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ETHNO-GRAPHICS: FOLKLORE AND BALTIC PRINTMAKING IN THE PERIOD OF LATE SOCIALISM

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Abstract: Visual representations of folklore and mythology played an ambivalent role in Baltic art and society during late socialism. On the one hand, it was often a safe choice promoted by Soviet national cultural policy; on the other, artwork tapping into national and ethnic identities carried a subversive, anti-Soviet potential. Exploring folkloric themes, Baltic artists of the 1970s developed different strategies to navigate the cultural field between Soviet censorship, folklore revival, modern forms of expression, and resistance to sovietisation in their home countries.

The renowned Estonian printmaker Kaljo Põllu (1934–2010) created a powerful fusion of ethnographic research and creative practice to re-imagine Finno-Ugric mythology and build an alternative foundation for Estonian identity. Latvian printmaker Dzidra Ezergaile (1926–2013) laid the groundwork for an ethno- and eco-critical approach towards Soviet modernisation through a novel visual exploration of Latvian folklore motifs. Finally, Lithuanian illustrator and monumental painter Birute Žilytė (b. 1930) revolutionised Lithuanian childhood imagery, providing Lithuanian folklore and myths with bright and brave contemporary forms.

A postcolonial reading of Baltic printmaking during late socialism generates an interpretive grid for understanding the role of folklore and folklorism within broader cultural trends and political dispositions. A combination of folklore studies and art history might efficiently contribute also to gender studies and environmental humanities.

Keywords: Baltic art, Birute Žilytė, Dzidra Ezergaile, ecology, folklorism, Kaljo Põllu, landscape, late socialism, mythology, printmaking

Embracing a semantic and contextual understanding of folklore leads to blurred boundaries between traditional folklore and so-called folklorism, the second life of folklore outside the community of oral transmission. Thus, contemporary, authored, mediated interpretations of traditional culture acquire similar valance, directing academic interest towards the social and creative life of specific motifs, formulas, ideas and images. Mediation and reoccurring new interpretations establish folklore as a site of collective memory and a binder of identities. Various forms of art have been the primary vehicles for contemporary interpretations of folklore over the past century, from staged folk dances and choral renderings of folksongs to folklore-themed poems, paintings and sculptures. These new forms provide visibility and influence to traditional cultures in a modern setting. When artists interpret and transmit traditional folklore through their works, folkloric subject matter provides specific opportunities for identity-building and cultural or spiritual meaning. It legitimises certain creative expressions under ideological regimes where such legitimation is necessary. The latter was characteristic of the Soviet Union and other Socialist Bloc countries, where 'the folk' were equated to 'the people'. However, an identification between the 'folk' and the nation has been heavily built up since the nineteenth century, and this remained present under communist rule too. This double relation created and sustained the ambivalent nature of folklore representations: ideologically correct and at the same time resisting the Soviet colonial discourse on national terms.

This article demonstrates the results of research into visual interpretations of folklore in Baltic printmaking during late socialism – in the Latvian, Estonian and Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republics in the 1960s–1980s.[1] I use the term 'printmaking' synonymously with the historical concept of the period – 'graphic art' – for both fine art expressions and products of graphic design or applied graphic art. The applied graphic art was an interdisciplinary practice, often bringing together and reinforcing the latest influences in various subfields of culture. Consequently, these artistic discoveries also affected the field of independent graphic artworks (cf. Žuklytė–Gasperaitienė 2018b: 7). Importantly, Soviet ideology was more tolerant towards applied arts, allowing various experiments without attaching the label of 'formalism', which was the most typical way of carrying out aesthetic censorship.

My research is grounded in three case studies of graphic artists from all Baltic states: Dzidra Ezergaile (1926–2013), Kaljo Põllu (1934–2010), and Birute Žilytė (b. 1930). All born less than a decade apart, they shared childhood experiences of their countries under authoritarian but independent governance, the hardships of World War II and the following Stalinist repressions against relatives and compatriots. The artists graduated in art from their respective higher education institutes, began their professional activities during the Thaw period when ideological control was slightly loosened, and gained international recognition in the early 1970s. As such, they represent a new generation of post-war intellectuals, known as the Generation of 1930 in Lithuania or more widely by the Russian equivalent *shestidesiatniki* (Sixtiers) (cf. Davoliūtė 2016). All three suffered episodes of political censorship of their work, yet continued successful creative practice. Ezergaile, Põllu and Žilytė might be considered as rebels of a kind, who undermined the dominant art discourse, although each of them employed different strategies – partnering with science, focusing on children's literature, or just avoiding communist imagery as much as possible.

The late 1960s constitutes a key formative influence on the artists' oeuvre. With a slightly different focus in each case, the 1960s meant revival of interwar cultural traditions, exposure to contemporary Western popular culture, neo–avant–garde art and its socialist adaptations, the blooming of design, as well as the mobility and cultural exchange that occurred under the socialist banner of Friendship of Peoples. In 1968, the Tallinn Print Triennial was established, soon featuring all three artists among the participants receiving awards (Taidre 2018). The same year was marked by the violent suppression of the Prague Spring, when Alexander Dubček's so-called socialism with a human face in Czechoslovakia was replaced with Brezhnev's real socialism. The resulting disillusionment with the perspectives of the communist regime often took a national-conservative turn in the Baltic countries (cf. Annus 2018), encouraging increased interest in folklore, mythology and traditional culture in various forms. While Soviet authorities pushed forward with agricultural industrialisation (notably, through melioration projects and the destruction of many traditional homesteads) and urbanisation, the most popular works in Latvian and Estonian culture, just like in Lithuania, "started to express an anxiety and lament over the separation from the land that with time grew in intensity until it emerged as a widely shared vision of cultural apocalypse and national disaster" (Davoliūtė 2016: 56–57). The sentiments coincided with the global crisis of industrial modernity and also the rise of environmental awareness (Kaljundi 2022: 29). Exploring folkloric themes in art communicated a vital concern for one's land, nature, and national identity.

Informed by the recent advances in Baltic postcolonial theory (Kelertas 2006; Kalnačs 2016a; Annus 2018) and its application to both folkloristics (Naithani 2019; Ķencis 2021) and art history (Kangilaski 2016; Kaljundi 2022), I examine the appearance of folkloristic themes in the oeuvres of all three artists against the background of their subject positions within the Soviet colonial matrix of power. My focus is on the interplay of opportunity and legitimacy, ideological demand and creative freedom, taking into full account the specific Baltic situation, in which traditional culture was exposed to the double modernity characteristic of the Soviet western borderlands (Thaden & Thaden 1984; Annus 2018). Throughout the research, I have explored sources in the Latvian State Archive, the Estonian (KUMU) and Lithuanian national museums of art, and other art depositories in all three Baltic countries, as well as primary, grey and secondary literature (see references in case studies). In addition, I had the privilege of meeting Birute Žilytė and interviewing art experts from the relevant countries, as well as contemporaries of the artists. Ezergaile's case study is almost exclusively based on archival and museum material, as there has been no scientific or extensive popular research on her heritage. This article is the most recent contribution to my investigation into the synergy between the fields of art and folklore in Latvia and the Baltics (Ķencis 2015, 2016, 2020).

The case studies of the three artists are followed by an analysis of the cultural logic that governed their creative trajectories and possible generalisations that might be derived from these cases. Furthermore, gender and environment appear as two emergent themes understudied in art histories of folklore.

CASE STUDY 1: DZIDRA EZERGAILE

Dzidra Ezergaile was a devoted and prolific, yet elusive Latvian graphic artist. Her approach of merging ethnographic references and abstract expression had the power to represent the high variability characteristic of folklore. At the same time, folklore in her works was a marker of Latvian identity. Born in the capital, she was raised in various towns and spent summers with relatives in the countryside. Ezergaile studied art vocationally and often created folklore-themed pictures in her teens, and then went to study architecture (1947–1950) and printmaking (1951–1956), majoring in so-called poster art at the State Art Academy of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR). Her tutors were graphic masters of the era, the national–minded Pēteris Upītis (1899–1989) and Arturs Apinis (1904–1975). Both had been students of Rihards Zariņš (1869–1939), a pioneer of folkloric representations in Latvian art (Ķencis 2015).

From graduation until her retirement (in 1976), Ezergaile worked as a designer at the magazine *Soviet Latvian Woman,* a local version of a global Soviet franchise. Joining the LSSR Artists' Union (1962) and becoming secretary of its printmaking section, she avoided other public obligations, later also confessing an aversion to the infamous artistic bohème. Instead, the artist regularly visited state-sponsored artist residences across the Soviet Union and participated in a record number of exhibitions, sometimes as many as 14 in a single year (Kaprāne 2008). To my knowledge, she led a solitary life with her parents until meeting the politically repressed neopagan poet and playwright Vidars Balts (1911–1994). They married in 1980 and moved to a humble house in the countryside in northern Latvia, where, after he suffered a stroke in 1986, Ezergaile virtually became her husband's caregiver, combating poverty and the grim daily life of *perestroika* and the tumultuous 1990s. These circumstances heavily impaired the artist's creative and technical capabilities, reducing her artistic practice to miniature bookplate (ex-libri) etchings and later to small, simple ink drawings that she loved to bind or glue into improvised little books.

Landscapes were Ezergaile's favourite subject of both prints and watercolours. The artist remembered "[t]hose spontaneous, soulful works one could not display publicly. For commissions, I gave landscapes because it is impossible to make mistakes [in this genre]; there was nothing political" (Kaprāne 2006: 6). Most of the artist's landscapes are void of socialist realities; even a construction site is depicted as a serene view through the trees at night (*Night at the Construction Site*, 1963). The series *Our Sea* (1973–1974) does not hint at the achievements of the Soviet fishing industry, and a collective farm is represented by a lonely fish pond (*At Fish Ponds* from the cycle *Daily Life at the Collective Farm*, 1982). Her urban vistas mostly feature either architecture of long bygone times (e.g., the urban cycles *Kuldīga,* 1970–1972, and *Vecrīga,* 1965–1970) or decorative patterns of bridges (LVA 30: 6, 41: 27). After conducting multiple interviews with the artist, Dace Kaprāne wrote in her thesis, "The most crucial [aspect] in this traditional observation of landscape was to demonstrate the *characteristic* beauty of the Latvian countryside, avoiding the industrially degraded environment that was brought by the brutality of the Soviet regime" (Kaprāne 2008: 47). Ezergaile approached landscapes she encountered on her trips abroad – Lithuania, Estonia, Georgia, Crimea, the Moscow region – in a similar way. Visual rhythms and the linear etching the artist preferred allowed the organic integration of allusions to the folk ornament in works on almost any subject matter.

The highlight of Ezergaile's oeuvre is the series *Folklore Motif* (10 sheets, 1970). Prominently featuring her signature geometry of light, works from the series were widely reproduced, exhibited and included in museum collections, and received awards internationally, at the second (1971) and third (1974) Tallinn Print Triennial. The series consists of abstract ethno-scapes that integrate iconic ethnographic objects (such as a well, a barn, and a traditional dress) into abstracted natural space, with the multiple simultaneous positions of the sun gesturing at the timeless quality of the view. Similar folkloric elements and hints towards folk art spill over into her more than 500 bookplates, providing an interesting research opportunity for combined socio-semantic modelling.

The position of graphic designer at *Soviet Latvian Woman* was intertwined with the artist's creative practice in several ways. First, it was an opportunity to publish works in the most popular monthly periodical of the state, with a print run of up to 178,000 copies (Bērziņš 1972: 11). Similarly, Ezergaile's artwork regularly appeared in other monthlies (*Karogs, Zvaigzne*) and in newspapers.

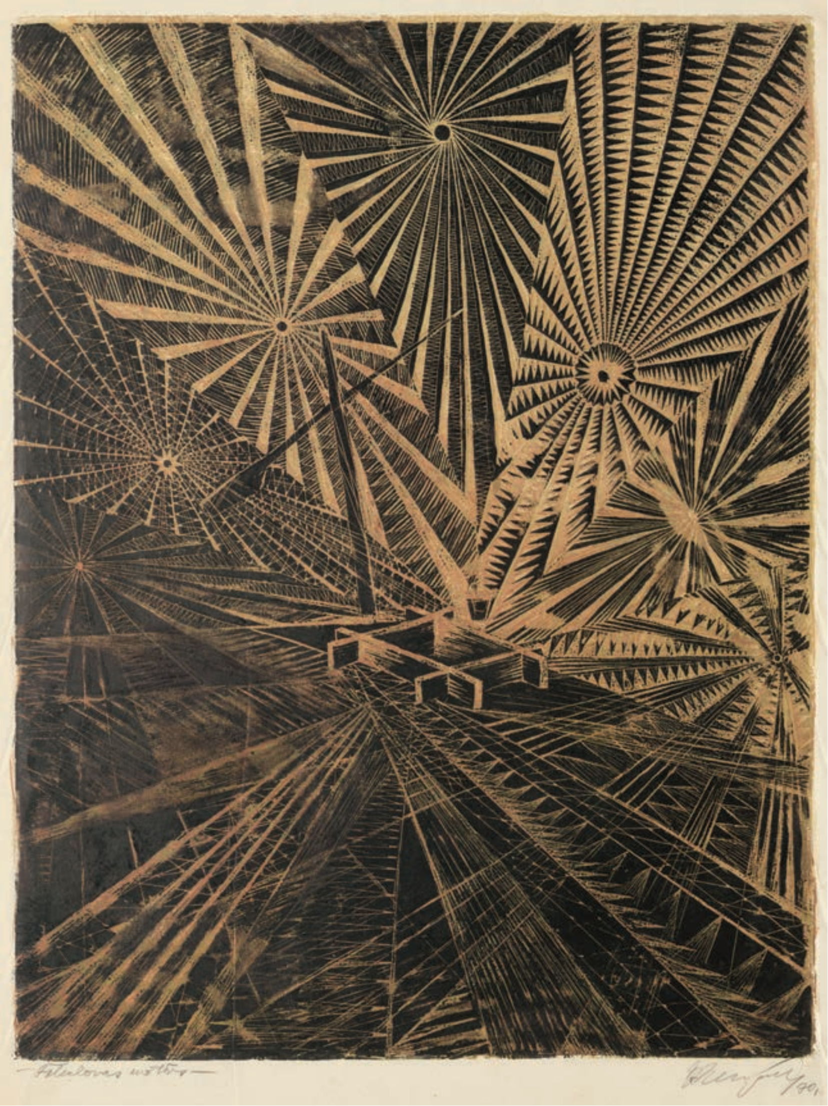

Figure 1. Folklore motif. *Dzidra Ezergaile, 1970. Latvian State Archive, f. 2697: 41-0003.*

Second, the preparation cycle for journal issues provided enough free time to engage in art during her daily routine and gave ample opportunities to visit artist residences and carry out organisational tasks at the Artists' Union. The third aspect was a practical benefit reflecting the particularities of the Soviet economy: the artist used the reverse side of the journal's cover proofs as paper for her prints (LVA F2697).

In 2006, Ezergaile received a gold medal of Artist of the Year from the Board of the Latvian Artists' Union. This article is the first scientific exploration of her creative legacy.

CASE STUDY 2: KALJO PÕLLU

Kaljo Põllu made the first and most influential introduction of Finno–Ugric mythology into Estonian art, leaving behind a unique artistic heritage, huge ethnographic collections, and a living legacy of dozens of artists who he influenced. Põllu's artistic merit was recognised with multiple national awards both during and after the Soviet occupation; his works have been shown in more than 60 solo exhibitions worldwide.

The artist was born on the scenic Baltic island of Hiiumaa in 1934. He manifested an interest in folk culture as early as during his studies at the Haapsalu Pedagogical School (1949–1953). In 1962, Põllu graduated in glasswork from the State Art Institute of the Estonian SSR (the Estonian Academy of Art since 1996). Before returning to the Institute as a lecturer (in 1975) and professor (in 1988), Põllu became a leading figure in the artistic life of the spiritual capital of Estonia – the university town of Tartu. The artist headed the Tartu University Art Cabinet (1962–1975) at the Department of Pedagogy. Under Põllu's leadership, the cabinet became "one of the most important interdisciplinary cultural phenomena in Estonian art history" (Koll 2020: 33) and a liberal hub that gathered together a circle of young intellectuals, organised numerous art exhibitions and informal meetings, and translated and self–published foreign treatises on contemporary art. At the same time, the artist actively experimented with various styles of creative expression (most notably Pop, Op and kinetic art), becoming one of the most radical, if not the leading, neo–avant-garde artist of the late 1960s' Estonia. Põllu challenged the dominant paradigm of Socialist Realism and the Severe style. Moreover, some of his best-known Pop art images – like the iconic *Cornflower* (1968) – combined local ethnographic references, ready-made images and national symbols like the forbidden blue-black-white tricolour of independent Estonia. Perhaps this part of his oeuvre can be characterised as avant-garde in form and national-conservative in content.

The Thaw of the 1960s brought relative freedom in establishing informal art groups that voiced ideas different from the Communist Party and artists' unions. Together with Peeter Lukats, Enn Tegova and several other associates working at the Art Cabinet, Põllu established the *Visarid* group (The Discontented, 1967–1972) and characteristically became its leader and the author of its manifesto. Among other questions, the manifesto drafted a blueprint for local and national identity in artistic practices, raising awareness of modern mass culture and blind following of international trends (Põllu 1997). The artist's pioneering relationship with modern art ended in 1972, after the period of Pop and Op art; at the same time, *Visarid* ceased to exist, and the following year the Art Cabinet was moved to less central premises (Kübarsepp 2005: 49). Põllu's nationalistic views and interest in folklore as an expression of national identity acquired a whole new quality in the 1970s, after the disillusionment with modernity (especially the Soviet variety) and contemporary art as its language.

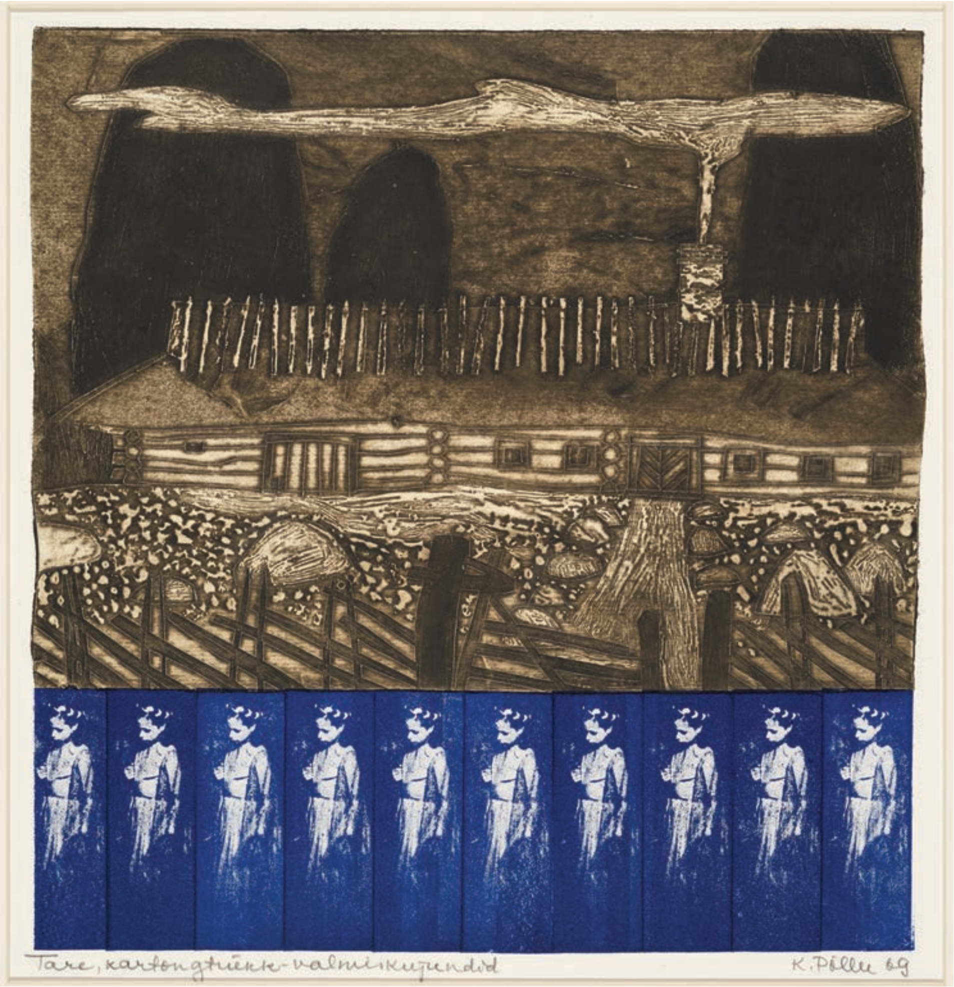

Figure 2. Tare *(Peasant house). Kaljo Põllu, 1969. Art Museum of Estonia, j 13440.*

At the beginning of the 1970s, the artist radically changed his artistic practice, turning from the neo–avant-garde to what could be called expressions of national-conservatism. The central source of inspiration and ideological core for the latter became the folk art, mythology and folklore of Finno-Ugric peoples: a range of cultures in various stages of nation-formation scattered from Siberia in the east to Lapland in the north to Hungary in the south. The artist has considered the personal and ideological reasons behind this turn in various writings and interviews (Põllu 1997, 1999; see also Kübarsepp 2005; Koll 2020).

Põllu claimed that there were two turning points. First, the Prague Spring testified that Western powers (and the culture they represented) would not save the nations subjugated by Soviet power. That initiated a turn away from contemporary art and neo-avant-garde experimentation. The further direction was indicated and inspired by a colleague at Tartu University, the renowned linguist Paul Ariste (1905–1990), who suggested turning his attention to Finno-Ugric folk art (Põllu 1997, 1999; Kübarsepp 2005; etc.). As a result, the artist famously claimed to have discovered “an older and more durable foundation under the barely century-old layer of Estonian professional culture – a foundation still undamaged by modernism, or the original mentality uniting all Finno–Ugric peoples” (Põllu 1999: 6). Focus on the ancient past was also somewhat safer in the post–Thaw atmosphere of increasing control and restrictions on artistic life.

Theories of Finno-Ugric kinship and cultural distinctiveness predated the Soviet occupation. A particular Estonian ideology in this field was developed by folklorist Oskar Loorits (1900–1961) and theologian Uku Masing (1909–1985) (cf. Kangilaski 2016: 44). Põllu’s change of intellectual trajectory coincided with a broader cultural movement in the 1960s and 1970s in Estonia, especially in Tartu, through close and direct ties within intellectual circles (cf. Kübarsepp 2005: 41). It was inspired by the most important poet of the 1960s, Paul-Eerik Rummo (b. 1942), and taken up by historian and filmmaker Lennart Meri (1929–2006) and composer Veljo Tormis (1930–2017). In the visual arts, for example, a similar turn from avant-garde to conservative interpretations of religion, folklore and myth was taken by Olav Maran (b. 1933) in 1968 (Tatar 2015) and by Jüri Arrak (b. 1936) a few years later (Taidre 2021). Ornament and psychoanalytical thinking formed a powerful symbiosis in the works of another leading printmaker Tõnis Vint (1942–2019). Friendship and numerous cooperations tied Põllu with another firebrand poet, Jaan Kaplinski, who eventually became the voice of Põllu’s works (e.g. Park 1985). In the ethno-federal Soviet Union of 15 modern republics, defining the Estonian nation through belonging to the Finno–Ugric world was a powerful project of counter-identity (cf. Kangilaski 2016; Kaljundi 2022: 26; Tatar 2015).

Põllu's fieldwork expeditions were one of his most important contributions to this project. Põllu went on several student trips in the 1960s, visiting the Kola Peninsula (1964, 1967 and 1969), Siberia (1966) and Courland in Latvia (1967). Soon he started organising annual trips to different regions of Estonia with the Art Cabinet's students, later reflected in his monumental graphic series *Estonian Landscapes* (1971–1972). Within the same timeframe, as a legal but highly un–Soviet activity, it might be paralleled to the burgeoning of fieldwork-centred and interdisciplinary regional studies in Lithuania.

After returning to Tallinn in 1978, Põllu organised voluntary extra-curricular research trips to the homelands of Finno-Ugric peoples with the State Art Institute students. Since 1994, the work has been undertaken by textile designer Kadri Viires. Over time, Põllu's expeditions came to form an interdisciplinary, art-oriented ethnographic research platform. Participants documented a wide range of data, from textile ornaments and folk architecture to folklore and ancient petroglyphs. The cultural-historical material collected was afterwards deposited in museums and served as a source for the research and creative activities of participating artists. This experience may have influenced some 300 young artists, designers, and art and ethnography historians.

In the early 1970s, Põllu had established his distinctive niche in the Estonian art world by his distance from the Western avant-garde in forms of expression, the specific subject matter of his works, and his mastery of the complex, demanding mezzotint printmaking technique. The highlights of his oeuvre are the so-called mythological series: four impressive sets of prints on myth, folklore, history and national identity. Those award-winning series reflect artistic interpretations of findings made during the Finno-Ugric expeditions and related in-depth research in libraries and museums. The series *Kodalased* (Ancient Dwellers) (25 sheets, 1973–1975) continues to explore the Nordic landscape but combines it with ethnographic motifs and mythological references to reflect upon the existence and worldview of hypothetically shared Finno-Ugric ancestors. The same approach is evident in 65 sheets entitled *Kalivägi* (Kali People) (1978–1984). The artist's ideology is emblematically expressed in the first sheet of the series: "Where We Are Coming From, Who We Are, Where We Are Going" (1978), testifying to a belief in a collective identity connected over very long periods.

Moreover, the image features a larger-than-life patriarchal (or archetypical) figure of a bard, a *kannel* (psaltery, Estonian national instrument) player, and a narrator-creator-artist. *Kali People* dwells on the ancient myths of the world creation but also includes a set of prints dedicated to a rustic folk calendar that could be considered a separate series, as well as prints on ancient Estonian counties and symbols of Estonian national culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In such a way, the whole series suggests a national answer to the questions of the first print. Art historian and curator Kersti Koll has concluded that this visual epic is one of the largest and most powerful series ever in the history of Estonian graphic art (Koll 2018: 26). With minor shifts regarding generalisations and precision of mythological references, Põllu also remains true to this approach in the 40-sheet-long series *Heaven and Earth* (1987–1991) and the coloured mezzotint set *Enlightenment* (1991–1995, 47 sheets). In the mid-1980s, the artist created a series of sizeable coloured cardboard print works, creatively interpreting ancient Estonian proverbs marked by ethnographic ornament and national symbols.

In stark contrast to Soviet historical materialism, the artist interpreted ethnographic findings as an embodiment of ahistorical, timeless truths:

> *We have to bear in mind that figurative folk art, the object of this research, as well as the scientific material brought back from the expeditions, is timeless in its character. At the same time, it belongs to the past, the present and the future, and focuses our thoughts on the main question: where we come from, who we are, where we are going, or, in other words, identification of our place in the universe.* (Põllu 1999: 7)

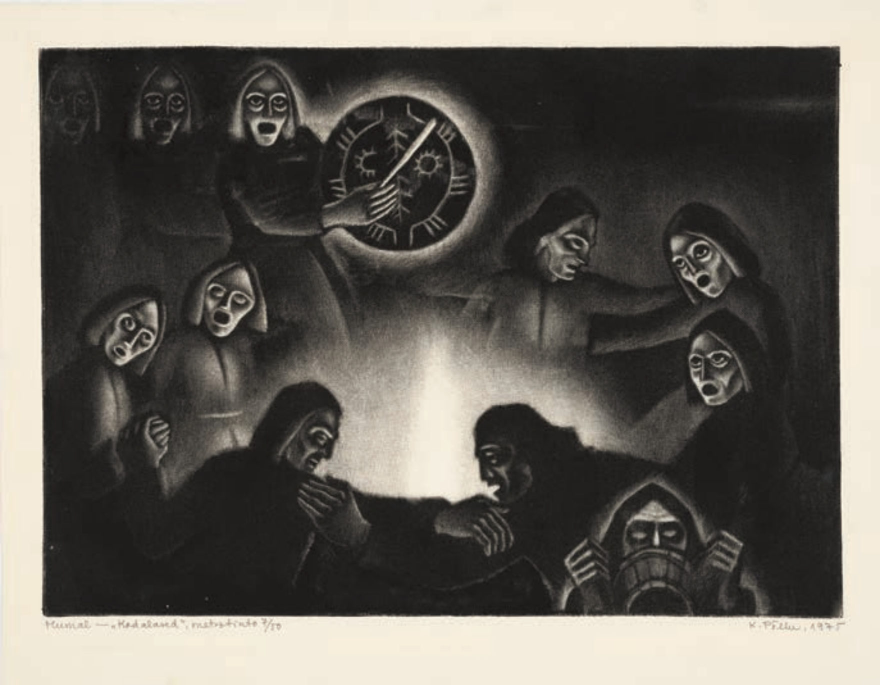

Figure 3. Humal *(Hop), from the series* Kodalased *(Ancient Dwellers). Kaljo Põllu, 1975. Art Museum of Estonia, j 54239.*

As such, it was a perfect vehicle for (trans)national identity-building. In his intellectual and creative progression, Põllu strove to uncover universal or archetypical content of folk art and narratives, paying particular attention to the oldest myths about world creation. In the artist's own words: "For in a deeper observation of folk art, we inevitably arrive at its most fundamental and ancient theme – cosmogony, or a man's attempt to define his place in the universe" (Põllu 1999: 191). He devised his version of comparative mythology along the way, referring mainly to post-Jungian scholars like Joseph Campbell and Mircea Eliade (e.g., Põllu 1999). Of course, searching for archetypes as the most basic, persistent structures of culture in myth and folklore was a fashion of the day. The artist resided in Tartu during the years that gave birth to the influential Moscow-Tartu school of semiotics, which was preoccupied with such subject matter too (Ķencis 2012: 98; Waldstein 2008: 113). In his artwork, Põllu creatively combined and interpreted a variety of ethnographic imagery, archaeological findings, petroglyphs, ornaments, and original visualisations of myths, folklore and imagined ancient life.

In this regard, original fieldwork was just one source. It was combined with extensive research in libraries and museums. Due to their composition, in most works from the mythological series, an important role is also played by landscape. Art historian Elnara Taidre has noticed an interesting distinction in this regard:

> *If Põllu has used a synthesising approach when depicting natural scenes, he has been quite precise when dealing with the motifs of rock drawings, archaeological finds and ethnographic artefacts: they seem to document the materials of the artist-explorer's Finno-Ugric expeditions*. (Taidre 2013)

Põllu's research activities, such as his affiliation with the field of science, facilitated a wide-ranging local and international cooperation with historians, linguists, anthropologists and other scholars interested in Finno-Ugric matters. Reflexively, that enhanced the circulation and popularity of the artist's works.

The late art historian Riin Kübarsepp traces Põllu's artistic genealogy to such national founding figures of Estonian art as painters Kristjan Raud and Oskar Kallas, both visual interpreters of the national epic *Kalevipoeg* and related themes in Estonian mythology (Kübarsepp 2005). Põllu mentions similarities between Raud's and his own activities in collecting data in field studies and interpreting folk art (Põllu 1999: 188). However, the scale of investigation and cosmogonic themes are at least two principal differences that set them apart. Põllu's creative output was inseparable from the active transfer of knowledge: scientific and popular publications, creative cooperations, and lecturing several generations of students. While his expeditions made the Estonian Academy of Arts “a centre of Finno-Ugric studies of an original bias, with the artistic work of expedition participants as one of its outlets” (Põllu 1999: 37), his artwork became emblematic of Estonian culture in the period of late socialism, too. “They were frequently exhibited, displayed on the walls of cultural and other institutions, reproduced widely in print media, and re–mediated in various other forms of culture, etc.” (Kaljundi 2021). Põllu’s success was a perfect storm of original artistic mastery addressing deep concerns of society related to identity and nature, meeting contemporary trends in science and art, and enhanced by his overtly charismatic personality.

CASE STUDY 3: BIRUTĖ ŽILYTĖ

Birutė Žilytė is a graphic designer who creatively revolutionised Soviet Lithuanian childhood imagery. Janina Grasilda Žilytė was born in the village of Nainiškių, in the Panevėžys district in Lithuania, in 1930. From 1949 to 1956, she studied graphic arts at the State Institute of Art of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (now Vilnius Academy of Arts), and a year after graduation settled in the capital Vilnius to live together with her husband Algirdas Steponavičius (1927–1996), also a renowned graphic artist and an illustrator. From 1963 to 1987, she taught at the Vilnius Secondary School of Art (now Vilnius National M. K. Čiurlionis School of Art). A springboard to recognition for her was her work for the children’s magazine *Genys.* From 1954 onwards, she illustrated numerous magazine issues, in parallel discovering her bold personal style of bright colours and surreal play with time, space and characters. In addition to regular participation in exhibitions at home and abroad, Žilytė illustrated more than 15 children’s books on behalf of the State Publishing House of Fiction (later called Vaga).

Her passion for folklore and many creative inspirations, as well as the general strategy of escaping bleak Soviet reality through the niche of graphic design for children were wholly shared with her husband Steponavičius. They formed a unique, closely intertwined duo of modern Baltic artists. Together they created two monumental paintings that form a bright landmark in post-war Lithuanian cultural history. The first one, made in 1964 together with fresco painter Laimutis Ločeris (1929–2018), covered the walls of a 60-seat hall at the Vilnius children’s café Nykštukas (Dwarf) at 24 Pamėnkalnio St. The café became an instant sensation, inspiring similar institutions in Lithuania and the rest of the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, the colourful frescoes filled with fairytale heroes, friendly animals and sunny countryside views were destroyed in the 1990s due to accidental flooding, negligence and a change of ownership of the premises. A digital copy of about 30 square metres was restored from photos under the guidance of Žilytė in 2019, on the initiative of entrepreneur Audrius Klimas. Currently in the possession of his Vilniaus Galerija, this copy, in many ways a simulacrum artwork, shares similar questions of originality, authenticity and ontological status with a restored digital copy of another series of monumental frescoes authored by the duo (cf. Aleksandravičiūtė 2019).

At the beginning of the 1970s, the artists undertook the impressive task of creating frescoes at the sanatorium Pušelė (architect Zigmas Liandzbergis) in Valkininkai, in the Varena district near Vilnius, where children with tuberculosis were treated. Located in a long narrow passageway, the painting consists of 12 compositions separated by windows and covers an area of about 110 m^2. The range of characters in the frescoes is not limited to Lithuanian folklore alone. Besides Eglė, the Queen of Serpents, and other folktale heroines, there is a dragon and a sea monster, Venus and a flaming centaur, zodiac signs and medieval knights, and The Beatles in disguise.

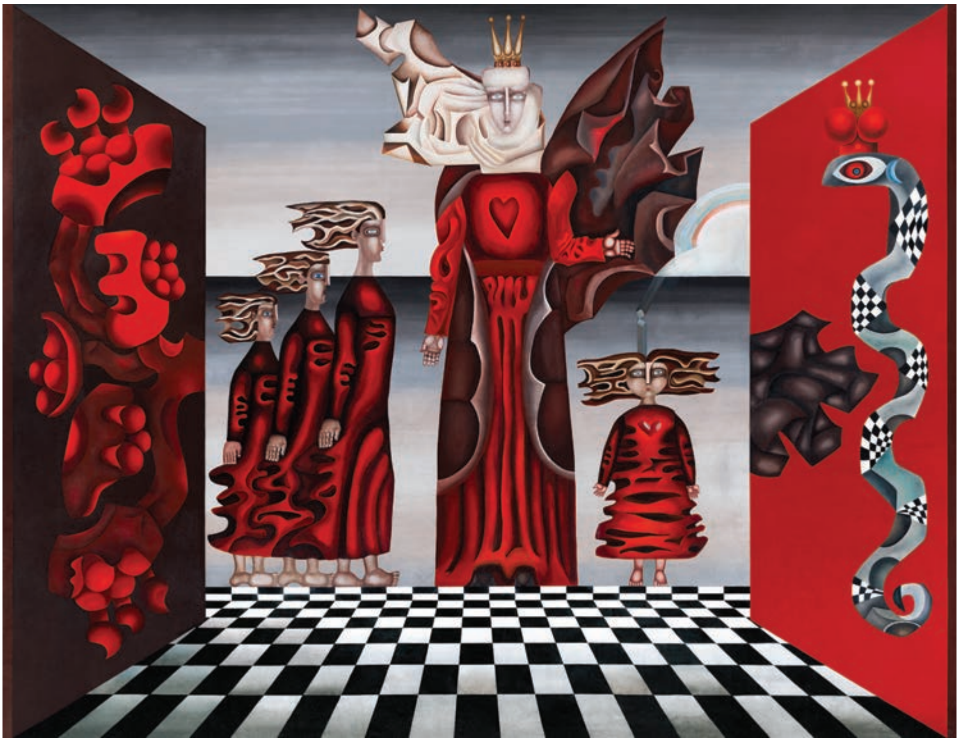

Figure 4. Eglė. *Frescoe at sanatorium Pušele, fragment. Birutė Žilytė and Algirdas Steponavičius, 1969–1972. Vilniaus Galerija.*

Art historian Kristina Stančienė notes that “the strict rhythm of the painting of the walls of Pušelė, the angry, constructive stylisation of the image is related to classical modernism; it responds more to the spiritual anxiety, transformations and fractures of a physically and psychologically mature personality” (Stančienė 2015: 49). This work of original colour and plastic expression has been acclaimed as one of the most remarkable works of Lithuanian modernist art of the second half of the twentieth century (e.g., Aleksandravičiūtė 2019: 77; Žuklytė-Gasperaitienė 2018a). In 2015, the Minister of Culture Šarūnas Birutis declared the wall painting a state-protected cultural heritage object. Despite this status, it has already deteriorated and is steadily vanishing. However, the artist participated in the digital restoration of a considerable fragment (230 x 1872 cm) that the aforementioned Vilniaus Galerija carried out in 2016–2018. Now the piece adorns the wall of the MO Museum café in Vilnius, printed on an aluminium composite plate.

Žilytė and Steponavičius shared a keen interest in contemporary culture, Western art, and cultural heritage. Their home in the Jeruzale district in Vilnius was an informal intellectual centre, gathering not only artists of their generation but also scholars like the leading Lithuanian folklorist and mythology researcher Norbertas Vėlius (1938–1996). The artists’ reluctance to take day jobs resulted in financial strain but allowed them to take every opportunity of staying at artist residences all across the Soviet Union, participating in Baltic graphic art plein-airs and taking part in ethnographic expeditions, as well as simply travelling to the nearby countryside to collect folk art, like the rough carvings of saints and crosses still on display in Žilytė’s apartment.

By mostly choosing to create illustrations for fairy tales for children, the artists created fantastic visions in a legal way. In the highly regulated space of Soviet art, folksongs, fairy tales and myths gave creative licence for borderless and relatively censorship-free imagination. Art historians have characterised Žilytė’s works as strongly influenced by Pop art and Surrealism (Žuklytė-Gasperaitienė 2018b; Korsakaitė 2011), as well as optical and psychedelic art, and belonging to the Lithuanian Baroque school and Renaissance visual poetry (Kisarauskaitė 2015). Repetitions and other Pop art elements align Žilytė’s oeuvre with the early works of Kaljo Põllu, while his later search for cultural archetypes might echo her investigations into individual subconsciousness, characteristic of the surrealistic perspective. Folklore and myth were an inspiration and a starting point for both artists. It is part, not just an object, of artistic practice:

> *I do not like a superficial imitation of folk art. National forms could not be artificially created. An internal connection is necessary with the spiritual experience of one’s nation and its artistic legacy. Folklore comes*

> *to professional creation through intuition; it can be understood and transformed in various ways*. (Počiulpaitė 1977: 11)

When Žilytė entered the art scene in the mid-1950s, the Lithuanian national printmaking style was defined by the use of crude, rudimentary forms and increasing diversity in interpretations of folk art, allowing one to speak of the "folklorist graphic art movement"[2] (Grigoravičienė n.d.). Her generation of graphic artists gave a new meaning to Lithuanian folk art, dissociating it from the blunt decorativeness of Socialist Realism (cf. Zovienė 2000: 204). One of the first books Žilytė illustrated was based on the Lithuanian folk song "The Wolf Sowed Buckwheat" (Vilkas grikius sėjo, 1964). However, references to Lithuanian folklore are integrated with other avenues that lead the artist toward national cultural heritage: landscape and history, state symbols and canonical literary texts. Akin to Ezergaile and Põllu, she addresses the native landscape by dedicating a series of prints to the Anykščiai region (1961) and Vilnius (1966). However, she did not choose to generalise particularities of a natural landscape in order to reveal their identity-building or spiritual potential. Quite the opposite, she starts with symbolic and narrative associations, projecting them on the highly deconstructed, nominal background of the land. A successful combination of patronage and particular gender dispositive allowed Žilytė to create something as unimaginable as a public display of forbidden state symbols of independent Lithuania. In a sanatorium fresco, a red raider holds a shield with Gediminas's Pillars, while the central part of the triptych *Žalgiris* features the heraldic Lithuanian knight Vytis. The triptych received an award at the second Tallinn Graphic Triennial in 1971.

One of the most popular subjects in Lithuanian art in the 1960s was the story of Eglė, Queen of the Serpents – an international fairy tale on the subject of animal husbandry (ATU 425M) turned into a canonical Lithuanian narrative through many artistic and literary renditions. It was often staged in theatres. In 1960, Eduardas Balsys composed a ballet on the subject, and a bronze sculpture by Robertas Antinis was displayed in the town of Palanga. A pen-pal of Ezergaile and Žilytė's friend, artist Petras Repšys (b. 1940), made an engraving of a version of the tale in 1967. Žilytė made a couple of prints of Eglė (1965) and her daughter Drebulė (1967) at this time, but it was in 1989 when a book with her illustrations of a powerful rendition of the tale in verse was published.[3] Eglė is just one of the tragic female characters that haunt Žilytė's oeuvre. There is also the folktale orphan Sigutė and Veronika, who is ostracised into suicide by society. Finally, with a happy ending but still packed with macabre details, is *Pasakos apie narsią Vilniaus mergaitę ir galvažudį Žaliabarzdį* (Tale of the Brave Vilnius Girl and the Assassin Greenbeard, 1970) by Aldona

Liobytė (1915–1985), a writer, and, from 1949, head of the editorial office for children's and youth literature at the State Publishing House of Fiction. Liobytė became a patron of young artists, both providing a flexible source of income and defending their creative freedom (Jankevičiūtė 2016: 116). Žilytė's illustrations for the *Brave Vilnius Girl* earned the artist a gold medal at the Leipzig International Book Fair in 1971, and the book has been reprinted at least four more times. She admits to sharing with the heroine a love of "the unknown, as if a forbidden, ever-opening creative space" that unlocks the reality of being (Marcinkevičiūtė 2010: 47).

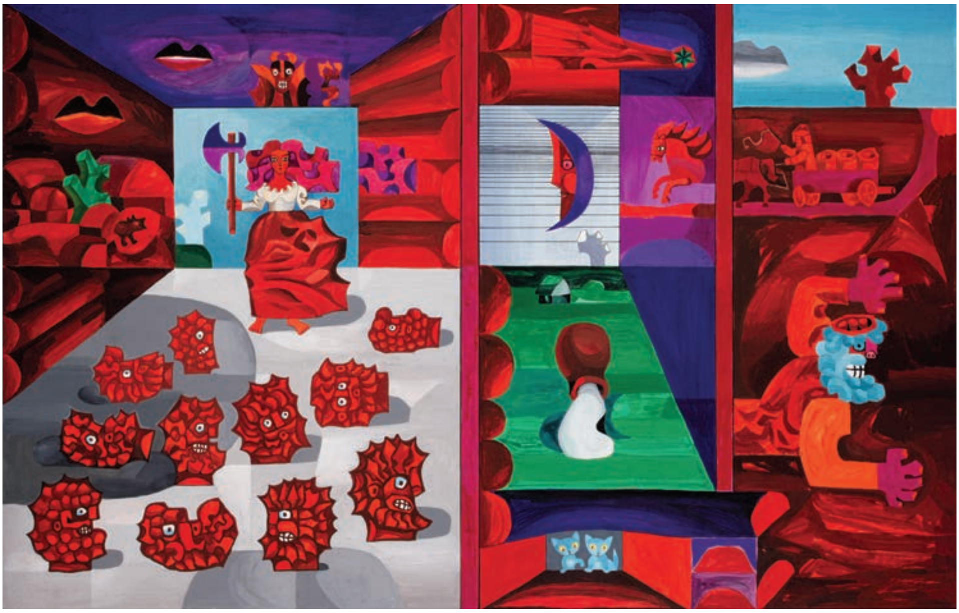

Figure 5. *An illustration of the* Tale of the Brave Vilnius Girl and the Assassin Greenbeard *by Aldona Liobytė. Birutė Žilytė, 1970. Viliaus Galerija.*

Žilytė was one of the few talented Baltic artists of late socialism who could genuinely distance herself from Soviet ideology. An essential precondition for such a possibility was focusing on children's images and folklore subject matters and working mainly in the sphere of so-called applied graphic art or graphic design. Soviet censorship was less strict in applied arts and thus allowed more creative experimentation and individual expression. In addition, Žilytė reached and influenced much wider audiences than many of her contemporaries who were engaged primarily in fine arts. Her influence was amplified by her longstanding teaching role in the arts, while her oeuvre became "an example and a point of reference for the later generation of artists”[4] (Zovienė 2000: 204). The eve of the twenty-first century brought public recognition of the artist’s merits: a Fifth-Degree Order of the Grand Duke of Lithuania Gediminas (1997), the National Prize (2015), and the title of Honorary Professor at the Vilnius Academy of Arts (2020).

In Lithuanian art history, Žilytė’s work is exceptional for its ability to constantly convey the themes of Lithuanian folklore in an original, brave and strikingly modern form. However, the artist’s heritage reached further than that, allowing us to locate it among other works of Eastern European neo-avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s. The creative method of subconsciously processing as many references as possible – besides Lithuanian folklore and folk art, Western pop culture and Romanesque European art, Peruvian and Mexican folk creativity, icons of ancient Slavs and so on (Žilytė 2014) – more likely suggests a cosmopolitan figure with unique Lithuanian quality.

FOLKLORE IN POSTCOLONIAL ART HISTORY

Folkloric representations might constitute and reinforce local identities as well as address universal issues of human existence. The contour of Soviet colonial history in the Baltic states points towards another essential function of folklore and folk art – the constitution of national identity. All three artists in the case studies speak about the spiritual essence of folklore that transcends time and can manifest through their creative practice. Furthermore, the practice weaves together folkloric representations with other references to nation like stately symbols, historical personalities, venerated natural sites, literary classics and the like, allowing one to interpret artist’s oeuvre like a worldview, a coherent visualised ideology instead of a series of motifs. The case studies indicate three intertwined trends in artists’ lives and creative trajectories that directly reverberate with Soviet colonial policies in the Baltics: nationally based resistance, escapism, and complex relationships with various trends in modernism as expressions of the art’s autonomy.

Soviet colonialism as a form of governance over the occupied Baltic countries determined artists’ subject positions and horizons of opportunity. In addition to influencing aesthetic matters and cultural processes, it also shaped the institutional and economic environment in the Baltic art field. In a postcolonial reading, the response to this situation was equally determined. Thus, searching for authenticity, the founding myths and primal roots of one’s culture might be seen as a compensatory trend typical of postcolonial culture. As relevant to the interpretation of at least Põllu’s views must be mentioned the non-colonialism doctrine shaped and expressed by his close collaborator Jaan Kaplinski (1941–2021), which tries to invoke non–dualistic indigenous identity as an answer to the modernity of all political regimes (Salumets 2006). Tõnis Tatar even generalises that "delving into the artistic cultures of exotic people led Põllu to radically doubt the enlightenment project of modern art. In the spirit of postcolonial critique, Põllu inclined to see modernism as a repressive ideology that levels and assimilates indigent cultures" (Tatar 2015: 278). However, the artist's representations of indigeneity reflect an inherent ambiguity. As art historian Linda Kaljundi recently indicated:

> *The relationship Kaljo Põllu and his contemporaries had with Finno-Ugric indigeneity was in many ways controversial. On the one hand, they differed from the Western gaze, taking a step further and identifying themselves and their nation with these indigenous cultures. On the other hand, they did not position themselves as indigenous authors either, but rather took the position of intermediaries. They remained at a safe distance, maintaining their position as the more civilised, modernised white brothers to their Finno-Ugric Siberian siblings, who embody the* authentic *roots of Estonians.* (Kaljundi 2022: 28)

Põllu remembers that "it was in an atmosphere of oppression imposed by a foreign power, which posed a question mark over the preservation of the Estonian nation and its culture" (Põllu 1999: 7). While his early works express a modern affiliation with the free world, from the 1970s, Põllu oriented himself towards the Finno-Ugric past, which far antedates any of the possible Estonian-Russian relations that were so emphasised by the official histories of the day. Both periods of his oeuvre are stylistically opposite yet share a common anti-colonial intention. Art historian Jan Kangilaski has pointed out in this regard that "the resistance to oppressive ideology brought together the potential opposites: formal innovations in the Estonian art of the 1960s acquired an anti–establishment meaning, which was admired by both nationalists and avant-gardists" (Kangilaski 2016: 41; see also Kübarsepp 2005: 32). Neo–avant-garde interpretations of folklore as national cultural heritage returned to the national discourse a modern sensibility, which had been lost during the predominantly conservative years of the interwar authoritarian regimes and the first two decades of the Soviet occupation. Still, the relations between modernist expressions in art and possible anti–colonial intentions of artists are not always straightforward. The history of the most representative forum for Baltic graphic artists, the Tallinn Print Triennale, reveals the 1970s as a time of obsession with the aesthetic sense of form and colour, expressive discretion and technical purism as means to the main goal of differentiation from Socialist Realism. The content and referential meaning of the artwork thus moved into the background. Moreover, various modernist trends appeared in the Baltic art of late socialism in a compressed manner, simultaneously and decontextualised from their ideological and philosophical origins. Artists drew contradictory knowledge from them and applied them to their works sporadically (Piotrowski 2011 [2005]; Žuklytė-Gasperaitienė 2018b: 5). In addition to her Western-like stylistic innovations, Žilytė challenges the all-too-happy socialist paradigm of childhood by invoking transformative processes of the subconsciousness and channelling existential fears expressed in gruesome folk–tale imagery. While in some cases intentional, the anti-colonial stance I read into those works might also be accidental.

Põllu, Žilytė, and Ezergaile demonstrate a dynamic variety of escape mechanisms from the oppression of Soviet coloniality and its ideological confines. While membership in their respective national artists' unions was mandatory in order to sustain themselves through art, none of the artists opted for the Communist Party member's card, which granted significant privileges and was a regular choice among Soviet creative intellectuals. Žilytė and Steponavičius freelanced and led a somewhat nomadic lifestyle, mirrored by the surrealist spaces of their works, which speak much more of internal than external reality. They illustrated children's literature, which seems to be the least ideologically engaged niche of graphic design. Žilytė confessed in an interview: "By illustrating children's books, we have created the freedom of artistic self–expression and the dissemination of unique worldviews. I draw illustrations for children as a picture for myself" (Korsakaitė 2011). Põllu more often than not chose archaic and mythical themes.

Similarly, with a few exceptions, Ezergaile stubbornly avoided human subjects, social relations and other references to contemporary reality. Converging pathways of escapism led to productively working through the cracks in the system. Põllu turned the dormant Art Cabinet into a humanities hub with unprecedented popularity and influence. Forced out of the latter, the artist designed his artistic-ethnographic expeditions that drew legitimacy and resources from the fields of both art and science. Due to their unique interdisciplinary design, the expeditions were not directly subordinated to either of the two domains or their control apparatuses. Ezergaile smartly managed time and other resources in her daily work to pursue her creative goals.

Coloniality should also be accounted for when we weigh the influence of late socialist artists and their interpretations of folklore. In short, the political power imbalance and control over free speech created a situation where creative elites played an exceptional role. Cultural historian Violeta Davoliūtė claims that it was in non–Russian Soviet republics like the Baltic states "where they took advantage of the limited cultural autonomy that was a key element of Soviet nationalities policy, the intelligentsia served as mediators between society and political power. Their works of literature and art, architecture, film, and performance constituted the public sphere, constrained but real, in which various discourses of collective identity took shape and interacted" (Davoliūtė 2016: 55).

Repeated invocations and creative interpretations made folklore a vital identity marker (or sustained it as one) of the Baltic peoples during late socialism. Põllu's widely reproduced mezzotint series, Ezergaile's direct access to large print-media runs, and popular editions of Žilytė's illustrations play the most significant role besides the visibility of artists' works at exhibitions and their influence through the art education system.

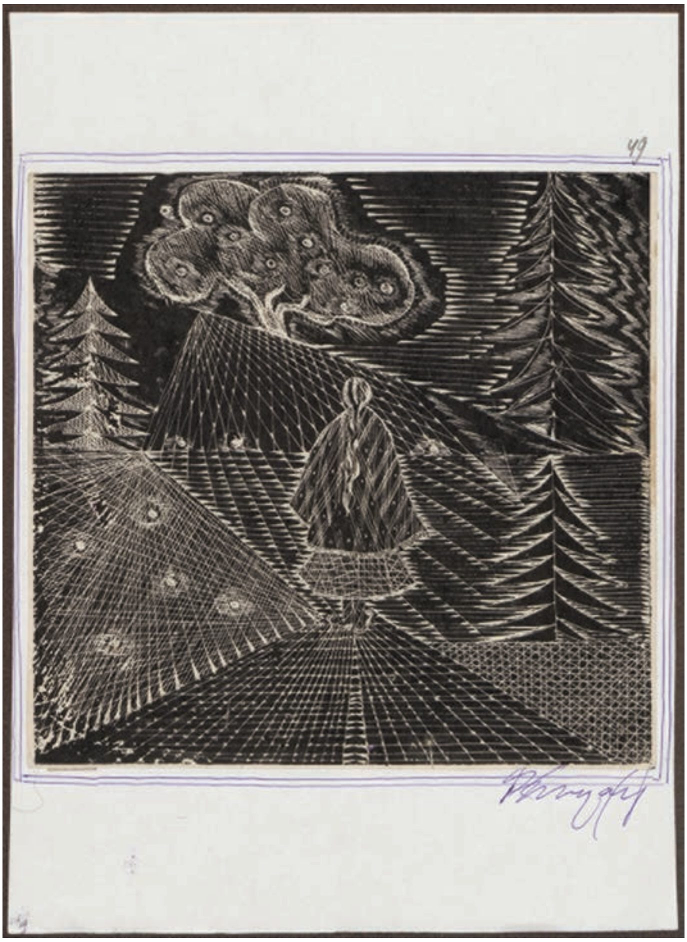

Figure 6. *Untitled. Dzidra Ezergaile, n/a. Latvian State Archive, f. 2697: 51-0049.*

GENDERED FOLKLORE IMAGERY

The Soviet colonial dispositif also determined the artists' subject positions according to the established gender order. Was this reflected in their visual interpretations of folklore? Although the Soviet state boosted advanced welfare policy and vigorously declared emancipation of its female subjects, in reality, "the Soviet system replaced classical capitalist patriarchy where a woman is economically dependent on man – father, brother or husband – with a socialist patriarchy where a woman became dependant on the state and the Communist Party" (Kukaine 2019: 106). Gender hierarchy was clearly reflected in the disproportionate representation in power positions, and in the art world, where most of the limelight was reserved for male artists, while anonymous work in applied arts was commonly carried out more by women. Paradoxically, this invisibility allowed female artists more creative freedom and opportunities to advance in the art field. This imbalance was also replicated in art criticism and journalism.

> *In reviews of art exhibitions, interviews and other materials, the Soviet woman, regardless of the propaganda's image of a powerful working woman, still maintained the features of a weak, fragile, shy, humble, airy and childish creature in need of protection – one that was common in the preceding bourgeois society – while art forms were, as if by invisible hand, divided into 'feminine' and 'masculine'.* (Melngalve & Cipste 2020)

Žilytė remembered that it was exactly this disposition that saved her from trouble resulting from including forbidden emblems of independent Lithuania in her works. Her former teacher, Head of the Artist's Union of the Lithuanian SSR, professor Jonas Kuzmiskis (1906–1985) had told the worried authorities something along the lines of "Oh, do not bother; it is just that girl, she does not know what to do" (Žilytė, personal communication, 2022).

Ezergaile's oeuvre features representational portraits of socialist heroines and generic workers, but otherwise, she favoured the emblematic image of a woman in a folk costume. As a traditional depiction of women in Latvian art under all political regimes in the twentieth century, it is safely decontextualised from reality. Gendered differences in the treatment of folkloric subjects are striking in the juxtaposition of works by Põllu and Žilytė. The Estonian artist's famous series present a clear division of gender roles. Limited to a heteronormative masculine gaze, his representations of womanhood are strongly associated with fertility, childcare and primordial Mother Nature (see also Kaljundi 2021). Some of his works turn to the decorative eroticism characteristic of the era (cf. Kivimaa 2009), reducing feminine presence to objectified shapes (e.g., *Hay Month*, 1981).

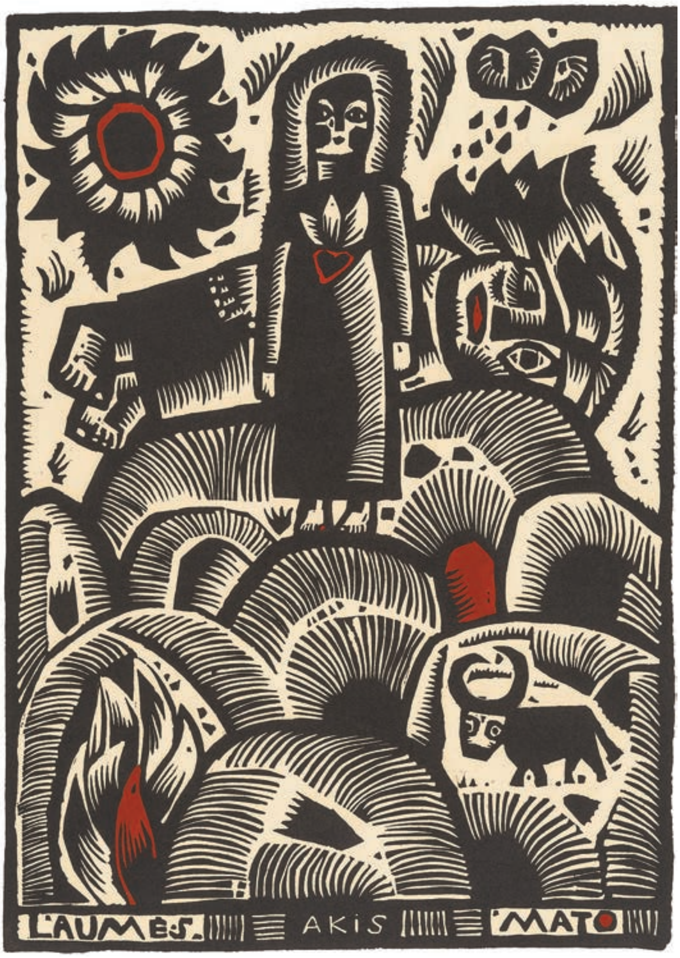

Figure 7. Sigutė. *Birutė Žilytė, 1963. Vilniaus Galerija.*

Žilytė's depictions of women transcend self-serving decorativeness. These are peculiar visions of gender, character, and destiny. Although in the case of illustrations, they are closely linked with particular narratives, the images still speak in essential categories. Art historian Erika Grigoravičienė points out the similarity in the treatment of subject matter by Žilytė and by another prominent post-war printmaker, Albina Makūnaitė (1926–2001): both "were drawn to the difficult lot in life of women as portrayed in stories, songs and poetry, and they crafted their sombre prints and engravings to reflect that grief and pain" (Grigoravičienė n.d.). Their works reflect their generation's experience of the war and the following occupation, and may have been a way of decoding and working through the trauma. The brave, beautiful, tragic female characters in Žilytė's images, so often against crimson, bloody red backgrounds, may be commemorating her murdered relative, interwoven with the artist's childhood memories (Žilytė 2014: 14).

Curiously, recent art history also projects the same gendered image of artists as the Soviet paradigm. Because of their co-created monumental works, Žilytė is most often mentioned together with her husband and sometimes also with their daughter, Daina Steponavičiūtė (b. 1952), also a graphic artist. At the same time, all research articles published on Põllu depict him as a standalone male genius, never mentioning his wives and children.

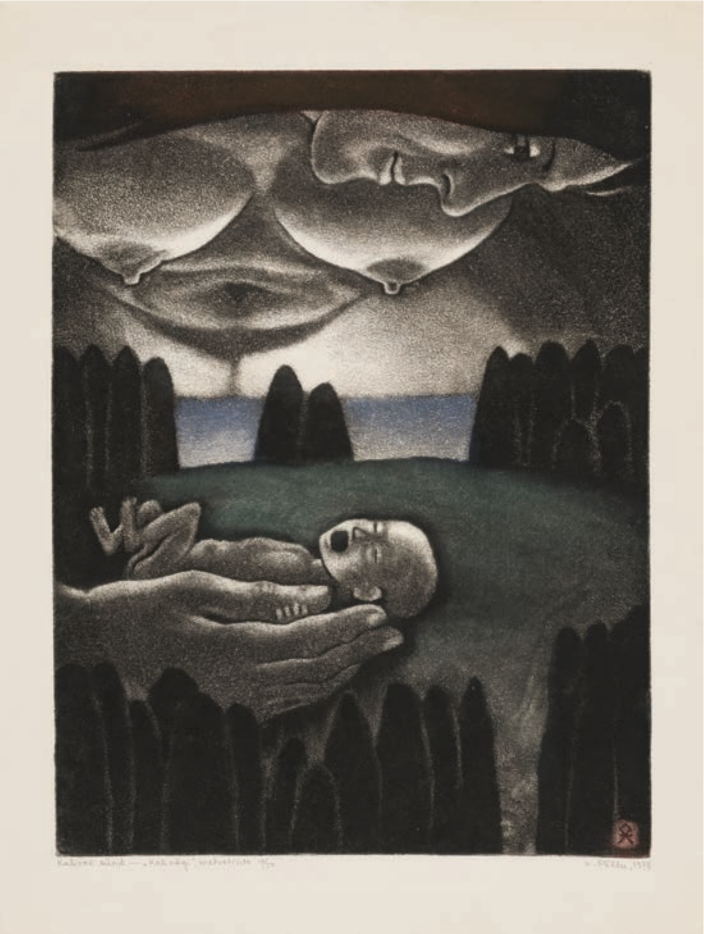

Figure 8. Kaliväe sünd *(The Birth of Kali People), from the series* Kali People. *Kaljo Põllu, 1978. Art Museum of Estonia, j 63401.*

VISUAL ECOLOGIES OF THE BALTICS

The prominence of nature and landscape in the works of Ezergaile and Põllu invites an ecological reading of their oeuvre, seeking possible connections between natural and cultural heritage, interest in folklore and environmentalism. In the historical context of the rising ecological awareness of the 1960s in the Socialist Bloc, in some respects pioneered in the Baltics, such a reading might contribute to addressing similar concerns today through discoveries of cultural history. Põllu closely cooperated with the Estonian Nature Protection Society (est. 1966) (Koll 2020: 38; Kaljundi 2021). While there are no other links, it might be mentioned that Ezergaile created several bookplates for the prominent Latvian environmentalist Guntis Eniņš (ANM 14306; LMA E4–20).

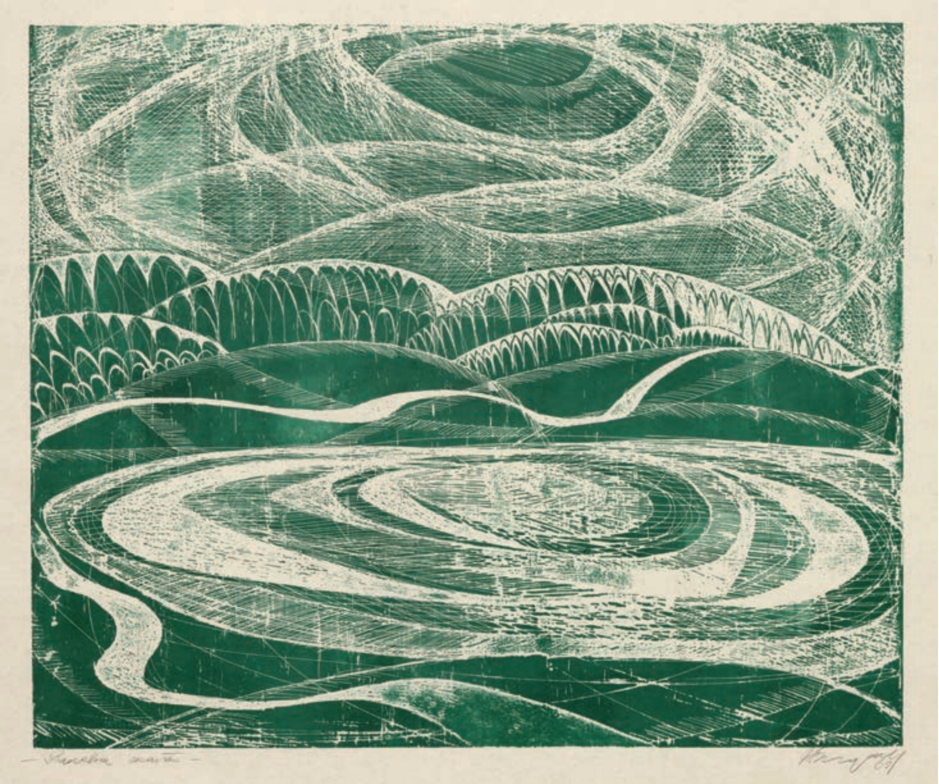

Figure 9. Sounds of the hills*. Dzidra Ezergaile, 1969. Latvian State Archive, f. 2696: 41-0061.*

When referentially connected to a particular site, land or region, artistic representation of a physical landscape is always political (cf. Kruks 2015: 11). In the case of all three artists, the link between national culture and land is certain, as their creative approach is based on embedding folkloric and ethnographic symbols in real or abstracted natural sites as identity markers. The interplay between references to nature and culture in a visualised landscape is a reflexive process of valorisation that generates and mutually reinforces the value-awareness of both components. Situatedness thus makes intangible components of the composition tangible and connects two trajectories of national identity. "Kaljo Põllu did not depict concrete places, but synthesised elements of Estonian landscapes, natural communities and signs of the climate" (Koll 2020: 37). Thus, balancing natural environments and creative generalisation, Põllu, in his series *Estonian Landscapes*, "seeks an objective expression of Estonian nationality" (Taidre 2013). Although primarily referring to the dominant approach in national identity building, his idealised depictions of a rustic way of life might be similarly read as a utopian, past-oriented critique of industrial modernity. The same is true of the ethnographic references in Ezergaile's prints. Kaljundi also points out the parallels with linking native communities with ideas of pure nature, as various indigenous groups became icons of environmentalism at the time when Põllu was visiting and depicting the Sami, Udmurt and other Finno-Ugric peoples of the North (Kaljundi 2021).

Imagining desolate natural spaces is one of the universal strategies of environmental discourse even today. Connecting them to national cultures through folklore might be the mechanism for a possible critique of civilisation reinforced by a sense of belonging and group identity.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of the cases of Ezergaile, Põllu, and Žilytė situates their visual interpretations of folklore within the intersection of several cultural trends which connect Baltic and global histories in the period in question. The back-to-the-roots, environmental and counter-cultural sentiments of the 1960s were shaped in the Baltics through an anti-colonial prism, leading to the valorisation of folklore and mythology with clear national and nationalist connotations. At the same time, public appearance, circulation and critique of folkloric representations were legitimised and shaped by the particularity of Soviet cultural policy that gave a prominent status to folklore matters. Following the loosening of Socialist Realist dogmatism of the first post-war decade, interpretations of folklore acquired a diverse and modern outlook that reflected various branches of neo-avant-garde expression. However, knowledge and impressions of trends in Western art and popular culture developed since the interwar period arrived through the porous Iron Curtain in a decontextualised and simultaneous manner. That led to a phenomenon which in the 1960s–1970s Baltics might be called compressed modernity – an original synthesis of various impulses rather than merely following Western trends. Due to the colonial hierarchies of taste and mechanisms of control, the dialects of the new visual language were pioneered and advanced in the field of applied art, and applied graphic art in particular. The latter's visibility was amplified by a sharply increasing demand from the emerging socialist consumer society. Simultaneously, a nationally articulated anti-colonial stance led to the rise of national-conservative forms of expression. Folkloric subject matters were easily accommodated within both aesthetic directions.

Literary scholar Benedikts Kalnačs once characterised "the turn toward history and mythology as sources of different, pre-Soviet or non-Soviet experience, simultaneously providing continuation of the tradition of the nineteenth century's anti-colonial and nation-building processes" (Kalnačs 2016b: 23). This allows folklore to be contextualised not only through its immediate role in postwar culture but also as a signifier that unites several historical layers of Baltic coloniality and decolonial histories. I argue that folklore might have a special place in collective memory due to folklore's mnemonic capabilities – it is designed to be remembered and adjusted to patterns of communication and the structure of consciousness. As modern collective memory is shaped through mediation, mediated forms of folklore, those new interpretations reaching broader audiences, are of the utmost importance for understanding the mechanisms that shape cultures and identities. Recognising the embeddedness of folklore in this context – as demonstrated in the case studies – highlights new opportunities to explore cultural heritage. A further inquiry from the perspective of trauma studies might discover transference and healing potential in the collective memory dispositif of collective trauma and folkloric knowledge. Meanwhile, discovering and intensifying links between natural and intangible cultural heritage might open new venues for efficiently addressing today's ecological concerns.

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NOTES

[1] Late socialism is a contested timeframe across various disciplines and approaches. Its mostly accepted borderpoints are Stalin's death in 1953 and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. It is usually analysed via three distinct periods colloquially called the Khrushchev's Thaw, Stagnation and Perestroika. For the purposes of this article, I look at the period as a relatively coherent cultural milieu in the Baltic countries, characterised by the modernisation of Soviet society, the increasing autonomy of the field of art, and growing national aspirations.

[2] Besides Žilytė, also other young artists, such as Albina Makūnaitė, Algirdas Steponavičius, Vytautas Valius, Aspazija Surgailienė, Sigutė Valiuvienė and Aldona Skirutytė, created a multitude of prints employing folk ornaments and motifs from folk songs, stories and related literary works.

[3] Created in 1940 by the controversial Lithuanian poet Salomėja Nėris (1904–1945).

[4] Including the most outstanding Lithuanian contemporary artist, Žilvinas Landzbergas, whose personal exhibition *Crown Off* (Vilnius, CAC, 2015) featured a video based on the Pušele frescoes.

ARCHIVE SOURCES

ANM – Museum of Alūksne District, Latvia

LMA E4 – E4 collection at the Art Academy of Latvia

LVA F2697 – the fund of Dzidra Ezergaile and Vidars Balts, the Latvian State Archives

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