

“Free Creativity Zone” of Soviet era Artists

Summary

In the aspect of creative freedom and anti-Sovietism, the study examines several paintings by prominent Lithuanian modernist artists of the 20th century Vincas Kisarauskas, Vincentas Gečas and Jonas Švažas. First of all, the essential features of the memory of the Soviet era are discussed, emphasizing the importance of the concept of the Soviet way of life in understanding the documents, testimonies and works of art of that time. Reliance on various documents usually bypasses very important problems of document interpretation, which are related to the “rules” of everyday life not recorded in any written sources, as well as the circumstances of preparation, coordination and acceptance of documents in the field of social relations. The artists acted tempted by their work to serve the government and live well, to express themselves in public life, to earn public attention and official signs of respect, while at the same time very clearly realizing what kinds of repressions, camps or non-existence await the disobedient. However, remembering the Soviet era, it is important not to lose sight of a certain aspect of that experience, which can be described as the creation of „zones of freedom“. The artists’ „zone of freedom“ was the result of their creative self-determination, which could be supported by the institutional environment and quietly approving spirit of some colleagues. In that creative „zone of freedom“, artists opposed official ideology in various ways with their works, and in some works there is a clear sign of anti-Sovietism. This aspect of creativity is explained by considering how in paintings certain meanings and references to the

“exiled memory” are portrayed in disguise and concealed in depiction. We are able to describe only the most general experience and living memory determined by the atrocities of pre-war Sovietization and deportations, German occupation and the massacre of Jews, post-war partisan struggle, and mass deportations. The historical narrative about the post-war resistance to the Soviet occupation, which lies in Kisarauskas’ paintings, is highlighted and analyzed. It can be considered as a clear artistic manifestation of anti-Sovietism, perceiving the paintings themselves as a testimony and a creative commitment to struggle, which is undermined by the prevailing attitude among art historians to force the artist in the framework of the so-called “nonconformist”.

In the *Pietas* of Švažas, full of the Christian symbolism, there are references to the deportations experienced by the Lithuanian nation, as well as to the tragedies of the German and Soviet occupations. The study considers how it was possible to perceive those paintings at that time and how they are perceived now. The author argues that perception depends on the changing content of living memory and social knowledge, as well as on the ability of social strata to become aware of that content. It is pointed out that in the post-war years the natural transmission of living memory was interrupted, so it became difficult for the young people educated in the Soviet school to understand some of the creative allusions of older artists, coded meanings, and thus to grasp a more general historical narrative.

In Gečas’ works the distancing from the canons of Soviet art in a special expressionist manner by depicting insignificant scenes “pulled out” of everyday life is stressed, and also the emphasizing on the painterly significance of the picture plane and abandoning the completeness of the pictorial background is specified. Attention is drawn to the special institutional environment created

and maintained by Gečas, the representative of the highest party nomenclature – the vice-rector of the Art Institute, and later the long-term rector, – which was supported by Kisarauskas, who has worked as a painting teacher at Vilnius M. K. Čiurlionis Secondary School of Art.