

**Agnija Lesničenoka**

Art Academy of Latvia, Riga

### **Art Academy of Latvia Student Fraternity "Dzintarzeme": Latvian National Art Conservation Policy in Exile (1958-1987)**

In 1923, students of the Art Academy of Latvia founded a fraternity "Dzintarzeme" ("Amberland"). "Dzintarzeme" was the first academic type student organization of artists in Latvia and even in the Baltics. In the 1920s "Dzintarzeme" established friendship with "Athenea", the student fraternity of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, from which the example of organisational structure, everyday life, and traditions were taken. The aim of "Dzintarzeme" was to unite nationally minded students of the Art Academy of Latvia and to promote the development of national art and self-education. Their main everyday activities in the interwar period were literary evenings on the issues of Latvian art, academic fencing lessons, and closed and public art exhibitions. Most of the "Dzintarzeme" members were faithful to old masters and Latvian national art, which was developing from the second part of 19<sup>th</sup> century, and reached its full maturity in 1930s. This phenomenon is significant, because "Dzintarzeme" members grew up along with Latvian painting traditions, which is a remarkable heritage of interwar Latvia.

In 1940, when Latvia was occupied by Soviet Union, "Dzintarzeme" was banned. Part of the "Dzintarzeme" members were deported, killed in war or missing, the remaining continued to live in the Latvian SSR or chose exile. During the first post-war years, "Dzintarzeme" members who left Latvia were living in refugee camps in Germany or fled to Sweden by boats. In the late 1940s and the early 1950s, "Dzintarzeme" members were emigrating to the USA, Canada, and Australia. Although scattered throughout the continents, some members in 1958 in New York were able to rebuild and sustain the fraternity's life, gathering its members, organising traveling and anniversary art exhibitions. The fraternity's inner life changed its order because it had to adapt to the new circumstances. The fraternity lost most of its interwar traditions and became more similar to Latvian exile artists societies, and with the purpose to preserve and popularize Latvian national art. From 1958 to 1973 "Dzintarzeme" organised 15 art exhibitions in the USA, Canada, and Australia. After 1973 "Dzintarzeme" members organized their own art exhibition, mentioning belonging to the fraternity and its ideas. The expiration date of "Dzintarzeme" is not precisely identifiable. In 1987 the existence of "Dzintarzeme" turned into mutual disagreements. Also the generational change and members age was one of the problem, which prevented a successful continuation after 1987.

The aim of this research is to reflect "Dzintarzeme" activity in exile (1958-1987), focusing on the main factors of Latvian national art conservation policy –the ability of the

ideology of "Dzintarzeme" to preserve the values of Latvian national art in an international environment, the main tools for popularizing national art, the problem of generation change and the enrolment of young Latvian artists, who continued to maintain "Dzintarzeme" values in exile, and the development of art of each of the "Dzintarzeme" member in exile.