

UNVEILING THE INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN ART, POLITICS, AND SOCIETY IN THE SOVIET SYSTEM THROUGH ART: A CASE STUDY OF THE EXHIBITION “1972. BREAKING THROUGH THE WALL”

Summary. This article is dedicated to analysing the exhibition “1972. Breaking Through the Wall” from several perspectives: the curator, the viewers, and the exhibition architect tasked with creating an environment for the art exhibition in an unconventional setting. The article examines the curators’ choices, discusses the work of the exhibition architect within the context of heritage conservation requirements, and presents the results of a viewer survey.

This exhibition raised the issue of the significance of alternative creativity, opposed to the official narrative, in a non-free society. It focused on Lithuanian art from the 1960s to the 1980s that countered the official Soviet cultural course. The exhibition’s prehistory includes the historical fact that in the spring of 1972, a young man self-immolated in Kaunas in protest against the lack of freedom. These events had direct and indirect reverberations in the arts, although they were not exhibited at the time due to fear of repression. This difficult experience has left its mark on Lithuanian culture and collective memory.

The exhibition highlighted the role of various societal groups in opposing the ruling authorities and establishing personal and creative freedom as the highest value. The art display, composed of works from professionals (fine arts, theatre) and amateurs (rock and big beat musicians) from the 1960s to 1980s who resisted official Soviet art, clearly demonstrated how Kaunas – the capital of Lithuania from 1920 to 1940 – was influenced by the city’s prominent pre-war modernism (environment and lifestyle) and the Soviet ideology imposed on the entire country. The clash of two diametrically opposed ideological stances and artistic principles in Soviet Lithuania led to the emergence of an alternative culture. For the first time in the history of Lithuanian exhibitions, this exhibition showed how the social and the arts were affected by the pressure exerted by the official authorities.

The visitor survey showed that the positive reactions to the exhibition were also due to socio-political events that have become embedded in the nation’s memory. The events stored in the collective memory of the nation correlated with specific creative artefacts and historical details, which the younger generation saw for the first time. Noteworthy was the symbiosis of emotional experiences among visitors of different ages, observing exhibits with both artistic and historical value. As indicated by the visitor survey, the exhibition facilitated the establishment of a closer connection between generations. The exhibition’s display in a cultural heritage site – the former post office building (by architect Feliksas Vizbaras, 1932) – was a complex task creatively resolved by contemporary architects.

Keywords: art and ideology, the doctrine of socialism, alternative creativity, hippies, art and politics, modernism in Lithuania, “quiet modernism”, “The Kaunas Spring”.

INTRODUCTION

This article¹ is dedicated to analysing the exhibition “1972. Breaking Through the Wall” from several perspectives: the curator, the viewers, and the exhibition architect. The year 1972 was a significant one in Lithuanian history. The suicide of a young man, Romas Kalanta, in the centre of Kaunas sparked open resistance from part of the society. Protest

demonstrations were brutally repressed. Information about the event was either stifled or turned into disinformation, and the participants were persecuted and intimidated. From a fifty-year perspective, it can be said that the protests that erupted in Kaunas in mid-May 1972 were an expression of deep dissatisfaction that was prevalent due to the

Soviet government's policies of Sovietisation, a part of the society's unwillingness to accept the occupation,² and the acute sense of a lack of creative freedom felt by various social groups (artists, university students, hippies). The year 1972 remains vivid in the personal and collective memory of Lithuania.

In Lithuanian culture, manifestations of resistance against the Soviet regime and ideology appeared as early as the 1960s. Artists created under conditions of censorship. Following the events of May 1972 in Kaunas (analogous to the Prague Spring of 1968, referred to in historical studies as the Kaunas Spring), artists and marginalised groups (such as hippies, participants in the ethnographic movement, and political dissidents) faced even greater restrictions. Control permeated all areas – culture and art, human relationships, and lifestyle. Attempts were made to regulate even the appearance of youth – hair length or the width of their trousers. But all this did not extinguish the idea of freedom in Lithuania. Culture – theatre, visual arts, youth music bands, and cinema in the 1960s and 70s – was a bastion of the idea of freedom, and these groups of people acted as networks interconnected by invisible links. The curators of the exhibition “1972. Breaking Through the Wall”³ focused on groups of people who defied the system – painters, actors, mimes, rock bands, and the hippie youth. Their social behaviour and alternative creations, not conforming to the demands of socialist realism, reflected the thoughts and moods of members of an unfree yet creative society.

Literature review. Lithuanian historians have written significant scholarly texts on the topic of the Kaunas Spring.⁴ These events are also documented in broader historical research.⁵ However, it is regrettable that the events in Kaunas, in which artists played a crucial role, have not yet been featured in major works dedicated to activism and art.⁶ Lithuanian art historians have extensively researched the alternative to Soviet socialist realism, known as “quiet modernism”.⁷ Curator Elona Lubyte organised an exhibition under this title⁸ as early as 1989, just as the reforms known as *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* began in the Soviet Union.⁹ Silent

modernism is regarded in Lithuanian art history literature as a prominent alternative and opposition to official Soviet art – socialist realism. However, after proving its significance and uniqueness in the Lithuanian art scene, art historians seem to have paused in their exploration. Rarely do art historians' studies seek connections between “quiet modernism” and societal development processes. Conversely, sociologists investigate social peculiarities but pay little attention to the cultural sphere and artefacts as illustrations of socio-political events.¹⁰ In this context, the practice of contemporary exhibitions and the communication of various societal groups (including researchers) through artefacts, exhibition atmospheres, and locations are crucial.

The issue of the role of the arts in politically turbulent times is not uncommon in exhibition practice, but it is still not often associated with phenomena from the second half of the 20th century. One can mention the London Tate Modern exhibition *Year in Art. 1973*. This exhibition explored how artists used art as a form of political protest.¹¹ As far as the post-Soviet space is concerned, it must be said that there have been few exhibitions where art has been presented as a form of protest. It is worth mentioning the Estonian exhibition about Soviet hippies, exhibited in many places around the world.¹² In Lithuania, there have also been exhibitions attempting to highlight what is related to protest against the system and collective memory. It is worth noting the project by art historian Rimantė Tamoliūnienė, about breakthroughs to freedom in Soviet-era Kaunas (2007).¹³ Photographs and documentary material were exhibited, testifying to political and religious underground activities. Authentic artefacts from the late 1970s, vinyl records, and household items were displayed in the Kaunas hippie movement exhibition “Flower Children: From Pacifism to Barricades”.¹⁴ It seems that the Kaunas Spring is also remembered in the United States, at the Wende Museum in California, in the exhibition “Socialist Flower Power: Soviet Hippie Culture”.¹⁵ The testimonies¹⁶ of one witness, published in the catalogue, raise doubts about the authenticity of the narrative. It is likely that the events of 1968 in Prague and 1972 in Kaunas are confused in this publication.

The sharp clashes between youth and the militia, violence, and arrests that took place in Kaunas do not at all resemble a fun party as described in the Wende Museum catalogue. People's memories are truly relative and selective, so sometimes it is worth recalling recent history in the form of exhibitions and presenting artefacts to new audiences.¹⁷

The main goal of the article is to analyse the exhibition "1972. Breaking Through the Wall" as a revelation of the interconnections between art, politics, and society within the Soviet system, and to discuss the possibilities and challenges of presenting this historically and visually complex collection of exhibits in unconventional spaces from both curator and visitor perspectives.

The article aims to reflect on a broader question important to exhibition curators – how to present art exhibitions to visitors about politically and socially significant events that are distant in time but still well-known to parts of society. The *object* of this article is not only the exhibition itself as a practical result of research activities, but also the reception of the exhibition from the perspectives of curators and visitors. In order to achieve this goal, the task was to shed light on the historical context and to present the idea of the exhibition. Without an understanding of these aspects, it would be more difficult to grasp both the artworks and the exhibition's structure and main narrative. It is also necessary to describe the criteria for selecting exhibits and to analyse the structural parts and narrative of the exhibition. The exhibits in this exhibition include not only artworks but also various memorabilia, mass-produced items, and objects whose value is more historical than artistic, related to memory. Therefore, it was important to find a suitable basis for such curatorial choices – facts, documents, and eyewitness memories. All of this helped to establish a proper foundation for clarifying the exhibition's structure and its justification in this text. Another task is related to the unconventional exhibition venue – the former Kaunas Post Office building (1932, architect Feliksas Vizbaras) – and the architectural solutions of the exhibition. These need to be discussed because the exhibition was

displayed in a cultural heritage site subject to special heritage conservation requirements.

Methodological approaches. The main question posed by the exhibition curator team was as follows: how to narrate events in the exhibition that are distant from our times – not too much, not too little, around fifty years? Recent works by Lithuanian historians¹⁸ and sociologists¹⁹ allow us to understand the attitudes of various social groups and their ways of operating in the sociocultural environment. These studies reveal the strong influence of the environment (the social) on creativity. For art historians, they pose a new challenge – to examine the role of art and free creativity in an antagonistic socio-political environment towards the Soviet regime. The mentioned exhibition was an attempt to practically demonstrate how tension and dissatisfaction, expressed not directly but through artistic means – abstract artistic language, symbols, metaphors – are reflected in artefacts. Artists constantly experienced pressure and dictates from the authorities. Even in the most modern works of the Soviet era, one can easily notice isolation and constraint, traces of the ideological pressure experienced by artists. These works are truly a reflection of the time compressed by the regime. In analysing the exhibition, the paradigm of images of compressed time was chosen, a system within which it is possible to think about the arts of a historically distant period (mid-20th century). It is also possible to understand them today. This paradigm was useful in structuring the sections of the exhibition and selecting artworks. However, it also somewhat constrained and raised concerns that viewers would see this exhibition as just another presentation of "quiet modernism", seeing only what fits their preconceived notion and ignoring everything that does not fit the conventional paradigm. To avoid this, several methodological approaches were used. It was maintained that an art exhibition is a certain form of communication. Based on the images of compressed time paradigm and the viewer's approach, the exhibition was treated as a tableau of social life and (to a lesser extent) as a presentation of artistic phenomena. Therefore, a cultural anthropology approach²⁰ was used, aiming to look at the

phenomenon from within – to gather and analyse information about contemporaries' relationships and documents related to the events of 1972.

To reveal the social environment, memories of everyday life during the Soviet era and one particular event – the suicide of a young man for political reasons – were used. The artefacts of this exhibition are related to the special emotions and states of people living in an unfree country – mourning, disappointment, the desire to resist, fear of exposure. Therefore, it was important to find ways to reconstruct and explain this specific emotional background. A substantial amount of written memoir material about May 1972 in Kaunas and the consequences of the events proved helpful in achieving this. It was also useful in searching for the visual design of the exhibition.

Anthropological perspective was also important in selecting artefacts. It helped to reveal individual experiences and understand what meanings the author attaches to the depicted event and why they choose one visual language over another.

Context and idea

The exhibition title “1972. Breaking Through the Wall” uses the metaphor of breaking through the Iron Curtain. The word wall in the history and culture of the mid-20th century is also associated with the Berlin Wall. In Lithuanian, there is an expression “banging your head against a brick wall” meaning an unpromising, hopeless action. By the 1970s, on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain in Lithuania, children of the post-war generation, who had been repressed and suppressed in the mid-20th century, had already grown up. Some of them had an attitude and activities that were truly similar to breaking down the wall separating the socialist camp from the rest of the world. It was a generation of avid readers, musicians, free thinkers, and creators of their own networks, dissatisfied with their situation and prospects. It is now known collectively as the Romas Kalanta generation. Having heard about the difficult experiences of their parents and grandparents during the occupation of the 1940s, World War II, and the Stalinist era,

and actively indoctrinated as members of the Communist Youth League and atheists, they still did not openly oppose the Soviet system. However, all of them, whether hippies or students, had a clear sense that the system was leading their young lives in an absurd direction. The youth's conflict with the Soviet authorities and the ordinary part of society was programmed. It hurt the youth, but it did not scare them too much because something else was more important to them. More important were the internal, spiritual bonds with like-minded friends, imagined (indirect) connections with the West and the hippie youth, believing that their ideas were shared. Indeed, the Soviet hippie, idealising capitalism, could only be considered a very distant relative of Western hippies who protested against capitalism and the Vietnam War. But the bonds that united them were vivid – pacifism and ideas of free love, the same fashion, the same rock music and literary idols. Books by Jack Kerouac, Jerome David Salinger and Hermann Hesse were available in Soviet Lithuania. The road and travelling, inspired by Jack Kerouac, were imagined as an alternative to freedom. The toughest wanderers reached Russian hippies in St. Petersburg (or Leningrad), seekers of Eastern spirituality wandered to Uzbekistan, Ulan Ude, Buryatia near Lake Baikal, and to the Ivolginsky Buddhist monastery.²¹

The curatorial team of the exhibition sought to exhibit works unfavourable to the Soviet system with politically prohibited or unwanted plots. The authors and their creations were important, as they did not have a chance to pass through Soviet censorship during the Soviet era. Anti-systemic works and authors who were ridiculed in the press during the Soviet era, and whose works were unacceptable or removed from exhibitions, were of interest. The artworks and other items in the exhibition are primarily witnesses and storytellers of stories for today's audience, already formed in the globalised world.

The exhibition showcased paintings, graphics, theatre photographs, documents, musical instruments, youth fashion, and photographs telling about the hobbies and lifestyle of the hippie youth. The curatorial focus was on colourful and memorable

groups of people – the Kaunas hippies, Lithuanian beat and rock music groups, Modris Tenisons' pantomime troupe, rebellious painters, and graphic artists in their works.

Artworks and other testimonies of alternative cultural life created approximately between 1965 and 1986 were presented. The well-known line of Lithuanian history and cultural development was maintained: the Khrushchev Thaw in the arts left interesting results of modernist art; 1972 was an unpleasant turning point, as after the events in Kaunas, Lithuanian culture experienced increasing ideological supervision, manifested not only in directive instructions but also in open surveillance, periodic calls from KGB agents to artists, invitations to conversations, and phone tapping. All this raised the level of anxiety in society, exacerbating loneliness and alienation. Non-Soviet, anti-systemic art of that period absorbed and reflected the depressive moods of the era.

The idea of the exhibition is related to the memory of the Kaunas Spring and the death of Romas Kalanta, who is a symbol of the fight for freedom in Lithuania. Hence, this exhibition is essentially about attempts to liberate oneself through creativity. It highlights the problem of inner personal freedom, directly and historically related to resistance to violence and oppression. To tell a wide audience about the resistance to the Soviet system in Lithuania, the curatorial goal was to organise an exhibition that would reveal the profiles of Lithuanian society in the 1960s–1980s, tells about what influenced the cultural and socio-political environment, and what emotional state prevailed in the country at that time. All this was aimed at revealing through the works of professional and non-professional artists, through the presentation of everyday cultural objects (household items), and through manifestations of Western cultural influence (vinyl records, fashion, and fiction literature). The aim was to show in what ways the breath of freedom spread in Kaunas and occupied Lithuania, where for practically fifty years (1940–1990) there was no room for free thought. The curators of the exhibition focused on cultural areas that exhibited

clear and very interesting expressions of belief in free creativity. The exhibits talked about the forms of freedom and the atmosphere in which forces hostile to the Soviet regime were brewing, eventually leading to independence in 1990.

This exhibition was not retrospective. The goal was not to show the origin, development, suppression, or merging of phenomena with other art phenomena or periods. That would have been relevant if the target audience of the exhibition had been art experts or an academic audience. But the target audience of this exhibition was ordinary people – youth, city guests, and foreign tourists. Therefore, an intensive visual study was chosen, not an extensive one, through well-selected and thoughtful examples (works) showing various non-conjunctural arts and alternative movements in society.

Lithuanian artists who created modernist and non-Soviet (non-socialist realist) art during the Soviet period mostly spoke in metaphors and allegories. The modernist and metaphorical language of art was not self-serving and immanent. Ten years before the Kaunas Spring and about twenty years after it, the socio-political environment sharply intersected with the field of ideas in art. In the shadow of official Soviet culture, there developed a publicly invisible latent cultural level.²² Such art, not shown publicly but still known, alongside public compromise, and opportunistic solutions, had an impact not only on cultural perception but also on the socio-political environment. When selecting works for the exhibition, the most attention was paid to those authors and works that were important to the consumers of art at that time and are now forgotten. Historians and art researchers now agree that emotions and content embedded in artworks, parallel to the activities of genuine political dissidents, eventually matured anti-Soviet ideas and actions within the Soviet regime.²³

The exhibition primarily focuses on visual storytelling, which through individual narratives reveals a unified trajectory of thinking among people, art professionals, and enthusiasts of the time – resistance to homogenisation, the desire for

individuality to stand out from the ruck, whether one is a professional artist, a student mastering electric guitars, or just a “polisher” of Laisvės Avenue (*Laisvės alėja*). The artefacts collected in the exhibition reflect a different, opposing model of life and art to the Soviet one. Together, they speak of strong sentiments of disobedience towards the system. The objects in the exhibition directly and indirectly express a wide spectrum of desired life images and dissatisfactory realities.

VENUE OF THE EXHIBITION

The choice of the former post office, now a non-functional building, for this exhibition was both precise and risky (Fig. 1). It was risky for the organisers of the exhibition: it was an empty and abandoned building, without exhibition equipment and suitable lighting, not adapted for any exhibits. Most importantly, the exhibition was heavily constrained by current heritage conservation requirements.

The precise choice for the exhibition is termed so due to the significance of this building in Kaunas and its strong aspect of collective memory. Kaunas Central Post Office (this name was given to these postal buildings during the Soviet era) was the only place as an institution in the Soviet era where it was possible to attempt to maintain connections with the wider world – make calls abroad (to socialist countries), send letters, and receive parcels from so-called capitalist countries. Of course, all operations and recipients were strongly controlled.

Kaunas Post Office – an imposing Art Deco style building, a prominent feature of Laisvės Avenue, a place for various encounters, firmly entrenched in the memory of several generations of Kaunas residents. However, in around 2019, postal services became less necessary due to the rapid development of the internet. Postal workers relocated, and the decline of this building began. The abandonment and apparent lack of need of the building, and its bleak emptiness in the heart of the city, had a very negative impact on the townspeople, causing them



Fig. 1. Kaunas Central Post Office (Post Office, 1932), Architect Feliksas Vizbaras. Photo by Rasa Žukienė, 2022



Fig. 2. Display of exhibition “1972. Breaking Through the Wall” in the central hall of Kaunas Post Office. Photo by Aušra Lissauskienė, 2022

to distrust the city authorities. Therefore, although temporary, the opening of the post office for the exhibition, presenting an important theme from the recent history of the city and the country, was a suitable decision for art managers²⁴ and curators (Fig. 2). The interest in both the exhibition and the building itself redeemed the difficulties of setting up the exhibition. The architecture of the building and the layout, dimensions, and lighting had a significant impact on the logic of the narrative and the mood of the exhibition. The architecture of the building inspired the curators to create a branching and multi-layered narrative. It permeated both the public areas of the post office known to the city's residents and the former closed service rooms. Visitor flows could move in several directions, but the overall narrative of the exhibition “1972. Breaking Through the Wall” did not suffer as a result.

STRUCTURE AND NARRATIVE OF THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition began with the only contemporary art piece in this exhibition, installed in the post

office vestibule on the first floor. It was the film *The Effect of Unexploded Bomb* (2008) by the well-known Lithuanian video artist Deimantas Narkevičius. On the screen, there were nuclear weapons storage sites and a close-up of a uniformed Soviet soldier. The slowly changing image was building up emotional tension. The sounds of the film freely filled the space of the post office vestibule. Commands delivered in a stern voice by a Russian soldier made the viewers pause, spread a heavy atmosphere, and accurately conveyed the essence of the Soviet system. Exhibition visitors commented that this film by Deimantas Narkevičius reminded them of the fear of war sown by the Soviets during the Cold War years. This video artwork was correctly understood even by those who knew nothing about Soviet military intentions. During the fervour of the Cold War, the mood of nuclear apocalypse equally affected people on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Semiotician Algirdas Greimas wrote that uncertainty about the fate of mankind turned into protests by youth in Paris, battles against Soviet soldiers in the streets of Prague, and later reached Lithuania.²⁵ Deimantas Narkevičius' work on constant readiness and the tension of (not) exploding introduced the viewer



Fig. 3. Protest demonstration in Laisvės Avenue on 18 May 1972. The numbers on the images were written by the Lithuanian SSR Prosecutor's Office to identify and punish the demonstrators. The photo was taken by a KGB employee. Lithuanian Special Archives, LYA, K-1, 58

to an atmosphere of a threatening era, now largely unknown. Deimantas Narkevičius' work, housed in the post office vestibule, acted as a common denominator for the anxieties of the 1970s and 1980s in the East and West.

The first section of the exhibition was dedicated to Romas Kalanta and the events related to his death. It was a documentary narrative constructed using Romas's personal items (guitar, sunglasses, copies of notebooks, fragments of his burnt clothes), texts from the Soviet press, which distorted the essence of events, and documents from the Soviet prosecutor's office. The screen showed photographs taken by KGB agents and militiamen during demonstrations on Laisvės Avenue (Fig. 3). These photos were used as evidence of youth crimes against Soviet power in Soviet courts. The most active participants in the demonstrations were identified from these photos and sentenced.

In the same room, several paintings were exhibited in which artists reflected on and interpreted the meaning of Romas Kalanta's sacrifice. It became clear that there are only a few such works in Lithuania in general. Artists avoided touching on this topic because it was dangerous. Only a

few artists – Marija Teresė Rožanskaitė, Vaidotas Žukas, Valentinas Antanavičius – dared to express their thoughts and feelings on canvas (Fig. 4).

During the exhibition, it became apparent that a significant portion of the audience, especially older people, came to this exhibition solely because of Romas Kalanta's persona and the story of his life. This was unexpected for the curators, whose main goal was to show the echoes of the 1972 events in art, not Romas Kalanta's personality or his life. The question from the audience, especially the older generation, "Where is Kalanta's room?" prompted a reflection on what could be most important and interesting to the audience who had witnessed everything with their own eyes: the restoration of history or its interpretations in art? As the survey shows,²⁶ the younger audience was most interested in the exhibitions of their grandparents' generation music, art, and fashion. The older generation was most interested in historical authenticity and in those works of art or theatre that they had seen during their youth, i.e. in the 1960s and 1970s.

After learning the story of Romas Kalanta, the audience could move in two directions: choose to explore the art in the telegraph room or go to



Fig. 4. Valentinas Antanavičius. "Slavery". 1975, cardboard, oil 245 × 120 cm. Collection of Violeta and Romanas Raulynaitis

the representative postal operations hall, where an exhibition was set up telling about the relationship of Lithuanian youth, especially the hippie, with music.

In the music section, the narrative focused on the alternative to Soviet stage music – big beat and rock music, and some of its performers, ordinary boys and girls who had initial musical education and a great desire to play guitars, perform Western rock band songs, and create their own music. In the late 1960s and 1970s, music groups were officially called vocal-instrumental ensembles. Such ensembles operated in institutes, schools, and factories.²⁷

Public institutions provided venues, helped acquire equipment, but also controlled the groups, raising requirements for the nature of the music, which were often cleverly circumvented. Youth played and sang, following their own Western music idols. Since there were no opportunities to legally obtain tapes in the Soviet Union, musical youth wrote them down while listening to recordings of Western bands. Original music was also created. One such exhibit was the score of *Antimalda*, a composition by Antanas Stancevičius, a future engineer and student, created for the *Nuogi ant slenkščio* band. The composition was performed but never recorded on any media, remaining only in the score. Lithuanian youth bands played for their own pleasure and, understandably, did not become the *Beatles* or the *Rolling Stones*, but the creativity and enjoyment they felt contributed to the formation of personalities. Creating original, and listening to and replaying Western, group music was a substance that shaped personalities to a certain extent. Sometimes, young people were praised and supported by the authorities. For example, the *Gintareliai* band was invited to join the state philharmonic *Oktava* vocal-instrumental ensemble. Student rock bands like *Kertukai* and *Aitvarai* became winners of the official light music competition *Gintarinė triūba*. However, most of them experienced significant trouble because they organised themselves and were clever and talented. The exhibition recalls the history of the *Smūtkeliai*²⁸ pop club at Kaunas University of Technology (formerly Kaunas Polytechnic Institute). This student cultural club began organising the first discos in the Soviet Union (1970) (Fig. 5). The activities of this student cultural club, full of youthful enthusiasm, were constantly monitored, and, when the opportunity arose, disrupted by the members of the Communist Youth League of Kaunas University of Technology.²⁹ What and why it happened was explained by the documents of the institute's Communist Youth Committee meetings. Students who organised the Lithuanian rock bands concert called *Popsession*, or Lithuanian Woodstock, in the institute hall in the winter of 1971 were considered and reprimanded. The number of long-haired hippies in the hall of a Soviet institution of higher education (Kaunas University



Fig. 5. Poster of the first disco for students of the Kaunas Polytechnic Institute. Designed by Leonas Rasteikis, 1970. Property of Eugenijus Maleckas

of Technology, now Kaunas University of Technology) and the fact that the concert was held on the eve of Lithuanian Independence Day, February 16, scared the ideological servants. In Soviet Lithuania, this holiday was banned.

The Lithuanian youth's passion for big beat and rock music was enormous. This music connected them with the world beyond the Iron Curtain. Meanwhile, young people in the Western world probably knew nothing about Eastern Europe and the occupied Baltic countries. Lithuanian youngsters were fascinated by the songs of Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and Frank Zappa. They were simply crazy about their guitars, *vinyl* records of Western bands, the top-ten charts announced by foreign radio stations, and information about worshipped Western groups *Led Zeppelin*, *The Beatles*, *The Rolling Stones*, *Deep Purple*, *The Doors*, *Creedence*, *Black Sabbath*, and *The Who*. Sparse information was obtained from socialist countries' magazines, which were read not only in English, German, or Polish but also in Czech or Spanish. At that time, student Česlovas Lesevičius actively collected all

possible press information about the activities of musical groups. Only a small part of this press collection was presented to the exhibition visitors. For those deeply interested in music during the Soviet era, who rewrote songs onto brown cassette tapes dozens of times at home, Česlovas Lesevičius' collection of original Western *vinyl* records, displayed at the exhibition, was thrilling.

It is hard to imagine now, but listening to Western music and recording, distributing it in the Soviet Union was illegal and therefore prohibited and punished.³⁰ However, there were people in Kaunas who bought records sent to Lithuania by relatives from the USA, rented them out to rock enthusiasts, or traded them on the black market. As Česlovas Paplauskas, a member of the *Smūkeliai* pop club, recalls, the rental price was high – five roubles per hour,³¹ which equalled five lunches in Kaunas canteens.

Several rare music devices (electric organs, synthesizers) from the collection of the well-known Lithuanian pianist Motiejus Bazaras were exhibited at

the show. They were selected to reflect musicians' efforts to achieve high quality, revealing what was actually played and about which instruments the young people in Lithuania at that time could only dream. A prominent example of efforts to achieve good sound is the A1 synthesiser, made in Kaunas by engineer Orūnas Urbonas and composer Giedrius Kuprevičius. Also exhibited were electric musical instruments (e.g. the *Claviset* synthesiser from German democratic Republic), which were a real rarity, sometimes found in music stores in Kaunas, Riga, or Tallinn. The exhibition featured a Soviet-era instrument previously unavailable in Lithuania – the *Hammond B3 (BC)* organ, famously played by the most famous Western rock bands. Lithuanian musicians were aware of them, but they were unattainable at the time.

Another unique group of music-related exhibits was the *BIN* self-made magazines (8 issues), (Fig. 6) created by Kristupas Petkūnas from the *Chairs* group, deeply interested in rock music and the lifestyle behind the Iron Curtain. The young man pasted clippings from foreign (mainly socialist) magazines into thick notebooks, adding his own drawings and annotations. The *BIN* magazines serve as authentic witnesses of the youth mindset of the 1980s. Together, they form a unique branch of

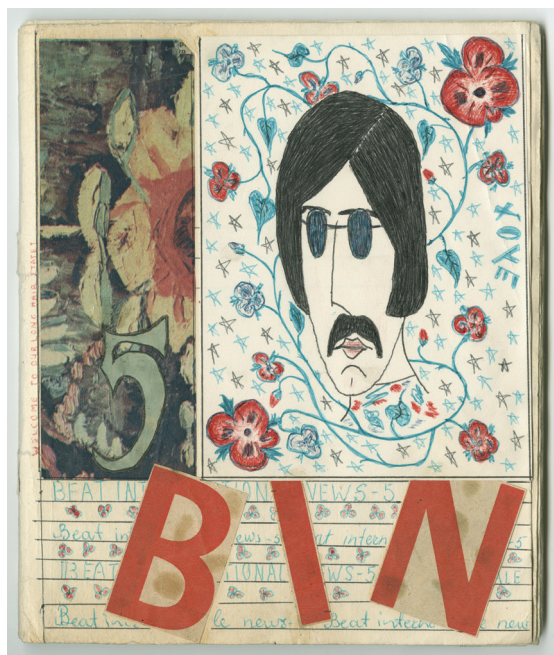


Fig. 6. *BIN* cover, 1971, No 5. Property of Kristupas Petkūnas

the underground subculture, emerging within the environment of a specific group – Soviet hippies.

The largest part of the exhibition was dedicated to the 1970s–1980s Lithuanian painting and graphics exhibition, with a significant focus on the content of the artworks. Therefore, the artworks were categorised into thematic groups: *Everyday Life, Oppression, Yearning for the West, Modern Lifestyle, Journey, Love and Girls*. These are works exploring forbidden topics during the Soviet era, not only for artists but also for society – forest brothers, religious themes, unhappy children, coercion, intimacy, and sex.

Three types of artefacts were exhibited. The first group consists of artworks created during Nikita Khrushchev's rule (early 1960s), when a brief period of so-called modernisation course was implemented in the Soviet Union. During this time, much like during the Stalinist era, strong art censorship persisted in Lithuania, with bans on abstraction and figure deconstruction. For example, illustrations by



Fig. 7. Saulė Kisarauskienė. Illustration to Eduardas Mieželaitis poetry collection "Autoportretas. Aviaeskizai", 1961, paper, mixed media, 29.9 × 20.3 cm. Property of M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art

Saulė Kisarauskienė for Eduardas Mieželaitis's book *Autoportretas. Aviaeskizai*³² were heavily criticised in the press for their formalism, i.e. strong deformation of faces and figures³³ (Fig. 7). Consequently, the artist lost the opportunity to receive commissions and participate in exhibitions for decades.

The second group consists of artworks created after 1972 when the authorities began to tightly control and persecute artists, leading them to create partially conformist works in order to participate in exhibitions. These were the so-called silent modernists such as Arvydas Šaltenis, Algimantas Kuras, Valentinas Antanavičius, and others. Their partial conformism manifested in the ability to encrypt the true meanings of their works, provide misleading titles to deceive censors, or create dual-purpose artworks – one for official exhibitions and another for their close circle of friends.

The exhibition vividly revealed the different situations and uneven attitudes of artists from Kaunas and Vilnius. Kaunas was the capital of Lithuania from 1920 to 1940. Vilnius, however, became the centre of public life after World War II. Despite

being only 100 kilometres apart, these cities exhibit significant urban, social, and spiritual differences.³⁴ The painting collection assembled for this exhibition revealed relatively few works by artists from Kaunas. Kaunas was the epicentre of unrest in 1972. Following demonstrations, Kaunas residents faced the strongest persecution. This might explain why the city's artists of the 1970s and 1980s predominantly painted landscapes and portraits. When creating compositions, they often hid behind layers of mysterious symbols. It is tempting to speculate, albeit requiring further research, that Kaunas painters deliberately chose a more heavily encoded, symbol and metaphor-rich artistic language in their works from the 1970s and 1980s. A striking example of this choice is the enigmatic paintings by Valerija Ostrauskienė, featuring figures against backgrounds of pyramids and sunsets, clearly referencing Lithuania's past and the prominent symbolist, national artist Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (Fig. 8).

In the works of Vilnius artists from the 1970s and 1980s, a sense of dissatisfaction and disillusionment prevalent in Lithuanian society is more



Fig. 8. Valerija Ostrauskienė. *Solitude*. 1978, canvas, oil, 75 × 105.5 cm. Property of M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art

palpable than in the works of their counterparts from Kaunas. Painter Saulius Šaltenis conveyed the gloomy moods of everyday life through ironic or drastic compositions. Sometimes, he even incorporated uncensored phrases into his paintings, depicting love scenes as brutal acts. This represents a sharp critique of Soviet everyday life intertwined with deep existential sadness. Irony, grotesque, and openness to all aspects of life became the dominant artistic language of an unofficial group of painters called *The Four*.³⁵

Alongside themes of anxiety and intimacy, these artists displayed an interest in Western artistic tendencies and attempted to connect with them. The exhibited artworks indirectly reflected the depressive feelings of the suppressed Lithuanian society. This is generally the case in the 8th–9th decades. It is typical of the work of Lithuanian artists.

The third group consisted of outsider, non-systematic works that starkly contrasted with the familiar Soviet worldview for the exhibition's visitors.

There were actually very few such artworks in Lithuania. In fact, only individual works can be considered strictly non-systematic, sharply contrasting with the Soviet worldview. These works were created by painters, Algimantas Julijonas Stankus-Stankevičius, Antanas Matulevičius, Vaidotas Žukas, graphic artists Gražina Didelytė, and a self-taught artist Ramūnas Paniulaitis. This exhibition served as a pretext to remind people about these creators and to focus more on expanding the field of outsider art research in the future.

Unexpectedly, Vaidotas Žukas' collages, laden with political anger, were also on display at this exhibition (Fig. 9). In the 1970s, young artists worked with reproductions from pre-war and Soviet press. By combining images of different natures into one artwork, the artist changed the meanings of official photographs and highlighted the subtexts. During the Soviet era, these collages could not be publicly displayed solely due to their execution technique, let alone the anti-Soviet meanings encoded within them.



Fig. 9. Vaidotas Žukas. *Protesting Women*. From the *Iranian Widows* series. 1978. Photo-essay. Paper, pencil, ink, gouache, 13.5 × 18 cm. Property of Lithuanian National Museum of Art



Fig. 10. Antanas Matulevičius. *Goodbye, Lennon*. 1982, canvas, oil, 80 × 115 cm. Family property

Antanas Matulevičius had no hopes of being included in official exhibitions because he painted decoratively stylised forms. His works dedicated to Romas Kalanta and John Lennon were exhibited at the exhibition “1972. Breaking Through the Wall” (Fig. 10). They were the ideals of the young artist, an expression of his silent and secret thoughts about freedom. In one painting with a motif of a small aeroplane, Antanas Matulevičius nostalgically inscribed the words: “I envy the Seychelles Islands.” In this artwork, the painter expressed the unattainable dream of the Soviet person – to visit the Seychelles – as well as the nostalgic mood through both motif and written words.

The concluding highlights of the art section at the exhibition included the “Zooparkas” (1986) series by Edmundas Saladžius – an artistic testament to a time devoid of hope or promise. Alongside these were works by Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas (1957–1993) and Eimutis Markūnas, referencing the second Lithuanian hippie generation, which matured in the latter half of the 1970s in Kaunas under the guidance of Steponas Žukas in applied arts technique. They learned art crafts there, but desired to become true artists, inspired by the freedom ideals of the hippies. Their pursuit of the hippie subculture was strongly suppressed by the leaders of the technical school, as were the movements of the Kaunas hippie generation in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Despite this, Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas became a prominent figure and significant painter in the Lithuanian art world of the 1970s and 1980s.³⁶ Defining the uniqueness of Kampas, the plot element was also significant. For quite understandable reasons (the social realism yoke), the majority of Lithuanian painters avoided storytelling in painting, calling it literariness. Storytelling in painting was the prerogative of ideological art. This is how future painters were also shaped at the Vilnius Art Institute, where Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas enrolled in 1981. However, after completing the institute, he no longer avoided deeper content and storytelling in his paintings, being drawn to cultural history plots and their juxtaposition with the inklings of his meagre everyday life (Fig. 11). His painting gained great popularity, and is still unforgettable and astonishing.

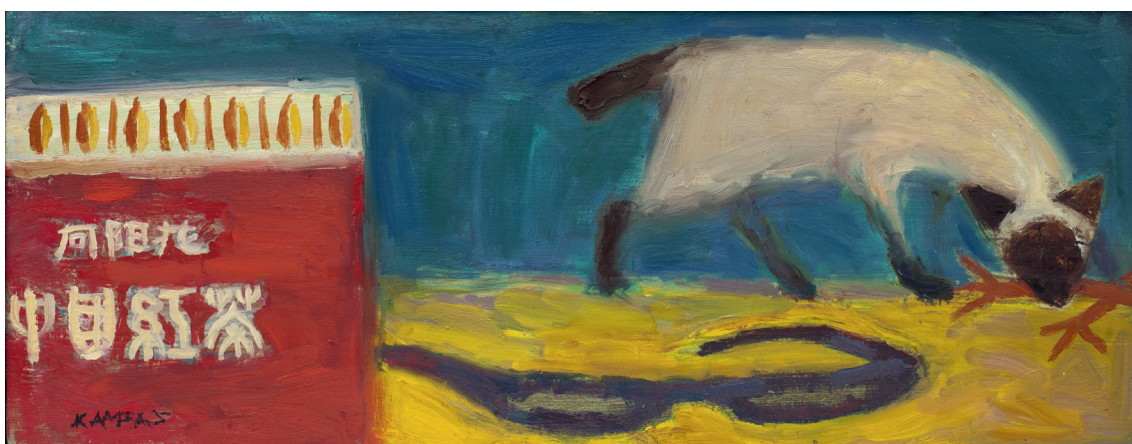


Fig. 11. Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas. *Chinese Motif*. 1987, wood, oil, 25 × 65 cm. Private property

In addition to the main art and music components, several smaller parts were presented at the exhibition, including a series of work about hippies by the famous photography master Romualdas Požerskis, the work of Kaunas theatres, youth fashion, and periodical self-publishing by the Lithuanian Catholic Church. All these areas were connected by the attitude of an unfree society, constantly silently but persistently resisting imposed rules and demands.

As the master of artistic photography, Romualdas Požerskis, belongs to the generation of Romas Kalanta. At the exhibition, photographs were displayed of the daily lives and travels of students from the 1960s, as well as brand new video works where the author used his own filmed footage from the lives of hippie youth.

The exhibition of theatrical events emphasised the connections of Lithuanian theatrical culture with international post-war modernism. Authentic recordings of the Modris Tenisons pantomime troupe, which worked at the Kaunas Drama Theatre from 1967 to 1972, were featured at the exhibition. According to theatre historian Edgaras Klivis, they perfectly reflected that cosmopolitan atmosphere that briefly unfolded in Lithuanian culture between the years of Stalinist terror and the heavy stagnation depression that began after the events of 1972 in Kaunas.³⁷ The reconstruction of the play “Mammoth Hunt” (1968) revealed the political imagination of that time. The theatre exhibition revealed how the dissatisfaction of actors and society with reality and internal torments shaped specific metaphors and allegories easily understood by Soviet society and turned the actors’ body language into multi-layered symbols.

The fashion section exhibits not only the fashion of the 1970s and 1980s, mostly sewn or knitted at home, but also testifies to the lack of beauty and elegance – albums with pictures of beautiful women, nude photographs, cutouts from foreign magazines. These albums, compiled by a Kaunas doctor from 1958 to 1991 (effectively her entire conscious life from youth to old age), were a clandestine activity, a completely secret hobby, an alternative to the

grey everyday life, compensating for a longing for a more interesting and colourful life.

Fashion and appearance were perhaps the most open fields for the expression of youth individualism and even protest. Inventive Lithuanian youths, both boys and girls, showcased the image of a free individual through their clothing and accessories (Fig. 12). In Lithuania, this image was crafted by following the fashion trends of Western Europe and the United States. They were visible in press photographs and occasionally in movies. Those who had relatives in capitalist countries and received parcels could proudly boast blue jeans. However, most trendy clothes had to be home-sewn, because the Soviet clothing industry had become a subject of ridicule among young people. The Soviet Union was a society of absolute deficit. There was almost no choice of clothing or accessories. Girls recalled:

*We used to knit and sew ourselves. That’s why we were unique and different, with a twist. ... I remember how my neighbour bragged about sewing himself pants with a whopping 60cm flare. Youth and the VEF transistor radio were inseparable attributes of that time ... With my wide-legged pants, those flares, I wasn’t allowed into the Astra café in Kaunas.*³⁸

Many episodes remain in the memory of Lithuanian youth from that time, involving heated discussions with parents and teachers about the width of pants, the mini or maxi length of skirts:

*There was one hippie in our school who flared the bottoms of his pants up to 50cm wide. He sewed in light bulbs that flickered when connecting the wires to the shoeboxes in the pocket. Teachers nearly went mad when they saw it and called the police. The man was taken away in handcuffs. Even though the lad was a good student, he never got into anywhere because of his long hair and that ‘anti-communist’ bell bottom pants ...*³⁹

This narrative testifies that conservative adults often perceived the appearance of hippie youth as intolerable. Now it is clear that youth fashion



Fig. 12. Lithuanian hippies at the Baltic Sea. 1969. Unknown author

reflected very distinct features of the 1960s generation – a more open pursuit of freedom, unwillingness to be part of the ruck, and liberal values. Indeed, it was precisely with these things that a part of Lithuanian society, which had already adopted Soviet standards of living, actively tried to fight. There were various “educators” – teachers, Kom-somol activists, police officers serving in the structures of violence (at that time – militiamen). One of Romas Kalanta’s contemporaries said:

A week after the Kalanta events, I happened to be in Kaunas, on Laisvės Avenue. I was long-haired with a flowery tie – almost a hippie. And so? It wasn’t even ten minutes before two suited guys approached me. They told my girlfriend to go home, and they took me in a Volga to the security headquarters at the end of Laisvės Avenue. I avoided arrest because my alibi was flawless (I wasn’t involved in those events because I was in

*Vilnius at the time). But my mane remained in Kaunas, they shaved me ... Soon the Communist Party secretary at my workplace called me in for a talk. For a long time afterwards, I felt the invisible tentacles of security. Youth, try to imagine what the Soviet authorities were like.*⁴⁰

That is how the man finished his story, having personally experienced Soviet pressure and violence in his youth because of his clothing style.

One section of the exhibition was dedicated to the underground activities of the Lithuanian Catholic Church and the publication *Lietuvos katalikų bažnyčios kronika* (further *LKB kronika* – The Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania). *LKB kronika* was an underground periodical published in Lithuania and distributed in the West from 1972 to 1989. It covered the situation of the Church and believers in Soviet Lithuania, highlighting the

absence of religious freedom. Participants in the Catholic underground found clever ways to disseminate information to the free world about the illegal actions of the authorities against believers. It was a significant informational weapon against the system.

However, at the exhibition “1972. Breaking Through the Wall”, some visitors logically raised the question of what connected dangerous underground activities of priests, nuns, and the then largely indifferent youth and artists of Lithuanian cities. After all, believers and hippies who professed free love had diametrically opposed beliefs, yet there were some things that united them. This was an idea of conscious resistance to the totalitarian system. Another connecting link was the ideological pressure experienced by all societal groups and their unwillingness to reconcile with glaring lies, a common aspiration to ignore the Soviet way of life. Moreover, escaping through the Iron Curtain, freely travelling through Western countries, was almost forbidden for all societal groups, except for the most loyal servants of the system, high-ranking Communist Party officials.

LKB kronika informed about the sacrifice of Romas Kalanta, published an open letter⁴¹ from the artist Vladislovas Žilius to the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party at the time when no official Soviet newspaper reported on the conflict of this quite famous artist with the authorities. The artist demanded artistic freedom. In the letter, he wrote that the critical evaluation of his work was left to individuals occupying high positions in the bureaucratic hierarchy who often lacked the most basic competence to judge art. He wrote about the crushing of the artist’s individuality, stating that the principles of so-called socialist realism were alien and difficult for him to understand as a human being and an artist: “I am convinced that as an individual living in our era, I have a universal human right to freedom of thought and a free understanding of the surrounding world”.⁴² This right, as Kaunas Drama Theatre director Jonas Jurašas and writer Aušra Marija Sluckaitė also found, could only be realised after emigration from the USSR to the USA.

This part of the exhibition was housed in a cramped, dark space, formerly a storage area for small parcels at the post office. The environment itself testified to the complexity of the situation of the believers during the Soviet era. It should be noted that this location provided the viewer with the opportunity to experience unexpected emotional and visual sensations that accurately reflected the colour of the *LKB kronika* narrative.

EXHIBITION ARCHITECTURE

The exhibition architects faced a special task – to create a modern, visitor-friendly exhibition atmosphere not in a traditional exhibition hall, but in an unused post building. The building is a monument⁴³ of Lithuanian culture, protected by the state. In reality, this meant that when setting up a temporary exhibition, it was forbidden to attach any constructions to the walls, to drill, to change wall colours or floor coverings. It should be noted that, while operating a postal service, especially during the Soviet era, this modernist architecture was certainly not carefully protected. The interior of the post office, as a “legacy of bourgeois Lithuania”, was treated by the Soviets in a particularly brutal way: the walls were repainted many times with poor paints, some rooms were lined with wooden planks, and the premises were divided by temporary partitions. The exhibition architects (IMPLMT Architects) faced a special challenge – to find a way to display both large objects (paintings, posters, musical instruments) and small exhibits (archival documents, a camera and its tapes, clothes, and accessories). The decision was made to build new internal walls with a frame structure, without touching the old walls and ceilings (Fig. 13). The flexibility of gypsum plasterboard was utilised. The new walls had no straight angles and ended with a slight curve, creating a cosy space. Curved walls without sharp corners are a characteristic feature of the exterior of the Kaunas Post Office. It has been creatively transposed into the interior of this exhibition. This created new planes and enough space for the exhibition of massive paintings. Blocks of lightweight plastic were used for smaller format

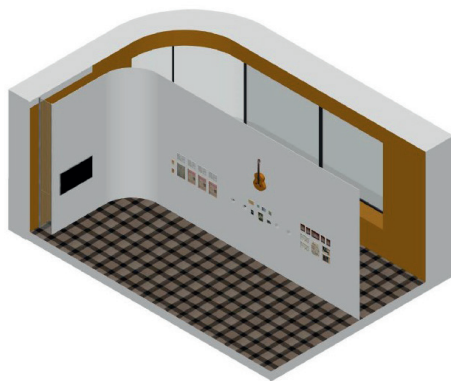


Fig. 13. Sketch of the exhibition hall interior. New internal walls with frame structure. IMPLMNT Architects, 2022

paintings, rhythmically arranged in the halls. Their gentle translucency created an impression of lightness, and the art gallery did not look like a maze of blocks.

The music exhibition was located in the former main postal operations hall. This is a huge bright space with columns, surrounded by a wall painting friso. The decoration of the hall has a distinct national identity character. The friso consists of copies of neoromantic paintings by Kazys Šimonis and postage stamps of the Republic of Lithuania. The floor of the hall is a very vivid imitation of national textile patterns. Additionally, there are still massive dark wood counters from the Soviet era in the hall. The exhibition architects had to find solutions to manage the large space and exhibit valuable musical instruments (guitars, synthesisers), concert photos, and other archival documents. The space of the operations area was narrowed by covering the gaps between columns with plastic panels. This provided enough planes for displaying concert posters, vinyl covers, and guitars. Video screens and smaller exhibits were placed on the former postal counters. In the centre of the hall, architects integrated a white furniture piece almost throughout its length, designed for displaying electric organs and synthesisers (Fig. 14). The simple white form helped to respectfully highlight and accentuate the musical instruments in the rich environment. Several seating areas nearby were designated for listening to music recordings using headphones.



Fig. 14. Sketch of the interior of the exhibition. Matt plastic blocks are intended for displaying pictures in space. IMPLMNT Architects, 2022

The second floor of the post office housed poorly conditioned rooms allocated for theatre and fashion exhibitions. Dimming the space was necessary for comfortable viewing of video material, which saved the aesthetics of the theatre exhibition. The presentation of fashion exhibits was complicated by the cold light green colour of the walls and worn, cracked terrazzo floors. Despite the real wear and tear, architects strictly adhered to heritage conservation requirements – avoiding further damage to the walls or floor condition. The environment starkly contrasted with the elegance of 20th century fashion from the 1960s–1980s and the exoticism of hippie fashion. The architects' solution was quite radical. Since it was not possible to change the wall colours, they were used as the exhibition's colour foundation. The floors of the room were covered with the same light green fabric, creating a space of green colour and immersing all the exhibits within it. A consistent colour background helped to highlight the colours, patterns, and silhouettes of the clothing. Nevertheless, this part of the exhibition disappointed some visitors. Not everyone was satisfied with the room's decor and referred to this decision as poor taste, without trying to understand the reasons behind it. However, as revealed by a visitor survey, about 80 per cent of the exhibition's visitors enjoyed the overall exhibition environment.⁴⁴ Many appreciated the opportunity to closely examine the postal building. It was also well-received that the artworks were excellently contextualised in various postal spaces, allowing visitors to experience the spirit of the past era.



Fig. 15. Sketch of a music hall interior. IMPLMNT Architects, 2022

VISITOR SURVEY AND OPINIONS

Over the course of more than three months, the exhibition attracted a record number of visitors to Lithuanian museums – 27,000. However, very few participated in the surveys, with only 62 completed questionnaires⁴⁵ received. Both closed and open-ended questions were provided. Only half (out of the 22 questions submitted) of the closed questions were directly related to the exhibition, so I will continue to present evaluations of the exhibition from the visitors' perspective.

Overall, the exhibition scored highly: very good – 35.7 per cent, good – 46.5 per cent.⁴⁶ In response to the question of whether this exhibition as part of the Kaunas European Capital of Culture project was unique, the answer was “Yes”: 67.8 per cent of respondents said they strongly agreed with this statement. Only about 10 per cent disagreed or did not notice any distinctiveness, which represents the opinion of four people.⁴⁷ 23.3 per cent of respondents completely agreed that the exhibition was engaging and thought-provoking. About 60 per cent of those who expressed their opinion agreed with the exhibition, using the words “agree” and “partially agree”.⁴⁸

In the survey, a rather provocative statement “The event is not intended for people like me” was

presented to find out if visitors understood the concept and main narrative of the exhibition. The result pleased the curators: 65.5 per cent of respondents disagreed with the statement.⁴⁹ This means that the exhibition largely engaged the minds of visitors. In the opinion of 79 per cent of respondents, the exhibition was professionally organised.⁵⁰

Next, I would like to share the responses to the open-ended questions next. Visitors said that the exhibition awakened the memory of the elderly and informatively told the youth and children: “The elderly remembered their youth, while the youth felt as if in space, comparing the past and present”.⁵¹ For many visitors, it was valuable and interesting to step into the past and explore the music, art, and styles of the past, and some noted that the exhibition reminded them of various forms of rebellion and the struggle for freedom.⁵²

Interestingly, there were visitors who came up with the idea to visit the exhibition as part of a personal celebration. One group of visitors wrote:

We celebrated Father's Day⁵³ at the exhibition. The exhibition exceeded our expectations greatly: it was large, detailed, and deep, forcing us to think, reason, and try to understand what the authors of the works meant. It was very valuable – about freedom, the desire to live in a Western

way, the ability to resist between the lines, to bypass Soviet censorship. It was especially nice to participate in it with our parents, as they remembered from their experience and could add to the exhibition. The exhibition presented both political (e.g. the decisions of Romas Kalanta's trials) and life-related highlights (e.g. rock music). Such education is necessary as air we breathe. Thanks to the exhibition organisers, a great and very high-quality job has been done.⁵⁴

This visitor feedback is a clear testament that the exhibition narrative resonated with interests of various educational backgrounds and age groups, while also bridging the gap between generations.

CONCLUSIONS

The exhibition "1972. Breaking Through the Wall" is the first case in the history of Lithuanian art exhibitions where the focus was on the confrontation between art and the political system. It presented a comprehensive, detailed portrait of alternative culture, making this exhibition a valuable case study of socio-cultural art exhibitions.

The exhibition revealed the complex cultural and socio-political life of Soviet Lithuania (1960s–1980s). It provided clear references to the socio-political relationships of Kaunas society with the international community, mostly on the level of mental thought, which was influenced by the specific attitudes of a large part of Lithuanians towards Soviet policy and ideology. The parallels between the socialist camp and Western societies are evident in the areas of imagery of freedom, creative ideas, and modes of operation. This exhibition is evidence of the ideas of cultural unity that survived in conditions of captivity in Lithuania and neighbouring countries. The exhibition revealed the roles of very different groups of people in the fight against injustice, for the great value – freedom. The project revealed how the political power machine sought to directly influence the art world, but nevertheless had no essential impact on it in Lithuania.

The idea of presenting a historical exhibition about resistance in unconventional spaces has fully justified itself. An abandoned building in the historical memory of Kaunas acted as a striking memory stimulator. The former post office building attracted the public as a witness of the city's rich past. The grand past of the post office and its current abandonment, signalling the Soviet period, became a precise background for the exhibition's narrative, with the main emphasis on resistance to the Soviet system. The architectural solution of the exhibition is to be appreciated as sensitive to the environment, fully meeting contemporary heritage conservation requirements, and comfortable for viewers. Visitor feedback strongly testified to the success and importance of both architectural and curatorial design to society.

References

- Aleksandravičius, Egidijus, Saulius Žukas (eds.). *Romo Kalantos auka: 1972 metų Kauno pavasaris*. Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2002.
- Bartulienė, Genovaitė, Kristina Budrytė-Genevičė, Arvydas Žalpys, Rasa Žukienė. *Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas 1957–1993*. Kaunas: Meno parkas, 2023.
- Beitin, Andreas, Eckhart J. Gillen (eds.). *Flashes of the Future: die Kunst der 68er oder die Macht der Ohnmächtigen*. Aachen: Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, 2018.
- Budrytė-Genevičė, Kristina (ed.). 1972. *Pramušti sieną [Breaking Through the Wall]*. Parodos knyga. Kaunas: Kaunas – Europos kultūros sostinė 2022, 2022.
- Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Selected Essays. New York: Basic Books, 1973.
- Greimas, Algirdas. *Gyvenimas ir galvojimas*. Vilnius: Vaga, 1998.
- Grigoravičienė, Erika. „Modernizacija, (post)modernizmai, naujasis modernizmas: Lietuvos dailės nuo XX a. 6 dešimtmečio istorijos sąvokos.“ In *Was There a Quiet Modernism in Lithuania? Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis* 95 (2019): 53–85.
- Kauno istorijos metraštis*, 4. Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto leidykla, 2003.
- Klavis, Edgaras. „Through the Prism of Allegories: Alternative Theatrical Expression in 1970s Kaunas.“ In Kristina Budrytė-Genevičė (ed.), 1972. *Pramušti sieną [Breaking Through the Wall]*. Kaunas: Kaunas – Europos kultūros sostinė, 2022, 197–201.
- Lubytė, Elona (ed.). „Was There a Quiet Modernism in Lithuania?“ *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis* 95 (2019).
- _____. *Tylusis modernizmas 1962–1982*. Vilnius: Tyto alba, 1997.

- Ramanauskaitė, Egidija. *Kauno hipiai: Tapatybės paieškos 1966–1972*. Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2023.
- Ramonaitė Ainė, Jūratė Kavaliauskaitė (eds.). *Sąjūdžio ištakų beiėskant: nepaklusniųjų tinklaveikos galia*. Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2011.
- Smūtkeliai: Česlovo Paplausko prisiminimai praėjus 50 metų. http://www.bigbeat.lt/images/Smutkeliai/Ceslovo/Sm%C5%ABtkeliai_2021%2005%2031.pdf
- Socialist Flower Power: Soviet Hippie Culture*. Culver City: Wende Museum of the Cold War, 2018.
- Stanevičiūtė Rūta, Danutė Petrauskaitė, Vita Gruodytė. *Nailono uždanga. Šaltasis karas, tarptautiniai mainai ir lietuvių muzika*. Vilnius: Lietuvos muzikos ir teatro akademija, 2018.
- Swain, Amanda Jeanne. *A Death Transformed: The Political and Social Consequences of Romas Kalanta's Self Immolation, Soviet Lithuania, 1972*. University of Washington, 2013. https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/bitstream/handle/1773/22787/Swain_washington_0250E_11418.pdf?sequence=1
- Tamoliūnienė, Rimantė (ed.). *Laisvės proveržiai sovietiniame Kaune: nuo slapto pogrindžio iki atviro protesto*. Kaunas: Kauno apskrities viešoji biblioteka, 2007.
- Uloza, Vilius, Domas Šniukas. “Ar tikrai tokia mūsų grafika?” *Tiesa* 53 (1963 kovo 3): 3.
- Žukienė, Rasa. “The Landscape of Artistic Kaunas in the Context of Vilnius.” In Justina Juodišiūtė, Miglė Survilaitė, Tomas Vaiseta (eds.), *Kaunas-Vilnius: Moving Mountains*. Vilnius: MO Museum, 2022, 36–52.
- Žukauskienė, Odeta. “Pauliaus Normanto gyvenimas kelyje: kultūriniai kontekstai.” In Odeta Žukauskienė (ed.), *Rytai-Vakarai: komparatyvistinės studijos XIII*. Vilnius: Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, 2019, 12–23.
- Yearbook (Kauno istorijos metraštis)* is dedicated to the events of 1972 (Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto leidykla, 2003).
- ⁵ Amanda Jeanne Swain, *A Death Transformed: The Political and Social Consequences of Romas Kalanta's Self Immolation, Soviet Lithuania, 1972* (University of Washington, 2013), https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/bitstream/handle/1773/22787/Swain_washington_0250E_11418.pdf?sequence=1
- ⁶ The book *Flashes of Future* highlights global events of 1972, such as the launch of the first feminist magazine Ms. in the USA, the beginning of the Watergate scandal, the tragedy at the Munich Olympics, and student strikes in Greece, yet it pays no attention to Eastern Europe. In Andreas Beitin, Eckhart J. Gillen (Hrsg). *Flashes of the Future: die Kunst der 68er oder Die Macht der Ohnmächtigen* (Aachen: Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, 2018), 576–577.
- ⁷ Elona Lubyte (ed.), “Was There a Quiet Modernism in Lithuania?” *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis*, Vol. 95. (Vilnius: Vilniaus dailės akademijos leidykla, 2019).
- ⁸ Elona Lubyte (ed.), *Tylusis modernizmas 1962–1982* [Quiet modernism in Lithuania] (Vilnius: Tyto alba, 1997).
- ⁹ *Glasnost ir perestroika* – a concept relating to openness and transparency. *Glasnost and Perestroika*, initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985, aimed to democratise the Soviet Union. These reforms significantly influenced the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Lithuania seized upon perestroika as an opportunity. It broke away from the Soviet Union and became an independent country again on 11 March 1990. The Soviet Union finally collapsed in 1991.
- ¹⁰ Egidija Ramanauskaitė, *Kauno hipiai: Tapatybės paieškos 1966–1972* (Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla, 2023).
- ¹¹ <https://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-modern/display/year-art-1973>
- ¹² The exhibitions by Estonian curators Kiwa and Terje Toomistu are worth mentioning: “Soviet Hippies”, Estonian National Museum (2013), Moderna Museet, Malmö, Sweden (2014), Uppsala Konstmuseum in Sweden (2014), and exhibition “Soviet Hippies: The Psychedelic underground of 1970 Estonia”, Presentation House gallery, Vancouver, Canada (2014), Red Gallery, London, U.K. (2016), Galerie KUB, Leipzig, Germany (2018).
- ¹³ Rimantė Tamoliūnienė (ed.), *Breakthroughs to freedom in Soviet Kaunas: from secret underground to open protest* (Kaunas: Kauno apskrities viešoji biblioteka, 2007).
- ¹⁴ The exhibition “Flower Children: From Pacifism to Barricades” was held at the Lithuanian Expatriate Institute of Vytautas Magnus University in May 2012, without a catalogue.
- ¹⁵ *Socialist Flower Power: Soviet Hippie Culture* (Culver City: Wende Museum of the Cold War, 2018).
- ¹⁶ An anonymous story: “In Kaunas we found ourselves in the midst of a storm. People were having fun, music was playing, there was celebration, barricades ... It was one big party. Elders, nationalists, everyone was there ... entire villages, elders, sons, grandsons – these were really strong guys. Entire villages came. And somehow we were there too ... Music, people playing guitars, many weapons – it was all public. There were many long-haired youths, mostly Lithuanians, mostly from the Baltic countries. There was someone from Belarus ... There were many Russians there

Notes

- ¹ The publication is a part of the project “Strengthening the R&D activities of the Vytautas Kavolis Transdisciplinary Institute for Social Sciences and Humanities (SOCMTEP)”. The project is funded by the Research Council of Lithuania and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania, Contract No S-A-UEI-23-13 (2023-12-27). The exhibition “1972. Breaking Through the Wall” is part of the project Kaunas – European Capital of Culture. The exhibition was open in Kaunas Central Post Office building from 14 May 2022 to 30 August 2022.
- ² In 1940, the Soviet Union occupied the Republic of Lithuania.
- ³ The curatorial team of the exhibition: Art historians Rasa Žukienė, Edgaras Klivis, Gediminas Jankauskas, Genovaitė Bartulienė, Rimantė Tamoliūnienė, historian Arūnas Streikus, composer Zita Bružaitė.
- ⁴ Egidijus Aleksandravičius, Saulius Žukas (eds.), *Romo Kalantos auka: 1972 metų Kauno pavasaris* (Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2002). Volume 4 of *Kaunas History*

too. There was really intense rushing, surging. And then military divisions burst in. I heard a whistling, banging sound ... a bullet ... a ricochet. It was interesting to be right in the middle. And they let me hold an automatic rifle. I fired a few times." Source link: *Socialist Flower Power: Soviet Hippie Culture* (Culver City: Wende Museum of the Cold War, 2018), 6–7. https://issuu.com/wendemuseum/docs/wm_socialistflower_catalog

¹⁷ Kristina Budrytė-Genevičė (ed.), 1972. *Pramušti sieną* [Breaking Through the Wall] (Kaunas: Kaunas – Europos kultūros sostinė, 2022).

¹⁸ Ainė Ramonaitė, Jūratė Kavaliauskaitė (ed.), *Sąjūdžio įtakų beišeikant: nepaklusniųjų tinklaveikos galia* (Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 2011).

¹⁹ Egidija Ramanauskaitė. *Kauno hipiai: Tapatybės paieškos 1966–1972*.

²⁰ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Selected Essays (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

²¹ Odeta Žukauskienė, "Pauliaus Normanto gyvenimas kelyje: kultūriniai kontekstai," in Odeta Žukauskienė, *Rytai-Vakarai: komparatyvistinės studijos XIII* (Vilnius: Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, 2019), 18.

²² Latent refers to the unseen, difficult to analyse. Vita Gruodytė emphasises the dichotomy of Lithuania's cultural situation during the Soviet era and its two levels – the patent (visible, official) and the latent. Source link: Vita Gruodytė, „Lietuva tarp Rytų ir Vakarų," in Rūta Stanevičiūtė, Danutė Petrauskaitė, Vita Gruodytė, *Nailono uždanga. Šaltasis karas, tarptautiniai mainai ir lietuvių muzika* (Vilnius: Lietuvos muzikos ir teatro akademija, 2018), 108.

²³ Erika Grigoravičienė, "Modernizacija, (post)modernizmai, naujasis modernizmas: Lietuvos dailės nuo XX a. 6 dešimtmečio istorijos sąvokos" (Modernisation, (Post)modernities, and New Modernism: The Concepts of Lithuanian Art History Starting from the Late 1950s), in *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis: Ar buvo tylusis modernizmas Lietuvoje? (Was There a Quiet Modernism in Lithuania?)*, Nr. 95 (Vilnius: Vilniaus dailės akademijos leidykla, 2019), 68.

²⁴ The exhibition "1972. Breaking Through the Wall" was part of the Kaunas – European Capital of Culture 2022 project (directed by Virginija Vitkienė).

²⁵ Algirdas Greimas. *Gyvenimas ir galvojimas* (Vilnius: Vaga, 1998), 215.

²⁶ The online survey "Visitor Survey of the Event" 1972. Breaking Through the Wall" was conducted by the Office of the project Kaunas – European Capital of Culture 2022 in the months of May to August 2022.

²⁷ In the context of the exhibition, Lithuanian rock bands are mentioned: *Eglutės* and *Bitės*, *Kertukai*, *Nuogi ant slenkščio*, *Gintarėliai*, *Dainiai*, *Raganiai*, *Mes*, *Nenuoramos*, *Gėlės*. Noteworthy bands include: the all-girl groups *Eglutės* and *Bitės*, *Kertukai*, *Nuogi ant slenkščio*, *Gintarėliai*, *Dainiai*, *Raganiai*, *Mes*, *Nenuoramos*, *Gėlės*.

²⁸ *Smūtkeliai* – a reference to the Pensive Christ figures found in Lithuanian folk art.

²⁹ Kauno politechnikos instituto komjaunimo komiteto biuro posėdžio protokolas Nr. 30, 1971 m. vasario 23 d., Lietuvos ypatingasis archyvas, f. 9885, ap. 1, b. 85, l. 13.

³⁰ *Smūtkeliai: Česlovo Paplausko prisiminimai praėjus 50 metų*, http://www.bigbeat.lt/images/Smutkeliai/Ceslovo/Sn%C5%ABtkeliai_2021%2005%2031.pdf

³¹ Ibid.

³² Eduardas Mieželaitis, *Autoportretas*. *Aviaeskizai* (Vilnius: Valstybinė grožinės literatūros leidykla, 1962).

³³ Vilius Uloza, Domas Šniukas, "Ar tikrai tokia mūsų grafika?" *Tiesa* 53 (1963 kovo 3), 3.

³⁴ Rasa Žukienė, "The Landscape of Artistic Kaunas in the Context of Vilnius," in Justina Juodišytė, Miglė Survilaitė, Tomas Vaiseta (ed.), *Kaunas-Vilnius: Moving Mountains* (Vilnius: MO Museum, 2022), 36–52.

³⁵ *The Four* are representatives of the young generation of painters, gathered in an informal and unofficial group of the 1970s: Arvydas Šaltenis, Algimantas Kuras, Kostas Dereškevičius, Algimantas Švėgžda.

³⁶ Genovaitė Bartulienė, Kristina Budrytė-Genevičė, Arvydas Žalpins, Rasa Žukienė, *Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas 1957–1993* (Kaunas: Meno parkas, 2023).

³⁷ Edgaras Klivis, "Through the Prism of Allegories: Alternative Theatrical Expression in 1970s Kaunas," in Kristina Budrytė-Genevičė (ed.), 1972. *Pramušti sieną* [Breaking Through the Wall] (Kaunas: Kaunas – Europos kultūros sostinė, 2022), 198.

³⁸ Quotes from the author's conversation with informants Loreta, Abel, Margarita, January 2022, Kaunas. Rasa Žukienė's personal archive, unnumbered.

³⁹ The presenter introduced himself as *Diedas*, audio recording, 21 January 2022, Rasa Žukienė's personal archive.

⁴⁰ Presenter N. G., audio recording, 18 January 2022, Rasa Žukienė's personal archive.

⁴¹ The letter to Petras Griškevičius, the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party, *Lietuvos katalikų bažnyčios kronika*, 1975–1976, t. 3, Nr. 22, p. 403–404.

⁴² Ibid., 403.

⁴³ The Kaunas Central Post Office, opened in 1932 (by arch. Feliksas Vizbaras), is one of the most important representative and modernist buildings of the interwar state. It is significant in terms of architecture, engineering, and history, becoming one of the most prominent architectural highlights of the temporary capital. In 2015, the European Commission awarded the European Heritage Label to Kaunas modernist buildings, including the central post office. The Kaunas modernist architectural complex was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2023.

⁴⁴ "Survey of the event visitors '1972. Breaking Through the Wall.'" (open questions and answers), 1. Rasa Žukienė's personal archive.

⁴⁵ The visitor survey at the exhibition "1972. Breaking Through the Wall" was conducted by the team of the project Kaunas European Capital of Culture 2022 from May 15 to 30 August 2022. I would like to thank the project researchers – sociologist Tadas Šarūnas and art curator Milda Rutkauskaitė for sharing the data.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁵¹ Ibid., 1.

⁵² Ibid., 1.

⁵³ Father's Day in Lithuania is celebrated on the first Sunday of June.

⁵⁴ Survey of the event visitors "1972. Breaking Through the Wall" (open questions and answers), 1. Rasa Žukienė's personal archive.

Rasutė ŽUKIENĖ*Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, Menų fakultetas, Vytauto Kavolio transdisciplininių tyrimų institutas, Kaunas, Lietuva***MENO, POLITIKOS IR SOCIUMO RYŠIŲ SOVIETINĖJE SISTEMOJE
ATODANGA MENE: PARODOS „1972. PRAMUŠTI SIENĄ“ ATVEJO
ANALIZĖ****Santrauka**

Straipsnis skirtas analizuoti parodą „1972: Pramušti sieną“ („1972. Breaking through the Wall“) iš kelių perspektyvų: kuratoriaus, žiūrovų ir parodos architekto, gavusio užduotį sukurti aplinką meno parodai netradicinėje vietoje. Straipsnyje analizuojami kuratorių pasirinkimai, aptariamas parodos architekto darbas paveldosaugos reikalavimų kontekste, pateikiami žiūrovų apklausos rezultatai.

Šioje parodoje buvo keliamas klausimas apie alternatyvios kūrybos, priešiškos oficialiajai, reikšmę nelaisvoje sovietinėje visuomenėje. Ji buvo skirta XX a. 7–9-ojo dešimtmečių Lietuvos menui, oponavusiam oficialiajam sovietų kultūros kursui. Parodos priešistorėje slypi istorinis faktas, kad 1972 metų pavasarį Kaune, protestuodamas prieš laisvės nebuvimą, susidegino jaunas žmogus. Šie įvykiai turėjo tiesioginį ir netiesioginį atgarsį menuose, tačiau jie nebuvo eksponuojami, menininkams baiminantis represijų. Ši sunki patirtis paliko pėdsaką Lietuvos kultūroje ir kolektyvinėje atmintyje.

Paroda atskleidė įvairių visuomenės grupių vaidmenį oponuojant valdantiejiems ir įtvirtinant asmens ir kūrėjo laisvę kaip didžiausią vertybę. Meno ekspozicija, sudaryta iš oficialiajam sovietų menui besipriešinusių profesionalų (dailė, teatras) ir mėgėjų (roko ir bigbito muzika) XX a. 7–9-ojo deš. kūrinių akivaizdžiai parodė, kaip Kauną – 1920–1940 m. buvusią Lietuvos sostinę – veikė šiame mieste toks ryškus prieškarinio modernizmas (aplinka ir gyven-sena) ir pokariu visai šaliai primesta sovietinė ideologija. Dviejų diametraliai priešingų idėjinių nuostatų ir meninių principų susidūrimas sovietinėje Lietuvoje lėmė alternatyvios kultūros susiklostymą. Ši paroda pirmą kartą Lietuvos parodų istorijoje parodė, kaip sociumą ir menus veikė oficialiųjų valdžios struktūrų vykdytas spaudimas.

Lankytojų apklausa parodė, kad teigiamas reakcijas į parodą lėmė ir tautos atmintyje užsifiksavę sociopolitiniai įvykiai. Kolektyvinėje tautos atmintyje nugulę įvykiai koreliavo su atskirais kūrybos artefaktais ir istorinėmis detalėmis, kurias jauna karta išvydo pirmą kartą. Pažymėtina skirtingo amžiaus lankytojų emocinių patirčių simbiozė, stebint eksponatus, turinčius ir meninę, ir istorinę vertę. Kaip liudija lankytojų apklausa, paroda pasitarnavo glaudesniai ryšiui tarp generacijų užmegzti. Parodos eksponavimas kultūros paveldo objekte – buvusiuose pašto rūmuose (architektas Feliksas Vizbaras, 1932) buvo komplikotas uždavinys, kurį kūrybingai išsprendė šiuolaikiniai architektai.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: dailė ir ideologija, socializmo doktrina, alternatyvi kūryba, hipiai, menas ir politika, modernizmas Lietuvoje, „Tylusis modernizmas“, „Kauno pavasaris“.

*Gauta 2024-03-28**Parengta spaudai 2024-06-06*

PhD Rasutė Žukienė is an art historian and curator, professor in the Faculty of Arts, senior researcher in Vytautas Kavolis Transdisciplinary Research Institute in Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania.

She has published numerous articles, exhibition catalogues on Lithuanian art of the 20th century and several scientific monographs. Her research interests include the work of painter and composer Mikalojus

Konstantinas Čiurlionis and its relationship with the work of other artists from around the world,

Lithuanian modern art of the 20th century, and art by Lithuanian émigrés in the world.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3507-3018>

E-mail: rasute.zukiene@vdu.lt