

In the course of history, Lithuanian art was constantly affected by adopted examples of West and East European art and the majority of the features of our cultural mentality are characteristic of all Central European countries. At the end of the twentieth century, Lithuanian art, music and theatre are an integral part of the modern international cultural process. Still, the artistic culture of Lithuania has not become, and had never been, faceless, but it is impossible to describe its peculiarity in a few sentences. Peculiarity manifests itself through the methods and scope of integration of external factors. Specific features of cultural mentality may be detected on the margins of the mainstream processes, in the transformations of universal images, and in the fragments of particular works of art. Therefore, the true understanding of the peculiarity of Lithuanian art unimpeded by preconceptions of any kind and pre-established clichés should be based not on the exploration of the general directions in the cultural process alone, but as well on the study of its marginalities, exceptions and ephemeral local manifestations.

Many specific local aspects of art processes may be explained through the analysis of civil life crises and social turnovers. The Lithuanian cultural community has lived through several shocking turning points in the history: the formation of the commonwealth of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the loss of the statehood at the end of the 18th century, the two world wars, the establishment and destruction of an independent state, and its rebirth. Among the political cataclysms, there were periods of mass destruction: outbreaks of epidemic diseases in the 17th and 18th centuries, Russian and Swedish invasions, 19th-century post-rebellion repression, and Stalinist mass deportations and post-war guerrilla struggles of the 20th century. As a matter of fact, such vital events alter the consciousness, thinking, and aesthetic attitudes, but, above all, they pierce through the entire system of cultural spread.

Political, social and creative processes always coincide only partially. Qualitative changes in art are sometimes determined not by fundamental historical changes, but rather by moderate and slack pro-

cesses and impulses of entirely different origin and scope, such as changing principles of commercial art organization, the changes in church life and cult, spiritual and civil emigration to the West or to the East, etc. During some periods of political decadence (e.g. the second half of the 18th century), Lithuanian art flourished and acquired the shape of a distinct school, yet not all the periods of civil success, such as the first decade of Independent Lithuania, have been productive in terms of creativity. Significant changes in art may be determined by the activity of a single art patron or creative personality. The proportion of the external (political, societal) and immanent transformations is an important aspect in evaluating the local peculiarity of any art phenomenon.

This collection of articles presents a thorough analysis of the shifts in Lithuanian art at the transitional points in the society life and during the periods of change in consciousness. The authors do not discuss individual pieces of art, music and literature or their aesthetic features. Instead, they explore the whole process of art. That is why the methods of history, sociology of culture, psychology and anthropology of art are frequently used. This study presents some unpublished archival material and new sources that challenge and force to reassess the pre-conceptions towards different periods of art and cultural factors.

The collection includes the articles by the researchers of the Lithuanian Institute of Culture, Philosophy and Art and the Lithuanian Art Museum and doctorate students.

Editor

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