

Editor's Foreword

In the early 21st century, the genesis of art history was strongly influenced by ongoing social and political processes, encouraging to revisit the local, national, and global art canons, the criteria of assessment of artworks and, correspondingly, the collection of masterpieces and authorities, and the way it functions in contemporary society and the academic field. The deconstruction of the art and art history canon, discoveries of previously marginalized artists, artistic phenomena and processes that for some reason have not been explored before, public discussions of topics that have been dismissed, disputes regarding “our own” and “other” heritage, and – last but not least – heated public arguments concerning monuments are the subjects that by necessity involve not only historians, politicians, and sociologists, but also art historians. Conflicting experiences and contested memories shape a specific subject of art research – *uncomfortable heritage*.

The concept of *uncomfortable heritage* has long been established in the public sphere of many countries and cultures. In fact, its roots go back to classical culture. One of the most popular examples is the law of *damnatio memoriae* – condemnation of memory that was in force in Roman times. Heritage is always asymmetrical: it is not shared by everyone, and it does not appeal to everyone. Thus, its assessments are inevitably fragmentary, biased, convenient to those who control power, wealth and, respectively, heritage, and public opinion about heritage. Thus, heritage – owning, handling, interpreting and using it – gives voice to some and takes it away from others. In the conditions of democracy, it is not only the majority that should be given voice, but it remains an ideal to strive for. This striving brings up *uncomfortable heritage* – a kind of heritage that is often evaded, omitted, and concealed, as it does not play into the hands of the dominant powers, or it is simply unclear how to approach it and how to deal with it.

It was not so long ago that the concept of *uncomfortable heritage* emerged and started to be given critical attention and analysis. Research into uncomfortable heritage requires a specific mode of thinking. By nature, it is a critique of memory, whose aim is deconstructing politics of the past in its various stages, and revealing the missing or deformed links in the vision of the past that is narrated, showed, and communicated to our contemporaries. Systematic research into uncomfortable heritage, besides other insights provided by the humanities, was encouraged by the discipline of cultural memory. Memory is inevitably canonized by determining which parts of the heritage should be preserved and which ones should be erased, and how this actualized heritage should be assessed and perceived, and what should be forgotten. The argument regarding what should be actualized and what is valuable for the present is constant and never-ending. The discussion about the assessment and interpretations of the remembered heritage is no less intense. In the conditions of democratic freedom, themes that cannot be put up for public discussion, all the more in the academic field, theoretically do not exist. On the other hand, the struggle for the freedom to express different views, particularly those that have been marginalized for a long time, paradoxically brings about more and more limitations, prohibitions, and even conflicts. Those social groups that have a stronger position at a given moment impose their ideas and values on weaker groups. The heritage of colonialism and the expressions of colonialist politics in various art forms including fiction, cinema, and memorial sculpture are rightfully contested. Conversely, new religious and antireligious wars in many countries of the world, including traditionally Christian countries, increasingly turn people professing Christianity into social outcasts, and believers are subjected to ridicule and restrictions.

The authors of the articles in this collection do not aim to analyze the phenomenon of uncomfortable heritage and its current situation. The texts published here are more related to the deconstruction of the canon of cultural memory and the possibilities offered by this process, which are very wide and diverse, as testified by the topics of the articles.

Among the subjects addressed in the collection are those dictated by traumatic memory, whose visible expression is the Second World War narrative and the change of its visualization in Soviet Lithuanian art (Indrė Urbelytė), monument wars in the long-disputed territory – the former German and, later, Lithuanian city of Memel / Klaipėda – caused by memory shifts (Vasilijus Safronovas). Both latter themes can also be related to the postcolonialist discourse, which is particularly relevant for Central and Eastern Europe: the memory of the countries and societies that constitute this region was heavily deformed by the colonial experience of the 19th and 20th centuries. Directly related to the colonialist discourse is a case study – Giedrė Jankevičiūtė's interview with the Moscow-based researcher of the Exhibition of Achievements of National Economy, Dmitry Vorobyev, about the first pavilion of the three Baltic countries, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, occupied by the Soviet Union in 1940, its symbolism and significance.

Gražina Kristina Sviderskytė, generalizing the reflections on the ill-fated transatlantic flight of the Lithuanian American pilots Darius and Girėnas, writes about a myth born from an experience of history marked by oppression, subjugation, and annihilation, about heroization without a valid reason. Her article questions the stereotypical view of the narrative, which has been considered vital for maintaining Lithuanian self-esteem and identity for several decades, and which has become an untouchable topic because of its significance. The historian Šarūnė Sederavičiūtė uses an analogous approach in her research on Holocaust photography or, more precisely, the case study of the Kaunas ghetto photographer Hirsh Kadushin. In her article, she addresses evaded questions, deepening our understanding of the sensitive and thus somewhat untouchable topic characterized by a narrow interpretation.

Another case study – Katarina Lopatkina's article devoted to the cultural diplomacy of Mexican left-wing modernist artists – is a contribution to the history of the barbarity of totalitarianism. The researcher speaks about the efforts of Mexican artists sympathizing with Communism to win Stalin's attention and favour, which were met by the Soviet dictator with hostile contempt and dismissive attitude towards the

artworks dedicated to him. Rūta Stanevičiūtė-Kelmickienė also analyzes the questions of loyalty to a dictator, rewards for loyalty, and the place of a creator in the national canon of cultural memory based on an example of Lithuanian composers who were awarded the Stalin prize.

The texts of the collection in large part represent the revisions of memory from the perspective of the colonized. Distinguished in this respect is the article by Serena De Dominicis devoted to a heritage object that was kept in the dark in the second half of the 20th century – Italian architecture and urban planning in African countries that were part of Mussolini's empire. Laura Petrauskaitė explores a grey zone of Lithuanian cultural memory, the activity of migrant artists in South America and the reception of their artistic legacy, based on the case of the painter Jonas Rimša.

The preconditions for the appearance of uncomfortable heritage, both aesthetic and ideological, are questioned in every article to an extent the author of the text finds it important. The editor and the authors did not aim to cover all the aspects of uncomfortable heritage. It is a hardly feasible task, as nowadays the concept of uncomfortable heritage is rapidly mutating and spreading into new spheres of human activity that include memory and heritage. The focus of this collection is the subjects that are above all relevant to the researchers of European artistic culture. In other words, the idea of the collection and the selection of texts were dictated by the current condition of the history of European art and architecture as an academic discipline. Analogues of the case studies presented in the collection can be found in the entire region of Central and Eastern Europe. This universal aspect gives more relevance and importance to the articles of the collection.

Giedrė Jankevičiūtė