

THE ROLE AND IDENTITY OF LATVIAN EXILE ART IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA: EXAMPLE OF THE STUDENT FRATERNITY “DZINTARZEME” OF THE ART ACADEMY OF LATVIA

Mg. hist. **Agnija Lesničenoka**

Art Academy of Latvia, Latvia

Abstract

The year 1944/45 is inscribed on the pages of Latvia's history as the time of the second occupation by the USSR, as a result hundreds of thousands of Latvian citizens left Latvia as refugees. Since the 1945 the development of contemporary Latvian art was tragically divided between the occupied native land and the free world. The period in exile from 1945 to 1952 can be called the “restoration period”, or the period of preservation of Latvian national values and art, when the continuation of the form of artistic expression during the period of Latvia's independence took place in refugee camps in Germany. The issue of national art became more problematic after 1952, when the exile lasted and Latvian artists were scattered on several continents of the world, the question of the fate of the expression of Latvian national art became more topical.

In November 1958, with an art exhibition in New York (USA), the Art Academy of Latvia student fraternity “*Dzintarzeme*” (“Amberland”), which was banned in July 1940 by the USSR, was renewed. There is reason to assume that “*Dzintarzeme*” can be called as one of the most purposeful associations of Latvian artists in exile in the efforts to preserve and popularize Latvian national art in the USA until 1973. The main purpose of this research is through the example of student fraternity “*Dzintarzeme*” to clarify the concept – what is Latvian national art in exile, what we can define as Latvianness in Latvian exile art, and also look at art development and its role in the society of exile Latvians in the United States of America where the most active community of “*Dzintarzeme*” was located.

Keywords: *Latvian national art, exile, the United States of America, fraternity “Dzintarzeme”.*

Introduction

As the Soviet Red Army approached the eastern borders of Latvia, in the summer of 1944, an extensive movement of Latvian refugees to the west began. Between them were many notable social workers, also artists. Most of the Latvian refugees, called *Displaced Persons*, were accommodated in German refugee camps. At the beginning of 1946, the Art Agency of the Latvian Central Committee identified the creative potential of refugees, finding that between refugees were 142 painters, graphic artists and sculptors [The National Archives of Latvia 2014].

The period in exile from 1946 to 1949 is called the "Little Latvia" [Latvija un latvieši pasaulē 1993: 302], but artist and art historian Juris Soikans has called it as "restoration period", or in other words, a preservation period of Latvian national values and art [Soikans 1983: 84]. During this period, the new conditions in the German refugee camps were not an obstacle to maintaining cultural and art life – the form of expression of independent Latvian art continued. The Union of Latvian Artists and the Union of Latvian Craftsmen were established in Esslingen, also various artisan groups and workshops operated in about 10 refugee camps which organized regular exhibitions, took care of the preservation of national traditions, educated artisans, supported the search for creativity and promoted commercial activities (salons, markets).



Figure 1. Latvian artist and member of "*Dzintarzeme*" Maksimilians Mitrēvics (1901–1989) in Esslingen, during the Latvian art exhibition, 1947.
Source: National History Museum of Latvia (LKMD 3452).

However, the issue of national art became more problematic after 1952, when the exile lasted and Latvian artists were scattered in several continents, and the question of the fate of the expression of Latvian national art became more topical. And it was not only in the field of art – all the Latvian cultural workers in exile were clearly aware of their mission to preserve, promote and further develop national cultural values.

The older and middle generation of exile Latvian artists mostly participated in the maintenance of Latvian national art traditions. The older generation consisted of artists with art education obtained and completed in the Russian Empire at the end of 19th century and interwar Latvia. They had preserved their heritage, peculiarities of European schools and national art. Trends, for example, in American post-war modern art were mostly unfamiliar and unattractive, even incomprehensible. The middle generation consisted of artists whose art education began in Latvia from 1920s to 1940s, but they did not finish studies, or they continued them outside it due to the Second World war – in West Germany and the new emigration countries. Although the features of European and national art were still alive in their spiritual world, this generation was able to understand and adapt to new directions of art and means of expression in exile. The new generation of Latvian artists was mainly formed in their new homelands and was under the absolute influence of the post-war modern art trends that prevailed there. This generation is the most unfamiliar for the old Latvian ethnic group. Mostly they do not have any national artistic features or traditions.

This research is dedicated to student fraternity of the Art Academy of Latvia “*Dzintarzeme*” (“Amberland”), which consisted from older and middle generation of exile Latvian artists and was a part of the maintenance of Latvian national art traditions in the United States of America and Australia. The main purpose of this research is through the example of student fraternity “*Dzintarzeme*” to clarify the concept what is Latvian national art in exile, what we can define as Latvianness in Latvian exile art, and also look at art development and its role in the society of exile Latvians in United States of America where the most active community of “*Dzintarzeme*” was located.

Several research methods have been used in the research. With the help of genesis or descriptive method, the activity of the “*Dzintarzeme*” is considered and analysed, thus determining the causes and consequences of various processes, contradictions, regularities, and characteristics of the studied phenomena. With the help of the formal method, the research identifies visual elements, composition, colours, and interpretation of the work of art. With the help of iconography, also called the semiotic method, the symbols and meaning included in works of art are identified.

Both published and unpublished sources have been used in the research. The publications of Juris Soikans [Soikans 1983] and Niklāvs Strunke [Strunke 1971] have been used to focus on historiography, which reflects the mentioned problems of exile art in general. The main base of used sources were documents from the State Archives of Latvia. "Dzintarzeme" member Verners Dukurs fund LNA LVA 2061 ("Dukurs Verner (b. 1914), skulptors, Austrālija") contains materials dated from 1960 to 1997, including materials from "Dzintarzeme" activities in exile – statute, protocols, letters etc. Next is the artist and "Dzintarzeme" member Arnolds Sildegs fund LNA LVA 2652 ("Sildegs Arnolds (1915–2003), mākslinieks, žurnāla "Latvju Māksla" redaktors (ASV)"), which has not yet been sorted and systematized completely, but contains valuable documents of "Dzintarzeme" – historical descriptions, member biographies, letters, protocols, photographs etc. The third "Dzintarzeme" member, whose documents about "Dzintarzeme" and artistic work are stored at State Archives of Latvia is Jānis Cīrulis fund LNA LVA 2313 ("Cīrulis Jānis (1908–1995), mākslinieks (ASV)"). Author has also included periodicals. The newspaper "Laiks" can be considered as one of the most fundamental witnesses to the cultural life of Latvians in exile. "Laiks" has also documented the activities of "Dzintarzeme", which includes descriptions and critiques of art exhibitions.

The value and content of Latvian exile art

Fine arts in the United States of America had a few problems and conditions that failed to fully develop the expressions and essential of Latvian national art, and the author has clarified three factors. First, it is thematic sentiment as almost the only content and goal of the artwork. Latvian exile artist Niklāvs Strunke at the end of the 1950s considered – *Latvians in emigration understand art as a national ethnographic expression. They do not understand that today it is not necessary to paint only national skirts and ornamentation to express Latvianness, but it is enough and much deeper to be national if the painter seeks and shows his Latvianness in a flower, composition and in his Latvian sense of the world. Such painting can only elevate and deepen our national culture – so the theme is not the main thing* [Strunke 1971: 25]. And it was true, in the United States till the 1970s there were almost no Latvian exhibitions, in which you would not see beautiful landscapes or portraits with a taste of sentiment about lost Latvia. The paintings mostly showed sweet landscapes of the homeland, bath houses, towers of Riga, lovely folk girls, which were admired by many exiled Latvian spectators. Latvian exile art historian Eleonora Šturma has also emphasized that thematic sentiment has no place next to professional, seriously valued works of art, but she has also mentioned some strong and significant influence which come from interwar Latvia – *Exile Latvian artists all changed in their own way in artistic expressions, however, they always went back to the topics of Latvian nature*

and countryside, because we have to take into account the Kārlis Ulmanis authoritarian regime (1934–1940). It was a time that glorified Latvian antiquity, the prosperous present of Latvians, and rural people, that Latvians are farmers, that we must live and support agriculture with it, that is our source of profit. Artists who wanted to earn, felt it immediately and many rushed away from Cubism and began to paint in national way fishermen and rural people again. The Art Academy of Latvia also had a great influence. All academy artist technique was good, they were not allowed to be careless, and the conservative foundation that the academy laid was a rule for everyone, and all the professors were like gods [Šturma 2020].

The second factor was artwork as object of purchase and sale. As the material base of members and organizations of the Latvian exile society grew, the demand for works of art for decorating new houses, apartments and public property increased significantly. Until the beginning of the 1970s, the taste of the art public was quite conservative and the sensitivity to art was not very high. There was no pursuit of the extremes of avant-garde. Only the well-known and the usual were accepted. Among Latvians, there was often a misunderstanding of the essence of art, considering art only as a means of entertainment, pleasing the eyes and the heart with romanticized and sentimental paintings which reminded Latvia. There was a lack of a more art-educated audience. Consequently, a large part of Latvian artists in exile, instead of developing, adapted more to the taste of the audience and its needs. It was difficult and almost impossible to claim recognition in the wider American community in this direction. Also E. Šturma has claimed – *The artist could not get out of his frames. He felt that way and he was free to speak, and they had no desire to leave. And since there was an audience who wanted it, why should I break into other fields if I can live well and have my own audience [Šturma 2020].* More progressive view can be observed among the middle generation – there were artists who were not afraid to move in search of new forms of expression.

The third factor was material difficulties of artists and focus on commercial art. This factor is more applicable to the older generation of artists who found it more difficult to adapt to the new conditions. How to fit in and exist without losing themselves was a difficult problem, especially in professional existence and job opportunities. In Latvia they had gained recognition and success, but in the new home countries, everything had to be started from the beginning. This meant that they had to think about living first and about art only in their free time. Only a few exceptions had the opportunity to continue working in the field of professional art. Most artists worked in non-artistic works, or created designs for consumer goods, books, or made decorations for local theatres. For examples, Sigismunds Vidbergs initially could only make a living by illustrating stories for American magazines and making designs of tie fabrics. After stabilizing, Vidbergs found a job at the company

"M. Lowenstein" in New York, where he was one of the fabric design artists, whose task was to provide the company with designs of men's pajamas and shirt fabric patterns. A great incentive to devote old Latvian artists to art was mostly being in Latvian society and paint custom work, adapting to the Latvian customers' wishes.

Restoration and standing of fraternity "Dzintarzeme"

An important circumstance that strengthened the viability of Latvian national art in the United States were the artists' organizations or special art sections, for example, American Latvian Artists' Association, art section of *Daugavas Vanagi* in New York, art field of American Latvian Association and the World Federation of Free Latvians, which formed various collective exhibitions of artists. A wider demonstration of national culture was provided by the Song Festival in America, which shared not only song but also art. Art shows during the Song Festival became an inalienable part of the festival.

In the history of Latvian exile art, until recently almost no attention was paid to the student fraternity "Dzintarzeme", and most of fraternity's emigrated members-artists in Latvia are unknown or little known. The only exceptions are the Latvian art evaluators in exile, who have mentioned the fraternity in various contexts in their publications. Between them were Juris Soikans and Eleonora Šturma. But from 2018 a few publications have been made by A. Lesničenoka, which have changed the research situation¹.

"Dzintarzeme" was the first academic art student organization in Latvia and even the Baltic States, founded in 1923. The aim of "Dzintarzeme" was to unite nationally-minded students of the Art Academy of Latvia and to promote the development of national art and self-education [LNA LVA 2061-1v-1, 2]. In the interwar period and later in exile, the fraternity in its ideology leaned towards Latvian old masters and Latvian national art. This is particularly important, because the majority of "Dzintarzeme" members developed in the interwar period at the same time when Latvian national painting traditions were strengthened. An organized movement of

¹ 1) Lesničenoka, A. (2018). Latvijas Mākslas akadēmijas akadēmiskās studentu organizācijas (1923–1940): to loma sabiedrībā un jauno mākslinieku profesionālajā izaugsme. In: I. Boldāne-Zeļenkova, A. Rokpelnis (eds.). *Jauno vēsturnieku zinātniskie lasījumi III: Starpdisciplināri pētījumi Latvijas vēsturē*. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, pp. 53–66.

2) Lesničenoka, A. (2019). Student Fraternity of the Art Academy of Latvia "Dzintarzeme": Latvian National Art Conservation Policy in Exile (1958–1987). *Art History & Criticism / Meno istorija ir kritika* 15, pp. 57–70. DOI: 10.2478/mik-2019-0004.

3) Lesničenoka, A. (2020). Mākslinieka Jāņa Cīruļa (1908–1995) daiļrade trimdā. In: A. Lesničenoka (ed.), *Acta Academiae Artium: Latvijas Mākslas akadēmijas Doktora studiju programmas zinātnisko rakstu krājums III*, Rīga: Latvijas Mākslas akadēmija, pp. 131–147.

Latvian national art appeared only at the beginning of the 1890s. It was initiated by a group of enthusiastic art students at the Academy of Arts and Stiglitz school of design, both in St. Petersburg, the capital of the tsarist Russia. The foremost representatives of that generation of National Romanticists were Latvians Adams Alksnis (1864–1897), Rihards Zariņš (1869–1937), Vilhelms Purvītis (1872–1945), Janis Rozentāls (1866–1916) and Jānis Valters (1869–1932). Rozentāls, but particularly Purvītis have been influential for growth of younger artists. They all opened new aesthetic horizons by creating images of the national scene. In the beginning it was plein-air realism, later impressionism. Then came the tragic years of the First World War, of the miseries of refugees, the heroic fights of Latvian Riflemen, of new hopes and political activities and struggle for national independence followed in 1918. During this period of suffering and idealistic aspirations formed and fermented a young generation of artists, striving for new art forms within the lines of expressionism and constructivism. Born around the 1890s, they revolted against the academic art. French Fauves and cubists were the mainsprings for their enthusiasm. Most recognized representatives were Jāzeps Grosvalds (1890–1920), Jēkabs Kazaks (1895–1920), Valdemārs Tōne (1892–1958) and others. Already in 1925, the revolting had lost its momentum. Years of calmer development and reappraisal of different artistic tendencies began, and a meaningful influential role was played by the Art Academy of Lavia (founded in 1919) and its teachers – Vilhelms Purvītis, Rihards Zariņš, Ludolfs Liberts (1895–1958), Kārlis Miesnieks (1887–1977), Jānis Kuga (1878–1969) and others. Art trends in the 1920s and 1930s had a particularly strong impact in which realism and traditionalism became more noticeable. It was a retrospectively oriented art dominated by romanticized landscapes and folklore themes. These art trends of the last twenty years were taken to exile by the teachers and students of the Art Academy of Latvia, including members of “*Dzintarzeme*”. The Soviet (1940–1941, 1944/45–1991) and German occupation (1941–1945) put an end to independent development of Latvian art and culture.

In June 1940, when Latvia was occupied by the Soviet Union, fraternity “*Dzintarzeme*”, just like other Latvian student organizations, was banned. But the year 1944/45 was more fatal for “*Dzintarzeme*”, when fraternity started to separate into two parts – “*Dzintarzeme*” members who stayed in Latvian SSR and who had to keep the name of the fraternity alive only in their memories, and “*Dzintarzeme*” members, who went as refugees to West to escape from the Soviet regime and were able to restore its activity. At the second General Latvian Song Festival on 6 July 1958 in New York, USA, for the first time, some of “*Dzintarzeme*” members managed to meet. “*Dzintarzeme*” member and artist Jānis Audriņš has written – *I announced the meeting through a loudspeaker and after some time artists Otto Grunde, Kārlis Šaumanis, Jānis Vecrumba and Fridrihs Vīksne came* [LNA LVA 2652]. During this



Figure 2. Fraternity "Dzintarzeme" members at the one-year anniversary celebration, 1925.
Source: State Archives of Latvia (LNA LVA F. 1601, A.1, L.54, P.2).



Figure 3. General Latvian Song Festival in New York, 1958. Photo of Alise Ziverte.
Source: State Archives of Latvia (LNA LVA, F. 1996, A.1v, L.1, p.15).

small meeting, the idea of a joint art exhibition was expressed and future plans were outlined.

On 19 November 1958, the fraternity “*Dzintarzeme*” was officially restored with an art exhibition in New York, French Art Center, which was dedicated to fraternity’s 35th anniversary and Proclamation of the 40th anniversary of the Republic of Latvia [Laiks 1958: 3]. Under the new circumstances, which were mostly due to the large dispersion of members, “*Dzintarzeme*” changed its profile. Although “*Dzintarzeme*” retained the status of a fraternity, it transformed more as an artists’ association located in New York and Adelaide (Australia). The new purpose was to gather “*Dzintarzeme*” members to maintain contacts with them on all continents in order to exchange thoughts and ideas to continue, nurture and further develop Latvian art traditions [LNA LVA 2652]. Literary evenings and academic fencing were replaced by less frequent meetings, discussions of artistic phenomena, articles in exile periodicals, where art and artistic life was viewed and evaluated, and joint art exhibitions in the United States, Canada and Australia (Table 1). Mostly they were anniversary and travelling exhibitions, and the most active period was from 1958 to 1973, when the last exhibition in honor to the 50th anniversary was organized in New York.

Table 1

Year	Place	Meaning
1958	New York (USA)	35 th anniversary exhibition
1959	Boston (USA)	Guest exhibition
1960	New York (USA)	Local exhibition
1961	Melbourne – Sydney (Australia)	Travelling exhibition
1963	New York (USA)	40 th anniversary exhibition
1965	Cleveland – Detroit – Chicago (USA)	Travelling exhibition
1966	Philadelphia, Washington (USA)	Guest exhibition
1967	Toronto (Canada) – Boston (USA)	Travelling exhibition in honor to the 45 th anniversary in 1968
1968	New York (USA)	45 th anniversary exhibition
1969	Philadelphia (USA)	Guest exhibition
1973	New York (USA)	50 th anniversary exhibition



Figure 4. "Dzintarzeme" members at their 40th anniversary exhibition in New York, 16.03.1963. From the left: Pēteris Kārklīšs, Otto Grunde, Jānis Audriņš, Francis Ernests Bange, Jānis Cīrulis, Kārlis Šaumanis, Maksimilians Mitrēvics.
Source: State Archives of Latvia (LNA LVA F. 1996, A. 1v, L. 149, p. 22).

Fraternity "Dzintarzeme" comprehension of national art

One of the most significant problems in Latvian exile art is the comprehension, what was understood as national art. The cultural core of Latvian identity means that the "world art mosaic map" must show the place of belonging of Latvian artists to it, which, like other colored stones of this mosaic, also has its own place, its own form, and its own color. There is a statement that what a Latvian artist creates is already Latvian art because every Latvian artist also has a Latvian feeling. Others think that Latvian art is reflected in the theme of the work. The answer in several essays was proposed by Latvian exile artist and art historian Juris Soikans – *Many questions must be answered: what spiritual currents of a time or age are reflected in it which might give at least some more detailed indication and a greater common sense of belonging or something that becomes understandable only in a very exact connection with a certain place, time and people. Such art, which arises in such a constellation, should be called art identical only to that human community (nation)* [ZA FB RK 11048: 5]. He also claims that the concepts, which should characterize only the character traits typical of

Latvians, were expressed in vastly different ways in various stages of the history, nature and intensity of the Latvian people, so they are of a variable nature. Consequently, there cannot be any “formula” that would typify Latvian “Latvianness” in the art and be identical with the Latvian people at all stages of its history. Art historian Jānis Siliņš believes that more than a theme or style, it is the sense of Latvian life in a work of art that includes Latvian national identity. According to Siliņš’s observations, art for the best Latvian masters has not only been a subjectively free play with color, form and decoration elements, but has heralded something important about the fate of the Latvian people, ideal struggles and dreams. Neither the directions that come and disappear over time, nor a specific genre, style, or even a generation of artists is decisive in reflecting Latvian national identity. It is important to seek the expression of the spirit of himself and his people as adequately as possible within the age [LNA LVA 2123-3v-118, 6].

The exhibited works of “*Dzintarzeme*” were mostly realistic, or close to them with the features of the academy’s traditions. The themes were often Latvian, which “*Dzintarzeme*” members consider to be a particularly important circumstance to remind Latvians in exile about their homeland, people, their lives and history, including the most popular theme between exile Latvians – folkgirls. For example, “*Dzintarzeme*” member Otto Grunde (1907–1982) painting “Latvian Folk girl” [Figure 5]. Grunde was an excellent figuralist with a strong tonal sense in a well-worked technique. In his figural compositions he has paid great attention to Latvian motifs with precise accents of character, and all that can be seen in this painting. “*Dzintarzeme*” members also has tried to build a monument – with their works, to the 20th century tragedy brought by the World war I and II to Latvian land and people. This monumental thinking was the way how they revealed their inner emotions because they experienced it with their own eyes and feelings, especially leaving Latvia affected by the war as refugees in 1944/45. It can be seen in Jānis Audriņš (1898–1994) paintings, for example, in “Refugees” (Figure 6). In his art, he always focused on historical themes of the Latvian everyday traditions of Latvian ancestors, as well as painted struggles of Latvian soldiers and refugees, basing them both on his own youth experiences or studying history. One of the most significant examples is also artist Jānis Cīrulis’s (1908–1995) series of paintings “My homeland in the flames of war” with 50 paintings in the manner of expressionism created from 1945–1947. Visions for paintings were created in memories from Kurzeme (Courland – one of the historical Latvian lands) in 1945. In these paintings, he identifies himself as an emotionally touched witness of a tragic historical era with a certain sense of sentimentality. J. Cīrulis through this series of paintings speaks in symbolic language. The author sees 5 main symbols and characters that dominate



Figure 5. "*Dzintarzeme*" member Otto Grunde's (1907–1982) painting with Latvian folk girl, 1960s–1970s. Source: private art collection of Andris Grunde, Quakertown, Pennsylvania, USA.



Figure 6. "*Dzintarzeme*" member Jānis Audriņš's painting "Refugees", 1960. Source: Aizpute local history museum (Pal.f. 4157 (102)).



Figure 7. “*Dzintarzeme*” member Jānis Čirulis’s painting “Mother saves her baby from the burning cradle” from the series of painting “My homeland in the flames of war” 1945–1947. Source: State Archives of Latvia (LNA LVA F.2313, A.1, L.9).

in several paintings: mother with child, Latvian soldier, Latvian folk girl, cross, Latvian flag or its color combination (Figure 7).

Through its ideas, “*Dzintarzeme*” has expressed that by studying the sources of Latvianness ideas regardless of the direction and styles of art, the concept of Latvianness ideas in art should be gradually nurtured, which could then become a common denominator for all expressions, styles and Latvian artists from all countries. One Latvian national art language for all. In their active stage, “*Dzintarzeme*” did not deny or fight against the most topical modern phenomena in Latvian exile art, but to imitate them according to convenient examples for “*Dzintarzeme*” members meant artistic assimilation, and that was not their way. Not all “*Dzintarzeme*” members have adhered to the conservative path. Some “*Dzintarzeme*” members pursued search for new means and development of expression and styles. One of them was painter-mariner Jānis Gailis (1903–1975). He was a seeker of new pictorial expression in both abstract and semi-abstract directions, but at the same time he preserved his Latvian sense (Figure 8). In this case, the Latvian sense can be



Figure 8. "Dzintarzeme" member Jānis Gailis's (1903–1975) painting "Sunny day near the sea", 1970. Source: Latvian National Museum of Art (AG-4005).

seen in the theme and sea views that dominate his art – Kurzeme (Latvian province) beach with steep shores, fishermen's huts, winding dune pines, stormy sea and storm. Latvian art historian Jānis Siliņš has written about Gailis's Latvian identity in his sea landscapes – "*Jānis Gailis is among those who recognize the importance of their Latvian roots and try to include the Latvian core in their works through the might of nature*" [LNA LVA, 1996]. One more example is artist Maksimilians Mitrēvics (1901–1989). Until the 1960s, there was a slight tendency towards the old masters' realism in the artist's works, but for the most part Mitrēvics began to detach himself from academic traditions. He had fundamental knowledge, a good understanding of modern painting and a fairly fine sense of tone. Although his manner of painting became much more open to new means of expression, Mitrēvics was still able to include features of Latvian art, such as themes, for example, in the painting "Spirit boat", depicting ancient Latvians (Figure 9).



Figure 9. “*Dzintarzeme*” member Maksimilians Mitrēvics’s (1901–1989) painting “Spirit boat”. Source: State Archives of Latvia (LNA LVA F.1638, A.1v, l.90, 43. lp.).

In “*Dzintarzeme*” opinion, each artist could have their own technique, theme, color, but above all there had to be a Latvian view and feeling. The view expressed by “*Dzintarzeme*” was that National in Latvian painting means: 1) the art works which are made in the traditions of the Latvian school of painting, 2) the art works which include Latvian themes. For example, all both these factors can be seen in Jānis Audriņš’s painting “*Māra in the bath house*” (Figure 10) – it shows Latvian girl in the bath house, which is an important and traditional element in Latvian folklore, but in the manner of painting we can see skills and traits from professor Jānis Tillbergs’s figural painting workshop of Art Academy of Latvia.

For such paintings “*Dzintarzeme*” has often been criticized by progressive Latvian exile art critics. For example, Eleonora Šturma about “*Dzintarzeme*” 40th anniversary exhibition in 1963 has written – *They seek inspiration from natural motifs, in its variety of colors and moods, and most of them belong to the conservative wing of Latvian painting. In this case, conservatism, with a few exceptions, is understood in the most direct sense of the word – for several decades, there have been no significant changes in the translation of the essence of their paintings, in the solution of problems, or in the technical plane. Experimentation and change do not in themselves guarantee qualitative benefits, but sometimes it seems incomprehensible to be stubborn in the*

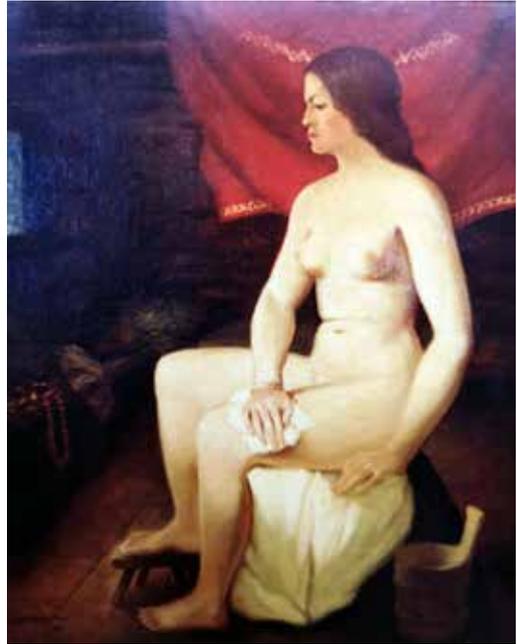


Figure 10. “*Dzintarzeme*” member Jānis Audriņš’s (1898–1994) painting “*Māra in the bath house*”. Source: Aizpute local history museum (Paf Fa 2536).

stands of the past [Šturma, 1963: 3]. However, criticism used to be overshadowed by Latvians in exile, which was the main audience of “*Dzintarzeme*”. Exhibitions were usually well attended; paintings were purchased by Latvians and Latvian public organizations – Latvian gathering houses and Latvian congregations. The majority of paintings have been received by organizations as a gift from artists after exhibitions held in the organization’s event rooms.

Conclusion

An important circumstance that strengthened the viability of Latvian national art in United States were the artists’ organizations. Fraternity “*Dzintarzeme*” can be called one of the most purposeful organizations of Latvian artists in exile in the efforts to preserve and popularize Latvian national art in the USA from 1958 to 1973. Fraternity has given some examples how we can identify Latvian national art in exile, and also see the role of Latvian exile art among exile Latvians in the United States of America.

Fraternity “*Dzintarzeme*” comprehension of national art includes four main points. First, they claimed and supported the search for new means and styles of artistic expression, but with the condition that in the art work Latvian sense – must be preserved. Studying the sources of Latvianness ideas regardless of the direction and styles of art, the concept of Latvianness ideas in art must become a common

denominator for all expressions, styles and Latvian artists from all the countries. Second, the art works must be made in the traditions of the Latvian school of painting, which mostly means influence of the Art Academy of Latvia. Third, the art works must include Latvian themes, which reminds about Latvian homeland, people, their lives and history. Fourth, artistic activity should not be intended as a source of material income, but as a pure cultural achievement for the Latvian people in exile.

A large part of Latvian artists in exile, instead of developing, adapted more to the taste of the audience and its needs. There was often a misunderstanding of the essence of art, considering art only as a means of entertainment, pleasing the eyes and the heart with romanticized and sentimental paintings which reminded Latvia. As a result, fine arts in the United States of America were like luxury items which pleased sentiment and longings after the lost homeland Latvia and so thematic sentiment was almost the only content and goal of the artwork. Sweet landscapes of the homeland, bath houses, towers of Riga and lovely folk girls were admired by many exile Latvian spectators. But for “*Dzintarzeme*” it all had somewhat different meaning. Art was not the opportunity to earn money, it was the way to preserve Latvian national and cultural values, and to build a monument to the 20th century tragedies which were brought to Latvian land and people during the World war I and II.

Sources

- Audio interview with Eleonora Šturma, 11.02.2020 in New York, from private archive.
- Audriņš, J. *Dažas sīkas atmiņu druslas par Dzintarzemi*, State Archives of Latvia. LNA LVA F. 2652 (non-arranged fund).
- Dzintarzemes 35 gadi (1958). *Laiks*, No. 94 (895), p. 3.
- Gleznotāja Jāņa Gaiļa izstāžu katalogi ar veltījumiem M. Zivertam. 1963. gada izstāžu katalogs, State Archives of Latvia. LNA LVA, F. 1996, A.1v, L. 124.
- Exile documents of fraternity “Dzintarzeme”, State Archives of Latvia. LNA LVA F. 2652 (non-arranged fund).
- Jāņa Siliņa raksti par latviešu mākslu trimdā. State Archives of Latvia. LNA LVA F. 2123, A.3v, L. 118.
- Latvian National Archives (2014) virtual exhibition *Camps in Germany for refugees from Baltic countries* Available: http://www.archiv.org.lv/baltijas_dp_vacija/?id=18&lang=en
- Soikans, J. (1983). *Mākslas kritika un esejas*. Toronto: Astras apgāds, p. 84.
- Soikans, J. (1986). *Latviskais latviešu mākslā*. Latvian Academic Library (The Misins Library). ZA FB 11048 400.

Statute of the fraternity "*Dzintarzeme*", State Archives of Latvia. LNA LVA F. 2061, A.1v, L. 1, 2.

Strunke, N. (1971). *Niklāva Strunkes Trimdas grāmata*. Stockholm: Daugava, pp. 25–26.

Šturma, E. (1963). Reālisms un romantisms. Iespaidi "Dzintarzemes" 40 gadu jubilejas izstādē Ņujorkā. *Laiks*, No. 25 (1344), p. 3.

Zinātniskā asociācija "Latvija un latvieši pasaulē" (1993). *Latvieši ārzemēs*, Rīga, p. 302.