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### **Decorative-monumental painting in Soviet Estonia and beyond:**

During the past five years I have acquired information and visited more than 200 murals in Estonia. This inquisitiveness has lead me to co-author a book on this topic and contribute an article to the sixth volume of *History of Estonian Art*. Despite this work I am aware that there are still many blank spots in this topic. I am further analyzing this field under the interdisciplinary umbrella of culture studies in order to draw parallels with multiple research methods and theories. The purpose of my PhD dissertation is to research the history of decorative-monumental painting of Soviet Estonia, to address the multimodal relationship between art and power in the Soviet Union, to study the agencies involved in the commissioning of public artworks and to investigate the travelling concepts which operate in the discourse of public art.

Currently my research is divided into three sections. Firstly I analyze the agencies involved in the production of decorative-monumental art: state monumental art commission at the Ministry of Culture, Estonian State Art Institute's chair of mural painting, art criticism and theory in those days and the Artists Union of Estonian SSR. My research questions are: how did these institutions and individuals support the dominant ideological and political narratives, what was their symbolic function in the society and what were the specific mechanisms of commissioning and producing artworks?

In the second part of my dissertation I utilize Mieke Bal's method of exploring travelling concepts and investigate in depth the following terms: monumentality, decorative, synthesis of arts, supergraphics and the public.

Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, my dissertation is about more than two hundred artworks and more than fifty artists whose role I in no way intend to downplay. In the doctoral forum I would like to present pictorial examples of how diverse this body of work is – and discuss the variety of methods which could be applied to analyzing such phenomena. My dissertation is inclined to what Lawrence Grossberg has titled radical contextuality: objects of cultural analysis

call for original research tools. In writing the recent history of Estonian public painting, my study by turns invokes art historical research, critical theory, empirical observation and semiotics of culture.

On the whole my goal is to underline the discourses which were active in the production of public art commissions: by whom, to whom, how and why was the public sphere, space and art constituted? I rely on primary and secondary sources that include public and personal archives, former newspapers and other published materials and my own interviews with the artists and other subjects involved. On the other hand I join a community of thinkers from East and West who have contributed extensively to the understanding of this topic: David Crowley, Nikolas Drosos, Michel Foucault, Romy Golan, Boris Groys, Jurgen Habermas, Janos Kornai, Stephen Kotkin, Moshe Lewin, Piotr Piotrowski, Susan E. Reid, Johanna Ruohonen, Katherine Verdery, Alexei Yurchak and on the local level Anu Allas, Boris Bernštein, Mart Kalm, Andres Kurg, Mari Laanemets, Epp Lankots and Ingrid Ruudi.

To conclude: as a writer and curator I am fascinated of architecture, sculpture, art in public space and the public sphere. I have been mostly exploring art and culture of the traumatic 20th century, but in doing it, my goal has been to shed light on the continuities, connections and overlapping between concepts, cultures, generations and histories. Although my dissertation focuses on examples from Estonia, the methods and findings may serve as a model for global art history which tackles the predetermined Western canon, socialist–post-socialist division and other tricky binary oppositions.

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i This is an early 'work-in-progress' title. I employ the phrase 'decorative-monumental painting' because it was used both in Russian and Estonian texts throughout the Soviet period to denote what might otherwise be labeled monumental painting, mural, public painting or the synthesis of arts. As for the periodization, I am currently considering the whole Soviet period, 1944–1991.