

estonian **Art**

I 2010



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Let's Refuse to Be What We Are (Supposed to Be)!

Airi Triisberg

Based on the title *Let's Talk About Nationalism!*, it would be tempting to look at this exhibition* in relation to theories of public space, as it is precisely the medium of talk that constitutes a core notion in the liberal concept of the public sphere, most notably elaborated by Jürgen Habermas. The curatorial statement by Rael Artel seems to support the parallel with Habermas, insofar as it stresses the importance of contemporary art as a site for holding public discussions. Nevertheless, the curator's preoccupation with conflict actually indicates a different dynamics of democratic politics, where 'talk' proves insufficient as a tool for political participation. Therefore, a critical account of the liberal concept of the public sphere also raises interesting questions in relation to the exhibition.

However, as much as the concept of the liberal public sphere is a contested one, to some extent, the exhibition *Let's Talk About Nationalism!* seems to have been shaped by one of its key propositions, in the sense that the curator's intention of challenging the 'currently prevalent national discourse, and to create a counterweight in the public sphere' doesn't give a definite answer as to whether the focus is on the concept of a single, comprehensive public sphere or on a competing (counter)public spheres. It is not only the uneasy relationship between the exhibition and its venue, in terms of whether the national art museum is supposed to form a part of the dominant or the counter-public sphere in this particular case, but also the fact that the notion

of identity is almost exclusively addressed as an instrument for engendering normativity rather than a potential tool of empowerment that I find problematic in this context. At the same time, it should also be noted that even the Habermasian definition of the public sphere appears to be quite operative, insofar as it allows a conceptual distinction from the state which has effectively been put to use in the framework of *Let's Talk About Nationalism!* in order to criticize the ideological and institutional manifestations of the state.

This place between ideology and identity that forms the focal point of *Let's Talk About Nationalism!* seems to be precisely the framework of political and cultural institutions that nation-states use in order to shape our contemporary realities and subjectivities. From that perspective, the exhibition addresses various ways in which state power is enacted and reproduced in the dominant public sphere, such as through the education system, media etc. Nevertheless, it is not so much the legitimacy of the nation-state that is in question as the particular processes of subjugation and of making subjects which are de-constructed by showing the performative and repetitive aspects that form a crucial basis of the formation of national identities, such as in Katarina Zdjelar's video *Don't Do It Wrong!* or Jens Haaning's collage *Estonia, Thursday, November 12, 2009*.

One of the main contentions against the liberal concept of the public sphere is based on arguments that reveal the impossibility of possessing a fully closed identity. In contemporary critical

Katarina Zdjelar
Don't Do It Wrong! 2007
 Video and sound installation
 10 min 13 sec





Tanja Muravskaja
Estonian Race. 2010
Digital C-print
á 110 x 87 cm



Artur Žmijewski
Them. 2007
Video. 26 min 25 sec
Foksal Gallery Foundation

theory, identities are seen to be formed through political struggles, conflicts and antagonisms that simultaneously constitute and destabilize identities. Moreover, public spaces are conceived as pluralist battlegrounds where conflicts emerge without any possibility of achieving a rational consensus. Such irreconcilability of conflict is addressed in the works *Monuments* by Tanja Muravskaja and *Children of the Revolution* by John Phillip Mäkinen, which accentuate the confrontation between the nationality-based division line of two memory collectives striving for hegemony in the particular context of Estonia. However, the frontiers of conflict visualized by Muravskaja and Mäkinen leave virtually no room for the possibility of transgressing the essentialist notion of fixed identities in order to shift and reconstitute antagonistic relations. An important question emerges: How can contemporary art create an arena where social identities can be negotiated and contested?

The exhibition *Let's Talk About Nationalism!* presents two scenarios of how the conflictual nature of the public sphere(s) can be mediated through art practices. The video *Them* by Artur Žmijewski could perhaps be interpreted as an attempt to control social conflict by creating a set of rules that allow group identification and conflict to be produced and articulated, while limiting the struggle over meaning and hegemony within the realm of visual images. From that perspective, the ostensible failure of communication that is evident in the final episode of the video shouldn't be seen as being too pessimistic here, since the stakes are actually not very high: Žmijewski seems to be more concerned with proving that the consensual model is non-functional rather than providing a horizon into which re-negotiated social relations can be channelled after leaving the 'social studio' he has created.



Joanna Rajkowska
Airways. 2008
2-channel video installation
22 min 20 sec

John Phillip Mäkinen
Children of the Revolution. 2007
Installation (textile)
Art Museum of Estonia



Airways by Joanna Rajkowska, or more precisely the part of it documenting a flight over Budapest, also depends on creating a controlled framework which is not determined by a fixed set of rules but rather by the fragility of a situation in which a violent articulation of conflict can become fatal to all the passengers on board. Moreover, Rajkowska's departure point is different from Žmijewski's in the sense that she reverses the power relations that are prevalent 'outside', in society. By creating a situation in which minorities become a majority, Rajkowska abandons the discourse of victimization that, in my opinion, forms a bit of a weak point of the exhibition *Let's Talk About Nationalism!*, insofar as the exhibition predominantly stresses exclusions, segregations and discriminations that (ethno-)nationalism produces. In relation to the



Jens Haaning
Eesti (Estonia). 2010
 Mural, installation
 882 x 657 x 396 cm

exhibition, it isn't that the critique of the ethnocentrically constructed public sphere – in the form prevalent specifically in Eastern Europe, but also elsewhere – isn't urgent and necessary. On the contrary. I want to point out the relative lack of attention to the processes through which the ethno-national systems of power and knowledge can be challenged. From that perspective, Joanna Rajkowska's *Airways* forms a notable exception that contests the individualizing effects of identification processes administered by the ethno-nationally oriented state apparatuses and offers ways to resist and alter the subjectivities that are dictated by the 'norm'. In that sense, Rajkowska points out another urgency, besides necessity, for taking a critical stance towards the subjectification mechanisms administered by nation-states: it is of equal importance to continuously generate new subjectivities and identities, to refuse to be what nation-states allow us to be.



Tanja Muravskaja
Monuments. 2008
 Limestone, glass

* The exhibition *Let's Talk About Nationalism! Between Ideology and Identity* (curated by Rael Artel) took place at the Kumu Art Museum from 5 February to 25 April 2010.

Airi Triisberg
 (1982), art critic and cultural theoretician.

Eva gives birth to earth Johannes Saar



Eva Labotkin (b 1982) is a young Estonian video artist, whose works are still in search of a critical background system. However, her undertakings are already producing benevolently 'old-fashioned', competing interpretative chains. The air is thick with *Blut-und-Boden* (blood and soil) rhetoric, existential breakdowns and slumbers, a kind of finalism. Fatalist proverbs bubble up to the lips, so why not a ritual funeral mood – earth to earth? Neo-conservatism in younger Estonian video art? Plus post-Freudianism? Or perhaps Eva Labotkin, together with Epp Kubu (b 1982) and Marge Monko (b 1976), leading the feminist protest against the conservative depiction of women?

What to think of Labotkin's video of 2007, *Woman in the Field* – a metaphor of woman who gives birth to a bellyful of black earth? The never-ending repetitions of rise and decline in a semiotic dead end? Good old Sigmund would

Eva Labotkin
Woman in the Field. 2007
 Video. 3 min 6 sec
 Video stills

Installation by Eva Labotkin
 displayed at the exhibition
Let's Talk About Nationalism!
 in Kumu Art Museum.
 In the front:
Separated Ground. 2010
 Installation. Soil, wood.
 Back on the left:
Belt. 2010.
 Video. 6 min 20 sec
 Back on the right:
Woman in the Field. 2007
 Video. 3 min 6 sec

probably not lose his head: procreation and death drives, hand-in-glove, Eros and Thanatos. Puffing on his cigar, he contentedly returns to his armchair.

On the other hand, there's the feminist-Socratic question: why is woman mainly defined by giving birth? Don't certain images or, in other words, an iconographic strategy, suggest desolate biologism? You have been born a woman and thus you will remain ... Doesn't patriarchal providence force the feminist war of liberation to start with deriding social roles? A pretty floral smock worn by Marge Monko, black earth spilling from Eva Labotkin's phantom pregnancy, and Epp Kubu thrashing around in public space in model feminine fits of hysterics, exactly as described in psychiatry textbooks. All this contains so much slavish applause to the sexist iconography of women that the whole thing turns into a masquerade, posturing and myth.



Marge Monko
I Don't Eat Flowers. 2009
Colour photograph
100 x 70 cm

Komar and Melamid, if I am allowed this distant parallel, undermined the ideological hagiography of the Soviet Union, and successfully, with too shiny icons. Cindy Sherman – apologies for a bit more obvious comparison – dramatised the social gender into no less than one-woman theatre. Let us then try to fend off the chauvinist devil with the weapon of theatricality in Estonia as well.

And so it has happened: the tormenting intellectual body of knowledge has been provided with excessively moving illustrations. This 'excess', which turns the established framework into social carnival, is precisely the remedy for iconographic hegemony. Everybody knows why Grandma had such a large mouth but, after Eva, Epp and Marge, they also know why the Red Riding Hood had such red cheeks. Because this is what Mister Artist wanted.

I've got myself into a mess here. I tend to answer the 'old school' question "What does it represent?". What do women want? Shall I reply to this too? Of course not. I really wanted to avoid the discourse where woman constitutes the question to which man has an answer. No success, alas. Instead, what we have here is a session of questions and answers. I tended to see these artists as a task needing to be solved, and for some reason I was convinced that the solution 'lies within them'. At best, this prejudice confirms only the following: Labotkin, Kubu and Monko are justifiably fed up with being mere illustrations to the male way of thinking, and with a society that tries to cultivate the 'unhealthy' femininity in them: the fickle mind and consenting to gender restrictions.

Johannes Saar

(1965), art critic and curator, head of the Center for Contemporary Arts, Estonia. See also www.cca.ee



Epp Kubu
Weeping and Moaning. 2009
Video



Kristina Norman
After War. 2009
Installation
Display at the Tallinn Art Hall
in 2010

Around the Golden Soldier Agne Narusyte

Kristina Norman's installation *After War* has brought me back to questions I had safely tucked under the label 'no longer important'. The 'I' is significant because this piece pricks the sense of identity; it rouses memory, thus pointing to the particular place where art disturbs an individual viewer, where it really works rather than remaining mute like an alien object.

So, who is the 'I' to whom all the works presented in the Kunsthalle speak? It is a 'proper' Lithuanian without a mixed background who knows that history has finally corrected its mistakes and there is no longer a need to harbour hatred towards others. This 'I' has followed the troubles of the Bronze Soldier in Estonia with a mixture of relief and apprehension, always silently supporting the Estonian cause and seeing how people from other European countries, who have never felt the earth vibrate under approaching Soviet tanks, cannot understand the situation adequately.

By making the Golden Soldier, however, Kristina Norman has disrupted the pleasant layer of self-evident 'truths' that had been protecting the safety of my convictions. The installation works by establishing opposing points of view



The relocated
Bronze Soldier in the
Military Cemetery,
Tallinn, 9 May 2010



Kristina Norman
First Encounter. 2010
Drawing

Kristina Norman
Community. 2009
Installation



and constantly shifting them, denying the viewer a safe and stable position. Everything revolves around the horizontal figure of the golden soldier; there is neither beginning nor end. Yet, to me, it starts with the video of Russians putting flowers at the feet of the Bronze Soldier, still in its original place; then my gaze zooms into a tiny opening – a screen showing footage from the Soviet years, when the same ceremony was formalized, performed with orchestrated respect and grandeur. It flickers and disturbs the peaceful ritual of present day, ‘real,’ Russians – a motley crowd of weary, but likeable people who, nevertheless, hold onto this single sacred object to affirm their identity. This tiny screen is like the past haunting the present, a powerful memory underneath every moment of today that does not allow me to identify fully with the action on the big screen. I see blood, betrayal and death under the black-and-white aesthetics, which destroys the apparent innocence of the red flowers laid at the soldier’s feet in the present.

This feeling is enhanced by the sounds from another video: the riot, windows smashing, the shouting, the sirens. These are the same people, I realise, the people bringing flowers. To me, the riot in Tallinn in protest against the removal of the soldier signifies another night almost twenty years ago: then Soviet tanks crushed people in Vilnius and, even though the soldiers were of different nationalities, they were obeying orders given in Russian. This is also a memory that still shapes our present. The installation is disturbing because it shows how the removal of an object

has torn a hole in the fabric of our new reality – so easily – and let the rage and the threat of the past back in. But, and this is most important, it does not let me adopt an unambiguous position, because I don’t know who should be held more responsible for the outburst: those who were smashing windows (bad guys, no doubt) or those who wanted to delete the last trace of traumatic history by mindlessly excising a part of Russian identity?

The last footage of the artist bringing a ‘golden’ soldier to replace the bronze one shifts the point of view again. In the presence of other videos already discussed, the artist’s interference with the public space and national feelings seems



Kristina Norman
We Are Not Alone In The Universe. 2010
Installation
In front: 1:1 copy of the sculpture by Mati Jakson

to be equally mindless: whatever her intentions, it may just be the spark needed to blow up the peace of everyday life. The same people who had been laying flowers come back; they do not care that the soldier – now golden – is not the same. There is a man here phoning somebody to say, excitedly: ‘Come here, quickly, the soldier is back!’ This is where, hearing the sincerity of his voice, I am shaken: what if the artist ends up disturbing, not the peace, but indifference? The indifference that makes sure that uncomfortable feelings, identities and memories stay buried.

Kristina Norman’s *After War* works because it denies the possibility of a clear answer; it makes me see the situation from positions I don’t want to be in; it even makes me internalise opposing views – the way that the artist with a double, Russian and Estonian, background can feel it, I imagine. From the moment I saw the exhibition, the two irreconcilable interpretations of events have stayed with me, uneasily, constantly shifting like the advertisement template used in the installation: the square with the soldier and without. I leave with a question instead of the statement which I came here with.

On the other hand, I suspect that Kristina Norman has also subtly undermined the seriousness with which we take the question of national identity. The soldier floats horizontally rather than standing – is he a fallen soldier in the war of ideas? The ‘gold’ is fake; in fact, the material it is made of is less durable, lighter and more humble than bronze. Is this the Golden Calf of the Soviet Empire meant to replace the truth with bliss-

ful oblivion? Isn’t the artist also questioning the attitudes of Russians who don’t even notice that the material is wrong? Russians who have also lost something by having focused on a piece of metal? Who worship misinterpreted symbols of the past and would, perhaps, be better off if they tried to live in the present instead? Or does it represent the ‘golden’ solution of the Estonian government that has thus destroyed the possibility of peaceful co-existence?

The other installations in the Kunsthalle seem to confirm the idea that Kristina Norman is questioning the reasons of both sides. The glass cross **, which was supposed to shine but doesn’t, is a parody of itself. The space next to its pompous religiousness becomes even more conspicuously empty – so empty, in fact, that it can only be filled with something imaginary, maybe even more threatening to what the cross represents than a simple bronze statue of a soldier. And then, the whole war over statues boils down to the UFO that was seen (or not) by somebody who wanted to believe (or not) and that now gives a false aura of significance to an insignificant place and community. It shows the relativity of all deeds and the meaning we like to wear in our lives. The bronze soldier, rather than being the centre of controversy, could be like the UFO: a temporary flash that fades into the oblivion of history. As I look at it hanging in the air, I cannot help thinking that, ironically, the best resolution of national conflict would probably mean that this work of art became irrelevant, a piece of history to be discussed in boring art history classes with the same somnolent appreciation as we dedicate to, say, Trajan’s Column, struggling to remember what it was exactly that the emperor did to deserve such a long story carved in stone.

* The exhibition *We Are Not Alone In The Universe* by Kristina Norman (curator Anders Härm) took place at the Tallinn Art Hall from 10 April to 9 May 2010.

** The glass cross or the so-called The War of Independence Victory Column in the center of Tallinn. See also Linda Kaljundi’s article *The Spatialisation of Politics and/or the Politicisation of Space* in the *Estonian Art* 2/2009.

Kristina Norman

(1979), artist, represented Estonia at the 53rd Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition in 2009.

Agne Narusyte

(1970), PhD, art historian, published a monograph on the aesthetics of boredom. Currently Head of Art History and Theory Department, Vilnius Academy of Arts.

An artist and his double

Anu Allas

Toomik's Film. Director Marko Raat; camera Heilika Pikkov and Marko Raat; editor Madli Lääne; sound Ivo Felt; producer Ivo Felt. 78 min, Allfilm 2008
Father, Son and the Spirit of Theatre. Director Marko Raat; camera Marko Raat, Rein Kotov and Heilika Pikkov; editor Madli Lääne; sound Ivo Felt; producer Ivo Felt. 40 min, Allfilm 2009

Marko Raat's two portrait documentaries – *Toomik's Film* and *Father, Son and the Spirit of Theatre* – are rather similar and linked in many ways, although the protagonists and the different contexts and scales of the films give common features dissimilar meanings. The first portrays Jaan Toomik, one of the best known Estonian artists internationally since the late 1990s, who has become a sort of embodiment – either of glory or misery – of contemporary art in Estonian society. The other film focuses on Alar Sudak, a night guard and a 'life artist' whose dream is to appear on stage. *Toomik's Film* is among the films introducing Estonian artists, commissioned by the Artists' Association in the last decade, and is certainly one of the most ambitious and interesting of them all. *Father, Son and the Spirit of Theatre* was part of the series of Estonian Stories commissioned by Estonian National Broadcasting and the Estonia Film Foundation, which compiles grass-roots cultural-historical chronicles, recording the 'life around us' in all its diversity.

Jaan Toomik in *Toomik's Film*.
Director Marko Raat, Allfilm 2008

The first film concentrates on 'art' and the 'artist' (according to the director, the main issue here is: how do nightmares become works of art?), and on Toomik's idea of making a full-length feature film. The second film depicts 'life', dominated by a hopeless and obsessive desire to become an actor, plus various parallel stories, the colourfulness of which always overshadows Sudak's real attempts in theatre. *Toomik's Film* contains fragments of the artist's videos and performances, a number of close-ups and long shots of his paintings, which harmonise and reveal Toomik's searching and doubts, but form a certain constant level in contrast to the film's general spirit of being unfinished. Whatever Toomik says or whatever others say about him, the works lead their own lives – in art history, museums and exhibitions – and this very strong core withstands the most diverse interpretations. Excerpts of Sudak's (artistic name Elaan) performances at summer art festivals, in a drama school hall and elsewhere primarily cause embarrassment and indecision, unexpectedly disrupting and even



disturbing the viewer who is trying to follow his 'genuine' life, controlled by fantasy and urges. In Toomik's case, there are any number of possible keys to his works; in Sudak's case, there are none, not even the knowledge of whether his performances and productions should be regarded as signs of hope or as failures, confirmations of the fact that 'art' can often come second to 'life' – or whether we should consider all of them as events worthy of attention, although they are always overshadowed by the personality of the protagonist.

Besides the general parallels of the two films, Toomik and Sudak are also directly connected, as Elaan is among the characters linked to Toomik who has taken part in his videos and performances. In *Toomik's Film*, Sudak turns up in the very first minutes, as the main character in Toomik's short film *Communion* (2007) and earlier in his video *Untitled (Man)* (2001). Toomik, however, is not mentioned in Sudak's film, as there the protagonist has three 'father figures' – the judge, the accused and imagined dialogue partners rolled into one – the theatre directors Eino Baskin, Kalju Komissarov and Elmo Nüganen. At vari-



Alar Sudak aka Elaan in
Father, Son and the Spirit of Theatre. Director Marko Raat,
Allfilm 2009

ous times, these three have excluded Sudak from one or another drama school, or instead have given him hope.

It would be tempting to say that Toomik and Sudak both personify the same energy in different forms, one on the one side of the often fragile and moving border between 'artist' and 'madman', and the other on the other side. Thus, Sudak becomes a kind of distorting mirror of Toomik. Several shots in the films strengthen this (e.g. Toomik's dances in the videos *Dancing Home*, 1995, and *Dancing with My Father*, 2005, as well as Sudak's dance on the stage of the Haapsalu community hall; Toomik jogs in the forest, listening to baby crying in his earphones, and Sudak disappears between the trees in *Communion*). Equally, the material of both films, and their main elements allow us to put together the completely opposite story, i.e. on the basis of Sudak's life the myth of a man of genius (always unrecognised) is presented, and shows Toomik as a weird martyr. Their activities nevertheless contain some essential differences, which in the end turn out to be crucial: Toomik's silence, concentration and self-restraint, and Sudak's lavish and partly charming rhetoric, which being incessant, manages to exhaust itself. Toomik's doubts and revaluations contrast with Sudak's constant compulsive self-expression. Toomik and his works could therefore provide material for a few other films, whereas Sudak would probably remain essentially the same throughout.

The failures on which both films are based – Toomik's film-making proceeds slowly and laboriously and is never completed, while Sudak's stage dreams are never properly fulfilled – play different roles in defining the protagonists. Making a feature film is something new for Toomik, something that he has not yet 'mastered' and that requires the artist to adopt new role models and ways of thinking. Compared with his habitual undertakings, such a loose process reveals something different in himself as well. If Toomik's film had been realised, the focus of the portrait would have been placed elsewhere. Going along with this probably unsuccessful idea shows the director's trust in his 'subject matter', as well as constituting one of the main values of the film: it does not try to



Toomik's Film.
Director Marko Raat
Allfilm 2008

complete a human being, but leaves him open (the film ends with Toomik's question: what do you think?). Sudak, on the other hand, does not undergo great changes during the film; his desire to perform on stage acquires new dimensions and finds new outlets (including his confusing court trials), finally culminating in the Old Testament truth that the sins of the father are visited upon the son (Sudak's son has been excluded from a drama school, allegedly because of his father). In Toomik's case, failure makes it possible to shatter the image of an ordinary artist who purposefully moves towards his new masterpieces, and instead show him as a human riddled with doubts. In Toomik's case, the risk is well justified because of his solid work, so that no fantasy of his, no failure or doubt, will totally define him (this could easily happen with a portrait film about a young and unknown artist, should anyone commission one). Making a film about Toomik thus offers many possibilities and choices, as well as freedom, if the attempt is bold. As for Sudak, failure is an inseparable part of him, and without it there would be no film; the core of the story lies in his human qualities in an extremely intense form: obsessions, illusions, fantasies and a rigid refusal to re-evaluate

or abandon them, which inevitably adds a touch of the sublime and tragic.

Toomik's Film received a lively, succinct and mainly positive response in the Estonian media. At the same time, it showed how many pretensions are evoked by portraying a controversial person such as Toomik, who is, after all, a significant 'hero' for a small culture. It also showed how many debates emerged about whether the film-makers allowed the 'right' people to have their say, whether the artist was shown in 'suitable' situations, whether it all had to do with the personal experience and ideas of one or another person regarding Toomik, and whether the emerging picture was in fact 'objective'. On the other hand, nobody had any pretensions concerning Sudak and how he was portrayed; it wouldn't have mattered if it had been a longer film, as he does not have to represent anyone but himself. This, of course, is the advantage of a 'madman' compared to an 'artist'.

Jaan Toomik

(1961), painter, video and performance artist.

Alar Sudak

(1964), performer.

Marko Raat

(1973), director of several documentaries and features, video art works, shorts, TV productions. Has been involved in several art projects.

Anu Allas

(1977), art historian and critic.

Alar Sudak in *Father, Son and the Spirit of Theatre*. Director Marko Raat, Allfilm 2009



Work-based solidarity is killed

Interview with Eiki Nestor

Based on the exhibition *Blue-Collar Blues**



Eero Epner: It is typical that an exhibition about workers has been organised by intellectuals. The issue here is not only that they are art historians, but there is also a wider political spectre, where Social Democrats are called 'the party of intellectuals'; they have no extensive workers' support, but nevertheless see themselves as a party representing blue-collar interests.

Eiki Nestor: This is by no means peculiar to Estonia. The Social Democratic parties in our part of the world, i.e. in Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark, have more or less the same electorate: centrist or centre-left intellectuals, plus an active contingent of workers. The more passive part of the workers' movement votes for communists or fascists - exactly as in Estonia. The difference

in popularity [Estonian Social Democrats are only the fourth largest party - Ed] is caused by the fact that the group of salary-earners is not as organised, active or knowledgeable of their rights.

Why so little self-confidence? Because of the Soviet era?

Exactly. Had perestroika happened 10-15 years earlier, the Estonian trade union movement would be much stronger than it is now. However, perestroika occurred at a moment when society was undergoing extensive changes and was increasingly becoming an information society. So many things coincided. Incidentally, the membership in Western trade unions is also diminishing. Why? Because trade unions are rather conservative and alter their collective identity very slowly, and all of the

Tellervo Kalleinen & Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen
I Love My Job. 2008
4 channel video installation
Video still

trade unions in the West missed the change to the information society.

In Estonia, the most difficult issue to tackle in workers' social inactivity are the terms and symbols violated by the Soviet power. My younger son, enrolled in one of the elite schools in Tallinn, got a '2' [the lowest mark - Ed], because he said to the headmaster in a lesson of social science that trade unions stood for the rights of their members. 'No-no,' said the headmaster, 'trade unions are Soviet-era organisations that distributed vouchers for sanatoriums and fridges, and this is no longer necessary in the market economy.'

Besides, there is now a duty to belong to a party. If you are not a member, you will not get a job or you will be sacked. Imagine! And if you join a trade union, we will throw you out of the party. It happens quite often. How can you then tell people: come, let's see what can be done; let's show some solidarity...

Fear?

Yes, there is fear. However, the trade unions are not totally without blame either; they have not been able to establish themselves. People need more than pretty slogans; they want something more specific.

With my first question, I also meant that intellectuals and art exhibitions fighting for the rights of blue-collar workers inevitably see things from 'the outside', as it were. Does this mean greater idealism and less pragmatism, being less 'specific', as was mentioned above?

The background, jobs and education of people are very different, but they are united by their tolerance. Social Democrats are normally elected by people who are able to understand other kinds of people or people in different situations. An intolerant person will never vote for Social Democrats. He could have ten university degrees, but if he is angry he will not choose Social Democrats. Blue-collar workers, by the way, always think that 'there are too many employees in offices', who are all free-loaders, do not understand blue-collar needs, and are eating up 'money earned by us'.

Most visitors to that art exhibition were probably also salary-earning white-collar workers, with a few unemployed thrown in. If I were an unemployed Tallinner who learned about this exhibition, I might have gone too. The unemployed perhaps feel better knowing that someone is thinking about them.

How much solidarity does Estonian society feel with blue-collar workers?

Ten years ago, the lack of solidarity worried me more, but the problem still exists, and I see an

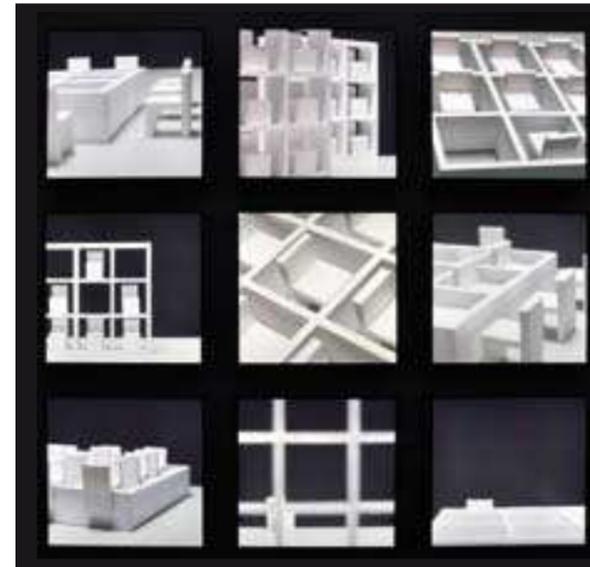
Dario Azzellini & Oliver Ressler
5 Factories – Worker Control in Venezuela. 2006
6-channel video installation. Video still



Johnson and Johnson
The End of Work. 2009
Live web stream

interesting paradox here. On the one hand, Estonians show enormous solidarity, for example in singing at song festivals or in joint undertakings to clean up the countryside or tackle other such worthy tasks. In the past, people did not merely go to song festivals to perform some pieces of music. They went there to sing TOGETHER; t h i s was the whole idea. There are many other similar manifestations of solidarity born out of nationality in Estonia, e.g singing against or for something etc. However, work-based solidarity was killed off a long time ago. In the 1930s, Finnish or Swedish trade unions were no stronger than Estonian trade unions, but now the differences are drastic, and all due to the 50 years of occupation. Job-based solidarity was destroyed, and to bring it to life again... sighs

Why am I saying all this? Because there is another interesting paradox: it has been easier to set up stronger trade unions where people work on their own, for example among bus



Dénes Farkas
SUPERSTRUCTURE
(these are not bloody exit signs).
2009
installation

Santiago Sierra
89 Huichols
2006

Blue-collar workers used to have a very positive image; they were depicted in literature, art and elsewhere as heroes. Today, I cannot recall a single work of art showing this image.

One of the most drastic shocks in the past twenty years has been connected with the prestige of working life. A place of work that used to mean a lot might count for nothing now. At granny's birthday party in the mid-1980s - a typical Estonian feast with shots of vodka, potatoes and jellied meat - when the topic of jobs came up, I remember how proudly people said: 'I am working at the Kirov collective fishery farm.' Everybody was impressed. And now? 'What's that place called?' I have a specific case in my own family: someone works in a shop selling spare parts for cars, and it's talked about only in whispers - it's embarrassing! During the Soviet era, such a shop was honoured by ministers! Because of your job, you are a totally different person than you were twenty years ago. How do you think these people feel?

* Exhibition *Blue-Collar Blues* (curator Anders Härm) was shown in the Tallinn Art Hall and the Tallinn Art Hall Gallery from 21 December 2009 to 31 January 2010.

Eiki Nestor

(1953), member of the Estonian Parliament since 1992, has held several ministerial posts and has been chairman of the Social Democratic Party.

Forum Marge Monko



I first photographed the Krenholm textile factory in Narva in autumn 2008, at a time when the media were talking about the economic slump and a bill dealing with a new employment contract. I read in the papers that over 1200 people had been made redundant at factory in early summer, most of whom were women with no knowledge of the official language.

To be honest, on my way to Narva I had no idea how I, as an artist, could describe the given problem.

The manufacturing complex was founded in 1857. Both of my great-great-grandmothers on my mother's side worked there. One reputedly vowed that she would not let her own daughters slave away in the textile factory. During the Soviet era, Krenholm was one of the largest textile manufacturers in the whole empire. The complex is now sitting almost totally abandoned. The factory buildings with their massive 19th century architecture are certainly impressive. Total silence reigns in the endless inner courtyards, so that every tiny sound seems eerie. Beyond the wall, scarcely 30 m away across the River Narva, is Russia – the apartment houses of Ivangorod. And, for some reason, the whole place is crawling with cats.

After my second visit to Narva, I decided that I would not photograph the women made redundant from Krenholm. An image of a north-eastern Russian-speaking unemployed woman is probably fixed in our minds anyway.

On 8 October, I watched the political programme *Forum* on Estonian TV. It discussed the new employment contract law. The par-

ticipants included the Minister of Justice Rein Lang, Tarmo Kriis from the Estonian Employers' Confederation, Harri Taliga from the Confederation of Estonian Trade Unions, Jaak Aab representing the Centre Party and the host Andres Kuusk. The law is shaped by neo-liberal labour policy. Its main aim is to guarantee that an enterprise can re-profile itself if necessary, and get rid of its workforce as quickly and cheaply as possible. The opposition can only argue over details. The new law focuses on flexibility and constant individual development of employees, and also remarkable knowledge of job legislation. Nobody has bothered to think about how mothers at home with small children can possibly maintain their competitiveness, and that the new law will totally cast aside people aged 50–60, because flexibility is now placed above experience. It seems scandalous that not a single woman or anyone speaking Russian as their mother tongue took part in that, or subsequent, television debates. And when Rein Lang said: "*Krenholm is precisely one of those [enterprises] which can only exist in a situation where there are a large number of low-wage unqualified workers, and this, thank heavens, is constantly diminishing in Estonia*", I decided to use the material of the programme in my work.

I decided to stage a video where the programme guests are the same kind of women of whom Lang talked, behind their backs, with undisguised right-wing arrogance. This form of staging was suggested to me by the Soviet-era workers' theatre model and the productions of the Rimini Protocol operating in Germany.

Marge Monko. *Forum*
2010. Single channel video
23 min 42 sec



By the time I started to work on the video, the law on the new employment contract had already been passed, and the number of unemployed was rapidly moving towards one hundred thousand. I managed to find the actors through an announcement placed on the labour market board website. I met Jekaterina, Larissa, Ljudmilla, Olga and Ljuba in November 2009, and Zinaida joined us later. They are all unemployed women over 50.

At the beginning of the video, the host introduces the actors by their first names and explains their roles. The alienation effect introduced by Brecht should preserve the viewers' sense of criticism towards the text. As a result of discus-

sions during the rehearsals, we decided to add to the first staged part another part in which the women talk about their own experience in job-seeking. The title *Forum* comes from the Latin word used by the original programme, and denoted a meeting place in ancient Rome where people gathered to have public political debates.

An excerpt of the video is available at
www.margemonko.com

Marge Monko

(1976), artist and curator, Associate Professor of Photography at the Estonian Academy of Arts.

Art and Identity: *The Soviet Woman in Estonian Art*

Michael Schwab



View of the exhibition
The Soviet Woman in Estonian Art
in Kumu Art Museum, 2010

The exhibition *The Soviet Woman in Estonian Art* (8 April–26 September 2010) at the Kumu Art Museum in Tallinn, curated by Katrin Kivimaa and Kādi Talvoja, introduces two controversial topics. On the one hand, it looks at a clearly identified image of ‘woman’ in the art of a particular time and place; on the other, it introduces examples of artistic practice for which additional stylistic and artistic considerations are relevant. Both themes are notoriously difficult to address, even when they are approached independently. By linking them together, the exhibition sets itself up to add yet another dimension to the discussions.

The exhibition’s concern is spread across two seemingly different domains: the artistic and the political. By being shown in a museum of fine art, *The Soviet Woman* suggests that however propagandistic the art of the Soviet area might have been, there is still a way to readdress the works on display as ‘art’. The challenge lies in finding an understanding of art through which this collection of works (mostly paintings) can be ‘liberated’ from its politically pre- or over-determined subject matter. This sets in motion an additional expectation concerning gender politics: provided such a liberating operation were possible, what understanding of ‘the Soviet woman’, or ‘woman’ in general, would we be left with?

I should state that any comment I may make is firmly rooted in what is termed ‘contemporary art’ in the Western capitalist context, within which I have lived and worked all my life. For better or worse, the global phenomenon of contemporary art has a disregard for national particularities, which are, from its perspective, ‘folklore’. This would be the case when addressing any national or regional art and is not specific to the Estonian or post-communist context, although, seen from the perspective of contemporary art, the negotiation of identity after communism is a high-risk operation: if successful, identity is not restored into some cultural or national body, but kept in a state of suspense; if unsuccessful, an image of identity is produced that is more desired than real, which tends to be of interest only to those (locals) who harbour this desire.

Ernst Hallop’s exciting painting *Producing Milk in the Väämela Dairy School* (1948) can be used to illustrate a ‘bridge’ that has since been built between Soviet art and Western contemporary art by Ilya Kabakov and the Moscow Conceptualists. Brown cows and milkmaids dressed in white are embedded in a picturesque landscape and are placed in close proximity to each other in the middle of the canvas as a brown/white symbiotic body. A cluster of white coats in the foreground leads the eye into that



Ernst Hallop
Producing Milk in Väämela Dairy School
1948. Oil, canvas.
89.4 x 166.2 cm
Art Museum of Estonia

body, which spreads its brown towards the horizon. The scene is at once artificial (the dairy industry) and natural (the landscape), abstract (through the distribution of colour) and representative (as an everyday scene), while it is conceptual with regards to the mode in which all those elements are combined. Against all the visual ambivalences, this conceptual dimension must surely have been fore-grounded as the work’s initial message: the creation of a new productive body through political will. Seen at least from today’s perspective, however,

the underlying visuality of the painting is not unlike Kabakov’s *Universal System for Depicting Everything*, for example, which is an equally conceptual construct pierced by visual, post-conceptual openings.

In Hallop’s painting, the artistic questioning of the concept has survived its political end and appears surprisingly fresh, particularly when compared to most of the other paintings in the show. However, although depicting working women, in its ambivalence the painting seems to exceed the exhibition’s theme of the ‘Soviet

woman'. In fact, in the rest of the show, the curators appear not to have sought an equal sense of ambivalence as to the question of gender: the choice of works mostly offers a withdrawal from the public into the personal, through a number of representational portraits displayed along the longest wall of the gallery. The withdrawal from the public to the private is even made the theme in Lola Liivat's strong painting *Portrait of Singer and Actress Elo Tamul, Recipient of the Stalin Prize* (1954), where the actress turns away from the limelight that shines on the medal attached to her chest. Beyond such turning away from the state, female identity is presented mostly through minor forms and smaller formats, restricting the female claim to the political to a mere memory of political activism and sought identity. As a result, although potentially torn, the 'Soviet Woman' is still presented as an identity that is little affected by questions of a more fundamental kind of ambivalence. Whether this is a reflection of a Soviet history that failed to provide any other works of art, or whether it is a message from the curators, who fail to address the possible complexity of the 'Soviet Woman', is difficult if not impossible to tell, based on what is after all highly complex material.

Michael Schwab

(1966), German artist and researcher based in London. He is a tutor at the Royal College of Art, research associate at the Bern University of Arts, Switzerland and research fellow at the Orpheus Institute in Ghent, Belgium. He is the editor-in-chief of the forthcoming *Journal for Artistic Research (JAR)*.



Lola Liivat
Portrait of Singer and Actress Elo Tamul
1954. Oil
Estonian Theatre and Music Museum

The queue as a social statement

Maria-Kristiina Soomre

During the first months of 2010, a long-forgotten phenomenon, which in some way clearly defines the essence of the new era – the queue – was fixed in the Tallinn urban space and, via that, in the Estonian unconscious. With the arrival of spring, this phenomenon, as expected, reached the stage of propaganda posters. The most vivid recollections of queues of the adult Estonian population are firmly connected with the Soviet era, or with the coupon period of the early 1990s, when shop counters were mostly bare and people were prepared to stand for hours in the hope of getting hard-to-find goods (occasionally even foreign goods). At some point, queues disappeared from the urban picture almost completely; only on rare occasions did people meet while queueing for cheap air tickets or toilet paper during a shopping centre, or travel agency, campaign. Queues became so exceptional that almost always either the print media or television cameras turned up. The triumph of capitalism brought abundance and choices, but didn't have enough time, before the crash, to develop fully into the other extreme – to the queue as the ultimate expression of consumer appreciation, as a promise, and a sign of quality. This is familiar to us from world metropolises, where enthusiastic hordes of consumers often snake along to doors of trendy eating places or shops, as well as museums. Defying a certain mass psychotic moment of competition that goes hand in hand with queues, most consumers finally manage to satisfy their desires. It is always possible to produce more pizza, and an exhibition can be visited the next day: people queueing in a society of affluence have no need to worry; they merely have to be certain of their wish to consume.

The most famous queue in Tallinn in the winter of 2010 was a social statement, a political action, an orchestrated cry for help from the imaginary 'other Estonia', which is not often reflected on the front covers of our newspapers. In mid-February, the Tallinn city government organized a job exchange in the rooms of the Tallinn Song Festival Grounds. By that time, the economic crisis had been biting the country for over a year; unemployment had increased to



Alar Kivilo. *Drinks*.
Lihula, Estonia. 1988

tragic proportions, and was growing. Politicians were uttering big promises and trying to seem reassuring. The capital city decided to offer an alternative (with a populist flavour): 'real' work. People came in the thousands and stood in frigid winter weather. This queue was a social statement, a living reproach to society, government, politicians and the economic crisis. Only 400 of the 5000-strong queue got public jobs – a chance to travel on public transport as attendants at minimal wages, thus continuing the social performance on the mundane level. The attendants have now become mascots of the new economic situation. In certain conditions, they can be regarded as a type of social art – performers who are not letting their fellow travellers forget the situation on the labour market, forcing everyone to subconsciously take a stand.

The same queues at the Song Festival Grounds we so often saw in the media soon turned up on propaganda posters in the election campaign, where the Centre Party (the party in power in Tallinn) set the freezing queue of the unemployed against the obviously complacent prime minister from the Reform Party. The visual solution, in the spirit of the British Tory campaign of 1978, was naturally harnessed to the campaign carriage of the Centre Party. The aim was to grab the position of prime min-

ister, while solutions to the job market problems and issues caused by the feeble economy tend to be populist rather than constructive. The 'new jobs' created by the Centre Party and its satellite institutions – performers in urban space at minimum wages – obviously do not provide people with any sense of social security or a necessary standard of living, but they still form perhaps a more human form of populism than the right-wingers' focus on meeting the European Union requirements or endless babble about economic-theoretical issues, which all makes it seem as if these politicians are trying to simply ignore the problem. Using disappointed citizens, the despair of the unemployed in the advertising campaign photo shoot, is certainly not an ethical method, but the autumn elections will show whether average voters appreciate the fact that at least someone noticed their problems. There are quite clear-cut client relations in Estonian society between 'the people' and 'politicians' – people do not actually expect any sensible programmes from those who aspire to power, or an opportunity to be ideologically positioned on the political axis. The parties have taken advantage of this and have abandoned classic campaigns based on views. What matters is the brand, the slogan, stars and enemies to stand against. Promises will do, and for their sake people are prepared to queue. After this skilfully and cynically orchestrated campaign, queues in Estonia probably do not mean what they used to mean.

The Centre Party campaign can indeed be regarded in the context of social art. However, the party ideologues are playing in totally dif-

ferent categories, and thus such an analysis is too artificial. It is, however, not by chance that this spring another queue appeared in the Art Hall in central Tallinn, near the city government building, this time a real art project – *Art Queue 100×100 EEK*, under the aegis of Culture Capital 2011. For the competition of events preparing for the Culture Capital, the artist Flo Kasearu and her colleagues suggested that the grant received from the foundation (allocated as production support for weekly mini projects) should be divided between those gathered at the Art Hall, according to position in the queue. By means of an artificially created queue – a living sculpture – the organisers wished to attract attention to the art institution, the most classic white cube in town, which was at the moment standing empty between exhibitions. The rather art world-specific action (in the context of earlier actions, however, it probably had an undertone of political comment) posed questions about the relationship with the audience. It also offered a critical comment on the economic logic increasingly dominating the cultural field – evaluating cultural institutions and events solely on the basis of the size of the audience, or the length of the queue. The first one hundred people in the queue on 5 April received a blue banknote (100 EEK) from the organisers, and so an audience was attracted by a totally honest business transaction, referring to the obvious: it is a piece of cake to assemble a queue.

Paradoxically, the action happened at the moment when there were queues at the very same spot at the Art Hall: in March, the private art collector Enn Kunila was exhibit-



Job exchange at the Tallinn Song Festival Grounds, February 2010.

ing his paintings. This was a project that had had exceptionally intense marketing and thus attracted huge masses, who very much appreciated the safe classical paintings. The record size of the audience made it into the papers and encouraged opinions in the media about 'permanent values' and art that 'addresses people' – and thus against contemporary social art. A bit earlier, in February, largely the same people who enjoyed traditional paintings in the overcrowded Art Hall had jostled at the doors of the Kadriorg Art Museum, where an ancient portrait painting from Italy that had been examined in Estonia, was displayed for only one week. The alleged author's legendary name – Leonardo da Vinci – attracted huge masses and the media. Many people went to an art museum for the first time. Although essentially connected with mass psychology, these two queues that shook and rattled local art institutions were statements as well. Not that there was anything specific about the queues; after all they can be seen even in the local art world: when entrance is free, queues at the Kumu Museum are nothing exceptional. What makes these queues significant – and especially against the background of the Centre Party's actions – is the readiness of the masses to storm art as part of a campaign, and to prefer unfinished solutions, largely based on appearance. The grand collection of a wealthy private collector cannot really be compared with a display at an art museum, but the enthusiasm of the masses appeared almost ecstatic: this reaction was obviously caused by the garnish of the professional market. The queue itself – especially if it makes it into the news – can be a significant marketing

argument, and mass psychosis feeds upon itself. In the increasingly stagnating Estonian society, brand-politicians and employees enjoying their positions to the full indeed prefer to appeal to the masses and their taste – an argument which primarily helps to cement conservative-national views and phenomena. A queue in such a society, reflecting the approval of the masses, no doubt forms the basis of success. The interest of the public, or lack of it, which is usually only examined as a 'statistical' factor, can become a propaganda lie, against uncomfortable cultural phenomena and for more populist projects. The seemingly conditional boundary between these phenomena does exist, and this should be kept in mind: professional standards, specialists' opinions, should maintain the gravitas that politicians are desperately trying to abolish (calling social scientists 'Red professors', accusing the critics of a propagandist monument of self-serving motives). It is essential to remember, especially in the cultural area, that a queue is a quantitative format which provides no reason to make decisions on the quality of either those who stand in it, or on the purpose for standing in the queue. Cultural experience is no more valuable if it takes place in the macho-like 'first come, first served' hierarchy; every museum visit is a separate value, especially in our lively art life, with its multiple programmes, where the main value and cultural policy statement should continue to be independence and essential quality.

Maria-Kristiina Soomre

(1978), curator of contemporary art at Kumu Art Museum. Art critic and columnist in Estonian cultural press since 2000.

Hoping for a job.
Job exchange at the Tallinn Tram and Trolleybus Company, May 2009 and ...



... at the Tallinn Song Festival Grounds, February 2010.



Hoping for 100 EEK.
Art Queue at the Tallinn Art Hall, April 2010



Five pictures of Flo Kasearu Kaido Ole

It is only natural that you should have a fairly good knowledge of someone you want to write about, although in my case I fear I hardly know anybody except myself. Besides, my memory is not what it used to be, so that when talking with people about the past it is occasionally difficult to understand whether we are in fact talking about the same thing. In a situation like this, I thought it best to focus on the few incidents connected with Flo which I certainly remember quite precisely and also my own relevant emotions. I call these descriptions pictures.



Flo Kasearu
She Answered
2006. Oil, canvas
195 x 166 cm

The first picture: I was a lecturer and Flo a student in the same department. However, I have no recollections of her at entrance exams, only from her second year onwards. This is quite strange because Flo, as a rule, is someone whom people remember. Anyway, at that time we were having a January workshop, conducted by an artist from abroad. The task was to deal with him, actively think along and also paint something good within a week, because there was going to be an exhibition afterwards. The guest was an artist, not an artist and a lecturer combined, who was used to an extremely professional approach, just as he did things in his own studio. Our students were diverse – some managed to keep up, some didn't. Flo was among those who left a positive impression, although she was younger than most of them. Her painting, although big and bold, was a bit weird. She depicted herself as a small girl mischievously lifting her skirt. Not painted after an old photograph in trendy photo-realism, but after memory, presenting a Fauvist colour display. Exchanging impressions with the guest lecturer afterwards, we both agreed that there was something in that girl. Something essential and universal that makes an artist of one person, but not of another, although that other person might produce better works for a long time. I remember saying about that painting that, although it was not bad, it certainly wasn't right. I also thought that, whatever her paintings were like in the future, they would not resemble this painting. There was some sort of contradiction with her personality. I can now say that I was partially right, but perhaps not in the most essential way.



Close-up of Flo Kasearu's
installation. 2008
Mixed media. 3 x 4.5 m

The second picture: the same school about a year later, I was still lecturing, but now also the head of the department, and Flo was a student. This time her works were definitely the best in her class. The marking of the works took place in the academy gallery and all passers-by stared at hers. The main work, which also attracted the most attention, was huge, a wall rather than a picture, where an incredible number of hand-made strange boxes with handles sat on small shelves. Both the shelves and the boxes were painted faded rusty red. Plus, there were a few paintings. Everything was still a bit shaky, but really worked. I was truly pleased because, after some very strong years, the current situation in our department was not exactly brilliant, and the marking was quite tedious. However, an excellent work always loosens the tongue and the discussion becomes lively.

This is exactly what happened, although a bit differently than I had hoped in my complacency. When Flo was given the floor, she

did not talk about her work as expected, but immediately launched into an attack on me and the department, listing all the faults and drawbacks she could think of, why we did one thing but not another, and so on and so forth. What made things even worse was that she was right in nearly everything, and I took the blame, promising to start improving matters at once. Flo attacked and I defended myself, feeling everybody's eyes drilling into the back of my head. I hadn't felt that awful for a long time. There were a lot of people from other departments, as the marking took place in the busiest place, and what I thought would be the most enjoyable moment of the day instead became a nightmare. It is one thing to analyse your activities yourself (in your mind), giving easy promises and dates to improve things. It is, however, quite a different kettle of fish if a second-year student takes you to task. You, who were just about to look kindly upon her good work from your elevated position.



Kaido Ole, professor of the Chair of Painting, working on the still life prepared by a student, and a student of painting recording the process. 2008. Video, 17 h 52 min

Paintings of an unnamed object by Kaido Ole, professor of the Chair of Painting, associate professor Laurensius (Lauri Sillak), contracted lecturer Tõnis Saadoja and student Flo Kasearu, who suggested the object to be painted.

Painting by Kaido Ole of an unnamed object suggested by student Flo Kasearu. 2008. Oil, canvas. 100 x 200 cm

The third picture: Flo and Tõnis [Tõnis Saadoja (1980), painter – Ed] were compiling an exhibition; the main topic of their conversation was teaching painting and whether the teachers themselves could actually paint. We proved it by painting the same little box with a handle made by Flo, only this time it was bigger and placed in a typical still-life setting with folds of textiles and falling light. The topic, after all, was not just mastery of painting, but mystical classical painting skills. Flo filmed everybody painting, at the same time bombarding us with questions. The atmosphere was much nicer than at that dreadful marking, almost enjoyable. I had not painted an object for a long time so realistically, and I also kept answering her questions, getting rather carried away. Later results showed that Tõnis painted the longest and probably the most carefully, and I talked the most. This time, Flo's questions were not that sharp, or perhaps I was better prepared. We both seemed pleased, although the teachers did not paint as well as Flo had hoped, at least not according to the given rules. Flo herself did not produce a wonderful painting either. The idea was that the professionals would paint first, and then Flo, having learned from us, would attempt to produce the same thing again, but in a new way. For some reason I, and probably she too, liked the first slightly faulty version better.



Flo Kasearu
21.05.09. 2010
Video still

The fourth picture: Flo and I were making art together, on a perfectly equal basis, fully democratic. It is a relatively old form of cooperation, with my architect friend and myself. A large number of creative people with different backgrounds and work experience, from beginners to prominent people, take part at various times. The result, as a rule, is a short video; the playfully regulated creative process reminds me most of all of the past undertakings of Fluxus. We invited Flo when we needed to start a new cycle with new people. I suggested Flo, as I was certain that she would be brave enough to participate in anything, without abandoning her critical attitude, because we needed both participation and criticism. Flo immediately blended into our diverse group and was more confident than I had dared to hope. Knowing her honesty and sincerity, I was certain that, if we got totally muddled, it would be she who would point this out. I often get carried away to the extent that I lose all sense of criticism. Everybody seemed well pleased with her part and hopefully we can do this again in the future.

The fifth and the last picture: I was in a gallery in the capital's greatest square, watching Flo's video about a white horse in a rainy and semi-dark Tallinn. I was consumed by professional envy. The whole thing worked, and my mind raced heaven knows where, urged on by the enchanting soundtrack. At some point I realised, with some surprise, that the white horse was just as naïve and vulnerable as the painting described in the first picture, where small Flo was playing around with her skirt. Still, the significant part of my prediction back then ended up wrong, because her continuous choices in somewhat childish topics and/or solutions are in fact something permanent and essential. Another clear change is that she is no longer painting, although I can't bring myself to lament it too much. The painted white horse made me shrug my shoulders and expect the girl to come up with something exciting any minute. That's now happened. After visiting the gallery several times, it dawns on me, with some glee, that this work has the potential to become a hit, which could well overshadow even some of her future works.

That's all. I do not actually know Flo that well, and we are quite different in character.

Flo Kasearu

(1985), artist, studied painting at the Estonian Academy of Arts (BA). Currently doing MA at the Chair of Photography at the Academy. She spent the year 2009/2010 in Istanbul with an Erasmus grant.

Kaido Ole

(1963), artist, 2003-2010 Professor and Head of the Department of Painting at the Estonian Academy of Arts. See also www.kaidoole.eu



Hurrah Berlin,
Carmen Lansberg,
Urmas Muru,
Kaido Ole
*Push Buttons Disappeared from
the Remote Control*
2009. Video still

Exhibition of Flo Kasearu
and Tõnis Saadoja in the
Tallinn City Gallery, 2008

The avant-garde is not dead

Interview with René Block

Joseph Beuys
How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare
 26 November 1965
 Performance documentation
 at Galerie Alfred Schmela,
 Düsseldorf



Eero Epner: In 1964, when you were 22 years old, you opened your first gallery in Berlin, where you showed work by fairly unknown artists, such as Beuys, Broodthaers, Paik, Polke, Richter and Vostell. How did you find them, and how did you choose them? What was it like to run a gallery in 1964?

René Block: You find artists with whom you want to work when you keep your eyes and ears open. This is a clear example of the snowball effect. When you have found an interesting artist, he or she in turn knows other similar artists still waiting to be discovered. This was true in 1964 of the young German artist generation, and it is valid today when I take an interest in artists in the Balkans or Turkey. The essential thing is to find someone who seems to be the 'right' artist. This determines the entire future trend. Running a gallery in West Berlin in 1964 was a true gamble.

Why did you give up your job in 1979?

After fifteen years, I was too young to become an art dealer, although I belonged to the German Society of Progressive Art Dealers, which in 1967 in Cologne organised the first art market ever. My situation was thus a bit contradictory. The first art markets were not commercial undertakings, but artistic. This was changed by Basel becoming another *Kunstmarktstadt*.

To be honest, I already wished to close down my Berlin gallery in 1974, i.e. ten years after opening it. But then I had the excellent idea of opening a gallery in New York. It opened in 1974 with Joseph Beuys's action *I like America and America Likes Me*. In it, he continued the dialogue started in the dead hare performance, this time with a living coyote.

Since the 1970s, you have been a curator and have organised many biennials. In December last year, you presented a paper titled *Biennials in Eastern Europe, Asia and Australia, and life with art*. What fascinated you in the art of Eastern Europe in the early 1990s that made you decide to take it up? Is whatever you liked back then, still there?

I began curating as early as 1972, when I also ran the gallery. Large exhibitions, such as *New York, Downtown Manhattan: SoHo* (1976), where I could use my New York experience, or *To Eyes and Ears* (1979), about the links between music and art in the 20th century, made me decide to exchange the small gallery room for larger institutions.

The first biennials I was allowed to curate – in 1985 in Hamburg and in 1990 in Sydney – cautiously peeked into Eastern Europe. It was only at the Istanbul biennial in 1995 that I was able to tackle the art in neighbouring south-eastern countries more intensely. For these countries, Istanbul is the traditional cultural centre. The artists I discovered there led me to other artists, and together they opened a totally new view of art and the world for me. The experience I gained in 1995 influenced my 10-year-long work at Fridericianum Kunsthalle. This culminated in 2003 with the *Balkan Trilogy* at the exhibition *In the Gorges of the Balkans* in Kassel and *Love it or Leave it*, a biennial in Cetinje (Montenegro). My love for the Turkish artists found back then is still going strong. So we established a separate Kunsthalle in Berlin for contemporary Turkish art.

What has been widely discussed in recent years is the possible future of exhibitions that rely on geographical or national peculiarities, as such peculiarities in the globalising world are gradually fading. What is your opinion?

Globalisation has indeed diminished peculiarities but, at the same time, has considerably expanded our horizons.

You have talked about the future of biennials. How would you now answer the question 'What is the future of biennials?'

I was interested in the future of biennials when there were very few of them, and when they played a significant informative role in peripheries, for example in São Paulo, Havana, Sydney or Istanbul. Fifteen years later, however, we are witnessing an inflation of biennials, both numerically and qualitatively. Most are unbearably boring. Curators have little to say and cannot be bothered to travel. They do not rely on the specifics of a region, but concoct random topics. The workshop atmosphere of earlier biennials, the dialogue between the local scene and international visitors is lacking. In 2000, I chose that as the theme for the Kassel exhibition *The Song of the Earth*. Things have not improved since then, however.

Is the avant-garde dead?

No. Of course not. But since it is avant-garde, we probably won't see it. 'Being dead' could then constitute our problem.

...

How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare.

Joseph Beuys's action in the René Block Gallery

I wouldn't want to suggest that the dead hare symbolised the petite bourgeoisie, because Beuys's aim after all was to explain his idea of art to everybody. He had been tirelessly doing that since the 1970s, placing the expanded understanding of art in the centre of his works. If Beuys chose a hare as his conversation partner, it was because – in his own words – a hare symbolised incarnation for him. 'It digs a den into the ground, builds a house for itself there. It incarnates into the ground and is thus already significant. By putting honey on my head I am clearly doing something involved with thinking. Human ability is not to produce honey, but to think, to produce ideas. A hare seems to be directly connected with birth... A hare makes whatever man has in his thoughts very real.' In this action, where Beuys completely separated himself from the public (the action could only be seen through a narrow slice of window outside the gallery), I see a meditative conversation with himself, and as such it has a highly universal character.

What happened to the hare after the action?

This I cannot quite remember. In 1964, there was an action in Berlin with two hares, *Der Chef*, and there we ate the hares after the action, together with some friends. The hare used in the action *Eurasia* (1966) in my gallery was later stuffed and is now at New York's MoMA, leaning against a panel that was produced during the action.

Inspired by the action of Joseph Beuys, *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, Theatre NO99 staged a production of the same name in 2009.

It tackled issues of cultural politics, whereas the word 'hare' in the title referred to the Estonian minister of culture Laine Jänes (*Jänes - Hare*).

René Block

(1942), has worked as an art dealer, curator and museum director. He has collaborated with such significant artists as Sigmar Polke, Joseph Beuys, Gerhard Richter and Nam June Paik, and is closely associated with the promotion and study of the Fluxus movement.

As the director of the Museum Fridericianum in Kassel, he continues to explore the wider realms of contemporary art. He has curated major biennial exhibitions in Sydney, Istanbul, Kwangju and elsewhere.

Eero Epner

(1978), art critic, dramaturge at Theatre NO99.

Politics of pop art: a private dream or a social practice

Mari Laanemets

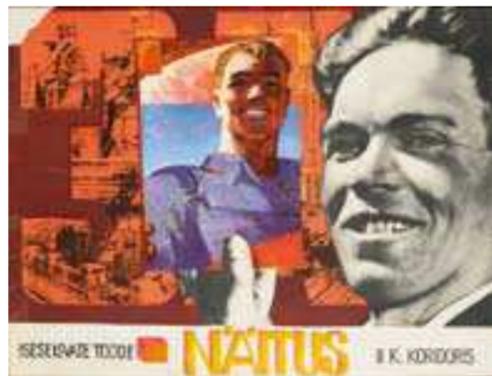


Peeter Urbla. Assemblage *Kasatchok* in the exhibition *Estonian Progressive Art in Café Pegasus*, 1970. Unlike the works of American pop art, the context of Estonian pop was not the white cube of the gallery but the café.

It is a bit surprising that the first exhibition dedicated to pop art was opened in the Kumu Art Museum only last year*. Pop art, after all, constitutes one of the most legendary phenomena in Estonian non-official art and, despite its episodic nature, pop art has earned the title of ‘avant-garde’ from art historians. The meaningfulness resting on a few vague photographs and only a few works surviving from that period seems rather remarkable. Finally, the exhibition *POPkunst Forever!* promised a chance to take a closer look at the legend.

Pop art appeared in Soviet Estonian art in the mid-1960s, when ANK’64 group members presented their brightly coloured paintings, labelled in the exhibition as *Cheerful Pop*. Following the general trend of interpretation in Estonian art history, this seemed to indicate that the adoption of pop art was restricted to purely aesthetic innovation of the language of colour and imagery. The honour of genuine interpretation of pop art was ascribed to the group SOUP’69, who launched ‘union-pop’ with their legendary exhibition in the Pegasus Café in 1969. Thus, Leonhard Lapin called local pop art, which adopted methods, but used strictly local material. This original interpretation of pop art was represented by two groups: SOUP’69 and *Visarid*, established in 1967. A third part of the exhibition, *Urban Utopia*, dealt with the contemporary artificial environment, one of the original themes of local pop art and its unique feature.

Pop art emerged in America and England, and a bit later in the rest of Europe, at the pinnacle of the post-war economic boom, as



Andres Tolts, Ando Keskküla. Poster of the exhibition of independent student works at the State Art Institute, 1968

a result of the altered mass industrial society, extensive commercialisation and aestheticisation of everyday life. Pop art reflected the new situation; it was either critical or affirmative, depending on the context and the viewer’s perspective. In Europe – including this side of the Iron Curtain – pop art became synonymous not only with the new American art, but also with the rock-music, literature and sub-cultures: the lifestyle of the new generation that opposed authority and the existing normative life models, aspiring to openness and freedom.

The interpretation of pop art offered by the Kumu exhibition indeed saw it as the dream of the young people of one generation, and hence a revolt against ‘all restricting borders’, in order to break through the routine in the academy and in daily life. When pop art became the official avant-garde in the 1990s, it was largely because its rebellious nature was easy to regard as ‘resistance to the system’, as the shrewd undermining of the system became the authentic and original topic of East-European art. At the same time, it was treated as being related to private dreams and not reality, not as social practice, but as a protest functioning only on an aesthetic level, absurd rather than constructive. This was emphasised by the exhibition design of Andres Tolts, which focused on strictly individual approaches.

The avant-garde, or pop art, policy nevertheless seems to be something more complicated than mere opposition to the system and the art mainstream, also because the clear border between official and non-official art started to fade in the late 1960s, and at least some pop art works were officially exhibited. It is thus difficult to think about it as an activity only directed at a narrow circle of friends. All of the exhibitions, which were often rather provisional, actively strove to spread their ideas.¹ And art critics noticed and acknowledged the new movement immediately, pointing out the political and critical aspects of the works of the younger generation of artists who were associated with pop art. In the official art magazine *Kunst* in 1971, Ene Lamp, for example, described the works at the Spring Exhibition of Young Artists as a protest



Sirje Runge. *Proposal for the Design of Areas in Central Tallinn*, 1975. 100 x 100 cm. Museum of Estonian Architecture



Ludmilla Siim. *Yellow Room* 1970. Oil, canvas. 120 x 120 cm. Art Museum of Estonia

against ‘cosy and well-organised bourgeois life’. The article was illustrated by Ando Keskküla’s *Self-portrait* (1970) – one of the hits of Estonian pop – and Ludmilla Siim’s *Yellow Room* (1970). The latter in particular, with its modernity and light atmosphere, is very attractive, stressing the ambivalence that characterised the relations in the mass culture society, where deficit reigned instead of abundance. The promised power and potency embodied in consumer-goods-turned-fetishes are reflected in Lapin’s Indian ink drawing *Open “Lee’s”*, showing an erect penis sticking out of a pair of Lee jeans. Local mass products did not cause any orgasms and it was impossible to talk about them with desire and adoration. (Popular) culture imbued in Soviet ideology and its heroes was an object of derision, parodied in various ways; hence, the impression was that local ‘union-pop’ was intellectual, critical and ambiguous. The best examples of union-pop interpreted in that way are Tolts’s collages depicting bizarre ‘scenes’ of Soviet life. His poster of the exhibition of independent student works at the State Art Institute in 1968 [together with Ando Keskküla – Ed] is a montage of scaffolding and construction workers bursting with health, ironically indicating the image of the artist in the Soviet system, who, in the role of a worker, was building up socialism, the precise image that the group of pop artists wanted to change.

Adopting pop art thus occurred within the framework of different popular-cultural and media-technological possibilities, and also in a different society. It seemed in the 1960s that the ‘world was within reach’, whereas the social climate changed radically after the suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968. Vanishing hopes made people withdraw into themselves and focus on material well-being, which Andres Kurg, for example, regards as a significant impetus for the development of local pop art.² As for non-official art, it is customary to talk about escaping the surrounding grim reality into art, where it is possible to build up a harmonious world. However, artworks and texts of that time, instead, sometimes even didactically, revealed a social sensitivity in which art was not considered

a refuge, but a means to shape the new cultural environment. This idea cropped up in various ways in the programmes of ANK, *Visarid* and SOUP'69.

In the opening text, titled *Situation 1968*, of the first booklet by *Visarid*, dedicated to French art, Tõnis Vint interpreted pop art as a new universal (art) system, which similarly to the works of the romantics and Pre-Raphaelites was trying to restore the integrity of culture.³ Pop art only differed from the above-mentioned in that it turned to contemporary forms, synthesising and not ignoring popular culture. This interpretation was radically different from, if not totally opposite, the ideas of American pop art. Besides criticism of mass culture and its levelling nature, we thus find an idea of future art as 'an indispensable element in the automated, spare-time society' of tomorrow.⁴ This was certainly more alluring than withdrawing into oneself.

This interpretation – the peculiarity of local pop art – is based on several factors. Pop art and American/Western pop culture arrived here simultaneously and almost as synonyms. The exhibition displayed tattered record sleeves, but not, for instance, the German edition of Lucy Lippard's *Pop Art* (1966), which Lapin brought from Budapest. On the other hand, local art was significantly influenced by the ideology of design. Warhol had enjoyed a successful career as an advertising artist, whereas Estonian pop art mainly developed thanks to design and architecture students. Although the design faculty was associated with an ideologically more liberal education, it still had its specific ideology and aims, which influenced the understanding of art and the paradigm change in Western art. Finally, design stood for the greatest promise of the avant-garde, i.e. the chance to unite aesthetics and politics and thus reform society.

As Lapin declared in his speech at the exhibition of independent works in 1971, the interest in the mundane, popular and low could not be restricted to its reflection in art, as 'presenting the objects of life on canvas', but instead required intervention. The aim of art should be to shape the environment.⁵ The exhibition itself culminated with the joint action *Colouring the Elephant*, where the children's playground was painted over. The most remarkable work of this kind was Sirje Runge's diploma work at the State Art Institute in 1975, *Proposal for the Design in Areas of Central Tallinn*. Blending pop-like aesthetics and new technological means,



Leonhard Lapin. *Open "Lee's"*. 1972. Indian ink, gouache 40 x 40 cm Art Museum of Estonia

Runge designed a dynamic and flexible urban environment that offered freedom and choices (services and information).

Pop art's dream was thus total art, and a new culture. Not small changes, but a 'transformation of the psychical-sensory extent of the whole environment and people's attention and imagination.'⁶ *Visarid*, SOUP and ANK were convinced that art (and the artist) must and could change consciousness, and through the reality in which we live, plus values and ideals that we follow. 'We heal the sick!' announced the poster of the only joint exhibition of pop art groups, titled *Estonian Progressive Art*, in the Café Pegasus in 1970. The purpose of that kind of art was not just depicting daily life but changing it. Western pop art – or rather the effect caused by pop art – helped to explain how aesthetics was subjected to the interests of capitalism, how to become aware of the manipulations of the cultural industry, and finally how to develop opposition, for example by evoking 'progressive' needs. The emancipation of the senses, increasing people's sensitivity and imagination, seemed to be one of the aims of local pop art, which would help to change, if not the system, at least the way of life. The surrounding environment became direct material for art. It was not just a matter of replacing souvenirs or wooden spoons with prettier products, or attempts to make the town



Villu Järmut, Jaan Ollik. Teabags in the exhibition of independent student works at the State Art Institute. 1974

more beautiful, as seen in Runge's project; it was almost the Marcusean idea of retrieving life through art, which might be truly called avant-garde. It must, however, be admitted that this criticism was closely connected with official discourses, such as design, and cannot be fully understood as just a negation.

Instead of de-constructing the myth of pop art, *POPkunst Forever!* however limited itself to reproducing it. The accompanying text emphasised the collective character of the phenomenon, but the display only contained the works of the leaders. Visitors searched in vain for any works by Gunnar Meier or Rein Mets, whose names were mentioned on the SOUP'69 exhibition poster. Photographic enlargement of Keskküla's destroyed paintings to their original size and displaying them among other paintings was awkward and problematic. Was that a snub to pop art? Nobody else's destroyed works were restored, although there were a large number of works from that period that have not survived. Practically everything ever produced by Lapin, Tolts and Keskküla was exhibited, whereas several other experiments characteristic of the period were ignored, for example Jüri Okas's narrow films, mostly documenting joint actions, or Villu Järmut and Jaan Ollik's Georgian teabags and bus tickets, which constituted part of the local pop art phenomenon, to name just a few.

- 1 Although the works of ANK'64 seem today like reflections of an introverted, elaborate and inaccessible inner world, this mostly indicates the situation in art's reception, meaning long-lasting, occasionally public, but mainly intimate conversations and discussion, a kind of alternative 'academy'.
- 2 Andres Kurg, *Almanac Kunst ja Kodu 1973-1980*. - *Kunsti-teaduslikke Uurimusi* 2 (13), 2004.
- 3 Tõnis Vint, *Olukorrad kunstis 1968*. - *Visarid* 1, 1968, p 55.
- 4 *VISARID Manifesto*. *Kunstirühmitus Visarid, Tartu 1967-1972*. Tallinn, 1977, p 55.
- 5 Leonhard Lapin, *Taie kujundamas keskkonda (1971)*. - L. Lapin, *Kaks kunsti. Valimik ettekandeid and artikleid kunstist ning ehituskunstist 1971-1995*. Tallinn, 1997, p 18. The text by Keskküla and Tolts has unfortunately not survived. It was supposed to appear in the magazine *Noorus*, together with an overview of the exhibition SOUP'69. The display shows a page with large white empty spaces. We thus do not know to this day how precisely they interpreted pop art.
- 6 See *VISARID Manifesto*, p 55: 'In the future, individual artists will no longer produce original work; instead, artists' collectives will reorganise the entire environment.'

* *POPkunst Forever!*, exhibition at the Kumu Art Museum from 27 November 2009 to 11 April 2010. It was curated by Sirje Helme.

Mari Laanemets
(1975), PhD, art historian and artist.

Ideological and poetic topic of land in the 1930s.

Eerik Haamer

Tiina Abel

The declaration that established the Republic of Estonia in the final stages of World War I and the building of the Republic during the next two decades, coincided with a period of increasing cultural conservatism. By the 1930s, modern art had lost most of its radical nature and followed the requirements of

monumentality, nationalism, truthfulness to nature and classicism. According to the new hierarchy of values, the ideas of (home)land, work and family in art were especially vividly reflected in the choice of topics and motifs; in political rhetoric. The idea of nationalism and regionalism triumphed over the notion of

Richard Uutmaa
Rye Harvesters (Rye Harvesting)
1941. Oil, canvas
103.5 x 118.5 cm
Art Museum of Estonia



art's international character. In Estonia, the intelligentsia of the inter-war period continued to dream of the dominance of intellectual values in society and an 'Estonian idea' that would unite the interests of the individual, the nation and the state. In this situation, a kind of state nationalism quietly emerged, whereas political discussions became markedly one-sided after the coup d'état of Konstantin Päts, who later became president, in 1934. The propaganda apparatus used the delight about the independent country and a sense of national self-confidence as tools of political manipulation. The idea of nationalism blended with the ambitions of the political regime. Artists, who once felt free and able to enjoy the more radical part of international modern art, were in the 1930s suddenly surrounded by the rhetoric of official art and a wall of conservatism.

The Estonian art of the 1930s thus returned to nature and the figure. The idea of closeness to nature and realism as a method led artists' interests to the topic of peasants' labour. For realists, the symbol of callous urban life was the slum, whereas rural life represented traditional way of life, persistence and truths that seemed eternal. The image of agreeable rural life, was among the most persistent myths of the 1930s. In Estonia, this tendency was supported by historical stereotypes (including the idea of Estonians as peasant people), a tradition of depicting farm milieu that reached back to the 19th century, and social-political circumstances: the majority of the supporters of President Konstantin Päts's politics lived in rural areas. During the inter-war period, the idea of morally beautiful rural life as an idea of paradise on earth was established not only in Estonia, but in various European countries as well. The struggle between the idea of chaos and order in the art of the 1920s was gradually replaced by fascination with the organic and a more sober attitude to machine aesthetics. The cult of land and work easily took root in Estonian art. A strong metaphorical connection appeared between the physical Estonian turf and the imaginary reliefs of the homeland.

The slogan of a return to a simple, close-to-the-earth world proclaimed all over Europe in

the 1930s, contained a hidden image of home and homeland. The strength of the country and its people was tied to the universal source of vitality – the land. The depiction of peasant life, which followed the inevitable rhythm of the seasons, also conveyed essential communications in art. Harmonious life in the lap of nature, poeticising morale-enhancing, useful (country) labour, seemed European, topical and attractive to artists. Poeticising rural labours enabled them to connect the events in nature and human life, avoiding the private, purely consumerist and trifling character of life. The artistic instinct recognised the intersection of reality and art, an opportunity to transform reality into poetry. The work of artistic 'reproducers' of rural life represented, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, the special type of restoring the folkloric era in which the main realities of idyllic tranquillity (topical both in the human as well as in the political-ideological plan), such as love, work and family, operated.

The land-image of Estonian art in the 1930s focused on the island of Saaremaa. Considering Saaremaa's meagre nature, barren land and hard everyday life, the artistic interpretation inevitably moved to the level of philosophising generalisation. Eerik Haamer [1908–1994], the epic painter of the islands of Saaremaa and Ruhnu, was not only born in Saaremaa, but as a painter he was totally one with it. The issue of centre-periphery that arose during the decade, introduced the topic of regionalism and locality in European art. On the axis of Haamer's personal geography, the centre as a source of inspiration was one's place of birth.

As for the sense of eternity in Haamer's paintings, it is again worth referring to Mikhail Bakhtin, who has drawn attention to the links between time and space, to organic serfdom, and relations, where the events in one's life are associated with home. This centuries-long attachment, even if only in imagination, also tended to level the facets of time in Haamer's work. In his work, time becomes an endlessly repeated current moment, a temporal constant that intertwines with the spatial, where the dimension of eternity and the topic of the ancestral land are



Kaarel Liimand. *Autumn*
1934. Oil, canvas
109.3 x 88.6 cm
Art Museum of Estonia



Eerik Haamer. *Virgin Soil*. 1942. Oil, canvas. 79.6 x 67 cm. Art Museum of Estonia



Eerik Haamer
Young Mother (Mother). 1940
Oil, canvas. 116.5 x 89 cm
Art Museum of Estonia



Eerik Haamer. *An Ox in Mud*
1943. Oil, canvas
89 x 145.5 cm
Art Museum of Estonia

revealed. Haamer was a humanist, an archaeologist and balladeer of human existence, for whom the land is the source of vitality.

Haamer's attachment to the land was almost physical. It is evident in coarse dry layers of soil and bottomless blood-coloured quagmires (*An Ox in Mud*, 1943, Art Museum of Estonia), in the darkness of the grave (*Virgin Land*, 1942, Art Museum of Estonia), and in his colours. A thick layer of paint seems to replace the soil, and the artist's means of livelihood is regarded as identical with those of country people. Haamer's land therefore has the dimensions of home or even the homeland, the territory of joy and sorrow, but also of refuge and tenacity. A layer of soil is always there, and it does not betray. Just like people in Haamer's paintings, the heroicised land also tends to present the ideology of endurance that was typical of the decade and became its symbol. Toiling on the land is consecrated, and ties with the land determine destiny.

Caring for the land shows concern for one's (home)land, and this, in turn, is transformed into caring for the soul.

The connection of nature as an organic whole with the topic of vitality and the home(land) is also reflected in Haamer's depiction of women, where the physical contact with the land seems to be part of a kind of fertility ritual. In the woman-land-child triangle, the artist placed female physical fertility alongside an image of the land's power of procreation. Uniting the spiritual and physical side of motherhood in the figure of the Madonna, Haamer inevitably added a Christian dimension at a time when different versions of the *Blut und Boden* ideology, which shaped the decade's cultural climate in Europe, were hovering in the distance.

Tiina Abel

(1951), art historian, curator at the Kumu Art Museum. Main area of research: Estonian art history from 1850 to 1940.



Orthodox Church of
St Nicholas in Tallinn

Russian artists in Estonia

Interview with Nikolai Kormašov

Eero Epner: I apologise for my ignorance of Russian artists in Estonia, although there have always been quite a few. You have dealt with this problem extensively. What is the role of Russian artists in Estonian culture?

Nikolai Kormašov: I think it is very difficult to measure the impact and quality, as the cultural integration has been rather slow, almost invisible to the naked eye. If we talk about Russian culture in Estonia, we have to talk in terms of millennia. Now, for example, we are discovering the oldest and extremely rare iconostasis in the country, in the Church of Bishop St Nicholas [The current church was built in 1827, although there had been a church on that spot for hundreds of years - Ed]. Only ten years ago, we did not know that it had survived, from the very beginning when the altar was built! In 1682, the double tsars Ivan V Alekseyevich and Peter I Alekseyevich, together with Ivan's sister Sophia Alekseyevna, acceded to the throne, and it was a custom on the accession of a tsar to give gifts to various churches and monasteries. Among others, Orthodox Church of St Nicholas in Reval got a new iconostasis. A brand new one. It was made in Pskov by local masters, but some parts came from artists at the Moscow Armoire, such as the *žalovannõi* [hired, commissioned from above - Ed] Sergei Rozhkov - a prominent icon painter. This particular iconostasis is remarkable because it forms a whole ensemble, which is very rare even in Russia. After the earlier famous iconostases -

Bernt Notke's altar in the Holy Spirit Church and Hermen Rode's in St Nicholas - this is the third oldest set, and its cultural meaning is huge, not only because of its size, but also because of the quality.

So, the first impact of Russian culture on Estonian art and culture occurred at the level of church, monastery and religion. The Orthodox faith began rapidly spreading in the mid-19th century, involved the whole country and naturally influenced culture too [it spread quickly because those who converted were promised land - Ed]. Orthodox churches were built especially on the islands and along the coast. What does Orthodoxy actually mean? It is iconostasis, it is reading the Word of God. It is not just a faith; to some extent, it is culture as well.

Does this include the culture of particular small prayer houses in Setumaa, in south-east Estonia?

The whole territory, especially from the 16th century onwards, was Orthodox, and this automatically meant churches, chapels and convents - religion and culture hand-in-hand. I think, and can prove it with examples, that, besides the Orthodox faith, Setumaa has preserved the ancient language and dialect, as well as the tradition of important anniversaries, and all this is connected to the Orthodox faith. People still wear national costumes and use pagan symbols, which are the symbols of motherhood and the matriarchate, plus all the necklaces and other such items. Setu is thus a brilliant example

Baroque iconostasis made by Ivan Zarudnyi in 1720 in the Orthodox Church of the Transfiguration of Our Lord in Tallinn





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1. Interior view of Källatüvä Nahtsi (Anastasia) tsässon. In 1940-1990, the building did not serve as a sacred building and its interior items and roof were completely destroyed. In the 1990s, the house was renovated, a stove was installed and since 1996, it is again used as a tsässon. Village reunions take place next to it. The gable-roofed tsässon is separated by the gates of the iconostasis into a prayer room and altar room.

2. Mikitamäe Tuumapühapäivä (*Toomapühapäeva*, for Setos also *ollõtuspühä* or *kõllapühapäivä* or *väiko lihavõõdä*) tsässon (chapel). According to dendrodating, the oldest tsässon that has survived within the Estonian territory of Setomaa was built probably in 1694.

3. Interior view of Pelsi Anne tsässon. The tsässon is dedicated to Anna (Annõ) who is regarded as the mother of Virgin Mary in the church tradition. According to the Julian calendar, *annõpäiv* - the day (Mother of God) Saint Anne's death is 7 August. Near the tsässon, there is a healing sacrificial stone of Annõ where people used to take sheep wool, milk products and ram heads or slaughtered sheep since Annõ had been the protector of sheep and cattle for Seto people.

4. New Võmmorski Nelipühi (*Suvistepüha*) tsässon, built and consecrated in 1999. The village chapel erected opposite the old Võmmorski tsässon across the road was inaugurated in 1999. The tsässon was constructed under the leadership of Priest Rafael (Raul Hindrikus), the then Orthodox priest of Võru and Obinitsa. Võmmorski tsässons are also known as tsässons of the Holy Trinity.

of a pearl that should be preserved by both Estonians and Russians, because the Russians themselves no longer have such a tradition.

The same was, incidentally, true in Tallinn. All the local Russians who went to St Nicholas' Orthodox Church differed (they still do) from other Russians, because they did not lose their roots, their culture. At the same time, they were totally integrated, working in the city council, active in trading etc.

Another pearl of Russian culture is the baroque iconostasis made by Ivan Zarudnyi in 1720 in the former Cistercian nunnery [now Orthodox Church of the Transfiguration of Our Lord - Ed], the first of its kind in Tallinn. It's a masterpiece! Zarudnyi in fact only made three iconostases: in Moscow, in St Petersburg and here.

Or the small wooden Church of Our Lady of Kazan near the Olympia Hotel. In 1920, the remaining Russian troops gave all their field iconostases to this church. This is a tradition. Unfortunately, only one or two survive, because the rest were stolen in the 1960s. It was suspected at the time that this was done by exile Russians, the 'Whites', who remembered that the regimental treasures were left there. Whatever the truth, the fact is that one night someone drove up with a lorry and took away all the extremely valuable 17th and 18th century iconostases.



When was the start of Russian figurative art in Estonia?

As early as the 19th century. Two major artists then arrived in Tartu; one of them was Mikhail Lebedev, a superb landscape painter. Excellent! He came from Tartu, studied in St Petersburg, then abroad, and his landscapes can be compared to, or are even better than, those of Shtshedrin or Vorobyov, who are both classics.

In the 20th century, there were a great number of Russian artists in Estonia. Call it what you like: colonisation or the creeping of the Orthodox faith into Estonia. The University of Tartu was teaching in German, but the impact of Russian society was clearly felt too, as many lecturers were Russian professors. There were quite a few, all closely connected with Estonia, and they naturally exerted some influence.

On the other hand, in the early 20th century, many young Estonian artists studied in St Petersburg, and they formed a national Estonian school! So the links between Estonian and Russian painting were close, and not only in painting. There is a lot to say about Russian culture in Estonia. I also mean here applied arts, wood processing, sewing, weaving, embroidery and so on, even ironwork.

Andrei Jegorov.
Boats on the Sea. 1922
Oil, cardboard.
Private collection

What happened during the independent Republic of Estonia, between 1920 and 1940?

Suddenly a huge number of Russian emigrants arrived, between 1917 and 1940. This was an extensive wave. Among the arrivals were artists, but also theatre people and graphic artists, for example excellent poster artists. Let's take Sergei Slastnikov: the very first poster artist in Estonia, who had a strong impact on the entire poster art field in the country.

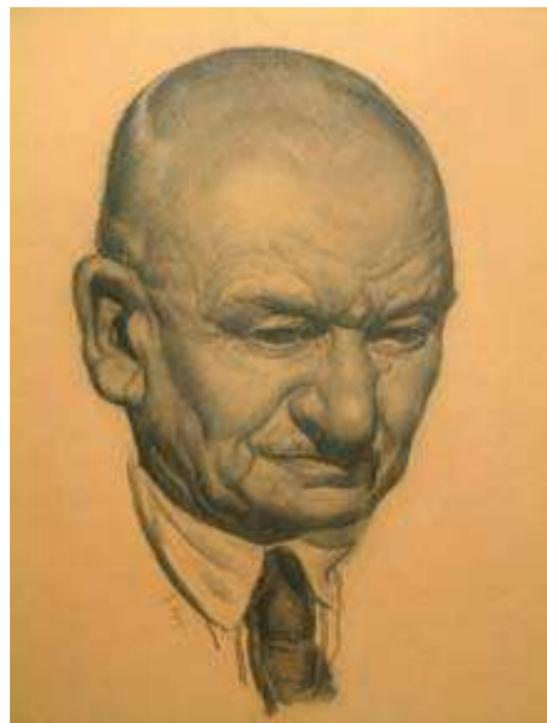
Some arrivals stayed for a year, some for two or three, then left. Some stayed for decades. Among the latter were the painters Kaigarodov, Grinev, Sokolov and Jegorov.

The other wave of artists was just passing through, as it were, but nevertheless had an influence on local art. For instance Obolyaninova: the first theatre costume artist in Estonia. Or the extremely popular Rundaltsov, who even did an engraving of the tsar's family, and certainly helped develop Estonian graphic art.

Several artists lived in Narva: Loginov, Leshkin and Kulkov. The latter was famous for the fact that his works cost more than those of any Estonian, because a great deal of his work was bought in Germany. By the way, many Russians who settled in Estonia had views similar to those of Baltic Germans and actually departed with



Aleksander Kulkov
Male Nude with a Dagger. 1925
Ink, paper.
Art Museum of Estonia



Georg Krug. *Portrait of Father*
1920s. Charcoal, paper
Art Museum of Estonia

them in 1939, when Hitler invited the Baltic Germans to return home. Kulkov did not leave. When the war broke out, he went back to Russia and ended his life somewhere in Central Asia, in total obscurity. Or Kaigorodov, who ran a hugely popular studio and taught many Estonian artists as well.

And, of course, Georg Krug. His family came from St Petersburg, but he was born in Narva. Krug studied at the Pallas Art School, together with the best Estonian artists, and was very highly regarded. I have got his drawings from the Pallas period. They are superb, and his whole body of work should be a part of classic Estonian art, but unfortunately very little is known about Krug. He later travelled to Paris and became a prominent icon painter. He was so famous that on the Holy Mountain in Greece - a place where only monasteries stand against the backdrop of the mountain - he was considered one of the leading icon painters in the world.

Nikolai Kalmakov. A remarkable person! At the beginning of the century, he was regarded as a doubtful and scandalous symbolist. His paintings - on Oriental topics, very exotic - were full of complicated symbols, elaborate forms and other such things. At great exhibitions in Moscow and St Petersburg, he was sometimes praised highly and sometimes derided. When he came here, probably in 1918, he continued

his rather stormy creative activities and was commissioned by the government - after a competition - to produce a painting in honour of the 24th of February [the Republic of Estonia was declared on 24 February 1918 - Ed] Kalmakov! A Russian! The work is not that significant from the point of view of national art, but is fascinating historically, because it fixes with absolute precision the portrait of every single character. In addition, it is in the form of a coat of arms: something the Estonian artists might perhaps never have thought of because they have a different way of thinking. For that reason, the picture was fiercely criticised by Estonian artists, naturally also because such a task had been entrusted to a foreigner.

What is the situation in researching Russian culture in Estonia today?

There is a Society of Russian artists, the Russian Cultural Centre organises exhibitions, some articles appear, etc. I personally know about a great many cultural monuments, both Estonian and Russian. But even I do not know enough, because so much is concealed under various cultural layers and in people's memories

Nikolai Kormašov

(1929), painter. See also *Estonian Art* 2/2009.

Leila Pärtelpoeg and the Soviet antique Mart Kalm

In 2010, the Estonian state gave the interior architect Leila Pärtelpoeg (b 1927) a lifetime achievement award worth one million EEK. During the Soviet era, she was deeply concerned about antique furniture. Today, this seems a normal issue of the wealthy, but during the post-war modernist decades, when history was despised, and under the conditions of Soviet rule, which called the old upper classes exploiters, this attitude truly involved swimming against the current.

INTERIOR ARCHITECT IN SOVIET ESTONIA

Interior architects are not taken very seriously at present. They combine temporary designs with ready-made products, which are soon replaced by new, fresh and more modern versions. Although Soviet Estonian architects probably did look down a bit on interior architects, the builders practically never properly completed what the architects had planned, the process dragged on indefinitely and there were always other things going wrong. Thus the architects were in no position to boast, and their reputation was rather poor. The much less time-consuming work of interior architects, on the other hand, was finished fairly quickly; they offered modern bits of spaces that looked almost 'like abroad', and this is what people behind the Iron Curtain certainly desired. The other factor envied by Western colleagues was the opportunity to make original furniture. The furniture industry in the Soviet Union was so underdeveloped that ready-made furniture was basically hopeless, and small workshops thus bravely produced furniture and various details according to the designs of interior architects. There was a huge difference during the Soviet era between rooms furnished with the usual factory products and the original designs of interior architects; the latter had a special aura and were highly valued.

ESTONIA and ANTIQUE FURNITURE

Estonia has never had much historical furniture, because the country is not wealthy and has suffered many wars. During the unrest in 1905, Estonian peasants burned down Baltic German manors with a vengeance. When the Republic of Estonia was established in 1918, many manors were abandoned; some owners

left for Germany, while others stayed and tried to make do with the little land that they could still keep, but were often forced to sell their property. After the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939, the Baltic Germans left Estonia. As they could not take much with them, they had to sell their antiques to Estonians at ridiculously low prices. The Soviet regime, in turn, persecuted and deported the Estonians who had acquired antique furniture; some fled to the West empty-handed at the end of the war. As a result, there are no old houses in Estonia where generations of inhabitants have accumulated antique furniture and various interior items over several centuries. This, therefore, adds extra value to Pärtelpoeg's role in researching, collecting (the biggest collection today is in Sagadi manor) and appreciating the Estonian history of furniture, both in her own work and in her job as a lecturer on the history of interior architecture at the State Art Institute in Soviet Estonia, today's Academy of Arts.

ANTIQUES and RED SUPREMACY

On the one hand, for ideological reasons the communists were not supposed to adorn their lives with the luxuries of the previous exploiters. On the other hand, the state institutions had to look dignified and decorous. The leadership of Soviet Estonia simply took over the official rooms of the pre-war Republic of Estonia. In the 1930s, under President Päts, the Toompea Castle in Tallinn, where the government and several ministries worked, as well as the president's residence in Kadriorg Palace, with its new office building, were all in such excellent condition that the Soviet authorities had no need to undertake any major renovation work.

Pärtelpoeg, whose competence in historical interiors the Soviet Estonian leadership trusted, played a significant role in preserving the pre-war interiors, partly furnished with antiques and partly with 1930s furniture. The Soviets recognised their ignorance and tried to take advantage of professional help. Pärtelpoeg's personal preferences were for great historical styles, such as the enfilade dating from the 1770s in the governor's flat in the former Provincial Government



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1, 6. Palmse was the first manor (originates from the rebuilding accomplished in 1782-1785) in Estonia that was restored as a complex to give a full picture of a typical Baltic manorial estate. The restoration of the mansion took place in 1975-1985. Interiors were designed by Leila Pärtelpoeg.

2. Manor house of Sagadi (18th century), interior design by Leila Pärtelpoeg (from 1977 to the end of 1980s)

3, 4, 5. Rägavere was the second manor (1770-80s), to be restored in the 1970s. Interior architect Leila Pärtelpoeg



Tallinn Town Hall (built in 1404), interior architect Leila Pärtelpoeg, 1973-1975

building on Toompea Hill. However, she also had to look after the expressionist Parliament building from the early 1920s, which she did not regard very highly then. During the Soviet era, she was not that keen on the style prevalent in the Republic of Estonia, which beside the genuine Empire style and Biedermeier seemed far too modern. Still, during the Soviet rule, Estonians never criticised the independence period of the 1920s and 1930s, not even in private conversations. In the mid-1990s, when Pärtelpoeg supervised the renovation of the Parliament building and took a closer look at expressionist architecture, she discovered its true worth and enjoyed her renovation task to the full.

A narrow-minded puritan might stress her cooperation with the occupying powers. She did cooperate, but an (interior) architect needs clients and it was actually lucky that the important interiors in Soviet Estonia were entrusted to the only interior architect of her generation to be interested in antique furniture. This was the best chance for state-owned antique furniture to survive the occupation period.

RESTORED COLLECTIVE FARM MANORS

Throughout history, Estonians were peasants and Germans were the manor lords. In the newly independent Republic of Estonia in the early 1920s, the former manorial lands were distributed amongst the peasants, and many manor houses stood empty. Some were used as

schoolhouses, community halls, hospitals and other institutions. When the first collective farms were set up in 1949, many established their offices in the old mansions. In the 1960s and 1970s, the collective farms prospered, and among other things built modern offices. In the 1960s, the medieval section of Tallinn and its renovation became fashionable; in the 1970s the wealthier collective farms adopted the idea and began restoring old manor houses in their territory, turning them into community halls or official buildings. One of the intellectual leaders of this movement was Pärtelpoeg, who saw an excellent opportunity to provide historical interiors with antique furniture. The paintings and the stucco, and sometimes the parquet as well, all cried out for a new lease on life, for furniture and pictures, carpets and curtains. A number of manor houses were thus revived, such as those at Palmse (the administrative centre of Lahemaa National Park), Sagadi, Rägavere, Saku and Järlepa; the manor houses of Vihula, Kolga and others were left unfinished.

Restoring the manor houses, together with their interiors and parks, was a huge radical change – this was not merely a demonstration of the might and wealth of some collective farms but it also symbolised the fact that Estonians were coming to terms with historical injustice, and learning to forgive the departed Germans for flogging their ancestors in manor stables. The whole undertaking was made even sweeter

because it was not in accordance with the official Soviet doctrine, which saw the German legacy as the root of evil. After World War II, the Soviet Union was ruled by Germanophobia and was not always able to distinguish Fascists from Germans. The justification for spending large sums of money on manor houses was heritage protection, because most manors were state protected as architecture or art monuments.

ORIGINAL OR COPY

It was obvious that there was not enough genuine antique furniture left in Estonia to provide for all mansions. Some furniture was found in specialised shops in Leningrad, but Pärtelpoeg, with her amazing energy, managed to get the collective farm wood workshops to produce copies of antique furniture. Relying on her knowledge of history, she often had chairs copied that had originally come from a particular manor house and, if specific information was missing, something typical of the area was copied. These 'new-old' pieces of furniture were naturally not of very high quality, due to insufficient skills, technical equipment or wood, but the effort itself was remarkable. The mansion halls had historically never been full of rows of chairs, but this was now required if these halls were to be used, and a few large rooms had to accommodate a few hundred 'new-old' chairs. It undoubtedly seemed strange when Pärtelpoeg had Empire style writing desks at the Kolga manor steward's house made for all the artificial inseminators, veterinarians and bookkeepers. Contemporary functions in a historical building could perhaps have been served by modern furniture, but Pärtelpoeg's ability to inspire her contemporaries to consider historical styles certainly deserves admiration.

MODERNISM and HISTORICAL INTERIORS

Pärtelpoeg's historical settings were encouraged by the popularity of post-modernist design; until that time she cultivated modernist designs. Among the most outstanding of them were the Tallinn Town Hall interiors, completed in 1975 and meant to be the official rooms of the city council. Restorers had already demolished the 19th century ceiling in the Citizens' Hall, thus making it two storeys high. What emerged was the pure Gothic hall with six vaults completed in 1404. She designed clearly modernist oak and leather chairs, although with a touch of history, and modern lamps for the ceiling, emphasising the height of the vaults. The missing doors were produced in a piano factory, and were highly



Café Pegasus, Tallinn (1965), interior architects Väino Tamm, Allan Murdmaa and Leila Pärtelpoeg

polished, which produced a synthesis of Gothic dignity and the enthusiasm for the new polyester varnish. In true medieval fashion, the walls had to be covered with tapestries, which were designed by Anu Raud in the style of geometric minimalism. The more traditionalist side of heritage protection has never been able to accept this modernist interior of the Citizens' Hall, and thus in 2008 copies were made of the Brussels tapestry preserved in the City Museum, which had been added to the Hall in the 16th century. This solution certainly seems prettier to the common taste, and the copies were also approved of by Pärtelpoeg, although it is a pity that the bold approach of the 1970s was abandoned.

Leila Pärtelpoeg has led a diverse and fascinating life: a childhood in Tallinn in the 1930s, post-war younger years filled with tennis, skiing and piano-playing, and a Stalinist education at the Tallinn State Applied Art Institute. The two sides were split into two in the mid-1950s, when she was able to design light modernist pieces of furniture on slender legs, and at the same time acted on her enchantment with classical style furniture. These two poles have accompanied her throughout her life.

Mart Kalm

(1961), PhD, historian of art and architecture; Dean of the Faculty of Art and Culture at the Estonian Academy of Arts. Main area of research: history of the Estonian architecture in the 20th century.

Public urban space in the new centre of Tartu

Henn Runnel

If we add a bit of red, a grain of yellow and a thin stripe of green to the light blue ellipse surrounding the most intense junction in town, we get the image of the new centre of Tartu in the general urban planning. The rather more colourful area taking shape in the physical space, where the most radical transformation of the Tartu city centre in the last two decades has taken place, runs from the Riga-Turu crossroads towards the boiler-house in the south-east. On the one side, it is bordered by the Emajõgi River, and on the other side by Turu Street. This constitutes the most contemporary urban fragment, which aspires to expand the territory perceived as the city centre, but how well is it going to succeed? Does the area have enough energy, layers, different users, spontaneity and all the other things that make a public space function?



The simplest way to measure would be to set the 'fairly successful' Old Town of Tartu as the yardstick to the public space in the new centre. However, Panu Lehtovuori warns that the concept of 'public urban space' is too often perceived through the past. It is common, in the light of excellent and clearly positive historical examples, that contemporary public urban spaces are somehow worse and duller. Referring to Doreen Massey, he writes that the public space actually lacks any straightforward 'foundation' to lean on. This is an object of constant negotiations and conflicts, which is repeatedly put in danger when it is taking shape; 'negotiations', however, make the urban space truly public¹. How strong the positions are of the parties at such 'negotiations' is an altogether different matter.

Unlike the Old Town of Tartu, the buildings of the new centre do not constitute a uniform group; rather, each new house tries to attract attention to itself and add an architecturally exciting accent. The high-rise *Pläsku* ning *Tigutorn* (Flask and Snail Tower) firmly and frequently tend to organise the pictorial space of photographs depicting today's Tartu. The plans of the 1990s determined the large bulks of the buildings – occasionally the same as in some quarters in the Old Town – but for that

reason they are more monotonous and contain walls with fewer entrances. Despite that, the space between buildings intertwines more with the commercial space than in the Old Town. The invitation to enter extended by the *Tasku* (Pocket) department store is perhaps even too insistent, indicated by the alternative path – the windy and grim corridor between *Tasku* and *Pläsku*. Although the intertwining of the internal and external seems exciting, it is also a drawback, as some areas of movement disappear outside business hours. The gates are closed and the appeal of the environment diminishes. The insufficient vibration is also indicated by the lack of night-life, except for the car park between the petrol station and fast-food restaurant. Unlike the Old Town, no festivals or student activities have been held here.

The open market behind the business centre offers an interesting contrast. The active space that enriches the social life and diversity during the daytime becomes an ugly barracks at night, guarded by fierce dogs. The situation of the market is also fascinating because it used to be the reason why the whole town emerged in the first place: it was the heart of the town, later repeatedly relocated. Today it once again finds itself in the way of more profitable businesses, and it



The new centre in Tartu aspiring towards the metropolitan look...



... although there is not enough similar urban quality for every nook and cranny



Removing the embankment from the picture. Väike-Turu Street walled in by the Tigutorn parking house



The back wall of the open market that blocks the embankment

has been seriously suggested that the market and the bus station should be removed.² This would be a severe blow to the quality of the public space of the new centre. According to Henri Lefebvre, there can be no town or urbanity without an energetic centre, without lived moments independent of exchange rates and exciting encounters³, which both the market and the bus station could certainly generate.

Influenced by Lefebvre, Bernard Tschumi claims that social practices must be accommodated in good physical environments, which pedestrians can use smoothly and easily⁴. Personal pedestrian experience is much more than moving from point A to point B – it means seeing and perceiving space, an act of communication depending on space, other people and various events, a social practice that includes a rich set of impulses. This could be a most effective measure to evaluate urban space; one indicator would be the same smoothness factor mentioned by Tschumi.

The biggest problem is not cars, although the spacious car park forms a significant structural element in the new centre. For some reason, the large number of cars here is less disturbing than the few cars on the streets of the Old Town. The positive aspect of car-friendliness in the new centre is that simple access helps the area and city centre compete with the huge supermarkets on the outskirts (and perhaps survive). Besides, the journey of one or several pedestrians either starts or ends at each parked car. However, the same care lavished on car traffic should be applied to the main flows of pedestrian movement and conflict places. Some current problem areas could be

sorted out fairly easily, for example the confusing area around the Turu pedestrian bridge and the Turu-Riga crossroads that pedestrians use only infrequently.

A significant problem of the new structure is its relationship to the riverbank. In other areas, the banks of the river are essential axes of public space, and they smoothly link different urban quarters. In the new centre near the fenced-in harbour, the riverbank becomes an abandoned and filthy 'back yard' and, despite the oft-repeated truth that the town should turn its face more towards the river, the new structure seems to favour the existing situation. Instead of the river, the best facades of the new buildings overlook the street on the opposite side. The back of the market and the car park of *Tigutorn* form a wall that cuts off the riverbank and turns Väike-Turu Street into an unfriendly transport corridor. The roads are more topical flows than the river.

On the other hand, this might actually be an advantage – an increase in the quality and diversity of the public space – that not all segments of space have achieved the planned aims; they have not been 'sorted out', and contain areas without any proper programme. Such undetermined segments outside all planning might contain the more space-related 'poetic' and 'mythical' experiences mentioned by Michel de Certeau⁵. In the back yards along the riverbank, the aspirations of other areas behind them to appear bigger and more urban are quickly forgotten. Besides, it is still possible to strap on skis here and disappear quickly towards the meadows.

- 1 Lehtovuori, P. 2010. *Experience and conflict: The Production of Urban Space*. Pp 42-43
- 2 Kuidas lahendada liiklusprobleemid linna suurimal ristmikul. *Tartu Postimees*. 11.03.2005
- 3 Merrifield, Andy. 2006. *Henri Lefebvre. A Critical Introduction*. Routledge. P 72
- 4 Avermaete, T., and K. Havik. 2009. 'Accommodating the Public Sphere'. *Oase* 77.
- 5 Lehtovuori, P. 2010. P 32.

Henn Runnel

(1983), MA in Urban Landscapes at the Estonian Academy of Arts in 2010. Previously studied landscape architecture in Tartu and Norway and participated in various competitions and landscape art workshops. See also <http://henn.runnel.ee>

National kitsch

Interview with Andres Tolts

Eero Epner: Andres Tolts, we were just talking about the President of Estonia, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, who occasionally turns up in national costume. At the presidential reception on the anniversary of the Republic of Estonia, several ladies wear clothes adorned with stylised 'national patterns'. A new product was recently launched: trainers with 'national patterns'. What's your reaction to all this?

Andres Tolts: Using national elements in fashion is often kind of ready-made, as the inspiration is provided by folk art, although the original roots are severed. The coat of President Ilves, for example, is a version of the long-coat that was widespread in the 17th and early 18th centuries, and is today also worn, for instance, by Orthodox Jews.

I have never been a fan of national costumes myself, except Bavarian jackets, which are neutral and durable.

Neutral in what sense?

They are adapted to changing fashion, without being particularly ethnographic. They, of course, contain ethnographic details, but the cut changes. We do not have typical national costumes that can be worn today as a natural part of an outfit.

As for patterns, it is totally all right to take over the geometry, as it is so archetypal that it is not aggressive. By being aggressive, I mean a narrative ethnographic element. Our patterns are more general and, if they have been traditional elements of national costumes, then why not use them.

Editing the magazine *Kunst ja Kodu* (Art and Home) in the 1970s and 1980s, you often fought against national kitsch. How do you define it?

National kitsch is an imitation, which only gives a vague idea of something archaic. It is a forced-thinking ethnography. Something like today's building of log-houses: such buildings of round logs are not at all typical of ancient

Estonian farm architecture. In proportions and construction, they resemble the ethnographic architecture in Nizhni Novgorod; they are some sort of 'little houses on chicken feet' – ambiguous tales of ethnography. Old threshing barns had precise proportions and technology came second. What matters in such kitsch is the pseudo or illusion. Without knowing the topic, deceptive semblances are accepted after a brief examination.

What is the ideological plan of such kitsch?

On the one hand, the aim is probably to oppose the standard, but then it turns into the standard itself. The naïve idea of the unique has caused the way of thinking to be standard too. Something unique cannot be mass-produced. If the mass starts hoping that it is unique, a new standard inevitably follows. Something similar happens in fashion: if people start thinking that light green is unique, everyone wears light green.

On the other hand, it is pseudo-nationalism. It is not an essential sense of a whole, but is seeking apparent visual signs or standard symbols. The same goes for the new green eco: log houses are considered to be ecological. They can, in a sense, indeed be ecological, but I cannot see why ecological has to be so ugly.

What causes national kitsch?

Imitation. Not an individual creative approach, but imitation. For me, kitsch started with rococo, when Chinese porcelain became popular and innumerable porcelain figurines appeared that were skilfully made, but their form was ridiculous. Kitsch is not personalised; it only seems to be personalised, but there is hardly anything less animated than kitsch.

On the other hand, people want to recall and remember, associate themselves with a location, and this is what various items hope for: wooden dolls in national costumes and small butter knives, as well as souvenirs sold in London and Paris. The merchants of such kitsch will probably be successful forever... They are selling materialised memory.



View of Emajõgi business centre - Pläsku and Tasku



1

During the Soviet era, national kitsch was also produced industrially, e.g a little lamp named after the famous Tallinn weathervane Old Toomas; this was officially approved, even encouraged. What ideological purposes did national kitsch serve which for ordinary people probably often meant 'returning to their roots' and denying the Soviet reality?

I think both Soviet and national kitsch had the same parents. Both were equally repulsive. I can not see any difference between the tradition of song festivals and Soviet propaganda. After all, as the choirs had to sing predominantly Soviet songs and only at the very end performed one little pseudo-national number, it was clear that the whole song festival was a skilful Soviet propaganda undertaking.



2

Do you now go to Song Festivals?

No. They do not offer any artistic experience and I do not need the feeling of blending into the masses. Or, let's take dance festivals: a large percentage of the dances are pseudo-dances, so-called new folk dances, which have nothing to do with ethnography. For me, the German reinlander is more of an Estonian national dance than the thematic ones invented in the 1950s.

Do you see the song and dance festivals as being a part of national kitsch?

Certainly. They might give you a positive sense of unity, but I wouldn't call this art. The aim of a song festival is different; it does not offer any aesthetic impressions. But it fulfils its purpose.

1. Aldo Järvsoo. *Red Passion: Folkcouture*. 2006. Fashion design in Estonian national stripe patterns.

2. The Youth Song and Dance Festival, 2007

3. Trainers with Estonian national pattern made in China

4. Souvenir of our President in his favourite national costume



Is it possible today to use national moments without being ridiculous?

There are thousands of opportunities to be ridiculous. Huge rock concerts can become equally ridiculous, because their aims are almost the same.

If no changes take place, if an event remains just an ethnographic undertaking, it is fine. For example, creating new folk dances is a popular rather than national activity. I have no objections to that at all, because there are differences, big differences, between national and ethnographic nationalism.

It seems to me that, since the Bronze Night, a wave of a kind of naïve nationalism has washed over the local visual world of images.

That could well be and, in the sense of political self-defence, emphasising certain national elements seems an understandable reaction. However, I do not believe that this new wave of national spirit is limited to Estonia. The other day I looked at pictures of the Beijing EXPO pavilions, where at least four or five were decorated on the outside with national ornamentation. It could be a wider reaction, for example against globalisation. On the other hand, it is a cliché: in order to make one's own pavilion stand out from the others, national costume patterns were used, and - surprise, surprise - they turn out to be rather similar the world over.



3



4

Was your fight all those years ago against national kitsch generational, as the parents who remembered the free republic in the 1920s and 1930s could not have done this?

We felt very acutely that we were being manipulated. Let's take the song festival: the regime used it as a chance for people to let off steam; tens of thousands were gathered together and were allowed to sing. This was total manipulation. It would have been much more dangerous to actually abolish the festivals. There were no conflicts with the older generation in our 'fight', but there were no results either.

Have you ever felt an urge to link yourself to national memory?

I want to link myself to my personal memory. I have nothing against nationalism if it is identical with a place or the creative work of a community which has maintained one tradition or another for a long time. But souvenirs have nothing to do with nationalism; the connection is just illusory.

Andres Tolts
(1949), painter.

Kumu Art Museum

Weizenbergi 34 / Valge 1, Tallinn
www.ekm.ee/eng/kumu.php
 Open: May-Sept Tue-Sun 11 am-6 pm;
 Oct-April Wed-Sun 11 am-6 pm

- until 8 Aug *Čiurlionis and His Time in Lithuanian Art* (1875-1911)
- until 5 Sep *The Dialogue of Earth and Water*. Sculptures by Eero Hiironen
- until 12 Sep *Tracing Neo-impressionism: Mägi and Finch*
- until 26 Sep *Soviet Woman in Estonian Art*
- until 10 Oct *Painting in Process*. Estonian Contemporary Painting
- until 12 Dec *Metaphysical Landscapes in 1970s Estonian Graphic Art*
- 3 Sep-Jan 2011 *Estonian Art in Exile*
- 24 Sep-2011 *John Constable*. From the Collections of the Victoria & Albert Museum
- 8 Oct-2011 *Estonian Ex-pat Photography*
- 30 Oct-3 Jan *Sirje Runge. Great Love* (painting)
- 8 Dec-June 2011 *Personal and Public Space in 1970s Estonian Graphic Art*

Museum of Estonian Architecture

Ahtri 2, Tallinn
www.arhitektuurimuuseum.ee
 Open: 19 May-30 Sept Wed-Fri 12 am-8 pm;
 Sat-Sun 11 am-6 pm
 1 Oct-18 May Wed-Sun 11 am-6 pm

- basement gallery *Apple Blossoms*. Alvar Aalto
- 14 July-5 Sep *European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture*. Mies van der Rohe Award 2009
- until 25 July *Young Architecture from University of Applied Sciences*

Estonian Museum of Applied Art and Design

Lai 17, Tallinn
www.ETDM.ee
 Open: Wed-Sun 11 am-6 pm

Permanent exhibition: *Patterns of Time 3*
 Survey of Estonian applied art and the development of design

- until 12 Sep *Classics*. Textile artist. Mall Tomberg
- until 12 Sep *Ceramics* by Jutta Matvei
- 28 Sep-9 Jan 2011 *Scripta Manent IV*

Adamson-Eric Museum

Lühike jalg 3, Tallinn
www.ekm.ee/eng/adamson.php
 Open: Wed-Sun 11 am-6 pm

Permanent exhibition
 Works by Adamson-Eric. Adamson-Eric (1902-1968) is one of the most outstanding Estonian painters of the 20th century. He also devoted much of his time to applied art. The museum's permanent exhibition consists of a display of Adamson-Eric's works (painting, ceramics, porcelain painting, leather art, metal forms, jewellery, decorative tiles, textile, and furniture).

- 19 Jun- 4 Nov *Adamson-Eric. The Diversity of One Creator*
- 20 Nov-Mar 2011 *Ernst Jõesaar (1905-1985)*

Kadriori Art Museum

Kadriori Palace, Weizenbergi 37, Tallinn
 Mikkel Museum, Weizenbergi 28, Tallinn
www.ekm.ee/eng/kadriori.php
 Open: May-Sept Tue-Sun 10 am-5 pm
 Oct-April Wed-Sun 10 am-5 pm

Permanent exhibitions:

Kadriori Palace: Paintings from the 16th-18th century. Dutch, German, Italian and Russian masters. Western European and Russian applied art and sculpture from the 18th-20th centuries.

Mikkel Museum: Collection of Johannes Mikkel: the Art of Western Europe, Russia, and China from 16th-20th centuries

- until 29 Aug *Baltic Biedermeier*
- until 31 Oct *Tension*. German Expressionism from the Collection of the Art Museum of Estonia

Niguliste Museum

Niguliste 3, Tallinn
www.ekm.ee/eng/niguliste.php
 Open: Wed-Sun 10 am-5 pm

Permanent exhibitions:
 Ecclesiastical Art from the 14th-20th centuries The Silver Chamber

- 31 May-Jan 2011 *Villem Raam 100*

Tallinn Art Hall

Vabaduse Sq 8, Tallinn
www.kunstihoone.ee
 Open: Wed-Sun 12 am-6 pm

- 19 June-25 July *Annual Exhibition of the Estonian Artists' Association*
- 31 July-5 Sep *Jüri Ojaver*
- 11 Sep-17 Oct *Hannah Hoeh* (Germany)
- 23 Oct-28 Nov *Revenge*
- 4 Dec-21 Jan 2011 *COBRA* (Belgium)

Tallinn Art Hall Gallery

Vabaduse Sq 6, Tallinn
www.kunstihoone.ee
 Open: Wed-Sun 12 am-6 pm

- until 11 July *Andro Kööp*
- 16 July-8 Aug *Malle Leis*
- 13 Aug-5 Sep *Enn Põldroos*
- 10 Sep-3 Oct *Marge Monko*
- 8 Oct-7 Nov *Enno Hallek*
- 12 Nov-5 Dec *Marko Mäetamm*
- 10 Dec-Jan 2011 *As Sweet As We Can*. Kurt Fleckenstein

Vaal Gallery

Tartu mnt 80d, Tallinn
www.vaal.ee
 Open: Tue-Fri 12 am-6 pm, Sat 12 am-4 pm

- 6 Aug-24 Aug *Kadri Alesmaa*
- 27 Aug-7 Sep *Lembit Sarapuu*
- 10 Sep-28 Sep *Leida Mätas*
- 1 Oct-19 Oct *Laurentsius*
- 21 Oct-9 Nov *Elis Saareväli*

Tallinn City Gallery

Harju 13, Tallinn
www.kunstihoone.ee
 Open: Wed-Sun 12 am-6 pm

- until 18 July *Marko Nautras*
- 22 July-8 Aug *Ott Kadarik*
- 12 Aug-29 Aug *Jass Kaselaan*
- 2 Sep-19 Sep *Kadri Klementi & Helis Heiter*
- 23 Sep-10 Oct *Taaniel Raudsepp & Sigrid Viir*
- 14 Oct-31 Oct *Eva Labotkin*
- 4 Nov-21 Nov *Karel Koplimets & Ivar Veermäe*
- 25 Nov-12 Dec *Erkki Luuk & Chaneldior*
- 16 Dec-Jan 2011 *Santiago Sierra (Mexico)*

ArtDepoo Gallery

Jahu 12, Tallinn
www.artdepoo.com
 Open: Tue-Fri 10 am-6 pm
 Sat 11 am-4 pm

- 2 July-31 July *Sven Saag & Andres Koort*
- 4 Aug-28 Aug *00130 Gallery: Jonna Johansson & Juan Kasari*
- 1 Sep-25 Sep *Jaan Elken*
- 29 Sep-23 Oct *taRRvi LaamaNN*
- 27 Oct-27 Nov *Urmars Viik*

Hobusepea Gallery

Hobusepea 2, Tallinn
www.eaa.ee/hobusepea/english/
 Open: Wed-Mon 10 am-6 pm

- until 12 July *Alvar Reisner*
- 14 July-26 July *Alice Kask*
- 28 July-9 Aug *Mare Vint & Vilen Künnapu*
- 11 Aug-23 Aug *Mall Paris*
- 25 Aug-6 Sep *Dénes Farkas*
- 8 Sep-20 Sep *Raul Rajangu*
- 22 Sep-4 Oct *Vano Allsalu*
- 6 Oct-18 Oct *Ivar Veermäe*
- 20 Oct-1 Nov *JIM. Johannes Säre, Iti Kasser, Maido Juss*
- 3 Nov-15 Nov *Marko Mäetamm*
- 17 Nov-29 Nov *Andres Tali*
- 1 Dec-13 Dec *Maarit Murka*
- 15 Dec-3 Jan *Olivia Verev & Eva Labotkin*

Vabaduse Gallery

Vabaduse Square 6, Tallinn
 Open: Mon-Fri 10 am-6 pm, Sat 11 am-3 pm

- 1-21 July *Mari Roosvalt*. Paintings
- 22 July-11 Aug *Eveli Varik*. Prints and collages
- 12 Aug-1 Sep *Rafael Arutjunjan*
- 2 Sep-15 Sep *Applied Art Exhibition*
- 16 Sep-29 Sep *Kelli Valk*
- 30 Sep-20 Oct *Kaie Parts*
- 21 Oct-16 Nov *Sirje Eelma*
- 17 Nov-1 Dec *Evald Okas*
- 2 Dec-22 Dec *Marju Bormeister*
- 23 Dec-12 Jan *Eva Jänes*

Draakon Gallery

Pikk 18, Tallinn
www.eaa.ee/draakon/index.htm
 Open: Mon-Fri 10 am-6 pm, Sat 10 am-5 pm

- until 10 July *Küllil Laikre*
- 12 July-24 July *Laura Põld & Veiko Klemmer*
- 26 July-7 Aug *Jaanika Okk*
- 9 Aug-21 Aug *Mari-Liis Tammi, Andres Koort, Ene Luik*
- 23 Aug-4 Sep *Karel Koplimets*
- 6 Sep-8 Sep *Liina Kalvik*
- 20 Sep-2 Oct *Lii Pähkel*
- 4 Oct-16 Oct *Andrus Rõuk*
- 18 Oct-30 Oct *Helen Melesk*
- 1 Nov-13 Nov *Anna Hints*
- 15 Nov-27 Nov *Kristi Kongi*
- 29 Nov-11 Dec *slippery terrain*. Nina Lassila (FI/SE), Juliana Espana Keller (CA/UK), Thora Gunnarsdottir & Elin Thorisdottir (IS)
- 13 Dec-31 Dec *Sandra Jõgeva*

HOP Gallery

Hobusepea 2, Tallinn
www.eaa.ee/hop
 Open: Thu-Tue 10 am-6 pm

- until 6 July *Kalevipoeg*. Leather art department of the Estonian Academy of Arts
- 9 July-27 July *Women's World*. Aet Ollisaar
- 30 July-17 Aug *Living Jewel*. Jewellery from Hungary and Estonia
- 21 Aug-7 Sep *Leena Kuutma*
- 10 Sep-28 Sep *Monika Grasiene-Zaltauskaite, Severija Incirauskaite-Kriauneviciene, Monika Järg* (Lithuania, Estonia)
- 1 Oct-19 Oct *Little Red House*. Anna Rikkinen, Nelli Tanner (Finland)
- 22 Oct-9 Nov *Mille fleurs*. Liisu Arro, Jaak Arro
- 12 Nov-30 Nov *Raul Erdel*
- 3 Dec-21 Dec *Pilvi Ojamaa*

Tartu Art Museum

Raekoja Sq 18, Tartu
www.tartmus.ee
 Open: Wed-Sun 11 am-6 pm

- until 22 Aug *Tartu University graduates' paintings*
- 27 Aug-17 Oct *They're here!* Estonian contemporary graphic art
- 22 Oct-28 Nov *Tanja Muravskaja*

Art and culture sites

www.cca.ee/?lang=en *True Guardian* - The official blog of the Center for Contemporary Arts, Estonia
ekkm-came.blogspot.com The Contemporary Art Museum of Estonia
www.foku.ee The Union of Photography Artists in Estonia
www.culture.ee Estonian cultural events



Lost Eighties. Problems, Themes and Meanings in the Estonian Art of the 1980s

Compiled by Sirje Helme
 Edited by Andreas Trossek,
 co-edited by Johannes Saar
 Design by Andres Tali
 464 pages
 in Estonian and English
 Published by the Center for
 Contemporary Arts, Estonia
 Tallinn 2010

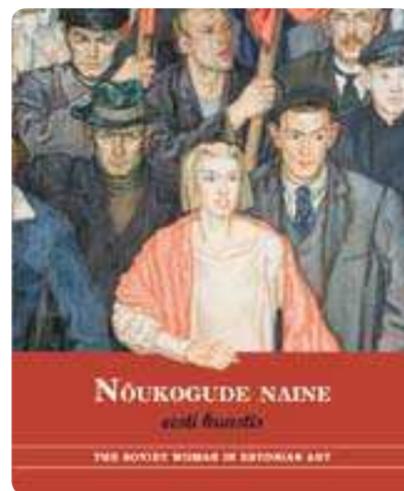
A presentation day, *Lost Eighties*, organized by the Center for Contemporary Arts, Estonia and the Estonian Society of Art Historians, was held at the Rotermann Salt Storage on 9 December 2003. The progress of this collection from the initial idea to a finished book is rather long for several reasons. However, the experience of putting together the previous collection *Nosy Nineties* showed that, although the authors' approach, styles of writing and methodologies might differ, the data itself does not. A history of Estonian art in several volumes was in the process of being written – and still is – but no compilation can replace smaller comprehensive insights, which can be provided by a collection such as this one.



Bernt Notke – Between Innovation and Tradition

Anu Mänd, PhD
 Designed by Liina Siib
 96 pages
 in Estonian and English
 Published by the Art Museum of
 Estonia
 Tallinn 2010

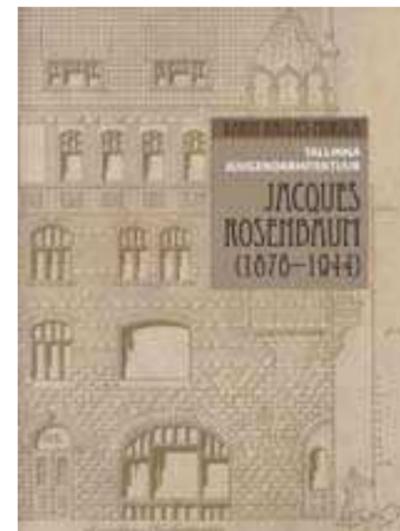
The recently published book *Bernt Notke – uuenduste ja traditsioonide vahel / Bernt Notke – Between Innovation and Tradition* is a catalogue of the exhibition of the same name. The catalogue provides an overview of the life and main works of Bernt Notke (c 1440-1509), one of the most famous and talented painters of the late medieval Baltic Sea region. The book also introduces the events in Tallinn in 2009, when the Niguliste Museum celebrated the 500th anniversary of Notke's death. The catalogue is richly illustrated and bilingual: in Estonian and English.



The Soviet Woman in Estonian Art

Texts by Katrin Kivimaa and
 Kädi Talvoja
 Designed by Külli Kaats
 96 pages
 in Estonian and English
 Published by the Art Museum of
 Estonia
 Tallinn 2010

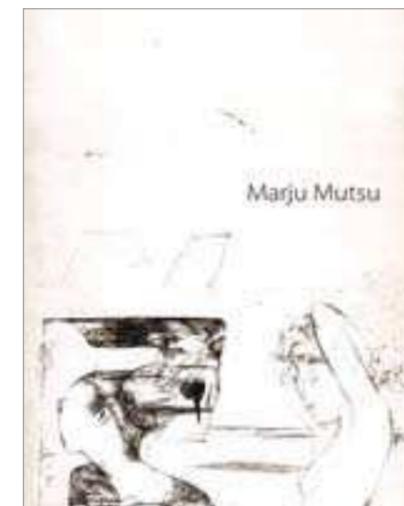
Catalogue of the exhibition *The Soviet Woman in Estonian Art* (Kumu Art Museum, 8 April-26 September 2010). The exhibition introduces forgotten or little known works from early Soviet Estonian art, concentrating on the image of the 'new Soviet femininity', which played an important role in Soviet ideology and culture. The works of art in this exhibition show that the representation of Soviet femininity in Estonian art was heterogeneous and that, in addition to the usual features of a specifically Soviet identity, e.g women workers and collective farmers, there existed a whole array of other images.



Jugendstil Architecture in Tallinn. Jacques Rosenbaum (1878–1944)

Karin Hallas-Murula
 Supervised by Jaak Kangilaski
 Designed by Piret Niinepuu-Kiik
 128 pages
 in Estonian and English
 Published by
 The Museum of Estonian Architecture
 Tallinn 2010

Jacques Rosenbaum was one of the most prominent architects in Tallinn in the early 20th century. His buildings constitute the most notable part of Tallinn's late Historicist and Jugendstil architecture. The book also presents Rosenbaum's numerous projects that were never realised. The research offers new data and documents on the architect's work.



Marju Mutsu

Compiled by Herald Eelma
 Texts by Elnara Taidre *et al*
 Edited by Tiiu Viirand
 Designed by Pärtel Eelma
 191 pages
 in Estonian and English
 Tallinn 2009

Marju Mutsu (1941-1980) was among the most prominent Estonian graphic artists in the 1970s. Her creative legacy includes about 150 etchings or prints in other techniques, drawings and watercolours. Her work is characterised by a poetic approach, spontaneous self-expression and a free treatment of lines. She often depicted the emotional world and nature of young people. The current book is the first monograph on Marju Mutsu.

The study maps the trajectory of gradual appearance of non-material, objectless and communicative artistic ideas into the Estonian cultural field, which apparently repeats the earlier developmental patterns of international art – the rejection of traditional materials and the introduction of electronic technologies.



Tallinn Architecture 1900–2010. Architecture Guide

Compiled by Karin Hallas-Murula
 Designed by Angelika Schneider
 160 pages
 in English
 Published by
 The Museum of Estonian Architecture
 Tallinn 2010

The book opens with a short historical overview of Estonian architecture. This is followed by a guide to the city, divided into sections in which the buildings are grouped and listed according to their location. The numbered entries start in the Old Town and continue in various directions along the main roads – Pärnu Road, Tartu Road and Narva Road, leading to Merivälja, Kalamaja, Kopli, Kakumäe, Mustamäe and Nõmme. The text is illustrated with mostly new but also some historical photographs.



S. Škop - 59

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