

Ed. Lotte Løvholm

MUSEUM OF CARE

The Latvian Collection of Malmö Konstmuseum

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2019

PALDIES,
Alja Brasliņa & Anna Pūtele, Latvian National
Museum of Art
Solvita Krese, Inga Lāce, Diāna Popova, Antra
Priede-Krievkalne & Andra Silapētere, Latvian
Centre for Contemporary Art

TACK,
Marcus Pompeius & Anders Lindsjö,
Malmö Konstmuseum
Cecilia Widenheim, Tensta konsthall

THANK YOU,
Andreas Hjort Bundgaard, Anne Kølbaek Iversen,
Boye Koch, Mart Kuldkepp, Maria Lind, Annelise
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Warsza

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Museum of Care

Artworks are wormholes. They are objects of affect, sometimes difficult to grasp, sometimes sticky. They invite endless readings. They can be glimpses of a far away past. They can be forgotten, they can come back to haunt us.

A few months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, people in the Baltic States formed one long chain by joining hands, which stretched 675 km across Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. It was a peaceful demonstration for Baltic independence after nearly five decades of occupation by the Soviet Union.

Through the centuries, the Baltic territories have been a target of conquest and the battleground between Denmark, Sweden, Russia, Germany, and Poland. An estimated 400.000 people fled the Baltic States during the Second World War without being able to return. By the time the Baltic countries regained their independence between 1990–1991, their populations had become displaced peoples.

In this publication I invite you to enter into a wormhole of five paintings with me. The paintings deal with the building of nation states, displacement, and the time around the First and Second World Wars

in Latvia. They are part of a newly rediscovered Latvian collection at Malmö Konstmuseum of forty-seven artworks. I introduce a selection: 'Refugees' from 1947 by Eduards Dzenis, 'Old Boats' from 1939 by Jānis Liepiņš, 'Riga Beach' from 1946 by Niklāvs Strunke, 'Latvian Riflemen' which is undated, but possibly from 1916, by Jāzeps Grosvalds and 'Two Friends' from 1938 by Kārlis Baltgailis. Alongside photos of these works I am also presenting photos of their "family members" – collections of artworks by the same artists currently in storage at the Latvian National Museum of Art.

In 2019, these paintings will be shown for the first time in over forty years, in the exhibition *Migration: Traces of an Art Collection*, which will travel from Tensta konsthall, to Malmö Konstmuseum, both in Sweden. The show is curated by Maria Lind and Cecilia Widenheim using works from Malmö Konstmuseum's collection by artists who worked with exile and migration as a theme.

In addition to my own essay, 'Through Wormholes', which highlights the five paintings from the "Latvian collection of Malmö Konstmuseum", I am reprinting four articles for this publication that expand the research further. This broader view includes the geopolitics of the Baltic and Nordic region, Latvian exile artists, a former research study into the Latvian collection from 1970, as well as an extraordinary story about the museum during the Second World War (WWII).

Museums are caretakers. They preserve objects for future generations. Most often they take care of objects, but sometimes they also take care of people. In 1945, Malmö museum was turned into a shelter for refugees for six months. This story is highlighted in Cecilia Widenheim's contribution 'A Living Museum', reprinted from the catalogue *Art in the Shadow of War – The Museum as Refugee Camp*. Apart from the remarkable nature of this story, it is also a testimony to the environment at Malmö museum around WWII, when the Latvian collection evolved.

From his exile in Chicago, Latvian art historian and poet Ojārs Jēgens woke the Latvian collection in 1970 with the article 'The Fate of Our

Artworks'. His article has been translated into English for this publication and excerpts of it have been reprinted.

An important aspect of Latvian art history is art in exile and so this publication includes the collective text 'Portable Landscapes' by Solvita Krese, Inga Lāce, Diāna Popova, Antra Priede-Krievkalne and Andra Silapētere from the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art. They have been an incredible resource and inspiration for this publication and I am honoured to reprint their touching and contextually precise text in this publication. *Portable Landscapes* is a research and exhibition project on Latvian exile art communities in New York, Paris, Berlin, Montreal and Gotland.

Estonian historian Mart Kuldkepp has contributed the article 'Hegemony, Liberation and Transnational Activism in World War I' for this publication. In its full version, it was originally published in *Ajalooline Ajakiri. The Estonian Historical Journal*, and it deals with the activist movement during WWI. The activists aimed to make Sweden a great power again – one that would liberate Finland and the Baltics and resume control over the Baltic Sea. A transnational movement, it had supporters in Finland, Estonia, Germany and Sweden.

Making this publication has been an emotional journey. My grandmother fled from Latvia to Denmark through Germany during WWII and never spoke about her past to me. Letting these five artworks guide me to get a better understanding of what went on in Latvia from the years of my grandmother's childhood to her migration, has been both healing and enlightening. I am sharing this research with you since these stories from the past carry relevance today and reach into the future. They are responses to events we keep facing: war, displacement and migration. They give us personal insights into abstract geopolitical questions. And ultimately, they tell us something about the nation state as a concept and the price we pay for it.

Lotte Løvholm
April 2019

Through Wormholes

Lotte Løholm

Latvia is the place my grandmother fled from. The place she rarely spoke of. The place with the beautifully melodic language I tried imitating once. She shushed me.

To me, my grandmother was otherworldly, a fun, extravagant creature, coming to save us from the mundaneness of middle-class life in the Danish countryside.

She was also bruised by war. It would show in her trembling whenever a curious question came up about her life before exile. She had changed her name and date of birth upon leaving Latvia, and kept it a secret. I found out in the hospital a couple of weeks before her passing when a nurse called her by a name I had never heard before. Her birth name was still in her documents.

On my first trip to Latvia, there was turbulence on the plane caused by lightning and thunder. My mother and I jokingly said that it was my grandmother opposing our plans from her grave. Latvia was the place we were not supposed to know about.

I was presented with a selection of artworks for the upcoming exhibition *Migration: Traces in an Art Collection* at Tensta konsthall curated by Maria Lind and Cecilia Widenheim. Five works from the “Latvian collection of Malmö Konstmuseum” were going to be part of the show. This collection had been forgotten amongst Malmö’s archive of 40.000 artworks and craft objects.

I wanted to know more about the Latvian works and started visiting archives, finding old Swedish and Latvian newspaper articles and contacting people in order to research the unconscious history of the museum. I was awakening the idea of the “Latvian collection of Malmö Konstmuseum” but I also felt reluctant.

The Donor

Just as the Second World War (WWII) broke out in 1939, Malmö museum¹ received a donation of 10.000 Swedish kronor. The amount is equivalent to 30.000 dollars today, or what a worker would earn in a little under a year. Private donor Oscar Elmquist gave the sum with the specific purpose of purchasing Latvian contemporary art and establishing a “Latvian collection” at the museum. Elmquist was a customs inspector and a private collector who had lived in Riga and befriended many artists there.

The terms of Elmquist’s donation could be seen as his wish to share his passion for contemporary art by Latvian artists with the public in his hometown Malmö. It also could have been a way to augment the value of his own private Latvian collection. Perhaps he was simply making sure that the artworks were in safe hands, before war broke out in Latvia.

Malmö museum already had an interest in collecting Nordic and Baltic art. The museum accepted Elmquist’s donation, continuing the legacy of the Baltic Exhibition in Malmö in 1914 – a small version of a world fair, that covered the nations around the Baltic Sea.

The Young Nation

A committee that included artist Ludolf Liberts was set up to prepare a selection of works for the museum. The exhibition *Latvian Fine Art for Malmö museum* was arranged at the University of Latvia and in November 1939 museum director Ernst Fischer went to visit. Around forty² newly acquired artworks became the start of the Latvian collection of Malmö museum – a tribute to Latvia as a nation.

In a Swedish review of the newly acquired works for the museum, the art critic Nils Gösta Sandblad dissects the artworks like exotic fruits:

“despite [the] international schooling [of the artists], Latvian art is not French, not Russian, not German, not Nordic, which makes it difficult to digest at first, but gives it a distinct Latvian character [...] The exhibition is dominated by fluid and elegant paintings, a personal temperamental impressionism, full of movement, sometimes slightly loose, often subdued and not always clean in colour, but playful with shiny, inserted highlight splashes. It is here we find the special Latvianess I mentioned before”

(Nils Gösta Sandblad: ‘Lettisk Konst på Malmö museum’, *Arbetet*, 19.12.1939).

The endless desire to categorize, name and emphasize nationality has always been part of art history, and of Western culture. When trying to explain my research on the Latvian collection, a Danish collector recently asked me: “So, how is Latvian art from the 1930’s? Is it similar to Russian?”

Reframing something as the Latvian collection is indeed targeting national pathos. Any reluctance I have around this research comes not only from family trauma, but also from my unwillingness to focus on nationality over content. I was not interested in talking about the collection as a whole, since the idea of a profound essence of Latvianess and Latvian paintings, or any nationality for that matter, is to me a phantom. I was instead led to the artworks that took me back in time and place, to the Latvia my grandmother fled from in the 1940s looking specifically at the mechanisms of nation state building and how artists have dealt with that.

The Director

Upon museum director Fischer's return from Riga, he was asked by the paper *Arbetet*, about the political situation in Riga. Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union had just invaded Poland and Latvia's neighbour Lithuania gave up territory to Germany that same spring. Fischer said: "allting var lugnt och tillitsfullt" ["everything was calm and trustful"]. It is hard to know his motivation for giving this statement; one can only assume that nobody knew how bad it would get.

Seven months later, the Soviet Army occupied the Baltic States. A few months prior, Sweden's neighbours Norway and Denmark were occupied by Nazi Germany, and Finland was at war with the Soviet Union.

Ernst Fischer's home became the secret meeting place for the Malmö branch of the Tuesday Club, an activist resistance movement of Swedish intellectuals organizing themselves against the Nazis. And in 1945, Fischer decided to turn Malmö museum into a refugee shelter.

The Neutral Country

During WWII in Latvia, it is estimated that the population decreased by twenty-five percent. The Latvian army was divided between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, and it was not uncommon for brothers to be forced to fight each other. Mass deportations were carried out and people were killed. An estimated 200.000 Latvians fled, of whom 4500 went by boat to Sweden.

My grandmother did not like Sweden. The Swedish government sent back Baltic refugees after pressure from the Soviet Union. Perhaps most dramatic was the "Baltic Extradition" in 1946, when around 150 Estonian and Latvian soldiers who had deserted the Waffen-SS were sent back to their Soviet Union-occupied homelands. Two committed suicide as an act of resistance; three were executed upon their return. Baltic refugees in Sweden feared being sent back to their occupied homelands, and many fled from Sweden to Canada.

The Artist in Exile

During WWII, it was not uncommon in the Baltic States to see processions of people walking, some next to horse-drawn carriages laden with their belongings, either trying to reach Germany or the Baltic Sea, and from there, escape by rowboats, ships or even rafts.

In 1947, upon arriving in Sweden from Latvia, artist Eduards Dzenis made the painting 'Refugees' and donated it to Malmö museum. The composition of the painting is rather unusual: the narrow framing almost cuts out a person behind the carriage. The figures are blurry and it seems they have been painted with quick strokes. This technique makes the painting seem inhabited by ghosts. The framing and the ghostly characteristics of the figures suggest a continuous event, rather than a singular incident. His painting is a testimony to the situation for Baltic refugees during WWII.

While working on my research it was brought to my attention by Cecilia Widenheim, the former director of Malmö Konstmuseum, that the Latvian collection was expanded in 1947 with acquisitions and donations from artists. Most of them were living in exile in Sweden and had come into contact with the museum through the show *Exhibition of Latvian Art*. Dzenis was part of this group. He left Sweden for Canada in 1951.

The Latvian Riflemen

In retrospect, the artworks collected after WWII are an important addition to the pieces collected in 1939, most notably in relation to 'Latvian Riflemen' (undated, possibly 1916) by Jāzeps Grosvalds and 'Two Friends' (1938) by Kārlis Baltgailis, who was inspired by Grosvalds. The paintings deal with the First World War (WWI) and Latvian nation state building.

Like many other young male artists both Jāzeps Grosvalds and Kārlis Baltgailis volunteered in 'The Latvian Riflemen', a local unit, defending Baltic territory against Germany during the first war in the industrial age, WWI. This war shaped the borders of the Europe we know today and the paintings bear witness to the cost of modern nation state building. The

Latvian Riflemen unit is part of this story; they fought for the Russian Empire but they were also important in Latvia's fight for independence from Russia a few years later. They represent a national minority within the empire that fought for independence.

Grosvalds fought in the same unit as artist Niklāvs Strunke. They documented their immediate impressions of warfare from their bunkers through paintings and drawings. The work 'Latvian Riflemen' is part of a series of tempera paintings by Grosvalds from the frontline. It depicts soldiers walking in a bombed landscape of trenches. Together with Baltgailis' painting 'Two Friends', which was painted from memory much later, it is a testament to the brutalities of WWI.

These paintings are not the "frames of war" described by American sociologist Judith Butler in relation to modern war imagery. According to Butler, the military and media frame war so that the public is prevented from grieving over the death of civilians. The lives of people, and primarily people of colour, become ungrievable through the framing of embedded journalism; the journalist signs a contract with the military and is therefore restricted in his or her reporting. Butler argues that the media coverage from war zones portray whole populations as threats rather than living civilians in need of protection.

What both Baltgailis and Grosvalds do in their framing of war is to show the complexities of their fight for freedom, from the soldier's standpoint. They both volunteered in the war and witnessed civilians fleeing or dying, whilst also losing friends. The bodies in their frames are grievable. The price for independence is high.

Baltgailis reconstructed many of his paintings by memory, as most of them were destroyed in air raids on the city Jelgava during fights between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in WWII. Jelgava is where the holocaust started in Latvia. The Germans took over the city from the Soviet Union in 1941 and were successful in taking advantage of Latvian anti-Soviet sentiment. Propaganda in the press soon connected Jewish people with communists, fuelling already rising anti-Semitism in Latvia.

The National Archive

After seeing the Latvian collection in Malmö Konstmuseum's archive, I went to the Latvian National Museum of Art to meet Aija Brasliņa who is head of the Collections and Scientific Research Department (18th – mid 20th century).

Located beneath the museum were racks and racks of paintings by the artists. Brasliņa pulled out ceiling-high storage racks of paintings by Jāzeps Grosvalds, Kārlis Baltgailis, Jānis Liepiņš and Niklāvs Strunke – artists I had seen in Malmö – represented by one work each. There were no works by Eduards Dzenis, about whom there is little information in general. With all the artworks next to each other, it was much easier to get a sense of the artists' ways of working. It was like coming home. I was meeting the family of the Malmö paintings. In Riga these "family members" on the racks guided my further reading.

The first thing you learn in exhibition-making is how an artwork will change meaning when put in different contexts. Seeing each artist's works together gave me a better understanding of how they individually understood their own practices. Furthermore, seeing the different artists' paintings next to each other gave me an understanding of possible connections between them and common interests.

There was one rack full of paintings by Grosvalds. On one side were serious depictions of the Eastern Front and refugees during WWI. On the other side, I saw his romantic playboy character, in the colourful expressionist portraits he made of women in Paris.

Today, Grosvalds is considered Latvia's first modernist painter, Brasliņa told me. He died young from the Spanish flu, and his family donated many of his works to foreign countries just before WWII, perhaps to save the paintings. Moderna Museet in Stockholm alone has eight of his paintings.

The Ones That Stayed, the Ones That Left

A handful of artists in the Latvian collection, including Marija Induse-Muceniece, fled Latvia. The etching 'Fishers' (undated) by Induse-Muceniece was bought for the collection in 1939. Together with her husband, children and paintings, Induse-Muceniece fled by boat to Sweden in 1944, and to prevent the boat from sinking her paintings were thrown overboard.

From then onwards, she included the exile experience in her practice. She sent the 1948 linocut 'Refugee Boat (Escape from the Russian Occupation)' to U.S. president Harry S. Truman as an expression of gratitude for accepting so many Latvian refugees during WWII. The linocut is engraved on a copper plate at Visby Cathedral (on the Swedish island Gotland, in the Baltic Sea) serving as a memorial for all the refugees from the Baltic States.



Marija Induse-Muceniece. Refugee Boat
(Escape from the Russian Occupation). Linocut. 1948.
Latvian National Museum of Art

Niklāvs Strunke, who exhibited alongside Eduards Dzenis in Malmö museum in 1947, fled Latvia too. He left for Sweden by boat in 1944 with his wife, children and his rolled up paintings. He donated the painting 'Riga Beach' (1946) to Malmö museum. Strunke painted the piece after his arrival in Sweden as a mental revisit to a once-familiar place, destroyed by war. Earlier works of his in the collection of the Latvian National Museum of Art display a similar motive, but with a much lighter atmosphere. After his exile, Strunke encouraged other exiled Latvian artists to paint their war-torn home country. In peaceful Sweden, where he never felt quite at home, he painted scenes of ruins. He spent his winters in Italy, painting ancient architecture.

Strunke's good friend, fellow artist, and beach summerhouse neighbour, Jānis Liepiņš, stayed in Latvia. His painting 'Old Boats' (1939) was made the year before the Soviet occupation and selected for the collection in Malmö. Unlike Strunke's painting, this Latvian beachside is softer, more peaceful. Liepiņš, who was active in the radical press in the 1920s and early 1930s making anti-fascist political posters, fell under USSR censorship – like all artists that stayed – and was obliged to work for the state.

In 1970, Latvian art historian and poet Ojārs Jēgens wrote the article 'The Fate of Our Artworks' for the Latvian magazine *Tilts* [Bridge], that was published in exile in the US from 1949–1976. Jēgens was stationed to fight for Nazi Germany in the Latvian army and sent to prison in Denmark after the war. As a young Latvian writer in exile, he was part of the Latvian art community in Denmark and was friends with Niklāvs Strunke. In the article, he explains how the Latvian collection of Malmö museum was taken down from permanent display in 1958 due to lack of space. Some of the works were placed in public institutions, however the management of Malmö museum apparently told people interested in the Latvian collection that it was "doubtful" that the works would be shown again after they were taken down. He also mentions how people asking whether the collection could not be redeemed, were told that it would not be possible as it had been a donation. In his footnotes, he connects the museum's attitude with an unwillingness to support the still-occupied Latvian nation. The point of departure for collecting the

works – as a tribute to Latvia and its art scene – had been forgotten. For Jēgens, an intellectual in exile, this gesture is similar to the erasure of Latvian history by the Soviet Union. There is a lot at stake when it comes to the Latvian collection of Malmö Konstmuseum.

Wormholes

The artist-protagonists in this story all cared deeply about freedom: freedom for themselves and others. They also cared about telling their story, which makes them important witnesses. Their's are songs from afar, resonating with today's political climate in Europe.

In their own individual ways, the paintings transmit complicated feelings: what does it cost to have a nation? What does it mean to flee? What does it mean to stay? And when it comes to our museum protagonist, Ernst Fischer: what does it mean to have so much responsibility and still be able to listen to your gut? He took a last-minute decision to close his museum and turn it into a shelter for people in need – what would it take for a museum director today to do the right thing?

Jāzeps Grosvalds shows his soldiers from behind. They are walking away. Apart from the burned-out trees, the painting is calm; the soldiers are doing their daily routine. Kārlis Baltgailis on the other hand shows his soldiers from the front. We see their faces, we feel their pain. Like a photo journalist, Eduards Dzenis reports on the thousands of people having to flee during WWII. Niklāvs Strunke exposes us to his inner state of mind. From his exile in Sweden he longs for his homeland and grieves his loss. With Jānis Liepiņš we get an insight into the calm daily routines before WWII for Latvian fishers. One common situation creates different responses.

With a little imagination, art can be a wormhole, transcending space-time and bridging the gap between generations – between those who left, and those who stayed, between my grandmother and me.

The antagonists in this story are the world wars, the greedy nations breeding enmity and wanting more. Nation state building has a tendency of finding enemies, and often today's refugees in need are seen as those enemies. Modern society is based on ancient Greek drama: always in search of heroes and villains. Can we form a collective identity without "othering"? Is it possible to escape this plot?

How do we, the public, learn from history? How do we learn from art? In my attempt to travel through wormholes, I ask if maybe these strangers from afar can bring us together.

Perhaps the timescales of these art pieces can give us something the 24/7 news cycle cannot. Maybe they can heal forgotten wounds, and make us aware of how to welcome a stranger. We need to take stories like this with us into the uncertain grounds the future holds.

1 In 1999 Malmö Konstmuseum was established with its own collection. Before this date, the art collection was part of Malmö museum.

2 Newspaper articles from 1939 refer to a total of forty-five artworks, but in Malmö Konstmuseum's database there are forty-one artworks acquired in 1939.



Jānis Liepiņš. In the Boat. 1936. Oil on canvas. 95 x 120 cm.
Latvian National Museum of Art.



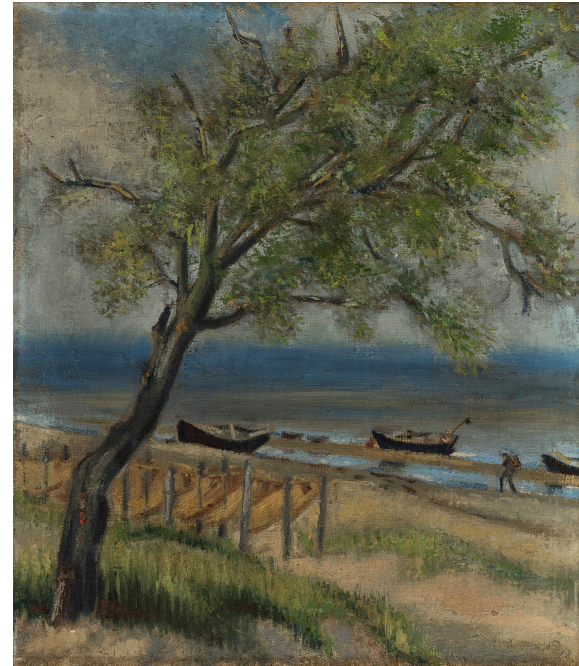
Jānis Liepiņš. Old Boats. 1939. Oil on canvas. 81 x 100 cm.
Malmö Konstmuseum.



Works by Jānis Liepiņš in the archive of the Latvian National Museum of Art.



Works by Niklāvs Strunke in the archive of the Latvian National Museum of Art.



Niklāvs Strunke. Landscape. Ca. 1930. Oil on canvas. 55 x 58,5 cm. Latvian National Museum of Art.



Niklāvs Strunke. Riga Beach. 1946. Oil on canvas. 60 x 81 cm. Malmö Konstmuseum.



Eduards Dzenis. Refugees. 1947. Pastel on paper. 39 x 58 cm. Malmö Konstmuseum.



Jāzeps Grosvalds. Fortifications under Fire. 1916-1917. Tempera on cardboard. 54,5 x 67 cm. Latvian National Museum of Art.



Jāzeps Grosvalds. From series: Latvian Riflemen. Undated (possibly 1916). Tempera on cardboard. 54,5 x 64,5 cm. Malmö Konstmuseum.



Works by Jāzeps Grosvalds in the archive of the Latvian National Museum of Art.



Works by Kārlis Baltgailis in the archive of the Latvian National Museum of Art.



Kārlis Baltgailis. Wounded Rifleman. 1936. Oil on cardboard. 52,5 x 65 cm. Latvian National Museum of Art.



Kārlis Baltgailis. Two Friends. 1938. Gouache on cardboard. 50,5 x 71,5 cm. Malmö Konstmuseum.



Malmö museum as a refugee centre in 1945. Photo: Karl Werner Gullers.

*This text was published by Malmö Konstmuseum in 2015 in the book
'Art in the Shadow of War – The Museum as Refugee Camp'.*

Translation: Frank Perry

A Living Museum

Cecilia Widenheim

Director of Malmö Konstmuseum from 2012-2018

"It has been the view of us all that a public institution is not an end in itself but a servant of society, and when society requires us to fulfil duties different from those we are intended to perform it should be our unquestioned obligation to accept these new tasks willingly."

'Glimpses From a Living Museum', published by museum director Ernst Fischer, 8 June 1945 in *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*.

2015 marks the seventieth anniversary of the end of the war when thousands of people landed in Malmö by boat. By late April 1945 the need was acute for premises to house the refugees and concentration camp prisoners who arrived on the famous white buses run by the Red Cross. The story goes that the then museum director Ernst Fischer called in the staff on April 27 so they could open Malmö museum to the refugees the following day. For almost six months the museum served as a refugee camp and quarantine centre. At its height there were 500 people living on site at the same time.

This event obviously invites careful consideration but it also raises a number of important questions about our current view of what an art museum is and what a public institution can be. The decision to close the museum to the public and set up dormitories, washrooms and dining

halls must have been challenged and debated. Retrospectively, however, that decision inspires great respect. What sort of event would be met with such a radical gesture of solidarity today? And what kind of situation would evoke such a rapid mobilisation of resources and energy?

Ernst Fischer's announcement in the local press testifies to a powerful conviction as to the role of the museum in civil society. A museum is not an end in itself; its *raison d'être* resides in the role society accords it at a particular time. Fischer was an art historian and had begun working at the museum as early as the 1920s. His enthusiasm for popular education is a matter of historical record. It was at this time that the idea that every schoolchild in Malmö should be offered a visit to the museum twice a year got off the ground.

Fischer was however also a committed opponent of the Nazis and his home soon became the base for the Malmö-branch of the legendary Tuesday Club. The first meeting of the Tuesday Club had been held on 9 April 1940 in Stockholm, the same day, that is, on which the Germans occupied Norway and Denmark. Amelie Posse, who started the secret club, had personal experience to draw on. She had been a writer and journalist in Czechoslovakia during the 1930s, but was forced to flee the Gestapo before the outbreak of war. What she envisaged was "the formation of a nationwide network of cells capable of galvanising opinion against the Nazis during peacetime and, if necessary, of leading the resistance against them in the event of an occupation."

As early as 1946 an exhibition entitled *Ravensbrück – Images from the Years of Captivity*, made up of a hundred or so works by three Polish women artists who came to Malmö at the end of the war, would be shown at the castle Malmöhus. Their images bear witness not only to unimaginable hardships and human tragedies but also to the humour, which seems to survive even the most degrading of circumstances. Several of the works were produced as commemorative images after the war.

Although the depiction of the real face of Nazism and later of the victims of the war was relatively unusual in Swedish art, it should be borne

in mind that considerable parts of the establishment were openly pro-Nazi during the 1930s. Open criticism entailed a significant risk. One exception was the periodical *Mänsklighet* [Humanity], which presented a vigorous Swedish anti-war satire. With the willing assistance of artists, graphic designers and writers, the artist Albin Amelin aimed to increase awareness of the rising tide of National Socialism and the censorship that was bearing down to an even greater extent on all aspects of society, including the visual arts. The original intention had been to put the periodical in regular production but only two issues were published owing to distribution problems because of the radical content.

The Swedish artist Sven Xet Erixson was powerfully inspired on hearing how the art museum in Malmö was being temporarily inhabited by prisoners from the camps. In a monumental and visionary painting he portrays ragged and emaciated figures being received by white-clad nurses who lead them round the works of art.

Reference is frequently made to the difficulty museums face in reflecting the contemporary world and to the problems that confront public institutions in trying to remain a vital resource for their visitors. Ernst Fischer's decision to set up a refugee centre would shake the self-image of the museum to its foundations. The photographs that show the conversion of the exhibition halls to dormitories while the art gallery was filled with metal bunk beds gives pause for thought. The photographs that reveal how the religious art in the museum's collections suddenly found a practical use provide evidence of a fascinating encounter between the institutional identity of the museum and the political imperatives of a secularised Sweden.

*This text is based on excerpts
from an article originally published in 'Tilts' in 1970.
Translation: Daila Krakte*

**The Fate of Our Artworks
Latvian Artworks in Malmö museum, Sweden**

Ojārs Jēgens

The first Latvian artist's work in Malmö museum was the painting 'Ferries on the Spree River' ('Prāmji Šprē upē') by L. Liberts, donated by the Malmö-Lund department of the Swedish-Latvian Association in 1938.¹

In 1939 the fundamental collection of Malmö museum's Latvian department was added to this painting, donated to the museum by the art collector, Swedish customs official, O. Elmquist – a total of forty-four or forty-five artworks: paintings, graphic works and sculptures. O. Elmquist lived in Latvia in the 1930s where he became friends with Latvian artists and began to collect Latvian artworks. After learning of his intention to give these works to Malmö museum, a special committee was established with the help of Latvian national institutions, the task of which was to support Elmquist in various ways and in general help him to create a truly representative Latvian art collection. Latvian artists in this jury committee were represented by Prof. L. Liberts and the Swedish-Latvian Association was represented by Prof. Francis Balodis – apparently there was also another representative of a third office. When the collection was formed, it was displayed in Riga for the public to

visit, before being shipped to Sweden. The catalogue of this exhibition has remained. Its full title: Artworks of the Latvian fine arts for the art museum in the city of Malmö, Sweden, 1939. Exhibition at the New Hall of University of Latvia, November 12, 1939.

[...]

Checking Malmö museum's catalogues confirms that all the works displayed in Riga were indeed received in Malmö, apart from 'Landscape' by F. Bange. It is also clear from the catalogues that the titles of the works were first translated into German and only then into Swedish, thus sometimes creating misunderstandings and inaccuracies.

[...]

There is a note added to all of the works donated to Malmö museum by O. Elmquist in catalogues, as well as on each work's frame or base. O. Elmquist's name is also inscribed in the museum's hallway, in the dark green marble of the wall of main staircase, along with the names of other prominent benefactors.

Although this overview is not devoted to critical analysis of O. Elmquist's collection, or to criticism of the work of auxiliary committee or selection of artistic works, it should be acknowledged that while this collection is highly representative of the state and level of Latvian painting in the second half of the 1930s,² seeing only this, one cannot even begin to grasp the idea of the brightest and most important period in Latvian art so far – the 1920s.³ Only an expert will notice the features of this period in the work of J. Grosvalds. The very few – though valuable – works of our old masters (J. Valters, J. Rozentāls, V. Purvītis, R. Zariņš) cannot sufficiently describe the development of Latvian art.

However, Malmö museum's collection of Latvian art was the largest and most important Latvian art collection outside the borders of Latvia.

In 1940s this collection was complemented by several donated or otherwise gained works of Latvian painters living in Sweden (E. Dzenis, M. Liepiņa, A. Strauss, J. Cīrulis, N. Strunke).

By the mid 1950s nearly all of these works were displayed in a special section of Malmö museum called Latvian Art. In 1955 the museum's management cut the space for Latvian Art section and only twenty-seven works were left to be displayed ('Riga Beach' by Strunke, works by Baltgailis, M. Liepiņa, Rozentāls, Dzenis, Grosvalds, Skride, Valters, J. Cīrulis, Svemps, both works of Liberts, works by Annus, O. Skulme, U. Skulme, Cielava, Purvītis, Tone, E. Kalniņš, J. Liepiņš, Strauss, Tīdemanis, Kuga, Zāle, Zaļkalns, Ubāns).

In 1958 the museum's management changed and under the pretext of a lack of space, Latvian artworks were moved to storage, gradually placing part of them in various public institutions of the city of Malmö for decorative purposes, keeping notes on the location of each artwork.⁴ An exception was the sculpture of K. Zāle, which was added to the Russian art section (also reduced).

When several people inquired to the management whether it would be possible to redeem Latvian artworks from the museum, the answer was that it was not possible because the works had been donated to the museum. When the management was asked if there is any hope that these works will ever be re-exhibited, the answer was: "Doubtful".

Thus the only thing still presenting evidence of the Latvian art collection at Malmö museum, Sweden, is the name of the benefactor – customs official, O. Elmquist, inscribed on the wall of the museum's stairway, as well as comments in Latvian artists' biographies that some of their works are in Malmö museum in Sweden.⁵

[Ed. In the original article a list describing each work in the collection and their whereabouts follows.]

1 Ojārs Jēgens, 'Latvian Art Department Has Disappeared from Sight', *Laiks*, 2 May, 1959. This article incorrectly referred to the work of L. Liberts as 'Boats in the Seine'.

2 See the comparing material and overview in *Five years of Latvian Fine Art (1934-1939)*, Riga, 1940.

3 Both more cautious and more open views on the importance of 1920s can be found in the art literature of Latvia and the literature of Latvians who emigrated. See, for example, monographs of essays by Anšlavs Eglītis: *Jānis Muncis*, Shipperville, Penn. 1961, page 61: "Right after the victory of struggle for independence the most enthusiastic, hopeful and productive era in the history of Latvian art, when those who had come home from all over the world, full of different impressions, began in feverish haste to restore art life, believing that at last everything they do and build will remain as a safe basis for the development of Latvian art for many generations". See also the article by Rasma Lāce 'The Diversity of National Arts' in the magazine *Māksla* No. 1, 1968, page 7: "... The national tradition of the Baltic Republics is first of all rooted in the progressive efforts of fine arts of this century's 20s and 30s." Also, the same author's article 'Looking for new expressions' in the journal *Māksla*, 1968, No. 4, page 12: "...Traditions of Latvian painting in 20s are actively being recycled in creative work through which one can sense the influence of Western Europe art directions of that time".

4 Aforementioned article of O. Jēgens 'Latvian Art Department has Disappeared from Sight' features some guesses on why Malmö museum's management acted in the way they did. Since those were only guesses I will not include them here. I will however quote a phrase that the editorial board of the newspaper had crossed out: "It seems that this time there is no black or red (since among exhibited works were also those by many artists who had received various credits, titles and positions in occupied Latvia, such as Ed. Kalniņš, O. Skulme, L. Svemps, T. Zaiķalns, etc.) indignity to be blamed for this ignorance towards Latvian art but simply disrespect from the museum's management towards art and artists of a country that's been occupied."

5 The information gathered here regarding the Malmö museum's deposit of Latvian artworks in the various institutions of the city of Malmö contains records up until the beginning of the 1960s. When, where and what artworks have been deposited afterwards has not yet been established.

This article is based on excerpts from an article published in 'Ajalooline Ajakiri. The Estonian Historical Journal' in 2015.

Hegemony, Liberation and Transnational Activism in World War I'

Mart Kuldkepp

As World War I began, the stability of the international system at the time was immediately put into question. In many politically aware circles, it quickly became recognised that the great power conflict not only threatened Europe with immense destruction, but also promised unprecedented changes to its political landscape. The exact nature of these changes was, of course, a matter of debate. This meant that parallel to successes and failures on the battlefield, visions of the post-war world came to be negotiated in diplomacy and propaganda, included in the war aims of the belligerents, discussed in privacy, promoted in secrecy and published in pamphlets and newspapers. Not unexpectedly, even the most unorthodox visions of future geopolitical reconfiguration could thereby gain some political currency.

There was a lot of variation in what the different groups were hoping for. In the ruling circles of belligerent multinational empires, the prospect of redrawing state boundaries and creating new spheres of influence fuelled imperialist ambitions of gaining control of even more resources and territories. Amongst patriots of “oppressed peoples” – representing the national minorities of the very same empires – the war gave rise to hopes for some kind of national liberation that ranged from increased

cultural autonomy to outright independence. Furthermore, radical social revolutionaries denounced the idea of national interests altogether and saw the war as a chance to overthrow the system of bourgeois states that had caused it. And even in neutral states, “war parties” sprung up, eager to enter the conflagration since they imagined that the war would somehow open a path towards future glory and the revival of their country’s ancient might.

One aspect of this ephemeral wartime dreaming was the hope of creating, at Russian expense, a new post-war Baltic Sea region with Sweden as its leading regional power: a new *Mare Nostrum Balticum*.² Drawing on Sweden’s seventeenth-century legacy as a great power, as well as on the fears and hopes associated with its geographical position, the plans for this new region came to be negotiated in a peculiar atmosphere of cooperation in wartime Stockholm that included representatives of empires (Central Powers, above all Germany), members of separatist Russian nationalities (Finns and Estonians), and Sweden’s own war enthusiasts – both Conservatives and Social Democrats – in what amounted to a transnational, and, to a degree, trans-ideological movement, united by its shared opposition to Russia. Even though the alliance between all these different groups was a largely tactical one, it also included a positive regionalist component, as will be argued below.

Activism as a Transnational Movement

In many cases, the wartime goals of empires, national and social revolutionaries, and neutral war activists were closely intertwined. All belligerents, probably without exception, attempted to make use of separatist and revolutionary movements in enemy territory in order to destabilise the respective foe’s inner affairs. Such groups were secretly supported with arms and money and encouraged with promises of future privileges. At the same time, empires also attempted to influence the neutrals, either with the goal of directly drawing them into the war, or at least of ensuring their benevolence in matters such as shipping and trade.

National and social revolutionaries, as well as the war activists of neutral states, naturally tried to take advantage of the great powers’ sudden interest in their affairs by using it to fulfil their own aims of national or social liberation or reinvigoration. Their specific aims varied and were rarely fully compatible with the goals of the empires, but it was nevertheless possible to forge at least temporary tactical alliances between these weaker groups and the warring powers interested in supporting them.

The nationalities that hoped to gain something from the war included, amongst others, the Irish, the Poles, the Czechs, and, not least, many of the national minorities of the Russian Empire. The national elites of Finns, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Georgians and others all adopted to some extent the hope that the war would weaken Russia enough to make greater autonomy or even full national independence possible for its subject peoples. To encourage this, their emissaries turned to Russia’s enemies – above all Germany – for moral and monetary support, which they also received to varying degrees.³

Somewhat more unexpectedly, the representatives of Finns and Estonians also courted Sweden, regarded by them as the leading state in Scandinavia, known to be anti-Russian in its sympathies and assumed to have an interest in regaining the territories lost during previous centuries – certainly Finland, lost in 1809, but perhaps also the Baltic Sea provinces lost by the Treaty of Nystad in 1721. Therefore, even though Sweden had declared itself neutral at the outset of the war, hopes were still entertained that it could be persuaded to join the war against Russia.

This shows that the tactical alliances mentioned above did not only exist between revolutionaries, separatists and neutral war activists on the one hand and belligerent empires on the other, but also that such alliances could be established between non-imperial groups themselves, especially if one of them was in a stronger and more dominant position (in this case Sweden). Put another way, the same mutual opportunism found in e.g. the German General Staff’s relations with Indian and Irish nationalists, brought together by common anti-British interests, was characteristic of the relations between Swedish, Finnish and Estonian nationalists inside the larger activist movement. The same Swedish

activists, in turn, were a non-dominant partner in their relations with Germany, while the representatives of Finns and Estonians naturally also had their own direct contact with Germany. In this way, a network-like structure of tactical alliances emerged.

At the same time, the dream of the new Swedish *Mare Nostrum Balticum* was something that seems to have transcended purely tactical concerns and to have become genuinely shared across the whole movement – even if its German, Swedish, Finnish and Estonian variants differed in their peculiarities. It was therefore not simply a Swedish imperialist project, meant to extend Swedish hegemony with German support at the expense of Russia, but was also a project of national liberation for Finnish and Estonian activists. Thus, as I have argued elsewhere, activist regionalism can be seen as an example of a “pooling of nationalisms”, a regionalist construction building on certain shared features of all of the three national discourses represented in the movement.⁴

The Importance of Sweden

In the end, of course, everything hinged on Sweden’s willingness to abandon what was regarded as its shameful neutrality, to enter the war as an ally of Germany, humiliate Russia and to reclaim its natural leading position in “Norden”. It was furthermore assumed that a liberated Finland would enter some sort of a close political relationship with Sweden, and perhaps also hand over the ethnically Swedish Åland Islands. Denmark and Norway were also expected to be drawn eventually into the Swedish sphere of influence.⁵

Activists and activist-sympathisers in Sweden included a number of prominent individuals: journalists, writers, politicians, academics, officers and even members of the royal family. One could name the world-famous explorer Sven Hedin, the ambassador of Sweden in Germany, Arved von Taube, “riksmarskalk” Ludvig Douglas, the mathematician and millionaire Gösta Mittag-Leffler, the professor of political science and member of the parliament Rudolf Kjellén, the minister of education, K. G. Westman, and the Queen of Sweden, Victoria. The most active personalities in the movement, however, were the young conservative

anti-emigration activist Adrian Molin, and the German-friendly social democrats Otto Järte and Yngve Larsson.⁶

Nevertheless, the Swedish war activists lacked significant public support, which meant that their war plans never became a serious political alternative to Swedish neutrality. The probability of this happening, furthermore, declined together with German military fortunes. But even if the immediate political achievements of the activists were limited, the movement affected the subsequent history of Baltic-Nordic regionalism, which for the interwar period became tainted with memories of their failed bid on imperial Germany and reckless military adventurism.

Conclusions

The First World War led to the whole or partial demise of several multinational empires and the appearance of many new nation states, as well as the wholly unprecedented phenomenon of Communist Russia. But it is not only in hindsight that the war’s geopolitical implications were understood. Such possibilities were already apparent during the war itself, both for the belligerent empires and for the other groups attempting to use the war for their own political advantage.

The dream of the demise of Russia and resurrection of Swedish power, liberating its now-lost territories and taking back its leadership over the Baltic Sea, was not simply a Swedish imperialist project conjured up by Swedish conservative nationalists. It was an idea supported by a genuinely transnational movement, one that brought together Finns, Swedes and Estonians who found a common ground in anti-Russian security interests, historical memories of an earlier Swedish-led regional consolidation, and the common understanding of the war as a window of opportunity to radically shape their own future.

1 This text is based on excerpts from my article 'Hegemony and Liberation in World War I: The Plans for New Mare Nostrum Balticum,' *Ajalooline Ajakiri. The Estonian Historical Journal*, 3 (2015), 249–284.

2 The term *Mare Nostrum Balticum* ["Our Baltic Sea"] was connected to the policy of "Dominium Maris Baltici" ["Baltic Sea domination"] by Denmark and Sweden in the 16th and 17th centuries, aimed at establishing political, military and economic control over the Baltic Sea.

3 On the various Russian nationalities turning to Germany for support, see Seppo Zetterberg, 'Die Liga der Fremdvölker Russlands 1916–1918: Ein Beitrag zu Deutschlands antirussischem Propagandakrieg unter den Fremdvölkern Russlands im Ersten Weltkrieg' (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1978), 15–41.

4 See Mart Kuldkepp, 'Estonia gravitates towards Sweden: Nordic identity and activist regionalism in World War I' (Tartu: University of Tartu Press, 2014), 33.

5 For a more comprehensive overview of the regionalist aims of Swedish activism, see Mart Kuldkepp, 'Sweden's Historical Mission and World War I: A Regionalist Theory of Swedish Activism,' *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 39:1 (2014), 126–146.

6 For an attempt to create a typology of the different branches of Swedish activism, see Mats Kihlberg, 'Aktivismens huvudorgan Svensk Lösen,' *Två studier i svensk konservatism, 1916–1922*, ed. by Mats Kihlberg and Donald Söderlind (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wicksell, 1961), 11–28.

Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art originally published this article in the catalogue 'Portable Landscapes' in 2018.

Portable Landscapes

Solvita Krese, Inga Lāce, Diāna Popova, Antra Priede-Krievkalne, Andra Silapētere

*When you get to barren New York,
you will share our opinion:
We must afforest it! And it could go like this:
A fast-growing birch on Times Square,
oaks on the fanciest avenues,
mountain ash, mountain ash in Greenwich Village,
weeping willows in Harlem,
pine and spruce on the waterfront,
juniper around the slaughter houses,
and every place where Latvians gather,
ash, linden and maple alleys,
suburbs and side-streets -
let's sow it all over with a mixed forest.*

This 1959 poem by Gunars Saliņš, which was dedicated to writer and translator, Dzintars Sodums, expresses Saliņš's desire to bring the Latvian forest to his new home, the urban island of Manhattan, and reveals the longing he shared with his fellow Latvian exiles for their lost homeland. Saliņš was one of the most active participants in the New York group of Latvian exile artists and poets known as Hell's Kitchen.

For the Estonian artist Enno Hallek, it was the sunset, as it is seen from Estonia, that he wanted to hold on to. He claims that the sight of the sun setting over the Baltic sea was actually the only thing that those forced to flee Estonia could take with them when they left. Just like the Latvian painter Laris Strunke, Hallek escaped with his family across the sea to Sweden at the end of the Second World War. It was Hallek's concept of "portable sunsets", often used by the artist in his works, that became the metaphoric framework of the exhibition 'Portable Landscapes'. His colourful paintings on round plywood shapes have handles that permit them to be carried, hung on the wall and used as frames through which to view the sky or to gaze upon new and alien milieus.

At the time that Saliņš was imagining a new forest for New York, Dzintars Sodums was working on his translation of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. With hitherto unseen pirouettes of the Latvian language, he was retelling the story of its protagonist Leopold Bloom, a story that itself revives the plot of Homer's *Odyssey* – a difficult, exciting, and forking journey of return – for the twentieth century. To make sure that Sodums' translation would be published, Latvian youths in the United States came up with the idea of organizing pre-orders for the book in order to collect the necessary funds. Although the painter Sigurds Vižzirkste was saving money for a trip to Spain, he alone paid for ten copies of the book.

Not long before – in 1954 – works by the Sweden-based artist Marija Induse-Muceniece had been exhibited in the Akademia gallery in Paris, which was run by the Latvian dancer, textile artist and publicist Aija Bertrāne along with Raymond Duncan. Meanwhile, Valdis Āboliņš was corresponding with the poet Juris Kronbergs – their letters, which were veritable works of mail-art, travelling between Berlin and Stockholm. The paths of Latvians in emigration and exile were weaving, tangling and unravelling, like threads in a knotted fabric of Ulysses' trip.

In the course of several chapters, the exhibition *Portable Landscapes* follows these threads through various corners of the world, bringing us the stories of a number of creative and often relatively unknown Latvian émigré and exile personalities and informal groups, situating them in the broader context of the histories of art, migration and globalization, and

revealing a polyphonic landscape. Highlighting landmark locations in the Latvian diaspora, such as Paris, New York, West Berlin, Gotland and Montreal, the exhibition is an attempt to create a common network out of individual migration routes and to form a live understanding of the current situation in Latvia that is informed by historical events.

Though the history of Latvian art during both the interwar period and the Soviet era has been much researched, this exhibition reveals a parallel chapter in the history of Latvian art and culture that has not been well studied. Considering the lives and works of the characters in this exhibition prompts us to contemplate the boundaries of countries and cultures and to see the links between developments in Latvia and global processes outside the Soviet Union. We are led to ask how well accounts of exile and emigration can be integrated into the local history of art and culture, and what doing so would mean in the context of the national cultural canon. Is it possible to look at history as something that exists beyond the borders of nation states, shared between several places at the same time? After all, the history of Latvians in exile is part of the history of Latvia and of the histories of their new homelands. An approach that acknowledges this might allow us to reflect differently upon the current refugee crisis in Europe, realizing that the situation will be interpreted differently when the viewpoints of migrant groups, and of the countries from which they are fleeing, are taken into account.

The largest wave of Latvian emigration in the twentieth century took place as a result of the events of the Second World War. In 1944, fearing repeated Soviet repression, hundreds of thousands of people left Latvia. Their flight took them to Western Europe, and most people ended up in Germany, where they spent years in displaced persons camps. In order to deal with the post-war European refugee crisis, a number of countries signed draft laws that would allow the refugees to leave the camps and start new lives through further emigration. For instance, on 25 June 1948, the U.S. President Harry Truman signed the Displaced Persons Act, allowing political refugees from Europe to immigrate to the United States. Thus, many Latvians who had found refuge in Germany emigrated to the United States and later to Canada, Australia, Great Britain and other countries.

The forced departure from their native land was a milestone in the lives of many. It demanded that one acquire new individual and collective experiences. People had to face the unknown – new circumstances and a new social status, as a refugee or immigrant – and work toward both acquiring a new citizenship and providing for themselves, which often meant taking a job that had nothing to do with one's education. These experiences shaped the themes addressed in the creative practices of exile artists, some of whom expressed critiques of their particular situations in their work, and some of whom made the conscious decision to turn away from the reality around them.

Analyzing the phenomenon of exile in 1984, Edward Saïd, the American literary scholar of Palestinian descent, tried to articulate a hitherto unknown division by distinguishing between the romanticized image of the traveller and the experience of exiled outsiders. Saïd claimed that, in the twentieth century, exile could not be considered from the point of view of aesthetics or humanism and that an exile, immigrant or political refugee was inevitably marginal vis-à-vis the dominant cultural and political processes. In such a situation it is easy to imagine at least two kinds of strategies that people might use to cope with their new circumstances: trying to fall in with the new group as quickly as possible in order to foster social and economic well-being; or, alternatively, trying to retain their distinct national character and to avoid blending in with the dominant nation.

One of the reasons to look back at the history of exile is to try to understand and analyse the current situation. In politics and in society as a whole there is a tendency to view the current European refugee crisis as a one-off phenomenon and to associate it with negative phenomena such as unemployment, integration problems or even terrorism. But if we take a longer look back, it is clear that there have been ceaseless migrations as a result of wars or political and economic change. Exile, diaspora and migration are characteristic elements of global culture, and their manifestations have not only determined changes in the world's map but also contributed to the development of various trends in art and culture, allowing for the blending and overlapping of cultures and the birth of new ideas and movements.

With each passing decade, the scale of global migration continues to grow as more people are forced to move due to economic or political instability or other circumstances. Migration resulting from climate change is particularly topical: rates of migration may double within the next forty years as rising sea levels leave some territories completely underwater and as others become inhospitable to life due to higher temperatures. Rising numbers of unregistered people may pose a serious threat to democracy and the currently existing structures of political representation. The philosopher Thomas Nail offers an interesting way of looking at the situation: he suggests reviewing both history and the current political situation from the point of view of movement, migration, and the migrant instead of that of the static citizen. Nail calls his theory "kinopolitics" in reference to social kinetics or movement.

Rather than taking the preconceived notion of "the citizen" as his point of departure, Nail proposes beginning with migrant flows, looking at the ways in which migrants travel to become citizens and to form countries and paying attention to how they often present an opposing force and an alternative to existing state structures. From a political point of view, a migration theory that takes movement as its prime consideration might be more inclusive than one which prioritizes citizenship. Given the recent tendency of European governments to take stances against migration, and in particular against migrants from outside the borders of the European Union, in a backlash against the openness of previous policies, Nail's approach seems absolutely necessary. It would allow migrants to finally find themselves, in political and cultural terms, equal to or perhaps even in a more important position than citizens, who have always and automatically benefited from every advantage. While equality between the two social groups is but a utopia, the exhibition *Portable Landscapes* tries to look at and highlight personalities and artistic phenomena that have resulted from migration – whether freely chosen or forced.

The story of Gotland told in the exhibition is the story of its place on the escape route for many artists and their families, including Niklāvs Strunke, who fled across the Baltic Sea with his family at the end of the Second World War just as Latvia was again being occupied by the

Soviet Union. The Berlin chapter of the exhibition revolves around Valdis Āboliņš – one of the most significant promoters of Latvian art in the West, a leftist intellectual and a brilliant representative of mail-art whose fostering of cultural relations in the Cold War era remains a catalyst for conjecture and speculation. The section on New York centers on Hell's Kitchen, an informal group of poets and artists that in the 1950s and 1960s was an important driving force in the intellectual milieu of the exile community and a catalyst for the survival of the Latvian creative spirit. The research conducted in Canada follows the story of Zanis Waldheims, whose impressive oeuvre of geometric abstraction is saturated with symbolism and philosophical reflection on the ways of the world. The history of Latvian emigrés in Paris is highlighted by the striking personality of the dancer and publicist Aia Bertrand, who, along with her husband, the American dancer and artist Raymond Duncan, led Akademia, an alternative educational establishment and commune of like-minded creative people, from the 1920s to the 1970s. In contrast to the other protagonists of these stories, Bertrand was not a refugee: she exchanged (then) provincial Riga for metropolitan Paris in 1911 in search of education.

In addition to pursuing these stories with the help of archival material, historical works of art and artefacts, the exhibition also gathers together works by contemporary artists working on the theme of migration and its attendant questions. By exploring the trajectories and fates of historical personalities and attempting to highlight not only the aspects of their creative practices that give us insights into the past but also those that relate to issues of contemporary relevance, a new chapter of the exhibition is created – a new network of dialogues and conversations.

1 Gunars Saliņš, 'Apmežosim Nujorku. Dzintaram Sodumam pār plašu jūru' in *Raksti*. (Rīga: Valters un Rapa, 2006), 105.

2 Edward W. Said, 'Reflections on Exile' in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 173–186.

3 Thomas Nail, *The Figure of the Migrant*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 17.

4 Ibid.

Museum of Care
The Latvian Collection of Malmö Konstmuseum

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