

ART IN EXILE: THE EMIGRATION EXPERIENCES AND MOBILITY OF ARTISTS IN XIX–XX CENTURY: THE CASE OF LITHUANIA

Summary. The point of this article is to distinguish and characterize the waves of migration and departures by Lithuanian and Litvak artists that periodically took place in Lithuania since the middle of the nineteenth century, and to discuss artists' experiences after they had left Lithuania. Artist migrations, moving to art centers is a part of European artists' life. The artist profession throughout the ages has been considered to be inseparable from moving and networking. Studying abroad, travels, search for commissions, founding of artist colonies, working in residencies was, and still is, an element of a fully-fledged creative lifestyle. However, in this article, a different type of artist migration is being analyzed. A specific phenomenon of long term or complete retreat of artists from their homelands, determined not only by artistic goals but also by complex social, political or economic circumstances, is being analyzed. Artists started emigrating from Lithuania (and its surrounding territories) to the West in the middle of the nineteenth century and continues to this day. In this article, Lithuanian artists' migration waves, from the end of the nineteenth century to the current day, are chronologically distinguished and systematically presented, intrinsic causes of emigration (and phenomena related to it – migration and re-emigration) are described and the problems of integration in new locations for artists, the effects of these problems on the artists' identities are discussed. It is deduced that the causes of Lithuanian and Litvak emigration were often similar but the degree of adjusting differed. Many emigrated Lithuanians changed professions, unable or unwilling to adapt to intense international art lifestyle. Lithuanian emigrant artists even under politically hostile circumstances looked for a connection with their home country. Artists in exile managed to form connections and influence their countrymen who created in Soviet Lithuania. This difficult topic requires more detailed research in the future. When researching twenty first century artist cases, one has to talk not about emigrants but about migrants, artists of a fragmented identity, operating exclusively in the international art field. The problem of an artist's identity is a lot more relevant than the artist's nationality.

Keywords: Exile, emigration, migration, exile culture, Lithuanian art, Litvak art.

INTRODUCTION

Leaving one's *Home* means destroying the entire structure, demolishing the former structure of life and replacing its foundation whether you want to or not. Exile results in major changes in the lifestyle of a society, national group or separate individual, including changes in values. Artworks created by exiled artists therefore often dwell on the subject of art and politics, emigration and expulsion from homeland, assimilation and integration, cultural and national identity, assimilation and integration in foreign countries, and other difficult problems of art and social and political European history. Due to the complex nature of the problem and the fact that artwork created by exiles is often scattered all over

the world, it receives relatively little attention from researchers and collectors. In our region, in Baltic States (Soviet republics in 1940-1990), the Cold War and the Soviet ideology have contributed greatly to the marginalisation and partial oblivion of the art made by exiles. Even here cultural memory had to be revived and recovered. This process of cultural memory and the recovery is taking place now. Bright manifestations of that process are growth of exile art collections and its turning to foreigners, especially Litvak culture traces in Lithuania. The necessary preconditions for that emerged when reforms started around 1988 and after Lithuania regained independence in 1990. This period witnessed a Jewish art exhibition in Kaunas and the first exhibition

of art created by exiles in Vilnius.¹ The perception that Lithuanian culture and history of art are, in fact, multinational, that its creation is not limited to the period when Vilnius or Kaunas were the capital cities of Lithuania, nor is it restricted to the geographical territory of Lithuania alone, is slowly coming back.

The fate of the artists who emigrated from Lithuania varies, but at the same time, they have a lot in common. We would probably not be able to find two identical stories of how they set down their roots in a new environment, and that is what makes their fate different. Yet all of them were forced to leave their home and had a strong longing for it. This is what they all have in common. Some of them had their works exhibited in world-known museums and were greatly admired by the public there. Others experienced an unenviable life journey. This text provides an opportunity to see history and experiences by artists of various nationalities who are in one way or another related to Lithuania. This exposure to Lithuanian and Litvak art created in exile will contribute to the formation of a new discourse based on the notion of cooperation and becoming closer to each other.

The aim of this article – to describe the migration waves that periodically arose in Lithuanian territory since the nineteenth century, and discuss the emigrant experience, which exile artists faced after they left Lithuania.

The subject of this article is the way the text documents the role of two diasporas – Lithuanians and Litvaks – in the history of Lithuanian art. The majority of the painters presented in the text come from Lithuania or have cultural connections with it. Some of them are descendants of historic Lithuania² and others are citizens of the Second Independent Republic.³ Both were taught art by those who studied at art academies in St. Petersburg, Munich, Krakow, Rome and Florence as early as the beginning of the 20th century. The art traditions, teachers, and vision of perfect art that they all sought were the invisible threads that tightly connected them all.

So what are these attitudes that are applied to exile art in Lithuania? Art historians Ingrida Korsakaitė,

Viktoras Liutkus, the literary critics Vytautas Kubičius and Dalia Kuiziniė, and many others support the view that Lithuanian art and the art of Lithuanian émigrés are two artificially separated branches of the same tree. There exist different opinions on emigration: however, Tomas Venclova once said that a deep tectonic rift separates these two parts of the Lithuanian nations, so there is hardly any point in searching for connections.⁴ The art historian and journalist Stasys Goštautas was even harsher: in his view, the exile is, by definition, not creative and incapable of creating outstanding works.⁵ The works on the themes of émigrés that have appeared in the recent decade in literary and musical history, theatre history and history in general⁶ not only reveal the meaning, novelty, and vitality of the phenomena in exile culture, they also take account into the fact that throughout the years of political stagnation (1945-1990) and political thaw (1958-1968) contact did exist sporadically between artists creating mutual intellectual gain. The question is how this happened and in what ways. However, this is already the subject of a separate study. Considering the characterization of the research on the iconography of exile in Lithuania, it is worth mentioning that national discourse prevails in the historiography. This is a narrow view.

Unfortunately, the ethnolinguistic imagination of the Lithuanian nation is often too narrow to include their co-citizens who used to live on the same Lithuanian land⁷ and walked the same paths as other artists in Paris, Rome or New York. As historians would put it, they were children who shared the same homeland and representatives of the same political nation. Certainly, it takes more than a day to stir the deeply rooted images and to change the grand narrative of the Lithuanian nation. This collection is a compilation of artworks reflecting the Lithuanian nature in the broadest sense of the word. By being so, it encourages us to model and complement the grand narrative of the Lithuanian nation. Only recently, at the end of the 20th century, did the narrative of spreading all around the world, leaving, running away, wandering, emigrating, and returning home start gaining a more obvious place in the collective memory of Lithuanians. The grand

narrative of the Lithuanian nation, about it being deeply rooted in the land of the Nemunas, has been supplemented with a relatively new and vivid image of a troubled wanderer who has left or is leaving his homeland. This image has already been confirmed by the newest works of history and art research as well as real life.

However, in Lithuanian art history, still little scientific texts are written from a multinational perspective. The monograph of Laima Laučkaitė⁸ about Vilnius artists at the beginning of the twentieth century is an important turning point. Laučkaitė studied Lithuanian, Russian and Jewish segments of Vilnius art as an integral part of Europe. The art historians Giedrė Jankevičiūtė⁹ and Vilma Gradinskaitė¹⁰ explore Jewish art as a specific phenomenon. Nevertheless, there is still a lack of work on the links between Lithuanian and Litvak. Perhaps they have not always been resilient. However, they should be examined. According to cultural anthropologist Leonidas Donskis,

“Litvaks still consider themselves Lithuanians based on the old formula of Jewish identity, which allows you to be a Jew of the Torah and remembrance no matter where you are and at the same time sends a message to the whole of Galut, that is, the diaspora, of you being a representative of one strong and significant identity, especially if that identity is related to Jewish history in that particular country or culture.”¹¹

METHODOLOGICAL ACCESS: EXPANDING THE LIMITS, CHANGING ATTITUDES

The above-quoted thought is related to another important insight an issue that remains rather sensitive in Lithuania. Every ethnic group in Lithuania still has its own individual historic narrative. Memories and recollections almost involuntarily serve as dividing lines between them. The time has come to expand the limits. However, we still cannot say that the binary contraposition of nations, which misbecomes the very essence of art, has disappeared.

Research into émigré art is in general a specific area of art criticism. It embraces the issues of art and

politics, emigration or expulsion from one's homeland, cultural and national identity, assimilation and integration in foreign countries, and other difficult problems of art, and social and political European history. Both this branch of art history and émigré cultural research are closely linked with the discourse of the discipline of history; while the meaning and place of an artefact is more often social than artistic when it is considered within the context of the exile experience. For this reason émigré art should not be analysed separately from political, social and ethnic history. The cultural phenomenon has not been the subject of much discussion in Western art criticism. There have been few exhibitions in Europe which have attempted to deal with the field of issues that are related to the strange, lost and recovered remembered yet unrecognisable world of émigré art. One of the most important exhibitions of this type so far was the exhibition “Exiles+Emigres”¹², held in Berlin in 1997, and Latvian art in Exile¹³, held in Riga in 2013, which attempted to follow the paths of the life and work of European artist, and to define the impact emigration had had on their work. To Western European artists, the period from 1933 to 1945 was the most painful. When the Second World War ended, they could re-emigrate thus the period of exile for these artists was neither as long nor as hard as for the artists from Eastern and Central Europe. Most of them never returned to their homeland.

Therefore, according to historian Egidijus Aleksandravičius, Lithuanians are a nation of diaspora.¹⁴ Their diasporic nature lies in the fact that the most active part of the nation not only stayed deeply rooted to the delta of the River Nemunas but also made attempts to look for a way out of their troubled situation in other parts of the world.¹⁵ Here it would be right to add that both Lithuanians and Jews are nations of diaspora, and their most active parts managed to establish themselves in new community and often showed themselves to be creative personalities, for example, artists and philosophers. The realisation of Aleksandravičius's idea significantly expands the limits of the Lithuanian world. At the same time, the history of Lithuanian culture and art becomes richer because of the contribution

made by the exiles from historical Lithuania. As a result, it gains some new bright and shining colours, including long forgotten Lithuanian, Litvak, Polish and Russian names.

ALLURE OF THE WEST

In the history of Lithuania, there were several major waves of emigration to the West. It is quite impossible to tell the exact number of artists who emigrated back then, because some of them melted into the crowd of economic refugees and others found their place in the world of art, but often lost their connections with their compatriots. Artists as a professional group have always been on the move. Travelling, studying, going to work on a commissioned assignment, looking for like-minded people, establishing art colonies, and working on residencies have always been strong features of the full-fledged life of an artist. Professional mobility is an important feature of the social life of modern artists. It is a precondition for intercultural influence and transformation.¹⁶

Since the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, practicing and aspiring artists from the edge of Europe often chose to go to Warsaw, Krakow, Wien, Munich and Paris. Even earlier than that, at the end of the 19th century, Lithuanians, Litvaks, Byelorussians and Russians tended to go to Riga, St. Petersburg, Moscow and Odessa to study art there. The periods of political unrest in the 20th century also resulted in reverse trends, that is, immigration into Lithuania. There were cases when Lithuania became the shelter for artists from post-revolutionary Russia (such as Mstislav Dobuzhinsky and Vladimir Dubenecky). In the 1930s, Litvaks and several Lithuanian artists had to leave Vilnius, which was then under the Polish rule. At that time, they settled down in Kaunas, the then temporary capital of the Republic of Lithuania, and later moved further West together with the migrating young generation of Lithuanian artists. The concept of mobility encompasses the state of an immigrant, a migrant, a refugee, and an emigrant. None of them has anything to do with a laid-back life. On the contrary, the concept defines a rather insecure

state, deprivation, and danger of melting into a multicultural environment but may also encompass situations in which an artist ends up in a cultural centre and experiences positive artistic influences, a sense of belonging, and skyrocketing artistic career opportunities. Exile is often the result of a complex mix of economic, political, social and cultural reasons, which determined the movement of people from the East to the West, often with a one-way ticket in one's pocket leading to emigration.

The first major wave of expatriation hit Lithuania in 1868–1914. The inhabitants of the north-western part of the Russian Empire, mostly Lithuanians and Litvaks, left mainly due to economic and political reasons. Among the hordes of peasants and craftsmen, there were also artists who dreamt of reaching the art centres of Europe. As a result of discriminatory policies aimed at the Jews, already as early as the end of the 19th century, the Litvaks who lived in the towns and settlements of Vilnius Governorate tended to study at the drawing school of Vilnius or Vitebsk for a while and then leave for Munich or Paris. For some years, artists from Eastern Europe lived alongside French artists in the art colony called *La Ruche* in Montparnasse, located in the south-western outskirts of Paris. Many were Litvaks or Poles, but there were also a couple of Lithuanians. For example, sculptor Antanas Jucaitis rented a studio in the art colony from 1897 until his death (1943). Before World War I, such Litvak artists as Jacques Lipchitz (1909), Benzion Zukerman and Leon Indenbaum (1911), Pinchus Krémègne (Kremeń, 1912), Issai Kulviansky (1913), Chaim Soutine (1913) and Michel Kikoïne (1913) came to Paris too. The majority of them attended the studio of Carmon at the National School of Fine Arts (École des Beaux-Arts), lived at *La Ruche*, and were one big friendly company together with Marc Chagall, Amedeo Modigliani, Constantin Brancusi, and Leopold Zborowski, a gallerist. The artists were very active in their creative endeavours and as of 1919, with the help of active gallerists, held numerous personal exhibitions thus making their way to the epicentre of the multinational artistic community of Paris. The integration of Litvaks into the international community of artists, that later received

the name of *l'École de Paris*, was very successful. In the 1930s, with the approach of World War II, some decided to stay in France, and some other emigrated to Palestine, Israel or the USA and gained their recognition as artists there.

Information about the very first Lithuanian artists who left for the West is rather scarce. It is only known for sure that at the end of the 19th century, several of them already lived in the USA. The artists visited the colonies of Lithuanian coal miners and offered to paint or to draw portraits of the better-off compatriots.¹⁷ Coal mines in Pennsylvania were certainly not a suitable environment for an artistic career, and the commissions that the artists received could barely ease their situation. The emigrant press wrote about the very first Lithuanian artists in America, and for that reason their names are known to us (among them were Adomas Ulmonas and Petras Stankevičius). It is highly probable that the works of art created by them did not survive. We therefore cannot say much about the achievements of the very first wave of Lithuanian artists who decided to emigrate.

The second wave of emigration (1918–1940) was also of an economic nature and coincided with the first period of Lithuania's independence. There are only a couple of artists who left for the USA at that period in time and whose names we know. Among them was Viliamas J. Vitkus, a painter, engineer, and active member of the artistic community. He held joint exhibitions together with the artists who reached the shores of America after World War II. The painters Mikas Justinas Šileikis (Michael Justin Shileikis) and Antanas Skupas (Anthony Skūpas, Antanas Cooper) were graduates of the Art Institute of Chicago. They both left Lithuania before World War I. In 1956, in addition to painting and making numerous other important contributions, Mikas Justinas Šileikis established the Association of Lithuanian–American Artists (which operated until 1980) and even two galleries named after “*Čiurlionis*”, which opened in Chicago (in 1957 and 1975 respectively).

During the pre-war period, the majority of emigrants from Lithuania chose to go to South rather

than North America. Lithuanian workers swamped Brazil, Uruguay and Argentine. The latter deserves to be mentioned in the history of Lithuanian art solely because of Jonas Rimša (Juan Rimsa), a painter who became famous in that faraway land. In addition, there were several other Lithuanian artists who left Lithuania for Argentine during the interwar period. Among them were Ona Draugelytė-Kučinskienė, Robertas Feiferis (Pfeiffer), Jonas Pogoreckis and Matas Menčinskas.¹⁸

Exiles from Lithuania went as far as South Africa, where a large Jewish diaspora had existed for ages.¹⁹ This explains why painter Pranas Domšaitis²⁰ emigrated to South Africa despite the fact that he was born in Eastern Prussia and cherished close connections with the modernists in Germany and, just like them, lost some of his works during Nazi rule.

After the second wave of emigration, rare cases of emigrants returning followed. In the 1930s, when Lithuania's economy became stronger, sculptor Matas Menčinskas returned from Buenos Aires and painter Jonas Šileika came back from Chicago. Šolomas Zelmanavičius (Saliamonas Zelmonovičius), Akimas Josimas (Jossimas) and Issai Kulviansky moved to Kaunas as a result of encountering stronger efforts to assimilate Jews in Vilnius, where they had lived earlier.²¹

During the interwar period when Lithuania was independent, young artists actively moved between Kaunas and Paris. The Ministry of Education offered grants to graduates of the Art School of Kaunas, which enabled them to travel around Western Europe and spend several years studying at the National School of Fine Arts (*École des Beaux-Arts*) and private schools such as the *Académie de la Grande Chaumière* and the *Juliano, Colarossi* and *Vitti* academies. Sometimes Lithuanians and Litvaks studied at the same art schools, held joint exhibitions upon their return home, belonged to the same societies, and together did their best to brighten and modernise artistic life in Kaunas. Some of them, for example, Antanas Gudaitis and Neemiya Arbit Blatas, became close friends. Their studies at the Art School of Kaunas served as a basis for their friendship. During the interwar period, 60 students of

Jewish origin graduated from that art school,²² with Neemiya Arbit Blatas, Zale Beker (Zalė Bekeris, Zala, Zemanas Bekeras, Bekertas), Chaim Meier Feinstein (Chaim Chona Feinstein, Faynsteyn), and Max Leiba Ginsburg (Motelis Gincburgas) being the most famous graduates. According to Vilma Gradinskaitė, researcher of Jewish culture in Lithuania, the Art School of Kaunas allowed both Lithuanians and Jews to plumb the depths of their own traditions and topics.²³ Jews were an inseparable part of artistic life in interwar Lithuania. They were loved by art critics and praised for being modern creators of art. When in the West, Jewish artists were quicker to grasp artistic novelties and were more productive. Compared to their Jewish colleagues, Lithuanian artists were less capable of smooth integration.²⁴

GONE WITH WORLD WAR II

The third wave of Lithuanian emigration. Towards the end of World War II, in summer 1944, almost 8 million inhabitants of Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, and Ukraine retreated to the West. In fact, it was the third wave of Lithuanian emigration which lasted for almost 50 years (1944–1990) and ended in political emigration. Approximately 200,000 citizens of the former Baltic republics gave up their homeland in order to escape peril.²⁵ In the camps for displaced persons that were set up in Germany, a new type of political refugees appeared. Post-war historians named them ‘the problematic final million’²⁶. These were Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians and Jews who were against the world order of the time. They absolutely refused to go back to the occupied Baltic republics. It was only around 1951 that these people were finally dispersed as immigrants among a number of countries, that is, Australia, Argentine, the USA and Canada.

Before the camps for the displaced persons appeared, the artists who left Lithuania in 1944–1946 tried to earn their living by creating various propaganda posters and drawing portraits of the German farmers and later soldiers or their relatives who gave shelter to them. During the period when the German camps for displaced persons existed (1946–1951), refugees from the Baltic countries were actively engaged in various cultural activities.

For citizens of Lithuania, fostering national traditions and their own culture seemed to be the true basis of their existence. By actively engaging in cultural activities (exhibitions, concerts, book publishing), they tried to prove that they belonged to Western European rather than Slavic culture as was believed by a number of French, American or British politicians. The intelligentsia’s deliberations about the redemption of their ‘guilt’ stemming from their emigration from Lithuania developed into a fight for Lithuania’s freedom. It was generally believed that the road to freedom was paved with cultural values. This is why emigrants actively promoted the spirit of Lithuanian national art traditions.

Freiburg im Breisgau was one of the most important centres of Lithuanian culture in post-war Germany. Lithuanians had their Art and Crafts School (École des Arts and Métiers, 1946–1950) in this southwestern German town. The creator of the idea was Vytautas Kazimieras Jonynas, who was close friend with some employees of the French occupation zone administration and therefore managed to realise his idea of establishing this kind of school.²⁷ Teaching at the art school in Freiburg was based on the academic curriculum of the Art School of Kaunas. Young people were taught the basics of academic art and practical crafts (weaving, knitting, pottery), so that upon their return to the Homeland, they could help to restore the country’s economy. The Art and Crafts School in Freiburg was a good start for post-war youth who wanted to continue their art studies in America and France. Quite a number of young Lithuanians graduated from the art school in Freiburg and later continued their studies at American and European academies. Among them were Juozas Bakis, Albinas Elskus, Elena Gaputyte, Vytautas Ignas, Julius Kaupas, Elena Urbaityte, Antanas Mončys, Romualdas Viesulas.

In Western Europe, displaced persons – Lithuanians – published artfully illustrated books and portfolios of their work.²⁸ During 1946–1950, Lithuanian graphic artists took part in European book publishing. Graphic artists remained loyal to their former artistic tradition and the usual Lithuanian iconography. Full of longing for their homeland, they often engraved cheerful Lithuanian landscapes with

chapels, wooden churches, ornamented crosses and wayside shrines. Traditional Lithuanian folk sculptures depicting the saints and sacred landscape signs became the main symbols of Lithuanian imagery.

During their stay in Germany, the Lithuanian intelligentsia actively promoted their national culture and concerned themselves with issues of adaptation and integration. Algirdas Julius Greimas claimed that when in Europe the exiles should put more effort into demonstrating the positive contribution of the Lithuanian nation to civilisation in general.²⁹ He tried to change the focus of his compatriots by directing them to Western culture which was opening up in front of their eyes. In fact, Lithuanian culture of the time was very much like a rather modern Western culture. However, having lost their homeland, Lithuanian artists tended to create art and organise vernissages embellished with national ideology, which was not welcome in the broader context of post-war European art.

Some artists truly searched for ways to break free from the tight frame of national art and join international artistic life by holding personal and group exhibitions in art galleries in Germany, Italy and France. Such artists as Petras Kiaulėnas (1943, 1946, 1950, Chardin's Gallery), Adomas Galdikas (1948, Durand-Ruel Gallery), Vytautas Kazimieras Jonynas (1949, Ariel Gallery), and Vytautas Kasiulis (1950, Christian Gilbert Stiébel's Gallery) held personal exhibitions in Paris. Adomas Galdikas, Vytautas Kazimieras Jonynas, Vytautas Kasiulis had personal exhibitions in Freiburg (Augustiner Museum). Viktoras Petravičius, Vytautas Kazimieras Jonynas and Estonian graphic artist Eduard Wiiralt showed their works in a group exhibition in Rome. All the exhibitions and positive reviews by art critics were clear proof of the recognition the Lithuanian artists received as true professionals and a sign of a viable national school of art. However, active efforts to exhibit their artwork and stay in Europe for good did not bear fruit as expected. The Russians, who won the war, were trying to force the refugees from the Baltic countries to return to their former home (very few refugees freely agreed to do so). At the same time, the allies (British, French and Americans) were putting pressure on them not to stay in Europe and

go further to Argentine, Australia, Canada and the USA. The politicians of the old European continent were extremely strict regarding war refugees. As a result, the symbolic artistic capital built by immigrant artists in Europe meant almost nothing when they reached their new destinations. On the American continent, the emigrants faced a rather different political and cultural climate, which they had to get to know, tame, or even create anew.

CREATION AS ADAPTATION, RESISTANCE AND FREEDOM

During the wave of post-war emigration in the mid-20th century, the inhabitants of the Baltic countries spread throughout North and South America and Australia. Only a tiny number of them managed to stay in Western Europe. Adomas Galdikas stayed in France for a while, Magdalena Birutė Stankūnienė spent several years studying in England, but they later had to leave for the USA. Antanas Mončys and Pranas Gailius, who were recipients of study grants, stayed in France permanently. Vytautas Kasiulis also settled down in Paris, where he managed to become a gallerist and a successful artist. The popularity of Vytautas Kasiulis's paintings and lithographs might have been because the Europeans who became better off during the post-war period wanted to see a simple plot, aesthetic forms, and nice colours. They found this reflection of hedonistic life in the artwork created by Vytautas Kasiulis. This might have been the reason why the artist was so popular in the galleries in France and Sweden in the 1950s–1960s.

In the 1950s, quite a number of Lithuanian artists lived in South America. According to Stasys Goštautas, there they had rather favourable conditions to work and were active in organising exhibitions of Lithuanian art. Nonetheless, South America was a temporary shelter for them. After almost a decade in Brazil, Columbia or Argentine, the majority of Lithuanian artists (Vlada Stančikaitė-Abraitienė, Eugenijus Kulvietis, Juozas Bagdonas, Juozas Penčyla, Mikalojus Ivanauskas, and others) moved to the USA.

Lithuanians had a strong tradition of graphic art, which found a niche in Australia. Graphic artists

were invited to take part in representative exhibitions of Australian modern art. In Australia, Lithuanian artists created portraits, exotic views of Australia, and abstractions. Museums and hotels eagerly bought works by Vaclovas Ratas, Henrikas Šalkauskas, Eva Kubbos and Vladas Meškėnas.

The famous Lithuanian artist, filmmaker Jonas Mekas wrote about the feeling he experienced when he came to America from the German DP camps:

“Suddenly the whole world was ours. The war was over and we were in the West, where we were suddenly overwhelmed by the world. The things we had heard about from a distance suddenly opened up in front of our eyes. All of it was ours.”³⁰

At the end of the 1940s, the biggest Lithuanian community existed in the USA. The Litvaks who left Lithuania right before the beginning of World War II settled down in the USA too. Among them were Jacques Lipchitz, William Zorach, Max Band and Emmanuel Mané-Katz. At that time, Benjamin Ben Shahn, who was born in Ukmergė, was already famous in America as an American painter, graphic artist, and photographer who emphasised his Lithuanian origin. Neemiya Arbit Blatas constantly migrated between New York, Paris and Venice. Close connections between the Litvaks and the Lithuanians in the USA no longer existed, but they all had one thing in common. At exhibitions, both Litvak and Lithuanian artists always emphasised their Lithuanian origin despite the fact that their cultural life had spun off into separate orbits.

It was not easy for the Lithuanian newcomers to find their place in the pushy and commercialised artistic life in the USA. According to Stasys Goštautas, researcher of the art of exiles, the main reason for that was that the Lithuanian exiles never accepted the loss of Lithuania. Psychologically, they never left their homeland and continued to live with the burden of exile, which weighed them down like an undeserved punishment. That the members of the Lithuanian diaspora took the position of waiting and protecting themselves from the foreign world around them preventing the artists from being

productive. The desire of the senior generation of artists to remain purely Lithuanian meant that they identified with only the Lithuanian exile community, which often rejected even the slightest attempts to be a bit more *American*.³¹

The first post-war wave of Lithuanian exiles faced major problems with their self-identity in another culture. Sociologist Vytautas Kavolis wrote an article titled ‘Indistinct Man and Historical Ambiguity’, in which he said the following: “exiles identify themselves with an open, painful and dubious commitment to the country that they no longer have, to the traditions they do not have any more, and to the faith that they have lost.”³² The younger generation of Lithuanian exiles had a different argument, however: “is not wise to resist the culture that surrounds us.”³³ But according to sociologist Vytautas Kavolis, the process of self-determination, and later adaptation to other cultures, was excessively long.³⁴ This national withdrawal of the exiles might have determined the fact that in the second half of the 20th century, most Lithuanian artists still ‘disliked modernism’, as Jonas Aistis put it.

After World War II, the centre of modern art moved from Paris to New York City. Post-war art was in general full of a cosmopolitan, competitive and avant-garde spirit. In the times of late modernism in the USA, the Lithuanian national school remained important only to its classics, that is, to the old generation of Adomas Galdikas, Viktoras Vizgirda and Adolfas Valeška. These artists tried to continue the Lithuanian art tradition that was formed before the war. On the contrary, the late modernism of the 1950s–1960s in the United States was focussed on breaking free from the European tradition. For the Lithuanian artists in exile who settled down in the USA, the European tradition remained very important. Even though quite a number of American artists were also exiles, they felt free from any commitments to European culture; free from any memories, associations, nostalgia, legends or myths; and free from all kinds of European theories about painting. On the one hand, we can be proud that the Lithuanian artists understood the value of tradition and continuity, which also means that the role of the art schools of Kaunas, Paris and Freiburg was

extremely important in the process of the formation of their artistic identity. On the other hand, it can be concluded that the Lithuanian artists did not make creative use of the European art tradition and were unwilling to get rid of the imported rhetoric. The majority of the Lithuanian artists viewed avant-garde artistic expression, including other artistic phenomena that did not exist in pre-war Lithuania, with great caution.

Only a small number of younger Lithuanian artists who in the 1950s–1960s had a chance to study for some time at world-famous art schools perceived the contact with Western trends as a natural development. They were able to express themselves as artistic individuals in the environment of ruthless competition that prevailed in the USA. Elena Urbaitytė, Kęstutis Zapkus, Aleksandra Kašubienė, Kazimieras Varnelis and Kazimieras Žoromskis created impressive abstract paintings and objects. In the 1960s–1980s, they were constantly invited to hold exhibitions at numerous international galleries in the USA and Western Europe, took part in a number of prestigious exhibitions, and enjoyed recognition in the artistic environment. They are the generation of artists who after the war matured in the West. They were the strongest artists in exile who had an authentic touch with the principles of late modernism. They were the pilgrims of the avant-garde trends and the apologists of abstract expressionism, optic art and minimalism because they had a natural interest in all the changes related to these trends. Although Lithuanians were not among the Western artists who pioneered late modernism, they were not mere observers either and contributed to the artistic development process to the extent they could.³⁵

The artworks of Lithuanian artists in public spaces are worth mentioning too. Architectural developments in the USA brought about the need to decorate the exterior and interior of buildings. At that time, the Lithuanian painters Adolfas Valeška, Kazys Varnelis, Vytautas Kazimieras Jonynas, and Albinas Elskus began organising studies of church art. Their works in stained glass and the sculptures they created adorned numerous churches, monasteries and community halls. Applied artwork brought

the Lithuanian artists recognition in American society. Aleksandra Kašubienė's contribution to the history of modern art and architecture in the USA remains especially vivid in the form of textile-like architectural works created for public spaces.

The works of artists who created in exile were full of longing for their lost homeland. Could this be a feature characteristic of the East European mentality, since the same phenomenon is found in the works of artists and writers alike? Scenes of the lost homeland prevailed and the signs of the new reality were much scarcer in the works of both painters and writers. Only the younger artists who had had the opportunity to study at foreign art schools embraced Western artistic trends. Jurgis Mačiūnas (George Maciunas), Kęstutis Zapkus, Romas Viesulas, Kazys Varnelis, Pranas Gailius, Elena Urbaitytė and Elena Gaputyte participated in important artistic movements and processes in USA, France and Great Britain. The majority of Lithuanian artists in émigré, though, were cautious in their attitude to avant-garde manifestations in art, especially to phenomena that were absent in pre-war Lithuania.

In 1995, young artists started leaving Lithuania. The freedom to create is in general inseparable from the freedom of the individual. The latter goes hand in hand with cultural migration which flourishes in the free world. Cultural migrants tend to be on the move, always heading towards the hottest art destinations. This is not a new trend at all. For centuries, the history of art has been full of stories about the artists travelling from outlying regions to centres of art. The artist Žibuntas Mikšys is a good example of a young, post-war artist who refused to carry the burden of emigration that was forced upon him to the USA. This is what he said about the experience of his youth: “when I reached this land, a lot of things died out and became absolutely superfluous (the most beautiful flowers of the Old World were not worth a dog's ass any more). It is hard to be in a desperate situation and live with the feeling that it will be the end of you if you do not manage to escape it.”³⁶ As a result of enormous efforts, Žibuntas Mikšys received US citizenship and in 1962 settled down in Paris for good.

Quite a number of artists from independent Lithuania have been making use of the available cultural migration opportunities. Travelling and migrating from one centre of art to another is almost a necessity in the international career of every artist. The focus of artistic existence in the modern world has shifted. Belonging to a nation or a state, which was important for centuries, has nowadays been pushed to the periphery of reason. Still, it would not be just to claim that it has totally disappeared from the arena. Those who have settled down in megalopolises and become world famous often say that their fading connections with Lithuania are the price they paid for their freedom. Today foreign artists often shrug off the label of emigrant.

Could it be that time spent abroad does not have the power to erase memories of Lithuania? The connection that forms between curators of exhibitions, art critics, clients, and the international community of artists often forces one to make up one's mind regarding one's national and cultural identity or the identity of the artist. In the modern world of art, identity is not considered to be local. In principle, it cannot be related to a place but rather to an artistic community. Thus we should speak about a kind of active migrant, about a migrant as a person having a fragmented identity (with one identity for the world and yet another for Lithuania), about a migrant as a *global citizen* who in general avoids speaking about his nationality or about the place he left or the destination he has reached.

NOTCHED ART HISTORY

It must be admitted that for quite a while the heritage of Lithuanian artists who had spread all around the world long time, about 55 years, was little known to anybody. The names of many artists were deliberately pushed into oblivion and efforts were made to delete them from the history of Lithuanian culture of the 20th century. This artistic heritage was created by several generations of artists in Europe, America and Australia. Researchers of Lithuanian culture often did not even dare to dream of it ever ending up in Lithuania and finding its place in museums or private collections in Lithuania. According to Stasys

Goštautas, who researches art created by exiles, artists in exile truly and sincerely dreamt of coming home one day and leaving their art to Lithuania.

This heritage was created by artists whose names were elided or uttered with great reluctance during the times of Soviet Lithuania, because once they were uttered, a number of inconvenient questions had to be answered, such as what a war refugee, an exile or a deportee was, how they came into being, and what their artwork says to those who stayed on this side of the Iron Curtain and lived in the shadow of the agreements achieved at the Yalta Conference. It was only after 1990 that the forced retreat of a large part of the Lithuanian populace to the West was referred to as a factor that had an extremely negative impact on Lithuanian culture. The biographies of famous pre-war artists who left for the West during Soviet times were expurgated, shortened or even elided despite the fact that the artists continued creating art. The development of the 20th-century Lithuanian art seemed to be extremely fragmented and inconsistent. On the other hand, Soviet society was not completely forbidden from getting acquainted with art created in the West. Lithuanian artists were extremely impressed and strongly influenced by books about Western modernist art brought in by exiles. In 1966, an exhibition of pre-war paintings by Viktoras Vizgirda, a painter and member of the legendary group *Ars*, was held in Vilnius at the Lithuanian Art Museum (then the Art Museum of the Lithuanian SSR) with the participation of the author himself. It was the first ever exhibition in Soviet Lithuania presenting works by a Lithuanian artist who lived in the West. Viktoras Vizgirda gave a lecture on Lithuanian art in America and showed reproductions of artworks created by artists in exile. This event aroused memories and caused local artists to take a huge amount of interest in the art created by their fellow nationals on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Moreover, it encouraged people to start collecting art made by exiles. Viktoras Vizgirda took photographs of artworks created by Vilnius artists with him to America and used them when giving public lectures and writing articles. A close connection between the two parts of the divided nation formed. Letters with excerpts from the

Lithuanian–American press travelled to relatives who lived in Soviet Lithuania, where they ignited artistic discussions and encouraged further creative endeavours. The knowledge and opinions that entered Lithuania from the free world served as a strong creative inspiration for the artists who lived in the occupied country.

The graphic art classroom at Vilnius University library became a space to store the graphic works created by Lithuanian artists in exile and secretly brought to Lithuania by emigrants travelling around the Soviet Union with *Inturist*, the official state travel agency of the Soviet Union. The Leningrad–Moscow–Vilnius tour used to be the only opportunity to visit Lithuania, that is, to come to Vilnius for a short visit. Lithuanian artists were extremely interested in the exile graphic art that was secretly brought to Lithuania. They even used some memorable elements of it in their own work. Visits of Lithuanian exiles to Lithuania and their exhibitions here were rather rare in Soviet times, but became more frequent when the Revival movement started. Events of the kind used to attract a lot of attention for art created by exiles.

For 50 years, the Iron Curtain ruthlessly divided countries and people and the whole world into the East and the West. This division resulted in numerous blank spots on the cultural map. Therefore, today it is necessary to start speaking about a conscious strategy for the accrual of valuable Lithuanian art and promotion of it. Efforts to form Lithuanian art collections, and to present them at exhibitions and in the form of art albums are a meaningful cultural endeavour undertaken by Lithuanian national museums, private foundations, and individuals in Lithuania.

CONCLUSIONS

In general, artistic individuals tend to have a craving for wandering to new locations, for travelling the world continuously, and for gravitating from outlying regions to centres of art.

Émigré art was for more than a hundred years created by Lithuanian and Litvak people who had lost their homeland yet never doubted their identity.

Their works are diverse and heterogeneous, and important to Lithuania as an inspiring example of the power of identity. It is interesting as an aspect of art history which makes one think about art and culture in a much more flexible way.

The creative life of all the artists who left Lithuania went through a metamorphosis. They grew away from the images characteristic of their national culture and narrow perception. Their artwork gained a more open nature and became understandable to a multinational public without any additional explanations. The migrant Lithuanians residing abroad, or in other words, international artists, take part in global biennials and exhibit their works in prestigious galleries. Major museums around the world buy their works. All of this shows the creative potential of Lithuanian artists, including their importance in the global art arena.

The creative work of Lithuanians and Litvaks artists in exile is important not only in Lithuania but also in the diaspora countries. Their cultural contribution comes in addition to the Western Europe, the United States, Canada, South America, Australia's cultural heritage, which is also not forgetting about Lithuania. Although the artists of problems, emigration is ultimately seen as a positive phenomenon. Lithuanian artist migration should be frequently analyzed by asking what those positive people from the Baltic countries gave Western civilization and culture.

Notes

¹ Vytautas Kašuba: skulptūros kūrybų katalogas [Vytautas Kašuba: catalogue of sculpture works] / Introduction by I. Kostkevičiūtė. Vilnius, 1987. Vytautas Kazimieras Jonynas: jubiliejinė kūrybos paroda 80-sioms gimimo metinėms: katalogas [Vytautas Kazimieras Jonynas: anniversary exhibition of the creative work: catalogue] / Introduction by L. Bialopetravičienė, L. Gedminas. Vilnius: Lietuvos TSR dailės muziejus, 1987. Lietuvių išeivijos dailininkų kūrybos paroda: katalogas [Exhibition of Lithuanian emigrant artists: catalogue] / Compiled by M. Ulpienė. Vilnius: Lietuvos TSR dailės muziejus, 1988.

² The term refers to the former territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Litvak artists were born in the territory of the current Poland, Belarus and Russia. These territories belonged to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Many Litvak artists came from these areas.

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DAILĖ EGZILYJE: EMIGRACIJOS PATIRTYS IR DAILININKŲ MOBILUMAS XIX-XX AMŽIJE: LIETUVOS DAILININKŲ ATVEJIS

Santrauka

Šio straipsnio tikslas – išskirti ir charakterizuoti lietuvių ir litvakų dailininkų migracijos ir išvykimo bangas, kurios periodiškai kildavo Lietuvos teritorijoje nuo XIX a. vidurio, ir aptarti emigracijos patirtis, su kuriomis susidurdavo egzilio menininkai, išvykę iš Lietuvos. Dailininkų migracija, persikėlimas į meno centrus yra įprastas Europos meninio gyvenimo reiškinys. Menininko profesija visais laikais neatsiejama nuo judėjimo ir kontaktų plėtojimo. Studijos užsienyje, pažintinės kelionės, užsakymų paieška, menininkų kolonijų kūrimas, darbas rezidencijose buvo ir tebėra menininko visaverčio kūrybinio gyvenimo bruožas, tačiau šiame darbe aptariama kitokio pobūdžio menininkų migracija. Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas specifinis reiškinys – ilgalaikis arba visiškas menininkų pasitraukimas iš gimtųjų vietų, nulemtas ne tik meninių siekių, bet ir sudėtingų socialinių, politinių ar ekonominių aplinkybių. Lietuvos (ir jos aplinkinių teritorijų) menininkų emigracija į Vakarų šalis prasidėjo XIX a. viduryje ir tęsiasi ligi šiol. Straipsnyje chronologiškai išskirtos ir sistemingai pristatytos Lietuvos dailininkų emigracijos bangos nuo XIX a. pabaigos iki mūsų dienų, apibūdintos būdingiausios emigracijos (ir su ja susijusių reiškinų – migracijos ir reemigracijos) priežastys, aptartos menininkų integracijos naujose vietose problemos ir jų įtaka menininko tapatybei. Nustatyta, kad lietuvių ir litvakų emigracijos priežastys neretai būdavo panašios, bet prisitaikymo naujose vietose lygis skirtingas. Daugelis lietuvių emigracijoje keitė profesijas nesugebėdami arba nenorėdami prisitaikyti prie intensyvaus

tarptautinio meninio gyvenimo. Lietuvių dailininkai emigrantai netgi politiškai nepalankiomis aplinkybėmis ieškojo ryšio su gimtąja šalimi. Egzilio menininkai sugebėjo užmegzti kontaktus ir daryti įtaką sovietinėje Lietuvoje kūrusiems tautiečiams. Šiai sudėtingai temai būtina atidesnė menotyros analizė ateityje. Tiriant XXI a. menininkų gyvenimo ir kūrybos atvejus tenka kalbėti jau ne apie emigrantus, bet apie migrantus, fragmentuotos tapatybės menininkus, veikiančius išskirtinai tarptautinėje meno erdvėje. Jiems menininko tapatybės problema daug aktualesnė negu menininko tautybė.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: egzilis, emigracija, migracija, egzilio kultūra, Lietuvos dailė, litvakų menas.

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