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The art scene of Latvians in exile in The United States of America from 1948 -1991

As the result of the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 and Refugee Bill of 1950, from October 1948 through to March 1952, approximately 45,000 Latvian Second World War refugees emigrated to the United States. In later years, the emigration process continued, albeit episodically. Nevertheless central to the study are artists who acquired their art education from the start of the 20th century through to 1944 before making the decision to become refugees under the influence of the events of the Second World War. The artists' decision is justified by the fact that from their first years in the United States through to the mid-1970s, they were the leading personalities in the organization of artistic life, also dominating the art scene of Latvian exile society.

In recent decades, the highlighting of the art history of Latvians in exile during the second half of the 20th century in the context of the traumatic past has occurred gradually, although it has been a relatively fragmentary manifestation in the range of interests of Latvian art historians and theoreticians. This circumstance can firstly be explained by the limited availability of research material in Latvia and the ongoing need for its thorough collation. Secondly, the overly brief history since the restoration of independence has precluded comprehensive research into various aspects of the subject matter, which has also largely decreed the lack of methodological models in the practice of art history when it comes to focusing on art in exile.

Given the defined problems of researching the art of Latvians in exile, the study question considered in doctoral thesis is how to interpret and assess the art scene of exiled Latvians in the United States during the second half of the 20th century, bearing in mind that the United States played the dominant role in Western art during this period, at the same time realizing the efforts of exiled Latvian artists to preserve and nurture the artistic values of the era of the Latvian Free State.

The concepts that mark the boundaries of the study in conceptual terms are exile and the diaspora. In the study exile, Latvians in exile and the history of Latvians in exile are defined assuming that exile denotes forced absence from one's homeland, which has been decreed by repressive political factors. Moreover, it is also defined by the difference of that group of people or individuals from the environment, in which they have ended up and with which they do not identify in terms of history, culture and social experience.

The experience of the Latvians in exile has been defined by a period of almost half a century, which not only confronted exiled artists and society as a whole with existential feelings, making issues of identity, history and national culture relevant, along with consciousness of threats of assimilation in the new environment, as well as the manifestation and evolution of these circumstances. Therefore, taking the long years in exile into account, maintaining a sense of community and representing oneself in the fields of politics and culture become important operating directions. Accordingly, the diaspora and the structures it formed become an important part of the experience of the individual person in exile in relation to maintaining one's sense of belonging.

Doctoral thesis is formed as a presentation and analysis of the art scene of Latvian in exile in the United States, as well as its facts and processes, which has deployed empirical, descriptive, comparative and social art history methods as the main reference instruments of research. Since the subject matter of the study is focused on identifying the impact of forced absence on the exiled Latvian art scene and the creative output of artists, sequentially it also determined the accents of interpretation of the sources and materials in the research work, assimilating guidelines for interpretation from current formulations of the theoretical thought of Latvians in exile and the Latvian diaspora in the context of visual arts and literature. One should note that a conceptual position in the field of global theory is largely based on post-colonial and post-structural assumptions and the conceptual layers developed within their frameworks. However, at the current stage of research into the subject, non-critical application of post-colonial and post-structural methods would not facilitate the attainment of the formulated study objective. These were rather the impulse for ascertaining new methodological approaches and formulating opinions in the context of the art of Latvians in exile.