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### **Latvian Artists Entrance in United States, 1948 – 1970. Latvian Exile Art.**

The proposed paper for the Forum offers a case study recuperating the history of Latvian exile art in the United States the following two decades after Latvian exiles were admitted to enter the US<sup>1</sup>. The aim of the paper is to reveal circumstances and qualities of art language shaped by the *exile effect*. The Latvian and Baltic State art history for scholars have been seen as the point of interests regarding its development during the Soviet period, but exiled artists have been generally marginalised or forgotten by art historians. This fact asks the question how to draw in the post-war art map exiled Latvian and more important Baltic State artists taking into account the situation of reshaped Europe map after World War II – Baltic States became a part of Soviet Union enclosed with the *iron wall* (1944 – 1990).

In this paper I argue that the Latvian exile art heritage can be understood as marginality of post-war modernism. Study of thematic, iconographic and stylistics of modern art in the US leads to understanding of Latvian exile painting and its developed *aesthetics of improvisation* - exiled artists using dominating art movements (abstract expressionism, pop art, op art, hard edge painting, minimal art) combining them with vernacular context can be seen as *outsider artists* beyond the environment in which modernity was defined.

The focus of the research is Latvian exile painting in the US bringing in to alignment artist generation who received its education at Art Academy of Latvia during 1930 – 1944, but was forced to become refugees due to dramatic events of World War II as Soviet army in 1944 enters territory of Latvia. The aim of the research is to gather and study information about artists who have emigrated from Latvia in 1944 and after the period in refugee camps in Germany (1944 – 1949) find their new homeland - United States. Even being far

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<sup>1</sup>As the result of the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 and Refugee Bill of 1950, 37505 Latvian immigrants were admitted to the US between October 1948 and March 1952.

away from home, being in artistic exile, activity of the Latvian cultural society was very high - exhibitions, concerts and theatre plays were shown, books, newspapers, magazines were published and many other events were organised in order to keep Latvian culture and identity alive as all the connections to Latvia were cut. The culture and social life built up was strongly linked with national ideas and based on values developed during the First Independent Latvian State (1918 -1940). But on the other hand politically determined separation from Latvia constrained to adapt new conditions of life and marked a new creative development in artistic careers interacting with the new environment – socially, politically and aesthetically.

The study of Latvian exile art in the US emphasizes the hidden scenarios and hybrid aesthetics of post war modernism; it illuminates the question of *parallel histories* with the objective to contribute to the exile art studies and move the discussion forward. Theoretical coordinates of the exile and diaspora aspect lead to multidisciplinary field. It has been extensively explored in postcolonial theory, literary texts and culture studies, but if overlooking the art discourse then it only in last decades comes to questions, terms and problematic of exile art.