 (accessible online at <http://www.lma.lv/eng/downloads/K-Abele-Summary-EN.pdf>).

15 See Siliņš's essay on Walter's painting *Bathing Boys* in: *Latviešu glezniecība: Krāsainu reprodukciju sakopojums [Latvian painting: collection of colour plates]*. Vol. 2: *Žanrs [Genre]*. Ed. F. Balodis. Rīga: Valsts papīru spiestuve un naudas kalture, 1940, unpaginated.

Latvian painters, because it includes not only the Latvians Vilhelms Purvītis and Janis Rozentāls but also the above-mentioned Johann Walter, who declared his national prerequisites insufficient for joining the Latvian political fight in 1905¹⁶ and emigrated to Germany in 1906.

A twenty-first-century reader of Oskar Grosset's journalistic impressions of the ethnocultural scene of Riga in 1909 might ask why this portrait looks merely bi-cultural and does not represent the whole ethnic spectrum of the city in a way similar to Erwin Oberländer's and Kristine Wohlfart's edition *Riga: Portrait of a Multinational City on the Fringe of the Tsarist Empire, 1857–1914*, with separate chapters about Latvian, German, Russian, Jewish, Polish, Lithuanian and Estonian segments of the local society¹⁷. Surprisingly enough, the visual arts of early-twentieth-century Riga can not be described in terms of a real 'national kaleidoscope' with more than two considerable components, as it was in the artistic life of Vilnius at that time¹⁸ or, more or less, also in the production of architecture and its décor in Riga¹⁹. Being a locally active non-Latvian or non-German artist in the Latvian part of the Baltic Provinces was rather an exception. Even though the paper *Latvija* in 1910 was not quite accurate that the only 'popular Russian painter here in Riga' was Ivan Tikhomirov (1867–?) with his 'raw gold-framed oleographs'²⁰, the real situation was not much different, and there are not many names to be added, especially since artists of presumably mixed Russian-German origin usually associated themselves with Germans. An important and very poorly explored area, however, is the highly interesting field of art criticism in the Russian periodicals of Riga before World War I.²¹

Against the background of the Latvian-German cultural rivalry, it was precisely ethnic otherness that provided an advantage to the young and sociable Lithuanian painter Petras Kalpokas (1880–1945), who was met with friendship and support by both groups during his Latvian period of studies and work, thus showing that Latvians and Germans sometimes found it easier to communicate with contemporaries of some third nationality if they were accepted as harmless individual neighbours or compatriots

16 J. Walter, *Zuschrift*. – *Düna-Zeitung* 1 (14) September 1905.

17 German edition: *Riga: Portrait einer Vielvölkerstadt am Rande des Zarenreiches, 1857–1914*. Eds. E. Oberländer, K. Wohlfart. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004; Latvian edition: *Katram bija sava Rīga: Daudznacionālas pilsētas portrets no 1857. līdz 1914. gadam* [Everybody had his own Riga: Portrait of a multinational city between 1857 and 1914]. Eds. K. Volfarte [Wohlfart], E. Oberlenders [Oberländer]. Riga: AGB, 2004.

18 See the chapter 'A National Kaleidoscope of Artistic Life' in: L. Laučkaitē, *Art in Vilnius, 1900–1915*. Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2008, pp. 15–119.

19 See e.g.: J. Krastiņš, *Rīgas arhitektūras meistari, 1850–1940* / *The Masters of Architecture of Riga*. Riga: Jumava, 2002; S. Grosa, *Jugendstila perioda plastiskais un gleznieciskais dekors Rīgas 19. gs. un 20. gs. mijas arhitektūrā: promocijas darbs* [The plastic and painted décor of the art nouveau period in the architecture of Riga at the turn of the 20th century: PhD dissertation]. Riga: Latvijas Mākslas akadēmija, 2008. A monograph based on this dissertation is currently being edited for publication at the Neputns Publishing House in Riga.

20 J. Jaunsudrabiņš, *Izstāde J. Rieksta mākslas salonā* [An exhibition in the art salon of Jānis Rieksts]. – *Latvija* 25 February (10 March) 1910.

21 Unlike the mass of Latvian papers, journals and magazines that are completely indexed and available in Latvian library collections, or Baltic German periodicals that are not indexed but can be studied in our libraries and have relatively few gaps, only a small part of Riga's Russian periodical press before 1914 is preserved in contemporary Latvia. Therefore, most ventures of Latvian researchers into this vast *terra incognita* during brief visits to foreign libraries in St. Petersburg and elsewhere are limited by the urgent needs of some specific study themes.

without substantial cultural claims in the territory of future Latvia.²² In the exhibition scene of Riga, Kalpokas's double identity as both a Baltic and Lithuanian artist was taken for granted, whereas the inevitable Baltic/Latvian ambiguity of his Latvian colleagues gave rise to ardent debates that deserve closer inspection.

Fellow nationals vs. compatriots

In order to diagnose the gaps and distortions caused by the deliberately national narrative of Latvian art history, it is useful to return to its starting point in the 1890s, when the urge to discern every Latvian element in the whole production of Baltic artists (i.e. differentiate unambiguous 'fellow nationals' from ambiguous 'compatriots') took its first steps and the rising Latvian nation used every opportunity to manifest its budding cultural autonomy and eventual superiority.

The arrogant remark in *Düna-Zeitung* that the 'Latvian folk have learned something in this area too'²³, with regard to the Art Department of the Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition in Riga in 1896, could not conceal the anonymous reviewer's admiration of Janis Rozentāls's ambitious graduation piece *From Church* (1894, Latvian National Museum of Art). Soon afterwards, the ice of mistrust between the old city's German cultural elite and the fresh graduates of the St. Petersburg Imperial Academy of Art began to melt based on common aesthetic values, which ever more often bridged the gap between sons of different classes and nations in the changing society. The appearance of the 'Gnomes'²⁴ in their native country actually differed from the process outlined by the prominent art historian Tatjana Kačalova (1915–2010): in her interpretation, typical of the Latvian narrative, the Gnomes met with resistance on the part of 'representatives of Baltic German culture who are filled with the awareness of their mission as *Kulturträger*'. In spite of this, these pioneers found opportunities 'to establish themselves side by side with the local artists of a different orientation' and 'create the ground for the existence of their art'²⁵. Professor Kačalova, the legendary 'foreign grandmother' of Latvian art history²⁶, however, could not fail to sense that 'the peculiar intriguing complexity of the turn of the twentieth century in Latvia could be developed only at a creative intersection of the two cultural spheres': the Latvian and Baltic German²⁷. In 1898–1899, when the Baltic art exhibition at the opening of the Riga

22 For more about this aspect in the reception of Kalpokas, see: K. Ābele, *Tautieši un novadnieki: Nacionālais jautājums un teritoriālā identitāte Latvijas mākslas dzīvē 19. gs. beigās un 20. gs. sākumā* [Fellow nationals and compatriots: The national question and territorial identity in the art life of Latvia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries]. – *Mākla un politiskie konteksti*. [Art and political contexts]. (Materiali Latvijas mākslas vēsturei.) Ed. D. Lāce. Rīga: Neputns, 2006, pp. 60–61. Ed. D. Lāce. Rīga: Neputns, 2006, pp. 60–61.

23 Die lettische ethnographische Ausstellung. – *Düna-Zeitung* 7 (19) August 1896.

24 *Gnome (Rūķis)* – a semi-official organisation of Latvian art students in St. Petersburg during the 1890s, and after a break of several years revived in the first decade of the twentieth century.

25 T. Kačalova, *Latviešu ainavu glezniecība gadsimtu mijā (1890–1915)* [Latvian landscape painting at the turn of the century (1890–1915)]. Rīga: Zinātne, 2004, pp. 19–20.

26 Tatjana Kačalova, best known for her contribution to the research on Latvian landscape painting and forty years of lectures in foreign art history at the Latvian Academy of Art after her return from Siberian deportation in the 1950s, was born in pre-1917 Petrograd as Baroness Rosenschild-Paulin to a Russian-German lawyer's family descended from the landed gentry of eastern Latvia (Latgale).

27 T. Kačalova, *Latviešu ainavu glezniecība gadsimtu mijā (1890–1915)*, p. 21.

Art Society's Art Salon (*Kunstsalon des Rigaschen Kunstvereins*) turned into a convincing performance of two key exponents, Walter and especially Purvītis, a number of art lovers, with Roderich von Engelhardt (1862–1934) in the fore, were ready to welcome and promote young talent of any nationality whose artistic achievements in the country and abroad could be described with pride in *unsere Landsleute* (sing. *unser Landsmann* – 'our compatriot'). The Riga German artists Gerhard von Rosen and Friedrich Moritz (1866–1947), although more conservative in their own artistic practice, eagerly explained the unconventional qualities of their colleagues' lyrical painting of nature moods to the audiences of Riga German papers.

In the first years of the new century, numerous countrymen were quick to agree with the opinion of Julius Hasselblatt (a.k.a. Norden, 1849–1907) in Berlin that Purvītis's landscapes 'epitomise the very soul of the native scenery for every son of the Baltic *Heimat*'²⁸. Something locally unprecedented was taking place: the formation of artistic values that were appreciated by the whole art-centred part of the multi-ethnic Baltic society. At the same time, this new common ground, with its emphasis on the native instead of the national,²⁹ was constantly shaken by efforts of the Latvian press to insist on the use of strictly defined ethnic 'labels', even in ambiguous cases where one could not conjure up the wanted Latvianness without resorting to myth-making. 'The Riga Art Society wants to fill its exhibition rooms with new works by local artists, and there it is: two-thirds of them are by artists of Latvian origin. And even if their birth, education, communication and language may make one call their Latvianness into question, one should look at their paintings, i.e. look into their souls, and one will certainly find a Latvian there',³⁰ the influential literary critic Teodors Zeiferts (1865–1929) speculated in 1899. In the revolutionary year 1905, he authored the provocatively attacking article 'Baltic German and Latvian Culture', among other things wielding Purvītis's and Rozentāls's art as a weapon against its local German lovers: 'If a generally recognised artist has once appeared, should Germans ever show him their appreciation for any other reason than to not disgrace themselves?'³¹ Zeiferts had come to believe that Baltic German journalists referred to Purvītis as 'our compatriot' with the intention of depriving Latvians of their achievements, because people who 'are not closely familiar with the circumstances' would not properly understand that *unser Landsmann* could mean both 'fellow national' and 'countryman' of any nationality³². His rage in the heated atmosphere of national confrontation reached its peak after Purvītis's public answer, where the famous painter found it necessary to advocate for non-Latvian friends of his art whose patronage had been decisive in his establishing himself in Riga; he announced his retreat from the field of ethnic conflicts declaring: 'I recognise only the

28 From Wilhelm Sawitzky's (1879–1949) reminiscences about a visit to Hasselblatt in 1902, see S-y [W. Sawitzky], Julius Hasselblatt-Norden †. – Baltische Post 27 January (9 February) 1907.

29 Compare Paul Schultze-Naumburg's sentence about Worpswede painters in Germany: 'It has been called national art – native [*heimatlich*, literally – 'homelandic'] art seems to me more adequate for it. Not on patriotic spirit it relies, but on impressions.' (P. Schultze-Naumburg, *Die Worpsweder*. – *Die Kunst für Alle* 1897, vol. 12 (8), p. 116.)

30 Teodors [T. Zeiferts], Pēdējās Rīgas mākslas biedrības izstādes nozīme [Significance of the Riga Art Society's latest exhibition]. – *Mājas Viesis* 20 January (1 February) 1899.

31 –ts [T. Zeiferts], Baltijas vāciešu un latviešu kultūra [Baltic German and Latvian culture]. – *Dienas Lapa* 23 July (5 August) 1905.

32 –ts [T. Zeiferts], Baltijas vāciešu un latviešu kultūra; [T. Zeiferts], Mākslinieks Purvītis un vācieši [Artist Purvītis and Germans]. – *Dienas Lapa* 27 August (9 September) 1905.

personal element, require only personalities, and leave it up to history to make the national out of it.³³

At this point, public opinion, however, required taking this or that side of the war and drew strict demarcation lines between being Baltic and being Latvian (or Estonian). A thorough analysis of the tension between the concepts 'Baltic provinces' and 'Latvia' was recently undertaken by the German historian Ulrike von Hirschhausen, who states: 'In the second half of the nineteenth century the rival groups of Rigans began to elaborate specific 'mental maps' surveying and describing the same terrain in two different ways. While the German elite designed a 'Baltic space', Latvian nationalists were working on the project of *Latvija*.³⁴ Nevertheless, in many lives and developments, these concepts overlapped and had already merged. The destructive course of the revolutionary events of 1905–1906 was disillusioning for liberal minds who had cherished hopes of progress towards understanding between the nations of the country. In January 1906 bad news from the homeland made the Baltic artist Carl Alexander von Winkler (1860–1911) in Dresden write to his family about his feeling most deeply hurt by the attitude of Estonians: 'Had they ... unlike Latvians, acted with self-possession in this critical time, it would become a binding medium for further coexistence of the two nations and one could approach both social and political equality in a really brotherly spirit, without suspicion and arrogance ... and a new life could begin. But now – one has sown so much bitterness that will burst into hate and disdain.'³⁵ The dilemmas of the time must have been especially hard for people who, like Johann Walter, distinguished between German as their *Muttersprache* (native language) and Latvian (or Estonian) as their *Heimatsprache* (language of the homeland). Seeing fellow nationals of one's paternal line at war with those of one's maternal line could lead to a wish to break with the Baltic complexity of ethnic issues for good, as in the case of Walter's emigration in 1906. Several years later, still before World War I, the artist and critic Jūlijs Madernieks (1870–1955) encouraged his students to accept that this 'very remarkable and engaging artist ... is half German, half Latvian by birth and therefore one must not resent his being disloyal to Latvians'³⁶.

Nevertheless, the rough ethnic 'surface' of events covered another decisive conflict in the Baltic art scene in 1904–1905: the clash between local aims and international ambitions when eight Riga artists, both German and Latvian, succeeded in forcing the Riga Art Society to cancel the already accepted project of a Nordic Exhibition for the open-

33 Published in: Zur Zuschrift: Der neue Künstlerverein und die radikale Petition der lettischen Intelligenz. – *Düna-Zeitung* 23 August (5 September) 1905. An opponent of narrow-minded nationalism and chauvinism, Purvītis was to become one of the principal pillars of Latvian statehood as the founder of the Latvian Academy of Art and director of the Riga City Art Museum (after Wilhelm Neumann).

34 U. von Hirschhausen, *Die Grenzen der Gemeinsamkeit: Deutsche, Letten, Russen und Juden in Riga 1860–1914*. (Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft, Bd. 172.) Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006, p. 342. See the whole chapter 'Die Konkurrenz um Verortung: Raumentwürfe zwischen 'baltischen Provinzen' und 'Latvija' 1850–1918' (pp. 341–366).

35 Aus den Reisebriefen des verstorbenen Landschaftsmalers Carl von Winkler: seinen Verwandten und Freunden zur Erinnerung. Reval: Mickwitz, 1912, p. 73.

36 B. Bružis, *Dienasgrāmata* [Journal], 1913–1914. Collection Depository of Literature, Theatre and Music (Riga), inv. no. 290879, p. 19 (6th lesson with J. Madernieks. 6 August 1913).

ing of the Riga City Art Museum.³⁷ According to Roderich von Engelhardt's detailed proposal, it would have included works by prominent contemporary Scandinavian, Finnish and Russian painters, along with a selected collection of Baltic art.³⁸ The opponents obviously were afraid to support this competition and see it turn out advantageously for Walter and Purvītis, due to their comparatively promising international reputation. Therefore, the city of Riga in particular and early-twentieth-century Baltic art in general missed a unique opportunity to position itself on the map of a broader northern European cultural context, where we now would like to see the artistic heritage of our countries incorporated.³⁹

Thinking art in Latvian and its damned German accent

By the beginning of the twentieth century, communication in German in the Riga Art Society's contacts with the public was taken for granted, although it had no nationalist intentions and was often criticised for the lack of local patriotism in its basic concern with 'art in general'. Still, the ethnic proportions of the city's population⁴⁰ changed so rapidly that in 1903 the organisation's board of directors faced the issue of whether the Society should or should not publish their exhibition catalogues and press releases in Latvian too. Although the documented discussion revealed a full range of opinions, the majority (four to three) voted down the proposed changes and agreed that the Society was still closely connected with German audiences, but Latvians: let them organise for their needs whatever they want; such a competition would be good for everybody.⁴¹ The first attempts to found a Latvian art society around that time failed for a number of reasons, including the mistrust and ignorance between those Riga-based Latvian artists who had trained in the local art schools and studios and their numerous St. Petersburg colleagues, who treated the 'Riga smatterers'⁴² as inferior, as they looked down from the heights of their own more advanced

37 Latvian State Historical Archives (LSHA), coll. 4213, inv. 1, file 84, p. 175. The letter of protest against the Nordic Exhibition was signed by the following artist members of the Riga Art Society: the Latvian Janis Rozentāls, and the Germans Bernhard Borchert, Gerhard von Rosen, Friedrich Moritz, August Volz, Hans Lütken, Theodor Kraus and Ernst Tode.

38 LSHA, coll. 4213, inv. 1, file 84, pp. 119–120.

39 For similar reasons, the change in the Riga Art Society's plans was criticised by *Rigasche Rundschau's* art-interested co-editor in A. Ruetz, *Jahresversammlung des Rigaschen Kunstvereins*. – *Rigasche Rundschau* 27 October (9 November) 1904. Purvītis and Walter ignored the resulting Baltic Art Exhibition in 1905 because of its organisational controversies.

40 As one can calculate using the tables of 'Population Census in the City of Riga and its Patrimonial District on 5 December 1913' (Перепись населения в г. Риге и Рижском патримониальном округе от 5 декабря 1913 г. Ред. Е. Е. Штида. Рига: Рижская Городская Статистическая Комиссия, 1914) the total number of Rigans speaking German as their family language between 1881 and 1913 changed insignificantly in number but declined noticeably in proportion, fluctuating between 66,775 (40%) in 1881, to 65,332 (25,5%) in 1897 and 78,816 (16,3%) in 1913. At the same time, native speakers of Latvian rapidly rose from 49,474 (29%) in 1881 to 106,541 (41,5%) in 1897 and 186,971 (38,8%) in 1913. Other essential ethnic components in the city's population, which was the sixth biggest in the Romanov empire in 1913 (after St. Petersburg, Moscow, Warsaw, Odessa and Kiev), included native Russians, Jews, Poles, Lithuanians and Estonians.

41 Protokoll einer Sitzung der Direktion des Rigaschen Kunstvereins am Freitag, den 28. November (11. Dezember) 1903. – LSHA, coll. 4213, inv. 1, file 3, pp. 135–138.

42 Rihards Zariņš in a letter to Janis Rozentāls on 3 (16) September, 1908 from St. Petersburg. Quoted from: Dzīves palete: Jaņa Rozentāla sarakste [Palette of life: correspondence of Janis Rozentāls]. Eds. I. Pujāte, A. Putniņa-Niedra. Riga: Pils, 1997, p. 373.

metropolitan education. Reconciliation between the two groups was approached in 1910–1911, with the start of regular large-scale Latvian Art Exhibitions in Riga (1910), and the foundation of the Latvian Society for the Promotion of Art (*Latviešu mākslas veicināšanas biedriba*, 1911, further LSPA), which was a national counterpart to the Riga Art Society and the new international Baltic Artists' Association (*Baltischer Künstlerbund*, founded in 1910).

At the crossroads between the prospects offered by the two budding initiatives (Baltic and Latvian), the artist, critic and writer Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš (1877–1962) expressed the prevalent nationalist position: 'If we accept that painting has nothing to do with language and can be no less international than music, there is however still something to disagree with. It is generally known that every nation tries to develop its particularity as much as an individual tries to develop his. [...] In order to foster this national particularity, our painters must develop more intimate contacts among themselves and with their nation. An organisation uniting four or even five nations under a German banner will not have and cannot have such aims as our painters would like to set for themselves.'⁴³ At a distance of a century, it seems that he was right and wrong at the same time. While works of Latvian artists, in their morphology, did not differ from those of colleagues of other ethnicities, and the national element in artistic creativity basically had no more than subjective psychological importance, one could also not avoid this element in practising and promoting thinking, speaking and writing about art in Latvian. As late as 1913, the art-centred teenage son of the LSPA's chairman noted in his journal that 'it seems one must overcome lots of difficulties in order to write articles in Latvian'⁴⁴. Activities of this organisation brought about the first attempt to outline the recent past and the present of ethnic Latvian professional art in Jaunsudrabiņš's public lecture 'Our Art', first held on 2 (15) October 1912 in Riga, repeated in various places all over Latvia and ultimately published in three issues of the science, literature and art monthly *Druva* (*Cornfield*) in 1914⁴⁵. The popular presentation was illustrated with 120 images of artworks, projected by means of a 'magic lantern', and the lecturer's purpose was 'to wind a ball of the scattered yarn of our art'⁴⁶.

Undoubtedly, Jaunsudrabiņš accomplished something necessary for the promotion of Latvian cultural self-awareness; moreover, he did not tailor his highly journalistic survey to pre-existing ideological patterns. At the same time, 'Our Art' itself seemed to set a pattern, since from then on most of the writers of the same period either deliberately or by force of habit went on collecting pure 'Latvian yarn', with some of them making serious but vain efforts to separate it from undesirable 'alien' components.

Nevertheless, the increasing role of ethnic segmentation and rivalry in the local art scene did not mean actual self-isolation before the approach of the World War I front-line in 1915, when mass evacuations put an end to the success story of early-twentieth-century capitalist Riga. An opportunity to break with the native Baltic context was unexpectedly given by the course of wartime events, when Latvian (or Lettish as they

43 J. Jaunsudrabiņš, 'Baltijas mākslinieku biedriba' un latviešu mākslinieki [Baltic Artists' Association and Latvian artists]. – *Latvija* 14 (27) January 1910.

44 B. Bružis, *Dienasgrāmata*. 1913–1914, p. 40 (7 (20) November 1913).

45 J. Jaunsudrabiņš, *Mūsu māksla* [Our art]. – *Druva* 1914, no. 3, pp. 238–245; no. 4, pp. 388–396; no. 6, pp. 578–590.

46 A. [H. Asars], *Latviešu māksla* [Latvian art]. – *Jaunā Dienas Lapa* 10 (23) October 1912.

were commonly called in English sources of that time) artists staged their exhibitions in Petrograd (1915) and Moscow (1916) in order to win acclaim for their national cultural and political aims⁴⁷. They were, however, disappointed by Pavel Ettinger's (1866–1948) actually harmless statement that 'naturally enough this newly developed art of theirs has been unable to escape the influence of German art', frequently showing itself 'even in the work of artists who have studied at the Petrograd Academy'⁴⁸. Although they tried to convince themselves that Russian critics were simply mistaking all non-Russian elements for German ones ('Latvians have derived their culture from Europe and that is why the European influence can be observed in us'⁴⁹), the matter of Germanness was a sore point to be treated in different ways: with suppression, offensive bravado, or similarly bitter self-reproach. Typically enough, it was bravado and self-reproach that prevailed during the years immediately preceding and succeeding the birth of the Republic of Latvia (1918), whereas suppression, manifested in ignorance, with occasional derogatory remarks about the Baltic as a Baltic German context, became a standard practice as the life of the new state entered a period of relative stability.

Latvian centre, German periphery

The modernist artist Romans Suta (1896–1944), in his survey *60 Jahre lettischer Kunst* (1923), which was published in Leipzig and addressed to German readers, pointed out that the 'Baltic German mediation' was 'a very special obstacle' continuously hindering the free development of Latvian artistic thought, and he declared, in his typically insolent manner: 'Representing neither a nation nor an ethnicity on its own, but solely a caste vegetating in medieval privileges, historically bound to extinction and therefore ideologically retrograde, this feudal Baltic German class was not appropriate for mediating really creative ideas of the German spirit and the world of German art. Therefore artists who have been drawing freely from sources of German art without Baltic German mediation differ essentially from those who have been standing closer to Baltic German provincialism in their traditions and very nature.'⁵⁰

Since around that time, 'provincial' has been the fixed epithet for anything related to Baltic Germans in most Latvian art-historical writing and, surprisingly, is in use even today as part of the general 'default setting'. In the Soviet period, Skaidrīte Cielava, in her book *Latvian Painting during the Period of Bourgeois Democratic Revolutions (1900–1917)* (1974), described the scene of her story as 'this spiritual province of Germany',⁵¹ quoting Rozentāls from an unspecified source. In 2006, Dace Lamberga stated: 'At the beginning of the 20th century Riga was dominated by Baltic German culture, which had a

47 For more on the issue, see K. Ābele, *Out from behind the Fireplace*, pp. 14–36.

48 P. E. [P. Ettinger], *Studio-Talk*. – *The Studio* 1916, vol. 68 (281), p. 181.

49 J. Ak. [J. Akuraters], *Latviešu mākslinieku izstāde Maskavā* [Exhibition of Latvian artists in Moscow]. – *Lidums* 16 March 1916.

50 R. Suta, *60 Jahre lettischer Kunst*. Leipzig: Pandora, 1923, p. 21. About the key ideas of this book, see S. Pelše, *Creating the Discipline: Facts, Stories and Sources of Latvian Art History*. – *Kunsttiteaduslikke Uurimusi* 2010, vol. 19 (3/4), p. 29.

51 S. Cielava, *Latviešu glezniecība buržuāziski demokrātisko revolūciju posmā (1900–1917)* [Latvian painting during the period of bourgeois democratic revolutions (1900–1917)]. Riga: Zinātne, 1974, p. 36.

distinctly provincial character.⁵² This reflects the basic idea of the territory of the new Latvian state as the most marginal periphery of German culture and a budding centre of Latvian national culture at the same time. Along with the official nationalist ideology in the politics of the 1930s and the overall 'tendency to explore national specificity in the art of these or other nations that preoccupied prominent European art historians of that time',⁵³ this can help us to better understand why the independent statehood of Latvia did not change the focus of writers from ethnicity to locality, and why all significant local art historians contributed to '[t]he nationally oriented art-historical narrative'⁵⁴, with its 'emphasis on a single ethnicity'⁵⁵.

Borrowing from the once often repeated mantra-like phraseology of the painter, archaeologist and national propagator Ernests Brastiņš (1892–1941), most of the research was done 'for the sake of a Latvian Latvia'⁵⁶, in order to foster the belief that 'Latvianness has no end, no limits, that there can never be too much of Latvianity'⁵⁷. Symptomatically, even the art historian Visvaldis Peņģerots (1897–1938) referred to this truly tragicomic slogan of the time in the conclusion of his detailed historical survey 'Painting in Latvia in the 19th and 20th century',⁵⁸ in the second volume of the locally produced general *History of Art* (1934–1936). Peņģerots's contribution was the most comprehensive discussion of the subject up to that time, and the name of the country in its title, according to the geographical principle of the whole edition, suggested a transcendence of the ethnic focus, in contrast to earlier inter-war publications by Jānis Dombrovskis⁵⁹ (1885–1953), Boriss Vipērs⁶⁰ (Boris Vipper, 1888–1967) and the above-mentioned Romans Suta. The author, however, remained loyal to the ethnocentric tradition and the topical nationalist agenda of his day. Elsewhere in the volume, he criticised Wilhelm Neumann for his deliberate elimination of references to the ethnic background of artists and making all of them Baltic in his famous *Lexikon baltischer Künstler* (1908).⁶¹ Until the late nineteenth century, one of Peņģerots's major

52 D. Lamberga, *Latvia: Losses and Recovery. The Painter Vilhelms Purvītis. – The Future of the Lost Cultural Heritage: The Documentation, Identification and Restitution of the Cultural Assets of WW II Victims*. Proceedings of the International Academic Conference in Český Krumlov (22.–24.11.2005). Ed. M. Borák. Prague: Documentation Centre for Property Transfers of the Cultural Assets of WW II Victims; Institute of Contemporary History, Czech Academy of Sciences, 2006, p. 277.

53 Э. Клявиньш, *История искусства в Латвии с точки зрения методологии* [Art history in Latvia from the standpoint of methodology]. – *Meno istorija ir kritika / Art History & Criticism 7. Meno istorijos ribozenkiai / Landmarks of Art History*. Kaunas: Vytautas Magnus University, 2011, p. 190.

54 S. Pelše, *Creating the Discipline*, p. 30.

55 S. Pelše, *Creating the Discipline*, p. 30.

56 The much repeated mantra-like title of the book: E. Brastiņš, *Latviskas Latvijas labad: Mājieni un aicinājumi, 1925–1935* [For the sake of a Latvian Latvia: intimations and appeals, 1925–1935]. Rīga: Zemnieka domas, 1935.

57 E. Brastiņš, *Latviskas Latvijas labad*, p. 4. On the art-theoretical ideas of Ernests Brastiņš and his like-minded contemporaries, see the article: S. Pelše, *Ethnography, Neo-Classicism and International Context: Latvian Traditionalist Thinking on the Art of the 1930s. – Reinterpreting the Past: Traditionalist Artistic Trends in Central and Eastern Europe of the 1920s and 1930s*. Ed. I. Kossowska. Warsaw: Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences, 2010, pp. 89–104.

58 V. Peņģerots, *Glezniecība Latvijā 19. un 20. g. s.* [Painting in Latvia in the 19th and 20th century]. – *Mākslas vēsture* [History of art]. Vol. 2. Gen. ed. V. Purvītis, ed. V. Peņģerots. Rīga: Grāmatu draugs, [1935], pp. 399–469.

59 J. Dombrovskis, *Latvju māksla: Gleznniecības, grafikas, tēlniecības un lietišķās mākslas attīstības vēsturisks apskats* [Lettish art: a historical overview of the development of painting, graphic art, sculpture and applied art]. Rīga: Valters un Rapa, 1925. As 'latvju' is an archaic form of 'latviešu' (Latvian, of Latvians), the English archaism 'Lettish' seems highly appropriate for its translation.

60 B. Vipērs, *Latvju māksla: Īss pārskats* [Lettish art: a brief overview]. Rīga: Leta, 1927.

61 V. Peņģerots, 17. un 18. g. s. *gleznniecība Baltijas valstīs. Latvija* [17th and 18th century painting in the Baltic States. Latvia]. – *Mākslas vēsture*. Vol. 2, p. 239.

concerns was to presume or establish the Latvian birth of painters in cases of probable or even obvious non-Latvian origin. As the narrative approached the year 1900, German compatriots only featured in a limited number of minor roles as friends of bad influence ('Living together with Borchert and siding with the local German society turned Rozentāls into a typical 'Baltic' painter for some time'⁶²), art organisers (a line of homage to the role of Roderich von Engelhardt as 'the prominent local promoter of modern art'⁶³ in the Riga Art Society), or teachers, listed in passages about art education in Riga⁶⁴. None of them was discussed as an artist in his or her own right – not even the 'good fellow' Bernhard Borchert (1862⁶⁵ – assumed to have died in 1945), who was, between the lines, made responsible for leading Rozentāls down the wrong path of German symbolism. Readers must have assumed that becoming 'a typical 'Baltic' painter' was a symptom of artistic decline.

Peņģerots's survey, as a summary of the Latvian art-historical discourse of the first independence period, shows that the uprooting of German elements from the picture of the recent past was going on even before the continuity of the German segment of the local society was broken by the resettlement in 1939. An exception to the rule of ethnocentrism, however, can be found in Jānis Siliņš's 'Notes about the Art Life and Artists in Jelgava since the 19th century'⁶⁶ (1937). Although the author was a master of nationalist rhetoric in much of his other writing of that time, the close focus on locality in this study made him consider artists of any nationality to be co-creators of the local art scene. This is something one would now like to see as the general course and it is, therefore, surprising to discover it exclusively in the most unexpected setting of Kārlis Ulmanis's authoritarian policy, which involved the restoration of Jelgava's glory on the political and cultural map of Latvia.

National school of professional art within its provisional borders

'How many bright talents were lost because they were not ready to Latvianise', the literary historian Raimonds Briedis speculated in a recent impromptu conversation, advocating the idea that the best choice for them, in terms of both personal advantage and historical justice, would have been to join the increasing mainstream of Latvian culture, even at the cost of some or all of their Baltic German identity, very much in the same way as social and cultural promotion for an ethnic Latvian until about the middle of the nineteenth century inevitably required his or her Germanisation or Russification.⁶⁷ Recruiting members for the Latvian 'team' was an important and controversial issue in the local cultural scene of the early twentieth century. 'It is said that Belzēns had been in German skin from time immemorial and only lately Latvian

62 V. Peņģerots, *Glezniecība Latvijā 19. un 20. g. s.*, p. 415.

63 V. Peņģerots, *Glezniecība Latvijā 19. un 20. g. s.*, p. 419.

64 V. Peņģerots, *Glezniecība Latvijā 19. un 20. g. s.*, pp. 419, 442.

65 Bernhard Borchert's real year of birth (1862 instead of 1863) is a recent discovery and therefore differs from the information given in reference literature since his lifetime.

66 J. Siliņš, *Piezīmes par mākslas dzīvi un māksliniekiem Jelgavā kopš 19. gs.* [Notes about the art life and artists in Jelgava since the 19th century]. – *Senatne un Māksla 1937*, no. 3: Jelgava, pp. 109–149.

67 From a conversation with Raimonds Briedis in Riga on 29 March 2012.

artists in St. Petersburg have managed to Latvianise him',⁶⁸ Jaunsudrabiņš reported in his 'Our Art' about Jakob Belsen (Jēkabs Belzēns, Yakov Bel'zen, 1870–1937), an occasional participant in Latvian art exhibitions (1910, 1915 and 1916) who, by World War I, was active in the Permanent Committee of German Artists (*Ständiges Deutsches Künstlerkomité*) in St. Petersburg⁶⁹ and, despite his efforts, failed to overcome his dislike of the Latvian part of his ancestry⁷⁰.

In very particular cases, instead of the choice being made by the artist himself it was made by his contemporaries, and this was exactly what happened with the German-based Baltic émigré Johann Walter, from the time Jaunsudrabiņš began spelling the name of this painter as a Latvian one, Jānis Valters⁷¹, and the Latvian Society for the Promotion of Art purchased a number of works of his pre-emigration period from his Baltic German ex-wife in 1914⁷². Until the artist's death in 1932, Johann Walter-Kurau in Germany and his partly fictional memorial figure Jānis Valters in Latvia were counterparts on parallel lines which did not meet.⁷³ On one hand, this overemphasis of Latvianness continuously segregated the image of the painter in a particular 'national preserve' and came into conflict with reality. On the other hand, the status of having a Latvian value was a powerful factor saving much of Walter's heritage from oblivion, and even destruction, in critical moments of history.

In Latvia, the already existing gap of knowledge about Walter's real life increased with the return and consolidation of Soviet power after World War II. Until his eightieth birthday commemorative exhibition, which was held in 1949 at the Latvian SSR State Museum of Latvian and Russian Art, political changes had transformed the supposed border between the 'our own' (Latvian) and 'alien' (non-Latvian) phenomena into a battlefield along which 'proletarian realism' sternly faced the opposing army of Western 'formalism'. In the catalogue essay, Walter was portrayed as an 'active progressive fighter against a German artistic monopoly in the early period of Latvian art'⁷⁴. It was no longer the leading of Latvian art to the 'roads of European development'⁷⁵, but the becoming part of the 'community of Russian Realist painters'⁷⁶ that was proclaimed the foremost achievement of Purvītis, Walter and Rozentāls. The official attitude of Latvian SSR art historians regarding Walter in the Stalinist 1940s and 1950s, before the Khrushchev Thaw, was a blatant combination of ignorance and ideological distortions: 'Living in

68 J. Jaunsudrabiņš, *Mūsu māksla*. – Druva 1914, no. 6, p. 579.

69 J. Belsen, *Das Leben eines Künstlers*, p. 35. Copy of an undated manuscript (begun in 1933) from a private archive in Germany. Courtesy of Antonie Tosca Grill (Baden Baden) and Wenedikt Böhm (St. Petersburg).

70 J. Belsen, *Das Leben eines Künstlers*, pp. 15, 58.

71 A., *Mūsu māksla* [Our art]. – *Latvija* 4 (17) October 1912; J. Jaunsudrabiņš, *Mūsu māksla*. – Druva 1914, no. 6, p. 581.

72 *Latviešu mākslas veicināšanas biedrība 1914. g.* [Latvian Society for the Promotion of Art in 1914]. Riga, 1915, p. 30.

73 For more about the situation, see the sub-chapter '1906–1932: The Memorial Counterpart of a Living Contemporary in the Early Phase of Latvian Art-Historical Self-Reflection' of K. Ābele, *Johans Valters*, pp. 18–22; K. Ābele, *Johann Walter (Walter-Kurau), 1869–1932. Summary of the Doctoral Dissertation*, pp. 18–19.

74 [A. Eglītis], *Jāņa Valtera izstādes katalogs 80 gadu dzimšanas dienas atcerei* [Catalogue of Johann Walter's 80th anniversary exhibition]. Riga: Valsts Latviešu un krievu mākslas muzejs, 1949, p. 9.

75 *Latviešu glezniecība: Krāsainu reprodukciju sakopojums*, unpaginated.

76 A. Divensa, *Jāņa Valtera gleznu izstāde* [Exhibition of Johann Walter's paintings]. – *Padomju Jaunatne* 24 March 1949.

Germany, Valters gradually goes completely over to the Modernists' camp, gets stuck in the deadlock of art and dies in Berlin in 1932.⁷⁷

In the same source, the authors of this tragicomic synopsis, Arturs Lapiņš (1911–1983) and Arturs Eglītis (1907–1996), declared that 'proletarian culture and an inevitable part of it – Soviet art – absorbs, preserves and masters everything progressive and valuable that has been accumulated by the bourgeoisie'.⁷⁸ Later, the flexible notion of the 'progressive and valuable' was open to considerable extension in line with the gradual liberalisation of the regime, even reaching a level of close like-mindedness with the superficially criticised art-historical discourse of the independent 'bourgeois' Latvia, but it never included anybody or anything that, unlike Walter and his art, was not appropriated as Latvian.

'The national school of professional art', as a core concept with something self-defensive about it on both sides of the Iron Curtain, consigned to oblivion numerous non-Latvian personalities, events and achievements whose role even in comprehensive and greatly reliable surveys usually was reduced to the footnote area. Why on earth should one bother about any Baltic Germans if Latvia's own culture must be protected against the pressure of an alien power in its home country and against the hazards of exile elsewhere in the world? Therefore, a chapter several pages long about Baltic German artists as contemporaries of Latvian national romanticists by the US-based émigré scholar Jānis Siliņš, in the relevant chronological volume of his fundamental *Art of Latvia*, was important.⁷⁹ Siliņš, the same writer who had praised the national artistic 'thunderstorm of creative joy and daring', found it necessary to stress that 'until the events of 1905 and before Latvian artists in Riga got organised, relationships between Latvian and Baltic German artists and society were not hostile'.⁸⁰ The few authors he had chosen to focus on included not only Latvian-based artists but also Carl von Winkler⁸¹, and this chapter was followed by one about 'Founders of Estonian national art'⁸².

In the Soviet Latvian art history of the 1970s and 1980s, the prevailing narrative of the national school was interpreted differently in official surveys, such as the bulky volume *Latvian Fine Arts: 1860–1940* (1986⁸³), and their more research-based alternative versions published as rota-printed study aids for students of the Latvian Academy of Art by Eduards Kļaviņš, most notably about the contacts of Latvian art with other national schools in the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries (1988⁸⁴). Regardless of its humble format, this truly important venture into the field of

77 A. Lapiņš, A. Eglītis, Jānis Valters: Monogrāfija [Johann Walter: a monograph]. Riga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, 1953, p. 28.

78 A. Lapiņš, A. Eglītis, Jānis Valters: Monogrāfija, p. 29.

79 J. Siliņš, *Latvijas māksla: 1800–1914* [The art of Latvia: 1800–1914]. Vol. 2. Stockholm: Daugava, 1980, pp. 147–154.

80 J. Siliņš, *Latvijas māksla: 1800–1914*, Vol. 2, p. 147.

81 J. Siliņš, *Latvijas māksla: 1800–1914*, Vol. 2, p. 152.

82 J. Siliņš, *Latvijas māksla: 1800–1914*, Vol. 2, pp. 155–162.

83 *Latviešu tēlotāja māksla: 1860–1940* [Latvian fine arts: 1860–1940]. Gen. ed. S. Cielava. Riga: Zinātne, 1986. Two different – one slightly and one severely critical – evaluations of this publication from the twenty-first century perspective were recently given in: S. Peļše, *Creating the Discipline*, p. 38; Э. Гросмане, *Развитие истории искусств в Латвии. Проблемы и решения* [The development of art history in Latvia: problems and solutions]. – *Meno istorija ir kritika / Art History & Criticism* 7, p. 140.

84 E. Kļaviņš, *Latviešu tēlotāja mākslas sakari ar citām mākslas skolām XIX gs. otrajā pusē, XX gs. sākumā* [Contacts of Latvian fine arts with other art schools in the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century]. Riga: Mācību iestāžu metodiskais kabinets, 1988.

comparative art history in a decade that saw the appearance of Dmitrii Sarabyanov's *Russian Painting of the 19th Century among European Schools*⁸⁵ (1980) and Jonas Umbrasas's *The Development of Lithuanian Painting, 1900–1940: Movements and Tendencies*⁸⁶ (1987) has not lost its relevance over the years. In terms of content and ideas, Kļaviņš's work contrasted with the certified synopsis of Latvian art history that was published simultaneously by the same office⁸⁷. Kļaviņš was not negatively disposed toward the local Baltic German artistic context and briefly showed it as instrumental in Latvia's joining the sphere of influence of the German school⁸⁸. Going into details, he mentioned Rozentāls's cooperation with Bernhard Borchert and his wife Eva Margarethe Borchert-Schweinfurth (1878–1964)⁸⁹, without a trace of Peņģerots's former dislike of this mutually inspiring creative partnership, which was later examined more closely in Kļaviņš's contribution to the first volume of the *Kunst im Ostseeraum* series⁹⁰. Nevertheless, Baltic German art, though to a lesser extent than in many earlier studies by Latvian authors, still remained something of a no-man's land, not foreign enough and not quite 'our own'. Another publication by Kļaviņš in the series of study aids, however, was a pioneering effort to analyse the whole local artistic production of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century period in terms of iconography and style, with no regard to the nationality of artists⁹¹.

The ethnocentric inertia of Latvian art history in the 1990s can be illustrated by the example of myself as a student writing my BA paper about Latvian pastel painting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (1994). To contextualise the subject of my research, I wrote a particular chapter about the closest parallel developments,⁹² where a discussion of analogies in the works of Russian, Lithuanian and various Western artists whose pastels were familiar in St. Petersburg or Baltic provinces led to a glimpse into the artistic practice of Latvian-based Baltic German masters. Although this study was the first result of my interest in the multinational artistic scene of Latvia at the turn of the twentieth century, I never considered taking the opportunity to move these compatriots of my ethnic Latvian protagonists from the collection of comparative background material to the main focus of my story where, for example, the Borchert family of artists, undoubtedly, would find their proper place next to Rozentāls.

85 Д. В. Сарабянов, Русская живопись XIX века среди европейских школ [Russian painting of the 19th century among European schools]. Moscow: Советский художник, 1980.

86 J. Umbrasas, *Lietuvių tapybos raida, 1900–1940: Stovės ir tendencijos* [The development of Lithuanian painting, 1900–1940: movements and tendencies]. Vilnius: Mokslas, 1987.

87 *Latviešu mākslas vēsture: Mācību programma mākslas akadēmijas studentiem* [Latvian art history: synopsis for students of the Academy of Art]. Eds. R. Bēms, O. Spāritis. Rīga: Mācību iestāžu metodiskais kabinets, 1988, pp. 6, 28–47.

88 E. Kļaviņš, *Latviešu tēlotājas mākslas sakari ar citām mākslas skolām XIX gs. otrajā pusē, XX gs. sākumā*, p. 10.

89 E. Kļaviņš, *Latviešu tēlotājas mākslas sakari ar citām mākslas skolām XIX gs. otrajā pusē, XX gs. sākumā*, p. 41.

90 E. Kļaviņš, *Das Künstlerpaar Borchert und die erste Generation der Gemeinschaft 'Rūķis'. – Malerei, Graphik, Photographie von 1900 bis 1920.* (Kunst im Ostseeraum: Greifswalder kunsthistorische Studien, Bd. 1.) Eds. B. Hartel, B. Lichtnau. Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1995, pp. 78–86.

91 E. Kļaviņš, *Latvijas XIX gs. beigū, XX gs. sākumā tēlotājas mākslas ikonogrāfija un stilistiskais raksturojums* [Iconography and style of late 19th and early 20th century art in Latvia]. Rīga: Mācību iestāžu metodiskais kabinets, 1983.

92 K. Ābele, *Pastelis latviešu glezniecībā 19. gs. b. – 20. gs. sāk.* [Pastel in Latvian painting of the late 19th and early 20th century]. BA paper. Acad. adviser E. Kļaviņš. Rīga: Latvijas Mākslas akadēmijas Mākslas vēstures un teorijas nodaļa. Rīga, 1994, pp. 39–47. Typescript in the Information Centre of the Latvian Academy of Art.

Since then, the concept of the national school alone seems to have become too self-restrictive to be universally applicable. In a way, this approach makes its adherents too concerned with the boundaries of their research, which they inevitably and unwittingly transgress. Let us have a look at two high-quality academic publications which have been among the most valuable contributions to the study of the period under discussion, and beyond, since the re-establishment of Latvian independence. One of them is Eduards Kļaviņš's history of Latvian portrait painting from the mid-nineteenth century to 1916⁹³, and the other is Stella Pelše's history of Latvian art theory from 1900 to 1940⁹⁴.

Eduards Kļaviņš's discussion of Johann Walter's portrait painting ends with his 1906 emigration to Germany, where his 'becoming part of a different culture is obvious and his contacts with Latvian art life are broken completely'⁹⁵, while the next sub-chapter⁹⁶ is about Walter's former fellow student Jakob Belsen from St. Petersburg, who participated in the Latvian Art Exhibition in Riga in 1910 with a series of paintings. Some ten years after the publication of Kļaviņš's monograph, an avalanche of discoveries about Belsen's life and work showed that his decorative manner of painting around 1910 resulted directly from the influence of Walter's style, absorbed during Belsen's regular summer plein-air with his old friend in Germany between 1906 and the outbreak of World War I⁹⁷. A previously unknown illustrated article about Belsen from 1914 in the *Deutsche Monatsschrift für Russland*⁹⁸ and a series of other new-found sources made it possible to specify the context of Belsen's artistic development and diagnose a peculiar discrepancy in the formerly published interpretation. How could it happen that echoes of an artistic phenomenon are relevant in terms of the national school but their source of inspiration has already been discarded as no longer relevant? Perhaps there is something wrong with the self-restrictive construction of the 'national school' itself if it can be so easily undermined by newly elucidated details?

In a different way, the self-imposed boundaries seem too narrow in some episodes of Stella Pelše's history of Latvian art theory. Although the author states that the basic material of research was selected from the bibliographical index *Latvian Science and Literature*⁹⁹, but the biographical, social and cultural-historical context is not the main concern of her work, basically aimed at identification of theoretical tenets and their mutual relationships¹⁰⁰, it is still debatable whether the elimination of the cultural-historical context should necessarily mean complete exclusion of any potential interaction between Latvian and Baltic German writing on art. Against this empty background, Stella Pelše's discussion of the Riga-born and German-based Nobel Prize winner Wilhelm Ostwald's (1853–1932) essay 'Art and Science' in the category of 'Latvian

93 E. Kļaviņš, *Latviešu portreta glezniecība: 1850–1916* [Latvian portrait painting: 1850–1916]. Riga: Zinātne, 1996.

94 S. Pelše, *History of Latvian Art Theory: Definitions of Art in the Context of the Prevailing Ideas of the Time (1900–1940)*. Riga: Institute of Art History, Latvian Academy of Art, 2007.

95 E. Kļaviņš, *Latviešu portreta glezniecība: 1850–1916*, p. 140.

96 E. Kļaviņš, *Latviešu portreta glezniecība: 1850–1916*, pp. 141–145.

97 K. Ābele, *Jēkaba Belzēna odiseja: 1870–1937* [The odyssey of Jakob Belsen: 1870–1937]. – *Mākslas Vēsture un Teorija* 2007, no. 9, pp. 9, 11 (Latvian), p. 26 (English).

98 O. Grosberg, *Jacob Belsen*. – *Deutsche Monatsschrift für Rußland* 1914, no. 5, pp. 343–350.

99 *Latviešu zinātne un literatūra* – a systematic retrospective multi-volume index of the Latvian periodical press since 1763. Frequently referred to as Ģinters's Index, after its first editor Augusts Ģinters (1885–1944).

100 S. Pelše, *History of Latvian Art Theory*, p. 19.

Authors' Opinions'¹⁰¹, and not in that of translations, seems entirely accidental. Here again, the local multicultural context is ignored as obviously not foreign enough and not enough 'our own'.

Tardy return to the art-historical scene

Since the turn of the millennium, small signs in exhibitions, publications¹⁰² and students' works¹⁰³ ever more often show that the forgotten German compatriots of Latvian early-twentieth-century artists are slowly returning to the scene of the art-historical discourse. A small step of symbolic significance was the decision of the Latvian National Museum of Art in 2009 to perform 'Johannisation' of Walter, i.e. change the traditional 'Jānis Valters' for 'Johans Valters', the Latvian form of his real name, thus expanding the concept of 'our art' beyond strict ethnic boundaries and accepting that its modernisation in Latvia at the turn of the twentieth century was not as homogeneous ethnically as Latvian art history used to declare it.

Nevertheless, the delayed integration of non-Latvian personalities into the historical picture of Latvia's art around 1900 is a tardy process presenting various difficulties. Predominantly based on Kuno Hagen's dictionary of German Baltic artists of the twentieth century¹⁰⁴, short entries about a number of local non-Latvian turn-of-the-century artists were included in the dictionary *Art and Architecture in Biographies*¹⁰⁵ (Vols. 1–4, 1995–2003). Still, a series of potentially prominent names are missing there, although the art historian Anita Vanaga during her work as the editor of the two last volumes was generally enthusiastic about a variety of updates with regard to selection criteria: 'Actually we have no idea what their art was like.'¹⁰⁶ This typical honest reaction to new proposals several years later was sometimes replaced by her sincere regret about the previous ignorance, as curating a large private art collection made her discover, for instance, the astonishing *trompe l'oeil* realism of the painter Oskar Felsko¹⁰⁷ (1848–1921), who was among the formerly 'discarded' artists.

This situation is highly typical because the enforced displacement of the German population and the following air raids of World War II caused losses in Baltic German art of a proportionally much bigger scale than the collections and estates of ethnic Latvian art experienced, certainly with the tragic exception of its most important

101 S. Peļše, *History of Latvian Art Theory*, p. 57.

102 One of the latest and most interesting in this aspect is the collection of essays: E. Šmite, *Latvijas mākslas vēstures epizodes: 18. gs. beigās – 20. gs. sākums*.

103 Most notably: B. Villēruša [now Grinberga], *Rīgas Mākslas biedrība (1870–1938) [Riga Art Society (1870–1938)]*. BA paper. Acad. adviser E. Kļaviņš. *Latvijas Mākslas akadēmija*. Rīga, 2010. Printscript in the Information Centre of the Latvian Academy of Art.

104 K. Hagen, *Lexikon deutschbaltischer bildender Künstler: 20. Jahrhundert*. Köln: Wissenschaft und Politik, 1983.

105 *Māksla un arhitektūra biogrāfijās [Art and architecture in biographies]*. Vols. 1–2. Ed. A. Vilsons. Rīga: *Latvijas enciklopēdija*, 1995–1996. Vols. 3–4. Ed. A. Vanaga. Rīga: Preses nams, 2000–2003.

106 From a conversation with Anita Vanaga in Rīga on 6 January 1999.

107 G. Belēvičs, A. Vanaga, *Latvijas mākslas klasika*. Dr. Gunta Belēviča kolekcija / *Latvian Art Classic*. Collection of Guntis Belēvičs. Rīga: Blankenfelde, 2008, pp. 21, 244.

loss: the legacy of Vilhelms Purvītis¹⁰⁸. The picture of early-twentieth-century Baltic German art is greatly dependent on the images in the volumes of the Baltic art year-book *Bildende Kunst in den Ostseeprovinzen* between 1907 and 1914, as well as on random discoveries in private hands and in the art market.

Two German artists who possess the greatest power to emancipate themselves from the yearbook's realm of shadows and silhouettes are husband and wife Bernhard Borchert and Eva Margarethe Borchert-Schweinfurth, with their aura of the faun and the nymph of the artistic Riga in the period of art nouveau and symbolism. The initiative of their grandchildren and great-grandchildren from Germany resulted in the exhibition *The Borcherts: Between Reality and the Fantasy World* (curated by Edvarda Šmite), in the Latvian National Museum of Art in 2010, and the publication of the family-owned memoirs of Eva Margarethe¹⁰⁹. The surviving fragments of her heritage, however, do not include the most daring artistic statements of her best creative period, between about 1905 and 1910, among them a life-size self-portrait with a palette from 1908, visualising the spirit of modern womanhood, in impressive combination with an imposing attitude and bold neo-impressionist brushwork¹¹⁰. Described as a 'woman of genius' by Rozentāls¹¹¹, she was regarded as the best Riga-based German artist of her time, standing just behind Rozentāls, Walter and Purvītis in the general hierarchy of artistic forces¹¹².

As happens with preconceptions, art history writing has lately been the blind Fortuna who unknowingly makes fun of the old ethnically, socially and gender biased mistrust between students of the two turn-of-the-twentieth-century art schools in Riga. In the late 1890s, the young Jaunsudrabiņš and other Latvian boys of Venyamin Blum's Art School (officially, the Riga School of Drawing and Painting) were highly critical of the rival institution, Elise von Jung-Stilling's Art School, which was, in their opinion, 'attended almost exclusively by German demoiselles'¹¹³. It would hurt these lads to know that the international discourse of 'Women Emergent' would eventually favour the school of Jung-Stilling (1829–1904) as 'the first of its kind in the southern Baltic region' for a quite honourable mention in Jeremy Howard's *East European Art 1650–1950*¹¹⁴ in 2006, while not a word is devoted to the 'Blumists', whose names and works, unlike those of the 'demoiselles', are fairly well known in Latvian art history. Nevertheless, both 'Latvian boys' and 'German girls' deserve to be described together in a still unwritten book about the art of their country in their time.

108 '...of course there is practically no hope that his 500 works might have survived.' – About the puzzling, but presumably tragic destiny of Purvītis's artistic legacy at the end of World War II, see D. Lamberg, *Latvia: Losses and Recovery. The Painter Vilhelms Purvītis*, pp. 276–280.

109 E. M. Borchert-Schweinfurth, *Mara: Eine Malerin zwischen Riga, Paris, Moskau, München und Berlin*. Ed. B. Borchert. Husum: Husum Druck- und Verlagsgesellschaft, 2010.

110 *Jahrbuch für bildende Kunst in den Ostseeprovinzen 1908*, Bd. 2, p. 34.

111 R. [J. Rozentāls], *Rīgas jaunā mākslas muzeja atvēršana un Baltijas mākslinieku izstāde. III* [The opening of the new art museum in Riga and the Exhibition of Baltic Artists. III]. – *Vērotājs* 1905, no. 12, pp. 1493–1494.

112 Viēsis [pseud.], *Mākslas izstāde Kokneses Dziedāšanas Biedrības telpās* [Art exhibition on the premises of the Koknese Singer Club]. – *Balss* 21 July (3 August) 1904.

113 J. Jaunsudrabiņš, *Kopotī raksti* [Collected works]. Vol. 15. Riga: Liesma, 1985, p. 113.

114 J. Howard, *East European Art: 1650–1950*. (Oxford History of Art.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 112–113. 'Woman Emergent' – the title of the relevant chapter of the book.

Perspectives of research and interpretation

The outlined set of problems is quite familiar in all three Baltic countries, but both Estonian and Lithuanian colleagues at the moment seem to be ahead of Latvians in bridging the gap between the national and the multicultural in their local art histories. Due to the unity of the former Baltic provinces and many 'shared' Baltic German personalities, we can benefit from Estonian traditions of territorially focused art history studies, a field that, after Siliņš's 1937 publication about Jelgava¹¹⁵, was cultivated neither in Soviet Latvia nor afterwards, but which established itself in Estonia, with the appearance of Voldemar Vaga's books about nineteenth-century art in Tartu (1971)¹¹⁶ and Tallinn (1976)¹¹⁷. Certainly, it is easier to be conscious of the peculiar Baltic ethnocultural situation in which 'the young Estonian professional national culture ... was greatly inspired by the Baltic German culture in its European aspirations'¹¹⁸ and 'boundaries between nations became increasingly provisional'¹¹⁹ with a background of knowledge accumulated in the works of Jutta Keevallik, Rein Loodus and Lehti Viiroja¹²⁰. Lithuanian progress from nationalism to multiculturalism in the art history of a particular place has resulted in Lithuanian (2002) and English (2008) editions of Laima Laučkaitė's monograph about early-twentieth-century art in Vilnius¹²¹. Thus, even compared to the situation in the other two Baltic countries, Latvian art history still has much to do to proceed towards an integrated, inclusive picture of its turn-of-the-twentieth century past. The ethnocentric distortions outlined above have been successfully overcome within the boundaries of articles on some specific phenomena and on the level of biographical research on several artists that switch the focus from the limited aspect of the national school to the artist's personality.

This is far from enough, and the question of how to change the default settings of our art-historical constructions and what an unbiased history of the late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century art of Latvia should be like actually stands behind many steps taken in the research of this period. The practical urgency of these problems should increase if the ambitious project of a multi-volume national history of art and architecture for the centenary of the Republic of Latvia (2018) is successfully launched¹²² and art historians of the country prove their ability to join forces for the sake of a major assignment. A century ago, when Jaunsudrabiņš was working on his

115 J. Siliņš, *Piezīmes par mākslas dzīvi un māksliniekiem Jelgavā kopš 19. gs.*, pp. 109–149.

116 V. Vaga, *Kunst Tartus XIX sajandil* [19th-century art in Tartu]. Tallinn: Kunst, 1971.

117 V. Vaga, *Kunst Tallinnas XIX sajandil* [19th-century art in Tallinn]. Tallinn: Kunst, 1976.

118 M. Levin, *Hääbuv baltisaksa kunst / The Dwindling Baltic German Art in the 20th Century*. – *Eesti kunsti ajalugu 5 / History of Estonian Art 5. 1900–1940*. Ed. M. Kalm. Tallinn: Eesti Kunstiakadeemia, 2010, p. 82 (Estonian), p. 645 (English).

119 M. Levin, *Hääbuv baltisaksa kunst / The Dwindling Baltic German Art in the 20th Century*, p. 82 (Estonian), p. 645 (English).

120 Among them, J. Keevallik, *Kunstikogumine Eestis 19. sajandil*. *Kunstiteadus Eestis 19. sajandil / Kunstsammeln in Estland im 19. Jahrhundert*. Kunstwissenschaft in Estland im 19. Jahrhundert. Tallinn: Eesti Teaduste Akadeemia Ajaloo Instituut, 1993; R. Loodus, *Kunstieliu Eesti linnades 19. sajandil / Das Kunstgeschehen in den Städten Estlands im 19. Jahrhundert*. Tallinn: Eesti Teaduste Akadeemia Ajaloo Instituut, 1993; R. Loodus, *Kunstieliu Eesti linnades 1900–1918 / Das Kunstgeschehen in der Städten Estlands 1900–1918*. Tallinn: Eesti Teaduste Akadeemia Ajaloo Instituut, 1994; J. Keevallik, R. Loodus, L. Viiroja, *Tekste kunstist ja arhitektuurist 1–3 / Texte über Kunst und Architektur 1–3*. Tallinn: Teaduste Akadeemia Kirjastus, 2000–2006.

121 L. Laučkaitė, *Art in Vilnius, 1900–1915*. Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2008. See also the Lithuanian edition: L. Laučkaitė, *Vilniaus dailė XX amžiaus pradžioje*. Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2002.

122 The project proposal was elaborated on by the Institute of Art History of the Latvian Academy of Art and submitted to the Republic of Latvia Ministry of Culture on 16 October 2012.

lecture 'Our Art' in 1912, he attempted to collect the yarn of Latvian art in order to wind it into a separate ball¹²³ – Latvian culture was eager and ready to emancipate itself from the mixed Baltic context. After a century, we should use this national yarn together with other materials for a multicoloured tapestry of a more comprehensive cultural panorama, without fear of leaving many lines of the picture uncertain, broken and interrupted, as one of the reasons for Latvian reticence about the investigation of 'alien elements' has often been the seeming insufficiency of research material. Presumably, this change of approach will not dissolve the established national narrative but make it reveal itself as part of a more realistic scenery.

Changing ideas and priorities in art history continuously provoke small quasi-revolutions, where winners fall out of one extreme into another, such as the switch of focus from lower-class boys of one ethnicity to upper-class girls of another ethnicity or vice versa. Being limited in terms of aspects of interpretation (whether aesthetic, stylistic, national, geopolitical, topographical or chronological, or focused on personality, gender, class or social context) does not mean, however, being inevitably wrong. Therefore, it is not necessary to discard such concepts as the national school, providing that they are further applied not as solid constructions for restrictive purposes but rather as semitransparent layers that let other layers shine through and interact with them, manifesting 'the peculiar intriguing complexity of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century period in Latvia'¹²⁴.

123 A. [H. Asars], *Latviešu māksla* [Latvian art]. – *Jaunā Dienas Lapa* 10 (23) October 1912.

124 T. Kačalova, *Latviešu ainavu glezniecība gadsimtu mijā (1890–1915)*, p. 21.