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Art Academy of Latvia and its Role in the Development of Art During the Postwar Soviet Era in Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic

The Second World War changed the European map, erasing from it three Baltic states. It marked a time of changes in the development of Latvian art culture. Returning of the soviet rule in 1944, plenty of latvian artists expatriated to Western Europe, later migrating to USA, Canada and Australia.

Those who stayed in Latvia were forced to succumb to the ideology of the Communist party. This research deals with the problem of art education in the State Art academy of Latvian Socialist republic at the first onset after the war and till the first half of 1960's.

Art Academy of Latvia was established in 1921, by it's first rector, professor, landscape painter Willhelm Purvitis. It was a traditional structure, inherited from the St.Petersburg's Imperial academy. In 1944, when the Soviet occupation army came in, a great reorganization took place in the entirety of the academic structure. The better part of the in-house leadership was replaced by staff loyal to the Communist party.

This change of political system marked a breaking point in the education system, as well in the courses, including all departments of that time – painting, sculpture, graphics and decorative ceramic. The biggest focus of my research is the Department of Painting and composition.

The main stream of young soviet art was so called socialist realism – mixed styles of realism, academic painting and naturalism. It was very important to present the simply expressed, optimistic story of the reality of soviet people and show them as the tendentious ideological materials to the public at large, using art as a some sort of propaganda tool. Most part of graduation works of Painting department was compositions of this type.

Tutors, who studied in academy before the Second World War and endeavoured to pass on their professional skills onto their students, who started their studies in the post-war period,

and tried to retain the tradition of Latvian painting in future artists' works. There were 237 students, who graduated aforementioned department in the time period between 1944 - 1964.

The time between 1945 until 1964 we can divide in four larger periods of creative development : the first (1945 – 1949) period had retained many features of the previous period before the war; the next (1950 – 1958) is the zenith of Stalin's innings, when every individual idea was put down in the root. Third period was the time after Stalin's death, what clashed with so-called Severe Style in Latvian art. The last time period fraction was around 1961, until 1964, when the first timid trends reassembling conceptual art pierced through the iron curtain, separating the free minded and progressive world from the prison, created by soviet officials. Post-war period finished after inner fights in the Communist party of the USSR with so called Khrushchev Thaw in the very beginning of 1960.

My entire report offers an insight into the specifics of the post-war period, when in the result of the occupation, Latvian art acquired a two-faced nature. Externally adapting to the soviet guidelines, whilst retaining traditional Latvian art values in its essence.