SUMMARY

ART IN VILNIUS DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

INTRODUCTION

The period of the First World War (WWI) is scantily presented in the historiography of Lithuanian art. My research focusses on the art of early modernism in Vilnius: its multicultural artistic life and artists at the turn of the 20th century were described in my earlier book *Art in Vilnius 1900–1915* (2008), while this study takes the subject into a further period of 1914–1918. The book was born out of curiosity and the desire to find out what kind of art was being created in Vilnius during the war. Was there any art at all in the city behind the front, the city crippled by fear and suffering, exhausted by restrictions and contributions imposed by invaders, the city where death from starvation or disease was very much part of everyday life? And yet, despite all the trauma and violence that defined this time, artists did make art. There is an extensive body of images created in Vilnius or related to Vilnius that has survived from that period. It needs to be studied, analysed and evaluated.

The subject of this monograph encompasses art, artistic practices and art life in Vilnius under the extreme circumstances of military conflict. Understanding the art of that time requires a wider knowledge of the historical and cultural background, which goes beyond the direct task of the art historian: it was necessary to reconstruct the context of everyday life in Vilnius during WWI and the impact of historical, political and social events on the development of the city. The research spans the period from the outset of the war in July 1914 to the Armistice of Compiègne on 11 November 1918.

Different European nations and states have their own experience of WWI and their own relationship with it. In contrast to the big Western European states, for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Lithuania among them, the outcome of the war was positive in that it led to the emergence of independent states. In Lithuania, memories of WWI had been overshadowed by struggles for independence and public enthusiasm about creating a sovereign state. The collective trauma here was less severe than in the West, and ordeals caused by the war had not affected the public consciousness and political discourse so deeply. This was due to several reasons. Any war always implies a situation in which an individual or society find themselves on the side of one belligerent party or another. A war always poses the problem of identity and compels one to distinguish between 'us' and 'them' (the enemy). In Lithuania this distinction was rather complicated and ambivalent, as the war had been forced on its people. Lithuanians were pushed into this fratricidal conflict against their will, the front splitting them into two hostile camps. Men were conscripted by both warring states – Russia and Germany, and both of them were invaders. The people of Lithuania had no interest in fighting for any of the invading countries. Civilians endured privations of all kinds, famine and ruthless requisitions; they were killed by diseases and epidemics, which claimed more lives than the death toll of recruits from Lithuania who had perished in action.

The First World War has been somewhat forgotten in Lithuania; its historiography and sources are modest. In Soviet times, its memory was being obliterated by communist ideology, which regarded WWI as one waged by imperialists against the exploited and glorified the subsequent Bolshevik takeover. The Soviets were erasing the signs of the war not only from memory, but also from the cityscape. The monuments erected in 1916–1917, including the Three Crosses, and the German war memorial in Vingis Park were blown up in the 1940s and rebuilt only after the collapse

of the Soviet Union. After Lithuania regained its independence, the research into WWI conducted by Lithuanian historians has been deliberately targeted at re-creating the metanarrative of the birth of the independent state.

By contrast, historians of Western Europe had consistently showed interest in WWI throughout the entire 20th century; they, however, explored the Western front, whereas the Eastern front, to which Lithuania belonged, remained unchartered territory. Lithuania's experience, in parallel with other Central and Eastern European countries, was specific: the occupying regime of tsarist Russia had been replaced with that of imperial Germany. How did the collision between the different cultures and the opposite sides (aggressors and the conquered) take place amidst the armed conflict? A significant study of the topic was undertaken by Vejas Gabrielius Liulevicius, an American historian of Lithuanian descent, professor at Tennessee University, in a book entitled *War Land on the Eastern Front. Culture, National Identity and Occupation in World War I* (2004). Within the framework of anthropology studies, he examined the experiences of the Eastern Front from the perspectives of the occupiers and the occupied, revealing the 'anatomy' of the Ober-Ost machine. In the 21st century, WWI research in Lithuania also took a new direction, with new themes traversed at conferences and in collections of articles.

The 1990s saw the salience of a new approach to war in Western historiography: war started to be viewed not only as part of military and political history, but also as part of cultural history. Researchers were looking into how war affected society, how it was perceived by communities and individuals, and what ways of survival, relief, reconciliation and commemoration they developed. Art came to be regarded as an important aspect of wartime culture, prompting various angles of its exploration: memorialisation of war, the propagandistic function of art, the flourishing of mass media and entertainment culture, the relationship of avant-garde painters with war, anti-war strategies employed by artists. The past decade in Lithuania has also produced research into wartime culture and art; an international conference dedicated to the art of the two world wars was held in Vilnius in 2011.

Vilnius has a special place in the history and culture of Lithuania. Differently from agrarian Lithuania, Vilnius was home to urban society; moreover, it was the centre of the Eastern Front, where the commanders of the occupying army resided. Like many cities, Vilnius had historically evolved as a multicultural entity, and each ethnic community had their own relationship with the armed conflict, its own sorrows and losses. Therefore, this segmented multicultural structure has been retained in the range of problems that the book deals with.

War images had a thin presence in the oeuvre of Lithuanian artists, and Lithuanian museums house few extant works from that time. However, the scope of this study is broader: it includes not only the main branches of fine art, but also popular culture and artwork made for the press. Along the traditional methods of art history, the research relies on the social history of art, aiming to discover factors that had shaped wartime art and the ways they worked.

The research presented in this book crosses the boundaries of national art history, as it brings in a new player into the centre of the Vilnius art scene: German artists who performed their military service in Lithuania. Who were they? Brutal invaders? Observant tourists? Poetic wanderers? Thoroughly brainwashed instruments of propaganda? Ideological manipulators of images? War-traumatised people turned pacifists? Hubristic trailblazers of the latest trends in Western art?

In Soviet times, due political and ideological reasons, art historians could not research the art of the war period. The only Lithuanian historian to include German artworks into his iconographical study of Vilnius was Vladas Drėma; his study was published only after the restoration of Lithuania's independence. Today, researchers have new opportunities to mine Western museums and archives for artworks and documents, and access publications by German art historians. As a matter of fact, the German historiography on artists of the Eastern Front refers to this time as the 'Russian period' and is often discreetly silent about it, but recently some new works on the topic have appeared. The author of the present study found sources and artworks related to the war years in Vilnius at the

City Museum of Aschersleben, in the collection of the German Speaking Community in the Belgian city of Eupen, at the Jewish Museum in Berlin, the Art Museum in Bern, etc. The author also interviewed the heirs of the artists in Germany.

The structure of the book follows the political timeline: Part I deals with the period when the city belonged to the Russian empire; Part II describes the period of occupation by the Kaiser's Germany; Part III is devoted to several case studies of the most famous artists from Vilnius and those German artists whose work had transcended the genre of propaganda art.

PART I. BEGINNING: ON THE SIDE OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

At the outbreak of war, Vilnius had changed: it became the centre of movement and logistics for the tsarist army. Though the front was still far away, its consequences soon reached the city: in August 1914, the first refugees moving from Kaunas and Suwalki Regions swarmed in. The municipal authorities were ill-prepared for this influx, so city-dwellers rushed to the rescue of refugees. Vilniusites were setting up ethnically based societies in order to help refugees with food and shelter. The reaction of the locals towards the war was mixed: ethnic Russians viewed it as a challenge to their homeland, whereas anti-Russian-minded ethnic communities of Poles and Lithuanians harboured no such patriotic sentiments. Seeking to win the loyalty of the people in the annexed Western territories of the empire, the Russian government was ever so keen to be more liberal, and in September 1914 it declared a manifesto, promising change and political self-rule to the Polish in the future. This had also encouraged the Lithuanians to announce their Amber Declaration, setting out a project to unite Minor Lithuania with Greater Lithuania and a vision of ethno-political autonomy within the empire. So at the beginning of the war the Lithuanians and the Poles supported the Russian side; also, they were swayed by anti-German propaganda.

The chapter ACTIVITIES OF VILNIUS ARTISTS presents various art initiatives of the time. In December 1914, members of the Vilnius Art Society organised a 'Day of Art', an exhibition and lottery of artworks, the proceeds from which went to aid those who had suffered from war. To mark the occasion, the society produced the eponymous one-off magazine *Meno diena*, where texts were published in five languages – Russian, Lithuanian, Polish, Belarusian and Yiddish – without parallel translations. The texts showed a blend of symbolist and neoromantic aesthetics, pacifist and leftist ideas, and were sprinkled with anti-German political cartoons.

Another event to the same purpose held by the Vilnius Art Society was an exhibition of avant-garde painting, featuring works by the Munich–based expressionists Marianne Werefkin and Aleksey Javlensky and a local painter, Bencion Cukermann. The content of the show was politically paradoxical: the expressionist works by Werefkin and Javlensky born in the context of the enemy's art were used for charity fund-raising to support the victims of German military action. The February of 1915 welcomed the seventh and the last annual exhibition by the Vilnius Art Society, in which city artists of various nationalities took part. In the same year, the Lithuanian Art Society also mounted its annual show, but it showcased only the paintings by its chairman Antanas Žmuidzinavičius. In 1915 Valerija Čiurlionytė transferred the works of Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis from Vilnius to Moscow, and at the start of 1916 she exhibited them at the Moscow Higher School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. At the end of 1914, the Jewish community held the debut exhibition of the local sculptor Isaak Itkind. Artists participated in patriotic evening programmes, staged *tableau vivant* on historical themes and acted out victory scenes against their eternal 'foes'– the Germans.

The war spurred the mobility of people, and artists were no exception. All Russian artists, the main agents of pre-war art life in Vilnius, retreated to Russia; so did many Lithuanian artists, joining the activities of their compatriots in Russia. On the other hand, Vilnius received artists from Petersburg and Moscow, who were going to the front as soldiers and war correspondents; Mstislav Dobuzhinsky was among them.

The chapter ENTERTAINMENT CULTURE IN THE CITY BEHIND THE FRONT presents the flowering of the said culture, which was so vibrant that not even the calamities of war could dampen it. In 1915 the city was increasingly engulfed by the upheaval – its factories evacuated, tsarist institutions closed, the Russian army and civilians in flight, monuments and church bells dismantled. At the same time Vilnius hosted a myriad of theatrical and musical events drawing large crowds. The repertoire of the theatres was dominated by operettas, vaudevilles and comedies, while cinemas showed melodramas and propaganda films. The paradox of the popularity of light, diverting content as well as exhilarating, highly charged performances can be explained by the peculiarities of social psychology during the period of trauma.

PART II. OCCUPIED BY THE KAISER'S GERMANY

The chapter APPROPRIATION OF THE CITY recounts the story of how the German forces invaded Vilnius and made it their 'own'. The city was taken after surrounding it with a wide circular front, so the tsarist army managed to escape, and on 18 September 1915, the German army entered the city without much fighting or destruction. Vilnius became a city in the rear of the Eastern Front, and it is in the Eastern Front that Germany won its major victories, all earned by its Tenth Army. In 1915 it occupied the territories of the Russian empire in Lithuania, part of Poland, Belarus and Latvia. The occupied region was named in honour of the military command to which the achievement had been credited – *Oberbefehlshaber der gesamten Deutschen Streitkräfte im Osten* or Ober-Ost for short. From then on Ober-Ost was a separate political unit, a military empire with its military-administrative control structure. Finding itself on the German side, Vilnius had been subjected to a geographical metamorphosis: the East turned into the West. When in the Russian empire, Vilnius was the centre of the so called 'Northwest Region', but during WWI it landed in the part of the Eastern Front that had been torn away from Russia by the Germans. In the eyes of Germans, Russia was an uncivilized, wild country, thus Ober-Ost was earmarked for colonisation. A huge and complex military bureaucratic administration was established in Vilnius. City buildings were confiscated for the residencies of army chiefs and military institutions. St Casimir's Church was turned into an evangelical place of worship for the German garrison, city theatres became German theatres. The occupiers demonstrated their might by public events and military parades, the biggest celebrations in the city being the birthdays of Kaiser Wilhelm II. To signal the symbolic reign over the city, the Germans flew their flag on its landmark – the Tower of Gediminas. The war had also left long-term traces in the city's visual appearance: in 1917–1918 memorials to soldiers were built at the German military cemetery in Zakret (now Vingis) Park and at the cemetery of Antakalnis. All the activities of the invaders – from the factual to symbolic usurpation of the city's spaces – were meant to trumpet the power of Germany, create an impressive image of its state and its civilizing impact.

The chapter CITIZENS' RESPONSE looks at how the local people reacted to the new regime and what befell them. The descent of the occupation regime upon the citizens was felt immediately, the German order being more drastic than that of tsarist Russia. The city was ruled by the military government, and a curfew was in place throughout the entire war period. Every new day saw new notices issued to citizens, giving orders, expressing threats, informing them of penalties. But what sapped the city most was requisitions: the Ober-Ost authorities treated the region as a supplier of goods for the army. Everything that could be used by the army machine was expropriated. With any stock of food and fuel taken away, speculation became rampant. Soon food rationing was introduced, and the daily allowance per person was gradually dwindling until in 1917 it shrank to 100 grams of bread per day. The city was stricken with poverty and hunger. The winter of 1917 was severely cold, and people died on the streets. Mortality was soaring, diseases spreading, and in 1917 an epidemic of typhus fever had been afflicting the citizens for half a year. After the machinery from factories was evacuated, the industry came

to a halt, the shops of craftsmen closed down, and joblessness spiralled. The only businesses that did a roaring trade were pubs and breweries. Shop owners installed tables in their shops and ran them as beer halls (*Bierhalle)* – the entire city had become little else but one big beer hall for German soldiers.

The military government was unable to tackle unemployment, food shortages and poverty, so they allowed ethnic societies to support war victims. Societies in Vilnius were different in terms of their capability: the most numerous were Polish and Jewish societies, while Lithuanian and Belarusian ones had fewer members. Eventually ethnic societies developed into institutional structures, which became involved not only in charity, but also in cultural and educational work. In contrast to the tsarist authorities, the Germans permitted school instruction in native languages, and it was during WWI that the first schools in Polish, Lithuanian, Yiddish, Hebrew and Belarusian were opened. To de-russify the Jewish community (many of whom spoke in Russian), the invaders supported Yiddish, and in 1916 Vilnius witnessed the publication of the first newspaper *Letzte nais* in this language. During the war years Yiddish had been elevated from everyday colloquial slang to the level of a modern Jewish language that started to be used in politics, literature and theatre. Censored papers were published in several local languages, there were ethnic evenings and concerts, professional Polish and Jewish theatre groups were set up. In the wake of the 1917 Russian revolution, the occupation authorities in Vilnius started heeding the requirements of the ethnic communities. The latter, in legal and illegal ways, were pursuing political goals. In 1917 the Lithuanians organised a conference in Vilnius and elected their National Council, which on 16 February 1918 proclaimed the revival of the Lithuanian state.

Disobeying the occupation regime, the inhabitants of Vilnius seized the newly opened opportunities, even if risking punishment for that. Just as the war was ruining lives, it was also changing and mobilising people, marshalling them into societies to do charitable, cultural, educational and political work. Harsh conditions were modernising civilians, strengthening their solidarity, forming their civic views, nurturing future leaders and firing up visions of post-war change. Different societies communicated with one another and operated in similar ways, but each ethnic group was first and foremost thinking about their interests. Though there had been some concerted action to better the plight of the people, such as jointly written petitions to the Ober-Ost authorities demanding the alleviation of poverty in the city, the ethnic divisions of pre-war Vilnius persisted during the war, which played into the hands of the occupiers.

The chapter IN THE SERVICE OF VISUAL PROPAGANDA is dedicated to art that was intended for the occupiers' press. Artists working for periodicals had become the vehicles of Ober-Ost's cultural policy and propaganda: their task was to visualise the official ideology. Two newspapers in the German language were published in Vilnius: *Zeitung der 10. Armee* and *Wilnaer Zeitung*, both with illustrated supplements. Their editorial boards were staffed by soldiers who prepared the content of the newspapers. German artists Fred Hendriok, A. Paul Weber, Karl Schmoll von Eisenwerth, Gerd Paul and others worked for *Zeitung der 10. Armee.* The most important genre in the extreme conditions of war was political caricature, based on the polarisation strategy – 'we, us and ours' were lauded, while 'the enemies' were ridiculed and denigrated. The main artist for *Zeitung der 10. Armee* was Fred Hendriok, who created hundreds of political cartoons in Vilnius. No less significant propaganda role was played by the illustrated supplement *Scheinwerfer. Bildbeilage zur Zeitung der 10. Armee*, which published the photographs of military chiefs and occupied cities as well as drawings imbued with ideological manipulation. Artists constructed 'their' heroes in multiple ways: from archaic, historical and mythological images of German soldiers to 'realistic' ones, showing lifelike soldiers in uniforms. The armed conflict of WWI had brought to Vilnius aggressive art that extolled military expansion and that derived from indoctrination.

Alongside propaganda art, another phenomenon of mass culture was thriving: visual products dedicated to the memory of the war campaign – souvenirs, postcards, albums, hand-made toys and other things that were to remind the conquerors

of the Eastern Front. These emotionally engaging items – typical accessories of wars – were in great demand among German soldiers. Thematically, these products mostly featured images of the occupied land and its people.

The chapter 'PSEUDO' RUSSIA: LOCAL PEOPLE IN THE OCCUPIERS' ART discusses how German artists saw and portrayed indigenous inhabitants. The mental picture of Eastern Europe, and primarily of Russia, had been deeply entrenched in German literature well before the war: to the East of Germany there lay a backward, uncivilized country. What the German army confronted in Ober-Ost was not true Russia with ethnic Russians, but a motley multicultural society of the Western edge of the Russian empire. That, however, did not alter the army's preconceived notions about this country. Vilnius had a hotchpotch of ethnic communities and religious confessions: the city was inhabited by Jews, Poles, Lithuanians, Belarusians, Germans, Karaites and Tatars, while its assortment of religious faiths comprised Judaists, Catholics, Orthodox believers, Reformed Christians and Muslims. For the occupiers Ober-Ost was an unknown world: it was gradually discovered by journalists, writers and artists who pieced together the identity of the 'other' or the 'foreigner' as something outlandish, primitive and undeveloped. This view was determined by the policy of colonialism, according to which local people were considered uncivilised and, thus, in need of acculturation.

There were three social groups of civilians that the German administration encountered in Ober-Ost: 1) peasants who lived in rural areas, 2) Jewish traders and craftsmen who lived in urban areas, 3) well-off people, including gentry and citizens of liberal professions. Each of these groups were different in appearance and had customs and rituals of their own, so it was easy to distinguish between them. A much trickier question was establishing the ethnicity of peasants, as German soldiers did not speak the local languages and could not tell a Lithuanian from a Pole or Belarussian. Artists made portraits of ethnical types, using different strategies for their depiction. The least dangerous social groups that could not resist the invader (such as children, women and old people) were idealized, drawn or painted in light, positive colours. Another strategy was manifest in the representation of men: they were unflatteringly stereotyped; their social and ethnic image was negative. It should be mentioned that the attitude towards the locals was changing in the course of the war. For instance, at the beginning of the occupation, Lithuanian peasants were dismissed as primitive and boorish, whereas over time there appeared illustrated articles which presented Lithuanian culture, its folk music and folk art as valuable traditional heritage.

The greatest 'discovery' for the Germans during WWI was the traditional Jewish community that lived in the very heart of the Old Town of Vilnius. The images of Vilnius Jews as seen by the artists of the time were contradictory: delight and disgust here were inextricably mixed. To a certain extent, this view was conditioned by antisemitism and colonial ideology which polarized identities into 'us' and 'them'. Jewish culture and way of life were considered backward and archaic. Poverty, squalor, crime, prostitution dogged the Jewish quarters. The daily reality of ghettos and its dwellers looked menacing and repulsive. On the other hand, some German artists approached the same subject differently: they felt compassion for the Jews, admiring Jewish loyalty for their roots and faith. Some were enchanted by the Jewish quarters – an exotic medieval town with picturesque streets, the Great Synagogue and the Šnipiškių cemetery, and were charmed by their traditional practices and religious rituals. This counterpoint of opposite discourses encapsulates the German views of Jewish Vilnius during the war.

The chapter EXHIBITIONS IN BLEAK TIMES presents art life in Vilnius, which was in essence paralyzed. Nevertheless, the Ober-Ost administration sought to create an illusion that the city was living a peaceful life of normality and made effort to organise exhibitions. The main cultural initiative of the military regime was the establishment of a new institution *Wilnaer Arbeitsstuben.* Under its roof it housed workshops for craftsmen and an exhibition parlour where artefacts of local folk crafts were displayed. The institution's mission was to give

occupation for the unemployed so that they could earn some money and also to foster local folk art traditions. The four-section exhibition (Lithuanian, Polish, Belarusian and Jewish), curated by the German art historian Manfred Bühlmann, was ceremoniously opened by General Hermann von Eichhorn in June 1916. The display included exhibits from Vilnius societies and private collections; workshops were run by local painters. The exhibition was on for a year and received 40 000 visitors; German soldiers bought artefacts for the total of 250 000 marks.

Another exhibition on local art heritage entitled 'Vilnius-Minsk. Old Fine Crafts' was prompted by historical circumstances. In February 1918 the German army took over Minsk, and March saw the declaration of independence of the People's Republic of Belarus. The Republic survived until December of the same year when it was occupied by the Red Army. The leaders of the Belarus Republic – Anton Luckevich, Ivan Luckevich and Vaclav Lastauski lived in Vilnius and collaborated with the Germans, hoping to secure Germany's support in recognition of their state. They initiated the exhibition in the summer of 1918, with the intention to reveal the unique ethnic character of Belarusians, while the cities of Vilnius and Minsk were chosen as the main centres of Belarus culture. Among the exhibits were works of religious, applied and folk art from the entire territory of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which covered Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. The exhibition was curated by the German art historian Albert Ippel.

The Ober-Ost administration looked down on unsophisticated local art, holding it inferior to German art. The only kind of art that merited their attention was art at a lower level of hierarchy at the time – anonymous folk art and traditional historical crafts. Local artists were ignored, and the art scene was dominated by new players – German artists. In February 1917 and in February 1918 there were large group exhibitions of Königsberg and Munich art respectively. Exhibits were different in style, from symbolism to expressionism. Rather conspicuous among them were the portraits of Eastern Front commanders oozing ideological zeal. Also, there were exhibitions of artists who performed military service in Ober-Ost: 'Image and the Press' (1916) organised by the editorial board of *Wilnaer Zeitung* and 'Soldiers' Graphic Art' (1917) by *Zeitung der 10. Armee*. In 1917 *Wilnaer Zeitung* held another big show of 'Painters in Ober-Ost'. Max Heilmann and Alfred Holler had their solo exhibitions of paintings with Vilnius scenes.

Local artists could not exhibit their works during the war, the only exception being Jan Bułhak, a photographer of Vilnius. In 1917 he was given permission to hold a solo show of photographs in Vilnius; his photos were also printed in various German publications. Already before the war Bułhak had been taking pictures of architectural monuments for the City's Archive, revealing the diversity of art styles in Vilnius. The Germans appreciated his photos, as they were of high artistic quality and in line with the main *Kunstschutz* mission carried out by the occupiers: to describe, overview and disseminate the art and architectural monuments of occupied lands.

The above mentioned *Kunstschutz* mission is discussed in the chapter VILNIUS HERITAGE THROUGH THE GERMAN EYES. Ober-Ost was an unexplored territory for the occupiers, so their interest in its unknown heritage was natural. During the war, art historians everywhere in Europe became concerned about the destruction of monuments, and Germany set up a state institution whose function was to determine the condition of damaged monuments, and ensure their conservation and research. Famous German art historians Paul Clemen, Cornelius Gurlitt and others were sent to assess the condition of monuments in the Eastern Front and visited Vilnius, while the architectural historian Manfred Bühlmann was appointed chief conservator of Vilnius.

Vilnius was one of the most important transit, logistics and medical hubs in the rear of the Eastern Front, and many soldiers had either stayed in the city or passed through it. Among them there were people interested in the city's history and heritage. This interest partly stemmed from the late 19th century German mentality, fostered by *Landeskunde* and *Heimatschutz* movements, which showed sensitivity towards local cultural heritage. Soldiers' curiosity about occupied countries and their heritage

was related to the phenomenon of 'war tourism', which drew on the travelling experience acquired in peacetime. On the other hand, the Germans in occupied lands carried out a cultural programme of their own. One of its goals has been thus described by Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius: 'Native culture was to be bracketed by German institutions which would define native identity and direct their development. Finally, cultural policies also aimed to provide German soldiers with a sense of their mission'[1]. So the Germans undertook the mission of patrons of the local cultural heritage: they researched it and spread their findings among the public.

The press used different strategies to present this information. The newspaper for soldiers *Zeitung der 10. Armee* had a rubric entitled *Zwischen Wilia und Düna*, which featured separate monuments of Vilnius with accompanying drawings by artists Felix Krause, Gerd Paul, Wilhelm Güthlen and others. The newspaper also printed souvenir publications with images of Vilnius: postcards, leporellos, folders with reproductions; its illustrated supplement *Scheinwerfer. Bilderschau der Zeitung der 10. Armee* printed photographs of monuments and reproductions of paintings. The newspaper *Wilnaer Zeitung* ran a series of articles *Wanderstunden in Wilna*, published as a separate book in 1916. The articles were signed under the alias Paul Monty, co-authored by the writers, journalists and art historians Paul Fechter and Monty Jacobs, who shared with the readers their emotional insights about the city and subjective impressions of their travels. The key researcher of Vilnius art heritage was prof. Paul Weber, an art historian and museologist from Jena. Appointed as conservator of Lithuania's monuments by the military administration, he subsequently published an illustrated book called *Wilna eine Vergessene Kunststatte* (1917), introducing the city, its political history and architectural development to German readers. It was the first comprehensive overview of Vilnius art monuments in the historiography of Lithuanian art, while earlier studies of the subject had been fragmentary. In fact, this was an inventory of monuments, which German politicians needed as they planned to colonise the country, and colonisation required the register and control of its resources, cultural heritage included. Also, this was a professional assessment of the artistic value of monuments in the occupied country. Finally, the book had placed the local art of Vilnius on the map of Western European and German art, confirming the historical and artistic links between Lithuania and Germany, and thus legitimising the country's occupation. This kind of legitimation is implied in another illustrated book on Vilnius heritage *Die St. Annenkirche und die Klosterkirchen von St. Bernhardin und St. Michael in Wilna* (1918) by Walter Jäger. The choice of this unique architectural ensemble was not accidental, as for the Germans it attested to the influence of their Gothic architecture, and so they recognised this heritage as their own.

The German authors had positioned the heritage objects of Vilnius in the landscape of Western art history. Their works mingled various strands of discourse: romantic fascination with the city, its professional scrutiny, touristic inquisitiveness and colonial documentation. While writing their texts about Vilnius, the German researchers made use of the publications by local authors, kept contacts with local experts and artists, and sought their advice. Manfred Bühlmann was a friend of the photographer Jan Bułhak; the art historian Paul Weber, artists Fred Hendriok and Hans Rill mixed with the painter Antanas Žmuidzinavičius. Pre-war arguments between Lithuanians and Poles over the ethnic identity of the city and the title to its heritage did not fade during the war. Local intellectuals involved the German researchers into this 'internal strife', so that often the latter sided with one camp and contested claims of the other.

PART III. STORIES OF ARTISTS

The chapter CITIZENS OF VILNIUS explores the work of the most prominent local artists. Despite adverse circumstances and oppressive aggression, artists' creative impulses had broken through even more potently. A towering figure among the artists of the time was the sculptor Antoni Wiwulski. In

1 Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front. Culture, National Identity and Occupation in World War I*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 114.

1916 he erected a monument of Three Crosses, characterised by modern artistic idiom in the late *art nouveau* style, made of the innovative material – reinforced concrete. The monument proclaimed the Catholic identity of the city and jogged the historical memory of its inhabitants. During the war years Wiwulski also built monuments to national heroes, in which he embodied aspirations for freedom and resistance against occupiers; as a pretext to justify the erection of these monuments, he invoked the occupiers' anti-Russian rhetoric.

Another notable artist was the painter Stanislaw Bohusz-Siestrzencewicz. Among his works a monumental canvas called 'Famine in Vilnius' stands out: it metaphorically conveys the state of mind of the city's inhabitants, their uncertainty and the entire psychological gamut of feeling that came over them as the war neared its end. Artists that were strongly committed to the Lithuanian cause and that had banded together after the first exhibitions of Lithuanian art were now scattered by war in different cities of Russia and Western Europe. The only Lithuanian painter that stayed behind in Vilnius and continued to work for the community was Antanas Žmuidzinavičius. It was during the war that he painted his best works too – the landscapes of Vilnius environs, marked by escapism, flight into nature from the cruel daily reality of war.

The chapter ARTISTS OF NOBODY'S LAND is about German artists who resided in Vilnius and whose work went beyond the straitjacket of Ober-Ost propaganda art. The chapter focusses on five artists: Walter Buhe, Alfred Holler, Hermann Struck, Cornelia Gurlitt and Magnus Zeller. Visual propaganda was an inevitable companion of the armed conflict, but there also existed another kind of art at the time. Not all artists had succumbed to the glorification of militarism. Even those who worked for the German newspapers had a dim view of the official ideology and created art which was individualistic in style, suffused with strong emotion, heedful of the local people and sympathetic to their suffering. Walter Buhe, who worked for *Wilnaer Zeitung,* produced many drawings which captured the visual anthropology of the city and everyday routines of its dwellers. Alfred Holler, a military artist, painted subtle images of the Old Town, unveiling its sad, melancholic beauty. Cornelia Gurlitt, a graphic artist who served in Vilnius as a nurse, revealed a personal drama and the sorrows that the war inflicted on women. Magnus Zeller's lithographs rendered the horrors of war in an expressionist manner; the artist's sarcastic look was loaded with anti-war sentiment. The war had catapulted expressionism into the centre of the Vilnius art scene. Cornelia Gurlitt and Magnus Zeller employed it to speak of the torments of war and communicate a sense of catastrophe. Their work was artistic import that had little effect on the development of local art; nevertheless, the appearance of German expressionism in Lithuania was significant per se.

The impressions of the Eastern Front left a distinctive Jewish discourse in German art. While serving in the Kaiser's army in Ober-Ost, German intellectuals of Jewish origin discovered a community of Eastern European Jews that had retained a Judaism-based way of life. The German-Jewish painter Hermann Struck was shocked by the destitution of the Vilnius ghetto and at the same time beguiled by the moral strength of the Jews, faithful to the traditions of their forefathers. In his lithographs he created a mythological idealised image of *Ostjuden*. A similar image was fashioned by his fellow-countrymen: writers Arnold Zweig, Sammy Gronemann and Herbert Eulenberg, the artist Jacob Steinhardt and others. This image influenced the work of interwar Jewish artists in Vilnius; it was popular in post-war German literature and art. When the Nazis rose to power in Germany, artists of Jewish origin emigrated to other Western European states or to the historical Jewish lands in Palestine. Thus the works created during WWI left an imprint in the art of interwar Vilnius, Germany and post-war Israel.

IN CONCLUSION

The art created during the dramatic years of the First World War was not a logical continuation of Lithuanian art that existed at the turn of the 20th century. This art was born under the extreme circumstances of occupation. The body of art produced during this period in Vilnius is marked by asymmetry: a small amount of works by local artists

and the copious output by German artists. German artists were soldiers: some had the official status of a 'war painter', some worked as illustrators for the propaganda publications, some served in medical, military or logistic divisions. In 1916–1918 German artists dominated the art scene in Vilnius: they made art, organised art life and exhibited their works.

German artists' attitude towards the war was changing over time: inflamed by patriotic fever, they rushed to the front, expecting a quick victory, but after confronting the meat-grinder of war, they had second thoughts about it. Their stance had also been influenced by the views prevalent before the war: liberal, leftist and pacifist orientations were enhanced by traumatic experiences. Their work evolved in the course of the war too, the subjects of their images becoming ever bolder. As social aspects and the topic of poverty gained a larger presence, artists exposed the pain and hardship of the people pushed to the bottom of human existence. The motif of beggars was recurring in graphic works by Walter Buhe, Hermann Struck, Cornelia Gurlitt, Magnus Zeller, Jacob Steinhardt, Bruno Steigueber, Erich Feyerabend, Gerd Paul and others. Their heart-wrenching images of beggars might as well be considered a symbol of Vilnius during the war.

Such works help elucidate the role that artists and intellectuals of the occupying state – imperial Germany – played in Ober-Ost. The research has clearly indicated that there can be no blanket assessment for all the artists and their work. Each case was individual and complex, in terms of a human being concerned, his or her art and ideas. Moreover, one and the same artist could produce propaganda works and works neutral in content, and even critical or anti-war works. The study of the German artists who worked in Vilnius during WWI suggests that intellectuals in times of war can play very different roles and a simple black-and-white model does not apply here, that there is always a question of personal responsibility and the possibility of choice.

The experience of Ober-Ost had bound together German artists, writers, art historians and publishers stationed in the Eastern Front. In post-war Germany they maintained their relationship: they socialised and worked together, remembering Lithuania and Vilnius as a dark and tragic episode of their life, indelibly engraved in their minds. On the other hand, it was not devoid of a peculiar haunting charm. The relationship of German intellectuals with the city was summed up by the writer Herbert Eulenberg in his review of Paul Monty's book *Wanderstunden in Wilna*: 'Vilnius is a beautiful city. But its beauty has so far been uncognized... Whether we will be able to keep Vilnius or not, there is one thing that we cannot be accused of in the future – that there was a lack of understanding or recognition on our part.'[2]

The culture and art produced by local and German artists during the First World War under the conditions of occupation, aggression and indoctrination are an integral part of the multicultural polyphony of Vilnius art and a valuable addition to the overall picture of the 20th century art history of Vilnius.

Translated by Daina Valentinavičienė

2 Herbert Eulenberg, Wanderstunden in Wilna, *Vossische Zeitung*, 1916 12 21.