

Centenary

Magazine

4/4



Latvia
100 

Co-funded by the Latvian State
Centenary Programme



Ministry of Culture
Republic of Latvia

**Latvian Centenary
Information Centre**

Latvian National Library
Mūkusalas iela 3, 1st floor, Rīga

+371 673 303 50
+371 220 138 89

lv100@km.gov.lv
lv100.lv

Satori Internet Magazine Editorial Staff

Ilmārs Šlāpīns, Elizabete Lukšo-Ražinska,
Anna Andersone

Translator

Lauris Veips

English Editor

Laima Ruduša

Project Management

Elizabete Lukšo-Ražinska, Zaiga Pūce,
Paula Jansone

Typefaces

Freight, Lapture

Paper

Maestro print 190 g/m², *Maestro print* 90 g/m²

Design

Kārlis Dovnorovičs, “You Made My Day”

Publisher

“Ascendum” Association
November 2018

UDK 930.85(474.3)(051)

Ce565

ISSN 2592-8473

Draugiem.lv
Latvija100

Facebook
Latvija100

Flickr
Latvia100

Instagram
LatvijaiSimts

Twitter
LatvijaiSimts

Youtube
LV100

Proem

What Do We Know About Each Other?

The centenary of the Latvian state has given impetus to several telling processes that allow its residents to have a better and wider understanding of themselves.

Looking back into the past and delving deep into the tiniest details of the early stages of the state isn't just a cause for disputes among historians and a reason for rewriting history textbooks. It gives us a chance to recognize the influence of different events and personalities at times of political breaking points. With that in mind, we can evaluate the events of today with more care and responsibility, as well as assess our own personal influence, involvement and participation in nation-building processes.

As we choose and arrange the entries of the National Encyclopaedia we place our knowledge about Latvia into a certain frame and structure, visualising the connections and relationships between things and impressing a certain order upon the world around us. In a modern encyclopaedia, this scheme is no longer frozen and immutable. In the virtual environment we can continuously renew our knowledge, rearranging it when necessary and thus learning to preserve order in the storming waves of information that is increasingly becoming part of everyday life of modern humans.

The influx of new music, cinema, literature and art supported in the enthusiasm for the centenary doesn't only provide a creative value. These works talk about the way we see, hear and feel about ourselves – the way we can look at known or forgotten Latvian people anew, what words we use to talk about past or recent events, and what shape the possible or desirable Latvia might imaginatively take. The more diverse and manifold our art, the more opportunities to see and understand the differences between us, which is important in starting, or continuing, a discussion without which the future of Latvia can't be imagined.

Perhaps it would not be so bad to think about the next 100 years of Latvia this way – as an exciting conversation between friends. An everlasting conversation.

Ilmārs Šlāpīns

Latvia's Centenary Events from November to December*

Paradise '89 Feature film. "Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary" programme. In cinemas across Latvia	From February
To Be Continued Documentary film. "Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary" programme. In cinemas across Latvia	From March
Bille Feature film. "Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary" programme. In cinemas across Latvia	From April
Mērija's Journey Documentary film. "Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary" programme. In cinemas across Latvia	From May
Bridges of Time Documentary film. "Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary" programme. In cinemas across Latvia	From September
Homo Novus Feature film. "Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary" programme. In cinemas across Latvia	From September
Kurts Fridrihsons Documentary film. "Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary" programme. In cinemas across Latvia	From October
The Mover Feature film. "Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary" programme. In cinemas across Latvia	From October
Giving Light I Burn Out A series of public lectures. Pauls Stradiņš Museum of the History of Medicine, Rīga	October - December

Freedom Street Stories A series of events. Daugavpils, Jelgava, Jēkabpils, Jūrmala, Liepāja, Rēzekne, Rīga, Valmiera, Ventspils	Through 18 November
The XIII Baltic Triennial: GIVE UP THE GHOST Exhibitions, lectures, presentations, creative workshops, a publication. kim? Contemporary Art Centre, Rīga	Through 18 November
Trauma and Revival. Cultural Ties Between Eastern and Western Europe An exhibition, discussions, talks. Bunkier Sztuki Gallery of Contemporary Art, Krakow, Poland	Through 16 December
Over the Threshold The first exhibition dedicated to the Centenary of the Latgale Congress. Cultural History Museum of Latgale, Rēzekne	Through 30 December
The Latvian Red Cross Celebrates 100 An exhibition. Pauls Stradiņš Museum of the History of Medicine, Rīga	Through 21 January 2019
The Latvian Centenary Celebrations Programme Abroad UAE, USA, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, France, Greece, Georgia, Estonia, India, Italy, Ireland, Canada, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Hungary, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Finland, Spain, Switzerland, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Germany, Sweden	Through 3 December
To be Banned. Baltic Books 1918 – 1940 Travelling exhibition. National Library of Latvia, Rīga	From 1 November
The Ring of Zemgale A cinema concert. The ring of Zemgale in the "Ring of Latvia" concert series. Great Amber Concert Hall, Liepāja	2 November
The Latvian Provisional Government's Six Months in Liepāja Exhibition. Liepāja Museum, Liepāja	From 2 November
Glass Mountain. Daugava A modern staging of Rainis' dramatic poem Daugava. National Library of Latvia, Rīga	3 November

Terra Choralis [LV-CH] Concerts of Latvian and Swiss choral music. Chur, Zürich, Switzerland	3, 4 November
Facial Expression. The Portrait in 20th Century Latvia Exhibition. Latvian National Museum of Art and Arsenāls Exhibition Hall, Rīga	3 November to 24 February 2019
Prayers for Latvia A concert of Liepāja's choirs. Great Amber Concert Hall, Liepāja	4 November
War Sum Up A choral opera. OzAsia Festival, Adelaide, Australia	5, 6 November
Lielais Kristaps A preview and award ceremony of the Lielais Kristaps National Film Festival. Splendid Palace Cinema, Rīga	7-13 November
The Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, symphonic orchestra of the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music Concert. Part of the "Born in Latvia" concert series. Latvian National Opera, Rīga	8 November
Lāčplēsis A rock opera. The Arena Rīga, Rīga	8 November
Lustrum Documentary film. "Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary" programme. In cinemas across Latvia	From 8 November
Latvia in the Poetry of Imants Ziedonis and Ojārs Vācietis A concert of the Three Star Festival. National Library of Latvia, Rīga	9 November
Eslingen A musical. Latgale Embassy GORS, Rēzekne	9 November
The State and Municipal Heraldic Symbols of Latvia Exhibition. National Library of Latvia, Rīga	9 November to 24 March 2019
Impossible Run Ultramarathon. Valka	10 November

End & Beginning A Solo Exhibition by artist Ieva Jurjāne. Latvian National Museum of Art, Rīga	From 10 November
Lāčplēsis Day A day for commemorating those who fell in the Latvian War for Independence. Across Latvia	11 November
Latvian Soldiers' Songs A concert of the Three Star Festival. Great Guild Hall, Rīga	11 November
Meeting Place – Rīga Second (Russian) Theatre (1902-1918) Performances for school students. The Latvian School Bag initiative. Latvian National Theatre, Rīga	12-16 November
We Want to be Free And We Will Be Documentary exhibition. Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania, Vilnius	12-26 November
Gold. Silver. Bronze. Latvian Olympic Hall of Fame Exhibition. Latvian Sports Museum, Rīga	14 November
First Latvian Cultural Festival in Brazil Across Brazil	14-18 November
Moon and Sun A Solo Exhibition by glass artist and designer Artis Nīmanis. Finnish Glass Museum, Riihimäki, Finland	15 November to 31 December
State Academic Choir Latvija a capella concert Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania, Vilnius, Lithuania	15 November
Founders of the Latvian State Book opening, Latvian Museum of National History, Rīga	15 November
The Sun Rides Up into the Sky Animation. "Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary" programme. In cinemas across Latvia	From 15 November
Latvian artist participation in the Les Boreales Art Festival Caen, Normandy, France	15-25 November

A Hundred Years of Rīga Photo exhibition. By the Origo shopping centre, Rīga	From 16 November
Our Opera Turns 100 The Latvian National Opera's Centenary Jubilee Concert. Part of the "Born in Latvia" concert series. Latvian National Opera, Rīga	16 and 17 November
Staro Rīga Festival of light. Rīga	16-19 November
Award ceremony of the highest state decorations Rīga Castle, Rīga	17 November
Niagara Falls lit up in the colours of the Latvian flag Niagara Falls, the The United States of America	17 November
Freedom rogaining A rogaining competition. Abava Valley, Kandava	17 November
Concert for Mother Latvia A celebration concert by the Liepāja Symphony Orchestra. Great Amber Concert Hall, Liepāja	17 November
Concert by the Rīga Chamber Choir AVE SOL Konzerthaus Berlin, Berlin	17 November
The Servant Boy's Summer. The Beginning Theatre play. New Rīga Theatre, Rīga	From 17 November
Both Sides A Dance Spectacle. Arena Rīga, Rīga	17-19 November
Latvia - 100, Riga Latvian Society - 150 Charity ball. Riga Latvian Society House, Rīga	17 November

LV100.lv/18november

Morning Salute to Latvia

Freedom Square and Dzegužkalns, Rīga, Turaida, Gaiziņkalns, Mežotnes hillfort, the vicinity of Lake Rāzna, Kolka, Alsunga, Latvia and the world

City Song

Multimedia 3D projection. Jelgava St. Trinity church tower, Jelgava

Honoring the Freedom Guard

Guard mounting and honouring soldiers in places commemorating those who fought for Latvia's freedom. Cēsis, Jelgava, Liepāja, Rēzekne, Rīga, Valka, Latvia and abroad

Latvian Independence Day

Holiday programme, National History Museum of Latvia, Rīga

Celebratory parade of the National Armed Forces and an exhibition of Latvian and allied military vehicles and equipment

11 November embankment, Passenger Terminal, Rīga

State celebration concerts across Latvia's regions

Daugavpils Latvian Culture Centre, Daugavpils, Krustpils Culture Centre, Jēkabpils, Ogre Municipal Culture Centre, Ogre, Theatre House Jūras vārti, Ventspils

Residents' events, celebratory concerts, fireworks, etc.

Latvia and abroad

Latvia 100 sunrise gathering, the centenary scarf ritual and an exhibition of patterned mittens

Historic market square, Dobele

The Road of Light

A walk from the monument of first Latvian Foreign Minister Zigfrīds Anna Meierovics to the house where he lived as a student. The corner of Lielā and Jaunā Street – 14 Harmonijas Street, Tukums

People's run Breathe

People's run. Rēzekne

Godi

Celebratory event, Liepāja Latvian Society House, Liepāja

Freedom Street Stories. 100 years of Latvia in Ventspils

Exhibition of the Ventspils Museum, Ventspils Castle, Ventspils

Concert dedicated to the 100th anniversary of Latvia's independence

Valmiera Theatre, Valmiera

Professional brass orchestra Daugava concert

Vienības square, Daugavpils

Singing the Latvian anthem together

Vienības square, Cēsis

Musical spectacle featuring of the band Pērkons and the choirs of Jēkabpils, Latvian Signs for Jēkabpils

Vecpilsētas square, Jēkabpils

A ball on Raiņa Street

By the Cultural House of Kauguri, Jūrmala

Celebratory concerts

Rīga Congress Hall, Rīga Latvian Society House, Rīga Culture and Recreation Centre Imanta, Rīga Culture Centre Ilģuciems, Culture Palace Ziemeļbāzma, VEF Culture Palace, Rīga St. Peter's Church, University of Latvia Great hall, Rīga Small Guild Culture and Folk Art Centre, Rīga

18.11.

A celebratory musical event and address by president Raimonds Vējonis. By the Freedom Monument, Rīga

Both Sides of the Daugava

A concert. 11 November embankment, Rīga

The Life of the Sun

A musical spectacle of light. 11 November embankment, Rīga

Chamber music concerts in the Old Town concert halls and churches

St. Mary Magdalene Church, Zirgu Street Concert Hall, Anglican Church, Great Guild, Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation, Rīga St. John's Church, Rīga City Council, Reformed Church, Rīga

The Night Latvia was Born

An improvised spectacle. Latvian National Theatre, Rīga

Centenary Club Night

Latvia and abroad

LATEST. Läti Kama The days of Latvian contemporary theatre. Tallinn, Tartu, Estonia	19-25 November
The Sinfonietta Rīga Chamber Orchestra and Ksenija Sidorova on Tour in Sweden Baltic Music Festival. Malmö, Gothenburg, Örebro	21-24 November
The Latvian War for Independence 1918 - 1920 A permanent interactive exhibition for children and young people. Cēsis History and Art Museum, Cēsis	From 21 November
The First Year An interactive, educational exhibition. Cēsis History and Art Museum, Cēsis	From 21 November
Just on Time. Design Stories About Latvia Exhibition. Museum of Decorative Arts and Design, Rīga	22 November to 27 January 2019
Rothko in Jazz Concert programme as part of the London Jazz Festival. Latvian Radio Bigband, Mare Balticum, Kristine Prauliņa. Kings Place, London, UK	21-24 November
Baltic Symphony Festival A Joint Concert by the Leading Symphony Orchestras in the Baltic States. Great Guild Hall, Rīga	24 November
A Barbarian in Paris Group exhibition. Foundation d'Enterprise Ricard, Paris, France	12 November to 22 December
The State Before Statehood. Latvia - Provinces of the Russian Empire in the 19th century Scientific conference. National Library of Latvia, Rīga	6-8 December
State Academic Choir Latvija a capella concert Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory, Moscow	14 December
57th Australian Latvian Arts Festival Australia	26-31 December

* Programme is subject to change.

Full programme available on lv100.lv and lv100.lv/18november

First Concert of the Next Centenary

In the Name of Love. 18+

Eighteen beloved songs in brand new arrangements will be performed by young Latvian musicians. Soul-baring love letters that will ignite a feeling of togetherness to spite the wind and cold weather characteristic of our nation's birthday.

19.11.2018 Just outside the National Library of Latvia **18:30**



Officers and instructors of the 7th Sigulda infantry regiment of the Latvian Army in autumn 1919. Photographer Unknown. Latvian War Museum archives.

Winning is Half the Battle

TEXT Roberts Rasums

It's possible to create a new country only by giving up an existing state structure, and that's why a process like this always involves conflict. Even though international recognition is an important factor for the existence of a state, for a country being brought to being its *de iure* recognition is usually only a political confirmation of reality, i.e. it's recognising a power that is truly capable of ruling. In today's story about Latvia's foundation a less popular fact is that the first country to recognise the Republic of Latvia *de iure* was not the UK, or France, or the US. It was the Soviet Union. On 11 August 1920 the Treaty of Riga was signed, and its second article said: "Russia recognizes without objection the independence and sovereignty of the Latvian State and forever renounces all sovereign rights held by Russia in relation to the Latvian nation and land on the basis of the previous State legal regime as well as any international agreements, all of which lose their force and effect for all future time as

herein provided."

Even though the proclamation of the Latvian state on 18 November 1918 is the most important date in Latvian history, at the time it was but a symbolic act the likes of which could be witnessed throughout the region, from Finland to Georgia. In late 1918 the Latvian Provisional Government represented just one out of three possible scenarios for Latvia's future development, competing with Latvia ending up within the German sphere of influence or becoming part of Soviet Russia. In December 1918, when the Red Army entered Rīga, all that Rīga could muster as anti-Bolshevik forces were the remains of the 8th Army of the German Empire and the Baltic Landwehr (the "Baltic Territorial Army"), which per an agreement between the Latvian Provisional Government and the German party also included the first units set up by Latvians. At the turn of the year, these units fought shoulder to shoulder in the first battle for Latvian independence. It took place near Inčukalns, and in the battle which saw the defending side lose a total of 43 German, Latvian and Russian soldiers, but the Bolsheviks' impetus was slowed down for long enough to allow the German and Provisional Government institutions to evacuate from Rīga.

After a month of stepping back, the retreat finally stopped by the Venta River. After leaving Rīga, most of the Latvian units became scattered and the remaining men were united under Colonel Oskars Kalpaks in the Independent Student Company and the Latvian Independent Battalion. The basis of these was made up by the student intelligentsia and hardened veterans of the former Tsarist army in World War One. The situation became stable, however. It was made possible not only by the Estonian success in their independence battles and the arrival of German units, but also by a complete lack of support for the Latvian Soviet Government, which first of all became expressed in massive desertions from the Red Army, sometimes with entire units leaving to join the Latvian Provisional Government. At the same time, Latvian units under the Estonian Army were formed and united into the North Latvian Brigade under Jorģis Zemitāns. On 3 March 1919 the Latvian-German joint offensive started, while Estonian-Latvian forces marched on from the north. After Rīga fell on 22 May, the Red Army units made a chaotic retreat towards Latgale. This stage of the Independence War concluded with the Battle of Cēsis, in which the conflict of interest between the new Baltic countries and Germans concluded with defeat for the latter. Following the Battle of Cēsis, representatives of the Entente, who wanted the German units to remain as an important anti-Bolshevik force in the region, saw to it that the Strazdumuiža truce was signed. The agreement said that German units would have to leave Latvia, but the Germans had no

intention of doing so and started assembling a new force, namely the West Russian Volunteer Army nominally under the command of Pavel Bermond-Avalov.

The Allies were not ready to get involved directly to achieve the evacuation of the Germans, so Latvians had to take action themselves. On 10 July 1919 the Latvian Army was born by merging the North Latvian Brigade and the Latvian Independent Brigade. Its first commander was General Dāvids Simanons. The army was poorly provisioned and was in a difficult situation – in the east, it had to fight the Red Army, while in the south an inevitable conflict was brewing with the German forces, which on 8 October launched an attack on Rīga under the command of Bermond and von der Goltz. From this point on, the Latvian Army had to fight on two fronts against an enemy that surpassed it both in technology and absolute numbers. The only advantage for the Latvian Army was the considerable support by Latvian locals, which was expressed in financial and material donations to the army, as well as massive voluntary enlistment and partisan groups fighting behind enemy lines. While aided by cannon fire from the English fleet early on, the Latvian Army pushed Bermond's forces out of Latvia fully on its own by December 1919. This time the Entente's calls for a truce were not heard and the operation was quickly finished before the arrival of their representatives. The only thing that remained was the battle of Latgale, and Estonian and Polish help was enlisted for this.

The Latvian War of Independence is as substantial a part of the story of Latvian independence as the country's political, economic and social history. Even if you avoid romanticised clichés about the fact that “no country has gained independence without spilling blood” and “better die standing than live on one's knees” the War of Independence makes you realise several political mechanisms that are important today as well. First of all, defending independence does not consist solely on paying certain sums to the army. It can be ensured only by the entire public, furnishing both material and human resources: the army was born from volunteers who arrived in their own clothing and whose guns were provided for by selling donated valuables, growing gradually to reach 75,000 men in February 1920. Secondly, only if there is a powerful and battle-willing core can there be hope for allied support. Were the Latvian Army unwilling to fight, British and French cannons would have never fired upon Bermontian positions by the mouth of the River Daugava; Estonian forces would have never fought for Cēsis and Polish divisions wouldn't have helped in freeing Latgale. Thirdly, there is no dividing line between the army and the public. The army is part of the public and the people's readiness to defend their country is a litmus test for its willingness to have

a country of their own; the Latvian Army was an army of Latvian citizens, Russian princes, Baltic German barons and Latvian farm owners, who all fought side by side, and this continued into the interwar period.

The Latvian Army succeeded in its task. Not only did it win the struggle for independence, but also bestowed a legendary aura on the freedom battles, one that can be readily observed in the memoirs of the time. During the interwar period, the Latvian Army was an element that united residents of different Latvian regions and ethnicities, while the institution of officers created not just military specialists but the social elite. Nowadays this aura has vanished, perhaps due to the 1940 occupation in which the lack of Allied support as well as the politicians' overreliance on international treaties about neutrality and the powers of the League of Nations did not allow Latvia to keep its independence. The Latvian Army therefore fought as part of the armies of the Soviet Union and Germany, winning recognition and a fearsome reputation, which was however overshadowed by the political heritage that came with it.

In 1991 Latvia eschewed military conflict in regaining its independence. However, this doesn't mean that Latvian independence was won without the help of the Latvian Army. The first National Guard battalions were set up in the same way as the first Latvian Army units in 1918. These were volunteers that bought their scant equipment, including guns, purchased with their own money and joined in units despite the fact that a foreign military force was on Latvian territory. Only gradually could the Latvian fighting structures become professionalised, and until then the Latvian Army served as the backbone of foreign and domestic security, starting from national defence and fighting gangsterism. As the millennium turned, the situation became normal and as a result of general international euphoria Latvia joined NATO and the EU.

Nothing comes free – following the reinstatement of independence, fighting side by side with our allies, seven soldiers of the Latvian Army fell. The army has two obligations against the state: it has to win the struggle for security, and, secondly, it must preserve this security during times of peace. The timeless phrase, “*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*”, is where a country starts, and it must remain an extreme means to express the people's willingness to have a country; but the task is only fulfilled if the army has to spill as little blood as possible in the future to keep their country safe. Sadly, there's only one way of ensuring it, namely being ready to stand for ourselves. In the 21st century too, this readiness shows the will to a state among the public, and with the motto Honour to Serve Latvia it unites Latvian citizens of all ethnicities, sexes and professions.

Knowledge

We Should Be Glad We Can Argue

INTERVIEW **Ilmārs Šlāpins**

PHOTO **Ģirts Raģelis**



One of the most important events of the Latvian State Centenary is making the National Encyclopaedia. Its basis is constituted by a digital version of entries, but a special print volume is also in the works for the occasion. The book will be released 18 October 2018 but the digital version will be available at enciklopedija.lv starting 18 December. The encyclopaedia is an autonomous part of the National Library of Latvia, and the Library and its employees are in charge of practical editorial work. This task is lead and overseen by historian Valters Ščerbinskis, who assumed the responsibility four years ago. We met Valters to discuss what it means to create a modern encyclopaedia which would remain current and useful for the times to come.

In my childhood, I had a hobby of writing encyclopaedic entries into a notebook. It sounds funny, as in, what could I have been creating back when I was a child? But I collected all the available encyclopaedias and rewrote the entries about every country, redrew each coat of arms and flag, described its political system, its presidents, whether it's a monarchy... and its economic state. *Foreign Economic Geography* was one of my

favourite books. A cousin of mine came to Rīga from the countryside to study, and I leafed through the pages of her books. Back then, there was really no information about political geography, and the history I was interested in was not available in Latvian. Back then I wanted to learn about Africa, but I didn't have the chance. I was interested in the conquest of Africa, the rise of colonialism, the 20th century. Some are interested in beekeeping, others in fishing, but I was interested in these things. Now I'm into US history, the history of American Indians. But I read rather unsystematically. It simply entertains me. I like reading. It's a great pleasure to me. I try to convert others to reading as well.

Is the new encyclopaedia being made primarily as a digital source, or are you sticking to the classical principles of structuring a book?

There will be a printed book too. In a way it will be a niche product of sorts, but at some point we do need a volume of the encyclopaedia on the shelf. It would be completely fine if, after a couple years, we would create a plan about an encyclopaedia spanning eight to ten volumes. It would be a limited edition that doesn't include transitory phenomena like pop culture personalities

and sports, instead opting for entries with a timeless value, which would explain different things that practically don't age and which are significant in the long term. I think that an edition like this would find its niche and it would be useful. We could work on that. But a digital version of the Latvian Encyclopaedia is what's essential, of course.

But the entries in classical encyclopaedias, with which the history of encyclopaedias started in the world, were scientific entries.

Yes, of course, Diderot and d'Alembert invited the greatest minds of their time to come together and create them.

But science is evolving so rapidly now, it's useless to read about physics or biology in an encyclopaedia published a decade or so ago.

Of course, everything changes, but technologies allow us to correct and improve these things. We need this knowledge regardless of how it has changed. Most people want to learn something every day. Even the people who seemingly don't read anything at all. When we started making this digital version, we adopted a sociological approach and tried to identify our target audience. After surveying the three largest groups, we discovered that our target audience is people who seek knowledge every day. We have to offer them at least the *subsistence minimum* in their native language. Here, the interaction between scientists, the academia or, let's say, knowledgeable people, is mutual. We gain knowledge from them, while they have a chance to communicate with society in a popular science mode.

There are many areas in which it's useless for a layperson to try to read academic texts; they're impossible to understand. And there you have a chance to address a general audience, a chance missing until now. I'm a scientist myself, I'm a historian, and I have a feeling that the academic world lives its own life while the rest of the public live their own, and it would seem that both aren't necessary to one another. We can bring the two together.

Scientific diction, which became a classic staple of the encyclopaedic genre, was kept on a level as scientific as possible, assuming that the readers will

understand it. The other approach is related to different popular science encyclopaedias, such as those for students and children, as well as illustrated encyclopaedias. The third approach, which has recently seen great development, is the Wikipedia genre, which is carried out in close cooperation, with

the editors supplementing and correcting one another. It's something new entirely. What's your preferred approach?

This early, traditional genre also has different branches. One of these is the one created by Denis Diderot and adopted by Britannica, and then modified by Brockhaus and the so-called German encyclopaedic tradition. The first has quite long texts, a trend especially prominent in the Macropaedia and later adopted and further developed by Wikipedia. Meanwhile the German tradition has short, pithy entries, which were used by Russian encyclopaedias and the Latvian Soviet Encyclopaedia. These don't allow for expressing specific opinions, which couldn't

fit inside the volumes due to constraints of space. Meanwhile Britannica has never shied away from such practices. For a long time, its entry on Anarchism was authored by Kropotkin, who on any terms can't be considered to be an impartial researcher. But the entry was very good and its conceptual approach was – well, why not? It was he who came up with the field after all. I think that children's encyclopaedias and simplified editions were an attempt to adapt to people who have in no way immersed themselves. Publishers have always sought for ways to earn money, and that's the reason why these encyclopaedias were brought into being. It can't be excluded in our case in the future, but the basic approach has to be based on expertise. We order pieces from authors with different styles and approaches. One article in a sub-field is 15,000 characters, which – keeping the scope of the encyclopaedia in mind – is a lot. It's difficult to change the style of an essay such as this. And we've come to the conclusion that it's not even necessary. Who would benefit from that?

Well, one benefit would be that these entries could be comparable to one another. So that it's not the case where one author expresses himself with poetic metaphors, while another makes do with abbreviations and formulas.

Of course, the editors achieve many a thing with sweeping cuts. While other things are solved through discussion. It must be said that contemporary scientists have no experience in writing encyclopaedias, and they admit to this. And I am happy that many authors can describe very difficult topics. We know that these people have their heart

and soul on one side of the river, but they are still able to look at it, as it were, from above or sideways. We can't put poetry or epics inside the encyclopaedia, but we won't be able to cut it out completely either.

Encyclopaedias often have another role. Learning useless facts has been a well-known means of entertainment going back to the ancient times.

Yes, for me as well. As a child and a young person, I often thought what should I do, and my hand reached for the encyclopaedia as if on its own accord. I leafed through it, read it, looked at pictures and maybe forgot it afterwards, but the very process

provided useful entertainment. If we allow people to browse through our website we can go a step further and create some things that have entertainment value but also offer knowledge that urges people to look deeper into it. We will approach it more seriously.

As a child and a young person, I often thought what should I do, and my hand reached for the encyclopaedia as if on its own accord.

Will the National Encyclopaedia have disputable entries?

Almost all of the entries have been written by scientists. Or acclaimed journalists. And scientists always doubt what they write. A true scientist always doubts. Scientists include an element of doubt in their articles, and this in itself is a subject of dispute. There will be disputes, without a doubt. There were some already in the initial stages of creation. It's inevitable. Disputes aren't always a bad thing. We should be glad we can argue. Thirty years ago, as my colleagues were making the Latvian Soviet Encyclopaedia, they didn't have the chance to argue. It's part of being a free society.

10 Stimulating Events

1

Glass Mountain. Daugava

A modern staging of Rainis' dramatic poem Daugava.

WHEN	WHERE
3 November	The National Library of Latvia and its surroundings



The staging of Rainis' dramatic poem *Daugava – Glass Mountain* uses modern means of expression. *Daugava* reveals how this poem was able to dispel doubt about the future of the newly established country at a fateful moment for the Latvian state, strengthening the conviction that by rallying round the Latvian people could successfully defend their country. The audience are offered a chance to identify themselves with the contemporaries of the poem – people who believed in the idea of a Latvian country and fought for it in the face of doubt, pain and uncertainty.

The staging was carried out in different locations at the National Library by five artists from different fields, enabling visitors to look at the historically significant work of Rainis with the eyes of today and from different viewpoints.

2

Terra Choralis [LV-CH]

Concert

WHEN	WHERE
4 November	Zürich, Switzerland



Terra Choralis [LV-CH] or The Land that Sings [LV-CH] is a Latvian and Swiss choral music project, made to honour the Latvian state centenary and the 170th anniversary of the Swiss Confederation. The event, organised by the Zürich Latvian Choir *Balts*, will be a joint concert of both countries in Zürich, where a 300-singer choir has practiced for eleven months to interpret 12 works of Latvian and 8 works of Swiss composers, not only introducing the Swiss with the heritage of Latvian choral music and modern works, but also bringing the two countries together through the meeting of both cultures. The song lyrics of the concert repertoire have been translated into German, while the sheet music has been published in a special book designed to promote the entry of Latvian choral music into the choral repertoires of Austria, Switzerland, Germany and other countries.

3

Born in Latvia

Series of concerts

WHEN	WHERE
8, 16, 17 November	Latvian National Opera, Rīga



In November, at the height of the celebrations, the concert series *Born in Latvia* will continue, inviting to witness performances by Latvia-born classical musicians of world renown. On 8 November the Latvian National Opera will host the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra under the Italian conductor Daniele Gatti in a joint performance with the symphonic orchestra of the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music and world-class pianist Yefim Bronfman. Meanwhile on 16 and 17 November the National Opera will celebrate its own centenary in the massive Centenary Jubilee Concert with performances by Latvian National Opera soloists, as well as world-class Latvian opera stars and famous guest soloists from abroad who have performed at the Latvian National Opera and acted as emissaries of Latvia to the world, including Marina Rebeka, Inga Kalna, Egīls Siliņš, Zanda Švēde, Oļesja Petrova, Ludmila Monastirska and others.

4

Meeting Place - Riga Second (Russian) Theatre (1902-1918)

Performance for school-age children

WHEN	WHERE
12-16 November	Latvian National Theatre



Meeting Place - Riga Second (Russian) Theatre (1902-1918), a performance for school-age children, will be played at the Latvian National Theatre from 12 to 16 November several times a day, allowing them to travel one hundred years into the past and imagine themselves as those strategically-minded, or merely adventurously-minded or randomly involved people who adopted the historic proclamation of Latvian independence. At the same time the creators of the exhibition – Director Valters Silis and Scriptwriter Kārlis Krūmiņš – will invite young people to consider that it's them who will have to adopt decisions – perhaps courageous and unpopular – about the future of Latvia.

5

The Sun Rides Up into the Sky

Animation. "Latvian Films for the Latvian Centenary" programme

WHEN	WHERE
From 15 November	In cinemas across Latvia



This visual poem by the excelling artist Roze Stiebra tells the story of Latvia as the new-born daughter of the Sun and Moon. Mummers arrive to greet the new-born, but during the general festivities no one notices that the daughter of the Sun goes missing, until everyone finds themselves beside an empty cradle. No matter how strong the mother Sun and the father Moon are, alone, they are unable to find the child or return it home. It turns out that you need a human for that. The mummer Nabešnieks, as well as a girl with her little brother turn up to help and they all go out in the world to find and take the Sun's daughter home. They have only three days to find the daughter as otherwise she will lose her power and become an ordinary girl.

6

Both Sides

A Dance Spectacle

WHEN	WHERE
17 (dress rehearsal), 18, 19 November	Arena Rīga, Rīga

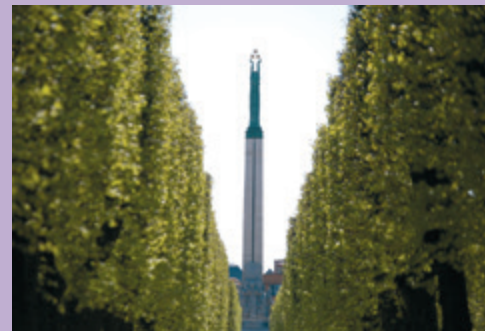


One of the chief events of the Latvian State Centenary celebration program will be the multimedia dance spectacle *Both Sides*, which will unite music, dance and modern technologies. In an event of an unprecedented scale for Latvia in terms of the number of professional dancers on one stage – about 450 artists representing different dance genres, including professional ballet, professional modern dance, folk dance and contemporary dance from hip-hop to dance-sports. Viewers will also be able to witness a spatial illusion which will be actuated by a 360-degree stage covering 2000 square meters. The Director and Artistic Director of the performance is Juris Jonelis. Ballet Choreographer Raimonds Martinovs, Contemporary and Modern Dance Choreographer Liene Grava, as well as Folk Dance Choreographer Dace Adviljone and other artists.

7

18 November - the 100th Birthday of the Latvian State

WHEN	WHERE
18 November	Across Latvia and the world



On 18 November 1918 the Republic of Latvia was proclaimed at the Second Riga City Theatre, now known as the Latvian National Theatre. On 18 November 2018 the 100th birthday of the state will be celebrated across Latvia with numerous events.

Several other concerts will take place alongside the *Both Sides* dance spectacle at Arena Rīga, like chamber music performances in Rīga's Old Town churches and concert halls, including concerts by the String Quartet of the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra, Raimonds Ozols, the Anima Solla vocal group and Dita Krenberga.

The Freedom Monument will also tell its story on the evening of 18 November becoming the platform of the 18.11 multimedia performance. It will pay particular attention to the figure groups of the monument. Its foundational ideas will be

expressed by the Latvian people in works by poets and composers, supplemented by video materials and light installations made for the occasion.

The celebration will continue on the 11 November embankment, with the *Saules Mūžs* musical light performance set to a score by composer Ēriks Ešenvalds. It will be followed on 19 November by the concert In the Name of Love. 18+ near the National Library of Latvia, where popular Latvian musicians will perform new renditions and new versions of songs that at one time created a free-thinking Latvia.

Objects of the annual *Staro Rīga* light festival will light the way from one culture event to another on the night of Latvia's centenary. Meanwhile the celebrations will continue at the *Latvian Centenary Ball* at the Culture Palace Ziemeļbāzma and the *Centenary Club Night* during which entertainment venues will play only Latvian music.

8

Just on Time. Design Stories About Latvia

Exhibition

WHEN	WHERE
22 November to 27 January, 2019	Exhibition. Museum of Decorative Arts and Design, Riga



Already by the early 20th century, Latvians were able to achieve commendable and globally-esteemed results in the area of design, observable in crockery and textiles, as well as in the idea – current for many artists – of creating a uniform ensemble of interior design. A couple of examples are found among the works by Ansis Cīrulis, Jūlijs Madernieks, the Balters workshop, as well as the best exemplars of book design the Zelta Ābele publishing house, Minox, VEF. Spīdola, as well as the Rīga Porcelain Factory design in the 1960s, the Rīga Poster School and other valuables that have been included under design and architecture in the Latvian Cultural Canon.

The exhibition *Just on Time. Design Stories About Latvia* collects the best phenomena of Latvia's material culture in the decorative arts and design, made from 1918

to 2018. They reveal the persistence of the Latvian national identity, rooted in Latvian nature, the ethnographical heritage, folklore traditions and crafts, the northern laconism and material aesthetics. Juxtaposed with the art and design values that have already been recognised, are the most recent achievements of Latvian designers, allowing visitors to compare Latvian design as it was then and now.

9

Baltic Symphony Festival

A Joint Concert by the Leading Symphony Orchestras in the Baltic States

WHEN	WHERE
24 November	Great Guild Hall, Rīga



The Rīga concert of the Baltic Symphony Festival will see all three organising countries appear on a single stage, with the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra under Mihhail Gerts, the Lithuanian State Symphony Orchestra under Gintaras Rinkevičius and the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra under Andris Poga.

The Estonian program includes the work of Erkki-Sven Tüür, a modern genius.

Meanwhile the Lithuanian orchestra has picked Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis' classic symphonic poem *The Sea*. The Latvian orchestra will perform a composition it commissioned from Kristaps Pētersons, who has come up with a meditation on the of chaos and order, played by all musicians from every nook and cranny of the Great Guild Hall.

The combined orchestra will play the modern American composer Michael Doherty's impressive opus *Time Machine*, composed for three orchestras and three conductors. Audiences can look forward to a powerful musical experience and an exciting show.

10

1906

In cinemas across Latvia

WHEN	WHERE
From 18 January 2019	In cinemas across Latvia



Director Gatis Šmits' film is set in November 1906 in Riga. Some time has passed following the tumultuous events of 1905. Punitive expeditions and the secret police have all but stopped the operations of social

democrat fighters. While one group, under its leader Orators, spitefully continues to fight. It plans a bold assault on a factory cashbox with the goal of procuring funds to continue the fight. Soldier Pelēkais is made leader of this initiative. As they plan the attack, Pelēkais starts an affair with the poet Violeta, whom he had met last year during an attack on a manor. Coming from different backgrounds and having different views, they nevertheless share an affinity for romanticism and free-thinking ideas. Inspired by Violeta, Pelēkais looks at life with a different set of eyes, while Violeta slowly enters the dangerous world of soldiers. For a long time, Rīga has remembered November 1906 as a month of bloody terror and manic revelry.

Director and Screenwriter: Gatis Šmits.
Starring Inese Pudža, Mārtiņš Kalita, Kaspars Zvīgulis, Gatis Gāga, Toms Auniņš, Kaspars Dumburs and others.



TEXT Justine Janpaule

PHOTO Ansis Starks

The Presence of Wild Souls

A Review of the Exhibition *Wild Souls. Symbolism in the Baltic States*, on how 10 April to 15 July 2018 at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris.

It's an early mid-week morning. The metro draws to a halt at a stop to open the doors to exchange another round of passengers. I am tired and sleepy. Seated at the window, I notice someone looking at me from the faint darkness of the tunnel wall. It's a peasant

girl on a yellow field of rye, her eyes the colour of rainclouds. She seems familiar. I manage to read *Les Ames Sauvages* before the train moves past the girl, leaving her in the dark. I am sure there's something we have in common. I am a wild soul as well, I think. That's what my French friends sometimes call me in jest. They point out their Latin roots that evidently still serve to make them feel superior to other European nations.

As I get out at my stop, I meet the girl

again. *Les Ames Sauvages. Symbolisme dans les pays Baltes*. It is an exhibition I have been waiting for so long I have managed to forget that it's about to take place. The girl is none other than Jānis Valters' *Young Peasant Girl*. As I rush outside the station, images come flooding into my mind of our first meetings in Latvia, on the big screens in art history lessons, in art books and the Latvian National Museum of Art. A tenuous intimacy is brought about between us by the realisation that no one of the passers-by at the Saint-Lazare station has an inkling of what the clouded summer sky and the field behind her mean. From now on, each time I see this poster, I am reminded not only of the opening and closing dates of the exhibition and its location inside the Musée d'Orsay, but also of the fact that these souls are my relatives, and sometimes I miss their presence here, a lot.

Classical Crossroads in European History

The name of the exhibition puzzles me. In Latvian, it is *Nepieradinātās dvēseles* (the untamed souls). It sounds more considerate, less offensive than the French *sauvage*. The English *wild* also seems more pleasant and conjures associations of the vastness of the soul, its spite and *untamedness*. But how do I explain to the French that *sauvage* is not limited to savageness and wild natives? That its emotional colouring is entirely different? It is difficult for me to find fitting synonyms. Maybe I am still unable to express myself, but maybe there is no such word in the French language.

Writing for *Le Monde*, Philippe Dagen says that the name of the exhibition is "quite disparaging and has without a doubt been chosen to attract attention to the posters, but it makes no sense. By all means not from

a savage (*sauvage*) country, these painters partake in a common European history. They are familiar with their contemporaries, the impressionists, Rodin, Whistler, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Böcklin, Klinger, Munch, Les Nabis, and Viennese art – these are all familiar to them despite the aesthetic solutions they have chosen."¹

This trend of modernism in the art of Baltic painters is one of the aspects that surprise the visitors, giving a sense of expanding of the borders of 19th- and 20th-century art, reaching as far as such terrae *incognitae* like the Baltics. The impressionist ripples and shadow play, the pointillist brushwork, fauvist blocks of colour, and the musical lines of Art Nouveau are obvious and unmistakable messengers of modernist classics, making the works of Janis Rozentāls, Voldemārs

The untamed souls. In Latvian it sounds more considerate, less offensive than the French *sauvage*.

Zeltiņš, Nikolai Triik, Konrad Mägi and other artists from our region more familiar and more understandable to Western eyes thanks to their formal execution.

The different, or the *untamed*, makes its way into the

exhibited works with the themes they touch on. The works are grouped in three thematic categories: Myths and Legends, The Soul, Nature. Accordingly, the works collected in the first part of the exhibition are rich with references to national symbols and legends, such as the heroic Kalevipoeg epic, present in the works of Triik, Kallis, and other Estonian painters. Despite the fact that visitors are given hints that the images from national mythology serve as symbols for preserving national identity, the meaning of these paintings remains coded within Estonian culture and it is difficult to read it without further information about the visual cues of this epic.

The Soul category is meanwhile dominated by portraits. Here we see the

aforementioned Jānis Valters' *Young Peasant Girl*, which has become the face of this exhibition. If, at this moment, visitors may muse as to why this portrait has become the mirror of these Wild Souls, the description underneath the painting sketches out the harsh history of Latvians as a nation of peasants, dominated by foreign powers. The peasant girl is situated at the centre of the exhibition hall and leads you to the final, most poetic part of the exhibition with landscapes evoking the Baltic mood. These don't indulge on the luminescent turquoise marina front, but nevertheless have the power to move the viewer with the monumentality, force and turbulence of nature.

Reminding Others of Yourself Unceasingly

On the opening day I was going in the direction of Orsay through the Tuileries Garden. Crossing the Pont des Arts, I saw the French First Lady Brigitte Macron leaving the museum accompanied by a couple of bodyguards. The fact that *Wild Souls* took place during the Latvian centenary and that all four presidents attended the opening obviously testifies to the political nature of this exhibition. That it took place in France stresses, once again, the diplomatic relations between the two countries and the role they played as we regained independence. The works exhibited at the Musée d'Orsay were supplemented by rich factual material that introduced visitors to the most important dates of 19th- and 20th-century history in the Baltics, also mapping out our geopolitical standing throughout this time.

Taking this into account, *Wild Souls* has become a gesture with which we want to

Wild Souls has become a gesture with which we want to assert that we belong to Europe.

assert that we belong to Europe and that, in the future as well, we want to “dedicate all of our imagination and energy to the European project,” as the President of Latvia said. In May, the *Festival Baltique* was held in parallel with the exhibition. It was an interdisciplinary program of events adding to the exhibition. It strived to introduce people to and assure them of our ambition to become a cultural powerhouse in many different ways, from amateur choir performances to the Kremerata concert, also featuring literature, film, and electronic music.

In conclusion to this piece, in which I wanted to look at the way painters from Latvia and its neighbouring countries look within the European art scene, I would like to mention two globally significant exhibitions that took place in Paris. The first of these is the collection of New York's Museum of Modern Art that was on display until late February at the Fondation Louis Vuitton. Among the pieces on display there were some by artists born in Latvia (and whose ties to Latvia we like to stress) – Mark Rothko and Gustavs Klucis – as well as fragments from the films of Sergei Eisenstein. Likewise, Klucis was on display at an exhibition dedicated to the Russian avant-garde, which took place at the Pompidou Centre at the same time as *Wild Souls*. In both exhibitions, queues formed to see these artists – who are pillars of modern art and the avant-garde. Biographical facts took less precedence, specifying the following: Mark Rothko, *US, born in Russia (in current Latvian territory)*; Gustavs Klucis – *Latvia*; Sergei Eisenstein – *Russia, the USSR*.

The Future Latvia

PHOTO Ģirts Raģelis



1 Philippe Dagan, Surprises Baltiques au musée d'Orsay, Le Monde, 28 Avril 2018, p 17.



Dreams of the Future: the 200th Anniversary of Latvia

TEXT **Andris Šuvajevs**

ILLUSTRATION **Pauls Rietums**

I remember quite vividly the 800th anniversary of the city of Riga when I was strolling around the city with my family, enjoying the festivities and the joyous atmosphere all around me. It already occurred to me then that in 2018 Latvia will celebrate its 100th anniversary and this prospect seemed exciting to me. I felt a certain kind of childish honour in the possibility of being a part of it. Importantly, there was never a doubt in me that this moment will come. The notion of Latvia being an independent state that will exist forever into eternity seemed quite simply an objective reality to me. Needless to say, this is no longer so. Latvia may very well never reach its 200th anniversary, and not due to some aggressive military campaign from the East, but due to reasons entirely of its own making. I realise that statements like these provoke popular sentiments and often cause a counter-reaction: why do you have to be so pessimistic? Why don't you do something about it then rather than just complain? In many ways I feel that the source of this counter-reaction lies in the manner in which the people of Latvia are taught patriotism: we are supposed to grant our unquestionable devotion to this country regardless of the form it takes. No matter if half the population leaves and another fifth is at the risk of poverty: the idea of independence towers above it and all else is secondary. It resembles a cult where the followers (citizens) have to undergo hazing, humiliation and other challenges to be considered full members of it. The possibility of not wanting to be a part of it is postulated as absurd or ridiculous.

While I do believe that Latvia may very well disappear from the world map in the next 100 years, and this is something we should all be conscious of, I do not think it is inevitable. This, however, requires that we finally start talking about it. Currently, we only talk about the past. Films, cultural events, celebration of natural diversity of the country – all certainly admirable ways of recognising the significant milestone. Nevertheless, the general temporality remains focused on accomplishments and obstacles that led us to this point in time. It is not even clear what it would mean to discuss the future: do we talk about where we want to be? Or where we could realistically get to? Is the future the same for us all or do we imagine parallel trajectories



occasionally criss-crossing each other? To break the deadlock, I would propose three subjects as particularly important for thinking about the well-being of our future nation. For purposes of clarity, I will split them into political, economic and ideological dimensions though it should be noted that all of them inevitably overlap. First, I will outline some of the ways in which we could meaningfully promote a democratic society. Secondly, the fiscal and monetary policy of the European Union is an enormously important topic virtually no one discusses but I will offer some remarks toward a better understanding of it. Finally, the most significant pre-condition for there being a country called Latvia in 2118 is an ideological shift toward the left. This demands that we reject the stereotypical knee-jerk reaction against ideas that promote solidarity and socialist politics and begin to seriously engage with questions that haunt the present, like poverty and inequality.

It is customary to assume that upon re-gaining independence in the early 1990s, the people in Latvia somehow magically gained *democracy*. Now Latvians would be able to manage their own affairs as they pleased by directly electing their leaders. Democracy was assumed to equate with elections and possibly a sovereign currency. Pretty soon though it became clear that the reality was much more different: the “experts” from the World Bank and the IMF did not hesitate to introduce shock therapy whereby inflation and unemployment sky-rocketed. The first independence years were marked by material and financial upheavals. No matter who you elected, the basic political direction remained the same: toward unfettered capitalism. The result of this “democracy” has been the emergence of a class of political parasites and it has become almost impossible to imagine a scenario where they would all disappear. These kleptocrats, popularly referred to as oligarchs, appear to pull the strings of their puppets whenever they wish to and the illusion of democracy is becoming all the more forceful. To me it’s clear that as long as we limit our imagination of the political to the singular act of voting or working in the civil society, the people in the corridors of power will not hesitate to take what rightfully belongs to everyone. If the only political decision most of us make is about who will make decisions on behalf of us then surely that cannot be meaningfully called democracy. It is necessary to wrestle this decision-making power back.

How to do this? Thankfully, the global experience offers us a lot of material to draw from. The latest anarchist movement that started off with the Zapatista uprising in 1994 was indeed quite successful in meeting their goals. Uniting under a common vision of dismantling global bureaucracies like the IMF and the World Trade Organisation which spoke and made rules in the language delightful

to multi-national corporations, but which simultaneously devastated the livelihoods of millions, these various anarchist groups presented a deathly challenge to the powers that be. What made them so effective? Their manner of organisation. Rather than replicating hierarchical structures, on which all Member States are built, they engaged in horizontal, consensual decision-making and made temporary alliances with other groups to meet their immediate goals. Their philosophy was centred on the notion of direct action: on acting as if one is already free, insisting that one does not need the mediation of the State to accomplish goals. In Latvia these forms of action are not at all foreign. Recently, rather than awaiting the municipality of Riga to plant trees, a group of activists decided to do it themselves. The Critical Mass cycling event which takes place every year on the 1st of May is a similar form of direct action: instead of petitioning to the authorities to make roads safe for cyclists, they simply congregate together and flood the streets to make their point. It seems to me that these political moves need to become ever more frequent if we are to inaugurate a truly democratic society. Initiatives like the participatory budget, neighbourhood assemblies, powerful municipalities, the power to recall specific parliamentary representatives, regular referenda on topics of collective importance – this is the language of the future and one that we should begin to use immediately.

It is likely that by changing the form of political action, we will change the economic and material dimensions of our lives. However, it is necessary to outline what are the actual issues we face and what direction the overall change should take. As most will readily admit, the three main economic problems haunting the society in Latvia are poverty, inequality and the demographic breakdown. These are the direct consequences of the austerity regime orchestrated by prime minister Valdis Dombrovskis and his associates. The introduction of the Euro in 2014 appeared like a step forward but currently in fact prevents actual economic development. Why is this? When the authors of the Maastricht Treaty, signed in 1992, stipulated that no country will be permitted to have a large budget deficit (it may not exceed 3%) and will have a debt limit (60% of GDP) this was a deliberate measure intended to place the private sector at the centre of driving economic growth. In other words, the Maastricht Treaty prevents individual nation-states to decide where financial resources should be flow or at least it severely limits their capacity to do so. For example, in Latvia the number of people at risk of poverty exceeds 20% of the population. At the same time, most politicians and “experts” will say that Latvia’s economy is growing. But if it is growing at such a high speed, as we are told it does, why doesn’t the rate of poverty decrease with the same speed? The simple answer is that this “growth” mainly

takes place in sectors that are already quite well-off (finance, real estate, insurance). If States were permitted to directly influence where money goes, it would be quite possible to make sure it flows toward the more vulnerable members of the population. However, the Eurozone membership prevents it. If the government of Latvia wants to spend more, it needs to go to the private markets where banks and investors decide, basing this decision purely on the grounds of profit, at what rate these money funds will be released. Obviously, this is never cheap.

Budget deficits may sound scary and certainly there has been every effort in the last ten years to make sure they do. But they are not. In fact, at times when a large chunk of the population is drowning in poverty and unable to commence any meaningful economic activity, they are the only answer. To better appreciate this, it is necessary to look at the economy holistically. Where do people in the private sector, households and firms, get their money from? Well, they earn it, could be an answer. But what is the original source of money? In our day and age – banks – and at least in the Eurozone, ultimately, the European Central Bank. Banks just whisk money into existence as they please. The notion that there is not enough money to go around is fundamentally mistaken. The policy of quantitative easing where the ECB has been pumping trillions into the monetary system is a clear example of it. Thus, we can observe that the source of all money is a public institution. This is in fact a basic relation between the public and private sector: if the private sector is to run surpluses (have savings for retirement, unexpected costs, etc.) it can only do so if the public sector (the State) runs deficits. This actually makes a great deal of sense if you think about it. As it turns out, the only way for private individuals to have extra money in the pocket is if someone else spends it, and this has to be the State. Otherwise, where will these private individuals get their money from?

Thus, important as politics is, it seems to me that the economic issues are even more significant as they require action on a much bigger scale. People who call themselves the representatives of the Latvian population have a fight to wage against the European institutions, either securing concessions from the arbitrary constraints of the Maastricht Treaty or by forming alliances with other nations and fostering a change on the level of the entire union whereby the functions of the ECB will be changed and it will be enabled to lend directly to governments or by designing some kind of fiscal union. The idea of a fiscal union is already in the air and would essentially mean that there is a common European budget and money would flow toward the countries and sectors that are in need of it most. Of course, the reason why it seems quite improbable at this point is because this would

mean that German taxpayers are directly financing Latvia's retirees and this is where European solidarity meets its limits.

Speaking of solidarity, the final issue I'd like to point out for your consideration is the ideological shift toward the left which I see as fundamental for any future well-being. It is understandable that after the fall of the Soviet Union, any leftist politics would be viewed with suspicion and hostility. The attempt to escape the historical association with "communism" and socialism seemingly offered only one alternative: capitalism, free markets, private sector-led growth, individualism, etc. Yet we have come to a point in time when these ideas clearly do not ensure a fair distribution of resources, overall social happiness, and a decent life for all. Instead, the ties of solidarity between people, the feeling of responsibility toward our fellow citizens, and an acknowledgement of mutual suffering have been persistently attacked. I am not at all advocating a return to the dictatorship of the proletariat but I am speaking favourably about the kind of politics that does not see the solution to everything in working harder and instead proposing a collective, social explanation of the roots of our economic ills. By the time this essay will be published, we will have a new Parliament, but regardless of who gets elected, the basic ideological trajectory will remain unchanged: it will be a capitalist path. Poverty and inequality are going to be issues whose solution lies in the private sector. The demographic implosion will be solved through entrepreneurship. It seems to me that as long as we limit ourselves to the capitalist imagination and perceive the world through the lens that the young generation has normalised and grown up with, there is hardly any hope. Here, I am hesitant to provide specific ideological tenets on which the future Latvian society should rest, inviting the reader to go back to the first dimension I described. It is only through collective, long-term deliberation that such ideology will emerge, and, if it does, it will surely be the very opposite of what we have now.

To conclude then, there is every reason to suppose that the current trends of economic catastrophe will continue: people will continue to emigrate, poverty and inequality will be felt ever more deeply, and the political class will continue to offer up for sale all of the natural wealth Latvia has. If this happens, then I am certain this is the last great anniversary we will be a part of. However, it does not have to be that way. Call it what you will – a revolution, a transformation, a development – but the only way we can recuperate our future is if we radically re-think the political and economic practices of the current period. Then it might very well be that not only our children get to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Latvia, but all the world will too, seeing this place as an example of what a truly happy life might be.

A Centenary Film

Comedy is a Quest for Truth

INTERVIEW **Ilmārs Šlāpins**

PHOTO **Ģirts Raģelis**



As a child, Anna Viduleja starred in the short film *My Friend Little Socrates*. She has studied at the European Film College and the National Film and Television School in the UK. Viduleja founded the Film Angels Studio, was one of the directors of the feature film *Vogelfrei* and has recently finished work on *Homo Novus*, a film based on Anšlavs Eglītis' eponymous novel. The film is set in 1938 and sees the poor artist Juris Upenājs arrive in Rīga, meeting different personalities of the art world under the patronage of curator and critic Kurcums, and experiencing success, failure, contempt and love. We met to talk about comedy and romance in cinema.

How much of Anšlavs Eglītis' ironic text has made it into the film?

At other times I would have been very careful with using words. In *Vogelfrei*, some four words were uttered within the 30 minutes I directed. But in this film, Anšlavs Eglītis is valuable in and of himself. The language is wonderful, like a melody, starting from such little words as "Is it within your ken?" [Latvian: *Vai jūs nenogīžat..?*] and so on. It's a thing of the past, but it's such beautiful Latvian. And then there are the characters living with language as an instrument. It's very important to them to be able to express themselves ironically, and Kurcums is the protagonist to whom we allotted the most of Anšlavs Eglītis' language. Speaking of jokes, I think there are but a few situations in the film that are funny without words. Language is inevitably present.

As you made the film, did you ask to repeat any scenes, saying: "No, this wasn't funny enough"?

No, I did not do that. I am convinced that if you try to force funniness you're asking for trouble.

But the actors do have a conception of the ways of playing something in a funnier or less funny manner? Of the moments that ask for a pause for the audience to laugh. In principle, a director could issue an order, asking it to be funnier, asking for a bit more.

I sometimes reminded the actors that we're shooting a comedy. Imants Strads was especially resourceful in this regard. I told him, "Imants, think about how you could help. We're making a comedy here." And he said, "Oh, in that case I can offer you a high-pitched laugh – hahahah." Even though it was a small episodic scene, in which he was a visitor at an exhibition and the back of his head was visible as it ended, he knew this and turned his head and scratched his ear. It's a tiny thing, a milligram as it were, but it pulls one corners of your lips up into a smile. As concerns pausing, it's like maths. A pause is a very strong element of the comedic equation. I have given it some thought – of how to create a funny situation and how to arrange the three steps in sequence: one, two, three, and the audience laughs. For the viewer to laugh, it must be a very precise and pure method. The theory of laughter lays serious stress on being precise. Different scenes allow approaching precision from different angles, but it's always a specific point which provokes a counter reaction on the part of the viewer. I recently found a book that an American comedian wrote, analysing and teaching comedy. He said that comedy is a quest for truth. Drama and tragedy are genres that seek superhuman characters, but in comedy the characters that are revealed are like you and I in everyday life. They are fighting to meet some goals, often not having the right tools. And right away this makes the process very amusing, sometimes funny and sometimes tragicomic. It seems very interesting

and significant to me to use comedy as a genre for learning a truth of sorts.

Does the film you started directing differ from the film you've finished?

You start with the text – Anšlavs Eglītis' text. And then you involve your colleagues. I had really wonderful associates – the costume designer Liene Rolšteina, the cameraman Jānis Eglītis, and the artist Kirils Suvalovs, – with whom we visualised the film. Liene did design sketches and Kirils did art sketches, or material evidence. A visualisation was created inside the heads of four people. All four of us entered our worlds of imagination, and it was a very beautiful process. Then it so happened that the pace of production dramatically accelerated our peaceful visuality. It was an unexpected change for me. The film that was initially in our heads was very different from the film we saw in the early stages of production. Only then I understood that the story and the many characters

We really wanted to visualise talent. We wanted to see what talent means... when it happens.

were very demanding, and that a lot of our attention and of the film itself was taken up by the story. What we had to marry in the film was, on the one hand, Anšlavs Eglītis' nimble and tight story with many characters and, on the other hand, the nature of the protagonist, a young person. The nature of an artist is slower. We really wanted to visualise talent. We wanted to see what talent means... when it happens. An artist is a carrier and realiser of talent. The artist Džemma Skulme allowed us to meet her. It was mostly because Kristīne Krūze, starring as Ciemalda, wanted to talk with Džemma, because the artist's mother, Marta Skulme, was sort of a prototype for the character, or at least we think so. At Skulme's workshop the art historian Ingrida Burāne, who

has been of great personal and professional help during the making of the film, went to a picture and said, "It's so beautiful!" or something to that effect. And Džemma Skulme replied: "Yes, when I finally got it right, my eyes were shining with happiness." It was something that I really wanted to show in our film - the moment when the artist experiences something greater than himself. Something that makes his eyes shine. When he experiences something outside the usual everyday consciousness. See, the quick-paced, dynamic situation we were in as we filmed it, was quite brutal. And there were many obstacles to a visual portrayal of talent.

Does the film feature a personified character of the 1930s Latvia?

I had an important goal with which I started this process, namely to maintain a respectful attitude for the text and the way things were back then as I knew them. But it seemed acceptable and commendable to me to give in to the way that this process led to unrealistic combinations. For example, we had a place to shoot Bicēns' workshop, and we had done preparatory work, and they withdrew at the last moment. We went to look at a different filming location, the former Literature and Music Museum in the unrestored part of the presidential palace. As we went into a room on the second floor, Jānis Eglītis and I understood at once that this must be Bicēns' workshop. But in the 1930s the same room had housed the State Art Museum, and the walls were covered with paintings of the artists we considered candidates for the prototypes of Anšlavs Eglītis' characters. But I didn't doubt that in this case we don't need to be as historically accurate. Does

it make the reality of the film a fantastical reality? Most likely not. But this degree of freedom was very important to me.

At first you wanted to make it a series.

I did for a while, yes. It seemed completely warranted, as *Homo Novus* is a novel that was published in a newspaper in 33 instalments, with a beginning, middle and an end to each part. But I am grateful for the way life sometimes turns out. One of my friends told me – here you were with your expensive project of a costume drama, and there they were with issuing a centenary contest, as though it were made just for you!

Will the film be romantic?

Will the audience have to cry?

I think I am quite romantic by nature. Therefore, it's most likely the film will have a lot of romantic stuff, but the makers of the film had no intention of making the audience cry. You're allowed to do as you please, however, as any emotional empathy is rewarding to us.

Did it seem too personal for you to reveal your romantic side?

No, I have no fear of opening myself up. I have many other fears, both in life and on film. The most pronounced of my fears is that what we're making could be boring, unclear, or senseless or unnecessary to the audience. And romance can be dangerous within the territory of senselessness and boringness. Therefore I tried limiting it on my end. But if someone, especially a

man, offered to do something romantic or heartfelt, I would accept it with open arms. Then it seems safer to me – if a man offers it, then we're on safe turf.

Do you think using romantic feelings for manipulative ends is worse than using humour?

I think that good humour is not manipulative. I like cerebral jokes. I like subtexts and small things that the viewers notice. But all the speculations happen with the use of sentiment, of drawing out cheap emotions. It's not interesting to me. It's not an interesting experience to the viewer as well. And it's quite senseless too.

It's most likely the film will have a lot of romantic stuff, but the makers of the film had no intention of making the audience cry.

What did working on this film do to you? Have you changed?

It was very important to me for the film to be an archaeological excavation of sorts. I have adopted this from Krzysztof

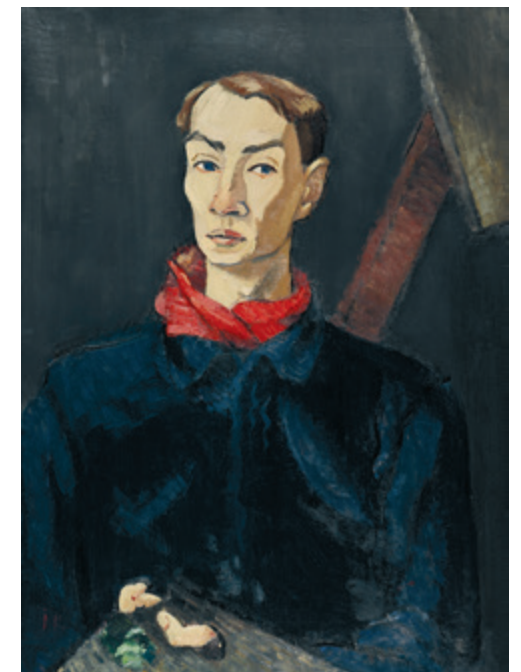
Kieślowski's cameraman Slawomir Idziak. In one teaching session he said he thinks making films is an archaeological excavation. It is important to start the shooting process with the episode that's most important in terms of content, as by then you have found the crossing point and reached a better understanding of where you should dig further – to the right, to the left, up, or down. A wonderful conviction arises that a film already exists in another dimension and then you uncover it. And the shape in which the film reveals itself to you, all these pleasant surprises – it's a wonderful process.

Ten Artworks of the Centenary

TEXT Santa Hirša

Self-portrait with a Red Neckerchief

Jēkabs Kazaks is present for but a small moment of the period celebrated by the Latvian state centenary – just two years, due to his early death in 1920. Yet his innovative, excellent artistic talents have caused heavy romanticizing of his image in the Latvian cultural space, conjuring, for many, associations of someone fatefully chosen for an artistic quest. Latvian art of the late 1980s creates similar feelings, making one think about an unusual correlation between the complexity of an era and the drive of artistic energy. Kazaks' *Self-portrait with a Red Neckerchief* (*Pašportrets ar sarkano kaklautu*) was painted in 1918, at a turbulent time when the Latvian independence battles were still raging. The tragedy of an age and of a person is reflected with equal strength, just like the brilliant brittleness and force of his personality. Jēkabs Kazaks' language of art reflects the modernist trends current in his time, but at the same time the looks, gestures and movements of his art stand for something outside time and this world, further mystifying Kazaks' special significance in local art history.



Jēkabs Kazaks. Self-Portrait with a Red Neckerchief (Self-Portrait with a Palette). 1918. Oil on canvas. 80 x 58 cm. VMM GL-468. From the collection of the Latvian National Museum of Art.



Aleksandra Beļcova. The White and the Black. 1925. Oil on canvas. 100 x 120 cm. VMM GL-4818. From the collection of the Latvian National Museum of Art.

The White and the Black

Aleksandra Beļcova's painting *The White and the Black* (*Baltā un melnā*, 1925) is a no less vivid testimony to its time, which, via the aesthetics of Art Deco and New Realism, depicts welfare, comfort and elegance in its full expression. The double portrait depicts Biruta Ozoliņa, a young lady from a well-off family, and Tao, the 16-year-old nanny of her child, who came from Thailand where Ozoliņa's husband, the Italian count Giovanni Amadori served as an envoy. Just a few years later, Biruta divorced Amadori to marry a rich French industrialist. She spent her remaining years in Cannes, France. Modern audiences are probably intrigued by the painting's racist title. It indirectly shows how the striving for the exotic, a prevalent attitude at the time, was also accompanied by the trend of exoticizing real people, and it reminds us of values that are thankfully doubted within our society a hundred years on. Apart from the ideological message, the composition and the story of the painting's heroine is a fascinating reminder about the glamour associated with interwar Latvia, about a Fitzgeraldian-ly turbulent carelessness and an aristocratic bohemianism.

Memento From 1918. John Yperite

Kārlis Padeģs is an artist everyone likes, just like the *Twin Peaks* series or travelling to far-away places. It's unusual that his oeuvre is almost clear of works that seem unsuccessful or unfortunate, and his variations and reprises of very similar motifs are likewise fascinating. Padeģs' special role in Latvian cultural history has been made more vivid by his dandy appearance, remarkable in Latvian art. This image permeates not only his complex persona but also his works. Their sad irony doesn't affect the elegance of the execution and the perfect feeling for form even in completely brutal compositions depicting



Kārlis Padeģs. Memento from 1918. John Yperite. 1935. Ink and watercolour on paper. 34,3 x 24,5 cm. VMM Z-6654. From the collection of the Latvian National Museum of Art.

the cruelty of war, or in hasty portraits of the life of prostitutes, the so-called "Madonnas of Rīga". The postcard imitation *Memento From 1918. John Yperite* (*Mīļai atmiņai no 1918. gada. Džons Iperits*, 1935) illustrates Padeģs' cynically harsh, highly sensitive feeling of life, which is expressed in most of his grotesquely expressive compositions. The image of a beautiful, almost childish brittle and flirty woman is juxtaposed with a monstrously screwed and disfigured face of a soldier, gradually losing its human features. This contrastive language that Padeģs speaks doesn't lose its directness even in fully aestheticized paintings. With a sad resignation, he reminds us of romanticism as often the only escape from the harsh injustices of the world.

Come on, Girls!

The artwork which I would like to use to characterise the first era of art under the Soviet regime is referred to as *Come on, Girls!* (*A nu ka, meitenes!*) from Latvian, while a translation from Russian refers to it as *Brace Yourself, Girls!* (*Saturieties, meitenes!*). Latvian-language information on the author of the painting, Mihails Korneckis, is quite fragmented. He was born and raised in a Russian-Latvian family in Moscow. He settled with his mother in Rīga in 1950, at the age of 24, started studying at the Art Academy of Latvia and spent the rest of his life here. The title of the painting, *Come on, Girls!*, as well as its composition, indirectly refers to the equivocal status of women in the Soviet society. The official ideology promotes full equality of rights, but in reality a woman is limited by a double burden of morals and obligations, which has long distorted local views on gender equality. Korneckis's painting is an accidental depiction of this discrepancy. It shows laughing, smiling workers who are happy with all the



Mihails Korneckis. Brace Yourself, Girls! 1959. Oil on canvas. 190 x 160,7 cm. VMM AG-2220. From the collection of the Latvian National Museum of Art.



Gunārs Krollis. Bridges. From the series My Rīga. 1967. Linocut on paper. 68 x 103 cm. VMM AL-223. From the collection of the Latvian National Museum of Art.

goods of socialism, but at the same time they are completely subdued to the male gaze, reacting to it with a body language consistent with a flirtatious situation. Kornetsky's work shows the influence of the Severe Style, but myths about the working class illuminated by the sun still abound, while the rough-sounding title of the work gives away their social status.

Bridges

Gunārs Krollis' graphic *Bridges* (*Tilti*) from the late 1960s' linocut series *My Rīga* seems to be an example of the 1960s Rīga we intuitively know from new wave cinema, nostalgic memoirs about the Kaza café, or Māra Brašmane's photos. Even though the style of Krollis' graphics is not part of the counter-culture or visual experiments inspired by Modernism, this work testifies to a very romantic maximalism of youth and the intoxication and elation that goes with it. The monumental ornamentality of Gunārs Krollis' linocuts is a code that you can't mistake for anything else, like a sweet greeting from the interior of your grandma's kitchen.

Jeanne d'Arc

Ilmārs Blumbergs entered Latvian art with the Associative Symbolism characteristic of the 1970s, as well as intimately meditative content. He graduated from the Art Academy of Latvia with an excellently finished work, a stage set for the Russian Drama Theatre play *Jeanne d'Arc*, which was reproduced in the legendary Polish art magazine *Projekt*, and it was also placed on the front cover of the Soviet Union's catalogue in the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space. The laconic white stage was turned into the space of the heroine's consciousness, which was slowly polluted by everyday scraps and finally overtaken in its entirety. The subtle symbolism, delicately balancing



Ilmārs Blumbergs. Stage set for the Russian Drama Theatre play Jean d'Arc. 1972. Photo credit: Gvido Kajons. From the archives of the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art.

on a knife-edge, allows adding Blumbergs' work to the most excellent achievements of 20th-century European scenography. In the history of Latvian art, Blumbergs has remained an unsurpassed philosopher of the myths of life and death, and the existentialism characteristic of his work does not become depressing or overpowering.

Clocks

The poetics of everyday silence are expressed strongly in Līvija Endzelina's art. The artist herself has avoided commenting on her work, and this secrecy is characteristic of her paintings as well. In the 1979 work *Clocks* (*Pulksteņi*), the silence and otherworldly peace are almost physically felt. It's the distinct realism of Endzelina, directed by subjective, metaphysical moods instead of the urbanely cool, restrained recording of outside reality, copying photographic aesthetics in the manner of hyperrealism that was current back then. Her still lifes often both approach the vanitas mementos about the transience of life, as well as express the need to settle into a very private world of objects, of things, as an unusual escapism from the official Soviet aesthetic of declarativism and poster-slogans.

Walks to Bolderāja

As is suitable for avant-garde attempts to blur the line between art and life, Hardijs Lediņš' and Juris Boiko's *Walks to Bolderāja* simultaneously qualify and disqualify themselves from being art events. Even though these arose as rituals among spiritually close friends, due to the interest of Western art professionals and the reorientation of Latvian art people to the requirements of modern art at the time, the walks became conceptualised and viewed in the context of performance art and happenings. NSRD's (or *Nebijušu sajātu restaurēšanas darbnīca*, the



Līvija Endzelina. Clocks. 1979. Oil on canvas. 65,5 x 65,5 cm. VMM AG-3054. From the collection of the Latvian National Museum of Art.



NSRD (Workshop For The Restoration Of Unfelt Feelings). Walks to Bolderāja. 1987. Performance. Photo credit: Māris Bogustovs. From the archives of the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art.

Workshop For The Restoration Of Unfelt Feelings) creative experiments are a very substantial part of Latvian culture. Differently from many other NSRD's projects, the *Walks to Bolderāja* did not include post-modern tinkering with the absurd, but with their introverted form they became a strong manifesto of a spontaneous, conceptually non-limited creativity, and the walk itself can be viewed as a metaphor for every creative process there is. And then there's no difference whether the train tracks lead to China or Bolderāja: every geographical location can generate everything there is, and NSRD's activities testify to the fact that the everyday obtuseness of Soviet life had the potential to be great artistic material, should it arrive at the hands of the right genius.



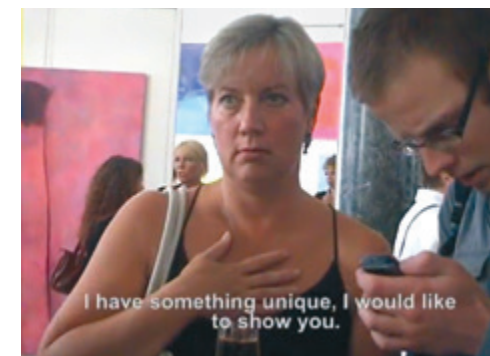
Oļegs Tillbergs. *White Wings*. 1997. Installation. Jūrmala. Photo: From the archives of the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art.

White Wings

Oļegs Tillbergs is among the first generation of conceptualists who entered Latvian art life in the late 1980s, which in the 1990s quickly freed itself from the values of Soviet art, devoting themselves to experiments in new media and form. Installations became a dominant art form, and Oļegs Tillbergs has a perfect command of its language. Industrial and natural material, ready-made objects and substances became social metaphors, often of a gigantic scale. In 1997, an international scientific and practical conference, Oil Terminals in Eastern Baltics – Environmental Problems was held in Jūrmala. During which, Tillbergs created the installation *White Wings* (*Baltie spārni*). Sheets drenched in oil were flying above oil tanks, making audiences see birds in the abstract, unable to rise nor go further. One of Tillbergs' most poetic and visually stunning works, it not only testifies to the breadth of his artistic strokes (every culture needs its own Joseph Beuys!) but also stands for the quintessence of monumental poetics of Latvia's installation art.

Mobile

I wanted to mention Katrīna Neiburga's *Solitude* (2005) as the final, chronologically most recent works, and to describe how this work stands for many of the most fortunate achievements of art in the 2000s – interdisciplinary, new media, a close connection to social realities, etc. But in the spur of the moment I decided to conclude the centenary art list with Ivars Grāvlejs' *Mobile* (2007), which does not stand for, or represent anything of what I just mentioned. Quite the contrary. His work up to now is completely opposed to the average trends in Latvian art, but at the same time, functions as a reversed caricature, it includes and reflects a lot of it. Grāvlejs is revealed as a questioner of all art canons and a deconstructionist of all conformism in the video report *Mobile*, in which he went to chic art spaces and showed random audiences pornography he had downloaded to his phone. It's a provocatively excellent and very precise commentary about the status of art in a consumer society, about the changing role of pictures and media in a digital culture, as well as an artist's role in society. In the conclusion of the video, indignant keepers of the hearth of artistic morals asked security staff to remove him from an art opening. He's almost a 21st-century Kārlis Padegs.



Ivars Grāvlejs. *Mobile*. 2007. Video. Screenshot.

Our Sisters

TEXT **Santa Remere**

ILLUSTRATION **Liāna Mihailova**



This year, along with the centenary of the state we can theoretically mark a hundred years since Latvian women gained the right to vote. Women's suffrage became effective together with the proclamation of the Latvian state¹ and was first exercised in the 1920 Latvian Constitutional Assembly election. Even though, unlike the French, the English or other Westerners, we can't take pride in having a suffrage movement of our own, Latvia adopted a ready-made, progressive and liberal model of government, like many other new countries that arose after the First World War. We can

be proud of the educated and open society which was ready to accept this model. The fact that there was no heated debate over the matter of giving women equal rights shows that, within the society of the time, the

role of women in matters both domestic and public seemed self-evident, to a great degree thanks to the level of education among both sexes and the efforts of early female public and culture workers. It is worth noting that all adult inhabitants of Latvia's territory could vote in the election of municipal delegates in the 1905 elections, held during the revolution, no matter their sex or ethnicity.

In early Latvia, the right to vote did not mean equal rights, but it was a solid basis for further development. Of the 164 deputies elected in the Constitutional Assembly,

Our laws stipulate that men and women are to have equal rights and opportunities, but they are not put to practice in all areas.

six were women. First and foremost they tried developing civil equality of rights for women, so that a married woman is not only an equal party but also gains respect in the eyes of her husband and the public. They championed law amendments that would extend the legal capacities of women, including the right to go to court, manage their own property, work a salaried job, and in separate cases to disobey the "head of the family". An understanding of the identity of Latvian women arose together with the Latvian state and the Latvian national and

state identity. In the inter-war period, the works of Lilija Brante, Zenta Mauriņa, Angelika Gailīte, Milda Palēviča were published, as well as the culture magazine, *A Latvian Woman*, discussing female contributions to literature, art,

and politics and the need for greater female involvement.

Over the last hundred years, the situation of women's rights has improved positively both in Latvia and across the world. Our laws stipulate that men and women are to have equal rights and opportunities, but they are not put to practice in all areas. In the 12th Saeima, 16 out of 100 MPs are women; women's pay is still lower than men's; and in many households women still experience violence directed against them. These indications make one

¹ The Russian Provisional Government was quick to introduce them in 1917, but the newly-established Latvian state followed this example from the very start.

think that changes in legislation are not enough to achieve an equal attitude towards both sexes; culture and upbringing should change too.

That's the goal with which Elena Favilli and Francesca Cavallo's book *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* was published. The biographies of notable women throughout world history were reduced to pithy 10-sentence tales, sketching out their personalities, their main achievements and the efforts they've made. The simple form of the tales makes it easily observable that no matter what the century, social status or geographical location, the path to growth for almost all the heroines has a similar scenario: it's a thorny world with countless obstacles and stereotypes that young girls and women have had to overcome not only to develop their talents in art, science and on the stage, or gain their political and social goals but also to show, first of all, that they have the right to do it.

Despite that many geniuses of this world have often gone against the grain, finding a source of strength in opposing forces, there are many significant differences between the biographies of men and women. What has been seen a matter of honour or a human failing for a man – be it a spiteful character, bohemian ways, a criminal past, or creative failings – has caused shaming or condemnation for women, even from the people closest to them. This has made them make tough choices. Historically, the public has expected women to be exemplary, motherly and domestically adept – not heroic. Therefore, we find very few heroines and female geniuses in encyclopaedias, anthologies, and school and picture books. Women disappear in the portrait galleries of male doctors, scientists, sculptors, inventors, and athletes, and therefore a myth is indirectly cultivated, namely, the one that you have to be born a

man to achieve success.

Nowadays, having voting rights and an equal legal standing is not enough. The life stories of women have to be emphasized and written down to correct the mistakes of the past and to make it so that little boys and girls don't continue the false preconception that genius/talent/abilities/a fierce character/perseverance equals "masculinity". These are characteristic of both sexes, and girls need inspirational examples from their own milieu and their own sex; and boys need these examples, too, so that they judge women and girls they meet according to their abilities, not some sort of genetic predestination. All the greatest people of the world have grown out of boys and girls around us and inside us. As I read my children the book about the greatest women in the world, I decided to write other good night stories – it's never too late to start writing them down and to add to their number.

ELZA

A hundred and fifty years ago, a girl was born into a prosperous Latvian family. She was given a long German name – Johanna Emilija Lizete. She did not like it and when she grew up she changed it to the short and sweet Elza. To the girl, it seemed that, just like her name, she could decide and change many other things in her life, but it was not easy to do it in the 19th century.

Starting from her early days, Elza wanted to star in the theatre, but her parents objected, as they thought being an actress was too vulgar. A priest once visited their house, and looking at the smart, energetic and curious girl he said: "It's a shame you weren't born a man. Good things would have come from you!" Elza wanted to prove him wrong.

Not only did she read and study a lot.

She could also write down her ideas and feelings in beautiful words. Literature became her chance to change the world. And even though the mischievous tease, as she would call herself, never got to play in the theatre, she wrote wonderful poems and plays with fiery and independent heroines that could defend their opinions and choices, just like she would.

Not only did she become the most prominent female writer of 20th-century Latvia, but also one of the first women in Latvia to defend the right of women to go to university, and choose their own profession and marriage partners. She did not graduate from the gymnasium as she was married off to someone named Wilhelm against her will. After a long and difficult process in court and in church, she was able to divorce her unwanted husband. Elza used her experience to change the divorce law, allowing both man and wife to end a marriage when it doesn't work and there is no love involved. "We must say no to the church and patriarchal guardianship! Marriage has been hitherto based on men's supremacy, even though all the weight of life in a natural environment was put wherever a woman was with her child and she was respected as such," Elza would declaim from the podium. She later married Jānis – someone who felt and saw the world like she did, and her passionate heart belonged to him.

ANNA

Anna was the youngest child in a farm-hand family. Each year, her parents would go serve another master. Even though she could study at a local school thanks to her father, she would rarely have the chance to speak her thoughts out loud at the household table. As they moved each year, she could not find friends, and therefore she was left to silently ponder all her impressions,

thoughts and acute observations about country life on her own.

She was an avid reader and taught herself to become a private tutor, continuing the ways of her parents, working in the families of strangers and silently observing their lives. She would write her first stories only about other people, as if she weren't present and her voice and opinion were of no consequence. But she not only had a voice but also a strong foundation of moral values. Through hardships, she had learned perseverance and developed a love of mankind.

Once, before Christmas, a Latvian director asked Anna to find and translate a German children's play, but she could not find anything fitting so, in nine days, she wrote a play about Sprīdītis, a little boy who would not put up with the way the world is and stands against it. Anna could finally admit that she really did have a writing talent, an ability to understand the way children see the world and feel the inner world of any human being.

Even when she was already recognised as one of the greatest Latvian writers, she avoided being the centre of attention. Her sister Līza was married to a man she did not love, and she later died in childbirth. Anna could not bear this and did not want to repeat this tragic fate. With her valuable work life she proved that women, like everyone else, can choose to shape their own personality and destiny.

MARGARITA

Margarita was a girl who could play for hours, lost in the revelries of her imagination, not seeing or hearing her surroundings. Most of all, she liked to watch insects and make little tots out of things found in nature. Margarita's father had wanted to become an artist himself, and that's why he praised her talent and supported her when

she wanted to study at the Art Academy of Latvia, where she perfected a unique, bright, colourful and detailed style you cannot mistake for anyone else's.

It so happened that at an international study camp young Margarita met a Dutch boy named Gerrit. They fell in love and could not live without one another. But they did not get married, as for Margarita this would mean moving to Holland and ceding her painting success that she could pursue only in Latvia. You can say she sacrificed her personal happiness so that she could dedicate her life to painting embroidered tots.

Margarita lived at a difficult time, when the Soviet power determined what you could draw and write in books. She chose to pursue the supposedly childish and less valuable craft of fairy tales and illustrating children's books, which gave her creative freedom, and she would perfect this ability to mastery, working for sixty years.

When Margarita was a grandmother and a famous, acknowledged artist, the Soviet state ceased to be and she could finally meet Gerrit, the love of her youth. They even married at an old age, like in a happy fairy tale. Twice as happy – we can only guess whether she was happier to become a wife or about her little readers and her international recognition. No matter how you look at her art and style, Margarita was a true artist, as through all the difficulties she did not lose confidence that she is doing her only and true work.

REGĪNA

Teachers saw Regīna as a gifted but complicated girl with a stingy tongue and an unfettered imagination whose answers when she was called to the front of class sometimes turned into vivid performances full of quotations. Small wonder that, from all her classmates it was she who decided to study

journalism and become a writer.

But writing demands everything from a human being – it requires silence, being alone and moments of self-awareness.

As one of her predecessors would say, “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction”. But she had neither. Not in her childhood, when she lived with four of her relatives in a cramped working-class apartment in Riga, and not in her youth and student years, as she had become the mother of three little daughters by the age of 26. Living without holidays, without sufficient sleep and with no one to help her, without the chance to read books and improve herself, the young writer and mother learned to treasure every moment she could dedicate to her calling, and that's why later in life she would never waste her time on any other offices or obligations that would interfere with her writing.

“Every time I have to decide between a manuscript and a dust rag, I will prefer the former,” she dared to say publicly at a time when women were still expected to take care of the household. To become a writer, Regīna had to cultivate not only her own writing style but also her lifestyle, sometimes breaking the norms accepted in society.

She found her *own space* in walks with the dog, in which, following the drive towards solitude, she said she walked tens of thousands of kilometres. Walking through the woods on her own, with her own wind and a silent partner beside her has allowed Regīna to write twenty books and become one of the brightest representatives of psychological prose in Latvian literature. Sometimes, the Author herself appears in Regīna's stories and novels, in which dreams and visions – and the overlap between the fantastic and the real – play a large role. And with the Author comes a dizzying spirit of freedom.

UĻJANA

Once upon a time, a girl lived in Latgale's faraway Medumi village. She grew very fast. The village children made fun of her when she would appear at the end of a field: is it a stallion running across the field, or is it Uļjana digging up the potatoes? But the girl did not mind, she was warm and industrious and simply kept on growing. Like everyone in her family, Uļjana liked skiing, paddling and playing ball. She was very sad when she could not make it to competition as she had to work on the fields.

At thirteen, Uļjana was 6'2, and had outgrown everyone else in Medumi. There was no place for her to grow anymore. Her heart nearly broke when she had to go to Rīga, where she was invited to study at the Basketball school, and two years later the girl had already made it into the leading female basketball team TTT Rīga. But not just her height contributed to her growth, it was mostly her perseverance and a will to fight.

As part of TTT, Uļjana, now at 6'11, outgrew Rīga and outgrew Latvia, which back then was still part of the Soviet Union. Her team soon scored gold medals at the USSR championship and repeated the success 20 times, also winning the European cup 18 times – a success that has been written into The Guinness Book of World Records. Her efficiency rating was almost twice as large as that of any other player. In the 70s and 80s she grew into the world's leading basketball player, a two-time Olympic, three-time world and 11-time European champion as part of the USSR team.

Uļjana is the first European female player to make it into the US basketball hall of fame. As she received the award, Uļjana

said, “I love this game”, which became the motto of the National Basketball Association and the entire world basketball. That is why she is not just one of the tallest but also one of the greatest basketball players in the world.

VAIRA

When Vaira was a little girl, the world went to war and her family was pressed to move away from Latvia, becoming refugees. Vaira ended up at refugee camps in Germany, and then they went to Morocco and later to Canada. In each country, Vaira learned a language, and she could speak five by the time she grew up. But it was not enough. She wanted to learn more, to understand

Dressed in a blouse adorned with folk signs and sporting a belt of Lielvārde, she came into the Latvian parliament and was elected the Latvian president.

the world and the way the human mind, memory and language works. She became a psychologist, a scientist and professor, proving herself in many leading offices.

But what Vaira loved most was researching Latvian folk songs and preserving their value, because

her most treasured memories were related to them. She thought that when you sing folk songs and tell fairytales to a child, they become part of the human being, just like they had become a part of her.

Vaira returned to Latvia after more than half a century had passed. Dressed in a blouse adorned with folk signs and sporting a belt of Lielvārde, she came into the Latvian parliament and was elected the Latvian president. She quickly became the most colourful leader in Eastern Europe, the Iron Lady of the Baltics, and Latvia's inhabitants approved of her. She was especially focused on foreign policy a lot, so that Latvia becomes part of the European Union and NATO. She became popular in the world

for her explanations of Latvian 20th-century history, and she was even nominated to become Secretary General of the United Nations.

As she spoke to the people, saying “We are strong. We are mighty”, president Vaira asked every inhabitant, no matter what their ethnicity, sex or social standing to actively work for their own and the state’s prosperity. She wanted people to let go of the role of being life’s outcasts and to stand by the other nations of the world with dignity. She especially stressed that women have to participate in the economy, by becoming educated and setting up their own businesses. She thought that women don’t have to choose between being a scientist or a mother. She also proved that no position, including a leading role in politics, should make women give up their femaleness.

INGA

When Inga went to study in school, women could already work in the most different of industries. Latvia had become an independent country and it had its own Academy of Culture. Even more – academy representatives came to Inga’s classroom in person, asking her to study - writing.

Inga was a shy and awkward girl, who had trouble speaking her mind. It seemed that whenever she expressed something that was important to her, an awkward silence set in, and that’s why the girl often chose not to speak. She was studious, had good grades and did not tell anyone anything, even when others hurt her.

Sometimes Inga succeeded in formulating her feelings into poems, but she was not sure if they were good enough until others

said so. She wanted to learn to write better, but her parents thought that she should study economics as you could only make money that way. Being an obedient daughter, she did start studying economics, but the desire to write never left. After repeated effort, her first book of poetry was released, and she wrote her first plays which were staged, only then did Inga start to believe in herself.

To prove to her parents she could make ends meet as a writer, Inga took up different jobs, but it was difficult to do several things at once. When Inga worked on her book, her day job suffered as a result and she had to change it. When her daughter was born, she realised she does not have time to write anymore. Even though there were two parents,

Inga is a feminist – someone who stands for women’s rights in the 21st century as well.

she was the one expected to take care of the girl instead of the responsibility being divided equally. By that time Inga had become a respected poet, and she

did not agree to become a housewife. That’s why she stood up and said: “It’s not okay! Women aren’t intended for men. Women are intended for themselves. And grown-up women set their limits for themselves.”

Each month, she leads female stand-ups where women get up on stage and allow themselves to be funny, rude and open. They share stories and female problems that have hitherto been either unsaid or considered isolated cases not characteristic of the group. Inga is a feminist – someone who stands for women’s rights in the 21st century as well. For the right not to pretend and for the right to be unpleasant to someone. For equal opportunities in all areas and that everyone’s abilities and opinions are respected regardless of their sex.

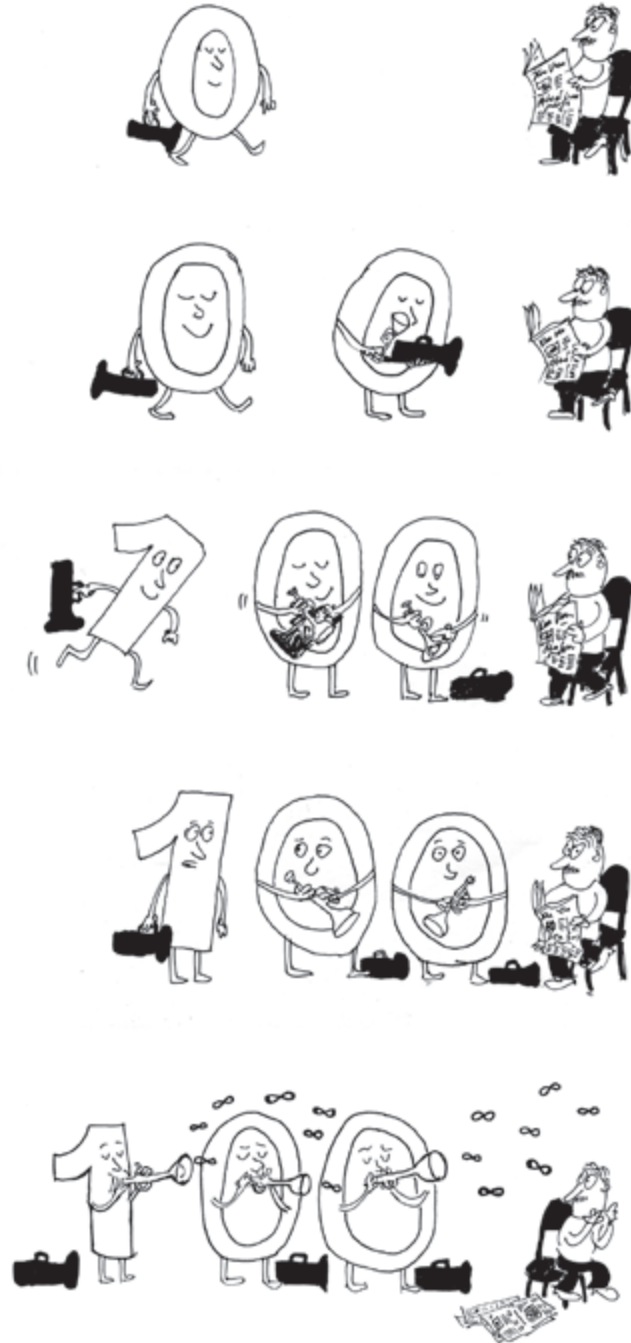
Small Elements of a Big Anniversary

ILLUSTRATION Toms Treibergs



In the brilliance of big events we sometimes miss the nuances that create this brilliance and colour the event. The author of these drawings, being a poet and an actor and not a professional illustrator, has chosen personally important details that concern both creativity and tradition, thereby offering his own view of the *invisible* things that make up the Centenary and its content.

The Visit



The Centenary Survival Kit



1. A repellent against ticks, mosquitoes and other unpleasant insects.
2. Binoculars for bird watching. During the winter season, it's also useful for watching operas from a distance.
3. A short *Spinning* collapsible fishing rod.
4. Chocolate-bar type candy *Vinnijs*, 400 grams.
5. A short *Sappers'* spade. Useful for commemorative cemetery rituals, final gardening work, and overcoming snow obstacles in the winter season.
6. A set of programs and seasonal catalogues of art museums, galleries and concert halls.
7. Sweetened condensed milk (non-boiled).
8. Four white shirts (unisex).
9. A lomography camera.
10. A candle in a metal holder. Useful in memorial events and night-time get-togethers with family and friends.
11. A map of Latvia for motorists. Scale: 1:500 000.
12. Wine from raspberries or other berries. NB: Excessive alcohol consumption is bad for your health! Consumption of alcohol is allowed in the Republic of Latvia from the age of 18.
13. The *Festive* fireworks set, F2 category. NB: For people aged 18 and above.
14. Aleksandrs Grīns' historical novel *Zemes atjaunotāji* (The Restorers of the Land) (1992), Rīga: Avots, 445 p.
15. Pickles.
16. A loaf of dark rye bread.
17. A citizen's passport of the Republic of Latvia. NB: If the owner of the kit is a citizen of another country, it should be supplemented with an ID of the respective country or union of countries.
18. A multi-functional pocket knife.

Poorly Drawn but Dear Friends

TEXT **Marija Luīze Meļķe**

TRANSLATION **Lauris Veips**

PHOTO **Ģirts Raģelis**

A girl in a turtleneck with long hair hanging over her shoulders. An expression of curious amazement. Pale eyebrows with darker spots here and there. An elegant nose, despite its expressive arch. A narrow face. The forelocks - symmetrically lighter than the rest, tucked behind her ears.

Beside her, a boy with similar but thicker eyebrows than the girl's. Elongated eyes, a wide forehead, mouth, nose and chin - which does look a bit narrower when drawn anew. Very curly hair. A striped, open jacket with a dark shirt showing underneath.

On one side of the next opening, a dark-haired girl with darkly made-up eyes and lips. A small nose with a piercing between the nostrils, surrounded by freckles. She is wearing a hoodie.

On the other side, another girl. She has messy hair, cut short over the forehead. A very similar nose to that of the first girl. Her lips are pursed into a thinking expression. She's wearing a t-shirt with "Reality is shit" written on it.

On the next page, a criss-crossed and crossed out field in the shape of a head. A round frame of glasses and eyebrows peeking through.

I'll return to this later.



(later)

On the right-hand side of the page there's an unconvincing portrait of a young man. The ears and the chin line have been drawn repeatedly, encircled with stubble-like scribbles. Short, dark hair, glasses with round frames, a pair of eyes closed halfway and a slight grin behind them.

No, this needs another try.

(another try)

Shit, this is no good. I have a lot of work ahead of me - two blonde boys, a girl very similar to one of them, and another with peculiar makeup covering her entire face. I should also draw my little brother, who has, by the way, grown abnormally tall, I mean, not abnormally but very. And my dear cat. But there goes another attempt, crossed out repeatedly, this time without attempting to completely cover the very strange sight of unnaturally large eyes, again situated behind slanting glasses, a completely oval head and the rest distorted as well.

The page beside it is empty and has marks of the beginning of a poem about my inability to draw the person most vivid in my mind right now, perhaps because we're not really friends, perhaps I'm making him appear here.



The Patriot “Business”

TEXT Aivars Madris

PHOTO Ēriks Kukutis

When everything's done, we're taken back to the battalion and transferred into the caring hands of the first sergeant. We're photographed for our ID's and informed about what awaits us in our further service. We have to provide our contact details for the umpteenth time. In the end the first sergeant hints that it'd be good if we cleaned the guns before handing them in, as after shooting blanks, the guns have become wretchedly dirty as if filled with tar. As I sway with a feverish temperature, I try to draw attention to the possibility of my arm being broken, as it has swollen to almost twice its size within the past 48 hours, and I ask whether I could clean my gun some other day, as I would profit from going to the emergency room. The first sergeant frowns and gives me a

careless look. “Is your arm falling off? Is it bleeding? The emergency room is open all night, you won't miss it...”

As we clean our shooters in the workshop that smells of oil, we conclude that they simply can't let us out before the workday has ended, as we'd receive full pay for the entire day. We already gathered in the first three weeks that we spent at the camp – it's impossible to clean such messy guns in the course of four hours.

The National Guard is a patriot thing or “business”, as they say in the army. At least that's what you'd think (or are supposed to think?) before actually enlisting. But patriotism is, of course, a difficult-to-define and very pliant concept. There are the hot-blooded, loud patriots who speak as if they

were quoting the National Alliance election program. There are the silent patriots who are close to being mute but are quick to do everything they're told. There are the adventure seekers, and those who have to prove something to themselves and the world. And some who simply want to get fit. For some, the final impetus to join was the Latvian state centenary. This is their gift to Latvia. There are some from the Youth Guard, aching to finally shoot combat bullets and, in addition, earn some cash for their daily beer outside the *Top* supermarket. There are some who fear a second Donetsk and the invasion of the *little green men*. Women are scarce, our platoon only has three. One of them is from the Youth Guard. She is preparing for professional service and shoots better than most of the guys. The second is a veterinarian, one of the silent patriots it seems. The third has health problems. It looks like she weighs less than the equipment that we have to carry. But they've all made it to the end. There are of course many others, each with their own story and their own outlook. But in the process, everything has gotten mixed up, it overlapped and, of course, changed. There was a guy with severely injured legs. He couldn't run, he didn't participate in physical training and told us he could lose his legs. His old man brought him to the camp “on principle”. After a week, his parents have taken pity on him and taken their offspring away from the camp. I've no clue to which category I belong. To all of them on some level, I guess. But there really are human beings instead of categories. There was a guy in his thirties incessantly declaring that he doesn't give a damn. He was tormented by an innate disease of the gastrointestinal tract. He ate only the stuff he'd brought with him and carefully calculated how much he'd receive as a compensation for food. Later he found out

that the recompense was twice as small as he thought it'd be and was further dispirited. He screwed off before the last week when we were meant to go to the forest. It's the exceptions that stick with you.

This summer we had a whole lot of bloody luck with the weather. Moving around in your uniform, you suddenly realised that this weather only has two states: hot and unbearably hot. Later, when we had to walk in full gear (web gear + full backpack + gun), these were joined by a third state: hell. Within twenty days I drank and sweated more under this sun than the previous thirty years combined. The face paint simply streamed off your face. The unbearable heat prompted some corrective measures. They took pity on us, reducing the physical training and allowing us to remove our service jackets. They made us drink a lot of water and stay in the shade. The doctor's tent came into vogue, as did the use of painkillers. There was not enough food, and people were swept off their feet from exhaustion and the heat. The scouts always say, “Be prepared!” But not everyone was. Some became dehydrated, and they were shuttled from the camp straight to the hospital. It became even hotter each day, and then shooting practice began – in the open air, of course. The feelings at the shooting range can be compared to sunbathing in a fur coat while holding dumbbells. The sweat ran into my eyes to the effect that I mostly gauged my shot with my gut. It was all sweaty, oily, sandy and sore. They promised us it'd be easier in the woods. That it'd become cooler.

The 20-day camp of the National Guard can be considered an army simulator with a basic difficulty level. In the professional service, of course, everyone is fucked even worse. That is what both the instructors and the professional soldiers we met during training kept reminding us. As I did my 130

reps, which I fairly deserved for the ammo I threw around like confetti (though, considering it logically – what’s the difference between a bullet striking the sand fortifications after having vs. not having hit the cardboard target?), one of our supervisors told us he had to do 200 for every bullet he missed during training. It came to thousands of reps a day, day after day, for weeks. We were told that we’re pampered at the National Guard as it’s important to them to retain every single soul who’d enlisted. Meanwhile they only select the most fit, both morally and physically, for professional service. That’s what we felt in the instructors’ attitude, which was, in general, unexpectedly compassionate with a few exceptions. But, like in school, the most respect went to the tough guys who could maintain discipline and make themselves be heard. The ones whose faces showed real experience you can gain only in the field, on missions in Iraq or Afghanistan with real bullets flying at you, real explosives detonating under your feet and comrades at arms bleeding to death, squirting real, warm blood out of their bodies. Only one of the instructors fell into true disfavour with some of the strapping young lads of the Youth Guard by mocking him openly, and Sasha, the undisputed strongman and bigmouth of our platoon, even promised to “fuck him up” after the camp finishes. All of this because the instructor, an athletic corporal of Lithuanian descent, made big demands of us during physical training. True, he did step over the line, as the trainees could not do the exercises and were criticised openly for that. Some were injured and there was an influx of complaints, which was evidently heard by the higher-ups as the instructor later lowered his demands.

Do you recall Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket*? It’s a story about a unit of US marines who are sent to Vietnam following an arduous

stint in basic training. The unit lumped together all soldier-type clichés you can imagine – jokers, smart-alecks, tough guys, pussies and strangers. Strangely enough, these clichés sometimes manifest themselves in real life, especially if it’s at a place that draws people of different social class, sex, age, education level, marital status, social status, etc. Our platoon was also lucky enough to be a motley crew. The jokers announced themselves within the first few days. Emils and Edgars quickly found common ground and set up the Non-Reactive Unit, for which the symbol and measure of all things was a strap-on you could buy at a sex shop. They took their calling seriously, even writing up the Unit’s manual and ranks, christening themselves Strap-on Generals, the chief military men in the unit. The Non-Reactive Unit recruited studiously from the rest of our platoon, as well as planned and carried out different “missions”. The most vivid of these was their walk to the showers while dressed in ponchos and protective goggles. They accompanied themselves with the rather outdated party hit, “Crazy Frog”.

Meanwhile *Dižais* (the Great) was the Gomer Pyle of the unit, if we recall the same Kubrick film: the dim-wit who always managed to get into a mess or screw something up. There he was off for a piss, and got tangled in barbed wire. Then he released gas right in the middle of a speech by the HQ’s first sergeant. He fell asleep during guard duty under the gaze of the instructor. Sasha was the cool guy who’s seen it all. He could do anything, did not shy away from talking back to his superiors whether it was warranted or not. But during the march he carried two bags while helping others at the same time. Everything was like in a film. But maybe the films got it right about real life?

Of course, we had to live with one another and cooperate. That was the

unwritten basis of the entire training. Generally speaking, life in the tent was like a field trip. Someone put their socks and undies wherever he wanted to. Someone tried to straighten out the mess. Someone else tried to fart the entire tent full with gas, cheering himself on loudly. Someone else put on the airs of an English aristocrat, or at least tried to until his ears started showing signs of high blood pressure. Of course, there was continuous bickering – about trivial matters, training tasks, bossing others around and what have you. “Boys will be boys,” the old song goes. But girls, too, didn’t limit themselves to the side-lines when the snafu erupted. The guys returned the favour, with the insults sometimes going so low you started to think you’ve ended up at a juvenile detention centre. Conflicts took place on several levels – eye to eye, between the fire teams, and then the whole platoon was on edge. Nevertheless, everyone stayed friends and no one fought for real, despite coming very close to it.

The greatest feeling of community that we had was during the evening walk when formation training was supplemented with the basics of military singing. We picked the song ourselves and started with “*Dīv dūjiņas*” (Two doves), which the instructors thought was too doleful for keeping up military spirits but nevertheless accepted. We sang it at the top of our lungs, but another song was to become the hit of our platoon – a song that our fire team instructor tipped us about. It’s about a Latvian infantryman and the instructor’s unit had made it up: “*Paskat, māmiņ, kas tad tas? / Pēc marša kājas lupatās / Kājnieku saule aust / Miesā slapjš, bet garā sauss / Sveicu tevi, kājniek / Mūsu zemes saimniek.*” (Mommy, would you look at that? / After the march, my legs are squashed / There rises the infantry sun / Wet in the flesh but not the spirit, for once / Hail thee, infantryman

/ My favourite countryman.) We took such a wild liking to it that we shouted the song as our fire team walked in between lessons. After a few days of heartfelt shouting my voice was so worn I couldn’t even whisper. But the emotion was strong; we were sometimes moved to tears when our platoon was able to find perfect harmony in stride, voice and spirit.

My eyes didn’t stay dry during the oath-taking ceremony either. That’s what chaplains are tasked to do, and they do their job well, even though their clichéd utterances wouldn’t work half as well were it not for the overall atmosphere. But as I was standing shoulder to shoulder with the comrades I just met, looking at Mother Latvia with an automatic rifle clinched in my hands, the chaplain’s clichés, filled as they were with flourishing pathos and pathos, suddenly came to life and even materialised. The responsibility and duty he invoked no longer referred to an abstract unity but to us who stood there. Of course, not everyone was as sensitive. After the ceremony, we quickly returned to our baseline humour. But, for a moment at least, the air was pregnant with an unspeakable impulse of spiritual energy.

I’ve saved the best for last, as is customary. The “woods” actually turned out to be a training site surrounded by lush pines and oak trees. The rain came, as promised, but, of course, just as we were pitching our tents and putting the camp in order, and when we had to do the night rounds. In an instant, all the equipment, the guns and the uniforms were covered in a thin layer of wet sand. Sand is the leitmotif for the entire final week. It got everywhere. Under your clothes, in your shoes and your hair, and even your digestive tract as the food, too, seemed to have been sprinkled with sand. Comrade heat returned as well. Meanwhile the workload kept growing. Firing and movement training

took place in the forest – this includes the two things I mentioned, namely shooting blanks until your ears are ringing, and running lightning-speed across ditches and mounds towards total victory or – the opposite – a retreat even quicker than lightning. Thankfully, no one broke anything. But it's not as if we went entirely without trauma. On the night before the concluding exam we had an emergency drill, which wouldn't have been anything tragic if I hadn't bruised my elbow as I rushed through the dark. It started swelling rapidly and pain shot through my body, but there was no time for surrender as there were only 24 hours to go. We went into the woods and set up a patrol base. The fever got to me steadily, but the countdown was already flashing in front of my eyes, just like the red digits running across a display of explosives. Sleeplessness and exhaustion made me paranoid, it was clear that we would be attacked on the final night. We had two people doing guard duty so that everyone gets a chance to sleep, but we decided to guard all the positions on rotation every half an hour. Of course, no one did attack but our sleep was completely botched. The sergeant nevertheless arrived at seven a.m. and took us to an ambush place for the main part of our exam. We dug deep into the moss and lead an immobile existence until the signal sounded. A veritable zoetrope ran through my head, while the elbow reminded me of itself with small, insistent pulses of pain, as if a woodpecker were busy with my arm. To cheer myself on, I thought about what the instructor of our fire team had said – that he had marched for 30 kilometres with a broken leg after bandaging it with tape. Shots were rattling, and the enemy was destroyed successfully. Nevertheless the sergeant had a surprise in store for us. An imaginary grenade wounded the other instructor and we had to take him to the patrol base. "This is it. One

last job," as they say in the movies. Everyone was shouting at one another and the sergeant's voice rose above all. Surprisingly, we managed to put together the stretcher. Surprisingly, we managed to put a pressure bandage on the wound. Surprisingly, we were able to quickly fill up and cover our defensive positions with moss. Thus began the long-awaited and fabled Golgotha – a march after which the camp would end, and the National Guard who'd undergone basic training would be handed their berets. But we had to get there. The road ahead of us wasn't long, likely a few kilometres in lieu of the traditional twenty. But our "wounded comrade" and his equipment, which we also had to carry, made us feel the theory of relativity in practice. The sergeant, marching ahead of us, made full use of the surrounding terrain, and so the march turned into a dynamic mountain hike with elements of an obstacle course. As we arrived at our destination – the evacuation point – I had so little strength left I could barely drink. But the greatest blow was still ahead of us. As we returned to our jokes and relaxed, one of the mid-life guys fainted. Now we had a real injured person; it was no simulation. Jānis was carried away on the same stretcher on which the corporal, our previous "casualty", had slept cosily earlier. Later we would learn that it turned out well but that he had to stay at the hospital to recover from dehydration. We strolled down the hill for our berets, singing the song about the Latvian infantryman.

Back in the camp, one of the attractive department Charlie corporals was there to greet us.

"So, how was the camp? Ain't worth sh**, innit?" he laughed. Jānis, who had fainted, was still before my eyes. The swollen arm pulsed all the way through my brain. But I managed to form my lips into a smile. I joined the others, saying, "Of course. No f***s were given."

