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during the Two World Wars

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Edited by

Giedrė Jankevičiūtė, Laima Laučkaitė

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Introduction

Volume 5 of the series *Dailės istorijos studijos* (Art History Studies) presents papers that were read at the international conference Art During Two World Wars in Vilnius on 12 and 13 May 2011. The conference was organised by the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute.

At the conference, art historians from Great Britain, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Russia analysed issues on art and artistic life in England and Central-East Europe during the two great cataclysms of the 20th century. The initiators of the conference aimed to gather specialists in the specifics of war art, issues of artistic life, and the functioning of art in wartime situations. They tried to determine the scale and the range of the research, recent tendencies, and the application of new methods in their investigations. Historians specialising in the art of the First World War and the Second World War are not numerous, and this fact conditioned the invitation to Vilnius of specialists in both wars. The conference was well supported, and not only are papers that were read by participants presented in this collection, but also articles written by scholars who for various reasons could not attend it in person (Uladzimir Valodzin from Belarus, Kai Artinger and Lars Olof Larsson from Germany, and Gregory Maertz from the USA).

The geographical range of the research (and the researchers) is a special feature of the Vilnius conference, because previously issues of the cultural history of the two wars were dominated by research into art, its creators, commissioners, critics and the public mainly from the great powers in the two wars, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy and Russia. The conference showed that interest in art and artistic life during the two

wars extended beyond the borders of the great powers, and did not limit itself to issues such as the use of art as a propaganda tool, and the looting and destruction of art treasures. The papers read at the conference looked at the relationship between art and politics, and discussed the fates of individual artists in the critical situation of war. Local stories enrich the historical narrative with details, which as a rule disappear in the syntheses of policy and warfare, but which are essential for an understanding of the realities of the two wars and the paradoxes of the historical memory, which become evident after the cessation of hostilities.

War doubtless means loss and destruction. Nevertheless, papers about heritage protection during the First World War and the Second World War show a rather radical change in the European attitude to the historical heritage between the wars. In the First World War, the imperial cultural policies of Germany and Russia still demonstrated traits of the 19th-century respect for culture, art and cultural variety (the reports by Lijana Šatavičiūtė and Elena Kulchinskaya), while the mid-20th century was characterised by the consolidation and demonstration of power. An occupying army in the First World War was not only a destructive force with respect to culture, although Lijana Šatavičiūtė revealed that German support for Lithuanian folk art in occupied Vilnius was based mainly on pragmatic considerations. The intention to appropriate the culture of an occupied city is demonstrated in Laima Laučkaitė's article on the work of Walter Buhe (1882–1985), a German newspaper artist during the First World War. His views of Vilnius were determined not only by his genuine admiration of the exotic culture of Lithuania, but also by his intention to point out the resemblances between the Old Town of Vilnius and images in the late work of Rembrandt.

Kristina Jõekalda presented a detailed analysis of the heritage protection situation in Estonia during the Second World War. The threat of war as a constant danger to cultural values stimulated the historical memory of the populations of the occupied countries, and led to the rejection of certain clichés, by revising the usual attitude to heritage and concentrating on its protection. Latvian art researchers also noticed a certain positive effect of the war on the rise of the cultural consciousness during

the First World War. For example, Kristiana Ābele showed that during the war, Latvian art received international acclaim in its search for recognition of its cultural and political aspirations. Stella Pelše pointed out that the identity of Latvian art was forged in opposition to German art and its traditions in Latvia. Meanwhile, in independent interwar Latvia, warlike rhetoric was widely used in the encounters between supporters of traditional art and supporters of modern art. In his survey of Hungary's presentations at exhibitions of industrial and fine art abroad, Miklós Székely proved that the situation during the First World War was rather advantageous for the representation of Hungarian nationalism.

The participants in the conference analysed works of art that were conditioned by the reality of war. It is noteworthy that the First World War, despite the extremely painful and traumatic experience, not only encouraged the search for a national identity, but also supported expectations for the creation of a new social order. The war years brought the avant-garde spirit to the periphery of Europe. Thus, Eduards Kļaviņš analysed the forms of contemporary art in the work of the artist Jāzeps Grosvalds (1891–1920), who fought on the Riga front; his paintings were conditioned by patriotic rhetoric and the desire to show the horrendous reality of the modern technological war in a new way. Irina Pronina devoted her article to the eminent Russian Futurist Pavel Filonov (1883–1941), who painted his main pictures, innovative semi-abstract compositions, to promote the idea that war and revolution created new forms of life from the pieces of what had been destroyed, and thus the world set out on a new cycle.

Researchers who analysed the art of the Second World War concentrated on strategies of escapism shown by tendencies towards Respectivism and Intimism (Giedrė Jankevičiūtė, Vojtěch Lahoda, Milan Pech). The marginalisation of modernism led them to question the consequences of the attack on *entartete Kunst* for the German-occupied countries during the Second World War. Vojtěch Lahoda's research revealed that for various reasons the Nazis were in no hurry to transfer the campaign of *entartete Kunst* into the occupied territories. Thus, in the Protectorate of Moravia and Bohemia, this campaign only started in 1944, and it was

introduced at the initiative of local collaborators. Participation in the creation of politically and ideologically engaged art was presented as an alternative to escapism. However, even works produced for propaganda purposes were oriented towards the art of the past. This was shown by research into British official war art. Kai Artinger analysed the works of the British painter William Orpen (1878–1931), an official war artist. The retrospective orientation of his paintings, based on works by Giotto, Michelangelo and Raphael, was associated with the requirement laid down by officialdom to use the Christian iconography of the Redeemer to legitimise ‘a simple soldier man’s death’. Jonathan Black, investigating the presentation of the war hero in the work of Eric Kennington (1888–1960), a British official war artist in both the First World War and the Second World War, established a connection with Russian traditions from the 19th century, and critical and Soviet Realism.

The analysis of politically engaged caricatures produced in the Second World War attracted special attention from researchers. Legally produced and published caricatures in Nazi-occupied Belorussia were discussed by Uladzimir Valodzin, and in Latvia by Jānis Kalnačs. They met the needs of official Nazi propaganda, and at the same time they reflected the reality and topicality of the occupied countries. A different side to caricature was discussed by Lars Olof Larsson in his paper about the humorous drawings by Hans Stephan (1902–1973), who produced them while working in the architectural office of Albert Speer. Stephan’s drawings conveyed the efforts of young architects in Speer’s organisation to combat the dismal moods of the war years, and also to express a rather ironic view of the megalomaniac plans to rebuild Berlin.

Investigating the Czech wartime cultural resistance, Anna Pravdová revealed the treatment of the conventionality of the category of artisticity. Thus, the sketchiness and commentariness of political drawings contributed to the rapid spread of information and to the spread of news. A work of art was valued by contemporaries for its mere visual signs, symbolising the resolve to fight and win independence. Drawings produced in captivity and imprisonment attest to a creative element that in itself was a value.

Rasa Antanavičiūtė's paper was devoted to the reordering of Vilnius during the Second World War. The transformation was based on formal urban examples. Formal urbanisation was understood as an aggregate of measures taken by the authorities with the aim of adapting the city's identity to the political ideology. This approach covered both urban architectural changes (the remaking of squares, the erection of monuments) and emblematic and decorative ones (the names of streets, the use of state symbols).

On the basis of the history of German art during the Second World War, Gregory Maertz researched the defensive reactions of the historical memory of the second half of the 20th century, which enabled the resurgence of pro-Hitler artists in the postwar artistic life of West Germany. The author also endeavoured to provide an answer to another painful question: what circumstances determined the peaceful coexistence of artists favoured by the regime and artists persecuted by the Nazis in the late 20th century?

This collection of papers, like the conference itself, is divided into two parts. Part One is devoted to art and artistic life during the First World War, and Part Two covers the situation during the Second World War.

The organisers of the conference and the compilers of this publication would like to express their sincere gratitude to the Contemporary Art Centre in Vilnius and the National Gallery of Art for their cooperation, and to the Research Council of Lithuania for financial support.

Giedrė Jankevičiūtė, Laima Laučkaitė

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