

Landmarks of Art History

International conference dedicated to the 200th anniversary of the delivery of the first art-historical lecture at Vilnius University, Kaunas, 14th-15th October 2010

Review by Odeta Žukauskienė

On October 14th-15th 2010 art historians from Lithuania, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, Latvia and Estonia gathered at the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas for the international conference *Landmarks of Art History*, addressing traditions, methodological issues and institutional discourses in art history. The conference carried on from the international jubilee conference *The History of Art History in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe* organized by Jerzy Malinowski at Toruń (14th-16th September 2010). Both conferences were celebrating the 200th anniversary of the first lecture on the history of art delivered at Vilnius on 15th September 1810. They were launched by Malinowski, who emphasised that Joseph Saunders (1773-1854) was the first one to be appointed Professor of Art History anywhere in Central Europe.

The two-day conference focused on the development of art history in a region distinguished by its multi-layered cultural heritage which was shaped successively by the legacies of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Russian Empire and Lithuania's time of occupation by the Soviet Union. Times have certainly changed since 1810 when Saunders delivered his lecture in the Faculty of Literature and Arts at Vilnius University, entitled *Discours sur l'influence ou l'utilité des arts imitatifs*. Key issues of the conference were the need to survey Central and Eastern European art historiography, to assess the achievements of the discipline of art history in the region, and to locate these themes within the wider framework of the development and re-definition of art history as a whole. Another topic of the conference was the cultural and national identity of different countries. This theme was the leitmotif of both the Toruń and the Kaunas conferences.

The first panel entitled *The Development of Art History in the 19-20th centuries* included papers on the fi-

gure of Saunders and other art historians' contributions to the study of Lithuanian art and architecture. INESSA I. SVIRIDA emphasized the significance of the conference as finally rescuing Saunders from obscurity and recognizing his importance within the history of the discipline. In 1800, he had left England for St. Petersburg where he became known as an excellent engraver. Invited by the Polish-Lithuanian aristocrat Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, Curator of the Lithuanian School District, he came to Vilnius in order to teach art history at the Imperial University, which became a leading academy in early 19th-century Russia. The significance of his designation as professor in the history of art becomes evident in view of the fact that it was only the third such appointment throughout Europe, following the precedents of Johann Dominicus Fiorillo at Göttingen University (1799) and Johann Gottlieb Buhle - also from Göttingen - who lectured in the theory of fine arts at Moscow University in 1804-1810. Svirida stressed Saunders's promotion of Enlightenment ideas and his focus on the social significance of art. Although he did not use the term of *Kunstgeschichte* in his lecture Saunders followed Winckelmann's ideas in general terms.

LAIMA ŠINKŪNAITĖ presented an analysis of Saunders's lecture on the prominent Polish and Lithuanian artist Szymon Czechowicz (Simonas Čechavičius), which was published in the monthly *Dziennik wileński* in 1815. She argued that Saunders was the pioneer in revealing the aesthetic value of Czechowicz's works - painted for various Vilnius churches - and conveying it to the contemporary society of the city. Šinkūnaitė underlined Svirida's assessment of Saunders's fundamental importance in establishing art history in the territory of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

RŪTA JANONIENĒ's paper was dedicated to Michael Homolicki and his contribution to Lithuanian art history. Homolicki published writings on buildings in Vilnius - notably cathedral and its chapel of St. Casimir - and undertook research on the oldest Orthodox and Uniate churches in the city. He thus emerges as the first serious architectural historian of Vilnius, equally distinguished by his emphasis on historical records and the wide range of periods and styles he investigated.

ELITA GROSMANE offered a wider perspective in reviewing the development of art history in Latvia, from the foundation of the so-called Academia Petrina in Jelgava in 1775 until the Internet-based project *Art History of Latvia* started in 2006. She defined several stages of Latvian art historiography and linked them with significant figures: the generation of art historians in the 1880s and the writings of Wilhelm Neumann; the publication of the first general history of art edited by Vilhelms Purvītis and Visvaldis Peņģerots (1934-36, 3. vol.), taking into account the art of Latvia and neighbouring countries (Norway, Sweden, Lithuania, Estonia) as well; the glorification of socialist realism after World War II, ignoring local artistic traditions and denigrating them as remnants of German culture; and the survey of Latvian art history published in Stockholm by the émigré scholar Janis Siliņš (1979-1993). Grosmane concluded that serious wide-ranging research on the country's art history has only been enabled by the formation of the Institute of Art History at the Latvian Academy of Arts (2002), an initiative possible once Latvia had regained its independence from the Soviet Union.

Three papers within this panel were delivered by researchers from Minsk and focused on Belarusian art historiography. This is currently informed by the awareness of the country's multicultural past and the necessity to take into account transnational historical perspectives, as Belarus - together with its neighbours Lithuania and the Ukraine - formed part of the Lithuanian Grand Duchy and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Belarusian Baroque - Europe's northernmost manifestation of this style in its urban and architectural impact - promises to be a phenomenon yielding particularly stimulating insights with regard to placing the country within the context of European

cultural history as well as defining its special quality, shaped as it is by the confessional coexistence of Catholicism and Orthodoxy.

In her paper on Baroque architecture in present-day Belarus, TAMARA GABRUS stressed the artistic originality of buildings such as the Jesuit church in Krivoshe, the Bernardin church in Slonim or the Trinitarian church in Lyskov. She set out the ideological difficulties challenging research on this topic whilst Belarus was incorporated into the Russian Empire: Orthodox Baroque churches were dismissed as manifestations of a primitive peripheral ethnical dialect and partly rebuilt in a pseudo-Russian style. Interest in Belarusian Baroque arose in the 1920s in the wake of the national-romantic movement and led to the investigation of numerous buildings in Western Belarus and the definition of the term 'Vilnius Baroque'. Following the negative impact of the post-second world war socialist and anti-national ideology, interest in the distinctiveness of Belarusian Baroque has undergone a recent Renaissance, resulting in the publication of several specialist studies since 2000.

OLEG TRUSOV gave an overview of the development of architectural history in western Belarus - assigned to Poland after World War I - in 1921-1939. Under Polish influence architectural conservation and restoration was significantly advanced, leading to the foundation of a national restoration school and new research on Belarus's national culture which traced its origins in Polatsk. Many religious buildings were rebuilt or reconstructed, removing 'pseudo-Russian' alterations to Baroque churches.

IRINA CHEBAN focused on the contributions of Nicholas Schekatihin to Belarusian art history. She stressed his achievements in the research on ecclesiastical architecture, the periodization of art history, the exploration of the genesis of artistic forms and of the different influences on Belarusian art. Schekatihin's legacy is still relevant, Cheban concluded, because it defines the identity of Belarusian art as well as showing its connexions to the art of Western and Eastern Europe.

The second panel Issues of Methodology and Terminology in Art History was opened by EDUARDS KĻAVIŅŠ who explored the methodological traditions in Latvian art historiography. Surveying the most

prominent Latvian art historians Kļaviņš demonstrated their respective methodological approaches, noting Franz von Kugler's and Wilhelm Lübke's influences on Wilhelm Neumann, Boriss Vipers's formation by the concepts of Heinrich Wölfflin, Alois Riegl and Max Dvořák, and Wilhelm Pinder's impact on Jānis Siliņš. Concepts such as structuralism and semiotics were reflected in more recent writings, contributing to Kļaviņš's overall diagnosis and criticism of methodological pluralism and fragmentation in current Latvian art history which, he argued, lacks theoretical awareness.

NIJOLĒ TALUNTYTĒ and ALEKSANDRA ALEKSANDRAVIČIŪTĒ discussed terminological problems. Aleksandravičiūtė questioned the definition of the term 'applied decorative arts', claiming it exists only in the post-soviet countries, yet being totally inconsistent with 21st-century art processes. She emphasized the problem of terminological relativity, which occurs with the loss of the traditional distinctions between arts and applied art. Two key issues emerging during the lively discussions were the inadequacy of present-day borders defining national art histories and the contradiction perceived in much current art-historical work between empiricist rigour and lack of methodological awareness.

The panel *Studies and Institutions of Art History* started with presentations by scholars from Kaunas University focusing on the institutional discourses that shaped Lithuanian art historiography from its foundation in the 19th century until today. VYTAUTAS LEVANDAUSKAS examined the writings by professors at the Department of Architecture at Vilnius University (Michał Szulc, Karol Podczaszyński), who introduced neoclassical aesthetics in Lithuania. NIJOLĒ LUKŠIONYTĒ gave an overview of the activities of the Section of Fine Arts of the Stefan Batory University at Vilnius (1919-1939), discussing the art-historical achievements of scholars such as Ferdynand Ruszczyk, Juliusz Klos, Liubomir Slendziński, Marian Morelowski, Stanisław Lorentz, Piotr Bohdziewicz, Euzebijus Lopaciński, Piotr Śledziwski, Jerzy Remer and others. Following the closure of the university in 1939, almost all of them went to Poland, mostly to the University of Toruń but also to the Catholic University of Lublin. Nevertheless their tradition was continued in Lithuania by the art historian Vladas Drėma. Lukšiony-

tė emphasised the so-called Vilnius Art School's intellectual formation by strong influences from German and Austrian art history as well as the Cracow school of art history.

AUŠRINĒ SLAVINCKIENĒ sketched the development of art history at the Vytautas Magnus University of Kaunas, where the traditions of Lithuanian art history were developed during the inter-war-period by Paulius Galaunė and Jurgis Baltrušaitis, who published the first professional manual of general art history in Lithuania (*Visuotinė meno istorija*, 1934-1939). Whilst the latter emigrated to France after World War II, Galaunė trained a new generation of historians undertaking research on Lithuanian art predominantly informed by archival sources.

Drawing on studies in the architectural history of Belarus carried out at the Institute of Art, Ethnography and Folklore at the National Academy of Sciences in Belarus – e.g. a multi-volume inventory of the country's significant buildings – ALEXANDER LAKOTKO argued that the formation of national consciousness is increasingly accompanied by an awareness of the national heritage shaping the social environment. Accordingly, the institute's activities have demonstrated the evolution of architectural styles in Belorussia and disclosed the wider context of Belarusian architecture which gains its unique significance in achieving a synthesis of the cultures of Eastern Slavs and Western Europe. Lakotko also advanced a new methodology linking comparative-historical and structural-typological approaches.

EERO KANGOR closed the panel with a presentation on the origins of art history as academic discipline in Estonia in 1920. Based on historical documents he named the potential candidates for the chair of aesthetics and general art history at Tartu University: Johan Jakob Tikkanen (Helsinki), Adolf Goldschmidt (Berlin), Heinrich Wölfflin (Munich), Osvald Sirén (Stockholm), Ewert H. G. Wrangel (Lund), and, at a later stage, also Josef Strzygowsky (Vienna). However, the Swede Helge Kjellin was nominated, who established the Institute for Art History in Tartu and focused his research on the Northern Baltic region, thus establishing historiographical and cultural links to Scandinavia.

IRENA KOSSOWSKA delivered the key paper of the panel *The Standpoint in the Crossroads*. By recalling the international conference *Reinterpreting the Past. Traditionalist Artistic Trends in Central and Eastern Europe of the 1920s and 1930s* (Warsaw, Cracow, 2006) she focused on the perception of traditionalism in Central and Eastern Europe. Kossowska interpreted pre-World War I ideas of classicism and realism as an antithesis to modernism, noting that the 2006 conference has established a basis for the cooperation of scholars revising the concepts of 'traditionalism' and 'national art'. Research currently in progress demonstrates how modified idioms of Neo-Classicism and Neo-Realism were adopted in Eastern and Central Europe, absorbing national, ethnic, and regional identities as well as the vernacular in the process. Kossowska thus delineated a new critical framework for the study of artists during the inter-war period advocating a return to traditional ethical and aesthetic values, proposing the launch of a broader debate on non-avant-garde visual arts in Eastern Europe.

SVIETLANA CZERWONNAJA discussed the reception of Lithuanian art abroad and sketched current issues of migration and art of the Lithuanian Diaspora. In the final paper, MIKHAIL SELIVACHEV explored interdisciplinary links between literature and art history. He analyzed the visual imaginations in the works of the Ukrainian-born Russian writer Nikolai Gogol, unfolding numerous historical and cultural insights on art.

The conference provided a fruitful discussion on the local and regional historiography of art, opening up perspectives for a dialogue in the study of the rich multi-cultural past and artistic heritage of the territories of the former Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth and neighbouring regions. The participants debated the opportunities of investigating national and transnational artistic phenomena, assessing various influences and their penetration into local cultural milieus. They also discussed art-historical changing approaches, frequently revealing processes of cultural symbiosis. In the end, this conference elucidated cultural homogeneity as well as diversity in a region in which the cultural and intellectual influence of the city of Vilnius played a significant role.

Conference schedule

Opening address: Nijolė Lukšionytė (Kaunas)

Panel I: The Development of Art History in the 19th-20th c.

(Moderation: Vytautas Levandauskas, Kaunas)

Inessa I. Svirida (Moskwa): Saunders as historian of art and within the history of art

Jerzy Malinowski (Toruń): On the first lecture of Joseph Saunders

Laima Šinkūnaitė (Kaunas): Joseph Saunders's lecture about the painting of Simonas Čechavičius

Rūta Janonienė (Vilnius): The contribution of Michael Homolicki to Lithuanian art history

Elita Grosmane (Rīga): The development of art history in Latvia. Problems and solutions

Tamara Gabrus (Minsk): Research on Baroque architecture in the study of Belarusian art history

Oleg Trusov (Minsk): The development of the study of architectural history in Western Belarus (1921-1939)

Irina Cheban (Minsk): Nicholas Schekatihin – the iconic figure in Belarusian art history

Panel II: Issues of Methodology and Terminology in Art History

(Moderation: Aušrinė Slavinskienė, Kaunas)

Eduards Kļaviņš (Rīga): Art history in Latvia from the standpoint of methodology

Nijolė Talunytė (Kaunas): Karol Podczaszyński „Nomenklatura architektoniczna czyli Słowniennik cieszczych polskich wyrazów“ (Architectural terminology or dictionary of Polish carpentry terms). International terminology

Aleksandra Aleksandravičiūtė (Vilnius): The issues of terminology in the applied arts

Panel III: Studies and Institutions of Art History

(Moderation: Oleg Trusov, Minsk)

Vytautas Levandauskas (Kaunas): Michael Szulc's "Talk on architecture" and the architectural school at Vilnius University

Nijolė Lukšionytė (Kaunas): The School of Art History in inter-war Vilnius

Aušrinė Slavinskienė (Kaunas): Art-historical research in Lithuania between the wars. The institutional aspect

Alexander Lakotko (Minsk): The study of architecture at the Konrad Krapina Institute of Art, Ethnography and Folklore of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus

Marija N. Tumėnienė (Vilnius): Studies of art history and criticism in Lithuanian Institute of Art

Jolita Butkevičienė (Kaunas): Studies and institutions of art history in Lithuania after 1990

Eero Kangor (Tallinn): Scientific networks of art history in the Northern Europe in the 1920's

Panel IV: Standpoints in the Crossroads
(Moderation: Mikhail Selivachev, Kyjiw)

Swietłana Czerwonnaja (Toruń): Lithuanian art in non-Lithuanian art criticism. A view from Russia - a view from Poland - a view from Germany

Irena Kossowska (Warszawa): Reinventing historic styles. The perception of traditionalist artistic trends in Eastern and Central Europe during the 1920-30s

Raimonda Simanaitienė (Kaunas): Research on the applied arts in Lithuania from the second half of the 20th century to the early 21st century

Mikhail Selivachev (Kyjiw): Nicolas Gogol's "Live Things". Art and artificial surrounding in his works

Author

Odeta Žukauskienė is a senior research fellow at Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas (Lithuanian Culture Research Institute). Her research interests include the history of art history, issues of cultural identity, intercultural dialogue and visual culture. In 2006 her study *Meno formų metamorfozės. Komparatyvistinė Focilono ir Baltrušaičio menotyra* (The Metamorphosis of Art Forms. Comparative Art Studies by Focillon and Baltrušaitis) was published.

Review

Landmarks of Art History. The international conference dedicated to the 200th anniversary of the first lecture on history of art at Vilnius University Kaunas. October 14th-15th 2010, reviewed by Odeta Žukauskienė, in: kunsttexte.de/ostblick, 2011.1, (5 pages), www.kunsttexte.de/ostblick.