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Local and National in the Baltic Heritage Discourse

My dissertation is on the construction of cultural heritage: the construction of memory, knowledge, identity and nation, but also material objects – physical monuments of architecture. Rather than the objects themselves, I am intrigued by their image as witnesses of history and as reflections of cultural identity, and that via the lens of 19th-century Baltic authors. Therefore the dissertation looks at the afterlife and reception of built heritage in visual art, in the writing of art-historical texts, and in the practice of preserving and restoring (the remains of) these monuments.

I started my doctoral studies at the Institute of Art History and Visual Culture in 2010; supervisors Prof. Krista Kodres, Prof. Ulrike Plath. I am writing a compendium of articles (altogether five: four published, the last one in layout), to be accompanied by a long introductory chapter, the last remaining bit that I am working on these days. These are:

1. Baltic Heritage and Picturesque Ruins: Visual Art as a Means of ‘Inventing’ the Local;
2. Art History in Nineteenth-Century Estonia? Scholarly Endeavours in the Context of an Emerging Discipline;
3. Baltic Identity via German Heritage? Seeking Baltic German Art in the Nineteenth Century;
4. Monuments as a Responsibility: Baltic German Learned Societies and Construction of Cultural Heritage around 1900;
5. Heritage, Patrimony or Legacy? Baltic German and Estonian Cultural Dialectic in Facing the Local Past

(full texts and publication details available here: <https://artun.academia.edu/KristinaJoekalda>).

As seen from the structure, although the topic naturally comprises visual aspects, my approach is largely historiographical: it is essentially a text analysis. One of the articles does deal with the depiction of ruins, however, looking at the pictorial narratives of the local material past and their audience. We can say that images with their romanticising approach and wide circulation were the means via which local heritage became a topic of interest and academic research.

I find this topic to be of wider interest, because institutionalisation, popularisation, narrative construction and cultural ideology that are in the focus of my research, are strongly intertwined with parallel processes across Europe. Of particular importance for the Baltic Germans was naturally the German-language art historical discourse. It is one of the aims of my dissertation to look at the similarities with and discrepancies from this discourse. In case of being selected for the paper session, I would revisit the evident aspects of colonialism in Baltic late-19th and early-20th-century art historical writing in an international context, because since I published on the topic, new research has come out that puts my findings in slightly different light. The denotations of earlier Romantic concepts such as *Vaterland* and *Patriotismus* had altered by the late 19th century, while the term *Kolonie* also had multiple parallel meanings in German, ranging from the neutral, resilient, entrepreneurial sense ('mastery over nature') to the imperial sense of an economically etc. exploited territory. What were the approaches and standpoints of Baltic German scholars (particularly Wilhelm Neumann) in this connection? Did the German roots of the discipline bring about an 'othering' gaze that would allow to speak of a 'double colonisation' – i.e. both by means of the physical remains themselves ('German heritage'), and the ways of interpreting them?