ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	THE GLOBAL INVENTION OF "ART": RACE AND VISUAL SOVEREIGNTY IN THE COLONIAL BALTIC WORLD, 1860-1920 Bart Curtis Pushaw, Doctor of Philosophy, 2019
Dissertation directed by:	Dr. Steven Mansbach, Distinguished University Professor and Professor of the History of Twentieth-Century Art, Department of Art History and Archaeology.

This study examines the role of art and visual culture in the Baltic Provinces of Imperial Russia, present-day Estonia and Latvia, between roughly 1860 and 1920. This period witnessed the unraveling of a strict social hierarchy that for centuries had long incubated a Baltic German elite, while suppressing the lives and aesthetic expressions of Estonians and Latvians. After the abolition of serfdom, dramatic social, political, and cultural gains transformed possibilities for indigenous Balts, yet most scholars suggest that art and visual culture were not concomitant with the rapid progress of the era. I reveal instead how images and the ability to assume the power of image-making—what one scholar has called "visual sovereignty"—were pivotal to changing these social stratifications.

The dissertation examines the ramifications of the necessity to invent "art" when native languages possessed no word to designate "artist" or "painting" as late as 1900. Since Eurocentric models of art history have preconditioned us to accept the fine arts as intrinsically natural to society, we have no model to grapple with the reality that art could be epistemologically novel, as it was for Latvians and Estonians. Working at the intersection of art history's global turn, postcolonial studies, and critical race theory, I extrapolate the discourses of seemingly disparate but simultaneous happenings across the globe to reveal that the art world of the colonial Baltic was a microcosm of global nineteenth-century debates about race, medium, and modernity.

At its core, the study investigates how art assumes significance for disenfranchised populations. The first chapter reveals how indigenous thinkers invented "art" in relation to their spatial experiences, from public monuments to intimate wooden chests. The second explores why photography became the most valued of all visual media, while the third contextualizes how painting, once deemed foreign and culturally irrelevant, could suddenly assume viability by the 1890s. The fourth chapter examines how native artists deployed the conventional genre of landscape painting to transcend the contingency of race in cultural production after 1905. The conclusion offers directions for global art history, revealing the planetary ramifications of Baltic coloniality.

THE GLOBAL INVENTION OF "ART": RACE AND VISUAL SOVEREIGNTY IN THE COLONIAL BALTIC WORLD, 1860-1915

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my mother, Janna Lynn Cooper Pushaw (1956-2010).

Disclaimer

Acknowledgements

It probably comes as no surprise to those who know me that my dissertation is deeply embedded in a small place as much as it reflects my peregrinations across the world in the past nine years from Bloomington to Budapest, Saldus to Seoul. The seeds of this project were first sown while I was a Fulbright Fellow in Estonia and Latvia during the 2013-2014 academic year. It was Tiina Abel's exhibition "The Progress of Images: Interpreting Estonian Art and Photography of the 19th Century" (*Pildiplahvatus. Kunst ja fotograafia Eesti 19. sajandi visuaalkultuuris)* at Tallinn's Kumu Art Museum that sparked many of the ideas that would fuel my intellectual inquiries over the following six years.

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slavery, and race in a way I had theretofore elided. It completely transformed my art historical practice.

The University of Maryland's Department of Art History and Archaeology would prove a most formative crucible in which to forge the perspective and methodology I employ here. Thus I must first thank the Department at large, whose faculty, graduate students, and staff took my interests and ideas seriously from the start and immediately saw the value in understanding modern art globally while rooting it in local contexts as diverse as Tokyo and Tallinn.

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I am lucky that my committee members are not only academics I admire professionally, but ones whose remarkable collegiality and encouragement helped me in ways far beyond the dissertation. Alicia Volk never let me doubt myself nor the integrity of being an art historian. She is an example I will always strive to emulate. Renée Ater's enthusiasm and compassion came at a pivotal point in my own scholarly development, and I am thankful for her insistence to contend deeply with the materiality of artworks. I must also express my gratitude to Ralph Bauer, who selflessly stepped in at the eleventh hour when it seemed like red tape might have made the defense itself impossible. Finally, I am deeply indebted to my advisor, Steven Mansbach, for his endless support, his trust in my endeavors, and steadfast faith in what I do. Thanks to his tireless efforts to make the study of modern art in Eastern Europe a serious and legitimate enterprise, I can proudly count myself among

a vast network of scholars equally committed to advancing modernism in all of its cultural complexities. I am also grateful to have worked under the aegis of a scholar who shared so passionately my enthusiasm for Baltic culture.

And last but not least, I must extend my gratitude to my family, and especially my father, who has never wavered in his endless love and support of my endeavors, wherever in the world they may take me. For their endless love, I also thank Denise, Aleah, Chris, Jackson, Noah, Erika, Ivy, and Ocean. Rogelio, tú has cambiado todo.

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Introduction
Art's Epistemic Ambiguity

> We should be thinking about modernism in more global terms not so that we can reinvent it into something more politically correct or to align it with our present's obsession with the "global," but because this is what it was all along. In this sense, it is a question of *restoring* modernism.[1]
> Christopher Bush, 2016

> To write global art history could suggest relentlessly revealing the normalcy of that marginalized history, of that time, of that place, of that agency, of that particular exchange and production, and of that art history as (normative) art history. Period.[2]
> Talinn Grigor, 2014

> We do not have a word for painting in our language.[3]
> Friedrich Bollmann, 1900.

A smooth, reflective red granite column, opulent white furs, crushed brown velvet curtains, and fragile yellow and pink flower petals ensconce a mother and daughter in a world of luxury (**Figure 0.1**). At the center of this lavish, intimate family portrait is a single shimmering pearl brooch. Thick, discrete white brushstrokes coagulate into miniature sculptural forms adorning the surface of the canvas, conveying the delicate beadwork of the woman's striped dress. Elsewhere, comparatively thin applications of paint convey the soft, feathery texture of the young girl's chestnut hair. Upon closer inspection, the painting appears to be a play with rendering surface and texture in oils as much as an endearing family portrait. The pendant portrait of the family patriarch (**Figure 0.2**), with its comparatively plain and

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[1] Christopher Bush, "Fielding Questions," *Modernism/Modernity*, last modified 2 March 2016, accessed 13 April 2019. https://modernismmodernity.org/forums/posts/fielding-questions
[2] Talinn Grigor, "What Art Does: Methodological Privileging of Agency and Art History's Global Dispute in 1901," in *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*, eds. Jill H. Casid and Aruna d'Souza (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 140.
[3] "Maalimise nimigi puudub meie keeles." F. Bollmann, "Piltide ja wäljanäitusest," *Postimees*, 28 February 1900.

paradoxically ascetic background, radiates with a degree of finesse indebted to a skilled and inventive portraitist. In both of these painted portraits, the handling of brushwork is no less than virtuosic. However, Sally von Kügelgen's painterly opulence in these portraits belies the writings of her contemporaries, who described the cultural level of their European homeland as mired in "the most extreme aesthetic poverty."[4] At fault was the supposed preponderance of "photograph colorists" and "technical drawing teachers." Painters, by contrast, appeared to be almost non-existent. One writer born in 1879 remarked that in his adolescence he had "not even heard of using paints."[5] As late as 1900, a local newspaper concluded that the absence of painters was indebted to a more fundamental, epistemological issue: "We do not have a word for painting in our language. It is no wonder there are no men going off to study something without a name."[6]

How could a European language not possess a word for painting at the end of the nineteenth century? Our instant reaction to this question may be to dismiss the statement as hyperbole or perhaps to interrogate its logic; the sentence does, after all, use a word for "painting." Sally von Kügelgen's sumptuous portraits of 1896 seem to allay such worries of "aesthetic poverty." They attest not merely to the fact that Kügelgen was an active artist, but a professional, accomplished, and sought-after painter. In fact, she was born into a family of artists, one with an impressive lineage.[7] How, then, are we to understand this chasm between the material evidence of

[4] Janis Rozentāls, "Baltijas mākslinieku izstāde," *Latvija*, 21 February 1909.
[5] Eero Epner, *Konrad Mägi* (Tallinn: Sperare, 2017), 42.
[6] "Maalimise nimigi puudub meie keeles. Et asjal nimegi ei olnud, ei ole siis ime, kui ka mehi puudus, kes asja õppisivad." Bollmann, "Piltide ja wäljanäitusest," *Postimees*, 28 February 1900.
[7] On the legacy of Kügelgen painters, see Kadi Polli, ed., *Dresdeni ja Peterburi vahel. Kunstnikest kaksikvennad von Kügelgenid* (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstimuuseum – Kadrioru Kunstimuuseum, 2015).

Kügelgen's paintings and the rhetorical insistence from the archive claiming the absence of painting? The back of Kügelgen's canvases provides a hint as to what might have fostered such a contradictory attitude about the medium. On the back of the portrait of the family patriarch, someone, perhaps Kügelgen herself, inscribed in German: "Count Paul von Medem. Manor Lord of Eleja. Honorable Knight of the Order of St. John, born 18 April 1860."[8] While it may come as no surprise that the male sitter is a count (*Reichsgraf*), what is more revealing is the second title, "Manor Lord of Eleja." This title locates the creation of the image at the southern edge of Kurland Province, one of the three Baltic Provinces of Imperial Russia in the nineteenth century, present-day Latvia and Estonia.[9] The Medem family had owned Eleja Manor since 1753, and it would remain in the family's hands until 1920. Realizing that the Medem family controlled the manorial estate since the eighteenth century—their presence in the region dated at least to the fifteenth century—reveals that their wealth was historically dependent on keeping enserfed persons as laborers.

The indigenous population of the Baltic Provinces, primarily Latvians and Estonians, had toiled as serfs since the medieval conquest of the region in the late twelfth century. Arriving under the banner of the Crusades, Teutonic knights conquered the region, leaving indigenous pagans, as Joep Leerssen has succinctly narrated, to become "either enslaved and forcibly converted to Christianity or else

[8] In German, the inscription reads: "Reichsgraf Paul von Medem. Majoratsherr auf Elley. Ehrensritter des Johanrittersordens. geb. d. 18 April 1860," RPM-12329. Rundāle Palace Museum, Pilsrundāle, Latvia. I am grateful to Laura Lūse for sharing these images with me.

[9] I utilize the German names of the three provinces of Estland, Livland, and Kurland because they retain a nineteenth-century geographical distinction which becomes muddled in the English translations of Estonia, Livonia, and Curonia, which can refer to an array of different territories depending on the century.

exterminated."[10] Despite the change of *de jure* rulers of the Baltic region between Denmark, Sweden, Poland and Russia over the centuries, *de facto* power on the local level always remained in the hands of the Baltic German elite until World War I.[11] Maintaining their wealth through feudalism and participation in the Hanseatic League, the German-speaking elite ensured the concomitant "submission" of indigenous Balts for centuries. Historian Toivo Raun has described that the "lowest point" in the status of Estonian and Latvian peasants occurred in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. After a new decree in 1740 "the most insidious aspects of the lord-peasant relationship under serfdom was the pervasiveness of corporal punishment and physical intimidation," suggesting a similar relationship between Baltic manor lord and peasant as that between a plantation master and an enslaved laborer in the Americas.[12] Throughout the turn of the nineteenth century, it was not uncommon for enlightened thinkers to compare the situation of Baltic peasants to enslaved Africans in the Americas. In his *Topographic News from Liv- and Estland,*

[10] Joep Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 28.

[11] Baltic German influence in rural areas remained mostly uncontested throughout the end of imperial Russian rule. The majority of Baltic Germans left Estonia and Latvia after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, when they fled to newly-occupied parts of Poland, then part of Greater Germany (*Großdeutschland*). While Estonians and Latvians excerised most political sovereignty in the interwar period, Baltic Germans nevertheless retained their stronghold in many cultural realms, keeping alive even such medieval institutions—with their exclusively German makeup—as the Brotherhood of the Blackheads (*Bruderschaft der Schwarzhäupter*). On Baltic German ideas of belonging and home in this period, see, among others: Ulrike Plath, "*Heimat*: Rethinking Baltic German Spaces of Belonging," *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi* 23, no. 3-4 (2014): 55-78. Katja Wezel, "Transcending Boundaries: Riga's Baltic German Entrepreneuers in an Era of Nationalism, Revolution and War," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 48, no. 1 (2017): 39-54. David Feest, "Spaces of 'National Indifference' in Biographical Research on Citizens of the Baltic Republics, 1918-1940," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 48, no. 1 (2017): 55-66.

[12] Toivo Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians* (Stanford, CA: The Hoover Institute and Stanford University Press, 2001), 42.

1774-1781, Baltic-German pastor August Huppel explained the selling of Baltic peasants:

> [Those without assigned duties] and their children are sometimes sold or traded for other things – horses, dogs, pipe bowls, etc. Peasants here are not as expensive as [Africans] in the American colonies. A single male goes for 30-50 rubles; if he is trained and has a good skill, is a cook, a weaver, etc., he might fetch 100 rubles. A family (consisting of peasants and children) costs the same. A maidservant seldom sells more than 10 rubles, a child for approximately four rubles.[13]

It is no coincidence that Hupel's description resembles the operations of chattel slavery. Global abolitionist movements of the turn of the nineteenth century directly influenced discourse on serfdom in the Baltic Provinces. As we will see, "slave" rather than "serf" is the word many nineteenth-century Balts would deploy to describe their historical status. Therefore, it is important to understand that scholars have routinely contended that the distinction between serfdom and slavery in the nineteenth century is one of "hairsplitting determination."[14] The word "serf" often conjures a medieval European peasant who is tied to the land, but "serfdom" in the Russian Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries became indistinguishable from slavery elsewhere in the globe.[15] Nevertheless, there was an important distinction between Baltic serfdom and American slavery. Estonians and Latvians were never traumatically uprooted from their native land. Akin to white plantantion owners in the Americas, so, too, did Baltic Germans view their unfree laborers as inherently inferior. Even after the abolition of Baltic serfdom in the three provinces between 1816 and 1820 through tsarist decree, it

[13] Quoted in Maruta Lietiņa Ray, "Recovering the Voice of the Oppressed: Master, Slave, and Serf in the Baltic Provinces," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 34, no. 1 (2003): 5.
[14] Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 43.
[15] Marten Seppel, "Three definite conclusions on indefinable serfdom," *Chronica: Annual of the Institute of History of the University of Szeged* 9-10 (2011):213-219.

remained a widely held belief among Baltic Germans that "Latvians and Estonians by their nature are not equal to Germans, but have lower status; Germans are created to rule Latvians and Estonians, but Latvians and Estonians—to serve them and to be their slaves."[16]

The medieval conquest of the Baltic region, the last part of Europe to adopt a monotheistic Abrahamic faith, laid the groundwork for other European powers who would deploy the Teutonic model of Christian conquest and conversion in the Baltic across the Americas at the turn of the sixteenth century.[17] Postcolonial theorist Walter Mignolo has argued that globalization as we know it today can trace its roots to the birth of a Eurocentric capitalism in the sixteenth century, one dependent on perpetuating and codifying inequalities between Europeans, indigenous Americans, and Africans.[18] Anibal Quijano similarly argues that race emerged as an invention in this period to categorize and normalize these colonial inequalities.[19] In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the period under investigation here, the terms "race," "nation," "folk," and "people" were often interchangeable, connoting culturally and scientifically demonstrable distinctions. Melissa F. Weiner has argued that the terms "ethnic" and "ethnicity" (like "nation," "folk," and "people") "[fail] to capture important power differentials" inherent within the concept of race. She continues,

[16] Jānis Bērziņš, "No vācu un latviešu attiecību vēstures," *Burtnieks* 1 (1935): 37. Quoted in Pauls Daija, *Literary History and Popular Enlightenment in Latvian Culture* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017) 13.
[17] James Brundage, "The Thirteenth-Century Livonian Crusade: Henricus de Lettis and the First Legatine Mission of Bishop William of Modena," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Neue Folge* 20, no. 1 (March 1972): 1-9.
[18] Walter Mignolo, The *Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).
[19] Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America," *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 215-232.

"regardless of the term used, power to both shape one's own identity and life outcomes and to control others, must be acknowledged. Avoiding 'race' by calling groups 'ethnic' does not diminish the consequences of racialization, exploitation, oppression, or essentializing dehumanization, particularly given the many ways in which ethnic groups can be racialized."[20] Given Weiner's insistence on the significance of power relations within creating ideas of race, it is clear we must view the social hierarchy of the Baltic Provinces as distinctly racialized. Indeed, there is now wide scholarly consensus that the Baltic region operated within a colonial framework dependent on a strict racialized social hierarchy of power.[21] In the period under investigation here, "race" was the most common word in German-language literature discussing the region, its populace, and its culture.

In this colonial context we can begin to understand how Sally von Kügelgen could paint opulent portraits of the Baltic German Medem family of Eleja Manor, while an Estonian or Latvian writer could lament the enduring alterity of painting

[20] Melissa F. Weiner, "Towards a Critical Global Race Theory," *Sociology Compass* 6, no. 4 (2012): 333.

[21] Karl E. Jirgens has been among the earliest and most outspoken advocates about the necessity of deploying a postcolonial lens to understand Baltic culture. "The Balts can be analyzed in postcolonial terms not only as victims of the Soviet occupation, but as victims of earlier imperialist occupations spanning over one thousand years at the hands of the Teutonic Knights, the German invaders, Tsarist Russian forces, and so on […] To exclude Balts from any postcolonial discussion not only overlooks ten centuries of recurring colonial activity, but extends the effects of oppression against these nations by deflecting or muzzling open debate. […] I nonetheless find it disturbing that Baltic scholars are in some ways obliged or compelled to prove what appear to be self-evident postcolonial conditions in the Baltic Region." Karl E. Jirgens, "Fusions of Discourse: Postcolonial/Postmodern Horizons in Baltic Culture," *Baltic Postcolonialism*, ed. Violeta Kelertas (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2006), 47. Jaan Undusk, "Kolm võimalust kirjutada eestlaste ajalugu. Merkel, Jakobson, Hurt," *Keel ja Kirjandus*, no. 11 (2007): 721–734; no. 12 (2007): 797–811. Ulrike Plath,"'Euroopa viimased metslased': Eestlased saksa koloniaaldiskursis 1770-1870," in *Rahvuskultuur ja tema teised*, ed. Rein Undusk (Tallinn-Tartu: Underi ja Tuglase Kirjanduskeskus, 2006), 37-65. Ulrike Plath, *Esten und Deutsche in den baltischen Provinzen Russlands. Fremdheitskonstruktionen, Lebenswelten, Kolonialphantasien 1750–1850* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011); Pauls Daija, *Apgaismība un kultūrpārnese. Latviešu laicīgās literatūras tapšana* (Rīga: LU Literatūras, folkloras un mākslas institūts, 2013); Ivars Ījabs, "Another Baltic Postcolonialism: Young Latvians, Baltic Germans, and the Emergence of the Latvian National Movement," *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 42, no. 1 (2014): 88-107.

through the turn of the twentieth century. Since social class was so intimately intertwined with race, and race predetermined a person's fate in the Baltic Provinces throughout the nineteenth century, it is tempting to ascribe the "absence" of painting as a mere indication of the social status of Estonians and Latvians. In this model, the sudden appearance of Latvian and Estonian professional painters in the 1890s is commensurate with the dramatic new social, political, and cultural gains typical of the nineteenth-century national movements of smaller European peoples.[22] Within this teleological framework of progress, art historians insist on a puzzling paradox; they argue that the first generation Latvians and Estonians who became artists in the 1890s had no contact with images and possessed no experience with art. As late as 2017, one could write:

> People have wondered how the first generation of Estonian [and Latvian] artists immediately turned out to be modernists. Why did they jump from nonexistence straight into modernity without going through the more traditional developments in the meantime? It can be argued that the reason for this was the absence of *cultural oppression*: they had not grown up in the midst of art and for this reason, linking into modernity was easier. They had not even seen many pictures, to say nothing of *art*. They had no experience whatsoever. The art world had not taught them the fundamentals of good taste or the special characteristics of aesthetic pleasure. They could start almost from zero.[23]

In truth, Estonian and Latvian artists did not "jump from nonexistence." In the second half of the nineteenth century, Estonians and Latvians could both claim at

[22] Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[23] "On imestatud, kuidas esimene eestlastest kunstnikepõlvkond kohe moodsusesse hüppas, käimata vahepeal läbi traditsioonilisemaid radu. Selle põhjuseks võib väita *kultuurilise ahistatuse* puudumist: nad ei olnud üles kasvanud kunsti keskel ning seetõttu oli lülitumine moodsusesse kergem. Tulevased kunstnikud ei olnud näinud eriti piltegi, rääkimata *kunstist*. Neil puudus igasugune kogemus. Kunstimaailm ei olnud neile õpetanud hea maitse aluseid või esteetilise naudingu eripära. Alustada võis peaaegu nullist." Epner, *Konrad Mägi*, 96. Emphasis in original text.

least five artists respectively.[24] To be sure, five to six painters or sculptors did not an art world make, especially since most of these artists spent the majority of their careers outside of the Baltic Provinces. Of course, Baltic German artists were active participants in the cultural life of their multiethnic homeland, displaying their works in public venues, founding new museum and exhibition spaces in various Baltic towns, and giving lectures on art and its history. Tourists interested in art from elsewhere in the Russian Empire and Europe would often stop in Riga, Tallinn, and Tartu. Clearly, there were opportunities for Latvians and Estonians to see and learn about paintings, sculptures, and prints, among other media. Nonetheless, it is well worth asking why were these opportunities not concomitant with the rapid social progress of the era?

Developing concurrently with the display of art in the Baltic Provinces was a fiercely debated and ever-growing indigenous discourse on visual production. In the 1870s and 1880s Estonian and Latvian newspapers debated the literal meaning of the word "art."[25] By the 1890s, Latvians and Estonians were astonished to learn they "even had a few young talented painters."[26] In the wake of World War I, the abstraction of Baltic modernists graced the covers of international avant-garde journals, also finding critical acclaim at home, even in the smallest of Baltic towns.[27]

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[24] Estonian artists include the painters Johann Berendhoff (1827-1873), Johann Köler (1826-1899), and Karl Ludwig Maibach (1833-1889), the printmaker Eduard Magnus Jakobson (1847-1903), the sculptors August Weizenberg (1837-1921) and Amandus Adamson (1855-1929). Among Latvians, the painters Jūlijs Feders (1838-1909), Kārlis Hūns (1831-1877), and Jānis Staņislavs Roze (1823-1897) and the printmaker Augusts Daugelis (1830-1899) all garnered various levels of fame domestically as well as abroad in the second half of the nineteenth century.

[25] See chapter 1.

[26] "Latviešu etnogrāfiskā izstādē. II," *Latviešu Avīzes*, 4 September 1896.

[27] August Alle, "Kunstinäitus Wõrun," *Waba Maa*, 23 February 1923. Gladys Fabre, ed., *Electromagentic: Modern Art in Northern Europe, 1918-1931* (Amsterdam: Hatje Cantz, 2013).

Linear as this progression may seem, it betrays the gaping chasm in art historical literature on visual culture in the Baltic Provinces before 1890. Thus, the question at hand should not be how does one become an artist without ever seeing art, but rather: how does art transcend perceived social irrelevance and become significant for disenfranchised populations?

This dissertation examines the role of art and visual culture in the Baltic Provinces of Imperial Russia between 1860 and 1915. It seeks to understand how art could affect a transformation from the cultural domain of a single cultural group into an increasingly pluralistic mode of expression. I argue that Eurocentric models of art history have preconditioned us to accept the realm of fine arts, especially oil paintings, prints, and sculptures, as so intrinsically natural to society that we have no model to grapple with the reality that art could be epistemologically novel. Untethering ourselves from a traditionally Eurocentric mindset enables the fluidity of thought necessary to understand the ramifications of having no word in one's language to designate "artist" or "painting." This absence reveals an uncomfortable truth for art history: painting could be at once literally accessible yet so culturally irrelevant so as to warrant no translation whatsoever.

Too often, the absence of art, whether rhetorical or literal, encourages the devaluation of a culture's significance. Since few cultures abstain from producing images or visual and material expression, an absence of "art" should never serve as a marker of inferiority, but instead it should readily spark our curiosity towards understanding how such value systems prize various modes of visual and material production. This dissertation thus examines the invention of "art," exploring the

modes of visual culture nineteenth-century Latvians and Estonians engaged as they grappled with the novelty of the idea from, initially, a vague inclination into a widespread cultural pursuit. By embracing a multiplicity of art's various meanings and material manifestations, I reveal that the art world of the colonial Baltic was a microcosm of global nineteenth-century debates about race, medium, and modernity. In doing so, I align myself with a growing cohort of scholars who take seriously the unusual colonial conditions of Baltic culture as the main impetus towards examining Baltic culture beyond a Eurocentric framework.[28] Exploring the colonial Baltic world as a case study is a fruitful and necessary endeavor. It has the ability to ascertain how art can extend beyond traditional elitist audiences. Furthermore, it is an idea of significant value in a society where class and socioeconomic divides had remained racialized, as we examine in greater detail below. Rejecting the idea that the value of art simply developed alongside an *embourgeoisement* inaugurated by modernity, the study investigates how images and the ability to assume the power of image-making were pivotal to changing the strict social stratifications of the Baltic Provinces. In order to understand how this process occurred, I follow Partha Mitter's call "to fashion more nuanced art histories drawing on the richness of truly global experiences."[29] Here it bears keeping in mind Larry Shiner's observation that "the assimilation of all peoples and all past epochs to our notions has been around for so

[28] Jaak Rähesoo, "Growing Up in Modernity: The Comparative Place of Estonian Culture," *Interlitteraria*, 5 (2000): 104. Benedikts Kalnačs, *20th Century Baltic Drama: Postcolonial Narratives, Decolonial Options*. (Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2016), 15-38.
[29] Partha Mitter, "Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery," *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (December 2008): 540.

long that the universality of European art is taken for granted."[30] As we will explore in this study, the idea of art, at a literal as well as an epistemological level, was far from universal or clear within Europe, much less the world in the nineteenth century.

Understanding the Ambiguity of the Image: From Tallinn to Tokyo

In 1871, painting became a medium of light. Among the cacophonous crowds of Riga's Central Agricultural Exhibition, jubilant songs hailing the tsar, towering modern tractors, and magicians dabbling in the "dark arts," it was the radiance and sheen of oil paint that most captivated the journalist Johann Voldemar Jannsen.[31] It was the first time in his life—at the age of fifty-two no less—that he had ever seen paintings, and he became enamored at the "brightest and most gleaming colors" radiating from the canvases.[32] Accompanying him was Leopold von Pezold, the new editor-in-chief of *Rigasche Zeitung* and a practicing painter. In his attempt to educate Jannsen about how to look at paintings and evaluate them properly, Pezold dismissed Jannsen's affinity for the radiance of oil paint as naïve: "Apparently that is not what art experts do," Jannsen noted. Pezold felt compelled to explain to Jannsen that "[art experts] certainly demand colors, but only enough necessary for texture, shadow, and light, no more or less."[33] When Jannsen tried to paraphrase his colleague's descriptions for his Estonian readers, however, he admitted that "if I start explaining

[30] Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 3-4.
[31] Johann Voldemar Jannsen, "Näitusest," *Postimees ehk Näddalaleht*, 21 June 1871.
[32] Johann Voldemar Jannsen, "Mis Postimehe saadik tagasitulles jutustab," *Postimees ehk Näddalaleht*, 28 July 1871.
[33] Ibid.

[artworks] to you, you would probably fall asleep."[34] Jannsen's curiosity at the luminosity of veneer reveals how strange the medium of oils on canvas appeared, evincing a concern with the surface appearance of paint and its materiality.

What was striking for Jannsen was not just the novelty of seeing art, but the novelty of an exhibition. The Riga Central Agricultural Exhibition would turn out to be the largest exhibition in the Baltic Provinces for forty years, reaching an astronomical and unprecedented 10,000 people.[35] The Riga Art Society, which had organized the art display at the exhibition, had collected over four-hundred paintings alone, including works from a variety of local Baltic artists.[36] What Jannsen wanted to communicate to his readers, however, was neither a personal review of the exhibition, nor a discussion of the various works on display. As he informed his readers, "A direct familiarity with and explanation of artworks are about as clear to us as a sermon given to a foreigner who falls asleep upon realizing they do not understand. We are more or less children when it comes to viewing artistically painted pictures (*kunstlikult maalitud piltisi*)." Although he calls his fellow Estonians children, we should not consider his tone to be infantilizing; when communicated between fellow Estonians or Latvians, it was common didactic rhetoric in the 1860s and 1870s.[37] Indeed, one would be remiss to consider Jannsen's experience and description of the 1871 exhibition as naïve. Jannsen had famously founded the first Estonian-language newspaper in 1857, establishing himself as one of the most

[34] Ibid.
[35] In the mid 1860s, some 100,000 people lived in Riga.
[36] A. H. Hollander, "Bericht des Präsidenten des Kunstvereins über die Kunstausstellung in Riga 1871," *Rigasche Zeitung*, 30 September 1871.
[37] Ījabs, "Another Baltic Postcolonialism."

influential cultural figures and most learned Estonians of the Baltic Provinces in the second half of the nineteenth century. Despite Jannsen's groundbreaking work as a journalist and endless attempts to update the vocabulary of his native language, there remained a marked difference between German-language and Estonian- or Latvian-language writing about art in the 1860s and 1870s.

German-language reviews of the 1871 exhibition described their joy at the impressive display of the "old Italian schools" and "Dutch masters" alongside historical and contemporary artists from all three Baltic Provinces.[38] Jannsen, by contrast, would summarize in one sentence what was otherwise the subject of numerous lengthy articles in the Baltic German press: "Some hundreds of pictures from older and newer times were displayed at the exhibition, including pictures by our famous professor 'Köler-Viljandi' from St. Petersburg, whom I heard experts praise."[39] On the one hand, the vast difference in discourse was indebted to the once limited capability of expression in the indigenous languages of the Baltic as compared with German. Throughout centuries of serfdom, the Latvian and Estonian languages were tied to and reflected a rural peasant existence, developing only in relation to their life toiling as laborers on the fields and plantations of German manorial estates. In the wake of emancipation, there began vast efforts to reform both languages in order to incorporate a dizzying array of new ideas about the world beyond the filthy smoke-coated windows of the manorial servant quarters. In the case of most of these concepts, Estonian and Latvian thinkers invented new words, which would be

[38] "Die 5. Gemälde- oder Kunstausstellung in Riga," *Rigasche Stadtblätter*, 17 June 1871.
[39] Ibid.

published in the first newspapers beginning in 1856 and 1857 (the Latvian *Mājas viesis,* or, *House Guest*, and Estonian *Perno Postimees,* or *Pärnu Courier*, respectively) and codified in new dictionaries. This was possible because literacy rates among the peasantry were, despite the brutality of enserfment, the highest in the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century due to the decisive role played by their Lutheran faith, the dominant form of Christianity in the region. It encouraged a personal relationship with God and necessitated an individual's ability to read and comprehend the Bible. Perhaps it was the visual asceticism of Lutheranism and its emphasis on textual literacy that may begin to explain why some of the most contentious and confusing new words were related to art and its varying institutions. Neither Latvian nor Estonian possessed an indigenous word for "art" and both languages originally adapted the German word *Kunst*.

If our task is to understand the fluctuating role of visual culture in the colonial Baltic, then it is clear we must follow Maki Fukuoka's insistence "to take seriously the historicity of languages and the efficacy of pictorial representation."[40] In this case, we must understand the deliberateness of Jannsen's descriptions, especially where his language may translate into awkward English today. Take, for instance, Jannsen's idea that Estonians possessed little experience in viewing or understanding "artistically painted pictures" (*kunstlikult maalitud piltisi*). It would have been important for Jannsen to distinguish "pictures" (sg. *pilt*, pl. *pildid*) that are "artistically painted" from other kinds for Estonian readers in 1871. No one other than

[40] Maki Fukuoka, *The Premise of Fidelity: Science, Visuality, and Representing the Real in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 193.

Jannsen himself had recently coined *päevapilt* (lit. sunlight picture), the native neologism for "photograph" which went into immediate usage as early as 1867.[41] For reasons we explore in chapter two, texts about photography in the Estonian language routinely elevated the medium of the photograph and denigrated painting well before Jannsen had ever traveled to an art exhibition. As such, Jannsen's task in 1871 was to explain oil paintings to an audience who was already more familiar with photography. In this context, we may begin to understand why Jannsen placed such value on the saturated colors beaming from the canvases—the major distinction between painting and photography—as well as why he initially evaluated paintings in terms of their luminosity.

New words such as the Estonian *päevapilt* (photograph) were not limited to new technologies, but could even account for fundamental concepts. Among the most enduring Latvian neologisms of the nineteenth century is *krāsa*, the word for "color." For decades in the nineteenth century, this neologism was also the root of a novel concept. *Krāsotājs*, literally "one who colors," was a common word in Latvian texts to designate "artist" from the 1860s through the 1890s. This knowledge reveals that Latvian thinkers foregrounded the importance of color within image making, thus illuminating how they perceived art. This connection between etymology and epistemology here is not mere conjecture. It is based on a fundamental methodology in art history: charting the conceptual genealogy of terms within the field of art. Nowhere has this methodology been more transformative than in the realm of

[41] One of the earliest articles on photography in the Estonian language appears in 1867. Ironically, the beginning of the article says "images under this name *päevapildid* are already well known," thus suggesting that there may have been an even earlier genesis of the term. We explore the ramifications of this article in chapter two.

Japanese art history, where it is known as "the study of words" (*kotoba no kenkyū*). It serves, therefore, as a careful comparanda.

Kitazawa Noriaki was the first to explore the significance of understanding the words of art history as a tool to help elucidate how the Japanese so rapidly adopted and assimilated foreign values of art into new modes of visual production in the nineteenth century. In his pivotal 1989 study *Temple of the Eye: Notes on the Reception of "Fine Art*," he explains:

> I was made to realize that to pinpoint the origin of modern Japanese art meant above all to investigate the origins of *bijutsu* [the Japanese translation for "fine arts" created in 1872]. And when I came to focus my interest on the process by which *bijutsu* was received and solidified, I became aware of an unexpected realization: apart from the reality of art, the process of the development of the concept of "art" made its own, fresh history that, though faint, was different from [received] history. From this discovery I gradually began to shift my attention from the dizzying quick-change theater of isms and styles towards the green room, or toward the creation of the state itself (history and structure). I began to anticipate that through such work we could derive the historical significance of this parade of styles and isms as an event of Japanese society...And I thought this would be a way to attempt to understand anew, as history, what had looked to be only a false history.[42]

Kitazawa's turn towards structural analysis would lead him to argue that the creation of *bijutsu* and other Japanese neologisms for the field of art revealed not only the outsized role of the state in these endeavors, but that these new ideas simultaneously ushered in a completely new mode of visuality. His pioneering methodology revealed that what had changed in the Meiji period was no less than the "epistemological

[42] Kitazawa Noriaki, *Me no shinden: "Bijutsu" juyōshi nōto* (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shippunsha, 1989). Quoted in Chelsea Foxwell, "Introduction," in Satō Dōshin, *Modern Japanese Art and the Meiji State: The Politics of Beauty*. (Getty Research Institute. 2011) 10.

reconfiguration of the eye."[43] Satō Dōshin would expand on Kitazawa's initial arguments in his pathbreaking 1999 *Modern Japanese Art and the Meiji State: The Politics of Beauty*, exploring how government institutions gave meaning to such new words as "exhibition" (*hakurankai*), "painting" (*kaiga*), and "sculpture" (*chōkoku*), as well as how these words shaped the experience of those who made the objects that would fall under these new categories.[44]

Japan's Meiji Restoration had famously transformed the country's relationship with the rest of world, ushering in the rapid adoption of an array of European and Euro-American cultural, political, social norms in an effort to establish parity with other international powers and avoid the threat of European and United States imperialism looming elsewhere in Asia. The cultural impact of the Meiji Restoration outside of Japan has received markedly less attention. For many in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Meiji Japan was a beacon of social reform and progress to admire, an example that demonstrated that change was attainable without capitulating fully to European or United States political hegemony. So widespread was this esteem for Japan across many parts of the world that modernizers seeking to transform Ethiopia in the interwar period would be known as "the Japanizers."[45] By contrast, the relationship between Meiji Japan and the Russian Empire, where our study is primarily concerned, is a narrative usually told in terms of the period's geopolitical struggles, culminating in Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese War of

[43] Kitazawa Noriaki, Kenneth Masaki Shima, "From *Temple of the Eye – Notes of the Reception of 'Fine Art'*," *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, 26 (December 2014): 228.
[44] The Getty Research Institute translated Satō's work into English in 2011.
[45] J. Calvitt Clarke, *Alliance of the Colored Peoples: Ethiopia and Japan before World War II* (Rochester, NY: James Currey, 2011), 7-21.

1904-1905. The historian Shō Konishi has revealed that there was great respect and admiration between Japanese and Russian intellectuals in the realm of philosophy and culture. Many in the Russian Empire considered the changes ushered in by the Meiji Restoration to be "the most sweeping revolution in history and impetus for future global progress."[46] The cultural and especially artistic valences of this relationship have been relatively unexamined.

Upon the opening of the first art museum in the Baltic Provinces in the fall of 1905, the Latvian artist Janis Rozentāls remarked that "just ten years ago it would have been unimaginable to open an art museum, because at that time there were no artists in the real sense of the word in the whole Baltic region."[47] What had changed in the following ten years, he thought, were the conditions for an artistic culture, but he felt an appreciation for art among the public still needed to be cultivated. Rozentāls argued, "We need not wait long to see the fruits of our labor. We can see that among the Japanese, who stand far from our circumstances."[48] Here Rozentāls cites the birth of an art public in Meiji Japan as evidence of the successful and rapid institutionalization of art. His reference was not indebted to a perception of Japanese art, but rather concrete evidence about the transformative power of art for modern society.

Since modes of visual production broadened so significantly in Japan in the middle of the nineteenth century, it is easier for art historians to accept ideas of a new

[46] Shō Konishi, *Anarchist Modernity: Cooperatism and Japanese-Russian Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).
[47] J. Rozentāls, "Rīgas jaunā mākslas muzeja atvēršana un Baltijas mākslinieku izstāde. II," *Vērotājs*, 1 November 1905, 1386.
[48] Ibid, 1387.

kind of visuality. It makes sense that a change in pictorial modes and aesthetic systems is concomitant with a similar shift in epistemology. But we also accept this change because it is Asian and not European, subconsciously channeling it through its status as an "alternative" modernity, rather than a deliberate product of modernity. As Jannsen's writings suggest, such epistemological change about art and vision was not restricted to Japan, but in fact common across the globe.

The Global Turn

The global turn has been among the most transformative and contested developments in art history. It has questioned our discipline's fundamental values and exposed, above all, the faultiness in our methods of inclusion and exclusion. The global turn shares with the critiques of feminism, critical race theory, and visual studies a fundamental skepticism towards canonicity and established standards of value in order to address the inequalities of art history, with the larger objective of allowing art objects and artefacts their full reading of complexity. This global turn is perhaps most emphatically engaged in the study of modern art. While it may be increasingly common to speak of multiple modernisms and modernities, art historical scholarship on many distinct strains of modernism still remain uncharted or inaccessible to Anglophone scholars.[49] As the idea of modernism becomes ever more inclusive and reflective of its global reality—what Christopher Bush has referred to in the epigraph as the restoration of modernism's inherently global nature—our

[49] Elizabeth Harney and Ruth Phillips, eds., *Mapping Modernisms: Art, Indigeneity, and Colonialism* (Duke University Press, 2018).

understanding of it should be enriched not only through episodic investigations into, say, Egyptian Surrealism or Korean abstraction, but also by developing new methodologies based on a critical awareness of discursive parallels and cross-cultural commensurability.

Nineteenth-century studies lag noticeably behind other periods of art historical inquiry regarding the possibilities enacted by the global turn.[50] In the field of contemporary art since 1945, globalization is almost taken to be a given.[51] The global turn has also fundamentally transformed our notions of the early modern period since the 1990s, with scholars now clamoring to "decolonize the Renaissance."[52] In the nascent field of global modernisms, scholarship has, perhaps unintentionally, skewed towards nuancing the universalist claims of the incipient abstraction of the 1920s and 1930s.[53] In the nineteenth century, by contrast, the field appears to be bifurcated. On the one hand, historians of nineteenth-century art still constrained by the unrelenting

[50] Given the name of the respected online journal *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, my claim may sound hyperbolic. However, a quick glance at the content of the journal over the years reveals the degree to which it is overwhelmingly biased towards visual production in nineteenth-century France, Britain, and the United States.

[51] See, for instance, Okwui Enwezor, Katy Siegel, and Ulrich Wilmes, eds., *Postwar: Art Between the Pacific and Atlantic* (New York: Prestel, 2017).

[52] Claire Farago, ed., *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America, 1450-1650*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995. Thomas daCosta Kauffmann. *Toward a Geography of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Cécile Fromont, *The Art of Conversion: Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo* (Chapel Hill, NC: Omohundro Institute and University of North Carolina Press, 2014). Denis Carr, ed., *Made in the Americas: The New World Discovers Asia* (Boston: Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 2015). Daniela Bleichmar and Meredith Martin, eds., *Objects in Motion in the Early Modern World* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016). Daniel Savoy, ed., *The Globalization of Renaissance Art: A Critical Review* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

[53] Timothy O. Benson, ed., *Central European Avant-gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910-1930* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002). Elaine O'Brien, Evelyn Nicodemus, and Melissa Chu, eds., *Modern Art in Africa, Asia and Latin America: An Introduction to Global Modernisms* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012). Harper Montgomery, *The Mobility of Modernism: Art and Criticism in 1920s Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017). William Schaefer, *Shadow Modernism: Photography, Writing, and Space in Shanghai, 1925-1937* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

grip of Francocentrism.[54] Thus it should come as little surprise that the editor of the volume *A Companion to Nineteenth Century Art* labored in 2018 to explain the inadequacy of the fact that the nineteenth century still remains "shackled to developments in France, specifically Paris, to the virtual exclusion (or at least subordination) of those occurring elsewhere."[55] The tendency to defend the rationale for exploring other European geographies of art in the nineteenth century is commensurate with the urgency of the global turn in general. This specific problem endures, however, because France retains an authoritative aura, and its particular presence in Baltic art history has become especially noticeable as of late. At his 2018 exhibition *Wild Souls: Symbolism in the Art of the Baltic States*, the French curator Rodolphe Rapetti staged turn-of-the-century Baltic modernism as an international revelation for Parisian audiences at the Musée d'Orsay. This was no small feat. Since there are three times as many visitors to the Musée d'Orsay in one year as the entire population of Estonia, the exhibition provided unparalleled exposure to Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian art, giving Baltic modernism long overdue and well-deserved international acclaim. In his introduction to the catalogue, Rapetti stressed that "the study of the art of the Baltic Countries should make historians change their tune. They can no longer talk about the classic confrontation of French art and national art

[54] Karen L. Carter and Susan Waller, eds., *Foreign Artists and Communities in Modern Paris, 1870-1914* (London: Routledge, 2015).

[55] She writes, "Why must our comprehension, contextualization, and analysis of an epoch first be stabilized by a map that establishes a hegemonic cultural/geographical relationship? Artists lived and worked in their widely varied contexts; they negotiated, represented, and responded to those contexts, Parisian or otherwise. A living history should be animated by those who lived it and be informed by their experience. Similarly, a responsible practice of history should entail understanding, not judging, particularly when that judging reinforces long-discarded teleological notions of artistic 'progress' and the eschatological march toward abstraction." Michelle Facos, "Introduction," *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Art* (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), xxv-xxvii.

history between the 1850s and 1950s, and the comfort of its bipolarity, and are forced to use other interpretations."[56] One wonders, however, who exactly still deploys such "classic confrontation" between French art and national art history. This admission is hardly a breath of fresh air. Contending with the obvious inapplicability of a Paris-centered modernist paradigm has been the main thrust of scholarship on Eastern European modernism since the fall of the Communist Bloc.[57] In reality, one must critically question why it was only in 2018 when such a show took place, since such scholars as Jeremy Howard and Steven Mansbach have made Baltic modernism accessible outside of the Baltic countries for over two decades, not to mention the growing trend among Baltic scholars to ensure their work reaches far beyond a native-language audience.[58] And even if scholarship or catalogues were not

[56] Rodolphe Rappetti, "Terra Incognita," in *Wild Souls: Symbolism in the Art of the Baltic Countries* (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstimuuseum, 2018), 14.

[57] Steven Mansbach, "Meaning and Methodology in the Modern Art of Eastern Europe," in *Central European Avant Gardes: Transformation and Exchange, 1910-1930*, ed. Timothy O. Benson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 288-308. Steven Mansbach, "The Artifice of Modern(ist) Art History."Kobena Mercer, ed. *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers* (Cambridge, MA: Iniva & The MIT Press, 2008) 96-121.

[58] Member states of the European Union since 2004, Estonia and Latvia have been keen to integrate themselves into a European framework and distance themselves from their Soviet past. Regardless of these geo-political orientations, it is important, if not banal, to realize that the artworks on display in Paris were many canonical images. These artworks were always in the custody of these countries's top museums, and thus I encourage skepticism towards why such a grand exhibition could only take place regarding the centenrary of the three republics, and could not take place earlier under different auspiecs. On the vast English-language literature on Baltic modernism in English, see the chapter "Latvia: Riga" in Jeremy Howard, *Art Nouveau: International and National Styles in Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 184-207; Jeremy Howard, "Latvian National Romanticism and Art Nouveau: Origins and Synthesis," in *Romantisms un neoromantisms Latvijas mākslā*, ed. Elita Grosmane (Riga: Izdevniecība, 1998), 128-153; Jeremy Howard, "From the Stieglitz Forward: The Snaking Progress of Latvian Applied Art, ca. 1900-1914," *Centropa* 4 no. 2 (September 2004): 267-280; See the chapter, "The Baltic States of Latvia and Estonia," in Steven Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe: From the Baltic to the Balkans, ca. 1890-1939* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 141-203; Steven Mansbach, "Modernist Architecture and Nationalist Aspiration in the Baltic: Two Case Studies," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 65, no. 1 (March 2006): 92-111; Steven Mansbach and Wojciech Siemaszkiewicz, "Modernism in the Baltic States of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania," *Graphic Modernism: From the Baltic to the Balkans, 1910-1935*, (New York: New York Public Library, 2007), 39-49; Steven Mansbach, "Modern Architecture and Nationalism in Estonia," in *Twenty-First Century Perspectives on Nineteenth-Century Art: Essays in Honor of Gabriel P. Weisberg*, eds. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu and Laurinda S. Dixon (Newark:

internationally accessible, the actual artworks featured in the exhibition have always been accessible in local museum collections. Indeed, given the exhibition's original French title *âmes sauvages*, one questions what is "wild" about them, and hopes—perhaps in vain—that it is not in reference to their geographical origins in Eastern Europe.[59]

The introduction of lesser-known modernisms among specialists in European art was once transformative, but the enduring presentation of such art as a "revelation" now rings hollow after two decades' study of multiple modernisms. It reveals the failure of European specialists to take seriously, grapple with and fully incorporate into art history exactly those conditions of difference, distinction, familiarity, and similarity that marked such displays as revelatory in the first place. Since art history's global turn is inherently indebted to postcolonial studies, Europeanists often reference that field's "bracing challenges," citing such groundbreaking works as Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* or Christopher Pinney's idea of an always already "creolized Europe," but they rarely engage such postcolonial provocations.[60] Chakrabarty has famously lamented that "a third-world historian is condemned to knowing 'Europe' as the original home of the 'modern,' whereas the 'European' historian does not share a comparable predicament

University of Delaware Press, 2008), 215-221; Steven Mansbach, *Riga's Capital Modernism* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2014).

[59] Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

[60] Hollis Clayson and André Dombrowski, eds., *Is Paris Still the Capital of the Nineteenth Century? Essays on Art and Modernity, 1850-1900* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 110. Christopher Pinney, "Creole Europe: The Reflection of a Reflection," *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 20 (2002), 125-159.

with regards to the pasts of the majority of humankind."[61] Although scholars understand the severity of this imbalance and may even acknowledge it as an act of epistemic violence, only recently have the humanities embraced the benefits of thinking more globally and purposefully beyond Europe. Despite such thinking, Europeanists seldom implement any change to their practice.

There is a concrete reason why scholars of the nineteenth century have been among the least welcoming of the global turn; this was the very period that historically tried to suppress global homogeneity as it actively created the conditions to enforce such homogeneity across disparate cultures. Natalia Majluf has explained that as early as 1855 French institutions worked to ensure the very binary of "French art" and "national art" that Rapetti finally denounces above. Investigating the failure of the Peruvian painter Francisco Laso at the Paris world's fair of 1855, Majluf coins the term "marginal cosmopolitan" as an artist who is expected to possess a language or culture distinct from a putative center, yet whose aspirations towards inclusion and validation render such distinction impossible. The marginal cosmopolitan was a constant reminder of impending global homogenization in the nineteenth century. Whereas progress in terms of industry was a celebration, progress in the realm of culture created the potential to level distinctions. At stake was the fact that "the future was a site where difference would be eradicated, where everything would be the same. The very possibility of such a homogenous world was quickly rejected. A world without difference is impossible to classify and order, and it is also devoid of

[61] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000) 42.

hierarchy. The demand for cultural difference was thus deployed to counter the perceived blurring of borders of an expanding world culture."[62] The fact that both the artist Francisco Laso and his critical reception oscillated between foreign and familiar, similarity and difference, is a hallmark of nineteenth-century modernism in as much as it reveals the difficulty Eurocentric discourse has had in admitting certain cultures into modernity. Majluf's insight is important because it reveals that the primary source documents of the nineteenth century were already structurally dismissive of the majority of contemporary visual production wherever it had been made on the globe, and thus complicit in ensuring a Francocentric version of the period.

Margaret Graves has further explained why we feel so "uncomfortable" in the global nineteenth century. She argues that there is too much material to be uncovered in our archaeological investigations to create a coherent canon of "masterpieces." The connoisseurial eye that determined the history of Asian and Islamic art cast modern art produced in these regions as "bad," "technically deficient," or even "ugly" because it collapsed externally imposed taxonomies of "traditional" aesthetics. The reality that nineteenth-century Asian and Islamic art emerged at a moment "when making coincides with the moment of acquisition" downplayed the contemporaneity of local modern art as collectors acquired images and objects primarily for their ethnographic value.[63] Mimi Yiengpruksawan has explained this tendency to keep certain cultures out of the modern permits scholars to "avoid some of the ideological

[62] Natalia Majluf, "'Ce n'est pas le Pérou,' or, the Failure of Authenticity: Marginal Cosmopolitans at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1855," *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 4 (Summer, 1997): 868-893
[63] Margaret S. Graves, "Feeling Uncomfortable in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Art Historiography* 6 (June 2012): not paginated.

and methodological critiques that, launched from the vantage of world art and world systems, might land some telling blows along the seams that now riddle Euro-American centrism."[64] In other words, many have seen the restoration of modernism's inherent globalism as threatening the legitimacy of their field rather than intellectually nourishing it. It is thus auspicious that it is historians of Asian and Islamic art who have spurred the most robust wave of scholarship on the global nineteenth century, a change of fundamental consequence in fields which historically have refused to explore any material after 1800.[65]

What this boon in nineteenth-century global modernism shares across geographies is an uneasy relationship with European art. Bert Winther-Tamaki has offered one of the most compelling ways to contend with this potential problem, urging us to realize that many formats of modern art, from easel painting to marble sculpture and ornamental bronzes, were "transnationally shared" regardless of their geographical genealogies. Departing from such a perspective, Winther-Tamaki has

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[64] Mimi Yiengpruksawan, "Japanese Art History 2001: The State and Stakes of Research," *The Art Bulletin* 81 (March 2001): 117.

[65] Book-length studies on art and visual culture in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Asia include: Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Ellen P. Conant, ed., *Challenging Past and Present: The Metamorphosis of Nineteenth-Century Japanese Art* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006); Forrest McGill, ed., *Emerald Cities: The Arts of Siam and Burma, 1775-1950* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, 2009); Alicia Volk, *In Pursuit of Universalism: Yorozu Tetsugorō and Japanese Modern Art* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010); Wendy Shaw, *Ottoman Painting: Reflections of Western Art from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Fukuoka, *The Premise of Fidelity*, 2012; Mary Roberts, *Istanbul Exchanges: Ottomans and Orientalists in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2014); Chelsea Foxwell, *Making Modern Japanese-Style Painting: Kano Hōgai and the Search for Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Roberta Wue, *Art Worlds: Artists, Images, and Audiences in Late Nineteenth-Century Shanghai* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2015); David Roxburgh, *Technologies of the Image: Art in Nineteenth-Century Iran* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Stephen Sheehi, *The Arab Imago: A Social History of Portrait Photography, 1860-1910* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016); Luke Gartlan and Roberta Wue, eds., *Portraiture and Early Studio Photography in China and Japan* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Octavian Essanu, ed., *Art, Awakening, and Modernity in the Middle East: The Arab Nude* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

undertaken an "experimental" comparison of various convergences of modern art in Japan, India, and Mexico from 1850 to now.[66] He argues:

> If modern India and Mexico seem unpromising choices for comparison to Japanese modern art given their geographic remoteness and the rarity of direct links between their respective centers of artistic activity, it is precisely this discontiguity of relations that recommends these regions for comparative analysis. For the history of globalization has proceeded as a sequence of increasing densities of interaction between remote cultures brought on by new technologies of transportation, communication, and finance. The relative infrequency of direct contacts between India, Japan, and Mexico suggests that the increasing resemblance of the art of these cultures over the past century and a half [was] accomplished through indirect channels of communication mediated through other regions.[67]

In his comparative framework, Winther-Tamaki seems to follow Reiko Tomii's call to create art histories based on *"*bottom-up (periphery-in) strategies through comparative readings of various locales."*[68]* Being versed in the art histories of various cultures within a single period—here, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—rather than predicating one's knowledge on the art historical tradition of a single geography, possesses the ability to transform our ideas of history and historical visual culture.*[69]* It is how art historians can implement change against the blatant cultural inequities in our collective ideas of history, the same ones that Chakrabarty urges us to ameliorate.

Winther-Tamaki argues that the "alienating alterity" of oil painting was common across Mexico, Japan, and India, yet as the case of the colonial Baltic

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[66] Bert Winther-Tamaki, "Six Episodes of Convergence between Indian, Japanese, and Mexican Art from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present," *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 26 (December 2014): 13-32.
[67] Ibid, 14.
[68] Reiko Tomii, "'International Contemporaneity' in the 1960s: Discoursing on Art in Japan and Beyond," *Japan Review* 21 (2009): 140.
[69] Foteini Vlachou, "Why Spatial? Time and the Periphery," *Visual Resources* 32, no. 1-2, (2016): 9-24.

reveals, many deemed the medium suspicious in parts of Europe as well.[70] He rightly emphasizes the importance of sidelining connections with European and United States culture in order to escape the hegemonic European/Other binary constantly enforced within the expansion of global modernisms. However, what becomes lost in the constant clamoring about Eurocentrism is an incredible, often unexamined homogeneity as to what the term "European" signifies. Critiquing the homogeneity of "Europe" may seem crass given the way in which art history reinforces the homogeneity of most other parts of the world, ensuring vast inequalities and imbalances in our collective art historical knowledge. However, if we understand the global turn as an ethical imperative, then we cannot reject or ignore European culture solely on the grounds of art history's irredeemable Eurocentrism. If we seek to write truly global art histories, Winther-Tamaki's ideas of commensurability across disparate visual cultures finds validity even among various European peoples. This point accords with Mary Roberts's emphasis on the necessity of "a more diverse and discontinuous sense of Europe" than typically accorded within global art history.[71] For the cultures variously homogenized under the banner of Eastern Europe, such "discontinuity" is of particular urgency.[72] As Anu Allas and Beáta Hock remind us in their volume *Globalizing East European Art Histories*, Eurocentric critiques have the

[70] Winther-Tamaki, "Six Episodes of Convergence," 22.
[71] Roberts, *Istanbul Exchanges*, 14.
[72] Piotr Piotrowski's observations are especially relevant here: "For post-colonial scholars, instead, Europe is the negative rhetorical figure. Post-colonial scholars used to homogenize culture of the old continent. Frankly speaking they can perform such a simplification, since for their purposes detailed differentiation of inner-European issues, including inner-colonization, does not have much sense. Europe for them is "simply" the Dutch, Belgian, English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish colonizer. They do not care so much about Moldavia, Lithuania, Slovenia or Slovakia, and the latter are very often confused to each other." Piotr Piotrowski, "East European Art Peripheries Facing Post-Colonial Theory," *Nonsite.org* 2 (2014), Accessed 22 February 2019. https://nonsite.org/article/east-european-art-peripheries-facing-post-colonial-theory

tendency to render Eastern Europe "nearly as invisible in this new and ever more mainstream scholarship as it has always been in traditional master narratives on the continent's art history: the region is only represented sporadically and largely incoherently in volumes implementing the new methodology and conceptual framework."[73] Therefore, the paradox at the heart of this study is the necessity of rejecting Eurocentric frameworks in order to understand European art more fully.

Exploring the global commensurability of Baltic culture is no mere embrace of a disciplinary trend. Nineteenth-century Baltic peoples envisioned themselves in global terms. In her literary adaptations of historical novels in the 1860s and 1870s, Estonian writer Lydia Koidula created clear parallels between Spanish *conquistadores* and German crusaders and the enserfment of Incans and Estonians, and later extended such metaphors onto the colonial conditions of eighteenth-century Jamaica in the age of the Maroon Wars and insurrections by the enslaved.[74] Decades later the Latvian artist Janis Rozentāls observed that local conditions for an artistic culture had transformed at an astounding pace, just as they had "with the Japanese."[75] These Europeans evaluated their own cultural development in dialogue with both historical and contemporary changes in cultures often radically different from their own, demonstrating the global dimensions of their thought. These comparisons and metaphors importantly reveal that their worldview was not tethered to Eurocentrism

[73] Beáta Hock, "Introduction—Globalizing East European Art Histories: The Legacy of Piotr Piotrowski and a Conference," *Globalizing East European Art Histories*, eds. Anu Allas and Beáta Hock (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 5.
[74] See chapter two.
[75] J. R. [Janis Rozentāls], "Rīgas jaunā mākslas muzeja atvēršana un Baltijas mākslinieku izstāde. II," *Vērotājs*, 1 November 1905, 1387. I have published elsewhere on the rhetorical similarities between Baltic and Japanese modernism, see Bart Pushaw, "Japonisme Beyond Difference: Towards Baltic *Bijutsu*," *Studies in Japonisme* 37 (2018): 42-48.

because, as Latvians and Estonians, their lived experiences as colonized subjects fostered a remarkable yet poorly understood cross-cultural awareness that informed their cultural production.[76] It is for this reason that Eurocentrism proves limited in understanding Baltic art.

What I aim to do here is broaden, reverse, and change the fundamental points of reference in establishing what discourse about art could be in the nineteenth century. Rejecting a solely Eurocentric framework, I extrapolate the discourses of seemingly disparate but simultaneous happenings—the invention of new art words in Meiji Japan, Mexican salon painting, the framing of photography in the Ottoman Arab Provinces, the fluidity of media in Qajar Iran, African American understandings of the racialization of vision—to illuminate the thorniest (historically problematic and thus avoided) elements of Baltic art. The methodology I enact here in this study is not as radical as it may seem. After all, comparisons are the methodological foundation of art history. Art historians constantly seek reference points and parallels in order to answer problems presented by the object or to understand an artist's creative choices. It is important to realize that the ability to hone one's familiarity of modernism's various manifestations across the globe in the nineteenth century has only been possible thanks to recent scholarship, especially of the past decade. Thus I want to distinguish my rejection of Eurocentrism not as a rejection of the tendency to situate

[76] Piret Peiker, "Postcolonial Change: Power, Peru, and Estonian Literature," in *Baltic Postcolonialism*, ed. Violerta Kelertas (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2006), 105-137. Kalnačs, *20th Century Baltic Drama*.

Baltic, Estonian, and Latvian art within pan-European contexts, but rather as a methodology that is complementary to such approaches.[77]

Enacting the discipline's global turn is not only edifying oneself in Japanese Impressionism or nineteenth-century Ghanaian photographers, but understanding how the issues and problems presented in such literature are part and parcel of planetary concerns.[78] *When* collated by their simultaneity, these similarities and differences foster striking and unexpected connections among artists across the globe, even if not explicit or direct. By demonstrating the remarkable relevance of understanding the nineteenth century from a global perspective, I aim not only to destabilize the strangely homogenous view of Europe cast in postcolonial studies, but also paradoxically diminish the prominence of "European culture" within the hierarchies of global modernisms. This is not just a call for the diversification of Europe, but more importantly, the flattening of Europe—especially Paris—from its self-imposed place at the top of a hierarchy of art and culture, and subsequently, of civilization and power. One way we can follow Chakrabarty and begin to provincialize Europe is to understand its interior provinces as microcosmic indices of global modernity. In 1877, the Baltic German artist Leopold von Pezold observed that "an ever tightly-knit net of threads is woven across the world, connecting every country with all other countries […] It is not a net that constrains but a system of liberation, like telegraph

[77] Here I am referencing what perhaps may be referred to as the "Kļaviņš School" of art history in Latvia. Under the aegis of Eduards Kļaviņš, art historians have been meticulously trained, on the one hand, to have a deep knowledge of developments at home, while, on the other, to remain cognizant of the strategies to map these cultural programs within a larger pan-European framework. I would argue this was especially necessary after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, and thus concomitant with the Latvian state's larger goal of reintregrating itself into a European cultural space.

[78] Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015). Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

communications and the railway, as knowledge and skill make one free."[79] When we unravel this global network and reveal the art world of the Baltic Provinces as one of its constitutive threads, its developments become less unusual and more indicative of a worldwide response we are only beginning to comprehend.

Medium as Measure: Towards Visual Sovereignty

When painting finally came into vogue among Latvians and Estonians in the mid-1890s, proficiency in a medium once considered foreign and alienating possessed an unexpected consequence: it challenged long-held stereotypes. As exhibition spaces became increasingly multiethnic in their featured artists, they blurred and in some cases even leveled the distinctions between the region's ethnic groups, thereby dismantling the efficacy of the social hierarchy that had wielded significant power and predetermined a person's fate for centuries. More than any other discrete political or cultural development, it was art and visual culture that lay bare a growing multiethnic egalitarianism because the visual transcended the confines of spoken language and thus isolation of the national. This incredible transformation was only possible because Latvians and Estonians began to assume control of their own self-image in a literal material sense. The widespread adoption of photography among the indigenous intelligentsia and peasantry in the 1860s fostered the dominance of the medium in local visual production well throughout the 1890s. Yet indigenous Baltic thinkers did not live in a vacuum unaware of paintings or

[79] Leopold von Pezold, "Die Ausstellung im Saale der großen Gilde," *Rigasche Zeitung,* 24 October 1877.

sculptures. They saw them in the lavishly decorated manor houses of the Baltic German elite, where many had been born into a servant underclass and their ancestors toiled as serfs. As early as the 1860s, paintings, prints, and sculptures were also displayed in open collections of wealthy individuals in the capitals of the Baltic Provinces: Tallinn (Reval), Riga, and Jelgava (Mitau). There were even Latvian and Estonian painters and sculptors who earned their income through portraiture in this period, including Kārlis Hūns, Johann Köler, Jānis Staņislavs Roze, and August Weizenberg. Nevertheless, photography endured as the most prominent aesthetic mode of representation despite the availability of painting and sculpture, indicating that medium was a deliberate *choice*.

Using photography and deliberately eschewing painting and its attendant signifiers is to enact what Native American scholar Michelle Raheja calls visual sovereignty.[80] Raheja is clear that sovereignty is a key concept specifically for Native and First Nations communities. Sovereignty is a necessary distinguishing notion for Native American studies within critical race theory, since indigenous groups in the Americas possess no single shared history, culture, or collective group experience, unlike, for instance, the Middle Passage and enslavement for African Americans, or racially-targeted immigration bans and concomitant violence in the case of Asian Americans.[81] Sovereignty is intimately intertwined with indigeneity because it relates to Native political structures, epistemologies, and relationships with concrete geographical spaces. Raheja coins visual sovereignty as a device "of engaging and

[80] Michelle H. Raheja, "Reading Nanook's Smile: Visual Sovereignty, Indigenous Revisions of Ethnography, and *Atanarjuat* (*The Fast Runner*)," *American Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (Dec. 2007): 1159-1185.
[81] Ibid, 1163.

deconstructing white-generated representations of indigenous people," which "intervenes in larger discussions of Native American sovereignty by locating and advocating for indigenous cultural and political power both within and outside of Western legal jurisprudence." Raheja sees the confluence of sovereignty and visual culture as an expressive space of self-representation that undermines externally-created stereotypes. Furthermore, it permits the understanding that Native peoples also exercised agency in non-Native representations through collaboration and awareness. Raheja's idea of visual sovereignty thus eschews binaries of colonized and colonizer or active and passive agents by embracing and opening up the ambiguous space between resistance and compliance in visual representation produced through asymmetrical power relations in cross-cultural encounters.

Let me be clear: Estonians and Latvians never faced genocide nor experienced forced assimilation in the way Native and First Nations people across the Americas experienced.[82] Since Estonians and Latvians today maintain their own independent nation-states with constitutions enshrining the protection of their native languages and cultures, it may seem garish, if not wholly inappropriate to apply a theoretical lens created by Native American scholars for understanding Native cultures to a case where (especially political) sovereignty appears to be a given, and to societies unequivocally racialized as white. But in the nineteenth century, the parallels between indigenous cultures in the Americas and the Baltic Provinces were obvious and alluded to by both insiders and outsiders, including indigenous Balts themselves.[83]

[82] If there is any European parallel which demands visual sovereignty couched in indigenous experience, it is the Sámi.
[83] Peiker, "Postcolonial Change," Plath, *Esten und Deutschen*.

Nineteenth-century Baltic Germans, Estonians, and Latvians were keenly aware of the fact that the medieval Teutonic conquest of the Baltic in the thirteenth century was the first successful instance combining the crusading conquest of territory with missionary activity.[84] In other words, Spanish and Portuguese *conquistadores* were only able to conduct missionary conquests across the Americas in the sixteenth century, decimating indigenous populations and destroying and suppressing their cultures in the name of Christian enlightenment and territorial expansion of the Iberian crowns, because they employed techniques which were already proven to be successful in the Baltic.[85] As we briefly explore in chapter three, nineteenth-century Germans and Baltic Germans alike considered the narrative of Christopher Columbus discovering the Americas as commensurable with Teutonic knights founding the city of Riga on the shores of the Daugava River in 1201. Determining which theme would be more appropriate for a history mural would be a matter of fierce debate in German circles in the 1860s and 1870s.[86]

Although my investigation is roughly chronological, it is by no means a linear narrative, as contradictions abound at every corner. As Eero Epner writes in the case of the development of the Estonian painter Konrad Mägi, and regarding Baltic modernism at large, we encounter times when "the logical model is turned upside down" more often than not.[87] The emergence of photography as an artistic medium

[84] Brundage, "The Thirteenth-Century Livonian Crusade," Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe*, 28. Press.
[85] Brundage, "The Thirteenth-Century Livonian Crusade," 9.
[86] Ulrike Plath, "Bremeni börsihoone maal kui alegooria. Plaanvankrid, konkistadoorid ja 'saksa Benjamin' – Das Bremer Börsenbild als Allegorie. Planwagen, Konquistadores und der 'deutsche Benjamin,'" in *The Artist and Clio: History and Art in the 19th Century*, eds. Linda Kaljundi and Tiina-Mall Kreem (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstimuuseum – Kadrioru Kunstimuuseum, 2014), 343-380.
[87] Epner, *Konrad Mägi*, 135.

preceding painting among Estonians and Latvians between the 1860s and 1890s is only the beginning of this story. Though photography clearly reigned victorious among indigenous Balts at this time, many artists in the Baltic Provinces actively practiced painting; they were almost all Baltic German. Given the enserfment of Latvians and Estonians until the early nineteenth century, oil painting, drawing, printmaking, and sculpture were solely the domain of the Baltic German elite. By emphasizing visual sovereignty, I illuminate how art in this little understood corner of Europe grew out of deliberate choices, never "delayed" or "belated" by poverty, ignorance, or backwardness, as the mainstream narrative—and Eurocentric art history at large—tendentiously suggests.

In our postmodern embrace of multiplicities, we are sometimes prone to forget when we pluralize Impressionism or Expressionism, what occurred was often much more than a mere dissemination of style. In many places, these styles were only possible because of a necessary cultural and material precursor: the active adoption of easel painting. Art historians have made important strides in revealing the racialization of the materiality of color and artistic media, from the affinity for brilliance and the radiance of color among indigenous cultures in the Americas to the production of indigo through enslaved plantation labor.[88] These developments are especially acute in the early modern period because cross-cultural encounters and exchanges were still mediated by difference and "discovery." By the nineteenth century, however, the visual culture produced out of these global relations became not

[88] Andrea Feeser, Maureen Daly Goggin, and Beth Fowkes Tobin, eds., *The Materiality of Color: The Production, Circulation, and Application of Dyes and Pigments, 1400-1800* (London: Routledge, 2012).

only increasingly similar but emerged simultaneously. The reason that this sudden radical resemblance in visual culture emerged concurrently in disparate places across the globe is likely because they were responses to the same phenomenon: a renewed and notably violent Euro-American imperialist expansionism, which reached its apogee between 1870 and 1930, the main period under investigation here.

The visual arts reached markedly international audiences once they were included within the complex of world fairs beginning in 1855. It is well known that these exhibitions were sites of empire and empire making, but they also provided unparalleled opportunity for disenfranchised people to demonstrate their parity with other countries more dominant in the period's geopolitical order. Yet because the majority of world fairs occurred in Europe, the United States and the Antipodes, they were organized according to Eurocentric frameworks, thus circumscribing cross-cultural comprehension. Take, for instance, the artworks created for display at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. The commercial interests of that fair widened the realm of painting to include works "in oil and water colors on canvas, porcelain, enamel, metals," ostensibly in reference to nascent United States artisans physically painting designs onto china and enamel. Chelsea Foxwell notes the significance of what was lost, or rather, gained in the process of translation from the United States to Japan:

> Although these "minor" arts were placed under the same heading as oil painting, American and European entrants would have understood that paintings in oils on canvas were the real centerpiece. In Japanese translation, however, the relative interchangeability of the words picture (*e*) and painting (*ga*), and the fluidity of a concept of "painting" that encompassed embroidered, lacquered, ceramic, and even metalwork "pictures" along with ink, oil, and watercolor painting, seemed to suggest a possibility for

overcoming the opposition between oil painting and "ink" drawing.[89]

What is important about Foxwell's investigation here is her emphasis on how "painting" clearly extended beyond oils on canvas and easel, and even the necessity of brushwork itself. In 1877, for instance, Shibata Zeshin created an image of chirping crickets perched on thin wisps of grass, set against a brilliant silver moon and twinkling starry sky. A gleaming, viscous black dominates the image, highlighting the precision of Zeshin's lines. Since it was created with lacquer, the image is technically within the realm of *maki-e*, a type of (usually gold dust) painting onto the lacquered surfaces of small household objects and wares such as medicine containers and writing boxes. The comparatively large scale of Shibata's *Bell Crickets and Full Moon with Autumn Grasses*, and his decision to frame it so it could be hung for public display, bring the image into the nebulous multimedia realm of Meiji exhibition art. Shibata's image thus serves a double function as both *maki-e* and *kaiga* (the Meiji neologism for painting), or, perhaps more correctly, sits suspended between these two categories. This fluidity was possible specifically in Meiji Japan as it contended with the novelty of new kinds of artistic media with outside pressure and internal desire to relate it to preexisting aesthetic modes and worldviews.

Alice Tseng writes that the place of the visual arts within these world fairs was "ambiguous from the start" for all participating countries, emphasizing that even European writers complained about the vagueness of medium at these displays as late as 1897.[90] But it was not only exhibitions which prompted such distinctive mixing of

[89] Foxwell, *Making Modern Japanese-Style Painting*, 56.
[90] Take, for instance, this quote Tseng draws attention to from an 1897 edition of the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*: "A tenet generally prevails that the quality of the substance is the basis of classifying glyptics, the art of stonecutting. Engraving on stones: precious, hard, even ordinary stones—works of

media in the nineteenth century. David Roxburgh has noted that a sophisticated fluidity across media characterized modern visual culture in Qajar Iran, a power who rarely displayed its contemporary art at world's fairs.

> Examples abound of images fashioned in one medium emulated in another, a process that deeply troubled most 19th-century European visitors to Iran. In the case of lacquer wares, these include subjects adopted from European engravings and rendered in opaque watercolor under tinted varnish as well as the direct use of prints that were selected, trimmed, and pasted onto the paper substrate of lacquered objects […] Other objects resulted from layered systems of material translation, some of which are difficult to disentangle. The graphic techniques of lithographs—which were themselves made after, and often simulated the qualities of, paintings, drawings, prints, and photographs—are often found in ceramic tiles [demonstrating] that Qajar artists in the period from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s were not troubled by new technologies of image production, particularly photography.[91]

Here it is noteworthy that Roxburgh emphasizes that Qajar material culture "deeply troubled" the Europeans who saw it. This has been a primary reason for the historiographical dismissal of the art of nineteenth-century Iran, and more broadly of Islamic and Asian art produced in this period. In the wake of the global turn, however, these objects are now understood as having immense art historical value

art! *Worthy to enter* into the International Salon of the Fine Arts at Brussels in 1897 and into the one in Paris in 1900. Stonecutting on soft materials, amber, crystal, glass, paste, shells, plastic on metal and pliable substances, tin, wax, wood? You will not entre the International Salon of the Fine Arts at Brussels. Such are the specifications without exceptions due to favoritism which proves the rule. Here is the academic criterion; here is the official aesthetic of the day; *the density of the material!* The piece which is presented, is it a *work of art* or an *object*? Is it hard, or is it not hard? 'Ask the question of the day!'" Quoted in Alice Y. Tseng, *The Imperial Museums of Meiji Japan: Art and Architecture of the Nation* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2009), 36.

[91] David J. Roxburgh, "Painting after Photography in 19th-century Iran," *Technologies of the Image: Art in Nineteenth-Century Iran* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museum, 2017), 109-111. Zeynep Çelik writes that Iran's contact with Europe was markedly less active in the nineteenth century than other Muslim countries, a fact that explains why "its displays summarized the country's culture, albeit modestly, by architectural reference to its most glorious building era—the seventeenth century, under the Safavid dyanasty." Zeynep Çelik, *Displaying the Orient: The Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 9, 119-122.

and significance because they "manifest highly complex intersections of mediums as well as their remediation."[92] The material and visual culture of the colonial Baltic, which display a comparable fluidity across and between media, demand a similarly rigorous process of examination, appreciation, and contextualization. For this reason, the Latvian artist Jānis Staņislavs Roze (1823-1897) features prominently in the first two chapters of this study, particularly his image *Woman with Hen* (**Figure 1.8**).

At first glance, Roze's image appears to be a simple portrait in oils of a seated woman draped in black, holding a hen at her side. Upon closer inspection, however, we notice an uncanny detail: the woman's left hand is surprisingly blurry, as if it has been suspended in motion. The detail and individualism Roze painted in her face, and even in the rendering of the hen's feathers, disappear in the woman's left hand, as if any visual traces of her knuckles or joints have vanished. This hand is significant for it is the only clue in the visual evidence presented by the image that suggests something is unusual about painting's construction. The painting appears unusual because it is also a photograph. *Woman with Hen* is an enlarged photograph that the artist glued to the canvas and subsequently overpainted with oils. Roze's image is neither a photograph nor a painting, but both simultaneously. Since *Woman with Hen* assumes the appearance of a painting so closely, its complex materiality has largely gone unnoticed. It is well known that hand-coloring photographs was a widespread practice in the nineteenth century in order to enhance the degree of realism. It was exceedingly rare, however, to paint an image with such detail that its origin as a photograph was concealed or indistinguishable—at least in Europe. As we explore in

[92] Roxburgh, "Painting after Photography," 109.

chapter two, such overpainting of photographs was the norm in nineteenth-century India and a pivotal site of aesthetic innovation in Meiji Japan, especially in Yokohama.[93] When we embrace a critical awareness of medium in conversation with knowledge about global modernity in the nineteenth century, Roze's image appears suddenly much more complex.

Embracing a critical awareness of medium is also necessary in order to address long ignored lacunae in museums. Nowhere is this chasm greater than in the gap between the Estonian artists Johann Köler and Ants Laikmaa. Köler, the first professional painter of Estonian origin, worked primarily from the 1850s through the 1880s. Laikmaa, generally considered the main figure in the renewal of Estonian painting, becomes prominent only once he establishes his atelier school in Tallinn in 1903. Art historians have strangely never addressed this chronological gap in Estonian material, but it was precisely this later period between 1880 and 1900 when most small European peoples began to consolidate ideas of national or culturally distinctive aesthetic idioms.[94] The exclusion of Estonian painters from this time frame is a typical example where many would claim ideas of provinciality and backwardness in an effort to explain away the problem, a knee-jerk reaction from an enduring self-inferiority complex of a small nation with a traumatic twentieth-century history. Such self-devaluation is unproductive and unnecessary. More importantly,

[93] Sawatari Kiyoko, "Innovational Adaptations: Contacts between Japanese and Western Artists in Yokohama, 1859-1899," in *Challenging Past and Present*, ed. Ellen Conant, 83-113.
[94] See, among many others, Howard, *Art Nouveau*; Michelle Facos and Sharon Hirsh, eds., *Art, Culture, and National Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Elizabeth Clegg, *Art, Design, and Architecture in Central Europe, 1880-1920* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); Andrzej Szczerski, *Views of Albion: The Reception of British Art and Design in Central Europe, 1890-1918* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015).

this perspective has obfuscated our knowledge regarding what exactly happened in between Köler and Laikmaa, or, in other words, between the 1860s and early 1900s in the Baltic Provinces more broadly. In chapter two, I examine how photography not only was the primary mode of visual culture for Estonians and Latvians in this period, but that such a rapid embrace of the medium also cast painting as culturally irrelevant. As such, chapter three examines how painting could suddenly become a viable medium among Latvians and Estonians by the mid-1890s, when local art histories usually pinpoint the beginning of Estonian or Latvian modern art.

1897 is seen conventionally as the beginning point for Estonian modern art because it is when Laikmaa decided to quit the Düsseldorf Academy.[95] It was at this same time that the artist completely embraced the use of pastel and never again painted in oils. So engrained was Laikmaa's love for pastels and disdain for oils that an entire generation of Estonian artists developed their painting proficiency primarily in pastels. The preponderance of pastel painting in Estonian towns in the early twentieth century has never been fully examined, yet Estonian critics seemed keenly aware of what was at stake in the new popularity of the medium. When Laikmaa displayed his pictures for the first time in Tallinn in 1903, one Estonian writer in the paper *Uus Aeg (The New Era)* declared:

> Yet another artist breaks through the main of what to paint with and what to paint on: Laikmaa pulls a dry piece of color into his hands, tosses an image onto rough cardboard and leaves the oil color by the picture to show up on the canvas, but this is necessary for the natural appearance of the painterly object (*maalitav asi*). As such, Laikmaa is not a *vaapaja* (*värvija*) and painter at the same time, like the larger

[95] Lehti Viiroja, *Eesti kunstist ja kunstikäsitusest 19. sajandi lõpust kuni aastani 1916* (Tallinn: Eesti Teaduste Akadeemia ja Ajaloo Instituut, 1993), 27.

> amount of painters from older times were, but a painter in and of himself.[96]

This description locates the artist's innovation here solely in the materiality of the image, rough cardboard and a "dry piece of color" (pastel). What distinguished Laikmaa for this Estonian reviewer was that his images liberated him from the necessary co-existence of *vaapaja* and *maalija*. *Vaapaja* emerged as an Estonian neologism at the turn of the twentieth century related to the idea of painting, but it was never accepted into common parlance. The root of the word is the verb *vaapama/vaabata*, variously translating into English as "to drizzle," "to glaze," or "to coat." Juxtaposed with the word "painter," a *vaapaja* in this context signifies someone who covered their image. In others words, a *vaapaja* varnished images, coating the surface of the canvas to protect the integrity of the image, while also providing a protective glistening sheen. It is a material necessary specifically for oil and acrylic paintings, but unnecessary for pastels. Thus this critic's need to distinguish Laikmaa as only a painter and not a varnisher was directly related to the artist's choice to use pastels. In doing so, the critic hailed Laikmaa's rejection of painting with oils. To paint instead with chalky, soft and crumbly pastels was a deliberate choice on Laikmaa's end, yet it was also a decision laden with deeper ideological meaning in the colonial conditions of the Baltic Provinces. As it would happen, Laikmaa would routinely deploy the term "canvas lacquerer" (*lõuendilakeerija*) not only as a derogatory epithet for bad artists, but specifically

[96] "Murrab teine kunstnik selle kallal pead, millega ja mille peale maalida, siis tõmbab Laipmann kuiva värvitüki kätte ja viskab krobeda papitahvli peale pildi ehk jätab õlivärvi pildi juures riidegi paistma, kui see aga maalitava asja loomulikule väljanägemisele tarvilik on. Nii ei ole siis Laipmann vaapaja (värvija) ja maalija ühtlasi, nagu seda suurem hulk vanema aja maalijaid olivad, vaid maalija üksi." "Laipmanni pildinäitus," *Uus Aeg*, 23 December 1903.

Baltic German artists. When we recall that a Baltic German artist once scolded Johann Voldemar Jannsen in 1871 precisely for his interest in veneer and varnish, the nuances of medium do indeed seem a significant measure of visual production in the colonial context.

Race and the Decolonial

Understanding the role of colonial conditions in the making of art has focused almost entirely on representations of history.[97] I add to this important and exciting body of scholarship by revealing that the very acts of art- and image-making themselves were both informed and circumscribed by the region's conditions of coloniality. Viewing the amorphous group of countries of Eastern Europe through the lens of postcolonialism has been often critiqued, notably in the art historical context by Piotr Piotrowski, who has warned about hastily applying postcolonial ideas about center and periphery to the study of Eastern European art, even if many characterize the region as "always a 'post-modern' polyphony."[98] But Piotrowski's hesitations focus on Poland, which, unlike Estonia and Latvia, had some degree of political and cultural sovereignty in the early modern past.[99] Estonia and Latvia, on the other hand, were constantly occupied and colonized by foreign powers, and Baltic scholars have convincingly argued that postcolonial approaches can be particularly enlightening

[97] Linda Kaljundi and Tiina-Mall Kreem, *Ajalugu pildis, pilt ajaloos. Rahvuslik ja rahvusülene minevik Eesti kunstis* (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstimuusem, 2018).
[98] Quoted in Timothy Benson, "Exchange and Transformation: The Internationalization of the Avant-Garde(s) In Central Europe," in *Central European Avant-Gardes*, 16.
[99] Piotrowski, "East European Art Peripheries."

regarding Baltic culture, especially its multiethnic dimensions.[100] Estonian art and architectural historian Andres Kurg rightly warns of the possibility of postcolonial theory invoking a martyr or victim complex about Estonia, potentially rehashing a narrative of oppression, a notion right-wing nationalists often invoke in order to enact their xenophobia.[101] I see the Baltic Provinces as colonial and thus use postcolonial theory specifically in relation to a historical hierarchy of power that determined access to and understanding of art. In the Baltic case, postcolonial theory can also have adverse effects. Rather than reifying a victim- or self-inferiority complex, postcolonial approaches can also enable us to understand and appreciate the ingenuity of Estonian and Latvian actors in their situation in relation to Baltic German and Russian artists, and recuperate their artworks from the dustbins of art history.

Postcolonial approaches also permit us to foreground the colonial aspects of the Baltic. Foregrounding colonial relations and seeing the Baltics holistically further questions the most enduring issue within scholarship on Eastern Europe: the prevailing force of nationalism. Ethnocentric art historical narratives emerged already in the interwar period, when fledgling nation states sought to create teleological narratives enshrining the distinctiveness of the cultures of their newly independent homelands. During the Soviet occupation (1940/44-1991), when research into both Baltic German heritage and the interwar era of independence became risky and politically taboo, a new kind of Soviet nationalism further encouraged the separation of Baltic narratives. Furthermore, linguistic barriers between Estonians and Latvians

[100] Epp Annus, Piret Peiker, and Liina Lukas, "Colonial Regimes in the Baltic States," Interlitteraria, 18 (2) 2013, 545−554.
[101] Katrin Kivimaa, Andres Kurg, Mari Laanemets and Virve Sarapik, "'Uus kunstiajalugu' ja eesti kunstikirjutis," *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi* 17, no. 3 (2008): 101-109.

further discouraged viewing the region more holistically. Yet in the period under consideration, the Baltic Provinces of Estland, Livland, and Kurland were always already seen as a single cultural unit because the medieval crusades cast the area collectively as *Terra Mariana*. From this period onwards, the areas of present-day Estonia and Latvia were intimately intertwined, with Baltic Germans often moving freely among the region's towns and manorial estates. National identity remains the dominant analytical lens to perceive Baltic culture between 1860 and 1920 because it has been termed in both Estonia and Latvia as the "National Awakening" (Est. *ärkamisaeg*, Lat. *Tautas atmoda*), taking inspiration from, among others, the Estonian pedagogue Carl Robert Jakobson, who in his famous 1870s "Three Fatherland Speeches" (Est. *kolm isamaa kõnet*), metaphorically cast the social changes beginning in the 1860s as an "awakening" from the "darkness" of institutionalized serfdom. Nonetheless, Baltic scholars in both countries in recent years have begun to question simple narratives of sudden "awakenings" among peasant populations, as Pauls Daija, Linda Kaljundi, Liina Lukas, Ulrike Plath, and Jaan Undusk, among many others, have argued for the idea of "entangled narratives" among the region's multiethnic population, emphasizing how Latvian and Estonian leaders were indebted to German and Russian movements in order to assert their identities.[102] Ivars Ījabs has rightly called attention to the relevancy of postcolonialism to interpret the cultural forms of early Latvian nationalism. Equally convincingly, Piret Peiker has replaced the idea of "national awakenings" and instead provocatively prefers the term "decolonization

[102] See, for instance, Undusk, "Kolm võimalust" Daija, *Apgaismība un kultūrpārnese*; Ījabs, "Another Baltic Postcolonialism;" Linda Kaljundi and Ulrike Plath, "Eesti ajalookirjutus poimitud perspektiivist," *Tuna* 1 (2017): 2–6.

movements." Repeatedly throughout this study, I subscribe to Peiker's notion of decolonization among the Estonian and Latvian intelligentsia, because it prioritizes how their ideas were produced in a colonial society with its own racial hierarchies, and their aims were to liberate their people and culture from these colonial structures, rather than strive towards political independence.[103] Indeed, when both states declared independence in 1918, it was because of an opportune moment when both Germany and Russia had weakened during the First World War. While national sentiment had consolidated Estonians and Latvians into ethnic groups, it is incorrect to project that nationalism backwards in time. It is, I would argue, anachronistic to do so. Thus to see Latvian and Estonian developments in the second half of the nineteenth century as decolonization movements also aids their discursive placement alongside other groups across the globe simultaneously contending with the power structures of imperialism and colonialism. Therefore I repeatedly refer to "decolonial movements" as the primary way to discuss the social and cultural changes the indigenous intelligentsia advocated from the 1860s through the 1890s.

Baltic Germans had asserted their racial superiority over Estonians and Latvians already in the early modern period (bolstered by a Christian-pagan binary), but these views assumed even more sinister dimensions in the nineteenth century when phrenology, craniology, and early anthropology asserted "truths" about the inferiority of Estonians and Latvians which continued as late as 1920. Even Latvians and Estonians themselves believed to some extent in their "inherent" racial

[103] I expand upon my ideas of decolonization in chapter two, especially in relation to the photographic portraits of Johann Voldemar Jannsen.

inferiority.[104] Thus I approach the multiethnicity of the Baltic Provinces not only from a postmodern appreciation of multiplicities and overlapping narratives, but also from the critical perspective that attitudes about race and ethnicity fundamentally shaped (and continue to shape) everyday existence. To that end, this dissertation also functions as a global extension of critical race art history, which Jacqueline Francis explains as a "comparative investigation and analysis of the central role that visual representation has played in the construction of race, a category that continues to matter."[105] According to Francis, the comparative approach of critical race art history "promises a sharper analysis of identity politics and their formation."[106]

Critical race theory enables us to make connections across art historical narratives. For instance, in 1900, the Baltic German art historian Wilhelm Neumann argued that "the art of the Baltic Provinces has never achieved complete independence, nor created its own school because of the inhabitants' political status and character. It is almost totally overwhelmed by the Germans and thus reflects German art in its basic outlines to which only the rare Baltic artist had a chance to contribute."[107] Neumann's claim that indigenous Balts possessed little "chance to contribute" because of their enserfment and presupposed intellectual and physical inferiority calls to mind Stephen Best's observation of the archive regarding black enslavement, noting that "when it comes to the representation of the inner life of the

[104] Björn M. Felder and Paul J. Weindling, eds., *Baltic Eugenics: Bio-Politics, Race, and Nation in Interwar Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, 1918-1940* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2013).
[105] Jacqueline Francis, *Making Race: Modernism and "Racial Art" in America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 13.
[106] Ibid, 15.
[107] Wilhelm Neumann, "700 Jahre baltischer Kunst," *Baltische Monatsschrift*, ed. Arnold von Tideböhl, 44, 49: (Riga: Jonck & Poliensky, 1900), 319–320.

enslaved, few of our sources are visual in nature. For slaves are not the subject of the visual imagination, they are its object. Slavery in the slaves' visual imagination remains foreclosed as a site of critical and historical inquiry—an absent cause only to be approached by way of a historical metalepsis."[108] Best's discussion of the absence of an enslaved person's visual expression of slavery is relevant to Latvians and Estonians, who also lacked a concrete visual archive before emancipation. Even as Best elucidates how to contend with an absence of the visual among an array of literary sources, he laments, "we have yet to discover a Frederick Douglass or Olaudah Equiano *of the canvas*" (my emphasis).[109] His desire is oddly medium-specific in its privileging of painting and ignores the fact that Frederick Douglass was not only the most photographed American of the nineteenth century, but a visual theorist in his own right before and throughout black emancipation.[110] Douglass was a firm believer in the power of black self-representation through the photographic lens in the face of slavery and racial violence. Deploying the perceived truthfulness of photography to capture their own self-fashioning, black Americans were able to dismantle nefarious stereotypes and compellingly counter dehumanizing objectification.[111] The image of the respectable black subject in the nineteenth century was thus not only powerful in its representation, but enacted emancipation through its creation. Through its easy reproducibility and cheap price, photography made (self-

[108] Stephen Best, "Neither Lost nor Found: Slavery and the Visual Archive," *Representations* 113, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 151.
[109] Ibid, 151.
[110] Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith, eds., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).
[111] Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. DuBois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

)representation possible to those historically denied by the bourgeois domains of painting and sculpture. It is for this reason that there is a remarkable similarity between nineteenth-century African Americans and Estonians and Latvians regarding the absence of painting and the concomitant intense embrace of photography.

Structure of the Dissertation

How art could ever become the domain of the indigenous population is the subject of the first chapter, "Inventing Art." As in Meiji Japan, there was considerable slippage in understanding new words related to the ambiguous field of "art," since these words conveyed epistemologically novel concepts and emerged in such great number that readers could never be confident in what, exactly, they were reading. In other cases, writers lamented the continued absence of indigenous words for art phenomena, with the Estonian case in point being the fact that the word *kunst* was never indigenized, prompting fierce debates and compelling arguments for other options, none of which ultimately took hold. Taking cue from Meiji art history, especially the scholarship of Kitazawa Noriaki and Satō Dōshin, I investigate these debates and engage critically with the invention and use of these new words, revealing the importance of newspapers not only in creating discourse about art—explaining the complications of reproduction between painting, photography, lithography and the legitimacy of the copy—but also codifying certain interpretations of artworks, and even inciting vandalism and violence in the case of some monuments.

Chapter two focuses specifically on photography, and delineates a rough history of why the medium became the primary mode of visual representation among

Latvian and Estonian audiences. Despite its clear historical prominence, the history of photography is but in its infancy in Baltic contexts, and thus a chapter specifically on photography begins to fill in these gaping chasms of history, and dispels the myth that Estonians and Latvians lived in a "pictorially deficient" (*pildivaene*) world. This chapter is perhaps best understood as an exploration of the tensions of "autoethnographic photography" among Baltic audiences. I derive this idea from Benedikts Kalnačs's deployment of the literary dimension of Mary Louise Pratt's term "autoethnography" into the context of the colonial Baltic world. Pratt defines authoethnography as "instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer's own terms … in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations."[112] In the case of visual representation, autoethnography relates both to how new classes of upwardly mobile Latvians and Estonians echoed the ideals of the middle class, as well as participated in the photographing of their own peoples in their own territories. I examine the tensions between the promotion of the individual, most especially among Baltic decolonization leaders like Fricis Brīvzemnieks, Carl Robert Jakobson, Lydia Koidula, and Krišjānis Valdemārs, and the enduring visual trope of the anonymous peasant type.

That Tiidermann and Krēsliņš actively exhibited ties into the third chapter, which examines exhibition networks between the 1880s and early 1900s and their role in eventually legitimizing the medium of painting among Latvians and Estonians.

[112] Quoted in Benedikts Kalnačs, "Smoke and Fire: Autoethnographic Expression in Early 20th Century Latvian Literature," *Otherness: Essays and Studies 3.1*, ed. Anne Holden Rønning (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 2012), 2.

Taking cues from Mary Robert's examination of exhibition networks in 1880s Ottoman Istanbul, I investigate how exhibitions became inimitable moments of cultural encounter among local multiethnic populations when the visuality of paintings often masked an artist's ethnicity. In some instances, exhibitions focused on a single ethnicity, as the 1896 Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition, where Latvian painters collectively exhibited to other Latvians for the first time. Otherwise Baltic Germans initially dominated most exhibition circles. I track how Baltic German, Estonian, Latvian, and Russian critics discuss the emergence of Latvian and Estonian artists into these circles, where the display of art by those of "peasant stock" would upset and eventually overturn the hierarchies of power and knowledge. Critical to this narrative is how individual paintings, such as Oswald von Sass's *Estonian Wake* of 1889 for instance, could become emblematic of competing racial discourses, signifying a quaint ethnographic image of the manor-bound peasantry for German viewers, while a tired trope for Estonian and Latvian viewers, who exclaimed their frustration at the perpetuation of the German colonial gaze, and even the invasion of their sacred spaces. By 1899, the co-existence of Latvian and Estonian artists alongside Baltic Germans at Riga exhibition spaces demonstrated the futility of enduring racial stereotypes to visitors from elsewhere in the Russian Empire. A visitor from St. Petersburg remarked, "More than once, we were forced to hear the opinion that the Latvians were a degenerate, worn out and dying people. This much is true: a people from whom such talented, original, thoughtful artists [...] emerge, cannot be regarded as degenerate."[113] The idea that the power of the paintbrush could

[113] "Ein russisches Urtheil über den Rigaschen Kunstsalon," *Düna Zeitung*, 7 January 1899.

actually be a tool of social mobility and change was no exaggeration. It demonstrated an aptitude among the indigenous populations that Germans had historically denied them. Equally important is that beginning in 1899, these exhibitions toured not only the capitals of the Provinces, but also small towns, bringing painting, once that most distant and foreign of all artistic media, directly into the spaces of rural workers, farmers, and peasants. This exposure to art in small towns would lay the foundation for avant-garde innovations in the 1920s, when some of the most aesthetically radical endeavors occurred in isolated towns with no more than five thousand people. In one case, over twenty percent of Võru's population would see the first display of indigenous Cubism over the course of four days in 1923, an astonishing accomplishment clearly indebted to these travelling exhibitions.

Exhibition circles became frayed in the wake of the revolutionary activity sweeping the Russian Empire between 1905 and 1906. In the aftermath of bitter ethnic divides, museum officials sought to ameliorate racial tensions by promoting harmony through sponsoring murals with a shared subject matter to all inhabitations of the region: the native landscape. As the fourth chapter reveals, however, landscape would become not a source of unification, but rather a modernist tool to reject racialized ideas of art and, most notably, that art had to be national or regional at all. After an investigation of the perceived failure of attempted multiethnic collaboration in the landscape paintings of Vilhelms Purvītis and Gerhard von Rosen at the Riga City Art Museum, the chapter focuses on how Emīlija Gruzīte and Konrad Mägi deployed landscape as an aesthetic device to experiment with the boundaries of the esotericism and the power of pulsating life forces beyond our line of vision. This

chapter thus reveals how Gruzīte and Mägi detached the trope of landscape away from race in order to create visual explorations of the porous boundaries between science and spiritualism, questioning the history of the earth and humankind's place therein, as well as foresee otherworldy realms as spaces of women's emancipation.

The four chapters collectively make the case for constructing art historical knowledge deeply within periods in order to transcend entrenched geographies, creating a new methodology for the discipline's global turn. The possible consequences of the dissertation—methodological as well as historical—are addressed in the conclusion.

Chapter 1

Inventing Art

"The task of Estonians and Latvians is certainly not the pursuit of intellectual knowledge or skills."
Ferdinand Walther, 1864.[114]

"Art does not ask who someone is, but reveals what someone can do."
Eesti Postimees, ehk Näddalaleht, 1878.[115]

In 1891, the Estonian printmaker Eduard Magnus Jakobson recalled, "Twenty years ago a man from Viljandi once came to St. Petersburg in his beautiful folk clothing, and I guided him through the halls of the academy to an art exhibition. All of St. Petersburg's honest and wealthy men and women froze in front of the Estonian man in awe, looking at him with joy, and I had to give a reason for the man seen in 'such beautiful clothing.'"[116] For Jakobson, his memories of guiding an Estonian peasant man through the exhibition halls of the Imperial Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg in the early 1870s were a historical testament to the inherent splendor of native folk costume. For the St. Petersburg public, however, the presence of an Estonian peasant man in costume—an unusual sight in the imperial metropolis, let alone at the art academy—must have reminded them of a recent exuberant display of empire, the Moscow Ethnographic Exhibition of 1867, where meticulously detailed mannequins clad in the elaborate folk costume of the various peoples of the Russian

[114] Quoted in Peiker, "Postcolonial Change," 111.
[115] "Tallinnast kuuleme sõnumid," *Eesti Postimees ehk Näddalaleht*, 26 July 1878. "Kunst ja teadus ei küsi mitte, kes keegi on, vaid näitab ja tunnistab, mis keegi oskab."
[116] "Kahekümne aasta eest kord üks Wiljandi maa mees omas ilusas rahwariides Peterburi linna tuli ja mina teda sääl kunstpildi näitusele akademia saalidest läbi juhatasin, jäiwad kõik Peterburi auusad ja rikkad mehed ja naesed selle Eesti mehe ees imekspannes seisma, teda rõõmuga waadates, kusjuures ma mitmele küsijale pidin otsust andma sellest 'ilusas riietes' nähtud mehest." Ed[uard] Mag[nus] Jakobson, "Rahwa-riietest," *Postimees*, 3 January 1891.

Empire were put on display.[117] The existence of the Estonian peasant at the art exhibition conflated two scopic regimes: one keen towards imperial ethnographic exotica newly heightened after the 1867 fair; the other aware that the most recent paintings made in the Russian Empire featured the exploitation of these same peasants, revealing their squalor rather than any exotic exuberance.[118] In this context, we can see how Jakobson's memory reveals that the Russian Empire of the 1870s saw both peasant and painting as objects to behold. While the peasant was often painted, rarely was she or he able to look at paintings.

The peasant assumed new cultural relevance and topicality after the abolition of serfdom across the Russian Empire in 1861. In the Empire's Baltic Provinces, however, serfdom had been abolished as early as 1816 in Estland, 1817 in Kurland, and 1820 in Livland. Despite the *de jure* emancipation of most Latvians and Estonians, their fates remained largely shackled to German manorial estates until the 1860s. But serfdom did not necessarily curtail a person's artistic aspirations. Between 1765 and 1817, the Academy accepted enserfed persons as students on the conditions their owners agreed to liberate them upon successful graduation.[119] In the Baltic

[117] I explore the Moscow Ethnographic Exhibition and its relevance to Baltic visual culture in greater detail in chapter two.

[118] Here I am referencing the Peredvizhniki (or Wanderers), a group of mostly Russian artists who seceded from the Imperial Academy of the Arts, mostly in order to foster more socially critical realism given the social atrocity laid bare by the abolition of serfdom. See, among others, David Jackson, *The Wanderers and Critical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Russian Painting* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2011); Rosalind P. Blakesley, *The Russian Canvas: Painting in Imperial Russia, 1757-1881* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); Josephine Karg, "The Wanderers and Realism in Tsarist Russia," *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Art*, ed. Michelle Facos (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 193-208. For a recent revisionist reading of the Peredvizhniki, see Andrey Shabanov, *Art and Commerce in Late Imperial Russia: The Peredvizhniki, A Partnership of Artists* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

[119] Rosalind Blakesley has explained that masters could remove their serfs from the Academy at any point throughout their education, as there was little incentive for estate owners to lose skilled artisans. Although there was a hiatus on accepting serfs into the Academy between 1817 and 1859, a considerable number nevertheless achieved freedom through graduation. Elsewhere in the Empire,

Provinces, however, Germans had explicitly forbidden Latvians and Estonians from gaining artisanal skills in order to protect the livelihoods of German craftsmen.[120] Thus throughout the majority of the nineteenth century, the field of visual arts appears far removed from the indigenous peasantry of the Baltic. So rare was the peasant at an exhibition that it was newsworthy to remark that "some persons from the servile class and even one peasant" were among the two-thousand visitors to a show in Tartu in 1870.[121] Another Tartu Baltic German paper recalled how audiences in the Baltic Provinces had been even less socially diverse, explaining that entrance was once permitted solely for "decently dressed persons," a sartorial demand meant to exclude the indigenous peasantry.[122] When the peasant did appear at exhibitions, it was more often in the form of oils on canvas, rather than as actual living, breathing persons.

Given this chasm between peasant and painting, it remains a fundamental tenet that Baltic modern art began when "sons of peasants, who had not ever seen a painting up close had the audacity to leave for Saint Petersburg […] to study the visual arts" at the turn of the twentieth century.[123] This background is puzzling and

masters ran schools for enserfed artisans at their estates, notably outside of the institutionalized spaces of the Academy. Blakesley, *The Russian Canvas*, 34-35, 170-187.

[120] *Postimees*, 6 September 1901.

[121] "Zur Manufactur Ausstellung," *Dörptsche Zeitung*, 29 April 1870. Quoted in Rein Loodus, *Kunstielu Eesti linnades 19. sajandil* (Tallinn: Greifikoda, 1993), 128.

[122] "Dorpat," *Rigasche Zeitung*, 6 March 1870. I am indebted to Kristiāna Ābele for directing my attention to this source.

[123] Dace Lamberga describes the context of the art world in turn-of-the-century Latvia: "Latvian professional art came relatively late into being. As recent as the middle of the nineteenth century, a rapid development of national awareness, the so-called Awakening, took place. Sons of peasants, whom had not even seen a painting up close, had the audacity to leave for the Saint Petersburg Imperial Academy of Arts in order to study the visual arts […] the first professional Latvian artists were forced to spend most of their lives in Russia or France because in their homeland the only connoisseurs and purchasers of art were the German aristocrats who did not appreciate the Latvians' contribution." Also she states "the most professional Baltic German artists looked for opportunities to work in Germany and that is why the artistic level of the participations in local exhibitions of Baltic art was quite mediocre." Dace Lamberga, *L'Age du Symbolisme en Lettonie*. *The Age of Symbolism in Latvia* (Cinisello Balsamo, Milano: Silvana, 2010), 21.

ambiguous. After all, how could peasants want to study painting if they had never seen a painting? How could someone become an artist without ever seeing art? This chapter seeks to answer how, exactly, this "audacity" emerged. Since Estonians and Latvians were overwhelmingly peasants in this period, this context suggests that there was no precedent for the large cadre of Latvian and Estonian professional artists that emerged in the 1890s. The perceived absence of art and artists is all the more confusing since scholars routinely contend that the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed an "explosion of images" (Est. *pildiplahvatus*) after the widespread use of photography and lithography.[124] For the Estonian writer Friedrich Bollmann in 1900, the answer as to why there appeared to be no art was clear: "we Estonians do not really have many painters. We do not even have a name for painting in our language. It is no wonder there are no men going off to study something without a name."[125] Latvians, by contrast, not only invented new words to designate "painting"—they experimented with several variants in the nineteenth century—but would also boast a surprising number of painters by 1900.

Art historian Mai Levin rightly emphasizes that, "regardless of the diligent work of their predecessors, art historians today face a daunting task regarding older [Baltic] art [before 1940], not only in terms of theoretical generalizations or contemporary evaluations, but in the collection and making sense of factual information."[126] The absence of basic factual information is most prominent regarding the period of between 1840 and 1890, exactly the era which has yet to be

[124] Kaljundi and Kreem, *Ajalugu pildis*, 15.
[125] F. Bollmann, "Piltide ja wäljanäitusest," *Postimees*, 28 February 1900.
[126] Mai Levin, "Tõnis Grenzsteini tagasitulek," *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi* 2-3 (2017): 135.

written about in the series of new art history volumes in both Estonia and Latvia.[127] As a necessary corrective, this chapter presents a critical examination of the "invention" of art as it relates to indigenous encounters and experiences with visual and material culture between 1860 and 1890. I do so by foregrounding native neologisms. Taking cues from Meiji art history, especially the scholarship of Kitazawa Noriaki and Satō Dōshin, I examine the roots, uses, and transformations of Latvian- and Estonian-language words for the field of art.[128] The little scholarship on early Latvian- and Estonian-language art writing all suggests an elementary level of discourse, decrying that it is often descriptive rather than analytical and thus not intellectual. In his formative 1984 study on Latvian art, for instance, Romis Bēms rightly notes the initial ambiguity around neologisms such as *māksla* (art), yet suggests that early writing "borrowed, deformed, and simplified" German ideas of art in order to broaden the "elementary understanding of aesthetics" among Latvian readers.[129] I argue instead that indigenous discourse was indebted to the conditions of coloniality in the region. Understanding how colonial circumstances circumscribed possibilities for indigenous thinkers—as well as setting the stage for the development of decolonial thinking—elucidates why we must take descriptive writing so seriously. It reveals worldviews about art and visual culture which add complexity to the visual field precisely because its content does not conform to what we may expect.

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[127] Although volumes in neither country have been published on this period, Kristiāna Ābele graciously granted me access to her unpublished manuscript on artistic life in Latvian-dominated areas between 1840 and 1890. Her insights play an especially formative role in the second chapter on photography.
[128] Noriaki Kitazawa, "The Formation of the Concept of 'Art' and the Displacement of Realism," trans. R. Thompson, *Art in Translation* 4 (2012): 435-457; Satō Dōshin, *Modern Japanese Art and the Meiji State: The Politics of Beauty* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Center, 2011). See the introduction on the significance of this methodology.
[129] Romis Bēms, *Apceres par Latvijas mākslu simt gados. 18. gs. beigas – 19. gs. beigas* (Riga: Zinātne, 1984), 119-120.

In their time, those individuals who wrote about language reform stressed the need to invent or revise words in order to temper centuries of imposed foreign influence. This process of indigenization was more than mere patriotic refashioning; in the case of visual culture, it was a fundamental grappling with the material and social significance of art. Indeed, the words themselves, such as the Latvian designation *krāsotājs*, a neologism for "painter" literally meaning "one who colors," reflect sophisticated intellectual engagement with materiality. Tracing these debates and changes over time provides novel insight into the cultivation and spread of visual literacy. Moreover, this discourse suggests a fundamental tenet of this study: there existed in the colonial Baltic a fluidity between artistic media, troubling to a Eurocentric framework but commonplace across artistic practices elsewhere across the globe in the nineteenth century.[130] These ideas help elucidate why "painting" could possess little relevance still in 1900; meanwhile, it was not contradictory to consider a fresco painted decades earlier to be a physical testament to intellectual ability and skill of the indigenous populace in an era when colonial norms denied the possibility of such potential.

Chapters one and two seek to understand how art transformed from the realm of a single dominant cultural group to an increasingly pluralistic practice before the advent of better-known multiethnic exhibition circuits of the 1890s. Until the last decade of the nineteenth century, art had remained, in the words of one Estonian

[130] Here I am thinking specifically of the intermediality of visual culture in Qajar Iran, but we find similar practices in India, China, Japan, and the Ottoman Empire, among other places. On similar images troubling Eurocentric frameworks, see David J. Roxburgh, "Troubles with Perspective: Case Studies in Picture-Making from Qajar Iran," in *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*, eds. Jill H. Casid and Aruna d'Souza (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 107-125.

painter, largely "a German affair."[131] The earliest histories of Baltic art confirmed this separation, noting that the divide of the visual arts favored Baltic Germans to such an extent that contributions by an Estonian or Latvian were still "rare" in 1900.[132] One Latvian described the achievements of his compatriots at this time as "breaking into a fortress which had been closely guarded for centuries."[133] To be sure, this period witnessed the gradual decline of the social order of the Baltic Provinces after the repeal of land laws around 1868 enabled the peasantry to own land and move to cities, but it is too simplistic to deem the rise of art among Latvians and Estonians to be an offshoot of social mobility. Art was not democratic. Exhibition and museum spaces were culturally novel for all Baltic peoples in the nineteenth century—the first collection open to the public began in Riga in 1772—but they retained an additional layer of distance for the indigenous population because of their status as what Nicholas Mirzoeff has called the visual subject, "a person who is both the agent of sight (regardless of biological ability to see) and the object of discourses of visuality."[134] The majority of artworks on display in Baltic exhibition halls collectively cast the peasantry into a state of timelessness, demarcating the exhibition space along lines which celebrated Germanness. It is for this reason that Estonian and Latvian words for art did not develop in relationship to domestic or foreign exhibition cultures—as they did, say, in Meiji Japan. Instead, indigenous discourse about visual production was indebted to a fluidity of the site of art.

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[131] Ants Laikmaa, *Mõteldes tagasi. Valik Ants Laikmaa autobiograafilisi artikleid*, ed Vaike Tiik (Tallinn: Kunst, 1991), 58.
[132] Neumann, "700 Jahre," 319–320.
[133] Toms Ķikuts, "The Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition of 1896 – Witness to an ERA," *1896. Latviešu etnogrāfiskā izstāde*, ed., Sanita Stinkule (Riga: Neputns, 2016), 31.
[134] Nicholas Mirzoeff, "On Visuality," *Journal of Visual Culture*, 5 (1) 2006: 54.

The enduring trope of absence in nineteenth-century Baltic art—one also propagated historiographically—was related directly to the limited number of professional Latvian and Estonian artists.[135] However, it was precisely this rarity that suggests their extraordinary status—only one Estonian was listed as an artist in the Tallinn registry between 1850 and 1890.[136] Therefore I do not consider them as the driving actors in this narrative. Instead, I emphasize encounters so as to draw attention to the locations that determined the set of conditions in which Latvians and Estonians could enact visual sovereignty: newspapers and print culture, Lutheran churches, public squares, and even dowry chests in peasant households. I examine how exhibition spaces were racialized in the Baltic Provinces to understand why they did not immediately contribute to ideas of art, despite the fact that these locations were the primary places to see art as such. Artist memoirs have turned my attention instead to native-language newspapers which fostered critical dialogue about visual culture through the publication of new words in varying contexts, as they advocated for the necessity of cultivating visual literacy by printing and circulating their own images. For almost every Latvian and Estonian in the nineteenth century, however, it was the altar paintings of Lutheran churches which constituted their main interaction with art. Since rural populations commissioned altar paintings, the works became vital tools for community building, thus influencing some of the era's most sophisticated and in-depth native-language writing on art. Although art vocabulary

[135] Kristiāna Ābele, "The Picture of the Period 1890-1915 in Latvian Art-Historical Writing: Ethnocentric Distortions and Ways to Correct Them,", *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi* 21, no. 3/4 (2012): 9-12.
[136] Väino Sirk, "Haritud eestlased Eesti linnades 1850.-1880. aastatel," *Acta Historica Tallinnensia* 2 (1998): 18.

was still unstable in the 1880s, Estonian and Latvian writers began to publish opinion pieces which would influence collective interpretations of artworks, especially public monuments, indicating a growing sense of visual sovereignty.

Beyond Time and Space: Exhibitions and the Caveat of Lutheranism

In the summer of 1866, Tallinn's Estland Provincial Museum suspended history. Eduard von Gebhardt had displayed his new altarpiece *Christ on the Cross* (**Figure 1.1**), which found great acclaim because it "ignored historical truths."[137] Gebhardt's dark color scheme of ominous bluish-black storm clouds and muddy tones of the earth creates a dramatic contrast to Christ's emaciated body, a visual nod to early modern German and Netherlandish Protestant altarpieces. Though born to a Baltic German family in Järva-Jaani in Estland province, Gebhardt spent much of his professional career as a professor and painter of religious scenes at the Düsseldorf Art Academy. In the wake of growing German nationalism in the 1860s, many traced their national pride to the Reformation, thus casting Protestantism as a spiritual manifestation of that nationalism. The fact that Gebhardt emulated early modern German masters in color scheme and formal layout led viewers to praise the image's "chaste Protestantism,"[138] a visual language that many saw as a clever erasure of historical reality.

[137] H., "Das für die hiesige Dom-Kirche bestimmte Altar-Gemälde von Ed. Gebhardt," *Revalsche Zeitung*, 3 September 1866.
[138] Ibid.

Baltic German newspapers in Tallinn commended the fact that the painting centered the lamentation around the four figures of Christ, Mary, Joseph, and Mary Magdalene because it dismissed "the historical environment of soldiers and Jewish people."[139] The sentiment of this Baltic German reviewer was unabashedly anti-Semitic, praising the "beautiful experience" of seeing Christ with German features rather than "Jewish or Oriental physiognomies."[140] In the Russian Empire, most Jews were required to live in the Pale of Settlement, the borders of which specifically excised the majority-Lutheran Baltic Provinces. Riga certainly had a sizable Jewish population, and Jews lived in many Baltic towns, including Jelgava, Tallinn, and Tartu, but the Jewish elements of these towns were vastly overshadowed by such Jewish cultural centers in the Pale as Vilnius, historically known as the "Jerusalem of the North."[141] The anti-Semitism promulgated in nineteenth-century Baltic newspapers thus reflected larger, more generic racialized attitudes about Jews rather than specific local situations.

If viewers already racialized the style, color, format, and mode of an altar painting's figuration in order to promote German racial and cultural superiority, we must be attuned to how that ideology pervaded other works of art on display, and what it might have communicated to the region's non-German populations. The contemporary reading of anti-Semitism in Gebhardt's altarpiece may appear to have little in common with Estonian and Latvian connections to and experiences of art.

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[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.
[141] On Jewish culture in the Baltic Provinces, see, among other sources, Svetlana Bogojavlenska, "Das Riga der Juden," *Riga: Portrait einer Vielvölkerstadt am Rande des Zarenreiches 1857-1914*, eds. Erwin Oberländer and Kristine Wohlfart (Padeborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004), 157-190.

However, Gebhardt won this commission for the Tallinn church at the suggestion of Leopold von Pezold, whose own painting, *Lutheran Service at a Sixteenth-Century Manor* (**Figure 1.2**)—still drying upon its display nearby Gebhardt's altarpiece—similarly enforced damaging racialized stereotypes. Pezold's image is a dizzying array of contradictory references typical within nineteenth-century history painting. Under the watchful eye of a painted portrait of Martin Luther, a German baron stands with his arms firmly crossed. He oversees the activity of Estonian women and men who have come inside the manor house to listen to the women of the house recount stories from the Bible.

Cloaked in jewel colored tones of teal, topaz, and ruby, the women sit on an elevated platform covered in a blue cloth, signifying their social distance from the peasantry. The women appear to engage with the text differently, as the central woman gazes towards the window as if in anticipation of revelation. Pezold took inspiration for the scene from Balthsar Russow's influential 1583 *Chronicle of Livonia,* a history of the region from the twelfth century to the late sixteenth century. Pezold's painting represents the line, "…in the absence of a parson, certain virtuous noble widows and respectable ladies were not whatsoever ashamed of reading five chapters of catechisms out loud in a language besides German to the peasantry and servant families of the manors, mentioning the fear of an eternal God."[142]

[142] "Ning mõningad vooruslikud aadlilesed ja auväärsed emandad ei häbenenud sugugi kirikuõpetaja puudusel oma talurahvale ja teenijasperele mõisates viit katekiskmuse peatükki mittesaksa keeles ette lugeda ja neid igapidi jumalakartusele mainitseda." Quoted in Epp Kangilaski, "Leopold von Pezoldi tegevus Tallinnas aastatel 1862-1869," in *Eestimaa Provintsiaalmuuseum ja muuseumitraditsiooni algus Eestis,* ed. Tõnis Liibek (Tallinn: Eesti Ajaloomuuseum, 2011), 32.

This line undergirded a main ideology among Baltic Germans in the nineteenth century, namely that their embrace of Lutheranism benefited the indigenous populations and reflected the benevolence of the Baltic German nobility. For mid-nineteenth-century Baltic Germans, Lutheranism not only evoked national sentiment, but also functioned to affirm the hierarchies of Baltic colonial society. The noble women expected to be commended for speaking the barbaric tongue of the peasantry, encouraged by Lutheranism so as to foster a singular relationship with God. Lutheranism was therefore also a key tool of control and domination: Baltic German pastors often learned Latvian or Estonian specifically in order to oversee and regulate the activities of the peasantry. By stark contrast, the nobility rarely came into contact with peasants, and, if peasants were not servants of the household, nobles would rarely invite them into their home, let alone recount tales of the Bible in local languages. Thus the situation that Pezold painted, a noble family reading to peasants, was already fantastical. For many Estonians and Latvians, the notion of Germans "not being ashamed" to speak indigenous languages would have felt especially unjust, since it was often punishable to speak in Estonian or Latvian in schools as late as the 1880s.[143] It was an act which could even incite violence. Indeed, the colonial conditions of the region had engrained inferiority complexes to such an extent that some of the first writings of the indigenous decolonization movements in the 1850s and 1860s were undertaken simply as efforts to demonstrate that one's native language was capable of expressing intelligent, complicated thoughts.[144]

[143] Liis Pählpauu, ed., *Ants Laikmaa: Vigala & Capri* (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstimuuseum, 2014), 11.
[144] Ījabs, "Another Baltic Postcolonialism," 95.

Pezold's painting was also historically incorrect in its representation of space, especially the two paintings hanging on the manor's walls and the colorful decorative flourishes adorning the fireplace on the right. Such images would certainly not have been available in the sixteenth century, let alone visible to the peasantry, and clearly contradicted the Lutheran move away from exuberance and ornate decoration supposedly celebrated in the image. Even the representation of Estonian peasants was anachronistic. The costumes of the women and men are recognizably of Harjumaa parish, but were not worn until the nineteenth century. Upon closer inspection, we can also see that the seated blonde woman nursing her child has bare toes peeking out from under her striped skirt, a subtle yet significant detail which emphasizes her backwardness as the uneducated, dimwitted Other.

Pezold's history painting and Gebhardt's altar painting both utilized Lutheranism as an ideologically potent subject to muddle history and reinforce (Baltic) German superiority, making the exhibition space and museum display welcoming to Germans, while casting Estonians and Latvians as objects of display, reinforcing their existence as the visual subject. At this time, it was in the interest of most Baltic Germans to continue to support Lutheranism as a means to enforce the subordinate status of Estonians and Latvians as pious, obedient, diligent peasants. In the wake of the complete abolition of serfdom across the Russian Empire and new laws permitting social mobility for the peasantry, the suddenly mutable social status of Latvians and Estonians became an acute issue in the 1860s. One Baltic German pastor, Ferdinand Walther, was clear about the role of the indigenous population, writing in 1864 that:

> The task of Estonians and Latvians is certainly not the pursuit of intellectual knowledge or skills. Their cultural mission is not there, it is in the field of practical activity. Long centuries have ripened them into an honorable peasant people whose hard work, serious mind and frugality can serve as an example for all other agricultural workers of the Russian state.[145]

Walther's "field of practical activity" was an oblique reference to physical labor, an activity that still defined livelihoods for the Baltic peasantry in the decades after emancipation because legal structures had severely restricted mobility and required peasants to rent land from manor lords. Walther assumed intellectual activity was impossible for Estonians and Latvians since it was barely visible in the decades following emancipation, making them unthreatening to the Baltic German elite and thus ideal models for recently emancipated Russian serfs after 1861. But Walther's perspective was out of touch with reality. Latvians and Estonians of peasant background were already engaging in "the pursuit of intellectual knowledge and skill." This was made clear by the fact that an Estonian had painted the 1863 canvas *Estonian Bride* (**Figure 1.3**), on display at the same exhibition of 1866. The artist, Rudolf Berendhoff, hailed from the same small parish as the subject of his painting, a young newly-married woman, suggesting that the relation between painter and subject could have been personal. Under such circumstances, Berendhoff's attention to detail in the representation of the young woman's bridal costume appear more honorific and celebratory rather than objectifying, as it often was under a Baltic German colonial gaze. Aesthetically, however, the work fell into the paradigms circumscribed by colonial reality, and would have been understood in ethnographic

[145] Quoted in Peiker, "Postcolonial Change," 111.

terms, as explored in the following chapter. Given Berendhoff's untimely death in 1873, little is known about the artist as his name has all but disappeared in history.

Although Latvian and Estonian artists displayed artworks in exhibition spaces, these spaces paradoxically played a small role in the conception of art in the second half of the nineteenth century. Ants Laikmaa, an Estonian pioneer of the lauded turn-of-the-century generation of Baltic artists, recalled that his first experience with art occurred in the same space of the Estland Provincial Museum, where he became enamored with a nymph painting by a German artist he saw in 1888. Despite this formative encounter, his memoirs also suggest that he was surprised that an international exhibition could ever "lose its way [to Tallinn] from god-knows-where."[146] Laikmaa lamented that the museum "rarely allowed one to experience good art, or even art at all," and argued that the collection's saving grace was the small amount of works by Estonian artists.[147] His suggestion of the provinciality of the museum ignored the fact the space had actively featured exhibitions since April 1865, just months after its grand opening. Already by 1866, the year of Laikmaa's birth, the museum was displaying works by Estonian artists. It is important to note that Laikmaa was one of the most outspoken Estonians of his generation regarding the stagnant Baltic German stronghold on society. It was only once he left the Baltic Provinces for the first time in 1891 that he was able to "[disentangle] a lot of what school and upbringing (the environment) had wrapped around me like a fog."[148] Given his own experiences with the prejudice of Baltic Germans and their cultural

[146] Ants Laikmaa, "Kuidas ma läksin kunsti õppima," *Meie Noorus* 4 no. 2 (1939), 105.
[147] Ants Laikmaa, "Tallinna maakonna muuseumis," *Olevik*, 11 January 1900.
[148] Quoted in Pählapuu, *Ants Laikmaa,* 11.

institutions, we should not take his opinions about the quality of art at face value nor utilize them in order to determine the significance of the museum. Though it is true that Latvians and Estonians could physically enter museum spaces, view artworks, and even display their works there, Laikmaa's remarks are valuable here because they suggest that the exhibition space, or, at least, the sanctioned institutional space of the museum, felt unwelcoming in the 1880s and the 1890s. From altar pieces and historical scenes to portraiture, works displayed by the museum cast the indigenous population into a state of timelessness beyond the contemporary moment, thereby demarcating cultural boundaries within the exhibition hall and the museum as a whole. Visual sovereignty among the indigenous population thus emerged firstly as a phenomenon of language and the written word, a necessary step at a time when intellectual thought in Latvian or Estonian was still a radical mode of expression. The textual dominance of early Latvian- and Estonian-language discourse about art did not preclude images. Instead, both word and image emerged as novelties simultaneously, fostering indigenous experiences of the visual which functioned outside of the limitations of Eurocentric ideas of display.

Prints for the Peasantry: Cultivating Visual Literacy

A boat and train race in opposite directions. Their respective billowing plumes of steam and coal meet at the center of botanical bundles intertwined with telegraph wires (**Figure 1.4**). Bursting forth from these entangled wires and vines is the thick bold font of the Latvian words *Mahjas wiesis* (now *Mājas viesis*, lit. *The House Guest*). Draped like curtains, the wires set the scene as a bustling center of knowledge. But it is not only the wires, trains, and steamboats that transmit

knowledge across far distances. It is also the eponymous house guest, reading aloud from a newspaper to a group of eager and attentive women, men, and children, who disseminates knowledge. Outside of the house, figures stare in amazement at the technological novelties before them. Likely created by the Latvian printmaker Augusts Daugelis, the vignette conveys the pivotal didactic role of the newspaper in informing Latvians about the modern world. In fact, *Mājas viesis* was the first Latvian-language newspaper run by native Latvian speakers, rather than the local Baltic German clergy. Founded in 1856, it played a significant role in mediating the vast changes Latvians would experience in the wake of the abolition of serfdom earlier in the century.

While the image clearly conveys the importance of *Mājas viesis* as a communal tool of knowledge for Latvians, it also reveals an audience of new social diversity. Consider, for instance, the men wearing top hats in the central and right panel. They stand alongside women swathed in thick patterned fabrics—perhaps the large plaid patterns typical of the parishes of western Kurland—and men in workers' caps and other broad-rim hats common among working-class Latvians in towns and villages. At a time when many socially mobile Latvians still faced immense pressure to assimilate into Baltic German circles—and thus used German to the detriment of their native language—consuming Latvian media written by and for Latvians was a pivotal step towards social and cultural equity.[149] By contrast, socially ascendant Latvians and peasants stand side by side in the *Mājas viesis* vignette, privy to the

[149] In chapter two, I explore more fully the cultural politics of sartorial choices and the ambiguity they engendered among socially mobile Estonians and Latvians.

same knowledge. As such, the image advocates for social cohesion among Latvians regardless of social status, a radical idea given that the colonial conditions of the Baltic Provinces rewarded assimilation into Baltic German or Russian spheres, making it difficult to sustain distinct Latvian (or Estonian) cultural spaces.[150] Just as significantly, the content of the newspaper—both the one read by the figure, as well as the actual newspaper on which the header was printed—provided information beyond the rural homestead, a world accessible, as the image so beautifully illustrates, with dazzling, unprecedented speed.

The first major railway in the Russian Empire connected St. Petersburg to Warsaw in 1861, bypassing the Baltic town of Daugavpils (Dünaberg). This line connected with Riga just a year later. Building railways continued unabated throughout the decade, as Tallinn became connected with St. Petersburg in 1870. As a proxy between Latvians and the world, the *Mājas viesis* image visualized quite recent developments. With the paper's eponymous "house guest" sitting in the center, the image gave pictorial form to the friendly, collegial tone deployed by journalists and writers in order to ease the gradual implementation of necessary neologisms. Piret Peiker has drawn attention to the significance of "the voice of a well-informed villager" in Baltic indigenous writing at this time. She argues that this tone of writing was a necessary tool to facilitate the reader's comprehension of foreign or unusual subject matter.[151] The Latvian creator of this *Mājas viesis* header image was clearly

[150] Many of the Latvian and Estonian intelligentsia ran decolonial agendas under the veneer of societies such as teachers' clubs or choral groups.
[151] Peiker, "Postcolonial Change," 113-114.

aware of the resonance of this "village voice," and that this textual negotiation between foreign and familiar could also manifest itself pictorially.

In order to understand the efficacy of such newspaper vignettes, a few words about the emergence of native-language newspapers are necessary here. Though Lutheranism may have been a tool to ensure colonial hierarchies through oversight by the German clergy, it also ensured that the literacy rate of the Baltic Provinces was the highest in the Russian Empire. Reforming the languages of Estonian and Latvian was central to this endeavor, and initially a task of German pastors who oversaw translations of the Bible as well as personally evaluated the literacy skills of individuals from household to household. In the wake of Herderian nationalisms and the Enlightenment valorization of the richness and complexity of peasant languages, Germans began to codify the orthographies and grammars of Estonian and Latvian at the turn of the nineteenth century. As late as the 1850s, Baltic German pastors served as the custodians of Estonian- and Latvian-language periodicals and publications, until the first native-language newspapers edited by native speakers emerged, including the Latvian *Mājas viesis (The House Guest)* in 1856, and the Estonian *Perno Postimees (Pärnu Courier)* in 1857. Edification was the core purpose of these papers. As the Latvian *Pēterburgas Avīzes* declared in 1862, their goal was no more than to humanize the peasantry.

> Now, when a peasant has truly turned into a human being, the first aim of the education is to educate him as a human being, as a rational being, which is able to use all his corporal and spiritual faculties. And this is the first aim of the education for all orders. Everyone is firstly a human being, and only secondly an artisan, a high or low ruler, like a judge, a landlord, etc. That is why the first aim of the education for all orders is to give them what they need as humans, and only the second aim – to give what is useful for their

professions and orders.[152]

The necessity of declaring a peasant a human being bespeaks the reality of the region's social structure. The notion that the humanization of the peasant was an actual transformation was to deny vehemently the inferiority of Latvians and Estonians otherwise codified by the conditions of coloniality, and to emphasize that education was the key to this pivotal change. How this education occurred, however, was actually quite varied in approach and desired outcome, and this difference manifested itself already in the tones of the newspapers. Historian Ivars Ījabs has noted that the arrival of *Pēterburgas Avīzes* in 1862 inaugurated a plurality of opinions among Latvian papers. *Pēterburgas Avīzes* increasingly aligned itself with larger issues of social emancipation in the Russian Empire, and reported on the latest scientific and technological issues in an effort to steer away from the colloquial tone of other papers. Ījabs compellingly argues that the sophisticated writing and nuanced analyses of the paper threatened Baltic German institutions by positioning Latvians as equal players. Conservative Baltic Germans were of the opinion that such newspapers functioned at too high an intellectual level for the majority of Latvians and Estonians. Instead, they hoped that Estonian- and Latvian-language periodicals addressed "simple" issues in order to reaffirm that education was never a tool of social mobility, but rather social stagnation, a way to cloak subordination in a veil of contentedness.[153] At this formative stage of the decolonization movements, indigenous Baltic culture developed specifically in relation to both approaches: a dual

[152] *Pēterburgas Avīzes*, 6 August 1862, quoted in Ījabs, "Another Baltic Postcolonialism," 97.
[153] Ibid, 93.

necessity of peasant villager contextualization and a cultural politics of radical emancipation.

Images were vital to educating the peasantry long before the emergence of native-language newspapers. Moonika Teemus has recently revealed that the texts of the most read and circulated Estonian books of the nineteenth century, including Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald's didactic 1848-49 text, *Ma-ilm ja mõnda, mis seal sees leida on (The World and What it Contains*), were quite literally indebted to imagery. Kreutzwald's book was copiously illustrated with wood engravings recycled from British and German books, newspapers, and magazines, especially *The Penny Magazine* of London, readily available at the Tartu printing shop of Heinrich Laakmann. Encyclopedic in content and design, the book was aimed towards educating Estonian children about the world around them. Importantly, Kreutzwald selected and wrote texts specifically in relation to the kinds of images available at Laakmann's print studio. His reason for doing so should not be taken lightly. Kreutzwald sought out images and illustrations specifically because he encountered tremendous difficulty in finding suitable Estonian vocabulary for basic fields of knowledge. The communicative power of the visual therefore spoke beyond, and in place of, words in the late 1840s and early 1850s.[154]

Heinrich Laakmann's Tartu print and xylograph studio was the first of its kind in the Russian Empire. As a German born outside of the Baltic Provinces, Laakmann was an individual who grew up outside of the region's strict hierarchies and could see

[154] Moonika Teemus, "Pennimagasinist kopikaajakirjaks: viiekümne puugravuuri mitu elu 1832–1876," *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi* 25, no. 3-4 (2016), 159-160.

the value of bringing literature to the majority of the population, an otherwise grossly underserved demographic. This turn no doubt facilitated the apprenticeship of some of the earliest Baltic artists of indigenous backgrounds, the Latvian Augusts Daugelis (also rendered as August Daugell) and Estonian Eduard Magnus Jakobson, both of whom trained in the field of printmaking. Like many of their generation, Daugelis and Jakobson oscillated between St. Petersburg, Tartu, and Riga, and earned the majority of their income through print illustrations in Latvian, Estonian, and German newspapers. It was no small feat that these printmakers worked for newspapers in a variety of languages, demonstrating that even at the height of the so-called "national awakening" movements, the activities of individuals were always intertwined with a multiethnic, multilingual, and multiconfessional reality. Newspapers were the most radical outlet of decolonial thought, and in this environment, it is no coincidence that the physical and material progress of engraving was not too distant a process from the physical handling of materials in other artisanal endeavors such as woodworking, shoemaking, or metalsmithing. There is, thus, a compelling and direct connection between literally inscribing emancipatory language onto the paper and the simultaneous rise of printed images among Latvians and Estonians.

Beyond encountering printed images in newspapers, books, and calendars, indigenous Balts also would cut out and collect paper images in order to paste them in inventive displays. In his famed 1914 children's book *Baltā grāmata*, Janis Jaunsudrabiņš recalled the consumption, collection, and imaginative display of printed images in nineteenth-century peasant households. As one of his illustrations vividly depicts, it was common practice for Baltic peasants to paste a collection of

images cut from newspapers and books onto the interior lids of dowry chests (**Figure 1.5**). In his short text "Pictures," Jaunsudrabiņš recalls his overwhelming excitement and anxiety in the act of beholding these images as a child.

> But what drew my eyes close to Ieva's dowry chest were the beautiful pictures that covered the interior of the lid. Oh, whenever we went to Ieva's village, my heart would just linger on these covers, and it was with the greatest eagerness that I waited for something to be needed, or a piece of clothing to show to my mother. I was constantly near the chest. I put my finger in the key hole, stuck it inside, and tried to raise the lid. Nothing! Locked tight. But Ieva already knew the reason for my anxiety.[155]

Jaunsudrabinš's accompanying illustration depicts that moment of wonder and revelation as Ieva opens the chest to display the images to the excited young boy. Since we know that Jaunsudrabiņš based the text on his childhood memories, it is clear that his description of images as revelatory bespoke common practice in peasant households as late as the 1880s (he was born in 1877). Indeed, a sense of awe and respect towards the visual was clearly already manifest among indigenous Balts. From recycled imagery from foreign books to new images created by Latvians and Estonians and circulated in newspapers, print culture was fundamental to peasant edification and social mobility.

What is further significant about Jaunsudrabiņš's illustration is that it reveals a Latvian peasant woman as a custodian of images, standing in vast difference to the patronizing and patriarchal colonial encounters between Baltic Germans and indigenous Balts at museums and exhibition spaces as articulated elsewhere. Inese

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[155] "Bet, kas manas acis pie Ievas lādes visuvairāk saistīja, tās bija skaistās bildes, ar kurām no vietas bija noklāti abi lādes vāki. Ak, kad aizgājām pie Ievas ciemos, tad sirds man pie šiem vākiem vien kavējās, un ar vislielāko nepacietību es gaidīju, vai kaut kā neievajadzēsies, vai kāda drēbes gabala, ko mātei parādīt, vai kaut kā cita. Es pastāvīgi tur ap lādi vien dzīvoju. Es bāzu pirkstu atslēgas caurumā, es pūtu tajā dvašu iekšā, es mēģināju vāku pacelt. Nekā! Aizslēgts. Cieti. Bet Ieva jau arī zināja iemeslu manam nemieram." Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš, *Baltā grāmata,* 1914, not paginated.

Sirica has revealed that most of these chests were specifically the property of women, bestowed as gifts upon marriage, complete with the inscription of the bride's name on the surface. Thus, in Jaunsudrabiņš's narrative, access to images in the peasant household was in the power of its resident women, a phenomenon which requires deeper investigation, but typical of the way in which indigenous Baltic relationships to images and visual culture did not conform even to gendered ideas of visual culture elsewhere in Europe, as, for instance, the gendered dimensions of "craft" and "fine art." What is also significant is that Jaunsudrabiņš even used the word "exhibition" (Lat. *izstāde*) to describe these image displays in dowry chests. To be sure, he used *izstāde* in 1914, when the idea as both a word and experience was already familiar to many Latvians. What this might convey about dowry chests instead is their function as an image repository. Against this background, we may even understand why the exhibition space in museums and other public venues were such infrequent places for Latvians or Estonians to visit. For many indigenous Balts, image collections already existed at home, at a much more intimate level, where one could exercise personal judgment, discernment, and taste over representation in a way not possible in public spaces still dominated by Baltic Germans.

Writing Materiality: Color, Paint, and Indigenous Vision

The influx of new words was overwhelming and often puzzling for Latvian and Estonian readers, as loanwords from German and, to a lesser extent, Russian, retained their dominance in everyday speech. The uneven use of these new words also created confusion around images. In 1885, a belligerent reader of the Latvian

scientific and literary journal *Rota* was incensed about a recently published reproduction of an artwork (**Figure 1.6**). The editors, dismayed that their reader expressed themselves "only in coarse and immature words," explained the controversial image in question.[156] They had seen an oil painting by the Latvian Ansis Legzdiņš recently purchased by the Riga Latvian Society, an image now lost.[157] They took a photograph of the image, and the printmaker Eduard Magnus Jakobson copied the image into a woodcut for the paper. Jakobson had worked with *Rota* since the journal's 1884 debut and was the main artist in charge of illustrations. This was no small task, for the journal prided itself specifically on its copious use of illustrations and images to cultivate visual literacy among Latvians, publishing, among other articles, didactic pieces defining neologisms like *māksla* (art) and stressing the significance of images to "evoke humorous and happy thoughts as well as serious thoughts about the nature of humanity."[158] An important element of *Rota*'s visual program was obituary portraiture. Jakobson created one such image upon the death of Kārlis Hūns (**Figure 1.7**), the first professional artist of Latvian descent to pass away. Jakobson's incredible attention to detail and nuance emerges in his sensitive portrait of Kārlis Hūns in an 1885 run of *Rota,* especially in his rendition of the subtle nuances of the figure's musculature in his forehead and cheekbones. Jakobson even managed to portray Hūns with glowing, lively eyes, betraying the appearance of the image as a reminder of death. I emphasize Jakobson's clear, crisp, and deliberate lines

[156] K. R. – J, "Rota vēstulnieks," *Rota,* 4 June 1885.
[157] "Perkona ozols vecajā Romovē," *Rota,* 21 May 1885.
[158] "Bildes," *Rota,* 23 October 1884.

here because they are visually legible, a style clearly at odds with the printmaker's lambasted copy of the Legzdiņš painting.

Ansis Legzdiņš was a self-taught Latvian artist, mostly active in printmaking, but he occasionally dabbled in painting as well. Few of his works have survived, making it difficult to conclude anything about his oeuvre. We do know that Legzdiņš was fascinated with Latvian mythology and ancient history, which had become increasingly in vogue among Baltic Germans and, eventually, Latvians in the search for distinctively indigenous cultural elements over the course of the nineteenth century. The painting Jakobson copied depicts an ancient rite as a priest kneels before billowing flames, three skulls raised on poles, and a towering, powerful oak tree bearing the visages of Latvian gods Pērkons, Potrimps, and Pikols. Surrounding the scene are the innumerable humble believers awaiting the blessings, if not fearing the wrath of the gods. The detail Jakobson afforded his portrayal of Hūns disappears in his rendering of the figures of Legzdiņš's painting, though the printmaker's ability to convey a nuance of light and shadow is visible in his modulation of smoke emanating from the fire. The spacing between the figures in the crowd, however, seems especially awkward in relation to the detail and attention of the undulating shapes of the tree in the foreground.

Legzdiņš clearly based the original painting on a print illustrating Garlieb Merkel's fiery abolitionist treatise of 1799 that valorized indigenous Latvian mythology and decried the atrocities Baltic Germans committed during institutionalized serfdom. It may have been the artist's intention to honor Merkel's transformative text, among the first to embrace rather than reject indigenous pagan

culture, and thus elevate Latvian culture to a level on par with the pan-European respect for Greco-Roman antiquity. Any trace of this relationship, however, was absent in the exchange in *Rota*.

In their rebuttal to their disgruntled reader, the *Rota* editors explained that there existed both an original work of art as well as a copy. Something in the letter to the editor must have cast doubt over Legzdiņš's artistic ability, since the editors responded, "we would not give Mr. Legzdiņš the title of 'artist' (*mākslinieks*) nor would we call him 'a room and sign painter (*malderis*), who is a little decent at drawing.'" As I explore below, Latvians used *malderis* as the term for a German academic painter who created an altarpiece in the 1870s, but already by the 1880s the meaning of *malderis* began shifting to connote a social position of painting as physical labor. Thus for *Rota* readers to demote Legzdiņš from *mākslinieks* to *malderis* was a disavowal of his skill and competency. Nevertheless, the editorial board's explanation remained frustratingly ambiguous, and read literally: "We presented Mr. Legzdiņš's oil coloring after a photograph in a woodcut."[159] For the unfamiliar reader, what exactly was an "oil coloring" or even a "woodcut" for that matter? It was not far-fetched that a reader might wonder why an "oil coloring" was rendered in black and white on paper. In radical contrast to the ambiguity of "painting," there existed an assumption that there was a clear understanding of photography (*fotogrāfija*) among its Latvian readers in the mid-1880s, for reasons I explore in the following chapter. As "oil painting" is called an "oil coloring," *eļļas*

[159] The original Latvian reads: "Mēs pasniedzām Legzdiņa kga eļļas krāsojumu pēc fotogrāfijas koka griezienā." In "Rota vēstulnieks," *Rota*, 4 June 1885.

krāsojums, this exchange between editor and reader evinces how intimately intertwined the ideas of color and paint truly were. In fact, if we were to translate the literal description of the newspaper's discussion of the creation of the work, it would read: "Mr. A. Legzdiņš colored a historical image from the ancient Prussian and Latvian past in oil colors."[160] Here even the new verb *krāsot*, to color, is directly used to explain that the artist painted an artwork.

Krāsojums added a noun ending to the neologism for color, *krāsa*, to signify "something colored," and *krāsotājs* as "one who colors." *Krāsotājs* often appeared in direct reference to painters. When an exhibition of Vassily Veretschagin's famous Orientalist war canvases of Russian victories across Central Asia arrived in Riga in 1882, for instance, Latvian writers called the painter a *mākslas krāsotājs*, literally an "art colorer."[161] The fluid connection between "color" and "oil paint" would continue until at least the early twentieth century, when a son in a short story declared, "I am a *mākslinieks* (artist), but not a *krāsotājs* (painter)," by which time *krāsotājs* obtained the meaning it has in Latvian today, which is that of a wall painter.[162] For three decades or so, it was resolutely clear that painting was the activity of adding color. Only in the 1890s did the now widely-used terms *gleznot* (to paint) and *gleznotājs* (painter) become common parlance, coinciding precisely with the rise of Latvian artists receiving an art education at academies, and transcending the historically fluid connection between color and paint.

[160] "Perkona ozols vecajā Romovē," *Rota*, 21 May 1885.
[161] *Balss*, 27 January 1882.
[162] "Hauptmaņa drama un noveles," *Apskats*, 1 October 1904.

Simultaneously, on the opposite side of the globe, the idea of color was also imbricated into new ideas of painting in Japan. Satō Dōshin has remarked that the semantics of *ga* 画, that term which historically signified the distinctively monochromatic medium of ink painting, greatly expanded in the Meiji era to assume the very opposite: the designation for all sub-specialties of often highly-pigmented painting.[163] Satō states that "*ga* assimilated a new future 'color' […] and broader conceptual function" which we can understand only in the context of the changing social meanings of the word.[164] He argues that the "colorization" of *ga* was an emphasis on painting as a "public entity" understood through the processes of encounter, assimilation, and translation endemic to Meiji modernity.[165] I argue here that we must similarly frame the prevalence of the fluid relations between color and paint in the Baltic Provinces within the circumstances of coloniality, which ultimately reveals indigenous modes of the visual.

Foreigners visiting the region as early as the sixteenth century were shocked to see that enserfed Estonians and Latvians lived in conditions worse than animals and livestock.[166] By the eighteenth century, German pastors had stated that peasants often "perished" because they lived in "unhealthy smoke-filled dwellings made of cut logs."[167] To be sure, as Marie Alice L'Heureux has revealed, the main issue was that

[163] Satō, *Modern Japanese Art*, 198.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On Japan and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
[166] On travelers' opinions of the Livonian peasantry, see Kari Tarkiainen and Ülle Tarkiainen, *Provinsen bortom havet: Estlands svenska historia 1561-1710* (Helsinki: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, Stockholm: Bokförlaget Atlantis, 2013), 224-231 and Triin Parts, "Reisimisest läbi Eesti ja Põhja-Liivimaa Venemaale: 16. sajandi II poole ja 17. sajandi reisikirjade põhjal," MA Thesis, Tartu University, 2007, 66-90.
[167] Marie-Alice L'Heureux, "Modernizing the Estonian Farmhouse, Redefining the Family, 1880s-1930s," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 41, no. 4 (2010): 474.

Baltic peasant houses often had no chimneys, so fire for heating the house, cooking food, or drying grain would create a thick smoke often coating the walls.[168] Smoke would be vented usually through half doors, or opened windows. This was an especially terrible problem in the winter. Despite a tsarist decree in 1814 that all Baltic peasant homes should have chimneys, peasants possessed neither the wealth nor the necessary skills to make changes.[169] Though nineteenth-century writers often exaggerated the miasmal conditions of peasant housing—chimneys became commonplace by the 1860s—brilliant color was still rare, highly prized, and preserved for specific items. Estonian artist and art theorist Kristjan Raud declared that the richness of the colors in nature and their "mesmerizing beauty" (*nõiduslik ilu*) gave the peasantry hope "in gray times":

> Hampered by slavery, degeneration, and distress, Estonian people did not possess the possibility to bring to flourishing perfection a declaration of life in their colors […] nevertheless, as with all peoples of nature (*looduserahvad*), the Estonians of yore prepared their own colors, searching for them in fields and forests, and collecting them from flowers, grasses, mosses, tree bark, mud, and much more.[170]

Raud explained that they made yellow from daisies and birch leaves, black from marsh soil, red from the roots of madder plants (*Rubia tinctorum*), and brown from mosses, birch bark, bog soil and spurce and fir cones. He noted, "These colors were pristine," adding that "they did not fade in the sun, were water-resistant, and did not

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[168] Ibid, 475.
[169] Ibid, 475.
[170] Kristjan Raud, "Üleskutse Eesti endiste värvide asjus," *Postimees*, 30 October 1906. "Eesti rahval ei olnud võimalust oma värivde eluavaldust õitsvale täiusele viia. Orjus, kehvus, mured takistasivad.... nagu kõik looduserahvad, valmistavad vanad eestlased ise omale värvisid. Nemad otsisivad neid väljadelt ja metsadest, kogusivad neid lilledest, rohtudest, sammaldest, puukoortest, raba mubast ja paljust muust."

destroy cloth."[171] Although this description is Estonian, it should be understood nevertheless as illuminating of Latvian experiences as well. This notion that colors lasted and did not destroy textiles was of the utmost importance, for textiles were the primary material vehicles of color in the Baltic peasant world. Marta Liepiņa Ray has emphasized that even during institutionalized serfdom, the ability to create textiles was one of the few opportunities for Latvians to claim agency over one's self-worth. *Dainas*, Latvian folk songs, are some of the only historical sources we have about peasant life during serfdom, and many emphasize women's pride in claiming ownership of exemplary work: "I spun the master's flax into the finest thread; I spun it one filament at a time, as though I were creating a dazzling ornament."[172] Ants Laikmaa recalled a distinctive "Vigala red" of the textiles of his native parish as "inseparable from the surrounding landscape," and its sight evoked pride and jubilant emotions when he saw village roads lined with red-patterned skirts when people went to church.[173] At the turn of the twentieth century, when Latvians, Estonians, and Baltic Germans collaborated in earnest to record and preserve indigenous folk and material culture, ornate and exuberantly colored mittens, skirts, and woven belts were the first types of objects collected and catalogued.

Thanks to the research of Inese Sirica, we know that dowry chests in peasant households were also colored, but how Latvians and Estonians transformed the materials of their colors into paintable pigment requires more research.[174] Sirica has

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[171] Ibid.
[172] Maruta Lietiņa Ray, "Recovering the Voice of the Oppressed: Master, Slave, and Serf in the Baltic Provinces," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 14.
[173] Pählapuu, *Ants Laikmaa,* 14.
[174] Inese Sirica, *Latvijas pūralažu un skapju otējums.* PhD. Diss summary, Art Academy of Latvia, 2015, 11.

also revealed many artisans painting these chests were itinerant Jews, suggesting that even the realm of vernacular painting was rarely the work of the native peasantry.[175] Given the dirt and grime soiling most nineteenth-century peasant homes, it is clear that these colored chests were necessary to ensure that their array of interior images—Jaunsudrabiņš's so-called "exhibitions"—could maintain literal visibility.

By contrast, the church would have been one of the few places in the life of an Estonian or Latvian that was truly filled with light. Since the majority of these churches were Lutheran, they sported austere decorative schemas. In these sacred, clean spaces, light made the colors of oil paintings remarkably visible, just as it also created a luminous sheen as it reflected off of the veneer of the surface of an altar painting. Furthermore, in a visual culture primarily composed of black and white images—newspaper illustrations, prints in books and pasted onto the interiors of dowry chests—painting would have immediately appeared to be a medium of color as well as light. In this historical context, intertwined with the potentiality of an indigenous vision, it becomes clear why Johann Voldemar Jannsen emphasized bright colors and luminous sheen when he saw oil paintings for the first time in 1871. His was a countervisuality, to paraphrase Nicholas Mirzoeff, a mode of looking which displaced the authoritative function and viewing practices of painting.[176]

In Latvian writings and debate, words connected to "painting" possessed more fluidity than any other art neologism. In these debates I have discovered a discourse wherein the materiality and the literal stuff of different artistic media became

[175] Ibid, 10-11.
[176] Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

imbricated into these neologisms. In 1868 Atis Kronvalds suggested three different words for the Latvian idea of a painting: *daileklis*, *glītums*, and *glezna*.[177] In addition, traces of the German *Malerei* continued in the noun *mālēšana* as well as the emergence of the competing Latvian word *krāsojums*. Part of the reason so many words vied for the meaning of "painting" was because the idea itself was still abstract and there existed no concrete relation to *Malerei* for most Latvians. After all, the idea of "art" was hard enough to explain and contextualize. Latvian philologist Anita Trumpa has argued that, although we can trace the roots of these Latvian neologisms variously to Lithuanian or even Russian and Old Church Slavonic stems, their etymology is ultimately ambiguous, a decisive move by such linguists as Kronvalds, who capitalized on this ambivalence precisely in order to emphasize the novelty of such phenomena.[178] Moreover, the foreignness of "painting" proved especially relevant regarding oil paintings, which were primarily at exhibition spaces in cities and thus rarely seen by Latvians until the 1890s. The one glaring exception was altar paintings in Lutheran churches.

Life began and ended at churches in the nineteenth-century Baltic Provinces, and religion was a significant ideological battleground for the expression of geopolitical and cultural allegiances. Over the course of the nineteenth century, tsarist decrees encouraged the adoption of Eastern Orthodoxy among the peasants, succeeding in mass conversion movements to the detriment of Lutheranism in the

[177] "Kronwalda Attis," *Baltijas Vēstneša divdesmit piecu gadu jubelijai par piemiņu* (Riga: B. Dihrika un biedru grāmatu drukatava, 1893), 38. One author writes that Atis Kronvalds's neologisms for the art field appeared in 1868 in the twenty-fourth edition of a weekly paper entitled *Draugs un Biedris* financed by a Th. H. Braunschweigs (37). I have been unable to track down the original source.
[178] Anita Trumpa, *Adjektīvu semantiskā diferenciācija latviešu un lietuviešu valodā*. PhD. Diss, University of Latvia, 2005, 60-63.

1840s, and again in the 1880s.[179] Nevertheless, Lutheranism maintained its centuries-long dominance, and Lutheran churches served as the heart of most rural communities. Refurbishing old churches and replacing altar paintings were vital aspects to fostering communal belonging, and thus widely discussed in local newspapers. These discussions are pivotal sources for understanding vernacular uses of art vocabulary. An 1878 article in *Latviešu Avīze* announced:

> We can rejoice in the fact that works of art (*skunsts darbi*) in our country churches come to be celebrated with each passing year. There is already a great number of congregations who spent large sums of money and decorated their houses of God with a beautiful altar image or other artistic *glītums*. The Sece congregation in Upper Kurzeme has also renovated their church […] having supplied a new beautiful altar image for it. The director of the Leipzig Art Academy, Professor Nieper, has *mālejis* this image. […] the second altar image I would like to mention is the new altarpiece of the Suntāšu congregation, painted in Riga by the famous *skunstsmalderis* Mr. Siegmund […] This image will be a beautiful *glītums* for the Suntāšu congregation.[180]

Here we encounter an array of art neologisms, most notably the endurance of German "doubles" in the Latvian rendition of "art" as *skunsts* or *kunsts*, the verb "to paint" as *mālēt* (the conjugated form *mālējis*, to have painted) and "painter" as *skunstsmalderis*. What is more significant, however, is the use of the adjective *krāšņs* and the noun *glītums*. Krišjānis Valdemārs's 1879 Latvian-Russian-German dictionary defined *glīts*, the adjective origin of the noun *glītums*, with the Russian word for "beautiful," *красивый* or *krasivyy*.[181] *Glītums* would seem to mean "ornament" or "decoration," and *krāšņs* had carried the meaning of "gorgeous" or

[179] On peasant conversions to Orthodoxy, see Daniel Cavender Ryan, *The Tsar's Faith: Conversion, Religious Politics, and Peasant Protest in Imperial Russia's Baltic Periphery, 1840-1870*s. PhD. Diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2008. On religious diversity in Imperial Russia, see Paul W. Werth, *The Tsar's Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
[180] "Divas jaunas altara bildes," *Latviešu Avīze*, 30 August 1878.
[181] Trumpa, *Adjektīvu semantiskā diferenciācija*, 56.

"splendid" since at least the sixteenth century.[182] In this era of constant neologisms and fluid definitions, both words were also intertwined with the act of painting. Kronvalds invented the word *glītonis* in 1868 to mean "painter." *Krāšņs* shared the same stem as *krāsa*, a Latvian neologism initially suspended between the meanings of "color" and "paint." Designating a church's new altar painting as a *krāšņs glītums* did not merely mean "beautiful decoration," but rather suggested an idea already pulsating with the meaning of resplendent color acquired specifically through the addition of paint.

There is another important dimension embedded within the relationship between color and indigenous vision. Among Latvian peasants, *krāsa* initially communicated the rosiness or pallor of someone's skin.[183] During the serfdom era, *krāsa* conveyed life and health, a glimmer of hope in the midst of oppressive brutality. The idea that color, and, by proxy, paint, had the power to enliven found resonance with the Estonian Jannsen, who exclaimed that colored images—paintings—appeared, "as if they are alive!"[184] This reaction was not just an enthusiastic description, but an idea that emerged specifically in the material practice of indigenous Baltic artists. Sometime between 1860 and the 1880s, the Latvian artist Jānis Staņislavs Roze created *Woman with Hen* (**Figure 1.8**). Framed in a rectangular ornate golden frame, yet positioned in an oval format, the image appears at first to be a painted portrait of a peasant woman cloaked in black and holding a hen. It is actually a photograph Roze enlarged and overpainted. Roze had already been using

[182] Ibid, 56-57.
[183] Konstantīns Karulis, "Krāsa," *Latviešu Etimoloģijas Vārdnīca. (Rīga: Avots, 1992) 105.*
[184] Jannsen, "Näitusest," *Postimees ehk Näddalaleht,* 28 July 1871.

photography for his compositions since the 1850s, thus, as we will explore in greater detail in the following chapter, the medium of photography was already a fundamental precursor to the act of painting for Latvians and Estonians. We also know that Roze created a series of painted portraits of leaders of the Latvian decolonization movement, ordered by the Riga Latvian Society around 1878, and based them on already iconic, well-circulated photographic portraits.

What is striking about Roze's *Woman with Hen* is the degree to which its appearance assumes the qualities of a painting. It is well known that hand-coloring photographs was a widespread practice in the nineteenth century in order to enhance the degree of realism. It was exceedingly rare, however, to paint an image with such detail that its origin as a photograph was concealed or indistinguishable. Only the peach colors around the woman's left hand, bleeding beyond the space delineated for her fingers, do we sense any degree of the image's intermediality. Thus Roze's image is neither a photograph nor a painting, but both simultaneously. In the following chapter, I explore Roze's specific material practice in greater depth. Here I want to emphasize that his use of materials in the creation of *Woman with Hen* was indebted to the confluence of the historical fluidity between the ideas of color and paint, the endurance of indigenous vision, and the origins of *krāsa* as a marker of life. Indeed, his act of painting the image, or coloring it, to use the Latvian terminology of the era, transformed the image from black and white to the realm of color and life.

It bears mentioning that some of Roze's nearest contemporaries in this practice actually worked on the other side of the globe. Christopher Pinney has demonstrated that in nineteenth-century India, exuberantly colored photographs were

the norm, since paint functioned as "much more than a supplement to the photographic image; rather, the overlay of paint completely replaces the photographic image in such a way that all or most of it is 'obscured.'"[185] Crucially, however, many Indian artists deliberately left traces of the body, notably faces and hands, unpainted, making the convergence of both media clear. Roze's practice of completely concealing the photographic origins of his *Woman with Hen* finds greatest visual resonance among contemporaries in Japan, especially the late works of Yokoyama Matsusaburō (**Figure 1.9)**. In the 1880s, Matsusaburō invented what he termed *shashin abura-e* 写真油絵 or "photographic oil paintings," wherein he removed the paper support of a photograph and applied oil paints to the remaining emulsion.[186] Carmen Pérez González views Matsusaburō's *shashin abura-e* as products of the era in which oil painting and photography came to Japan as novelties simultaneously, and thus reflect how the Japanese, in her view, did not fully understand the difference between both media.[187] Such an interpretation ignores the reality that Meiji ideas of artistic media are equally valuable and must be understood in their cultural context rather than judged against Eurocentric paradigms. We must similarly resist the idea that Roze "misunderstood" photography and painting. Instead, the images of Matsusaburō and Roze are the results of the purposeful combination of and experimentation with both media, demonstrating that these connections in the parallel

[185] Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) 70.
[186] Carmen Pérez González, "Yokoyama Matsusaburō: An Experimental Nineteenth-Century Japanese Photographer," *PhotoResearcher* 15 (2011): 3
[187] Ibid, 9.

modernities of Meiji Japan and the colonial Baltic manifested not just theoretically, but materially in the works of art themselves.

Markers of its Maker: The Materials of Emancipation

Estonian and Latvian writers devoted far more attention to their artist compatriots than their Baltic German contemporaries. Latvians prioritized Jūlijs Fedders, Kārlis Hūns, and Jānis Staņislavs Roze, all primarily painters, and Estonians Johann Köler, August Weizenberg, and Amandus Adamson, the latter two being sculptors. It is possible that the "prevalence" of painters among Latvian artists encouraged more thinking specifically about words for painting in the art field. By contrast, Köler, the sole active Estonian painter, displayed his works in Estonian towns only by photographic and print reproductions before his death in 1899. It is perhaps telling that Köler received his first commission, an altar painting, from parishioners in the Latvian-majority town of Cēsis (Ger. Wenden, Est. Võnnu). The work earned high praise among critics and granted him membership in the German Artists' Association in Rome, and paved his way towards an academic position at the Imperial Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg in 1848. Köler would not return to the Baltic Provinces until 1863, and what he saw upon his return, namely the continued struggle and suffering of his fellow Estonians, overwhelmed him with sadness. In his diary, he lamented:

> The squalor was inescapable and a stamp of long-felt inexpressible misery had befallen their faces. I was constantly reminded of the words of the famous writer [Garlieb] Merkel discussing Latvians, but equally relevant to my compatriots: 'Look at them in their faces. Starvation and numbness leer from the twisted and gloomy contours of their faces, a raw slave feeling (*orjatunne*)

> in every fiber of their being.' And the closer I examined the situation of the peasantry, the greater my deepest sympathies possessed my soul, since reality supersedes even the creations of your wildest imagination. While leaving town, and not the only time, I cried like a child realizing my complete and utter powerlessness in being any help at all to my miserable people.[188]

Garlieb Merkel was a Baltic German writer and activist whose 1796 abolitionist treatise *Die Letten vorzüglich in Liefland am Ende des philosophischen Jahrhunderts, Ein Beytrag zur Völker- und Menschenkunde* described the horror and atrocities of enserfment, and thus became a critical turning point regarding debates about the morality of enserfment in the wake of global abolitionist movements.[189] Historian Toivo Raun has described that the "lowest point" in the status of Estonian and Latvian peasants occurred after a new decree in 1740 when "the most insidious aspects of the lord-peasant relationship under serfdom was the pervasiveness of corporal punishment and physical intimidation."[190] For Köler to invoke Merkel's descriptions as still relevant over sixty years later reveals truly how little life had changed for the Baltic peasantry, and how bleak their lives often appeared despite decades of *de jure* emancipation.

In the summer of 1863, the appearance of a humble Estonian worker named Villem Tamm entranced Köler, who was visiting friends on the island of Kassari. Among the islanders, Tamm was affectionately referred to as "beautiful Villem," and he became the subject of many of Köler's images, first a recently rediscovered

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[188] Quoted in Alfred Vaga, "Johan Köler, III.," *Olion* 6 (June 1930), 11.
[189] For more on Baltic German abolitionist writing, see Andrew James Blumbergs, *The Nationalization of Latvians and the Issue of Serfdom: Baltic German Literary Contribution in the 1780s and 1790s* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008).
[190] Toivo Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians* (Stanford: Hoover Institute and Stanford University Press, 1987), 42.

painting *Hiiu Man with an Axe (Portrait of Villem Tamm)* **Figure 1.10**.[191] Emerging from dark, verdant woods, a bearded man clad in a heavy brown jacket slings an axe over his shoulder, as he meanders under the shadows of towering oaks and pines and among fallen trunks covered in soft creeping green moss. His rosy cheeks, luminous forehead, and dangling brown locks exude a youthful beauty which would forever immortalize him. Köler's detailed and delicate portrait would prove formative in the Estonianization of art. Sixteen years later, Tamm's youthful visage would appear again in an unlikely location: in one of Tallinn's largest churches, as the face of Christ himself (**Figure 1.11**).

Descending from a celestial realm, a blonde Christ clad in red and blue robes extends his arms towards us in a warm and welcoming embrace, amplified by the curvature of the cupola. Köler's Christ may appear unremarkable, typical, or even banal among church decorative programs. Even so, the image became the subject of the most in-depth Estonian writing on art, and its descriptions in the press grant us extraordinary insight into indigenous thinking regarding art, materiality, art history, and social criticism. An Estonian named August Einwald penned the longest description in *Eesti Postimees* in late August 1879.

> This type of altar image is painted *al fresco*, which means color is carried onto the surface of fresh lime, or when the color is mixed with lime. There were already *al fresco* paintings in olden times and people knew how to prepare them so that they would retain their appearance without changing over the course of hundreds and thousands of years, which we can see from the city of Pompeii, once destroyed by the volcano Mount Vesuvius in Italy, which has been recently dug out […] The Kaarli Church altar image is the *first* fresco painting ever made in Russia and thus will always remain important. […] This kind of difficult work is not done in a day or two, but requires more time. Professor Köler knew this very well, and since these kinds of paintings were

[191] Aino Kallas, "Köleri Kristuse algkuju," *Olion* 8 (August 1930), 31.

> not in Russia, he had to travel abroad to many towns in order to see how he could start to prepare it. Furthermore, he had to seek out all kinds of advice about how and in what way to paint onto the wall so that the cold and heat given off by the wall can withstand [the paint], since the church has no [regulating heat] ovens. Many practice attempts had to be made so that it could withstand the cold and heat of the church. Finally he got the approval of many people to make the intermediary wall so that air can travel through in order to keep the outer wall dry. All of these advanced preparations would take three years, and now the long awaited work and outer wall were finished. It should be noted that the bricklayers had to work as quickly as possible so that professor Köler would have enough time to paint, since color would not remain on dry wall unless the wall is raw (*toores*), and all the colors can dry as one into the wall (*ühes seina sisse kuivavad*).[192]

Above all, this description educates Estonian readers not merely about ancient art, but the materiality of fresco painting. By emphasizing that paint dries *seina sisse*, literally "into the wall," rather than painting *seina peale* "onto the wall," the author highlights the process of the absorption of paint, the fundamental essence of fresco painting which differentiates it from painting onto prepared canvas. In addition to the difficulty of its preparation and successful execution, this kind of painting merits discussion because of its rarity in the local and even imperial context—the writer argues it was the first fresco painting in the Russian Empire, an enticing but dubious claim. Elucidating the material aspects and creative process of the altar piece further reveals the skills and aptitude of Köler, and casts his character as eager yet humble, ambitious and talented. Johann Voldemar Jannsen would also write about Köler's painting, similarly drawing attention to what the materiality of fresco painting revealed:

> We have already read an in-depth, delightful description of the new altar image in Tallinn's Dome Church, but it is still better to see it with your own eye rather than just hear or read about it. We have seen the new altar picture in the church with our own eyes and must admit that the artwork is really the

[192] August Einwald, "Tallinna Doom-Kaarli kiriku altari-pilt," *Eesti Postimees*, 22 August 1879.

> work of an art master. Wherever we looked at the image, there it stood, a beautiful work of art in front of us, looking out at us wherever the viewer stood, even though an inanimate image certainly cannot move itself. Each stroke of color on the surface of the image testifies to the work of a competent (*osava*) master.[193]

Jannsen's celebratory description of Köler's altarpiece appeared just over a week after Einwald's detailed description in the same paper. A reader having recently learned about the materials of fresco painting would have been attuned to Jannsen's declaration that Köler's competency and skill as a talented artist manifested itself in "each stroke of color on the surface of the image" (*iga värvi kriips pildi peal*). Jannsen, who once described oil paintings in terms of their luminous sheen, was keenly aware of the material difference of fresco painting, and the ways in which it veered from oil painting's illusionism. Therefore, Köler's genius, his competency as a person able to create things, visually manifests itself in the material remnants of the painterly process of fresco, laid bare to the naked eye.

Beyond its impressive stature and technical mastery, the image captivated Estonians for other reasons as well: it was encircled with the Estonian translation of "*Come unto me, all* ye that labor and are *heavy laden,* and I will give you rest"—Estonians were undoubtedly the "heavy laden"—and the figure of Christ himself was modelled on an Estonian peasant.[194] Tiina-Mall Kreem has argued that Köler's nationality has been exploited in art history since his fresco is the first monumental painting in Estonia and his transformation of an Estonian peasant into Christ.[195]

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[193] Johann Voldemar Jannsen, *Oleviku lisaleht*, 1 September 1879.
[194] The inscription was actually incorrect. In the title "*Tulge minu juurde…*" (Come unto me), *juurde* was misspelled as *juure*, and remains so to this day, a notion that Einwald declared ridiculous given the misspelling in such a prominent and sacred place. Einwald, "Tallinna Doom-Kiriku altari-pilt," 1879.
[195] Tiina-Mall Kreem, *Viisipäraselt ehitatud. Luterlik kirikuehitus, -arhitektuur ja –kunst Eestis Alexander II ajal (1855-1881)* PhD. Diss. Tallinn: Art Academy of Estonia, 81. See also, Tiina-Mall

Kreem is rightly skeptical of national sentiment and the painting's status within a national canon of art in the nineteenth century, when Estonian artists are few and far between. Many scholars have thus valorized Köler to an unnecessary degree, thereby ignoring the important contributions of his Baltic German contemporaries, especially women, such as Julie Hagen-Schwarz, the academician and highly popular and accomplished painter of Tartu, or Sally von Kügelgen, who completed the cycle of religious paintings below Köler's fresco.[196] At the same time, however, Eduard von Gebhardt's 1866 *Christ on the Cross*, racialized as "beautifully German," was hanging just down the street at another prominent Tallinn church. As such, it bears analyzing how Köler's image and its creation functioned in relation not to national sentiment, but rather to the social hierarchies of the region and its conditions of coloniality.

The critical reception of the work in the Estonian press drew attention to the significance that the artist signed the painting as "Köler Viljandi," using the Estonian name of his hometown, rather than German name of Fellin.[197] When taken together, this signature and model would seemingly suggest the artist's intent to be decidedly "Estonian". More significant is that he chose to execute his painting with a fresco

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Kreem, "Johann Köler – eesti kunstnik. Johann Köler: An Estonian Artist," in *Kunstniku käepuudutus. Johann Köleri freskomaal '*Tulge minu juurde kõik…' *The Artist's Fingerprint. Johann Köler's Fresco* Come unto Me, All… (Tallinn: EELK Tallinna Toompea Kaarli Kogudus, 2014), 16-31.

[196] On Julie Hagen Schwarz, see Merli-Triin Eiskop, ed. *Julie Hagen-Schwarz. Eesti esimene naiskunstnik* (Tartu: Tartu Kunstimuuseum, 2018). On Sally von Kügelgen's religious paintings, see Anne Untera, "Sally von Kügelgen (1860-1928)," *Kuus baltisaksa kunstnikku. Sechs deutschbaltische Künstler* (Tallinn: Baltisaksa Kultuuri Selts, 2010), 71-80. On early influential writings on Köler, see Voldemar Erm, *Lähtemeistrid. Artikleid ja uurimusi 19. sajandi eesti kunstist* (Tallinn: Kunst, 1984).

[197] "Why does he give himself the additional name of Viljandi? Because other great men of Estonian origin, who stand on the edge of German dialects, add the place of their birth to inform others that they are Estonian by birth and will continue to consider themselves Estonian." Einwald, "Tallinna Doom-Kaarli kiriku altari-pilt," *Eesti Postimees,* 22 August 1879.

technique rather than create a large oil on canvas image as he had for earlier altar commissions. His choice of medium therefore tempers notions of nationalism, suggesting that Köler was more invested in distinguishing his altarpiece as original. The overwhelming majority of nineteenth-century Lutheran altar paintings in the Baltic Provinces were copies, translations, and modifications of early modern artists ranging from Fra Angelico to Albrecht Dürer and Bartolomé Esteban Murillo.[198] Copying was the norm among church decoration programs in the nineteenth century, and throughout the Russian Empire, the act of copying an iconostasis was part and parcel of the visuality of Orthodox faith.[199] However, given Köler's invocation of Garlieb Merkel's descriptions of "the twisted and gloomy contours of their faces" and "raw slave feeling," critical race art history encourages us to tease out the socio-anthropological dimensions of the copy.

The brutal history of serfdom deeply informed the creation of some of Köler's most iconic portraiture. Köler was born only six years after abolition, so it is significant to remember that his parents were born into serfdom. His portraits of his parents are iconic images of Estonian art history, yet one wonders if their faces, even in their modest piety, also pulsate with a "raw slave feeling." Köler's search for beauty in the wake of severe squalor among the peasantry would ultimately lead him to the highest levels of aestheticization: transforming a humble peasant into a beautiful Christ. In doing so, the artist decidedly responds to and fervently rejects the racialized ideas of inferiority thought to be manifest in the physiognomy of Estonian

[198] Kreem, *Viisipäraselt ehitatud*, 81-87.
[199] On nineteenth-century copies, see Tiina-Mall Kreem, ed., *Meistriteoste lummus. Koopia 19. sajandil*. Eesti Kunstimuuseumi Toimetised 1(Tallinn: Eesti Kunstimuuseum, Kadrioru Kunstimuuseum, 2007).

people. Yet there was an important element to Köler's shock upon his return home in 1863. His livelihood as a professional painter gave him access to a social class restricted from most Estonians. Having spent the majority of his life outside of the Baltic Provinces, Köler experienced a privilege rarely afforded to his compatriots, thus posing an important question: was the act of becoming a professional artist merely an act of assimilatory Germanization and/or Russification?

Estonian debates about the word for "artist" were directly related to the connection between historical enslavement and cultural dependency on Baltic German precedents within the ongoing decolonization movement. For some, even the word "artist" itself specifically invoked enslavement. The Estonian linguist Karl August Hermann argued that *kunstnik* was among the vilest of all Estonian words since it merged both German and Russian with no indigenous Estonian root whatsoever, combining German *Kunst* with the Russian noun-ending *–nik*, as in *khudozhnik, художник* (artist).

> It is really quite a shame that intelligent men must enslave (*orjastada*) themselves in Estonian with such a bastard word as the rubbish that is *kunstnik*. My heart aches that a beautiful work worthy of admiration must be *kunstlik* [artistic], since *võidiline* does not fit. It is irritating an artist calls themselves *kunstnik* and not *võidlane* because *kunstnik* is a rather horrible word, its face is German and tail Russian, yet together it makes an Estonian word. It's completely backwards.[200]

The Estonian word *kunstnik* is almost an exact replica of the Latvian *kunstnieks*, the original word for "artist" in Latvian, revealing how both languages, despite their divergent linguistic family affiliations, combined German and Russian words, just as artistic influences simultaneously originated from the Imperial Academy of Arts in St.

[200] "Teadus ja võidus," *Rahva Lõbuleht* 1 (1898): 2-4.

Petersburg as well as academicians from the Art Academy in Düsseldorf. As with the roots for the Latvian neologism *māksla* and *mākslinieks*, the Estonian proposal of *võidiline* emerged from the idea of "art" from the "ability to do" or "skill" and was also impacted by developments across the bay in Finland, where Finnish, the nearest related language, was also undergoing its own process of inventing neologisms.[201] Although no Estonian neologism for "artist" ever took hold—*kunstnik* remains the Estonian word for "artist" to this day— nevertheless inherent in the idea was the fact that the act of creating imagery displayed competence and skill, precisely what the majority of Baltic Germans assiduously denied Estonians.[202] Köler's altar painting demonstrated this possibility. In using his own prototype and subject, and honing his skill to deploy a locally unusual and rare medium, Köler distinguished the individuality of his creativity, thereby liberating himself from any indebtedness to Baltic German models, rejecting their supremacy and any kind of enslavement.

Aaron Hyman has investigated the idea of the slavish copy in relation to the arts of colonial Latin America, where the appearance of images as mere copies of European prototypes—an assumption which colors colonial Latin American visual culture as inherently derivative and quite literally provincial—collapses the real

[201] In the summer of 1892, an Estonian named E. Reiman repeatedly suggested the significance of emulating Finnish processes of creating art neologisms. In one article, Reiman offers the possibilities of *võime, suude,* or *jõude* in emulation of the Finnish *taide.* E. R.K., "Meie kunstnikud," *Postimees*, 26 June 1892. A later article suggests using Finnish words directly in Estonian, partly to foster the development of aspiring artists in nearby Helsinki. E. R. K., "Meie kunst ja kunstnikud," *Postimees*, 1 August 1892.

[202] Other alternatives for *kunstnik* included *võidlane, kujur,* and *taidleja*. The latter two terms were deployed in Estonian writing as late as the 1920s. A new artists' association in 1917 called themselves "kujurite ühing," which means "Society of Sculptors" in modern Estonian, yet in its time included only artists working in two-dimensional media.

geographical and cultural distance across the Atlantic and wrongly presumes uniformity across white Europeanate cultural spaces.

> The idea of a slavish copy […] has origins in the antique world, where certain activities—the so-called liberal arts—were reserved for enfranchised citizens of the republic. The binary of the servile, slavish copy and the free, liberal art […] threads through the early modern period. This binary rests on the antique notion that the education of the free citizen could and should be put toward creative invention, whereas the enslaved subject would remain untutored and condemned to simply copy. Though the word "slavish" has come to dominate our modern lexicon, at stake in these early modern commentaries was the mere state of being free or not. A slavish copy is the product of simple unknowing labor, of indiscriminate and purely manual dexterity, whereas the liberal art is the product of the free citizen's education in matters of choice, which is developed through the acquisition of knowledge and judgment that serve as requisites for the *ingenium* of invention.[203]

This discourse of servility had greater resonance for such artists as Juan Correa, of mixed African and indigenous American blood and thus of an enslavable caste, than for their creole contemporaries. Nevertheless, Correa, as Hyman explains, copied European prints as much as he transformed and transfigured them, suggesting that "painting on New World soil was not destined to move toward its triumphant liberation from the slavish copy, [thus] the configurations of painterly practice and values in New Spain, while engaging and deploying European terms and forms, remained different from those of Europe."[204] In an era when Estonian writers made explicit reference to Baltic Germans as *conquistadores* and Estonians and Latvians as indigenous Americans, Hyman's observations of the dynamics of the slavish copy in colonial Mexico find incredible resonance in the colonial Baltic. As citizens whose freedom was never challenged, questioned, or threatened, Baltic Germans artists

[203] Aaron M. Hyman, "Inventing Painting: Cristóbal de Villalpando, Juan Correa, and New Spain's Transatlantic Canon," *Art Bulletin* 99, no. 2 (2017): 123.
[204] Ibid, 128.

never saw the copy as detrimental to their professional careers in the nineteenth century, thereby bolstering Kreem's claim of the normalcy of the copy. Given the conditions of coloniality, however, the act of copying was racialized, thus the complacency of the copy reflects the status quo only for Baltic Germans. For Estonians or Latvians, copying was always already bound to notions of servile reliance and the perceived absence of intellectual ambition. In his actions, choices, and even literal existence, Köler embodied the liberal free artist, no longer enslavable, yet his practice was nevertheless indebted to European forms. Almost every Estonian description about Köler's decision to create a fresco painting reflected the idea that the original artwork is born out of agency as much as it was indebted to knowledge honed only after consultation with other experts. Years after the fresco painting was revealed, indigenous writers were still amazed that "the master hand of Köler the academician has demonstrated what the art of painting in our day has managed to accomplish *even among Estonians*" (my emphasis).[205] Within the context of Baltic coloniality, Köler's choices were an expression of visual sovereignty separate from Baltic German institutions, doing and creating what others deemed impossible or had not thought to do

Monumental Allegiance and its Discontents

By the mid-1870s and 1880s, a clear trend emerged among decolonial indigenous culture which rejected German dominance wholeheartedly. Nowhere was

[205] "Teadus ja kunst," *Oleviku lisaleht,* 4 January 1882.

this clearer than in the fate of a peculiar monument which appeared in Tartu in 1880. The university town was of inimitable importance for nascent Estonian and Latvian decolonization movements. Though the town is Estonian today, in the nineteenth century it hosted more Latvian students than Estonians, and nourished kernels of decolonial activism among its eager youth despite the prevalence of German and Russian students at the school. In 1880, a strange, new monument appeared on Dome Hill in the heart of the town (**Figure 1.13**). The sculpture featured a semi-nude male figure lounging on a rocky pedestal, posing with his right arm on an urn at an angle emphasizing his bulging musculature. His furrowed brows combined with his laurel crown and the flowing locks of his beard suggest a fortitude and regal elegance in marked contrast to the three playful and jubilant putti at his side. This was Franz von Villebois's colossal group sculpture *Father Rhine*, an allegory of the German god of the River Rhine; the three charming children represented the three main tributaries of the river, the Neckar, the Main, and the Moselle. Within less than two years, the city of Tartu was forced to remove the monument because it had been repeatedly "mutilated by nefarious hands."[206] The vandalism and eventual removal of the sculpture were emblematic of an important epistemological shift occurring in the Baltic Provinces: a dramatic diversification of art's audiences. Villebois's *Father Rhine* and its shifting contexts would fall victim to this nascent multiethnic audience.

Franz Karl von Villebois (1836-1890) was Baltic German sculptor who trained at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich in the late 1860s and exhibited *Father Rhine* as early as 1873. In 1876, a Dresden paper highly recommended to its readers

[206] Wilhelm Neumann, *Lexikon baltischer Künstler* (Riga: Verlag von Jonck & Poliewsky, 1908), 164.

to see a copy of the "surprisingly beautiful work," which in its Neoclassical form cast connections between the might of the ancient Roman Empire on the Tiber river, and the German state on the Rhine.[207] Over the course of the nineteenth century, the River Rhine became immortalized as a symbol of German unification. Located in an oft-contested area between France and Germany, the river had been a site of historical enmity. When the river was subject to border debates again in 1840, the atmosphere of animosity provided fodder for the patriotic song "Die Wacht am Rhein," which became a rallying cry for Germans to protect the river and ensure it "remained German." The song's popularity would pique three decades later during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871. When Germany emerged as a single, unified nation in 1871, the river was thoroughly enmeshed as an indispensable element of the German imagination. The figure of Villebois's *Father Rhine* was not merely an allegory of pagan German nature gods; it symbolized the divine power and force of the nascent German nation. In the wake of German unification, the blatantly patriotic and nationalist impulses behind Villebois's *Father Rhine* were undeniable.

Reading the monument as an emblem of German patriotism continued as the work moved from Germany to the Baltic Provinces and encountered new audiences. The sculpture arrived in Tartu when Baltic countess Charlotte von Grünwaldt acquired it in 1874. She had likely seen a photographic reproduction of the sculpture at a Riga Art Society exhibition in 1873, where it was noted that Villebois had received a prize for the work in Munich.[208] Upon purchasing the monument, she

[207] "Eine kolossalgruppe von einem livländischen künstler," *Rigasche Zeitung*, 23 February 1876.
[208] "Im Local des Kunstvereins," *Rigasche Zeitung*, 29 September 1873.

wrote immediately to the rector of the Univeristy of Tartu, asking if the school would assist in sponsoring the public and permanent display of Villebois's sculpture in a prominent location on the city's Dome Hill, where it would serve as a decorative element dedicated in memory of her mother.[209] The university rector responded enthusiastically to Grünwaldt's request, celebrating her "patriotic disposition" in wanting to bestow the university with such a gift.[210] The university board was thrilled with the acquisition, the Tartu public less so.

In August 1882, the Estonian paper *Eesti Postimees* reported that someone had built makeshift gallows around the monument, with a dangling rope tied around the head of the father figure. Next to the head was the inscription "for all the traitors of Imperial Russia," questioning to whom, exactly, did the commissioner, university board, and artist feel patriotic allegiance: Germany or the Russian Empire? Beyond its allegorical representation of the German nation, there was an even more troubling dimension to the monument for this Estonian reporter: "Anyone who has been to Tartu recently knows the copper statue representing the Rhine River in Germany. Its name is even 'Father Rhine' and around it are three other tiny figures, which stand for Estland, Livland, and Kurland, attempting to join 'Father Rhine'."[211] For Estonians and Latvians living in Tartu, the children did not represent tributaries, but rather symbolized the juvenile subservience of the three Baltic Provinces to Germany. In the multiethnic colonial context of the Baltic Provinces, the reception of *Father Rhine* changed dramatically from its debut in Germany just a few years earlier. The

[209] "Ein interessanter Proceß," *Düna Zeitung,* 14 February 1897.
[210] Ibid.
[211] "Kes Tartus on käinud...,"*Eesti Postimees,* 18 August 1882.

vandalism continued a few weeks later, when someone had covered the face of the main male figure, mostly its flowing beard, with black tar.[212] The damage became so extensive that the University of Tartu removed the sculpture from public display in 1883, and the work has since become lost.

Art historian Rein Loodus has argued that Villebois's *Father Rhine* was "simply the victim of misunderstanding" between Tartu's German and Estonian populations, as if to imply that Estonians were unaware of Germany's physical geography and unable to realize the putti were not emblems of German imperial conquest.[213] Such an assessment diminishes the processes of racialization within the Baltic Provinces and its impact on the understanding of art. In truth, it was common in Baltic German circles to infantilize Latvians and Estonians, especially when their cultural endeavors betrayed a fidelity to Baltic German institutions and mores, and crossed over into the realm of colonial ambivalence.[214] The vandalism of Villebois's *Father Rhine* evinced a deliberate rejection of dominant power relations and the casting of Estonians and Latvians as childish and subservient to (Baltic) German overlords, and opened a path for the indigenous intelligentsia to embrace another faction still vying for local power: the Russian state.

Before Köler completed his fresco in 1879, the most detailed and significant Estonian text on an artwork focused on the unveiling of Mikhail Mikeishin's 1873 *Monument to Catherine the Great* in St. Petersburg. In 1770, Catherine the Great oversaw the commission of St. Petersburg's most iconic and colossal monument:

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[212] Ibid.
[213] Loodus, *Kunst Eesti linnades,* 133.
[214] Ījabs, "Another Baltic Postcolonialism."

Etienne Falconet's *The Bronze Horseman*, an equestrian monument to Catherine's predecessor, Peter the Great (Peter I). Over the course of her reign (1762-1796), Catherine fostered an unprecedented blossoming of the arts, which enabled the rise of a professional class of Russian artists through bolstering the fledging Imperial Academy of Arts, the center for artistic education in the Empire until 1917. When Mikhail Mikeshin unveiled his *Monument to Catherine the Great* in St. Petersburg a century later in 1873, it was fitting that the fanfare not only reflected a new monument memorializing her achievements, but also that her rule inaugurated a new era of elevating the visual arts to a level of importance and prestige across the Russian Empire. In memorializing Catherine the Great, Mikeshin's monument was a testament to the importance of art.

When news of St. Petersburg's newest monument reached the Empire's Baltic Provinces, Mikeshin had caught the attention of an Estonian writer for an entirely different reason: Mikeshin was never trained as a sculptor, but as a history painter instead.[215] Estonian writing about Mikeshin's *Monument to Catherine the Great* would dominate the supplemental pages of the popular paper *Eesti Postimees* for two weeks in 1874, and was the earliest and most extensive discussion of the role of art and the artist in the Estonian language. Mikeshin's background as a painter and current profession as a sculptor suggested a perplexing malleability between artistic media which had been prevalent in other indigenous Baltic writing on art as well as in indigenous artistic practice. Nevertheless, the importance of public sculpture was

[215] "Keiserina Katharina II. mälestuskuju Peeterburgis," *Eesti Postimehe lisaleht ehk Juttutuba*, 2 January 1874.

clear for Estonian readers: a vital tool to express political allegiances, which meant fealty to the tsar or tsarina. It is for this reason that the words "for the traitors of Imperial Russia" accompanied the vandalism of Villebois's piece.

It is no coincidence that a shift embracing Russian hegemony among Latvians and Estonians began in the 1880s, for it is precisely at this time when the most serious campaign of Russification began in the Baltic Provinces. Historians have routinely asserted that the cultural impacts of Russification are difficult to measure, yet just a decade earlier, Latvian choirs sang "Die Wacht am Rhein" with jubilation despite their cultural, geographical, and even psychological distance from German lands.[216] Vandalism, then, was a significant declaration of visual sovereignty, making a new counterclaim against the hegemony of German culture in the region. In many ways, the opposing Russian orientation was more familiar and welcoming to Latvians and Estonians. The Imperial Academy of Arts had trained enserfed persons to become professional artists since the late eighteenth century, and with the advent of the Peredvizhniki painters in the 1860s, drawing attention to radical social disparities and seeking amelioration of such despair among the peasantry became key goal of artists in the Empire's Russophone realms—a drastic contrast to the *modus operandi* of most local Baltic German artists.[217] It is telling that the Peredvizhniki would even count Latvian painter Kārlis Hūns among its members. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, St. Petersburg would be home to some of the most radical thinkers of the Baltic

[216] Ījabs, "Another Baltic Postcolonialism," 94.
[217] Rosalind Blakesley, *The Russian Canvas*, 34-35, 170-187. One Estonian writer in 1901 revealed that such artisanal training was impossible during the era of serfdom in the Baltic Provinces, as Baltic Germans sanctioned laws specifically to ban Estonians and Latvians from gaining artisanal skills in order to protect Baltic German artisans. *Eesti Postimees*, 6 September 1901.

decolonial movements, and train the famous turn-of-the-century generation of Latvian and Estonian painters.

If German monuments were to be removed, the ideal replacement was not necessarily a sculpture valorizing the Russian Empire. As Toivo Raun notes, Russification efforts were also pivotal in liberating Estonians and Latvians from the dominance of Baltic German cultural spheres.[218] The act of vandalism thus rejected the presence of the monument and its seeming connection to eternity, and brought attention to the reality that there were actually viable indigenous alternatives, notably the works of the acclaimed Estonian sculptor August Weizenberg. A Tartu committee suggested that a sculpture of Vanemuine, the ancient god of song in Estonian and Finnish mythology, would be a logical fit on Dome Hill (**Figure 1.14**).[219] This was an ever more convincing case in Tartu, where the tradition of song festivals inaugurated the mythos of Estonians as a "singing people" (*laulev rahvas*) as early as 1869. As the god of song, Vanemuine created the natural world through sound and the ancient strumming of his golden *kannel*, a zither-like instrument. Vanemuine had been the subject of numerous sculptures by August Weizenberg, who was one of the few Estonian professional artists in the nineteenth century.[220] As with Köler, Weizenberg appeared often in the Estonian press due to his ethnicity, yet discussion of the latter never focused on the materiality of his chosen medium. Instead, Weizenberg became valorized because international juries praised his works. One article in *Eesti*

[218] On Russification efforts specifically, see Edward C. Thaden, ed., *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, 1855-1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).
[219] "Tartust. Eesti kirjameeste Seltsi koosolek Tartus 3. jaanuaril 1879, II," *Sakala*, 17 February 1879.
[220] I have written on the significance of music, visual art, and national consciousness specifically in Bart Pushaw, *Värvide dirigendid. Muusika ja modernsus Eesti kunstis. Conductors of Color: Music and Modernity in Estonian Art* (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstimuuseum, 2016), 13-15, 25-28.

Postimees revealed that "We hear messages from Tallinn about the artworks of our artists, painters and sculptors etc., ringing with praise […] [Eduard von] Gebhardt and [Julius] Klever are Germans, but [August] Weizenberg is *Estonian*. Art and science do not ask who someone is, but reveal what someone can do" (emphasis in original).[221] Weizenberg, despite the prejudice, discrimination, and struggle of coming from an Estonian background, could triumph and garner international acclaim. This brief remark was significant, for it was one of the earliest hints that the realm of visual culture could—indeed, would—unsettle the colonial social hierarchy of the Baltic Provinces. The visuality of art could not only erase ethnic markers in an era when viewers expected and demanded them, but reveal through the creation of artworks a competency neutralizing the colonial reality of racialization.

Conclusion

Eduard von Gebhardt, the titan of religious painting who towered over the field for some thirty years, made a radical turn in 1893: he inscribed an altar painting in two languages, German and, for the first time, Latvian. His *Koknese Altarpiece* revealed that the artist's once domineering German Christ of 1866 suddenly learned to speak Latvian in just under thirty years (**Figure 1.15**). While Baltic German commissioners desired Gebhardt for his prestige, elsewhere indigenous parishioners began specifically seeking out the help of their compatriots, rejecting the historically

[221] "Tallinnast kuuleme sõnumid," *Eesti Postimees ehk Näddalaleht*, 26 July 1878.

necessary trend of turning towards German painters.[222] In Nõo (Nüggen) parish, for instance, the congregation specifically solicited and waited for the work of Tõnis Grenzstein, an Estonian artist.[223] Altar paintings would become one of the most important arenas through which to introduce Estonians with paintings, but it was not always without prejudice. Ants Laikmaa would create a copy of Gebhardt's 1866 "German Christ" altarpiece for the Lutheran church of Pärnu-Jaagupi in 1901. (**Figure 1.16**). Doing so not only seemed to betray Köler's contribution of liberating indigenous Baltic artists from the slavish copy, but also bespoke the reality that Laikmaa had difficulty putting bread on the table as an aspiring artist in the 1890s. Significantly, it was the only time he painted in oils, turning specifically to pastels for the rest of his career. So deep was his disdain for oil painting that Laikmaa used the term "canvas lacquerer" (*lõuendilakeerija*) as a derogatory epithet for Baltic German artists.[224] Perhaps it was logical that Estonians, who did not have the same discursive debates about color and paint as Latvians, possessed a different relationship to what the materiality of oil painting signified. Laikmaa's awareness of the racialized dimensions of artistic media would foster an entire generation of artists in the Baltic Provinces more competent in pastel than any other kind of painting.

It is undeniably clear that the indigenous population of the Baltic Provinces consumed, created, and commissioned images. They even vandalized them. In 1903,

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[222] For more on this altarpiece, see Kristiāna Ābele, "Kunstniketriaadi Gebhardt-Dücker-Bochmanni looming ja selle retseptioon Lätis alates 19. sajandi lõpust," *Natuuri rikkus. Looduslähedus idee ja Düsseldorfi maalikoolkond*, ed. Tiina Abel. Eesti Kunstimuuseumi Toimetised 7, no. 12 (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstimuuseum, 2017), 259-265.
[223] "Nõo altarpilt," *Olevik*, 12 September 1895. See also Tiina-Mall Kreem, "Düsseldorfi koolkonna kunstnike maalid Eesti avalikes hoonetes," *Natuuri rikkus. Looduslähedus idee ja Düsseldorfi maalikoolkond*, ed. Tiina Abel. Eesti Kunstimuuseumi Toimetised 7, no. 12 (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstimuuseum, 2017), 205-206.
[224] Pählapuu, *Ants Laikmaa*, 12.

the Latvian paper *Mājas Vieša Mēnesrasksts* boasted that it had familiarized its readers with over 1000 images "from foreign artists as well as our own compatriots (Hūns, Purvītis, Rozentāls, Madernieks)" over the span of a decade, resolutely declaring that "the field of art was no longer a stranger!"[225] Thus even Rozentāls's lamentation that there were "no artists in the real sense of the word in the entire Baltic region" is not only a gross exaggeration, but one ignorant of a reality the complexity of which Rozentāls likely never realized himself. Indigenous writing and the invention of new words ushered in sophisticated ideas of what different materials can do, and that certain artistic media possessed varied efficacy among an audience diverse in race, language, class, and faith. It is therefore impossible to support the myth that artists working in the mid-1890s had never seen images. This myth of the absence of art may have endured simply due to a lack of serious research into the area, yet its complexity is illuminated only by contemporaneous global developments, as in the striking similarity of working methods between Yokoyama Matsusaburō and Jānis Stānislavs Roze in the creation of images suspended between painting and photography. The photograph, that most novel all of visual media of the nineteenth century, looms over and meanders among this indigenous invention of art. Indeed, the medium possessed few parallels in its transformative power to democratize the visual field. Its popularization in the Baltic Provinces would create a powerful alternative to visualization to the drastic detriment of Baltic German "canvas lacquerers." If Jannsen saw oil paintings as luminous images, the photograph would allow Latvians

[225] Unpaginated introductory text, *Mājas Vieša Mēnesrasksts*, 1 December 1903. The original Latvian reads: "Kam ir visi līdzšinijie Mēnešraksta gada gājumi ar viņa gandrīz 1000 bildēm, gan no cittautu māksliniekiem, gan no mūsu pāšu tautiešiem (Hūna, Purvītis, Rozentāla, Madernieka) tas mākslas valstībā vairs nav svešinieks!"

and Estonians to harness light in entirely different ways, illuminating a radical cultural politics of decolonization.

Chapter 2
Photography and the Rejection of Painting

"Painting, if anyone really understood that art anyways, was terribly expensive."
Eesti Postimees ehk Näddalaleht, 1867[226]

"Millions of [cameras] are deployed around the globe, and there is hardly anyone living in a cultured country on whom this apparatus did not carry out its work."
Rigasche Zeitung, 1874[227]

Photography mediated the visual field for nineteenth-century Estonians and Latvians more than any other pictorial mode. Regardless of whether the person behind the camera was Baltic German, Estonian, Latvian, or Russian, indigenous engagement with the camera lens far surpassed interaction with painting and sculpture.[228] Photography quickly gained currency among Latvians and Estonians for two reasons: it was surprisingly affordable and therefore accessible, and it created an uncanny and novel resemblance of reality. As one Estonian writer described in 1885, "The forms of living persons become immortalized as photographs. Entire groups of people can be captured [by the camera lens] so completely and *cheaply* in a manner a painter could never manage to do. Photographs can also depict lands and houses, towns and villages, rare forest animals, and even stars in the sky. These images bring these things to our vision so clearly as if we would see them with our very eyes. In its short lifespan, photography has managed to make itself known everywhere" (emphasis in original).[229] The objectivity of photography, its precision and

[226] "Pääwapildid," *Eesti Postimees ehk Näddalaleht*, 12 July 1867.
[227] "Die Entwickelung des Kunstgeschmackes in Riga," *Rigasche Zeitung*, 30 August 1874.
[228] By "indigenous" I specifically mean Estonian and Latvian, at the exclusion of Baltic German, for reasons I explore and explain below.
[229] "Walguse imetegu," *Oleviku lisaleht*, nr. 20, 4 October 1885, 309. "Elawate inimeste kujud pannakse praegu päewapiltidena jäädawalt paigale. Terved inimeste kogud wõetakse üles, mida maalija ialgi nii täielikult ja *odawaste* ei suuda teha. Niisamuti on maadest ja majadest, linnadest ja

accessibility, would enable Latvians and Estonians to assert visual sovereignty over these own representation, declaring a radical new subjectivity on their own terms, a subjectivity rarely afforded within painting.

For Baltic Germans, however, such subjectivity was never at stake, and many perceived the dissemination of photography as a detriment to art at large, especially the field of portrait painting. The influential Baltic German artist and Jelgava-based teacher Julius Döring (1818-1898), for instance, lamented in the 1860s that photography "[left] a progressively paralyzing impact on the work of portrait painters."[230] As late as 1902, Wilhelm Neumann even deemed photography the "evil enemy" of painting in his history of Baltic art.[231] But not everyone considered painting and photography as oppositional forces. Kristiāna Ābele has revealed that the Baltic German artist and publicist Leopold von Pezold articulated ideas of image reproduction, circulation, and consumption in the 1860s and 1870s, which bear striking resemblance to our conceptions of visual culture today. In *Rigasche Zeitung*, Pezold writes "An ever tightly-knit net of threads is woven across the world, connecting every country with all other countries […] It is not a net that constrains but a system of liberation, like telegraph communications and the railway, as

küladest, aruldastest metsloomadest ja taewa tähtedestki päewapilta tehtud, mis meile need asjad nii selgeste silma ette toowad, nagu näeksime meie neid ise. Päewapilt on enesele lühikese ajaga igalepoole teed teadnud teha."

[230] Döring, "Was ich nicht gern vergeßen möchte", 2: 218–219. Julius Döring, "Was ich nicht gern vergeßen möchte, oder Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben." 2: 194, manuscript, file 1107, reg. 2, coll. 5759, LSHA. Publication of memoirs in German: Julius Döring, *Was ich nicht gern vergessen möchte oder Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben*, Historisches Quellen 8, ed. Valda Kvaskova and Pārsla Pētersone (Riga: Lettisches Nationalarchiv, 2016). Quoted in Kristiāna Ābele, "Artistic Life, 1840-1890," *Art History of Latvia. Vol. 3. 1780-1890* (Forthcoming 2019).

[231] Wilhelm Neumann, *Baltische Maler und Bildhauer des XIX. Jahrhunderts* (Riga: A. Grosset, 1902), 70.

knowledge and skill make one free."[232] He specifically cites the reproduction of artworks as "a thread in the system connecting peoples," enabled by photography's capabilities of mechanical reproduction. Indeed, Pezold's networks seem to anticipate the iconic writings of Walter Benjamin as well as the anthropologist Deborah Poole's notion of the "image world" often invoked in global nineteenth-century contexts.[233] Just as remarkable is the fact that Pezold's emancipatory rhetoric of knowledge and skill echoes Latvian and Estonian discourse on the significance of art at large, recalling the methods of image production and even iconography of indigenous printmaking and newspapers. Although his visual networks of circulating and disseminating knowledge possessed emancipatory potential, Pezold nevertheless envisioned a strict hierarchy of artistic media:

> As one could imagine, a chance to see many images fosters the wish to own them. A person begins to adorn the walls of their residence, first with photographs, then with oleographs (*Oeldruckbilde*), and as prolonged possession produces a certain inadequacy of these reproductions, one then gradually passes over to an oil-image (*Oelbilde*), which, in turn, demands a counterpart, until it becomes necessary that the best-off people feel the need to put oleographs aside

[232] Leopold von Pezold, "Die Ausstellung im Saale der großen Gilde," *Rigasche Zeitung*, 24 October 1877.

[233] Deborah Poole describes "image world" as the following. "The term 'image world' captures the complexity and multiplicity of this realm of images that we might imagine circulating among Europe, North America, and Andean South America. With this term, l hope to stress the simultaneously material and social nature of both vision and representation, seeing and representing are 'material,' insofar as they constitute means of intervening in the world. We do not simply 'see' what is there before us. Rather, the specific ways in which we see (and represent) the world determine how we act upon that world and, in so doing, create what that world is. It is here, as well, that the social nature of vision comes into play, since both the seemingly individual act of seeing and the more obviously social act of representing occur in historically specific networks of social relations. […] It is a combination of these relationships of referral and exchange among images themselves, and the social and discursive relations connecting image-makers and consumers, that I think of as forming an 'image world.' The metaphor of an image world through which representations flow from place to place, person to person, culture to culture, and class to class also helps us to think more critically about the politics of representation." Deborah Poole, *Vision, Race, and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 7.

> and photographs in a folder where they belong, and decorate the walls with oil paintings.[234]

Rather than suggesting that photography and painting were oppositional, his narrative creates a teleological progression from photographs to oil painting. Pezold was certainly cognizant of the racialized dimensions of the ability to display images in one's home, once noting, "A German, since he settled in Latvian and Estonian lands, has become […] a lord, a nobleman in relation to the [indigenous] people, in both a good and a bad sense. In this position he, as soon as means allowed, had decorated his public and private life."[235] Although he hoped that art would never remain restricted to the upper classes, he also directly participated in racializing painting and exhibition spaces in Tallinn as we examined in chapter 1. Indeed, it must be stressed that Pezold's hierarchy of medium was not uniform across the social boundaries of the Baltic Provinces. If oil painting was the end goal of visual representation and the demonstration of the accumulation of capital for Pezold and Baltic Germans at large, it was also a medium Latvians and Estonians consciously rejected for decades. When Latvians or Estonians made comparisons between photography and painting in this period, it was routinely to the detriment of the latter.

This chapter examines what is at stake in the deliberate rejection of painting and concomitant embrace of photography. The earliest histories of Baltic art, and the long-standing historiographical bias against early photography in art history at large, cast photography as debilitating to the success of artists, effectively erasing the visual

[234] Leopold von Pezold, "Die Entwickelung des Kunstgeschmackes in Riga," *Rigasche Zeitung*, 30 August 1874.
[235] Leopold Pezold, *Zur Geschichte der Rigaschen Zeitung: Sonderdruck der Rigaschen Zeitung* (Riga: Müller, 1907), 43. Quoted in Ābele, "Artistic Life," forthcoming.

networks of indigenous cultural production which enabled palpable social transformation and change. The past decade has witnessed a flourishing of studies and exhibitions on nineteenth-century photography in the Baltic region, yet the historical paucity of scholarship has led to empirical data collecting and archival reportage rather than critical questioning.[236] This chapter demonstrates that foregrounding photography is the most significant way to understand Estonian and Latvian engagement with visual culture before the 1890s, revealing that they deployed the medium to assert a radically new individual subjectivity and decolonial politics.[237]

Global Knowledge, Local Change: "Sunlight Pictures" and the Indigenous Lens

Photography's technological limitations in chemical laws, optical principles, and lighting and exposure techniques initially determined the aesthetic conventions of

[236] Tiina Abel's 2013 exhibition "The Progress of Images: Interpreting Estonian Art and Photography of the Nineteenth Century" at Kumu Art Museum in Tallinn was the first to chart systematically the extent to which photography was truly intertwined with other modes of Baltic visual culture. Tõnis Liibek's 2010 dissertation charted a timeline of all photographers in the Estonian areas of the Baltic Provinces in his pivotal work *Fotograafiakultuur Eestis, 1839-1895*, PhD. Diss., Tallinn University, 2010, but I have been unable to consult it. Inta Pujāte has instigated new paths into the history of photography in Latvian areas. See Inta Pujāte, "Iluzorā pasaule. Fotogrāfija un portrets 19. gadsimtā," *Portrets Latvijā. 19. gadsimts*, eds. Inta Pujāte and Dainis Bruģis (Riga: Neputns, 2014), 259–281. Most of Pujāte's writings focused largely on Rozentāls, which in turn influenced Aija Brasliņa's Rozentāls retrospective of 2016 in Riga. See Aija Brasliņa and Laima Slava, eds., *Janis Rozentāls* (Riga: Neputns, 2017). Elsewhere in Latvia, the newest scholarship has focused more on the interwar era. See, among others, Katrīna Teivane Korpa, ed., *Vilis Rīdzenieks* (Riga: Neputns, 2018); and the respective chapters on photography in Latvian art history surveys. Eduards Kļavinš, "The Origins of Art Photography," *Art History of Latvia, 1890-1915*, 396-403 and Katrīna Teivane Korpa, "Photographic Art," *Art History of Latvia, 1915-1940*, 435-469. The most important recent contribution has been Peeter Linnap's *Eesti Fotograafia Ajalugu, 1839-2015* (Tartu: Tartu Kõrgem Kunstikool, 2016).

[237] Taking cues from Piret Peiker's work on postcolonial theory in Baltic culture in this period, I also describe the cultural politics of Latvians and Estonians between the 1860s and 1890s as expressive of decolonization movements instead of the anachronistic idea of a "national awakening." I explore the specific ramifications of "decolonial" in relation to "anticolonial" and "colonial" below. Peiker, "Postcolonial Change."

the medium. This technological uniformity sparked a striking visual similarity across cultural spheres in the second half of the nineteenth century. Given photography's geographical origins in Europe, scholars once attributed this cross-cultural visual similarity as wholly imported from Europe to the rest of the world. In the wake of the global turn, however, it is clear that the appearance and use of photographs often derived from certain pre-existing aesthetic modes, an understanding scholars have revealed through conceptual genealogies of the various terms now translated as "photography" (**Figure 2.1**).[238] Maki Fukuoka and Hye-ri Oh have demonstrated that, despite the technological novelty of photography, Japanese and Koreans both described photography with pre-existing words, rather than creating neologisms—notable departures from new words fashioned for the field of fine arts. The Japanese *shashin* related the medium to a historical imperative of rendering truth and knowledge, whereas the Korean *sajin* connected photography to a visual history of depicting a pulsating inner Buddhist spirit within portraiture. The emerging trend to trace the genealogy of these words undergirds an insistence that photography, despite its unified technical processes, was never understood nor employed solely in emulation of Europeans. As David Winfield Norman comments in his studies of the history of photography in Greenland, "any medium Inuit employ, in any manner, becomes an Inuit medium when it becomes a vessel for Inuit expression and

[238] Mari Fukuoka, "Towards a Synthesized History of Photography: A Conceptual Genealogy of *Shashin*," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 18, no. 3 (Winter 2010), 571-597. Yu Gi, "What's in a Name? Photography and the Reinvention of Visual Truth in China, 1840-1911," *Art Bulletin* 95, no. 1 (March 2013): 120-138; Hye-ri Oh, "Translating 'Photography': The Migration of the Concept of *Sajin* from Portraiture to Photography," *History of Photography* 39, no. 4 (2015): 369-389.

experience; the medium does not come locked into its corresponding European aesthetic paradigms."[239]

In staking claims of difference and delineating contrasts, scholars, however unintentionally, suggest a surprising homogeneity regarding the function of photography in Europe. Stephen Sheehi has argued "photography in the Arab world was not plagued by the questions of whether it was a 'bastard child' of painting or science, as it was in Europe."[240] David Roxburgh similarly notes that "the enthusiastic adoption of photography by Qajar artists and intellectuals as a means of equaling the achievements of European painting stands in marked contrast to how photography was received by the painting establishment in Europe. In Europe, its influence was short-lived and pictorial realism was soon replaced by Impressionism, whereas in Iran 'realism' remained the standard to which all artists were held until the middle of the twentieth century."[241] Wendy Shaw argues that "in contrast to their European counterparts, Ottoman artists viewed the photograph as equivalent of painting and saw the primary advantage of painting as residing in its abilities to correct the deficiencies of color and size that applied to photography." [242] These scholars are right to emphasize the fundamental sociocultural and epistemological differences in the embrace of photography across the globe in the nineteenth century, introduced as it often was through the colonial and imperial ventures of European powers.

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[239] David Winfield Norman, "Control Mapping: Peter Pitseolak and Zacharias Kunuk on reclaiming Inuit photographic images and imaging," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society* 3, no. 1 (2014), 50.
[240] Stephen Sheehi, *The Arab Imago: A Social History of Portrait Photography, 1860-1910* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 74.
[241] David J. Roxburgh, "Painting after Photography in 19th-century Iran," *Technologies of the Image: Art in Nineteenth-Century Iran* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museum, 2017), 109-111.
[242] Wendy M. K. Shaw, "Ottoman Photography of the Late Nineteenth Century: An Innocent Modernism?," *History of Photography* 33, no. 1 (2009): 82.

However, one must wonder, as Mirjam Brusius does, about the necessity of understanding early photography always already in close relationship to Europe. As she presciently notes, there is nothing "European" about photography besides the geographical origins of its technology and public announcement of its "discovery."[243] Even the origins of photography circa 1839 have become a topic of renewed debate, suggesting a multiplicity of origins for—if not inventions of—the medium across space as well as time.[244] Rarely ascertained from these analyses are the specific contexts and practices meant under the vague umbrella term of "Europe." As we will see, it is paramount to consider anew what is excluded within the postcolonial homogenization of Europe.

This tendency to distinguish early photography in Asia, Africa, and the Americas from Europe inadvertently creates a Europe which does not accommodate the function of photography in the Baltic Provinces. The "painting establishment" of the colonial Baltic rarely welcomed or embraced the indigenous population as cultural producers, fostering among them a radically different engagement with painting and its materiality than one might assume. Moreover, photography's influence was never "short-lived" nor did it give way to Impressionism in the Baltic, as Roxburgh suggests. This assumption belies the tireless work of so many scholars, especially those working on Eastern Europe, who have revealed the futility of a progression of or strict stylistic adherence to a series of isms to evaluate cultural

[243] Mirjam Brusius, "Royal Photographs in Qajar Iran: Writing the History of Photography between Persian Miniature Painting and Western Technology," in *Photography, History, and Difference*, ed. Tanya Sheehan (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2015), 59-60.
[244] Tanya Sheehan and Andres Zervigon, eds., *Photography and its Origins* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

production.[245] Instead, the practice of photography in the Baltic engendered a discursive similarity with disparate practices across the globe.

New global histories of photography often deploy the phrase "indigenous lens." This term appears asymmetrically in relation to photography's "others," wherein local context and conditions over-determine the distinctiveness of photography in one locale—historiographically "peripheral," "ignored," or "under-researched"—and then subconsciously juxtaposed to a universalist Franco- and/or Anglocentric history of the medium. In her pioneering *Vision, Race, and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World,* Deborah Poole first introduced the notion of *indigenista* photography from an anthropological perspective, focusing on nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Peru, to explain how portrait photography was a social practice of a global *embourgeoisment*, as much as it was tied specifically to the sociohistorical context of the modern Andes. In *The Arab Imago: A Social History of Portrait Photography, 1860-1910*, Stephen Sheehi expands Poole's framework to the Ottoman Arab Provinces (present-day Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, coastal Saudi Arabia) in order to evaluate quotidian photographers and to reject deliberately the enduring Orientalist tropes of colonizing histories. The notion of an indigenous lens is relevant to the Baltic because some of the most significant and earliest Estonian writing on photography was quite literally concerned with historicizing the medium's indigenization.

In 1885, the Estonian paper *Olevik* began publishing a series of articles entitled "The Miracle of Light," delineating what was perhaps the first history of

[245] Mansbach, "Meaning and Methology."

indigenous photography in the Baltic Provinces. The history began with the coinage of the word *päevapilt*, the Estonian neologism for "photography," which was described at length in a subsection entitled "Ancestors of the Photographer" (*Päevapiltniku esivanemad*).

> J[ohann] V[oldemar] Jannsen, editor of *Eesti Postimees*, was sitting at his office desk when the photographer (*päevapiltnik*) R[einhold] Sachker entered and gave him a small piece of paper. On the slip was an advertisement about preparing photographs that *Postimees* was to print. The editor took the advertisement, read it, and said, 'Fair enough, but the advertisement has the foreign word *Photographie* – no one in their right mind would understand that.' Sachker replied, 'That's the catch, and why I came to trouble you myself. I have searched for an Estonian word for quite a long time, but cannot find one. Please help!' The editor and the photographer sat at the desk for the rest of day, seeking a beautiful Estonian word which could replace *Photographie*. Finally the editor announced, 'Let's say *päevapilt* and the case is settled. You make your pictures with the help of light, and light comes from the sun (*päike*), thus it is sensible that we christen your pictures with the name *päevapilt*.' [...] Then, with proud lettering, *Postimees* declared to the Estonian people for the first time: 'Everyday in Tartu from nine in the morning to four in the evening, R. Sachker makes a *päevapilt* of people.' [...] The beautiful word *päevapilt* had thus been found, the people had read it and partially understood, and the photographer dreamt how people flowed into his atelier to stand in front of his camera.[246]

What is significant about this anecdote is that its author frames the history of photography not with any reference to the emergence of the daugerreotype in 1839, or a recitation of the development of the camera obscura or other optical technologies, but rather with the coinage of a native neologism. For this Estonian writer, the history of photography began only once the word was Estonianized. Translated literally, the word *päevapilt* simply combines the words "day" (*päev*) and "image" or "picture" (*pilt*), yet its description in the narrative here emphasizes the role of light (*valgus*) and

[246] "Walguse imetegu. 1. Päewapiltniku esiwanemad," *Oleviku lisaleht*, nr. 19, 19 September 1885, 1.

the sun (*päike*) in photography. In the Estonian language, *päike* is a diminutive form of *päev,* and the words were historically used interchangeably.[247] Thus *päevapilt* is better translated as "sunlight picture" rather than the literal "day image." At first glance, the idea of a "sunlight picture" may seem insignificant given its arguable similarity to the Greek roots of "photography" as "writing with light." Circa 1839, however, the word "photography" was far from a given in either English or French.[248] Nicephore Niepce often used the word "heliograph." After the coinage of "daguerreotype," William Henry Fox Talbot still used a variety of words to describe photography, including "sun pictures."[249] Frederick Douglass, the most photographed American of the nineteenth century, championed photography for its ability to permit "men of all conditions [to] see themselves as others see them." He also lauded Louis Daguerre for having "converted the planet into a picture gallery" by means of "simple but all-abounding sunlight." It was sunlight which transformed "what was once the exclusive luxury of the rich and the great […] within reach of all."[250] Even as late as 1934, American publications described the earliest photograph in the United States as a "sunlight picture."[251]

Sunlight metaphors possessed a particularly potent efficacy in Estonian and Latvian circles in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Between 1868 and 1870, the

[247] Matthias Johann Eisen, *Eesti mütoloogia*. (Tartu: 1919).
[248] Geoffrey Batchen, "The Naming of Photography 'A Mass of Metaphor,'" *History of Photography* 17 (1993): 2
[249] Ibid.
[250] Laura Wexler, "A More Perfect Likeness: Frederick Douglass and the Image of the Nation," in *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity*, eds. Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 21.
[251] Francois Brunet, "'An American Sun Shines Brighter,' or, Photography Was (Not) Invented in the United States," in *Photography and its Origins*, ed. Tanya Sheehan and Andres Zervigon (New York: Routledge, 2014), 144.

Estonian pedagogue and nationalist Carl Robert Jakobson delivered three fiery edicts published in a collection titled *Three Fatherland Speeches* (Est. *Kolm isamaa kõnet*). In his first speech, "Then and Now," Jakobson cast the history of his people and their brutal centuries-long enserfment as a "darkness" before their recent emancipation in 1819 and the contemporary moment of enlightenment as a "dawn" heralding a new day. Though his use of historical sources was dubious, Jakobson's speech deployed vivid language to romanticize antiquity as a heroic golden age ("light") and inaugurated the idea of a subsequent "700-year-long night of slavery" (*700-aastat orjaöö* or *orjapõlve*) before the "dawn" of a new era, a notion initially introduced by the abolitionist writings of Garlieb Merkel in the late eighteenth century. Jakobson's radical reevaluation of history aroused excitement among readers, and his metaphors of light, darkness, and dawn would influence decolonial discourse among Estonians to such an extent that the period's most significant poet, Lydia Jannsen, would adopt the penname Koidula, meaning "of the dawn."[252]

Latvians, too, had their own poet with a penname related to the dawn. Miķelis Krogzemis took the name Auseklis, the name of a powerful deity of ancient Latvian mythology as well as "morning star." Auseklis rose to fame for his collection of patriotic poetry, and it was his 1875 poem "Fortress of Light," *gaismas pils*, which would be his lasting accomplishment. Auseklis based the poem on an ancient Latvian folktale telling of a sunken fortress which retreated deep into the earth after the enserfment of Latvians. An ancient gray oak protected the name, waiting for the fortress to rise again once Latvians would remember its name.

[252] Mart Laar, *Rahvuse sünd* (Tartu: Eesti Rahva Muusem, 2016), 99.

Strikingly similar rhetoric to Jakobson's speeches and the poetry of Koidula and Auseklis occurred simultaneously on the other side of the world, where it was explicitly tied to photography. In 1869, Dr. Yusuf al-Jalkh gave the first treatise on photography in the Arabic language to the Syrian Scientific Society. He concluded that photography was essential to Arab progress because "rays of light" captured by the camera "illuminate the darkness of ignorance from our vision."[253] Al-Jalkh couched this "ignorance" as Arab decline and the rise of European supremacy: "As the sun of the sciences set on the horizons of the Abbasid Arabs' mind, it rose in the European sky until it reached its utmost limits. Its rays met the crown of the Europeans' heads, enlightening their hearts."[254]

Al-Jalkh was a prominent intellectual of *al-nahdah al-'arabiya*, the so-called Arab "Renaissance" of the nineteenth century which promulgated a discourse of "civilization and progress" (*al-tammadun wal-taqqadum*) in the face of European imperialism.[255] He found that "the execution of specific instructions, learning and implementing the science behind it, as well as the physical production of the photograph" was a source knowledge to be deployed, what Stephen Sheehi has called a "social performance of civilization."[256] In its invocation of the sun and emergence during the *nahdah*, the Arabic word for photography, *al-taswir al-shamsi*, literally "image of the sun," captured the notion that the camera was a tool of civilization and enlightenment. This connection between the function of a camera and the generic

[253] Sheehi, *The Arab Imago*, 82.
[254] Ibid, 81.
[255] Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 2004).
[256] Sheehi, *The Arab Imago*, 82.

discourse about enlightenment may seem too literal, but we must bear in mind that it is no coincidence that photography emerged precisely at the moment of a globalizing Eurocentric enlightenment discourse of the individual. This is, to paraphrase Norman Bryson speaking of the early years of Meiji Japan, the beginning of "the culture of the same" wherein there is but "one subject, that of modernity taken as a homogenous and global whole."[257] The ability to assume power over image-making and self-representation was not merely indicative of a new discourse of the individual, but its material manifestation. The knowledge necessary in using the camera spoke to an individual's personal enlightenment, while the portrait photograph itself was an index of the individuality of its maker as much as its sitter.

Sheehi sees the motivations of the Arab *nahdah* as similar in their aims to Meiji Japan's *bunmei kaika*, the Chinese *wenming*, and the *bhadra samaj* of Bengal.[258] All of these reform movements sought to counter the racialized hierarchy of power externally imposed by Euro-American imperialism by demonstrating native intelligence, aptitude, and cultural legitimacy through a carefully calculated adaption of foreign cultural norms. Scholars routinely compare and contrast such nineteenth-century Asian contexts, but what, other than geography, really separated the ambitions of intellectuals in Meiji Japan or Ottoman Syria from their counterparts in the Baltic Provinces? At precisely the same time Estonians and Latvians also sought to achieve parity with a vaguely-defined set of Europeans, similarly navigating the conditions of the period's capitalist global imperialism. The indigenous Baltic

[257] Norman Bryson, "Westernizing Bodies: Women, Art, and Power in Meiji *Yôga*," in *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, Joshua Mostow, Norman Bryson, and Maribeth Graybill, eds. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 100.
[258] Sheehi, *The Arab Imago*, 57.

embrace of photography therefore must be understood through a new, distinctively global commensurability in visual culture beginning in the 1860s, a commensurability emerging from disparate cultural groups finding similar answers in their attempts to transcend power imbalances and inequality.

Returning to *päevapilt*, we can now see how novel words possessed considerable potency. For instance, *Postimees* credited Reinhold Sachker in 1894 as "the first Estonian to advance this art [of photography] on his own" for the reason that he "even created the name 'päevapilt,' now so commonplace among the people."[259] This assertion was related to the first Estonian history of photography of 1885, which cast the emergence of *päevapilt* as the result of the great intellectual endeavor of two well-known Estonian men in order to advertise Sachker's atelier in 1869. For the author, even the literal act of inscription was powerful, claiming that Sachker "has put the real Estonian name *päevapildikoda* (photography atelier) on his door, which one can also read from the back sides of the images themselves, as if the sun really did start to shine on Estonians."[260] A marker of respect and parity, the inscription of *päevapildikoda* in addition to *Photographische atelier* indicated a radical expansion of portraiture's clientele, inaugurating a new kind of inclusivity. Although the media frequently touted Sachker's Estonian clientele, he clearly also served German-speaking customers, since many of the carte-de-visites produced in his atelier have advertisements in German, even iconic images depicting key figures of the Estonian intelligentsia, including Carl Robert Jakobson (**Figure 2.2, 2.3**). The backs of two

[259] "Haruldane ametipüha," *Postimees*, 17 March 1894.
[260] "Walguse imetegu," *Oleviku lisaleht*, nr. 19, 19 September 1885, 290.

carte-de-visites made in Sachker's studio in between the 1870s and 1880s bear identical inscriptions, the only difference being language, one in Estonian, one in German, and a slight font change in the titles of "Photography Atelier" and "Tartu". That carte-de-visites depicting Estonians were also inscribed in German suggests a fluid circulation of portrait photographs, not only among German-educated Estonians and Latvians, but of course also among Baltic Germans who could have purchased and circulated images of the indigenous intelligentsia.

It is likely that Sachker designed his studio logo printed onto the backs of his products. Prominently featuring earned medals and the location of the atelier, the carte-de-visites are calling cards not only for the photographed, but for the photographer. Though Sachker did advertise his studio as a *päevapildikoda* in 1869, literally inscribing the name onto his products, he did not actually invent the word. At least two years before Sachker opened his atelier, Estonian newspapers printed the word *päevapilt.* Rather than debating the semantics of nomenclature or discussing the novelty of the photography, writers for *Eesti Postimees* instead argued for the medium's familiarity:

> Photographs (*Päevapildid*). Images under this name are no longer unknown things in our day and age, just as many things which our parents could never imagine in their wildest dreams are no longer unknown. In older times, if someone wanted to portray themselves (*ennast maalida lasta,* lit. to let themselves be painted) and leave their figure (*kuju*) as a memory for their descendants, then they needed to have a hefty amount of money available, otherwise they could not even consider it. Painting, *if anyone really understood that art anyways*, cost a terrible amount of money, which only rich and great people could afford; poorer and lower-class people could see their face in a bucket of water, where they never stayed for long, if they even stood there at all. But now it's an entirely different story. The sun completes the picture and makes it in a moment, and your own face appears as created by God. The hand of a painter could also do this,

> but never as clearly and vividly as nature itself. For only two or three rubles a person can get a whole dozen [...] If parents want to leave a dear memory for their children—we are all mortal flesh and blood after all—then that once greater art [painting] is no longer necessary when you can go to the studio and sit in front of the machine for just a moment: one, two, three – ready! Here in Tartu we see people from the countryside quite often at the studio of the photographer (*pilditegija*, lit. image maker) Carl Schulz, where they can be pictured for a cheap price. You can get large photographs made there as well. Now we really have said something straight from the heart: whatever you want to do, let it be done of your own accord! (my emphasis)[261]

Historians of photography have routinely cited this passage and emphasized its conclusion as evidence of the rapid and remarkable embrace of photography among the rural peasantry, with "people from the countryside" flooding the atelier of Tartu photographer Carl Schulz.[262] Finding no archival photographic portraits of Estonian peasants before 1867, Tõnis Liibek has argued that this passage does not match the photographic record of extant visual culture.[263] Whether or not the text corresponds with surviving visual records, we must understand this description and its circulation

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[261] "Pääwapildid," *Eesti Postimees ehk Näddalaleht*, 12 July 1867. "Päevapildid. Selle nimealused pildid ei ole meie päevil mitte enam tundmata asjad, nagu nüüd nii mitu asja enam tundmatu ei ole, kellest meie vanema pool-sada aastat tagasi veel uneski midagi ei teadnud. Tahtis ennast vanemal ajal keegi maalida lasta ja oma kuju järeltulijatele mälestuseks jätta, siis pidi temal hea rahakurkur kõrvas seisma, muidu ei võinud ta selle peale mõtelda. Maalimine maksis, *kui keegi seda kunsti mõistis*, hirmus raha, mis läbi üksi rikkamad ja suuremad inimesed seda võisid teha lasta; vaesemad ja allamad inimesed võisid oma nägu veeämbris näha, kuhu ta aga kauem ei jäänud, kui ise seal ees seisid. Kuidas on nüüd lugu sellege koguni teine. Päike teeb pildi valmis, ning seda silmapilguga, mis nii sinu oma nägu on, kui Jumal sind loonud. Maalija käsi teeb ka, aga ei elades nii selgesti, kui loomus ise, ja sellel viisil võib inimene 2-3 rubla eest terve tosina sada, tahab ta suuremaid, siis maksab muidugi natuke enam, ja sedasama võib niihästi ühe kui mitme inimestega korraga teha. Saagu üks ehk kümme inimest pildi peale, aeg ja vaev on üks, kuid tegija kullo mitmega natuke suurem. Tahavad vanemad oma lastele armast mälestust jätta—meie oleme ju kõik verejad, surrelikud inimesed—siis ei ole siina suuremat kunsti tarvis, kui pilditegija juures silmapilguks masina ees mahaistuda: üks, kaks, kolm – valmis! Nõnda võivad vanemad lastele, lapsed vanematele, sõbrad sõpradele ja nõnda edasi, kergel viisil suurt rõõmu teha ja armast mälestust jätta, oolgu et kaugemale elama ehk, kui Jumal tahab, hauda hingama lähevad. Siin Tartus näeme väga sagedasti pilditegija Karl Schultzi juures maalt inimesi olevad, kes ennast nõnda odava hinna eest maalida laskvad. Tema juures said ka need suured pävapildid tehtud – Nüüd oleme asja oma südame pealt äraütelnud: mis keegi tahab teha lasta, jäägu nüüd tema oma hooleks."

[262] Ülle Lillak, "Nagu veeämbris. Fotograafi ja teatraali Reinhold Sachkeri viljakad aastakümned Tartus," *Sirp*, 16 May 2003.

[263] Tõnis Liibek, "Talurahvas fotoaparaadi ees XIX. sajandil," *Sirp*, 15 May 2008.

in a widely-read newspaper along the lines of decolonial politics: its embrace of free will—for Estonians to do something of their own accord rather than be forced—possessed incredible resonance in 1867 after the passage of new mobility laws just months earlier.[264] Right at this moment, the writer advocates choice and opportunity, championing photography and deliberately rejecting painting, just as Estonians were beginning to make new social, cultural, and political gains. Castigating the medium of oils on canvas as out-of-date and no longer necessary, the author also deems painting to be, remarkably, *incomprehensible,* "if anyone understood that art anyways," and thus foreshadows Jannsen's discourse regarding the alterity of painting circa 1871. Juxtaposed with "nature itself," the "hand of a painter" and the act of painting became irrelevant. On a larger sociohistorical plane, this rejection is a decolonial act, for to embrace the bits of light, salt, and glass of the photograph in lieu of glossy oil paints and gleaming veneer is to reject the imposed pre-eminence and domineering influence of Baltic German cultural mores. It is epistemic disobedience, an alternative deeply rooted in the cultural politics of medium which found a profound resonance among a disenfranchised population.

There is, however, a crucial distinction to be made here. The embrace of photography was not a nationalist disavowal of anything and everything Baltic German. The newspaper specifically encouraged its readers to visit the atelier of Carl

[264] Alexander II's Empire-wide emancipation law of 1861 not only liberated Russian serfs, but included Latvians and Lithuanians who lived outside of the Baltic Provinces and had yet to be emancipated. Thanks to this 1861 law, peasants in Estland, Livland, and Kurland could now buy land, thus ending the ambiguous and frustrating thirty some years between emancipation and actual, substantial change. In 1863, a new passport law was passed in the Russian Empire which permitted to peasants for the first time movement within and, perhaps more importantly, outside of the Baltic Provinces to any part of the Empire.

Schulz, the most prolific photographer of the Baltic Provinces in the nineteenth century. In *The Indigenous Lens? Early Photography in the Near and Middle East*, Markus Ritter and Staci G. Schweiller seek to steer us away from the pitfalls of that the idea of an "indigenous lens" could suggest an inverted category of othering: "To be an actor of local photography or to produce photography with characteristics or within contexts seen in one locality but not in other places of the world, it is not necessary to be a native of the country."[265] The idea of the indigenous lens should not only describe historical practices of photography, but also articulate present-day concerns about current art historical writing and discourse. In Baltic history writing, "indigenous" almost unanimously refers to Estonians and Latvians and excludes Baltic Germans. I use "indigenous" similarly throughout this study. It is true many Baltic Germans were native to the area insofar as they could trace their lineage to the region even back to the twelfth-century crusades. Heide W. Whelan notes that the idea of an "'identity crisis,' so familiar in our modern world, would not have been understood by a Baltic German noble of the early nineteenth-century. Baltic nobles knew exactly where they belonged and who they were."[266] Many Baltic cultural actors of the nineteenth century, especially those in the visual field, were actually immigrants from German-speaking areas outside of the Baltic Provinces, though practically all of them quickly adapted to the region's social hierarchy. This was certainly true for Carl Schulz, who was born in Baden and originally a citizen of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Before moving to Tartu in 1856, he also lived in

[265] Markus Ritter and Staci G. Schweiller, eds., *The Indigenous Lens? Early Photography in the Near and Middle East.* (Berlin and Boston: DeGruyter, 2018), 20.
[266] Heide Whelan, *Adapting to Modernity: Family, Caste and Capitalism among the Baltic German Nobility* (Köln and Weimar and Wien: Böhlau, 1999), 29.

Darmstadt and Frankfurt.[267] His wife, Julie Stahl, was a Germanized Estonian woman, the political and cultural ramifications of which we will discuss further below.

Here, then, the idea of a Baltic "indigenous lens" suggests the ways Estonians and Latvians used the medium of photography whether in front of or behind the camera lens. An indigenous lens does not presuppose a Latvian or Estonian photographer. Mārtiņš Buclers, one of the most prolfic writers and practioners of photography among Latvians at the turn of the twentieth century, remarked in 1906 that "earlier whenever a photographer would wander by us [Latvians], it was a foreigner almost without exception."[268] It is important to realize that for Latvians a "foreigner" (*cittautiets*) did not signify only Baltic Germans or Russians, but could also designate Estonians. Some of the most iconic Latvian figures of the nineteenth century, such as the schoolteacher and choral director Jānis Cimze, sat many times at the studio of the Estonian photographer Ferdinand Kajander in the mixed Latvian-Estonian-German town of Valka (**Figure 2.4**). Another Estonian, Jakob Livenström, opened his first photographic studio in the Latvian-majority town of Cēsis, nestled in the verdant woods of the Gauja river valley, before working in Valmiera and only later in Estonian-majority towns. We do know Latvian painters Jānis Staņislavs Roze and Jūlijs Feders pursued photography—Feders even worked briefly as a photographer himself. But when compared to the Estonian case, where a recent wave of vast archival research has already been undertaken, there is a severe lacuna

[267] Sven Lepa, "Tartu Fotoateljee Carl Schulz (1857-1935)," MA Thesis, University of Tartu, 2015, 16.
[268] Martiņš Buclers, "Ievadam," *Stari*, 1 July 1906.

regarding early Latvian photography before the 1890s. Even a basic understanding of Latvian engagement with photography is unclear. Exacerbating the Latvian situation is that a separate chapter on photography was not deemed necessary for a forthcoming survey of Latvian art of the period 1840-1890 because its editor considered the medium "mere documentation without aesthetic intentions."[269]

The issue of archival absence may be attributed to the fact that well-known images were reused and reframed as carte-de-visite portraits from other studios, making it difficult to trace originals. Recent strides in the history of photography, however, have revealed fruitful approaches to considering photography from the sitter's position. This is especially important among historically disenfranchised populations, whose importance in archives is often scattered if not systematically repressed or even destroyed. To this end, Maurice Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith have positioned some of the most iconic nineteenth-century African Americans, including W. E. B. DuBois, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Frederick Douglass as practitioners of photography. They observe that "although they might never have focused the lens or released the shutter on a camera, they put photographs to striking use in their varied quests for social and political justice, plumbing and expanding the political power of the photograph. While these men and women may not have been photographers, it is fair to say that they *practiced* photography."[270] To understand a Baltic indigenous lens similarly requires us to engage figures rarely considered as actors regarding visual culture and art history,

[269] Author correspodence with Kristiāna Ābele. 8 May 2018.
[270] Wallace and Smith, *Pictures and Progress*, 4.

including schoolteachers and educators such as Jānis Cimze, Krišjānis Valdemārs, and Carl Robert Jakobson, journalists like Johann Voldemar Jannsen, and—most significantly—the novelist, poet, activist and journalist Lydia Koidula. All of these personalities are iconic names in the Latvian and Estonian decolonization movements, and all engaged photography to varying degrees. In order to promulgate true change as possible for Latvians and Estonians, they needed to embody it themselves. As we will see, their modes of self-fashioning in this process of embodiment would be as hotly contested as they would be socially transformative.

The Civilizing Lens: Sartorial Codes of Respectability

The intervening decades between the abolishment of serfdom by 1820 by the ruling Russian tsar and the mobility ensured in the peasant reform laws of the 1860s promulgated under Russian imperial authority witnessed Germanization as the sole path for upward mobility for Latvians and Estonians. As a politics of cultural assimilation, Germanization was also gendered along a binary system. Attending a German-language finishing school, speaking German at home, and changing one's last name to German were necessary steps for Latvian and Estonian women to marry directly into Baltic German families and elide the bleak prospects otherwise inherited from a peasant upbringing and the legacies of enserfment. For Estonian and Latvian men, Germanization was not only an obvious social necessity, but also a patriarchal tool implemented to control domestic life. Even in the late 1870s, the Latvian writer and activist Matīss Kaudzīte admitted that it was still commonplace for "no house or family of educated Latvians, being German-educated and knowing the German

language, to speak Latvian at home at the same time."[271] As in most colonial societies, however, colonizers usually rejected indigenous attempts at assimilation, even though no other mode of change was socially permitted. Ultimately, Germanization was a civilizing politics, advancing assimilation into a "superior" culture so as to reinforce the irrefutable distinction from the peasantry. Germanization between the 1820s and 1870s was how Latvians and Estonians could erase their racialization as *Undeutsche*.

Photography was invented in the midst of this assimilatory period, thus those Latvians and Estonians who first posed for daguerreotypes already in the 1840s and 1850s were those of new social positions, including clergymen, doctors, soldiers, and, of course, cultural activists and the nascent intelligentsia. Historians have disparagingly remarked how difficult it is to differentiate Estonians and Latvians from Russian or German colleagues in portrait photographs of this period—an overly ethnocentric preoccupation—because they shared sartorial markers which masked ethnic difference.[272] Consider an ambrotype from the 1850s in the collection of the Estonian National Museum (**Figure 2.5**). Its frame damaged and image discolored, the fragile portrait depicts a seated man in a dark jacket and tightly fitted vest over a collared button-down white shirt. He clasps his right hand into a fist directly at his navel, and a ring has been colored over the surface in a yellowish golden tone. The color of the ring enhances our perception of the image's discoloration overall as well as its noticeable absence: the man's hair, eyes, nose, and mouth—the most delicate

[271] Quoted in Ījabs, "Another Baltic Postcolonialism," 93.
[272] Tõnis Liibek, "Eesti talurahvas fotoaparaadi ees XIX. sajandil," *Sirp*, 15 May 2008.

areas of a portrait—appear markedly untouched, suggesting the discoloration may not be solely an issue of age, but the results of a later, unfinished restoration attempt.

When the object was new, however, the studded bronze frame and the decorative band of triangles carved into the interior octagonal frame would have glittered against the (perhaps lacquered) black, imbuing the image with a degree of ordered refinement. Ambrotypes hastened the decline of daguerreotypes as luxurious objects, since the materiality of the former lacked the polished silver finish of the latter, producing otherwise visually similar images in a markedly cheaper way. The ambrotype's absence of a silver finish made this type of photography more accessible and affordable. Ambrotypes also did not possess the same fragility as the daguerreotype, so the former could be physically handled in a somewhat less circumspect manner. This material and physical difference in accessibility is important to understand, because it elucidates the creation of this specific image. The sitter is Johann Voldemar Jannsen. Born the son of a miller of the German Vana-Vändra manor in 1819, Jannsen would excel in school and was groomed to become a church clerk and cantor by the 1840s. It was from this position in a small church that Jannsen first published Estonian-language spirituals, which became so immediately popular they encouraged him to start an Estonian newspaper, an attempt which tsarist censors initially stifled. By 1850, Jannsen began working as a schoolteacher in Pärnu (Ger. Pernau), and succesfully began printing the first Estonian-language newspaper *Perno Postimees* (*Pärnu Courier*) on 5 June 1857.[273] Educated in the Lutheran church and having worked as a schoolteacher and pedagogue, Jannsen was typical, if not

[273] I have adopted this biography from Mart Laar's descriptions in his *Rahvuse sünd*, 248-249.

exemplary of the kind of Estonian person who would have had access to photographic technologies in the 1850s. The ambrotype portrait here is the earliest extant image of Johann Voldemar Jannsen in any medium, and it is no accident that we find this earliest representation in the realm of photography. Now upwardly mobile from his rural peasant upbringing so as to need a three-piece suit, Jannsen portrays himself as middle class, even if he occupied its lowest level. This sartorial choice was a visual process of necessary cultural assimilation, which would enhance his later ability to assert an alternative and radical cultural politics.

Stephen Sheehi emphasizes that similarity was pivotal to the function of photography across the globe in the mid nineteenth century, especially after the advent of the carte-de-visite around 1854. The practice of photographic portraiture suddenly became a "process of flattening," engendering a striking sameness not only in process, equipment, and chemicals, but in an iconography of modernity in pose, stature, and clothing.[274] In the Ottoman Arab Provinces, these global visual codes created a standardization of formal similarity among Arabs, Armenians, and Greeks which enacted a visual erasure of ethnic difference, a welcome result for the imperialist ideology of the Ottoman *tanzimat* reforms which sought to collapse non-Turks and non-Muslims into a homogenizing body politic of the modernizing state. In the colonial conditions of the Baltic Provinces, by contrast, difference, distinction, and discrimination were pivotal to maintaining a racialized hierarchy of power. Since racialization in the Baltic Provinces was not visualized by phenotype or other immutable characteristics of appearance, but rather by markers of social class, it was

[274] Sheehi, *The Arab Imago*, 57.

easier to blur the processes of segregation in the region's historical hierarchy of power. Sartorial markers, then, were not merely threatening to the colonial status quo; they engendered a powerful ambiguity which played a decisive role in what early photography achieved in the Baltic Provinces: the production of a new kind of person through the material and pictorial manifestation of a new kind of social mobility.

Photography's role as a radically and immediately democratizing medium of representation in the nineteenth century has become so common place in art historical literature that we have become not only numb to its revelatory significance, but even cynical, casting doubt on the actual visibility, circulation, and consumption of photographic portraiture. The paucity of scholarship on Baltic photography, and a long preoccupation that Estonian or Latvian interaction with the medium as overdetermined by the relationship between the peasant and the photograph, have overlooked precisely how visual representation at a base level could truly be transformative and affirming in the creation of a new kind of personhood. Nowhere was this more obvious than in the production of an 1863 lithographic portrait of Johann Voldemar Jannsen (**Figure 2.6**)

In his 1863 portrait, Jannsen appears in the way many Estonians would come to know him. His striking eyes and round, chubby face suggest a kind and warm demeanor, as if to extend a sense of camaraderie and foster an almost familial familiarity—he would, after all, be widely referred to as "papa Jannsen."[275] His facial expression is soft yet determined, the latter underscored by his official black coat cascading over his shoulders. His visage and stance, simultaneously firm and

[275] Malle Salupere, *Postipapa. Mitmes peeglis, mitmes roolis* (Tänapäev: Tallinn, 2006).

nurturing, would be pivotal to embodying the bold declaration emblazoned beneath him. The embellished font bursting with flourishing vegetal motifs reads *Eesti Postimees* (*Estonian Courier*), the renamed and revamped version of Jannsen's popular *Perno Postimees*. The location and size of this text labels Jannsen, thanks to his powerful editorial prowess, as a veritable courier in his own right. Below, the text is a brazen declaration: "Estonian! Let you remain Estonian in any clothing and under any name, then you are an honorable man before your people." In the original Estonian, the text has a lilt and rhyming cadence.

The juxtaposition of Jannsen's portrait with the text was a striking one: one's name and clothing—the two most conspicuous elements of an Estonian's or Latvian's Germanization—did not determine ethnic identity. This worldview strikes a chord with simultaneous debates regarding a binary view positioning the preservation of native culture against the adoption of European norms under the looming threat of imperialism.[276] In the context of Meiji Japan, Norman Bryson calls this phenomenon "a systematic attempt at 'protective mimicry' in which the threat posed by the Other was countered by absorbing differences into the category of Same."[277] The threatening potential of "Europeanization," however, also occurred among populations already externally deemed European, the continent's "internal others."[278] Latvian literary scholar Benedikts Kalnačs has referred to this European borrowing among Latvians and Estonians of the 1890s as an anticolonial gesture, since they

[276] Norman Bryson, "Westernizing Bodies."
[277] Ibid, 100.
[278] Kalnačs, *Baltic Drama*,

navigated a double colonial system of Russian imperialism and Baltic German colonialism**,** yet adopted external cultural ideas of their own free will.

Jannsen makes a clear distinction: the adoption of new clothing (a kind of European borrowing) is not commensurate with the erasure of identity. In fact, its adoption can be deployed specifically for the opposite purpose, to retain indigeneity while working within the reality of colonial norms. An Estonian or Latvian may indeed choose to Germanize themselves completely, speak German at home, and even identify themselves as Baltic German. Regarding the latter, it should be noted that nineteenth-century indigenous Balts fashioned derogatory terms for such compatriots, *kadaka saks*, or "Juniper German" in Estonian, and *kārklu vācietis,* or "willow German" in Latvian. But what Jannsen presents here is an alternative system of parallel co-existence and parity. Recognizing Germanization as a practical necessity, Jannsen advocates nuanced choice, agency, and possibility for Estonians. Taking cue from Kalnačs, we can see how anticolonial gestures of the 1890s have their roots in cultural movements of the 1860s, but I would hesitate to call cultural agency in the 1860s "anticolonial." In the 1860s, colonial reality still severely circumscribed indigenous possibilities. Instead, it was decolonial. This is a subtle, but crucial distinction. I see decolonial action as a method of cultural production indebted to the inherent structure of colonial ideologies. It is not a wholehearted rejection, but rather a pragmatic recognition of the necessity of working within these structures before working against or outside them. Decolonial thinking permits a critical questioning of these systems, and the possibility to reframe their structures in order to deploy them to different ends. In this case, it means that the visual and even linguistic

markers of social mobility vis-à-vis clothing, name, and spoken language, do not inevitably lead to becoming German. Jannsen thus advocates quite literally for a decolonial option.[279]

Jannsen's portrait and declaration were a clarion call. Since the photograph was reproduced into a lithograph, it was easily disseminated widely and inexpensively reproduced. Memoirs recall that this image of Jannsen was hung in the living rooms of nineteenth-century Estonian households, in rural pubs, and reprinted in newspapers. Historian Mart Laar has similarly noted how the image remained visibly hung for decades after Jannsen's death in 1890.[280] Moreover, it was printed precisely at the period Jannsen had moved his family from Pärnu to Tartu, where his new venture, the newspaper *Eesti Postimees,* immediately increased in circulation and would attain a vast readership, making it one of the most consumed Estonian-language periodicals of the century. The impact and consumption of Jannsen's portrait, not to mention understanding the potency and ideology of the image, were far from theoretical. Many memoirs of the era specifically refer to the sight of Jannsen's image as revelatory, fundamentally retooling what they imagined was possible in the lives they had imagined for themselves. The Estonian Heinrich

[279] As Madina Tlostanova and Walter Mignolo explain, "The decolonial option comes into being as a consequence of the emergence and transformation of the colonial matrix of power. Decolonization means here precisely, the decolonization of the colonial matrix. And the decolonial option is an option among many already existing ones, struggling against the oppressions and abuses, against the ignorance of the rulers of the state and corporation managers and for the knowledge and wisdom of all those human beings, around the planet, that do not, cannot play the game, historically established by the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality. The de-colonial option starts by de-linking from that dream, or rather, a nightmare, and from the sanctified belief that there is only one game in town." Madina Tlostanova and Walter D. Mignolo, "Global Coloniality and the Decolonial Option," *Kult,* special issue "Epistemologies of Transformation: The Latin American Decolonial Option and its Ramifications" (Fall 2009), 130-147.
[280] Laar, *Rahvuse sünd*, 78.

Rosenthal's memoirs published in 1912 and notably written in German, dedicated a specifically long text to the image:

> Before Jannsen moved to [Tartu], he copied his portrait in copperplate [actually a lithograph] and wrote the meaningful words under it: *Eesti mees! Jää igas riides ja iga nime all Eesti meheks, siis oled auus mees oma rahva ees* (Estonian! Let you remain Estonian in any clothing and under any name, then you are an honorable man before your people).The image was used in many instances among the readers of the newspaper, in living rooms, and hung on the walls of pubs that served as resting sites for travelers. Thousands read and respected the declaration. Its effect could not be missed, especially among the intelligent factions of the people. Whoever wanted to follow the admonition could no longer pretend to be Germans or Swedes and thus alienate themselves from their people, though they had learned German, participated in German education, or translated their last name into German. No matter what position he occupied or to which group he belonged, he would not be ashamed to remain Estonian and confess his ethnicity. This statement is therefore fundamental to the *very revival of the Estonian national consciousness*. It establishes the existence of an Estonian people (*Eesti rahvas*), which consists not only of a number of peasants, bound to remain poor and despised, but, just like any other people, must attain justice, strive for education, create higher culture and preserve its character. After Jannsen sowed the seed for the birth of national thought in the Estonian people in this way, the rising seed had to be nurtured and cared for and the growing little plant should be given the opportunity to enjoy the sunlight and to unfold itself before the world (Emphasis in original).[281]

[281] Heinrich Rosenthal, *Kulturbestrebungen des estnischen Volkes während eines Menschenalters (1869–1890)* (Reval: Verlag von Cordes und Schenk, 1912), 45-46. "Bevor Jannsen nach Dorpat übersiedelte, Hess er sein Portrait in Kupferstich vervielfältigen und schrieb unter dasselbe die bedeutsamen Worte: 'Este! bleibe in jeder Kleidung und unter jedem Namen ein Este, dann bist Du ein ehrenwerter Mann vor Deinem Volke.' Das Bild wurde in vielen Exemplaren unter den Lesern der Zeitung verbreitet, in Wohnstuben und Krügen, die zu Einkehrstätten für Reisende dienten, an die Wand gehängt, und die Unterschrift von Tausenden gelesen und beachtet. Sie konnte ihre Wirkung, speziell beim intelligenten Teil des Volkes, nicht verfehlen. Denn wer der Mahnung folgen wollte, der konnte seine Nationalität nicht mehr verleugnen, der konnte und durfte nicht mehr, sobald er Deutsch gelernt und der deutschen Bildung teilhaftig geworden war, sich für einen Deutschen oder Schweden ausgeben, oder seinen Familiennamen ins Deutsche übersetzen und sich seinem Volke entfremden. Erdurfte, welche Stellung er auch einnahm und welchem Stande er auch angehörte, sich nicht schämen, Este zu bleiben und sich zu seinem angestammten Volke zu bekennen. Dieser Ausspruch ist daher grundlegend für die Erweckung; des estnischen Nationalbewusstseins. Durch denselben wird die Existenz eines estnischen Volkes (Eesti rahwas) konstatiert, das nicht einzig und allein aus einer Zahl von Bauern besteht und darum ein armes, verachtetes Bauernvolk zu bleiben verurteit ist, sondern das, ebenso wie jedes andere Volk, berechtigt sein muss, nach Bildung zu streben, höhere Kultur zu erlangen und seine Eigenart zu bewahren. Die Volksgenossen aber verpflichtet dieser Ausspruch, die durch die Geburt erhaltene Nationalität unter keinen Umständen zu verleugnen. Nachdem Jannsen in

Other memoirs recalled how displaying the image was a rebellious act. Its revolutionary potential was made clear even in the classroom setting, where an Estonian language lecturer at the University of Tartu sneaked a print of the image into his class, showing it off to the students and drawing attention to the text.[282] It is not difficult to understand why this appeal felt so important: Jannsen declares the existence of an Estonian people comprising not merely of peasants, and determines ethnicity without excluding those who had grown up as or had been educated in German (or Russian). It was of vital importance for Estonians to break free of the situation where they were unilaterally seen as peasants.

Jannsen posed for the camera and authored his celebratory lines, but he was ultimately not responsible for the literal material process of producing the image. That responsibility was given to the lithographer and photographer Carl Schulz. Schulz, as we briefly noted, was a German-speaking immigrant who moved to the Baltic Provinces from the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1857, and thus was not a Baltic German by birth; yet the assimilatory cultural tendencies of the era directly impacted his life. In 1858, Schulz married Julie Stahl (**Figure 2.7**). Schulz had worked closely with Julie's father when setting up his own studio in Tartu. Stahl herself changed the spelling of her name from the Estonian Tall to the German Stahl. For Stahl, it was precisely that rejection of her Estonian background which enabled her marriage into German family. At a personal level, then, Carl Schulz was keenly

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dieser Weise den Samen für die Entstehung des nationalen Gedankens im estnischen Volk ausgestreut hatte, musste auch die aufgehende Saat gehegt und gepflegt und dem aufwachsenden Pflänzchen die Möglichkeit geschaffen werden, das Sonnenlicht zu geniessen und sich vor der Welt zu entfalten."

[282] Laar, *Rahvuse sünd*, 78.

aware of the precise politics Jannsen was espousing, and we know this must be true because Jannsen needed a lithograph. Since Jannsen wanted to disseminate his portrait with text, it was necessary to convert the photograph into a lithograph so that text and image could be printed together onto a single sheet.

Given the textual content of the page, Schulz needed to apply for permission to print the image from the tsarist censor. Each lithographer and photographer in the Russian Empire had to work in tandem with tsarist censors, determined within each individual province of the Empire. Eventually, Schulz obtained permission from a Russian governmental official and would print the image in 1863.[283] It is likely Schulz himself also took the original photograph portrait of Jannsen, given the fact he took a photograph of Lydia Koidula, Jannsen's esteemed daughter, around the same time (**Figure 2.8**). Therefore, it is clear that here in the visual field Baltic Germans played an active role in advancing social mobility and change for the indigenous population**.** Thus, we should be careful not to understand their role as one homogenized and always prejudiced against indigenous change. Moreover, realizing this "Schulzsche" history circa 1863 grants us new insight into the lengthy text lauding the power of *päevapildid* and the irrelevance of painting in 1867. Jannsen and Koidula were, after all, the main editors of *Eesti Postimees*, the paper which published many articles and editorials on photography. It is little wonder, then, that the "anonymous" author describes how photographs are "well-known among the people" in 1867, or that the journalist specifically recommends and advocates for Estonians to visit the atelier of Carl Schulz.

[283] Lepa, "Schulz," 24, note 207, 46.

These portraits assert a middle-class status, functioning as a visual manifestation of a civilizing discourse. Shawn Michelle Smith has argued for the importance of middle-class visibility and its material reinscription within the object of the photograph. For Smith, photography was particularly potent in its ability to visualize the new ascendant middle class because of the widespread belief in its irrefutable truth.[284] Smith's subjects, nineteenth-century African Americans engaging the camera, found democratizing potential in the medium to counter the racialized social hierarchy of the United States. After emancipation, photography possessed a particular stake for black Americans, as it presented unprecedented and unparalleled opportunity for self-representation as they were making claims on new legal, political, and social American identities.[285] Photography was both a visual and material manifestation of these new changes; it was how these ideas became produced and promulgated.

Perhaps no other image is revealing of this process than the the Jannsen family portrait, taken by Peter Christoph Rudolph Barth in Tartu in 1869 (**Figure 2.9**). Literary scholar and author Jaan Undusk has described this iconic photograph:

> We have in front of us the Jannsens' famous family portrait from the 1860s: in the back four studious brothers, in the front the family's four-member core. On the right wing the mother Emilie, and younger daughter, Eugenie, their hands chastely in their laps – the two of them kept the Jannsen home, serving and feeding the others. On the left wing papa Jannsen himself and his eldest daughter Lydia, elbows pressed proudly onto the table, a spiritual supremacy in their eyes – the two of them did the newspaper, earning fame and money for the family. In the 1860s, Jannsen was undoubtedly the primary emblem of a rising Estonianness (*eestlus*), the "senator of Estonia" as he was later called, possessing the power of the media. But the first lady of

[284] Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*.
[285] Wallace and Smith, *Pictures and Progress*.

> Estonian society was not his wife Emilie, oh no, even the thought itself seems ridiculous. The family portrait never deceives: having invisibly taken their forms from within Baltic German society, the Emperor and Empress of the Estonian state sit in the left wing and they are Jannsen and his daughter Lydia.[286]

A family of undoubted respectability, the Jannsens counter the racialization of Estonians by evoking their ascendancy to the middle class. The patriarchy of Johann Voldemar Jannsen rules the household not only as father of the family, but of the Estonian decolonial movement. The image thus heralds an entire generation of the new indigenous elite, with Lydia Koidula at its helm. Indeed, the image fashions Lydia, also with a pen in her hand, as powerful, and not one to be underestimated.

When compared to the majority of Baltic Germans, the Jannsens were certainly part of the lower end of the middle class. But what is significant here is what is missing or invisible: at the core of this quaint family portrait is the absence of any markers of the peasantry, historical enserfment, or even recent peasant revolts.[287] Though the Jannsens embodied a novel kind of person, few Baltic Germans greeted the so-called "new peasant" warmly. Woldemar Hansen, a Baltic German pastor in the parish of Paistu, delivered an infamously spiteful speech in Riga about the dangers of the nascent Latvian and Estonian decolonial movements, and the urgent need for their supervision and control. For Hansen, these changes were no less than "a disease of our time, grinning like an epidemic." He stressed that "the wrong and

[286] Jaan Undusk, "Kuninganna Koidula ja tema pagendus," *Päevaleht*, 1 June 2001.
[287] The most recent peasant revolt was the so-called Mahtra War (*Mahtra sõda*) of 1858. After unrest at a Baltic German Mahtra manor, a group of young Estonian men protested their reduced wage hours. Unsatisfied with the baron's response, the men travelled to Tallinn in search of justice, where, at least one, Ants Kentmann, was instead violently lashed in the streets. The public display of violence rattled Estland Province and would be codified in Estonian cultural memory—and overly interpreted in the Soviet era—as a moment of brave resistance against nefarious German oppressors.

godless thing in this struggle is that it violently tears apart the bonds that, under divine guidance, for centuries united entire peoples in common interests and sowed discord among those who were united to one another in brotherly peace."[288] Hansen thus casts any deviance from the colonial social hierarchy as blasphemous, and he found this change was manifesting itself in disturbing ways:

> The economic situation of our peasants has changed and allows them all sorts of life comforts, as shown in the construction of their houses, in food and drink, in clothing and in every other relationship; as a result, the social position of our peasants has changed considerably; The peasant is no longer treated like the bastard who has to wait to be addressed before he takes off his hat and gets out of everyone's way. Oh no, everything has changed. The peasant probably still wears his coarse coat, but he has a bag full of money and is an independent man who instills respect.[289]

Given all of these rapid changes, it is remarkable that Hansen latches on to the "coarse coat" as one of the few remaining markers of difference, and of the once immutable social hierarchy. This slight remark on appearance was necessary, because it was one of the last realms of distinction onto which Baltic Germans could clasp. But the middle class was not limited to sartorial stylings of the Jannsen family. Barth also photographed families of clear peasant background (**Figure 2.10**). Here, then, is ample evidence of what Estonian photography historian Peeter Linnap argued in 2001: the indigenous intelligentsia as much as the indigenous populations of the Baltic overall would rapidly engage photography and rarely engage painting.[290] The most iconic Estonian image of the nineteenth century also attests to this view: Reinhold Sachker's 1871 photograph of Lydia Koidula (**Figure 2.11**).

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[288] *Rigasche Zeitung*, 22 January 1871.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Peeter Linnap, "J.Köler ja R.Sachker: 'Puulane' ja 'Tohtlane' Eesti kunstis." *Kunst.ee,* nr 3, (2001): 8–15.

Lydia Koidula as Visual Theorist

Historian Marek Tamm has recently argued that "[Estonians] have great difficulties visualizing our past, an overwhelming part of the past is faceless and featureless, and we do not recognize our heroes (or our villains) by their face."[291] Tamm's claim is true in a larger historical sense—say, Estonian history before abolition—but it ignores the immediate familiarity of Lydia Koidula. Sachker's photograph would inspire an entire tradition of representations of Koidula in drawings, paintings, sculptures, and monuments. This specific portrait is so entwined with the idea of Estonia that it became emblazoned on the nation's currency upon the restoration of independence in 1991, remaining until the adoption of the Euro in 2011. Whether in public monuments, illustrations, commemorative take-home sculptures, or even graffiti and street art (**Figure 2.12**), the omnipresence of her face often evokes a sentimental patriotism tied specifically to her poetry of the 1860s and 1870s espousing a romantic idealism of her homeland. In 1944, many of her poems were set to new melodies for communal song festivals (*laulupidu*), with one song functioning as a covert "national anthem" during the Soviet occupation, assuming especially potent political and personal significance during the Singing Revolution of the late 1980s.[292] A key figure of the so-called "awakening" (Est. *ärkamisaeg*), Koidula embodies in both name—Koidula is a nom de plume meaning "of the

[291] Marek Tamm, "Eesti visuaalse identiteedi rehabilteerimine," *Kunst.ee* 2 (2018) Accessed 17 July 2018.http://ajakirikunst.ee/?c=kunstee-numbrid&l=et&t=eesti-visuaalse-identiteedi-rehabiliteerimine&id=1946

[292] On the retooling of Koidula's poems in Soviet song festivals, see Guntis Šmidchens, *The Power of Song: Non-violent National Culture in the Baltic Singing Revolution* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), 164-166

dawn"—and figuration a future-oriented patriotic visionary often bordering on the saccharine. Art historian Katrin Kivimaa has drawn critical attention to what is at stake in Koidula's visuality, making the astute observation that since women rarely figured as such beloved and transformative individuals in nineteenth-century national movements, her visual omnipresence and figuration especially on national currency function to display Estonian culture and nationalism as modern, liberal, and egalitarian, a critical step to "Europeanize" the nation and distance itself from the Soviet past. As Kivimaa rightly argues, depictions of Koidula—overwhelmingly created by men— have therefore become "violently removed from her life and real experiences."[293]

Lydia Koidula's contributions to Estonian culture are impossible to overemphasize, but her influence has been understood primarily within the literary field, specifically her poetry. While her poetry was widely read—many of her poems were printed in Carl Robert Jakobson's *School Reader*, the most-read Estonian book of the nineteenth century—her political views were most explicit in her prose. Koidula was also the first Estonian to address political and social injustice and oppression in fiction. Published under her father's name, Koidula's early fiction was one of the few realms where she could pontificate on social issues—women were forbidden from joining the premiere Estonian academic society, the Vanemuine Society, until the late 1870s. Malle Salupere and Mart Laar, however, have initiated a critical shift, understanding Koidula not merely as a poet, but a pivotal figure in

[293] Katrin Kivimaa, "Koidula pildis. Ajaloolisest isikust rahvuslikuks sümboliks," *Ariadne long* 1-2 (2004): 11.

public life and cultural discourse more broadly.[294] Salupere and Laar both emphasize how Koidula's gender has affected the historiographical dismissal of her political views, and overshadowed the reality that she had personally worked as a main editor of the most-read Estonian newspapers. Moreover, it was under Koidula's initiative that the many members of indigenous intelligentsia met each other in the 1860s and 1870s—most of them previously worked as community leaders and organizers in disparate small towns—discussing social and political issues under the auspices of the so-called Koidula salon.

In her new biography of Koidula, Salupere emphasizes how we still have yet to understand fully Koidula's true transformative role in the cultural discourse at the height of the decolonization movement.[295] I argue here that a significant yet unknown aspect was Koidula's role as a visual theorist in photography. She engaged herself with portrait photography frequently, and as early as 1855. In her incisive analysis of Koidula's appearance in visual culture, Kivimaa surprisingly does not investigate her agency in her self-representation, looking instead at its legacy across media and time. Kivimaa certainly emphasizes how photographs of Koidula were key to artists depicting her later in marble, oils, pastels, and bronze, yet she does not investigate the photographs as laden material and cultural objects on their own right. Here, I emphasize that we must view Koidula as a practitioner of photography in her self-fashioning, which we must connect to the polemical politics of her writings. Not only did she have extensive experience with photography, but she also worked for *Eesti*

[294] Laar, *Rahvuse sünd*, 116-122. Malle Salupere. *Koidula*. *Ajastu taustal, kaasteeliste keskel* (Tallinn: Tänapäev, 2017).
[295] Salupere, *Koidula*, 116-117.

Postimees, the newspaper which published most often about photography in the Estonian language. Whether or not Koidula personally authored texts about photography is less significant than what is revealed when we read the production of her portraits in relation to her writing. I focus on two portraits. Reinhold Sachker's iconic 1871 photograph, and an image of Koidula posing in full folk regalia, taken by Johannes Behse in 1867. Far from any romantic imaging of the nation—the end to which they have consistently been deployed in the past century and a half—Koidula's images espouse instead a subtle but nevertheless radical politics of decolonization entangled in the intersecting ideologies of gender, race, and colonialism. This is due specifically to the social and intellectual context in which Koidula was working and writing, the advent of *päevapilt*, and global history circa 1867.

Consider Johannes Behse's photograph of Lydia Koidula of 1867 (**Figure 2.13**). Koidula stands confidently, supported by a rake in one hand, and grasping a small barrel in the other, as she leans ever so slightly against an ornately carved wooden bannister. From head to toe, Koidula is dressed in all of the requisite elements of women's folk costume. The black and white contrast of the photograph highlights crisp articulations in her striped skirt. As viewers, we relish in the bold geometric patterns of the belt cinching her waist as well as the pattern of her head piece. Even discrete floral patterns embellished on the *käised* hanging over her linen blouse vie for our attention. These details of her costume appear striking in comparison to the faded colors of the landscape of the painted backdrop behind her, enriching the sense of perspective and depth in the image.

Two key elements of Koidula's sartorial choices reveal that her self-fashioning did not bespeak her lived reality. The white apron over her striped skirt was reserved for married women. Koidula was at most twenty-four years old when she posed for this photograph. She would not be married for six more years. The other questionable element is the colossal silver brooch hanging from her neck, rendered here almost invisible due its resplendent reflection. Silver brooches (*sõled*) of such size originated specifically from Seto populations, who historically have lived in the present-day borderland between the southeastern tip of Estonia and Russia, differed dramatically from most other Estonians in their dialect, traditions, and even mythologies. Koidula's family hailed from Pärnumaa, the opposite side of Estonia, with visibly different sartorial traditions.

The apron and the brooch, the two elements least connected to Koidula's life, were prominently visible when a printmaker sourced the portrait for a frontispiece for *Eesti Postimees* in December 1867 (**Figure 2.14**). This Christmas-themed vignette would appear in December printings of *Eesti Postimees* for five more years. Given Koidula's direct work with the paper, the appearance of her body in print media might suggest she posed for the photograph specifically to be copied into the print. But her figuration here in the print suggests little in terms of agency over the visual. The print foregrounds the joy of a little boy as he receives a present from his father on Christmas day. A ball rests on the floor next to a cat, as the mailman (*postimees*) stops by to drop off the latest copy of the newspaper. Koidula is almost an afterthought. She is pushed into the corner behind the table. Her silver brooch glitters in the flickering light of the candles adorning the Christmas tree, suggesting that she,

too, is no more than a decorative prop. The domestic tranquility suggested here circumscribes her role, and reifies the patriarchal order of most nationalisms, which characterizes femininity though markers of tradition, manifest here in her costume as well as her figuration as servile.

The confluence of visual codes in the 1867 photograph—an Estonian woman in a pristine folk costume with markers of agricultural labor (the rake and barrel)—were common tropes in nineteenth-century Baltic German painting. Male Baltic German painters in particular delighted in portraying Estonian women in idyllic situations to such an extent that the end result was often ludicrous, yet idealized under the veneer of restrained bourgeois desire for the (ethnic and gendered) Other. Carl Timoleon von Neff's 1840 canvas *Feeding the Chickens* is exemplary (**Figure 2.15**). From her glistening straw-colored hair and the intricate floral lace pattern of her blouse, to the deep jewel tones of majestic purple textile around her headpiece, and the navy blues and red trim of her skirt, each detail is faithfully, if not obsessively, rendered. These exuberant colors and delicate details conceal the strange contours of her body. Her position awkwardly strained, she holds a small, smoothly carved wooden bowl in one hand, and gracefully drops grain to the floor from the other. Such representation seeks to gloss over the fact that our protagonist remains unrealistically clean, although she is in the midst of feeding chickens who kick dirt and dust up into the air as they anxiously peck in search of grain. *Feeding the Chickens* seamlessly blends an erotic and exotic gaze, most especially for those Baltic German men deemed superior in power according to gender, class, and race. Given the paucity of Estonians' interactions with painting in the 1860s, it is possible that

this visual trope was unknown even to someone as learned as Koidula.[296] Whether she was familiar with the visual trope or not, her portrayal nevertheless suggests a similar transcendence of reality as established within paintings. The sartorial elements of Koidula's photograph—the hat, silver brooch, necklaces, and the details embroidered onto the sleeve—all point to clothing used for festive and spiritual purposes, radically different from the clothing worn for work in the fields.[297] Yet she poses with a rake and barrel, as if we have encountered her on the way back home after harvesting rye.

1867 witnessed the publication of her second poetry volume *Nightingale of the Ema River* (*Emajõe ööbik*). The same year, many poems would be subsequently printed in Carl Robert Jakobson's widely read and influential school reader. Malle Salupere notes that in this year Koidula's command of Estonian noticeably improved—even the Jannsen family was a German-speaking household—and she also began personal correspondence with Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald, the Estonian compiler of the national epic *Kalevipoeg*. All signs then point to the nation, and who better to embody it than Lydia Koidula, poetess of the dawn, in national costume? However, such a reading circumscribes her possibilities, her intellectual contributions, and her political views.

Koidula's dress was not the unequivocal sign of the nation in 1867 that it seems to be today. Explicit writing about the significance of folk costumes would emerge only decades later, especially in the paper *Sakala* in the 1880s. A 1927 history of Estonian folk costumes suggests that the rhetoric around folk clothing in the 1880s

[296] The 1871 Central Agricultural Exhibition in Riga was her father's first experience with oil paintings. Koidula also travelled to the exhibition and, although I have not encountered direct evidence, it was likely Koidula's first engagement with paintings as well.
[297] Ilmari Manninen, *Eesti rahvariiete ajalugu* (Tartu: Eesti Rahva Museum, 1927), 135, 141, 145.

was limited to idealistic appeals, with little application in daily life.[298] These writings argued that folk clothing should be worn only for special, festive occasions. In the second half of the nineteenth century, these festive occasions were primarily the newly enshrined traditions of Baltic song festivals, inaugurated among Estonians in 1869 and Latvians in 1873. Estonian women, however, were not permitted to participate in choirs at the song festivals until 1933, despite the fact that almost no choirs across rural parishes divided according to gender. Gender segregation at Estonian song festivals was also radically different from the otherwise similar tradition among Latvians. Latvian women had participated in equal measure as singers and participants since their festival's genesis in 1873. Koidula's portayal here predates both the song festival tradition as well as the surge in discourse about folk clothing, thus suggesting a more nuanced awareness of visbility. Having sat in front of the camera lens for many portraits before, Koidula knew what was at stake in photographic representation. In an era when clear social lines started to become increasingly unclear, and ambiguity specifically manifest in the visual markers of sartorial changes, her choice and ability to pose in folk clothing speaks to the malleability of a new Estonian subjectivity. Similarly to Jannsen's coats and bowties and similar self-fashioning of the indigenous intelligentsia, Koidula's folk costume seems equally determined by engaging the medium of photography itself. As she leans against the support of the decorative wooden bannister, elements commonly deployed in other studio photographs by Johannes Behse in the late 1860s and early 1870s, Her stance in front of the painted backdrop suggest such an awareness.

[298] Ibid, 12.

Koidula's difference appears striking when we view her portrait alongside another photograph taken in Behse's studio from around the same period (**Figure 2.16**). Even for this young girl here, with her hands clasped demurely on top of the support, a sense of bourgeois interiority seems to resonate, standing in vast contrast to Koidula's representation in Estonian folk costume, later heralded by her contemporaries as something which "externally declares and—without a doubt—internally supports the existence and self-consciousness of the Estonian peasant."[299] Posing with props against the painted backdrop, Koidula is conscious of the constructed act of being photographed. This awareness and deliberateness affords her an agency which removes her from the explicit ethnographic racializiation which so often befell her compatriots.

The Ethnographic Lens: Racialization on Display

Consider a photograph of the Estonian woman Mari Weinberg, taken by the Baltic German photographer Charles Borchardt in his Tallinn studio one year before Koidula posed in folk costume (**Figure 2.17**). Draped in layers of multicolored striped cloth, Mari's body becomes overwhelmed by clothing and only her right hand and her face are visible. She avoids our gaze. Instead, she stares stoically beyond the realm of the photograph, whose oval dimensions reinforce her conical shape, as her bonnet emphasizes a triangular composition within the image. These compositional elements specifically emphasize the distinctive patterns of the costume, her

[299] Ibid, 10.

physiognomy, and her obvious child-bearing capacities and status as a mother. A small child sits on the woman's lap. His piercing eyes gaze directly at us, his tiny leather *pastlad* (peasant shoes) dangling from a striped day gown. Tendrils of blonde hair frame his chubby cheeks as they escape the furry bonnet snuggly fit onto his head. Almost completely covered with cloth, the baby's phenotype may seem hard to decipher, but the details which are visible—his eyes, his hair, his skin tone, the shape of his face—resonate with us because we confront them head on as viewers. Underneath the image sits the German inscription: "Mari Weinberg, thirty-eight years old, Jüri Parish."[300] This text clarified her origins and age, important information since her image was exhibited in an award-winning group of "photographic portraits of the most pronounced specimens of the various races" of the Russian Empire, at the Moscow Ethnographic Exhibition of 1867.[301]

The Moscow Ethnographic Exhibition of 1867 was the first of its kind to take place in the Russian Empire. A child of the so-called "Age of Exhibitions" inaugurated by London's Crystal Palace of 1851, the Moscow Ethnographic Exhibition was, in the words of Nathaniel Knight, "a graphic display of the ineffaceable diversity of the Empire."[302] As Galina Krivosheina has explained, the exhibition's main triumph was the championing of anthropology as a serious science to improve the Empire.[303] The exhibition's crowning jewel was a series of

[300] The original German text under the photograph reads: "Marri Weinberg, alt 38 Jahre, Kirchspiel St. Georgen."
[301] "Die ethnographische Austellung in Moskau. I," *Rigasche Zeitung*, 22 May 1867.
[302] Nathaniel Knight, *The Empire on Display: Ethnographic Exhibition and the Conceptualization of Human Diversity in Post-Emancipation Russia* (Washington, D.C.: The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research 2001), 3.
[303] Galina Krivosheina, "Long Way to the Anthropological Exhibition: The Institutionalization of Physical Anthropology in Russia," *Centaurous* 56, no. 1 (2014): 275-304.

meticulously detailed mannequins, depicting peoples from all corners of the sprawling tsarist realms, from the Poles in the West to the Aleuts of the Alaskan Islands in the East (Russia ceded its Alaskan territories officially to the United States just months after the Exhibition closed). The emphasis on deploying anthropology to assert the Empire's diversity was only begrudgingly accepted in Russian scientific societies in the mid-nineteenth century. It is no coincidence that anthropology's biggest local champion of the era was a Baltic German, the scientist Karl von Baer. Though trained as a biologist, Baer saw ethnography as an "intrinsic science of empire," and cast Russia as "a vast and largely unexplored territory populated by a multitude of diverse nationalities, some of whom were in danger of disappearing off of the face of the earth."[304] In the 1840s, it was under Baer's aegis that the Finnish linguist Andreas Johan Sjögren and Baltic German artist August von Pezold (the father of Leopold von Pezold) conducted ethnographic expeditions in the Baltic Provinces to record costumes and traditions of peasant populations thought to be on the verge of extinction.[305] These images are typically seen as joyous historical sources about traditional ways of life—images of inimitable value now when Liv populations have all but dwindled away in the twenty-first century and assimilated into Latvian culture—but the Baer expedition of 1846 stressed especially the urgency of taking plaster casts of the skulls of the Liv populations.[306] Thus these bucolic images also

[304] Nathaniel Knight, "Science, Empire, and Nationality: Ethnography in the Russian Geographical Society, 1845-1855," in *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire*, eds. Jane Burbank and David L. Ransel (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 117.
[305] Saulvedis Cimermanis has stressed that these images are dispersed across an array of museums and have never been systematically analyzed. "Ar libiskām krāsām karogā, tērpos, un raksturā," *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, 21 July 1998.
[306] According to Renāte Blumberga, the casts were never made, but they were certainly a key part of the expedition plans. Renāte Blumberga, *Lībieši dokumentos un vēstulēs. Somijas zinātnieku*

function as colorful veneers concealing a dark science deployed to naturalize inequalities among populations.

Tõnis Liibek has argued that Baltic German Estophile societies such as the Estland Society of Literati (*Gelehrte Estnische Gesellschaft*) preferred to collect vibrantly colored lithographs, paintings, and drawings of Estonians rather than photographs, lamenting the absence of color in the latter. Charles Borchardt's *Estonian Types* series then appears path-breaking in its deployment of the camera lens "directly with the aims of ethnographic documentation" in the local Baltic context.[307] What this observation misses is the crucial connection between medium and imagination. The technological and optical limitations of photography in the 1840s and 1850s would have made a systematic ethnographic and pictorial study of Livs and other peasant populations practically impossible. Early photography could not accommodate the subjugation of groups of individuals into a collation of types. It is for this reason that even the most infamous images of the early photographic visual culture of racialized science depicts individuals, coloring the detailed psychological immediacy of photography with dark overtones. By contrast, a drawing, painting, or print enabled the artist to create a gleeful composition without direct interaction from the portrayed. It was not merely that early photography denied color—exuberantly painted photographs appeared in nineteenth-century India, Japan, Peru, and even the Baltic Provinces—but rather that Eurocentric thinking about the medium of photography cast its colorization as garish.

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ekspedicijas pie lībiešiem (Riga: Latvijas Vēstures institūta apgads, 2006), 16, 26. See also Edvarda Šmite, *Kārlis Hūns. Vienkāršās tiešamības skaistums* (Riga: Neputns, 2016), 34-35.

[307] Liibek, "Talurahvas fotoaparaadi ees," 2008.

Borchardt took around fifty photographs of Estonian peasants, most from parishes nearby Tallinn, whom he photographed in his Tallinn studio. All of the photographs depict Estonians in "costume." Some feature the sitter's profile in order to distinguish their facial features. Others place them in dubiously constructed situations. Consider his double-portrait *Tallinn Peasants* (*Reval Bauer* and *Reval Bauerin,* **Figure 2.18**). More striking than their costumes in each portrait are the backgrounds: a dramatically painted forest backdrop for the woman, and a mountainous valley region for the man. Both figures stand among an array of rocks and plants both painted and, it seems, plastic—it is difficult to tell whether or not these elements are fabricated, or actually brought into the studio from the outdoors. Nevertheless, these elements heighten the sense that Estonians lived in a primeval landscape in the 1860s, as if they were still ardent pagans. Even the object in the man's hand—a horn, or perhaps a sheath for a knife—contribute to this strange sense of historicity.

Though these photographs do not have names, all the others Borchardt took for the exhibition are inscribed on the front with the name, age, and parish of the photographer's subjects. This listing of name and "type" as scientific fact recalls infamous daguerreotypes of the enslaved produced in the United States. Baltic serfdom had been over for almost two decades by the time the daguerreotype was invented, and we do not see blatant naked "specimen" photographs so prominent elsewhere in the world, to be sure. Yet such conditions do not lessen the damaging and dehumanizing impact of these photographs, intended, after all, to depict "the most pronounced specimens of [their race]." This is resoundingly clear in the portrait

of Mari Weinberg. In the nineteenth century, Mari's high cheekbones and dark brown eyes would have been seen as emblematic of a specific racialized discourse concerning Estonians and their place within a global hierarchy of power. Estonians are a Finno-Ugric people, meaning their closest ethnic neighbors are the Finns, more distantly the Hungarians, and other smaller tribes scattered throughout Russia, whose origins and languages are completely separated from Indo-European societies and language groups, such as Slavic, Germanic, or Romance. To this end they are also separated from their Latvian neighbors, who belong to an Indo-European Baltic language group alongside Lithuanians. Archaeological evidence suggests that Finno-Ugric groups originally emerged from somewhere around the Ural Mountains, and in the nineteenth century this origin theory was perceived as evidence that Finns, Estonians, and Sámi were part of the inferior "yellow" races alongside the Mongols.[308]

In 1795, the scientist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach divided humankind into five principle races: Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malay. Blumenbach was unequivocally clear that the Caucasian race—his own invention—included "the Europeans, with the exceptions of the Lapps, and the rest of the true Finns."[309] He posited that Finnic peoples instead belonged to the Mongolian group, who were described as being "of a wheaten yellow, with scanty, straight black hair"

[308] Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of the Human Races* (London: William Heinemann, 1915). The French original was published in 1851. On racialized theories about Estonians, see Ken Kalling and Leiu Heapost, "Racial Identity and Physical Anthropology in Estonia, 1800-1945," in *Baltic Eugenics: Bio-Politics, Race, and Nation in Interwar Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, 1918-1940,* eds. Björn M. Felder and Paul J. Weindling (Amsterdam: Brill, 2013), 83-114. On the Mongoloid relation specifically, see 84-86, 88.

[309] Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, "Contributions to Natural History," *The Anthropological Treatises of Blumenbach and Hunter* (London: The Anthropological Society of London, 1865), 303.

with "flat faces with laterally projecting cheekbones and narrowly slit eyelids."[310] Blumenbach lumped a variety of small groups into "the Finnish populations of the cold part of Europe," a vague conception not entirely reflective of those we consider Finnish today, but one which in its time certainly contained Estonians.[311] Though written in 1795, Blumenbach's studies were translated into English in 1865 and were still widely read and circulated at the time of Moscow's Ethnographic Exhibition. Opinions began to diverge on the "Asiatic question" already in the 1830s, but this division was clearly attributed to local scientists in the Russian Empire on the one hand, and, on the other, armchair craniologists abroad with little contact with indigenous Balts, save for sporadic, gruesome access to their skulls. French anthropologists, for instance, used craniology well into the 1870s to conclude that Estonians were not European.[312] Many Baltic German scientists, including Karl von Baer, did not agree with the Asiatic hypothesis, though they were adamant that their studies still demonstrated that the indigenous population was inherently "of lymphatic constitution" and susceptible to chronic disease, scientific evidence deployed to promulgate the status quo of an exploitative racialized hierarchy.[313]

By emphasizing the appearance of Mari Weinberg's face, her most "Mongoloid" aspect, Borchardt visually activated this pseudoscientific discourse of inequality. Regardless of whether or not the latest scientific theories proved or disproved these Asian origins, the structure of the 1867 Moscow Exhibition

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[310] Ibid, 304.
[311] Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, "On the Natural Variety of Mankind, Third Edition, 1795," *The Anthropological Treatises of Blumenbach and Hunter* (London: The Anthropological Society of London, 1865), 265.
[312] Kalling and Leiu Heapost. "Racial Identity," 83-114.
[313] Ibid, 87.

facilitated comparative viewing so that visitors could juxtapose all of the other Finno-Ugric peoples living in Russia with each other, including the Sámi and indigenous Siberian tribes, as well as with peoples newly incorporated into the Empire, such as Central Asian Kalmyks and Kazakhs (at the time of the exhibition the tsar's army was rabidly conquering Turkestan). Latvians, it must be stressed, did not fall into either Finno-Ugric or Asiatic categories.[314] Coincidentally, perhaps, there were few photographs of Latvians present at the display, a conspicuous absence for visitors hailing from the Baltic Provinces. A writer in *Rigasche Zeitung* remarked:

> What would they say if they saw themselves here? [There are] two Latvian [mannequins] from the Vitebskie Governement. Yes, they are Latvians, but not like the ones I know from home. These Vitebskian Latvians look rather poor, especially the woman. This is not what my countrymen look like: here they look like Russian peasants. Livs and Latvians from Livland, as well as actual Finnlanders are missing completely; but I have seen Kurland peasants among the exhibited photographs, I do not understand why they did not receive mannequins. Of course, there are very few photographs of the Latvians, while there are many very beautiful ones of the Estonians.[315]

There is a pivotal faction of the population of the Baltic Provinces conspicuously missing from this discussion of ethnographic display: Baltic Germans. The contribution of Baltic Germans to the diversity of the Russian Empire was as scientists, ethnographers, geographers, photographers—active subjects *creating* knowledge, never subjected to display, their historicity in the region never requiring proof, nor their skulls ever measured. Here in this absence is where a Baltic German viewpoint aligns so closely with Martin Berger's investigations of the sight of

[314] Ivars Ījabs has hinted that Germans suggested Latvians were "Asiatic" similarly to Russians once Latvians began embracing ideas of Slavic cultural nationalism in the 1860s, but more research on this topic is required. See Ījabs, "Another Baltic Postcolonialism."
[315] "Moskauer Briefe über die ethnographische Ausstellung," *Rigasche Zeitung***,** 6 June 1867.

whiteness in United States visual culture—so normal and deeply embedded within the structures of power, of sight, and of vision that it is never mentioned nor would it need to be. Thus as viewers, it was their opinions, feelings, and emotions which mediated the reception of the Moscow Ethnographic Exhibition back at home in the Baltic Provinces. Hence German papers universally lauded the "beauty" of Borchardt's *Estonian Types*, while finding other Baltic photographs to be confusing and even disconcerting: "The first encounter consists of photographs by [Louis] Höflinger in Dorpat [Tartu] in three large frames, which give us much to think about. What does it mean that an Estonian in Dorpat carries a large book and a very mischievous face? That an Estonian coachman in Dorpat is dressed in velvet and his dog is carrying a cloth?"[316] Even here in this quick juxtaposition, where a learned Estonian carrying books bears a "mischievous" countenance, or someone in a service position could wear "velvet," bespeaks the continuing threatening ambivalence of sartorial distinctions we have come to anticipate among Baltic German writing in the 1860s. What remains surprising is the indigenous Estonian response to Borchardt's images. Rather than any disavowal of racialization of the photograph, or its objectifying, exoticizing role at the Exhibition of 1867, we find instead a sense of optimism and beaming pride:

> Readers have certainly heard that there was a great exhibition in Moscow this spring. Now we hear that the Tallinn *päevapilditegija* (*photographer* for foreigners) Ch. Borchardt has earned the prize of a silver medal for photographs he had taken of Estonian people and sent to the ethnography exhibition. There, among 1,481 photographs taken of the other peoples living in Russia, were Borchardt's *figures of Estonian people* in front of a foreign viewer, who otherwise had never

[316] "Moskauer Briefe über die ethnographische Ausstellung. IV,"*Rigasche Zeitung*, 10 June 1867.

> seen an Estonian person [...] and now know how Estonians appear in holy and profane ways.[317]

Under the scopic regime of imperial science and its racialized discontents, Borchardt's photographs categorized and classified a disenfrachised population in ways commensurate with upholding power imbalances and their exploitative roles. Yet the premiere Estonian newspaper of the period saw the awarded silver medal as validation not so much for the photographer—who coincidentally was called a *päevapilditegija* two years before Sachker opened his atelier—but for the unprecendeted visibility of Estonian people. This native response to the assymetrical imbalances of ethnographic representation seems to accord with a recent turn in the humanities, which no longer seeks to collapse the complexity of representation into simple binaries of colonizer and colonized, oppression and resistance, but rather suggests and opens up thornier liminal spaces. Elizabeth Hutchinson has stressed the necessity to recover the agency of sitters in such costumes, noting their deep awareness of being portrayed, and their choices and thoughts given the deliberateness of representation within portraiture.[318] This line of reasoning is similar to Michelle Raheja's visual sovereignty, and the ambiguous space between subject and object in such representations often bordering on the ethnographic. In order to explore the potential of that ambiguous liminal space, let us return to Koidula's portrait in folk costume.

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[317] "Ethnograhwia näitmine," *Eesti Postimees ehk Näddalaleht: ma- ja linnarahvale,* nr. 42, 18 October 1867.
[318] Elizabeth Hutchinson, "'The Dress of His Nation': Romney's Portrait of Joseph Brant," *Winterthur Portfolio* 45, no. 2/3 (2011), 209-227.

Lydia Koidula's Decolonial Lens

A year before Koidula sat for her portrait in costume, Tsar Alexander II authorized new parish laws across the three Baltic Provinces which regulated the relations between manor lords and peasants. Above all, the laws liberated peasants from the custody of manor lords, enabling peasants to own land and travel and move freely throughout the Empire. It was this 1866 law, rather than the empire-wide emancipation decree of 1861**,** which truly transformed Baltic peasant life and ensured *de facto* abolition. Abolition was the single most transformative aspect of indigenous life which laid the groundwork for cultural development into the 1870s.

Although abolition had been widely discussed due to the profound social changes across the Russian Empire prompted by the end of serfdom in 1861, the American Civil War brought global dimensions to debates about slavery and serfdom. Coinciding with the end of the American conflict was the foundation of the Vanemuine Society in Tartu. Initiated officially under the auspices of a singing society (Vanemuine is the god of song in Estonian and Finnish mythology), the group sponsored speeches on the theme of enserfment and liberation, transforming cultural discourse for Estonians. It was here that Carl Robert Jakobson delivered his famous speeches casting Estonian history as the story of an ancient golden age devolving into a dark era of enserfment followed by a dawn of the new era. Upon the end of the American Civil War, Jakobson posed the question: "Hundreds of thousands of people have lost their lives in America's four-year war. And for what reason? That their neighbors, poor blacks, could be free. These people were able to die for the honor of their fatherland and the freedom of black slaves – what good have you done for the

freedom of your Estonian brothers?"[319] Ignoring the fact that "poor blacks" also served as soldiers, Jakobson suggested that the Estonian experience might be read through the patriotic liberator as well as enslavement. Johann Voldemar Jannsen, for his part, rather histrionically stated that Estonians "lived the life of black slaves" as they were forced "into ignorance and poverty" under "the shackles of slavery."[320] Akin to most Estonian and Latvian literati of the era, Jakobson and Jannsen were ardent readers of Garlieb Merkel's 1792 abolitionist treatise, which served as the impetus for much indigenous discourse about the enduring legacy of enserfment decades after abolition was a reality.

Besides being well-versed in Merkel's abolitionist writings, Koidula also had a long fascination with the histories of the Americas, having avidly read Joachim Heinrich Campe's *The Discovery of America*. She funneled this interest directly into her writing, publishing translations as well as penning her own historical narratives at the intersections of class, race, and power across the colonial Americas. In 1866 she published *The Last Inca of Peru* (*Peruamaa viimne inka*). A translation from a German story, *The Last Inca* featured clear historical detail at the beginning and end, and was peppered with Estonian peasant sayings, connecting it to everyday Estonian life. In the novel, a Spanish missionary named Las Casas embarks on a Christian mission to convert indigenous Americans, yet flees Lima after witnessing excessive violence and the low morality of the Spaniards. On his journey, Las Casas encounters Halipa, formerly enslaved by Francisco Pizzaro himself, and later Huaskar, Halipa's

[319] Peiker, "Postcolonial Change."
[320] Laar, *Rahvuse sünd*, 63.

adopted brother and last descendant of the Peruvian Incas. After Halipa disappears and is presumed dead, Las Casas travels to Spain with Huaskar, seeking to ameliorate the violence in Peru, a viceroyalty of the Spanish Crown. Meanwhile, Huaskar attends a Spanish university, falls in love with a Spanish noblewoman, Elvira, and they move back to Peru, where, after much adversity, Huaskar marries Elvira, and becomes governor of Peru, finally able to help his people. Unlike the German original, Koidula ends her story with reference to the beginning of the African slave trade, connecting its recent end with the American Civil War.

Piret Peiker has argued that Koidula's reworking of *The Last Inca* is "obsessed with information and explanation," casting education as a source of social strength and power, a main tenet of the Baltic decolonization movements.[321] Many passages in the story are clearly interchangeable with contemporaneous Baltic social relations: "Already four-hundred years ago, this missionary was sensible enough to perceive, even in our time, what many a pious, wise man refuses to know: that no one with a clear mind should be refused worldly education only because we may think they are of lower birth."[322] The depiction of *conquistadores* was also a clear reference to the legacy of the thirteenth-century conquest by Teutonic crusaders—after all, Iberian *conquistadores* did actually follow the model of the Teutonic crusades in the Baltic. Other passages recall the entrenched opinions of Baltic Germans: "As kind and grateful [governor] Núñez might otherwise have felt towards Huaskar—he never forgot his class and his name and Huaskar was nothing more in his eyes than just

[321] Peiker, "Postcolonial Change," 125.
[322] Ibid, 115.

another Peruvian—his inferior and underling."[323] Nevertheless, the Koidula's reworking of the text celebrated how the "old mold" of strict class divisions was "beginning to fade away more and more in the newer light of day."[324]

A key transformation in Koidula's Estonian translation of the German original is that she describes the history and culture of the indigenous populations before serfdom and conquest. The original German text, by contrast, begins its story and historical context with the arrival of the Spanish in the Americas. Koidula's emphasis on a pre-conquest and flourishing indigenous culture and history decidedly rejects Eurocentrism. And while she espouses criticism of the church, she does not disavow or pass judgment on Huaskar's Christianity, his traveling to Spain to educate himself or his marrying a Spanish woman. Instead, she presents how these relations enabled social mobility and therefore access to unprecedented power and agency in his life, and the ability to intervene directly in indigenous affairs in Peru from an indigenous perspective.

In 1866, the story warranted the first book review in the Estonian language, with an Estonian critic in *Perno Postimees* highly recommending the book since it "forces one to mull over and deeply consider one's own self and the conditions of our own time."[325] It is tempting to see Koidula's metaphors connecting colonial Peruvian society and colonial Baltic society as solely indebted to the generic idealization of the pagan past so common in Baltic intellectual circles of the period, and (National) Romanticism overall. However, Koidula's *The Last Inca* actually predates Jakobson's

[323] Ibid, 121.
[324] Ibid, 121.
[325] "Sõbrra sowiminne," *Perno Postimees*, 2 February 1866.

famous "700-years-of-slavery" speeches, as well as her first direct interactions with most of the Estonian cultural activists.[326] Koidula clearly espoused her own decolonial politics, dedicated towards addressing issues of racialized oppression, the parameters of justice within colonial societies, and how to navigate and transcend these structures. She legitimizes historical change as possible and contests Spanish/Baltic German rule as a natural phenomenon, all while advancing a non-Eurocentric positionality from within a European setting.[327]

What is so exciting about Koidula is that she forwards decolonial politics in her writing and cultural contributions, as much as she embodied how decolonial politics could be enacted. Against this background, her 1867 photographic portrait takes on new valences. Her slightly awkward pose, and the strange blending of festival costume with tools of agricultural labor are likely indebted to the fact that, unlike almost all other Estonians, she did not have a peasant upbringing. Yet this invocation of labor and festival, of history and tradition is also a marker of strength. The rake endows her with a sense of power and control. The Estonian sculptor August Weizenberg would emphasize this element of Koidula when he used the photograph as a prototype for his now-lost 1902 marble sculpture *Estonia* (**Figure 2.19**). In 1903 the women's paper *Linda* would describe the statue as an "upright and strong Estonian maiden, every line pulsating with independence and the embodiment of power, supported by a rake and shovel, her work in the field."[328] When we compare Koidula's folk portrait to the historical and visual processes of racialization

[326] Salupere, *Koidula*, 383.
[327] Peiker, "Postcolonial Change," 126.
[328] A. K., "Estonia," *Linda*, 16 October 1903, 789-790.

in the photograph of Mari Weinberg and the others collated into *Estonian Types* for display, the control and power of the Koidula image rings like a clarion call. Her strikingly modern ideas that Estonians (and Latvians) need not be bound to history, and that change is possible and was indeed already happening, manifest precisely in her decision in this photograph to reject the sartorial codes of social modernity—broadening Jannsen's claim to be Estonian "in any kind of clothing and under any name." In her confident self-fashioning, Koidula declares resolutely that Estonians specifically and unambiguously belong to the modern project. These aims overlap with the ambitions of decolonial figures such as Johann Voldemar Jannsen and Krišjānis Valdemārs, yet she achives a powerful political position here which the other men had avoided, a reclamation of the power of her indigeneity at a pivotal global moment of social change in the wake of abolition. Koidula in folk costume was just as legitimate a person to partake in modernity as she was in middle-class bourgeois clothing. Photography, then, permitted not only Estonians to see themselves as others saw them—the sheer novelty and excitement of visual representation—but the possibility to project a representation for the future, of how Estonians would like to see themselves. For Koidula, photography enabled a visualization of a future which accommodated indigenous persons and perspectives into the fold of current discourses of civilization and enlightenment.

The decolonial positionality of Koidula's 1867 portrait may seem obvious in an image where she has specifically taken steps to portray herself in Estonian costume, but her decolonial writing continued well into the 1870s. As she further explored and grappled with ideas of race and gender in colonial systems, she also

began to address specifically, I argue, the visuality of difference in her novella *Juudit, or the Last Maroons of Jamaica* (*Juudit, ehk Jamaika saare viimsed maroonlased*). Her complex thinking about race, gender, and colonialism was just as important to understanding her iconic 1871 portrait taken by Reinhold Sachker. If Koidula seemed critical of the social order before, her text in *Juudit* seethed with biting irony and sardonic remarks as she sets the exposition of her story in Jamaica, circa 1795.

> As elsewhere in the Americas, blacks from the coast of Africa were taken into slavery also on Jamaica. Europeans were not able, or, at least could not be bothered, to do work, though they were able to enforce and to beat. The slave trade had blossomed. On the cotton and sugar fields, black bodies moved, weeped, and sighed in the place of red bodies, groups revolted, the whip flew and red blood flowed down into the black soil. But white masters lived in proud houses and their little kin witnessed the life of the slaves from soft pillows and thought it to be quite normal. Why would God have created black people if not to be enslaved by white people?[329]

The main storyline follows Juudit, a young woman of mixed white and one-eighth black ancestry. Her beauty makes her beguiling and entrances three male suitors: John, her white cousin, William, another white man, and Eevar, a black chief. Juudit's racial background creates a social ambivalence which hinders her position, yet she is unafraid to be loud and opinonated.

A key aspect we witness in Juudit's character development is her defense of Eevar, the chieftain of the Maroons, once-enslaved Africans who escaped plantation slavery and formed free independent communities. When John provokes Eevar and chastises him for his inherent inferiority, Juudit declares that Eevar is just as strong, if not stronger than John. Eevar at first takes pride in Juudit's defense, yet once he sees

[329] Lydia Koidula, "Juudit, ehk Jamaika saare viimsed maroonlased," *Vikerkaar* 12 (1993): 2-3.

a mirror and is confronted with his own blackness, he becomes ashamed, remarking that the sight of his blackness immediately evokes "a life born into slavery and wretchedness."[330] Juudit, however, begins her own transformation, and through her admiration of Eevar, she starts to recognize the dimensions of and power within her blackness, rejecting ideas of shameful, tainted blood. She later explains to Eevar that she will never know the lived experience of enslavement, but admits that her womanhood affords a certain kind of insight into being bargained among men *nagu kaupa,* like goods. Eevar does not see Juudit as an object—as William and John do—but rather as a spiritual equal in the fight for liberty and justice. Juudit exercises her free will by joining the Maroons and rejects the socially ingrained and enforced ideas of her blackness as limiting. Instead, she sees in Eevar his honorable Igbo heritage and an inherited power from a long line of chieftains. Eevar, for his part, seeks equity with Juudit.

For our purposes, it is important to note that Piret Peiker describes their shared goals as identical with the Baltic decolonization movements: "stating the equality of different peoples, challenging feudal and patriarchal norms and cultural discourse, an emphasis on the emancipatory power of education and national solidarity, as well as declaring a belief in the inner potential and better future of a people."[331] Koidula confirmed precisely such metaphorical overlaps between colonial Jamaica and the colonial Baltic in her correspondences.[332] When Juudit joins the Marooners, she proudly adopts clothes and aspects of her Igbo heritage otherwise denounced and

[330] Piret Peiker, "Rahvusvaheline kultuurimälu ja ümberkirjutus Koidula 'Juuditis,'" 601.
[331] Ibid 602.
[332] "Carl Gustaf Swani mälestused Lydia Koidulast," *Keel ja Kirjandus* 12 (1993), 745

demonized. That the novella centers around the visuality of race, whether in the blackness of Juudit and Eevar, or the whiteness of John and William, attests to Koidula's awareness of and investment in the significance of claiming sovereignty over the visual.

Theories of "yellow" and "Mongoloid" Estonians still wielded power at this time, when the differentials of power and the processes of racialization were tied to the more distinguishable element of social class. Thus, on the one hand, Juudit's embrace of her blackness and its visual markers finds correlations in Koidula's earlier photographic portrait in folk clothing. But, in a more complicated and nuanced way, the figure of Juudit also informs Koidula's iconic 1871 portrait. Juudit's value was pre-determined by the visuality of her mixed-race heritage. Kay Dian Kriz argues that the mulatresse in Caribbean slave societies was often a liminal figure caught between black and white, Africa and Europe**.** Mia Bagneris has expanded the image of the mulatresse to encompass both social control as well as material and sexual exploitation.[333] These may be prescient remarks regarding images made of Caribbean women by European men, however, they are not necessarily applicable to how a nineteenth-century Estonian woman constructed her character of a mixed-race woman in Jamaica.

Although *Juudit and the Last Maroons of Jamaica* takes place circa 1795—during the actual events of the Second Maroon War—it is important to understand the changes in Jamaican society after the abolishment of slavery there in 1834 given

[333] Mia Bagneris, *Colouring the Caribbean: Race and the Art of Agosto Brunias* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 136-181.

Koidula's tendency to contextualize her historical tales within contemporary society. In post-emancipation Jamaica, the designation "brown" began to replace "mulatto." Historian Belinda Edmondson has described how Jamaican brown society was "linked increasingly with urban life and ferocious levels of social aspiration, a shifting blend of desires and limitations."[334] Edmondson further sees the heightened visibility of nineteenth-century brown Jamaicans in urban spaces not as a "whitening" or "Europeanization" of browns, but rather a gradual "browning" of colonial spaces which would pave the way towards present-day understandings of Jamaica as a "hyper-black space."[335] This change is commensurable with Koidula's ideals for society, seeing such spaces as Tartu, where Baltic German society and Russian bureaucracy vied for dominance in the nineteenth century, as spaces which are increasingly "Estonianizing," not to mention the co-existence of Latvian activists in the town.

Both brown society in Victorian Jamaica and the emergent indigenous intelligentsia of the colonial Baltic were "rampantly consumerist, socially ambitious, insular yet outward looking" in their globalizing constructions of a new middle class. To this end, it comes as no surpise that Koidula confessed that she had based the character of Juudit mostly on herself:

> Juudit is a beautiful, wonderous woman: an opinonated, rebellious, stubborn, self-worthy Jamaican islander [...] From the proud valleys of the white island masters, she flees up to the mountain town of the black Marooners, and marries their strong, proud, black-skinned chief, the manly Eevar Montai. War rages between the blacks and whites and when the latter do not get their share, they bring help from Hispaniola

[334] Belinda Edmondson, "'The Most Intensely Jamaican': The Rise of Brown Identity in Jamaica," *Victorian Jamaica*, eds. Tim Barringer and Wayne Modest (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 553.
[335] Ibid, 554.

> across the sea in battle, whom the Marooners encoutner, but not before Montai and Juudit had disappeared: that is the main point of the story. The building up of her character – yes, that's the point of it all.[336]

It is clear why Koidula aligned herself with Juudit, a young, outspoken brown woman, whose existence was similarly liminal, caught between various social spheres in ways that tangled the strict order of the colonial social hierarchy. The adjectives Koidula chose to describe Juudit also seem to convey the author's own appearance in her iconic 1871 portrait to an uncanny degree (**Figure 2.11**).

Far from the demure poses of earlier portraits, Koidula radiates with a degree of self-determination and confidence we could see brewing already in the Jannsen family portrait of 1869. The most visually striking element of this portrait is also its most recognizable feature: her hair. There is something almost electric about her hair: it appears initially slicked backed and styled at her hairline, yet also released, as if a pompadour was undone, or left incomplete. The styling of Koidula's hair is the most distinctive part of her portrait, and the element which instantly renders later representations of Koidula so immediately recognizable. Kempt but unfinished, her hair seems to signal her brazen attitude and outspoken nature. The styling itself was also unusual for someone about to have her portrait taken. Most photography guides encouraged nineteenth-century women to keep their hair pulled up and away from their face, pulled up in a bun, held with clips or other accessories. Koidula here rejects any notion of constrained propriety or fastidious neatness.

Her styling seems especially at odds when we consider a photograph of Edmund Fischer produced in Tartu around the same time (**Figures 2.20)** Fischer, here

[336] Salupere, *Koidula*, 386

a young Baltic German student at the University of Tartu, is dressed as a woman in conjunction with his fraternity's traditions for first-year students to engage in theatrical performances. Since women were forbidden from acting in plays at this time in the Baltic Provinces, men played women's roles, and would dress their characters accordingly. Koidula, for her part, was deeply aware of this gender segregation and authored critical plays (*Säärane mulk, ehk Sada vakka tangusoola*) and engaged her brothers in this phenomenon in an incisive gendered critique which itself warrants further investigation.[337] Fischer's portrait was juxtaposed with a photograph of himself presenting as male with a full facial hair common in 1870s style, with the customary tri-color band of his fraternity around him. Often, these portraits were sold in sets, where viewers could juxtapose the sitter in male and female presentations. While many of the photographs of young men are clearly comical—some cannot even contain their laughter during the exposure time at the studio—Fischer's portrait is notable because of the seriousness with which he poses.

The queer dimensions here are obvious, but I want to highlight the fact that the photograph speaks not only to a potential queer subversion of gender norms, but also simultaneously to a hegemonic Baltic German male conception of femininity. Fischer's wig is styled in a belabored process to accomplish the illusion of realness, further demonstrating how comparatively unusual Koidula's hair truly was.[338] Otherwise, the clothing and poses of Koidula and Fischer are practically indistinguishable, related to the global circulation of a certain iconography of posing

[337] On this play, see Salupere, *Koidula*, 368-372.
[338] "Realness" is a term derived from the illusion of visually passing the opposite of your assigned biological sex.

to assume middle-class identity in portrait photography.[339] Thus, even Koidula's unconventional hair is a way to tie her again back to Juudit, who chooses to exist far beyond established cultural norms, declaring that one need not adhere to social norms of denigration based on externally imposed ideas of beauty and value in a racially stratified society. What gives this photograph even more power is that we know Koidula preferred this photograph as the main visualization of herself. When she lived far from Tartu, Koidula asked her brother to send reproductions of the 1871 portrait to various friends.[340] It was this portrait which would be included in the collage of prominent figures of the Estonian decolonization movement, a veritable who's who of familiar names finally receiving pictorial manifestation (**Figure 2.21**).

Photography and Remediation

In 1878, the Baltic photographer Carl Schulz received an Order of the Lion and the Sun from Nasser al-Din, the Shah of Persia, after bestowing upon the Shah a photographic album of views of St. Petersburg.[341] Sven Lepa has noted that the Order was notorious for the ease with which it was given.[342] Nonetheless, it should not be underestimated that Nasser al-Din responded so warmly to Schulz's photographs, for the Shah himself was an avid photographer—a veritable "lifelong shutterbug"—and personally played a pivotal role in the adoption of photography across Persian cultural

[339] Sheehi, *The Arab Imago*.
[340] Edith Rosenthal Lipp, ed. *Koidula kirjad omakseile, 1876-1886* (Tartu: Eesti Kirjanduse Seltsi Kirjastus, 1926), 9, 20.
[341] "Locales," *Neue Dörptsche Zeitung*, 7 October 1878.
[342] Lepa, "Schulz," 43.

spheres in the nineteenth century.[343] Thus, far from some mere bureaucratic process of diplomatic gift exchange, Nasser al-Din's bestowal of the Order upon Schulz was directly related to the Shah's experience with the medium. Remarkably, this was not the Shah's first engagement with Baltic visual culture. Four years earlier, *Latviešu Avīze* broke the news that "the famous work of Jelgava is off to Persia." The work under question was a landscape painting by "one of the sons of the Baltic, a native *vidzemnieks* (north-central Latvian)" which al-Din purchased from an international exhibition in London.[344] For the Shah, Feders and Schulz were subjects of Imperial Russia—a looming political threat yet simultaneous an endless source of fascination and influence in Qajar Persia—and their works thus served as exemplars of Russian culture.[345]

Consider a photograph from another album by Carl Schulz, his 1880 collection *Livländische Ansichten* (**Figure 2.22**). Schulz's photograph here captures the sinuous curves of the Gauja River as it meanders through a sylvan valley. The topography of the area is unusually undulated for the region, highlighted not only by Schulz's decision to capture hills with the framing of the image, but to pose the camera itself from a high vantage point among the trees. The Gauja valley had attracted artists for its topography since at least the late eighteenth century, and would even gain the moniker "Livonian Switzerland" for its picturesque appearance.[346] For

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343 Carmen Pérez González, *Local Portraiture: Through the Lens of 19th Century Iranian Photographers* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2012). See also Mirjam Brusius, "Royal Photography in Qajar Iran," 2014 and Holland Cotter, "Historical Photos of Persia Through the Eyes of a Shah," *New York Times*, 2 December 2015.
344 "Realskolas," *Latviešu Avīze*, 12 June 1874.
345 David Motadel, "The German Other: Nasir al-Din Shah's Perceptions of Difference and Gender during his Visits to Germany, 1873-89," *Iranian Studies* 44, no. 4 (2011): 563-579.
346 Kadi Polli, "The Role of Pictures in the Late Baltic Enlightenment," *Mākslas vēsture un teorija* 18 (2015): 27-28.

most Latvians, however, the photograph is remarkable for its incredible resemblance to an iconic work of Latvian art: Jūlijs Feders's 1891 oil painting *Gauja Valley* (**Figure 2.23**). Schulz's photograph predates Feders's painting by over ten years. This fact is noteworthy because Feders practiced photography while working as a professional painter. Inta Pujāte argues that Feders likely did not photograph landscapes for his own use—his extant photographs are portraits made to ensure a constant income—though we know he sourced other photographs to paint some of his landscapes.[347] Schulz was the most popular photographer in the Baltic Provinces of the nineteenth century, above all for his album views of towns and landscapes, which itself developed out of a lithographic tradition. This is logical given the frequency with which the earliest practitioners of photography, at least in the Baltic Provinces, all had significant experience working as printmakers, and specifically with producing lithographs.

Besides landscape views, Schultz often photographed new monuments, including one in Tartu of the aforementioned scientist Karl von Baer. By 1881, he expanded to Riga and would dominate the local market before moving back to Tartu in 1886. Schulz could expand from Tartu to Riga because both towns were in Livland Province. Tsarist laws required special permission for photographers to obtain licenses to practice across different provinces of the Empire—it was the lack of this permit which forced the constant itinerancy of the Estonian photographer Jakob Livenström from Valmiera and Cēsis to Viljandi and eventually Paide. As his atelier grew, Schulz would cultivate landscape as his most popular genre was landscape,

[347] Pujāte, "Fotogrāfijas epizode," 133.

specifically in photographs produced for painters, thus the likelihood Feders was already familiar with Schulz's work is high.

Feders's 1891 painting has never been connected to Schulz's 1880 photograph. Scholars have linked the painting instead to a photograph taken by Mārtiņš Buclers in 1905 (**Figure 2.24**), and reproduced in the Latvian magazine *Stari* (*Rays*). Eduards Kļaviņš draws attention to the comparison between the 1905 Buclers photograph and the 1891 Feders painting in the realm of "art photography" and pictorialism of the early twentieth century.[348] This may be plausible, but we should not rule out that even Feders's iconic painting was indebted to earlier photography inasmuch as it influenced later photography. The Latvian photographer undoubtedly took inspiration from Feders's painting, but the painting was clearly influenced by the earlier image in the series of *Livland Views*, revealing not only circulation between and across media, but also pointing to the significance of recovering older Baltic German artists, and not merely privileging Latvians.

Beyond referential image making of popular views, what we witness here is a clear circulation of image technologies, originating in lithography, but then constantly oscillating between photography and painting—from Schulz's photograph to Feders's painting to Buclers's photograph—each medium appearing to be perpetually constitutive of the other(s). The relationship between Feders, Schulz, and Buclers would seem to indicate the significance of photography as both fact and fine art in the Baltic Provinces, an idea which on the surface is hardly revelatory and might appear to be even art historically mundane, until we recall Tõnis Liibek's frustration with the

[348] Kļaviņš, "The Origins of Art Photography," 396, 401.

mismatch between archival newspaper and print media sources and extant visual and material culture.

In the mid-1880s, Estonian writing on photography significantly broadened the definition of practitioners, appearances, and even materialities of the medium. One paper described:

> A sharp housewife (*perenaine*) can become a skilled photographer as long as she has an affinity for art. She can lay out fabric and place many things on the surface, such as a brick or a sieve. She will leave these objects untouched on the fabric until the fabric becomes white. After removing the objects, look how the fabric is just as black in the areas where the objects were before it faded. And you know, the light could not touch or fade those areas. If you look at the black areas, they have four stripes like bricks, whereas the sieve area appears round, striped, and precise. In this way a housewife can depict all sorts of decorations on her dear fabric, and she can justifiably call these forms *photographs* (*päevapildid*), since the light of day created them.[349]

This description of *päevapildid* is difficult to trace in real, extant material objects; yet it is remarkable in its encouragement of women's active involvement in photography, and its consideration of textiles within the realm of photography. Unsurprisingly, Estonians gendered crafts (*käsitöö*) as explicitly feminine, touting especially the rise of a handicraft school run by the Estonian Natalie Johanson-Pärna after winning awards in numerous exhibitions in the early 1880s.[350]

Advertisements for the school emphasized the materials with which they would familarize their students (exclusively girls from the age of fifteen), including straw, fir branches, moss, pinecones, willow branches, cardboard, birch bark, leather, textiles, and paper.[351] In such a materially diverse context—one wonders what exactly

[349] "Walguse imetegu," *Oleviku lisaleht*, nr. 19, 19 September 1885, 290-291.
[350] *Sakala*, 11 July 1881.
[351] "Omalt maalt, Tallinnast," *Virulane*, 5 June 1882.

young Estonian women learned to create with moss (*sammal*)—the application of photography in the realm of textiles seems par for the course, again suggesting the intermediality of photography in almost every realm of image-making of the nineteenth-century Baltic Provinces, well before the advent of professional Estonian and Latvian painters in the 1890s. Indeed, it bears remembering that even those few indigenous Balts who became professional painters before the turn of the twentieth century engaged photography in surprising and compelling ways, most of all the Latvian Jānis Staņislavs Roze.

In chapter one, I explained how Roze experimented with the boundaries of painting in his iconic *Woman with Hen* (**Figure 1.8**), skillfully concealing most elements of the image's photographic origins. A more focused examination of Roze's other extant portraits reveals that the artist routinely painted over enlarged photographs, but that he did not always go to the same lengths to conceal the photographic origins of his works as he does in *Woman with Hen*. [352] In 1927, art historian Visvaldis Peņģerots mentioned the possibility that Roze painted after photographs, while also painting directly onto photographs he had already glued onto canvas.[353] In this case, the label of "oil on canvas" is not incorrect, but incomplete,

[352] This element has been difficult to ascertain because Roze's works are scattered across various Latvian museums, which differ in their art historical knowledge, thus creating inconsistent labels. *Woman with Hen* is located at the Latvian National Museum of Art, where curators and collection managers are trained art historians, and diligently note the image is a painted photograph originally on photographic paper. At the Latvian National History Museum, whose holdings include a markedly larger amount of Roze's portraits, all works are labeled simply as "oil on canvas," thus initially discouraging my investigation of Roze's material practice and process.The incomplete labels also appear in the important new study on nineteenth-century portraiture in Latvia. *Portets Latvijā. 19. gadsimts* (Riga: Neputns, 2014). Personal correspondence with Eduards Kļaviņš, Institute of Art History, Academy of Sciences, Riga, Latvia, 2 July 2018. Longstanding expert on Latvian art and nineteenth-century portraiture Eduards Kļaviņš confirmed their photographic origins.

[353] V. Peņģerots, "Piemirstie latviešu mākslinieki: Jānis Staņislavs Roze," *Ilustrēts Žurnāls* (1927): 246, referenced in Anita Meinarte, "Jānis Staņislavs Roze un Juliuss Gotfrids Zīgmunds. Portreti,"

missing the intermediary photograph between the oil and the canvas. Without detailed technical and material analysis, it remains difficult to determine which works are solely oil-on-canvas paintings, and which ones are painted photographs.

The artist's *Portrait of Jēkabs Balodis* (**Figure 2.25**) is exceptional in its grainy appearance, one which conforms most closely to our (Eurocentric) assumptions regarding how people colored photographs in the nineteenth century. It is grainy precisely in those areas where one expects exact detail to enact a psychological immediacy within photographic portraiture: in the lines defining the contours of his nose and the wrinkles of his face, but also in the use of a monochromatic peachy flesh tone applied unilaterally to his hair as well as the irises of his eyes. This same color even spills into the space around his collar. It is this lack of modulation which destroys the illusion presented so compellingly in *Woman with Hen*.

Other Roze paintings actually suggest the opposite: the vexing appearance of a colored photograph. Anita Meinarte argues that the artist's *Portrait of Karoline Wilhelmine Ertack* (**Figure 2.26**) is certainly a painting, yet is so "photographically precise" in its smooth appearance that it truly seems to be another magnified and painted photograph.[354] Something about Roze's portrait of Karoline Ertack retains a degree of the uncanny, for it does indeed look precisely rendered. The proportions seem agreeable, yet the color is applied unevenly. Unlike in the Balodis portrait, where Roze applied peach-colored tones unilaterally, Roze seems to have overly

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Latvijas Nacionālā Vēstures muzeja zinātskie lasījumi 2004.-2006. Rakstu krājums. ed. Ināra Stašulāne (Riga: Latvijas Nacionalais vestures muzejs, 2007), 142. I have been unable to access the original Peņģerots article and thus am indebted to Meinarte's citations.

[354] Meinatre, "Portreti," 143.

reduced his colors to compensate for light and shadow. Looking at the woman's face, we see a distinctive reddish pink modeling on the left cheeks and the shadow at her jawline, a striking contrast to the opposite side of her face. Her hair also presents a dramatic, yet uneven treatment of shadow. On the left side, her hair is remarkably darker. We know this commission was a posthumous portrait, and Roze portrayed Karoline Ertack as markedly younger, as was common in such commissions. Nevertheless, one may get the feeling that Roze's image appears to be only three-quarters complete, lacking the finesse of finishing details. To claim that Roze's *Portrait of Jēkabs Balodis* or his *Portrait of Karoline Wilhelmine Ertack* were unfinished would suggest a haphazard, even lazy artistic practice. Yet, this arguable state of "incompletness" characterizes the majority of Roze's portraiture from this period. Rather than making value judgments about Roze's ability as an artist, it is more productive to question why we feel so uncomfortable with these images. Since the Balodis portrait clearly reveals a confluence of photography and painting, it is easy to file it away as a "mistake" of the nineteenth century.[355] The Ertack portrait, however, is an instance of a messier process of remediation: here a painting assumes the appearance of a photograph, rather than vice versa.

Paintings which emulated the visual codes of photography abound in the nineteenth century. Consider *Portrait of Tsuda Umeko with a Plum* by Goseda Horyu II (**Figure 2.27**). The bust format of the portrait, and the young woman's gaze off into

[355] Balodis was a member the Moravian Brotherhood, an order which in the eighteenth century dramatically increased its colonial proselytizing missions not only to enslaved Africans across the Caribbean and the Americas, or to Inuits in Greenland, but also to indigenous populations of the Baltic Provinces. One wonders if faith-driven aesthetic ideals of ascetiscm and restraint fostered little urgency over the degree to which a comission appeared like an exquisitely painted portrait. Perhaps simple self-representation was all Balodis desired from Roze.

the distance recall the codified visual markers of nineteenth-century portrait photography and cartes-de-visite. The neutral grayish browns of the monochromatic background melt onto the young woman's dress, enhancing the image's photographic quality. In striking contrast to the grayscale rendered for her face, the peach tones delicately dabbed onto the woman's lips and ears further recall the common practice of the deliberate modes of coloring or lightly overpainting photographs to deepen the liveliness of an image. Upon close, detailed inspection, the image reveals washed pigments—black ink, pigmented reds, and a bluish-white which may be clam shell gesso (*gofun*)—on top of silk.

An image painted in oil on tin from late-nineteenth-century Iran displays similar artistic blending of painting and photography with the addition of lacquer (**Figure 2.28**). The illusion of green marble on the corners of the image recall protective cases made for daguerreotypes and other early photographs, whereas the golden trim enhances the degree to which the image appears like a typical oval framed photographic portrait. The artist was also conversant in Persian lacquer traditions, and David Roxburgh finds hints of the remediation of lacquer in the prevalence of honey- and amber-colored tones, while the misty background is similar to studio backdrops.[356] Neither artist solely emulates photography here. Their images are complex negotiations across media, betwixt and between diverse conceptions of photography and painting. Just as scholars have carefully excavated the cultural politics of medium in Meiji Japan and Qajar Iran, we must be equally conscious of the resonance of medium in the colonial Baltic.

[356] Roxburgh, "Painting after Photography," 121.

Aivars Leitis argues that all of Roze's portraits of this period appear artificial (*mākslīgs*) regardless of their mode of production. He suggests that after the advent of photography, commissioners evaluated portrait paintings according to their similarity to a photograph, a feature of an era which did not "distinguish the photographic from the painted" within portraiture.[357] We should treat this claim with caution. On the one hand, many made constant and clear distinctions between photography and painting, but, on the other hand, it is important to consider what is revealed when we relax Eurocentric taxonomies of art in art historical inquiry. In his brief analysis of the artist's "artificial" portraiture, Leitis does not actually include all of the artist's portraits, instead devoting a separate chapter to a treatment of Roze's more famous images of the era, his series of portraits of influential Latvian men commissioned by the Riga Latvian Society (*Rīgas Latviešu Biedrība*) around 1878. He references an unnamed 1881 Latvian article discussing "portraits of remarkable Latvian men" as examples demonstrating that "small blossoms have already begun to appear in painting or art coloring (*mālēšanā jeb daiļā krāsošanā*)."[358] Leitis therefore makes the bold claim that Roze's series of Riga Latvian Society portraits invoked "the activation of painting in Riga."[359] To be clear, painting's "activation" in Riga's public spaces had a much longer history (which excluded Latvians), but what Leitis is drawing attention to here is a new awareness of painting among the indigenous intelligentsia

[357] Aivars Leitis, *Leģendas hipotēze. Jānis Staņislavs Roze (1826-1897)* (Riga: Neputns, 2012), 100-101.
[358] Ibid, 143. Since Leitis uses footnotes sparingly in his study, I have been unable to find the original article the author cites.
[359] Ibid, 144.

associated with the Riga Latvian Society.[360]

After unusual crop failures across Livland Province in 1868, the Riga Latvian Society was formed to bring aid to starving Estonians. The Society quickly morphed into an organization which facilitated the urbanization of Latvian peasants and sought to foster a sense of community in the new environs of Riga. A humorous column entitled "Pēteris un Čaukste" emerged in in *Mājas viesis (The House Guest)* often pontificating on the new social changes between newly urbanized Latvians in Riga and those in the countryside. Occasionally the column would drop subtle hints about the benefits of getting one's photograph taken. In one tongue-in-cheek dialogue, Čaukste remarks, "You know as well as I do that we have with our chattering gathered many friends here, who really would like to know us well. That's why I was thinking that if you happen to come back on some bright day, we can go to [a] photographer, to depict our faces onto paper, and then we will send the picture into the hands of the people so that they get to really know us for once."[361] This desire to be recognizable and well-known was actually an ideological imperative, as the Riga Latvian Society also began to construct a contemporary pantheon of *tautas draugi*, or "friends of the people"—those (especially but not necessarily Latvian) individuals breaking ground in the decolonization movement, whether as journalists, authors, linguists, teachers, scientists, architects or, eventually, artists. A writer in *Latviešu Avīze* remarked how a Latvian schoolmaster's home was beautifully decorated "with all kinds of photographs, mostly of famous men and *tautas draugi*. All of this

[360] See, for instance, Edvarda Šmite, "Māksla ienāk Rīgas pilsoņu dzīvē 18 gs beigas 20 gs sākums," *Valsts Mākslas muzejs*, ed. Māra Lāce (Riga: Jumava, 2005).
[361] "Pēteris un Čaukste," *Mājas viesis*, 8 January 1872

demonstrates that the person living in this kind of room is a man who bears a mind for and recognition of finer, learned things."[362] In this instance, a *tautas draugs* was defined as someone learned and enlightened (*gaismots*), but also someone whose visage would be recognizable.

No one embodied the ideals of the learned Latvian more than Krišjānis Valdemārs (1825-1891). Valdemārs is frequently understood as the main ideologue of the Latvian decolonization movement. His famous declaration as Latvian on a visiting card at his university dormitory, rather than the typical declaration of his fraternity order, was, in the words of historian Ivars Ījabs, a "challenge [to] the colonial hegemony of Germandom."[363] Valdemārs later wrote for *Mājas Viesis* and was the main editor of *Pēterburgas Avīze* while in St. Petersburg. His significance and impact in Latvian circles is akin to Jannsen's role among Estonians. Unlike Jannsen, however, Valdemārs was banished from the Baltic Provinces in the 1870s and spent the rest of his life in St. Petersburg, and for this reason he could be only an honorary member of the Riga Latvian Society.

Valdemārs sat for many photographs while living in St Petersburg, including at least one instance at the studio of the massive conglomerate of Ivan Stahov (**Figures 2.29 and 2.30**). The atelier of Carl Schulz, sometime after incorporation of two studios in Riga and Tartu in 1886, seems to have also circulated a carte-de-visite of Valdemārs in the Baltic Provinces, though it remains unclear if the Schulz studio produced the image, or simply reproduced it from another studio's pre-existing

[362] "Drauga vārdi un padomi," *Latviešu Avīze*, 30 June 1871.
[363] Ījabs, "Another Baltic Postcolonialism," 94.

photograph (**Figure 2.31**) These photographs would prove crucial when the Riga Latvian Society commissioned Roze to create four portrait paintings of influential members, including Valdemārs (**Figure 2.32**). The exquisite detail and painterly quality of Roze's portrait of Valdemārs evokes a regal beauty, removing the painting from the supposed "artificiality" of other portraits. Scholars have claimed Roze may have deployed photography in his portraiture simply as a means to save time in creating comissioned works in which he posessed no personal artistic or creative investment. Yet Roze made a paltry sum off of the Riga Latvian Society commission, only one hundred rubles for four portraits, an unusually small amount for practicing painters in Riga, even for Roze, suggesting that these detailed commissions were perhaps a labor of love.[364]

Roze's Riga Latvian Society portraits of 1878 were paintings only made possible through the circulation of photography—the very same photographs which were so eagerly created, consumed, and circulated specifically to visualize the new Estonian or Latvian individual in the 1860s and early 1870s. These specific paintings, furthermore, were created by a Latvian painter whose oeuvre is already intimately tied to photography. For even the most educated Latvians, then, painting was only possible after photography. Indeed, photography was necessary for painting's "activation in Riga" and other Baltic towns among the indigenous populations. Perhaps there really is something to be said about Leitis's phrasing of the "activation" of painting, since the figureheads of the Riga Latvian Society, both real and honorary, were activists. And thus to this end, painting begins to take hold as a viable medium

[364] Ābele, "Artistic Life," Forthcoming 2019.

in the decolonial movement and within indigenous activism by the 1880s, a fact which we can chart more explicitly in exhibition circuits in Baltic towns, the subject of the following chapter.

Conclusion

By the turn of the twentieth century, photography was well embedded into the artistic practice of Estonians and Latvians. Photography manuals written in Estonian and Latvian were published, and indigenous theoretical discourse about the medium began to develop rapidly. The backside of a photograph taken by the Estonian Heinrich Tiidermann bespeaks this change (**Figure 2.33**). Adjusting her camera under the towering shadow of a white sail billowing in the breeze of the Baltic Sea, a young woman steps back, pressing her leather *pastlad* into the wet sand. Here we see the inversion of the ethnographic portrait of Mari Weinberg, or perhaps rather the full realization of Lydia Koidula's 1867 portrait in the folk costume: an Estonian woman in folk costume is arranging the picture, acting as a skilled photographer herself, rather than the subject of the photograph. Behind the woman and the sail is the silhouette of the city of Tallinn, and underneath her is the city's name rendered in German, Estonian, and Russian, bespeaking Tiidermann's multilingual clientele. The woman in Tiidermann's advertisement was more than idealized fodder—historical records demonstrate that the first Estonian women began working as professional photographers precisely at this moment, including Anna Kukk in Viljandi.[365]

[365] See *Positiiv*, 24 (2016) for more on Anna Kukk and other early Estonian women pioneers in the realm of photography.

Within the history of Baltic photography, Tiidermann is a prominent figure, especially for his photographic album *Estonica*, first displayed in 1892 and deemed "scientifically important" for posterity because it captured images of "the people's work, tools, dwellings, song choirs in folk costume, Estonian authors and their writings, and other beautiful pictures."[366] Rarely discussed is the fact that Tiidermann included prints and photographs produced by Baltic Germans earlier in the century, remarkably even images from Charles Borchardt's series *Estonian Types* (**Figure 2.34, 2.35**). Even in a deliberately ethnographic album such as *Estonica*, the material production of the album prevents us from understanding Heinrich Tiidermann solely vis-à-vis his national identity.[367]

Perhaps an even more vexing subject than Tiidermann's redeployment of Borchardt's portraits of the 1860s is Reinhold Sachker's recorded photographic work with the Baltic German painter Oskar Hoffmann (**Figure 2.36**) At least one photograph in the collection of the Estonian National Museum radiates with a haunting precision. The old man's ragged appearance, echoed in the striations of his aged shearling coat and seemingly unwashed, unkempt hair, suggests the bar-going types Hoffmann so loved to paint. Given the fact that Sachker once staged the most political image in the history of nineteenth-century Baltic photography—an image of two young Estonians cutting and destroying conservative Baltic German media and

[366] "Sõnumid Tallinnast," *Postimees*, 10 March 1897.
[367] This brings to mind Andrés Mario Zervigón's astute observation regarding the photographer Pascal Sébah, a Catholic Armenian living in Ottoman Syria who ran a portrait studio for locals as well as providing "types" for the voracious European market. For Zervigón, an overemphasis on Sébah's "non-Western identity […] obscure[s] how [his] pictures, the products of a long-existent globalism, show identity to be [a] contested and negotiable territory of intersection, fantasy, selective affiliation, and disjunction." Andres Mario Zervigon, "Towards an Itinerant History of Photography: The Case of Lalla Essaydi," *Photography, History, and Difference*, ed. Tanya Sheehan (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2015), 84-85.

propaganda circa 1871 (this was actually Woldemar Hansen's anti-Estonian speech discussed above, **Figure 2.37**)—Sachker's collaboration with a Baltic German painter to create more "Estonian types" strikes the reader as strange and unexpected. In this case, even Sachker, lauded in the 1890s as an "always zealous man and tireless worker in furthering the situation of our people," has a fluid, contradictory identity in a manner perhaps not too dissimilar to Pascal Sébah and his engagement of "types" in Cairo and Istanbul.[368]

What is noteworthy in early Baltic photography was where and how the medium was promulgated. For instance, Heinrich Tiidermann displayed his photographs at numerous exhibitions in Tallinn in the 1890s, a decade before the supposed "beginning" of Estonian art exhibitions in 1906 (discussed in the following chapter). Yet the more one investigates, the clearer it becomes that Tiidermann's following in the Estonian media in the 1890s was by no means novel. It was a logical extension of decades of indigenous engagement with photography, some of which stretched as far back as the 1850s—and the period's most prominent and well-known figures were photography's preeminent practitioners.

As this chapter has demonstrated, even the images which appear the most quotidian, say, an Estonian or Latvian teacher posing in a suit, or images whose ideologies seem immediately clear, such as Lydia Koidula's portrait in folk clothing, were tied not only to the sheer novelty of visual representation. Rather, they reveal a striking ability to harness its affirming power to promote meaningful and palpable social change. Indigenous Balts needed to establish themselves as subjects on their

[368] "Haruldane ametipüha," *Postimees*, 17 March 1894.

own terms first and foremost—and be able to visualize and materialize them literally—before they could disseminate and enact their ideas of social and cultural transformation. Their frequent engagement with photography already enabled a keen awareness of the visual, whether through the manipulation of certain codes, sartorial and otherwise, or the careful calculation of self-representation to deploy the visual specifically towards decolonial ends. That indigenous rhetoric consistently interwove photography with other media—whether in the explicit rejection of painting, its blending with textiles, or even its origins in lithography—demonstrates a flow between and beyond media, integrating Baltic indigenous cultural production even further into the global networks of image making and circulation of the nineteenth century. It is only when Estonians and Latvians appear to conform to Eurocentric ideas of art through the widespread adoption of oil-on-canvas painting in the 1890s do we conventionally begin to incorporate their endeavors into art historical investigations. As we will see, however, the promotion of Latvians or Estonians as professional painters would become the most contested element of Baltic cultural life. It was in the arena of local exhibitions where decolonial discourses of assimilation would give way to a radical *anticolonial* rhetoric. Art's visuality would jettison the colonial social hierarchy once and for all.

Chapter 3

Painting's New Viability

"Until now, the art of painting has been the most foreign to the Latvian people – the time has come for them to start to revere it more."
Mājas Viesa Mēnešraksts, 1896.[369]

"Love and understanding of art are the children of the social and political constellations of the time; neither museums, art societies, nor their salons can force them onto the broader public. Art does not allow its own democratization."
Baltische Monatsschrift, 1900.[370]

"Art must be shown to the people so they become bound within its language, awoken to beauty, to progress – to goodness. Up to now whatever has crossed over the boundaries [given to] art has missed the people, being tasted only by the more privileged, with their contacts and knowhow. *But art is for everyone*."
Teataja, 1903.[371]

An almost skeletal, sinking face peers through a veil. Shrouded in white, the decaying corpse is covered with fabric so thin that its right arm assumes an eerie bony appearance (**Figure 3.1**). Otherwise, the body sits in darkness. Shadow has blanketed most of the wooden interior like a thick, obfuscating smoke. Sunlight crawls through the window, a pale reflection from the white snow. A foreboding grey sky suggests that this bit of wintry light will soon succumb to an all-encompassing darkness, as the dim orange glow of the fireplace embers on the right offer little warmth. The remaining daylight illuminates worn, wrinkled faces and leathery hands. Amidst the

[369] "Gleznošānas māksla gan tā, kas līdz šim latviešu tautai vissvešakā – laiks, ka viņa sāktu arī to vairāk cienīt." "Latviešu etnogrāfiskā izstāde," *Mājas Viesa Mēnešraksts*, 1 August 1896, 627.
[370] "Kunstliebe und Kunstverständnis sind kinder des sotzialen und politischen Zuschnitts der Zeit; erzwingen lassen sie sich nicht, under weder die Museen, noch die Kunstvereine, sammt ihren Salons werden sie je in breiteren Bevölkerungsschichten hervorrufen. Demokratisiren lässt sich die Kunst nicht." Wilhelm Neumann, "700 jahre Baltische kunst," *Baltische Monatschrift*, 6 (1900), 432.
[371] "Rahvale tuleb kunsti näidata, kunsti keelel teda köita ja äratade ilule ja edule – headusele. Mis seni kunstist tema piiretesse ulatanud, läks temast mööda, ainult mõnedel jõukamatel, kel teiste leeridega ühendust oli, oli võimalik teda maitseda. *Kunst on aga kõikide päralt*." Hans Laipmann [Ants Laikmaa], "Üleskutse," *Teataja*, 17 November 1903.

bitter cold and impending darkness, an elderly bearded man reads verses aloud from a brown Bible on his lap, while a seated older woman, donned in a black dress, hunches forward as she clasps her hands in prayer. These figures are conducting a wake, and we as viewers are privy to but not a part of this intimate ceremony. Instead, the positioning of the scene makes viewers gaze solemnly from a distance, and a sense of detachment lingers in the air.

From the brown spinning wheel and intricately designed wooden mug in the left corner to the fishing nets strewn on the floor and worn chairs decorated with elaborate carvings, this meticulous description of objects in the house presents an attention to detail typical of mid-nineteenth-century realist painting. This attention lavished on detail, however, stands at odd with the privacy we are witnessing, calling the purpose of this painting into question. Does our delight in the painter's precision take away from the gravity of the scene? Is this painting supposed to be religious, emphasizing the enduring piety of the family despite their squalor? Or does the painting border on the ethnographic, highlighting distinctive elements of peasant life?

Consider further *Estonian Wake,* an oil painting by Oswald von Sass (1856-1913), an artist renowned for the "convincing fidelity" with which he depicted "the sufferings and pleasures of the Estonian people."[372] Contemporary critics deemed *Estonian Wake* to be the artist's most important work, commanding attention and "placing him in the first row among his Baltic colleagues."[373] But not all viewers found Sass's "fidelity" to peasant life compelling. The Latvian art critic Teodors

[372] Neumann, "700 Jahre baltischer Kunst," 432.
[373] "Arensburg. Oswald von Saß †," *Rigasche Zeitung*, 21 May 1913.

Zeiferts found an awkwardness in Sass's imagery, arguing that it appeared as though it was painted "from a different world."[374] Debating the significance of the painting's title, he questioned what purpose the ethnonym "Estonian" really served. He derided how "O. von Sass paints an Estonian girl, an Estonian wedding feast, and Carl von Winkler paints Estonian peasant houses, Estonian shepherd huts. These are paintings more from a distance, these gentleman look at Estonians as if from a different world, seeing something characteristically Estonian which is always marked in the title of the painting."[375] Estonian and Latvian painters, by contrast, never deployed such descriptors in the titles of their works, nor did they need to do so.

Zeiferts was able to make distinctions between Estonian, Latvian, and Baltic German artists because they collectively exhibited their artworks together. This collectivism was a novel concept. To be sure, Riga had already witnessed its fair share of exhibitions, "but who," Zeiferts wondered, "has had the leisure to linger long at them?" The debut exhibition of the revamped Riga Art Society in December 1898 and January 1899 signaled that change was on the horizon, fostering a new kind of public, one who "goes once and then again, starting to compare one work of art with another, judging paintings and painters, and arguing whether or not the artist [Johann] Walter is a Latvian or a German."[376] The significance of such discourse—not merely that exhibition-goers discussed the painter's ethnicity, but the fact that there was even an option besides German—was not lost on the critic, who declared it to be a testament to the fact that "an interest in art has awoken in the people."[377] For Zeiferts,

[374] Teodors Zeiferts, "Pēdējas Rīgas Mākslas biedrības salona nozīme," *Mājas viesis*, 8 January 1899.
[375] Ibid.
[376] Ibid.
[377] Ibid.

this new public, as well as the painters revitalizing Baltic art, were notably Latvian. He could reach this conclusion due to the comparative framework of the exhibition. The Salon's inclusion of Latvian and Estonian artists alongside more privileged and experienced Baltic German artists would covertly transform the exhibition space into a veritable threat to the colonial structures of power.

This chapter investigates how painting finally became a viable aesthetic mode among Latvians and Estonians given their historical disengagement with the medium. I argue that the ascent of painting among Latvians and Estonians was specifically indebted to exhibition networks of the late 1880s through the early 1900s, where it became possible to visualize competing perspectives of history and culture. Thus we can understand exhibitions as important nodes of intercultural contact across the Baltic Provinces. Exhibitions were spaces where the strict boundaries between Baltic Germans, Estonians, and Latvians appeared to dissipate, even as art began to assume more nationalistic valences. Here a multiethnic and multilingual public evaluated the works of their compatriots against their neighbors of varying ethnicities. Ultimately, it would be this juxtaposition that possessed the potential to dismantle assumptions about the inherent inferiority of indigenous Balts. Scholars have traditionally cast the multiethnic makeup of these exhibition venues as hampering rather than generative. The Latvian art historian Jānis Siliņš famously described how young Latvian artists, emboldened by their "fresh, healthy vitality rooted in the peasant nation," broke the "weary, provincial Baltic German air" dominant in turn-of-the-century Riga with their "thunderstorm of creative joy and courage."[378] Estonian art historian Vaike Tiik

[378] Quoted in Ābele, "The Picture of the Period 1890-1915," 12

has similarly remarked that the rise of Estonian artists in the 1890s was a "counterweight to the pallid overall picture of Baltic German art."[379]

Exhibitions play a pivotal role in such accounts, as they make manifest the ascendance of a Latvian or Estonian modern art. It is true that Estonian- or Latvian-centered art groups emerged and exhibited, and in some cases, would no longer have considered it apposite to display artworks alongside those by Baltic Germans. However, as we will examine in greater detail in the following chapter, these groups would manifest most clearly only in the wake of the 1905 Revolution. The most comprehensive display of contemporary Baltic art occurred in the midst of revolutionary turmoil, featuring artists of variously Baltic German, Estonian, and Latvian background, as well as Finnish, Lithuanian, Polish, and Russian artists, precisely at a moment most polarized by violence along ethnic lines. As such, it bears keeping in mind Elizabeth Clegg's observations on the pertinence of similarity regarding the multiethnic makeup of art exhibitions across the Austro-Hungarian Empire at this time. She stresses that:

> It is only through attention to the persisting element of cohesion that one can fully appreciate the complex nature of the separatist strivings that characterize so many of the cultural, as also political, ventures of the years between 1890 and 1920. It should be emphasized the attending to evidence of cohesion is not equivalent to imposing a spurious uniformity. This approach, on the contrary, allows one to distinguish true from illusory uniqueness and to assess the relative significance of developments and achievements through comparing like with like.[380]

[379] Vaike Tiik, "Eesti kunstielu XIX. ja XX. sajandivahetusel," *Kunst* 1 (1966), 2.
[380] Clegg, *Art, Design, and Architecture in Central Europe,* 4.

Echoing this divide between Baltic Germans on one side and Estonians and Latvians on the other is a much more entrenched divide in global art history between Europeans and all others in the nineteenth century. In her recent study of art in nineteenth-century Istanbul, art historian Mary Roberts has revealed the significance of exhibition spaces as pivotal points of intercultural convergence.[381] Transcending binaries of Ottomans and Orientalists—another binary born out of the local and global, national and international, native and foreign—her emphasis on network relations at exhibition spaces shifts away from the idea of national cultures as circumscribed or self-contained. By attending to the relationship among diverse communities rather than narrating the rise of individual national groups, we can temper long-held ethnocentric distortions, providing a fuller picture as to how various media under the banner of modern art could sway public opinion and advance social equity.

Contending with Coloniality in *Terra Mariana*

The 1890s are ingrained in Baltic art history as the beginning of modernism. Despite the wealth of scholarship on the turn of the twentieth century, the period's immediate precedent, which would explain how such an achievement was possible, remains surprisingly murky. The emergence of native Latvian or Estonian professional artists is often explained as an offshoot of social mobility. Indeed, even critic Teodors Zeiferts explained the sudden prominence of Latvian painters at a salon in 1899 as the natural result of the transformative social changes ushered in by the

[381] Roberts, *Istanbul Exchanges*, 112.

decolonization movements earlier in the century. By the end of the nineteenth century, a new generation of indigenous Balts had been fully immersed in the affirmative ethos of the Latvian and Estonian decolonization movements which generally asserted the value of a distinct indigenous cultural identity. They were educated at the highest levels, whether at the Riga Polytechnic Institute, institutions in Russia proper, or elsewhere abroad. Despite Russification reforms during the last third of the nineteenth century—especially following the Polish Winter Insurrection of 1863-64—to render all schooling in the Russian language, and encourage conversion to Eastern Orthodoxy, the efforts of Lydia Koidula, Johann Voldemar Jannsen, Krišjānis Valdemārs and other earlier activists in the 1860s and 1870s were not in vain.

One of the greatest inheritors of the ideologies of the decolonization movement was the Latvian artist Artūrs Baumanis. Born in 1867, he grew up precisely in the era of greatest social change for Latvians. No less significant was the fact that his father was Jānis Frīdrihs Baumanis, the first academically educated Latvian architect and founding member of the Riga Latvian Society (*Rīgas Latviešu Biedrība*).[382] Baumanis the elder would design some of the most prominent schools, banks, and houses in Riga's central district, including the home of the painter-photographer Jānis Staņislavs Roze. Indeed, Baumanis the elder was included as a subject of one of the portraits of Riga Latvian Society members Roze painted in the late 1870s and 1880s, the same portraits that scholars credited with no less than "activating painting" among the indigenous intelligentsia in Riga. In this context, it is

[382] For more on the Riga Latvian Society, see chapter two.

no surprise that young Artūrs Baumanis had access to easel painting, as the idea of a Latvian working professionally in a variety of cultural realms had become commonplace in his life.

Scholars have typically placed Baumanis within the genealogy of Rūķis, the collective of Latvian art students that emerged under nationalist auspices at the Imperial Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg in 1891. Rūķis's significance in the history of Baltic and Latvian art, especially in exhibition venues, is important to emphasize—we will examine it in greater detail below—but many of Baumanis's most significant works were created years before Rūķis came into being. The artist painted his most iconic work at only twenty years old, three years before graduating from the Academy of Fine Arts. In his 1887 canvas *Horse of Destiny* (**Figure 3.2**), a blond bearded and barefoot man leads a white horse over a fallen lance into the center of a flat clearing encircled by stones. The horse is the center of the gaze of numerous women, men, and children, who wait eagerly in anticipation. To the right of the man leading the horse is a stack of wooden logs, lit ablaze on top of the flat surface of a stony grey raised platform. White animal skulls, perhaps of horses or other such beasts of burden, dangle from the sacred oaks encircling the scene. Most visually prominent, however, is the man draped in a striking yellow fabric, with a hood pulled over his head. He clasps his hands together, as if in prayer. Upon closer inspection, a small brown crucifix dangles from his neck. He is a Christian missionary, but this ritual we witness is anything but Christian. It is a pagan rite practiced by ancient Livs. The inclusion of the Christian man indicates to us that this scene is vaguely historical, dating to the conversion of the Baltic in the twelfth century. Rather than the conflict

and violence we associate with the crusades, we witness instead a pagan man resting his hand on the Christian man's shoulder, suggesting a sense of warm camaraderie rather than resolute opposition. What is so remarkable about this gesture is it reveals how Baumanis completely transformed the representation of the relationship between indigenous Balts and Teutonic/German colonizers.[383]

Baumanis based the composition of *Horse of Destiny* on a highly influential series of copper engravings depicting episodes of Baltic history made by Friedrich Ludwig von Maydell in 1839 and 1842 titled *Fünfzig Bilder aus der Geschichte der deutschen Ostsee-Provinzen Rußlands*.[384] Baumanis specifically cites Maydell's engraving *Monk Thedoerich's Impending Sacrifice to the Idols* (**Figure 3.3**). In the original engraving, the priest sits atop the horse, raising his hands to the heavens as he hopes to avoid an imminent death. Three Liv men are clad in heavy bear pelts. Each has arranged their thick, long hair into top knot at the center of their heads, cascading over their faces and onto their shoulders in a confounding mop-like appearance. In marked contrast to the soft, sinuous locks dangling from the heads of the surrounding German crusaders, the texture of the Livonian hair appears to be as furry and animalistic as the thick mane of the horse or even the pelts they bare on their chests. Maydell deployed nineteenth-century "scientific" markers of visual difference in his medieval scene in order to racialize the indigenous population as savage and barbaric, and the Germans as civilized and pure.

[383] Kaljundi and Kreem, *Ajalugu pildis,* 60.
[384] Linda Kaljundi and Tiina-Mall Kreem, eds., *Friederich Ludwig von Maydell Pilti Baltimaade ajaloost* (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstimuuseum – Kadrioru Kunstimuuseum, 2013).

Whereas Maydell advanced an image of indigenous pagans as savage, Baumanis removed precisely those demonizing markers of difference in order to idealize and heroicize his ancient compatriots. Maydell had sourced this scene from a passage in *The Chronicles of Henry of Livonia*, the oldest extant written text on Baltic history which narrated the colonial encounter and conquest in the twelfth century. Both Baumanis and Maydell thus cited the following passage:

> Because the crops in his fields were quite abundant and in their own fields dying because of a flooding rain, the Livonians of Treiden [Turaida] prepared to sacrifice [Brother Theodoric] to their gods. The people were collected and the will of the gods regarding the sacrifice was sought after by lot. A lance was placed in position and the horse came up and, at the signal of God, put out the foot thought to be the foot of life. Brother Theodoric prayed aloud and gave blessings with his hand. The pagan priest asserted that the Christian God was sitting on the back of the horse and was moving the horse's foot forward; that for this reason the back of the horse had to be wiped off so that the God might slide off. When this was done, the horse again put forth the foot of life, as before, and Brother Theodoric's life was saved.[385]

Therefore what is most significant about Baumanis's transformation of Maydell's source image is one of its least conspicuous parts: the ancient Liv man leads the horse over the lance, suggesting the monk will live, whereas in Maydell's earlier images, it appears as though nefarious Livs hold the lance with the hope that he will die. In Baumanis's painting, the monk does not appear to a sacrificial object, but perhaps even a welcome witness to a glorious rite. In this sense, the original source material, wherein the white horse foretells whether the monk will live or die, suddenly seems less important, and Baumanis instead has emphasized the co-habitation that would determine Baltic history for the next seven centuries.

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[385] Henricus Lettus, *The Chronicle of Henry of Livonia*, trans. James Brundage (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 27-28.

Baumanis likely gained inspiration to turn to Maydell from his first teacher, Jānis Staņislavs Roze, who had painted two small historical scenes in 1884 as a colorful rendering of the original print series. The specific print Baumanis cited also circulated widely, and was reproduced during the indigenous decolonial movement in calendars dedicated to narrating the Christianization of Estonians and Latvians.[386] This widespread visibility across Baltic German, Estonian, and Latvian circles would have fostered an unusual cross-cultural legibility to Baumanis's painting, rendering its rejection of colonial tropes of demonizing indigenous belief systems all the more powerful. Indeed, *Horse of Destiny* is emblematic of how indigenous artists began to reclaim and retool Baltic German colonial narratives and visual legacies about their backwardness and inferiority. No longer were the ancient forbearers of the Latvians obnoxious-looking heathens in heavy pelts and strange mop-like hairstyles, but rather high priests and priestesses, taking part in sacred devotional acts within the powerful realm of nature.

The artist would continue his engagement with medieval Baltic history and indigenous pagans a year later in *Terra Mariana, 1186-1888*, the most luxurious work created in the Baltic Provinces during the nineteenth century. Intended as a gift to Pope Leo XIII on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of his priesthood, *Terra Mariana* was a lavishly illustrated album narrating the history of the Christianization of the Baltic Provinces. In November 1888, the Riga Art Society arranged for illuminated texts and accompanying watercolors to be on display before the album was assembled and sent to the Vatican. The exhibition proved so popular that the

[386] Kaljundi and Kreem, *Ajalugu pildis*, 58.

Society extended its duration from one day to two weeks, and organized photographic reproductions of the watercolors for subscribers.[387] During the runtime, a reviewer in *Rigasche Zeitung* commended the album as "an eloquent testimony of art and craft in Riga," especially heralding the "elegant and lively compositions of the students of the St. Petersburg Academy Borchert and Baumann."[388] To be called out by name as students was no small achievement, especially given the fact that the album was a colossal collaboration between painters, lithographers, architects, engineers, bookbinders, calligraphers, and silversmiths, including, in addition to Bernhard Borchert and Artūrs Baumanis: Erik Backstad, Guido von Czarnocki, Oskar Felsko, Albert Franz, Alexander Grosset, Sigismund von Lessel, Antoni Porczynski, Maria Scheffers, Max Scherwinsky, and Wiktor Zelichowski—the majority of these names are unknown to art historians today.[389]

Countess Maria Przeździecka, a Polish noblewoman, commissioned the album, whose organization in Riga was taken over by the Polish-Baltic German historian Gustaf von Manteuffel. The album's visual program recalls medieval manuscript illumination in its exuberantly colored texts, all written in Latin, explaining the history of Catholicism in the Baltic Provinces, once named "The Land of Mary." For anyone familiar with Baltic culture and history, the existence of the album is noteworthy especially for its glorification of Catholicism at a time when the area was overwhelmingly Lutheran. However, in the early modern period, much of

[387] It remains unclear if these reproductions were ever made. "Kunstverein," *Rigasche Zeitung*, 2 November 1888.
[388] "Die Aquarell-Ausstellung im Kunstverein," *Rigasche Zeitung*, 1 November 1888.
[389] Rūta Kaminska, "Albuma *Terra Mariana, 1186-1888* mākslinieciska apdare un tās autori," *Terra Mariana 1186-1888. Albums un komentāri* (Riga: Latvijas Nacionālā bibliotēka, 2013), 28-30.

present-day Estonia and Latvia was under Polish rule—Manteuffel had just published his volume *Polish Livonia* in 1879—and though staunchly Catholic Poles were rare cultural figures in the Baltic Provinces in the nineteenth century, many were fellow citizens of the Russian Empire.[390] Indeed, in Vilnius, Poles occupied a similar position over Lithuanians in the art world akin to Baltic Germans in Riga, Tallinn, and Tartu.[391] Given the tumultuous relationship between Poles living in the Russian Empire, and a series of failed revolutions throughout the nineteenth century, emphasizing earlier Catholic and Polish periods of the Baltic Provinces would have played an ideological purpose, deeming current Russian rule, Russification reforms, and the imposition of Eastern Orthodoxy as ahistorical and thus neither genuine nor authentic to the region. Nevertheless, although Polish engagement with the culture of the Baltic Provinces in the nineteenth century was not common, it was not without precedent.[392] In truth, if there was any outlier in the *Terra Mariana*'s roster of artists, it was Baumanis, the sole Latvian to take part. It is unclear how Manteuffel selected the artists to illustrate the *Terra Mariana* album, but the choice of Baumanis may have been indebted to the connections of the artist's father, the prominent Riga architect. Baumanis, it should be said, was only twenty-one years old when he embarked on this daunting commission, which makes his accomplishments all the more impressive.

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[390] Poland was infamously partitioned between 1772 and 1795 between Prussia, the Russian Empire, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and would remain so until 1918.
[391] Laima Laučkaitė, *Art in Vilnius, 1900-1915* (Baltos Lynkos, 2008).
[392] The territories comprising present-day Lithuania were not a part of the Baltic Provinces in the nineteenth century. The 1795 partition of the Poland-Lithuanian Commonwealth made all Lithuanians citizens of the Russian Empire, but Lithuanian co-operation with Poles during numerous uprisings throughout the century resulted in punitive measurements severely curtailing the development of Lithuanian culture. After a failed uprising in 1831, the area was officially known by the generic term "Northwestern Province" (*Severo-Zapadnij krai*) until 1918.

Baumanis contributed three illustrated pages to the *Terra Mariana* album: one contains vignettes about the Christianization of the town of Jelgava (Mitau), another juxtaposes a Baltic German estate at Durbe with battle scenes of the Teutonic knights and its victors and losers, while the third juxtaposes townscapes of Krustpils with a menacing knight and a sylvan encounter between a German monk and a pagan Latvian woman and man (**Figures 3.4, 3.5, 3.6**). All three images appear to glorify the twelfth-century German crusaders, who assume domineering forms in each composition, whether valiantly striding in from victory on horseback, or standing atop a felled oak tree, with the banner of the Virgin and Child waving in the wind. Upon closer inspection, however, Latvians also play key roles in these compositions. Some appearances are more innocuous, including ancient Latvians curiously conversing with German monks, or modern peasants praying at a makeshift rural altar set against golden wheat fields. Other appearances are clearly meant to evoke pathos in the viewer on behalf of Latvians. In one scene, a pagan man is trampled under the hooves of the horses of the crusaders, who pay no attention to the death and destruction they have caused. In another, an elder man rests atop a stone altar, overwhelmed by the destruction of his heritage, rendered most potently by the smashed icon of Pērkons, the Latvian pagan god of thunder, below him. Latvian historian Ojārs Spārītis has cleverly deemed Baumanis's emotional rendering of Latvians to be an act of "quiet dissidence," [393] making visible indigenous perspectives

[393] Ojārs Sparītis, "Artūra Baumaņa 'klusais disidentisms' un tā evolūcijas veicinātāji mākslā," *Latvijas Vēstures instituta žurnāls* 98, no. 1 (2016): 66-88

of the ramifications of Christianization—indeed, of colonization—alongside mainstream narratives of German conquest.

There is another unusual element to the artist's contributions to the album: Baumanis signed each image as "Sihmejis Baumaņa Arthurs Rīgā 1888. gadā," literally "Drawn by Artūrs Baumanis in Riga in 1888." By rendering his signature in Latvian alongside Latin, he elevates the peasant tongue to the sacred level of the holy language of Catholicism and the Roman Empire, declaring both to be languages of faith, and thus Christianity and indigenous paganism to be equals. The order of his name, Baumaņa Artūrs, also rejects German nominal syntax. The significance of Baumanis writing in Latvian should not be underestimated. Despite his upbringing in the 1860s and 1870s, he grew up speaking German at home, and would only learn to speak Latvian around other Latvians later as a student in Tartu and St. Petersburg.[394] What has remained unnoticed, however, is the power of Baumanis's choice of words, for the word *zīmēt*, to draw, was one of many contested Latvian neologisms for the field of art, and possessed particular potency in the exhibition context of Riga in 1888. Just five years earlier, the new word had drawn the ire of writers in *Latviešu Avīze*:

> On drawing (*Par ceiķināšanu*). Today some have attempted to supplant this word with another one for drawing (*zīmēšana*). However, one has to say that Latvians do not speak this way. Latvians do say this when a forester goes into the forest to mark (*zīmēt*) trees for cutting but when you want a picture of a pretty tree, a Latvian would say: we will draw this (*to mēs uzceiķināsim*).[395]

[394] Edvārda Šmīte, "'Zemgaliešu gari' etnogrāfiskajā izstādē," *Studija* 106, no.8-9 (2016): 26.
[395] "Drusku par ceiķināšanas, dziedāšanas un vingrošanas mācīšanu laukskolās," *Latviešu Avīzes*, 20 April 1883. Quoted in Kristiāna Ābele, "Artistic Life," manuscript in print.

Ceiķināt derived, of course, from the German *zeichnen*. By contrast, *zīmēt*'s connection to mark-making was also etymologically connected to making "meaning" or "significance," as in the word *nozīme*. Yet in the 1880s *zīmēt* conveyed the felling of forest trees more readily than any creative or artistic act. Trees, specifically fallen oak trees, feature prominently in all of Baumanis's *Terra Mariana* drawings. In each case, a German crusader tramples over these oaks, among the holiest sites in ancient Latvian mythology. The deliberate destruction of sacred trees was one of the first steps the crusaders took in order to eradicate indigenous belief systems. Indeed, this act even featured in Friedrich Ludwig von Maydell's 1839 print series, where indigenous Baltic tree deities assume the form of sinister, menacing demons (**Figure 3.7**).[396] His demonization of native paganism would have been well-known to Baumanis, for it also featured in the same print he sourced in the creation of his canvas *Horse of Destiny.* Kaspars Kļaviņš has demonstrated that pagan nature and tree worship continued among Latvians long after the conquest.[397] However, in the nineteenth century, many decolonial activists lamented how Latvians and Estonians, "starved by the burdens of slavery" and "exhausted in spirit and mind," had forgotten their ancestral connections to the spirits of the natural world. In his 1868 essay "Forest and Trees," Latvian activist Atis Kronvalds posed particularly provocative questions:

[396] Linda Kaljundi "The Workings of Cultural Memory and Colonialism. Friedrich Ludwig von Maydell's *Baltic History* in Images," in Kaljundi and Kreem, *The Artist and Clio: History and Art in the 19th Century* (Tallinn: Kadrioru Kunstimuuseum, 5 (10) 2015), 251.
[397] Kaspars Kļaviņš, "Sacred Forests and Trees in Latvia and in the Latvian Mind," in *Umweltphilosophie und Landschaftsdenken im baltischen Kulturraum*, eds. Liina Lukas, Ulrike Plath, and Kadri Tüür (Tallinn: Underi ja Tuglase Kirjanduskeskus, 2011), 259-267.

> Do Latvians alone have no remnants about the forest, about oaks, pines, and birches? Is this the understanding of the forest's strange life entirely extinguished in us, do we alone no longer feel sacred presentiments in the shade of the forest? Or do we perhaps no longer hear the rustling of the dense canopy and the cheerful singing of the birds? Do the gaily flowing forest streams no longer refresh our hearts and soul? Or were our sensations, our thoughts killed, too, when our gods were driven from the forest—so that we are no longer capable of honoring the memories of our people's youth?[398]

Here Kronvalds made explicit the connection between the twelfth-century conquests and the destruction of sacred nature as concomitant with the obliteration of native cosmologies. Kronvalds, the same man who invented so many Latvian neologisms for the field of art, also prided himself on knowing the Latvian name "of every plant and flower" as a tool to counter Germanization.[399] Such writings were the bedrock of Latvian decolonial literature and it was in lock step with the emergence of a native song festival tradition in the 1870s that poets extolled ancient indigenous virtues about the natural world. It bears repeating here that Auseklis's iconic 1875 poem "Fortress of Light" recounted how the honor of protecting the name of the mystical sunken fortress, the power of the Latvian people, was bestowed upon a mighty ancient oak. Sacred trees and groves would appear in numerous poems of this period, precisely the era of Baumanis's childhood and upbringing.

Baumanis's decision to sign his name with the neologism *zīmēt* instead of the German loanword *ceiķināt* did not merely display his Latvian identity. More significantly, it conveyed a distinct message to the Latvians who managed to see the artist's watercolors on display at the Riga Art Society exhibition. In an era when, as

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[398] Atis Kronvalds, "Mežs un koki," 1868, Quoted in Katrina Z. S. Schwartz, *Nature and National Identity after Communism: Globalizing the Ethnoscape* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 34-35.
[399] Ibid, 34.

Jane Costlow suggests, a "rhetoric of catastrophe" loomed over the fate of the forests across the Russian Empire, the artist culled the powerful potency of the native desire to reestablish an ancestral, biomystical connection with nature.[400] Baumanis thus confirmed the new relevancy of *zīmēt*, retooling the word from its origin as a symbol of destruction into a means of creation. In doing so, he made manifest the reality that a Latvian could be the agent of such change, normalizing the notion of the Latvian as artist. His canvases and watercolor paintings reworked dominant narratives of Baltic German conquest to account for indigenous catastrophe as well as native resilience, adaptation and survival.

In the grand scheme of the *Terra Mariana*, Baumanis's contributions would be numerically overshadowed by the watercolors of Bernhard Borchert, a Baltic German artist who had just graduated from the Imperial Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg in 1887. Borchert illustrated fourteen pages of the album, but the 1888 exhibition featured forty-five of his watercolors. His representations of Baltic history are, as to be expected, markedly different from Baumanis's images. What is so significant about Borchert's *Terra Mariana* imagery is its surprising ambiguity. Borchert had a penchant for history painting and medieval battle scenes in particular, yet the main knight figures in his images are unexpectedly passive. At least two images portray Teutonic crusaders leaning against an altar, one pensively looking off into the distance, and the other resting during a nap (**Figures 3.8, 3.9, 3.10**). Unlike Baumanis, who always depicted the cultural encounters between German knights and

[400] Jane Costlow, *Heart-Pine Russia: Walking and Writing the Nineteenth-Century Forest* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

Latvian pagans, Borchert depicted his large figural knights in solitude. In doing so, Borchert fulfilled the duty of his commission by depicting the crusades, yet advanced an unusual pacifist stance by avoiding overt representations of conflict, conquest, or even victory. Upon close inspection of another page, a smaller black-and-white battle vignette depicts a fallen crusader, suggesting the formidable strength of the ancient forbearers of Estonians and Latvians, while also portraying them from behind. This clever deployment of the *Rückenfigur* elides the possibility of depicting native Balts as barbarians. Instead, Borchert's depiction portrays them as powerful adversaries, arguably acting out of self-defense. It is clear that the artist rejected the inheritance of his Baltic German forbearers by refusing to reduce the conquest into a simple clash of cultures along a binary of civilized and savage, Christian and pagan, German and Latvian/Estonian. Such a stance was undeniably progressive for a Baltic German in the colonial Baltic Provinces. What requires explanation is how Borchert could arrive at this position, and the extent of its ramifications.

While a student at the Imperial Academy of Arts, Bernhard Borchert would grow to become close friends with Ādams Alksnis, a Latvian student at the school. Borchert and Alksnis shared a room in St. Petersburg during their education, and both were keenly interested in history painting, especially medieval scenes.[401] Our framework for discussing social mobility among Latvians and Estonians from the 1860s to the 1890s often ignores those Baltic Germans who espoused moderate or progressive views about their neighbors. We should remember that as a contemporary

[401] Eduards Kļaviņš, "Das Künstlerpaar Borchert und die erste Generation der Gemeinschaft 'Rūķis'." *Kunst im Ostseeraum: Malerei, Graphik, Photographie von 1900 bis 1920, eds.* Brigitte Hartel and Bernfried Lichtnau (Frankfurt, 1995), 80-81.

of Alksnis and Baumanis, Borchert was ostensibly just as comfortable with the changing social order, having grown up within it, and thus considered it to be normal. In fact, art historian Eduards Kļaviņš has emphasized how we must understand Alksnis, an initiator and main ideologue of the Latvian art collective Rūķis, as having likely exerted a formative influence on Borchert's opinions and ideas about Latvians, Latvian artists, and a nascent Latvian art.[402] Borchert was a frequent guest at Alksnis's homestead in Rūjiena, where he even sketched Latvian midsummer festivities, the remnants of precisely that indigenous pagan culture the conquest sought to eradicate.[403] As we will later see, Rūķis would eventually count Janis Rozentāls, Borchert's lifelong friend and colleague, among its ranks, as well as Johann Walter, whose mixed Latvian and Baltic German identity rendered any sense of an inherent racial hierarchy irrelevant.

In this context, we can begin to understand Borchert's muted progressivism in his *Terra Mariana* images more fully. One potential source hitherto unmentioned by art historians for Borchert may have actually been Baumanis. In the bottom left-hand corner of one *Terra Mariana* illustration (**Figure 3.9**), Borchert has recreated the infamous scene of the monk Theodoric about to be sacrificed at the hands of indigenous pagans, but the overt racialization of the original Maydell print is absent. Instead, Borchert's rendering occupies a liminal space between the savages of Maydell and the welcoming diviners of Baumanis. Borchert's monk still appears to act on his faith, as we would expect in a volume gifted to the pope, yet what is more

[402] Ibid.
[403] Ibid.

significant is the artist's tempering of the activities of the ancient Livs. It may indeed have been Baumanis's canvas *Horse of Destiny*, painted just a year earlier in St. Petersburg, which awoke Borchert to the possibilities of critically questioning received narratives, even when one is tasked to recreate them.

Kristiāna Ābele has presciently noted that the 1888 exhibition of the artworks for the *Terra Mariana* album marked Borchert's entry into the Riga art scene, where he would later be a commanding figure in the 1890s and early 1900s. Her insight reveals that just as much was at stake for Borchert in the exhibition as for Baumanis. Indeed, it was not only Baumanis, but also Borchert who articulated a quiet dissidence. While history emerged as generally a popular genre in the nineteenth century, this 1888 exhibition was the first time competing, if not contradictory conceptions of a shared Baltic past was on display for Riga's multiethnic and multilingual audience. As Latvians and Estonians began to partake in exhibitions, ideas of the past were becoming increasingly diverse. Equally important to this shift was that progressive Baltic Germans utilized their social privileges to advocate for tolerance, seeking to transcend paternalistic admiration and demonstrate genuine respect. While the radical nature of Baumanis's and Borchert's collective dissidence was cloaked in subtle gestures, the largest painting in the history of nineteenth-century Baltic art, painted far away from home, proved both artists were far from alone in their endeavors.

Indigenous Ambiguity and the Exhibition Picture

Johann Köler painted the largest canvas of his career in 1887 (**Figure 3.12**). At a colossal 395 by 345 centimeters, the oil painting *Lorelei Pursued by Monks* is a remarkable outlier in a visual culture whose imagery most often assumed the intimate forms of daguerreotypes and wood engravings in newspapers. Few Balts thus ever saw this painting in the nineteenth century. The artist painted the image in Paris, and exhibited it at a personal show in Vienna in 1889. Voldemar Erm has reported that the image only made its way to the collection of the Estonian Art Museum in the early 1920s.[404] It was not even on display at an important posthumous retrospective which took place in St. Petersburg in 1900, an exhibition largely credited with introducing Köler's works to many Estonians for the first time. Perhaps accordingly, the theme of the painting appears to have little to do with the colonial Baltic. At center stage is a nude nymph, Lorelei, with an anxious look upon her face as she twists her body over a jagged rocky outcrop. We encounter her suspended between two realms. On the right, a band of menacing monks chase after Lorelei, bearing glistening golden crucifixes, silver incense burners, and banners of the Virgin and Child. In the center of the right side, a fiery crimson red illuminates the face of one monk, whose sinister, dastardly appearance is haunting. The blazing oranges of the upper-right hand side of the canvas soon give way to cooling mists out of which water maidens emerge, aching to help Lorelei escape. Along the bottom register of the canvas, another ethereal nymph has lulled a horse to its death by drowning it, awaiting to do the same to a fallen monk. In most versions of the tale, Lorelei is a siren who lived at a granite

[404] Voldemar Erm, "J. Köleri teoste näitus Viinis 1889. a.," *Kunstiteadus, kunstikriitika* 6 (1986): 120.

rock cliff on the River Rhine, where she lures sailors to their death after grieving the loss of her beloved. When bishops try to confine Lorelei to a nunnery, she decides to visit her original rock one last time, as knights accompany her. Thinking of her lost love, she tragically falls to her death.

The tale was especially widespread in nineteenth-century German cultural spheres, especially after poems written by Heinrich Heine in 1824 and Clara Schumann in 1843, and was a popular subject of operas. This German origin has led most art historians to interpret Johann Köler's painting as an opportunistic way to make money. In his letters, Köler lamented how difficult it had become to earn wages as a painter in the late 1880s, and that even the canvases of such renowned artists as Hans Makart and Vassily Veretschagin were rarely finding buyers.[405] To this end, Köler's *Lorelei Pursued by Monks* would seem to be a carefully calculated gesture, taking advantage of the myth's popularity given his current location among the German-speaking echelons of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

When the painting arrived in the fledgling and newly independent Republic of Estonia in the 1920s, however, both the interpretation and title radically transformed. In the interwar period, the painting was presented under a variety of titles, including *The Arrival of Christianity to Livonia* and *The Penetration of the Crusaders into Livonia*. Art historian Anu Allas has been among the most vociferous in denouncing such an interpretation. These later titles, she notes, may lead one to "entrancing presumptions about a nascent Estonian national consciousness, which eagerly adopted the figure of the weak, innocent, suffering young maiden, even when a foolish farm

[405] Erm, 109.

girl with magical powers had deformed into a flippant maiden awaiting her capture."[406] Allas rightly criticizes the deployment of the visual trope of the nude woman as the embodiment of the nation, though she also denies the potential for the painting to have any "between-the-lines meanings" about Estonian history. Her analysis is contingent upon reading the image as a *müügipilt*, an image made for the sole purpose of selling it. It is certainly true that Köler struggled with his finances while shuttling between Paris and Vienna in the late 1880s, but a need for income should not eclipse the potential for an artwork's multivocality among various audiences. To be sure, Allas penned her insightful critique in 2001, long before anyone truly began to consider what postcolonial perspectives could reveal about Estonian art and culture. In their 2018 monograph *History in Images, the Image in History: National and Transnational Pasts in Estonian Art*, Linda Kaljundi and Tiina-Mall Kreem have embraced the ever-changing receptions and contexts of the painting as indices of their time.[407] As we have encountered in the contemporary reception of Franz Villebois's sculptural group *Father Rhine* (chapter 1), the meaning of German myths transformed significantly once placed within the colonial Baltic context. In truth, Köler's painting did not need an Estonian or Latvian audience to ascertain potential Baltic dimensions at play, for they became manifest in the original title.

The original title emphasizes the wrath of the monks, a significant change from the original narrative, where three knights simply accompany Lorelei outdoors. The majority of nineteenth-century images of Lorelei focused on her impending

[406] Anu Allas, "Kõrge kunsti kaitseks," *Sirp*, 27 April 2001.
[407] Kaljundi and Kreem, *Ajalugu pildis*, 55-56.

tragic fate, perched precariously atop the pointy granite peak before falling to her death below. In his painting, Köler immortalizes that liminal moment where Lorelei is suspended between capture and liberation, Christianity and paganism. The title and composition also suggest a similar gendered binary, an aspect which deserves further scrutiny.

As one of the main ideologues and most popular poets of the decolonial movement, Lydia Koidula is the woman most associated with the Estonian nation. As we examined in chapter two, photographs of Koidula were even the inspiration for August Weizenberg's marble sculpture *Estonia*. Yet there was at least one precursor to Köler's figuration of Lorelei in the realm of painting: Tõnis Grenzstein's *Vanemuine's Song* of circa 1885 (**Figure 3.13**). Among the earliest paintings to depict an Estonian pagan past, the image portrays Vanemuine, swathed in gold and red cloths, as he strums a golden harp, while a young blonde woman in a pristine white dress and blue hood has gathered local fauna—deer, doves, ducks, swans, cows, barn swallows, even a cat—to listen to the dulcet tunes. As a primordial deity of song, Vanemuine created all sounds in nature through his voice and music, thus we may be witnessing the bestowal of sound to the world in Grenzstein's painting. To our eyes today, the painting may appear overly saccharine and even exceedingly national—the barn swallows, *pääsukesed*, floating in skies on the right, are Estonia's national bird. Mai Levin has suggested that Grenzstein had not yet received any formal education in art when he painted *Vanemuine's Song*, a factor explaining what she perceives as the painting's "garish colors" and "rough execution."[408] Yet dwelling on style and

[408] Levin, "Tõnis Grenzsteini tagasitulek," 141.

appearance runs the risk of missing the ideological work at play here. The young woman is in a subservient position to Vanemuine, and her engagement in listening alongside the other animals of the forest only underscores her inherent rootedness in—if not depiction as—nature. If Vanemuine creates the world in Estonian mythology, this young woman may be an Estonian Eve, one in a different kind of Garden of Eden. Her childlike demeanor may inform why this Eve figure is not nude, as it is the brilliant white of her garment—instead of exposed flesh—which suggests her chastity, purity, and innocence.[409] Though it is difficult to ascertain the visibility of Grenzstein's painting in the 1880s, and Köler was not in Tartu at this time, the image still proves a compelling precursor to the hellish fate which awaits Lorelei, imagining what an Estonian world without Germans might have been.

Returning to *Lorelei Pursued by Monks*, it is important to realize that the relationship between Christianity and paganism would be an enduring theme throughout nineteenth-century painting, yet it would rarely depict Christian monks and missionaries in such an unflattering light. What remains underemphasized is how and why Köler decided to render the monks as fiendish, dangerous, and haunting. If the artist wanted to make significant income by selling a colossal canvas of a well-known tale in Germanic cultural spheres, why would he change the source material so significantly? Udo Arnold has explained that most nineteenth-century images of the

[409] Tiina-Mall Kreem and Linda Kaljundi have remarked that the figuration of the young girl appears similar to Tõnis Grenztein's images of Mary Magdalene in his altar paintings in Nõo and Otepää. The altarpieces, however, were painted significantly later than *Vanemuine's Song*, and Mai Levin has pointed out the artist used his niece and father as the models for the young girl and older man. It is likely Grenzstein would continue using his niece as a model for the later altarpieces.

medieval German order focused on important battles of the crusades.[410] Knights in these images appeared as powerful and victorious or exhausted in solitude. Furthermore, we should be cognizant and critical of the trope of the blonde nude white woman as a synecdoche of the (European or Euro-American) nation; we must also be careful that our criticism does not blind us to how such a figure might transform within the colonial context. I do not emphasize the colonial dimensions of *Lorelei Pursued by Monks* in order to emphasize the Estonian or national nature of the painting as interwar critics had perceived the image. Instead, I find that such a reading allows us to trace precedents globally, and to understand its function as an exhibition image born out of a global exhibition culture.

There is surprisingly little information about Köler's activities and whereabouts in Paris in the 1880s, especially considering the city's skewed importance in most accounts of nineteenth-century art. This archival gap, however, presents intriguing possibilities in the wake of art history's global turn. While it is not surprising Köler would have created an enormous, vaguely historical salon-style painting in Paris, potential sources for his elevation of paganism and concomitant demonization of Christianity may be related to contemporary Latin American painting. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the visual trope of the evil or conflicted monk featured prominently as a foil to the exploited native body in Latin American history painting. Colossal paintings such as Felix Parra's 1875 canvas *Fray Bartolomeo de las Casas* (**Figure 3.14**) is typical of the period's new kind of

[410] Udo Arnold, "Saksa ordu 19. sajandi maalikunstis," *The Artist and Clio*, eds. Kaljundi and Kreem, 83-124.

envisioning of the colonial encounter and the violent introduction of Christianity to Mexico. A Spanish monk stands in front of an indigenous stone temple, crossing his arms in front of his chest, clasping onto a wooden crucifix, and turning his despondent face towards the heavens. A grieving woman clings to his legs, her face covered by her arm, while one breast remains inconspicuously exposed. She is mourning the loss of her husband, whose slain body drapes over the stone as blood oozes out of his head. The broken column suggests an especially violent encounter took place, perhaps the destruction of an indigenous idol akin to the stone sculpture on the left. Parra would describe his painting as such:

> This venerable priest, who always deployed the cruel system employed by the Spanish *conquistadores* to dominate the ancient inhabitants of Mexico, is found in the middle of a destroyed building where the father of a family has been sacrificed; [the family] had come peacefully to place flowers on the tomb of its ancestors. The abandoned wife takes refuge in the protection of the generous defender, who with diligent care, always tries to mitigate these sufferings of the conquered.[411]

Parra sought to convey at once the cruelty of the conquest, and the benevolent forgiveness bestowed by one's faith in Christ. The indigenous woman turns, after all, to the monk for support in the wake of her husband's violent death. Unlike her husband, whose flesh is bare besides a small white waistcloth, the woman is noticeably covered, suggesting her salvific potential despite her engagement in non-Christian ritualistic offerings. Indeed, the painting's public display in Mexico City at the salon of the Academy of San Carlos provided the opportunity for Mexicans to redeem the conquest. One critic noted that the painting revealed how even something

[411] Stacie Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National in Late-Nineteenth-Century Mexican Painting* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996), 106.

as brutal as the *conquista* possessed a silver lining: "Among the bloody and desolate traces that the conquest left in our country, there emerged also some benefits that the administration of a people more civilized ought to inlay in a new nation […] one of the benefits, perhaps the only one of excellence, was the seed of Christian charity."[412] The monk here functions as ambiguous, advancing a "cruel system," while also serving as a point of salvation. His figuration, perhaps more so than the representation of the indigenous woman or man, embodies the contradictions of contemporary reality and the violence upon which the young nation was based. Despite the conquest, it was argued that "Europeanization" was ultimately beneficial to Mexico's indigenous peoples.

At 263 by 356.5 centimeters, Parra's imposing image is a painting made to be exhibited. After its initial display in Mexico City in 1875, the work would travel to Philadelphia, where it represented Mexico at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition. As Stacie Widdifield has argued, the second half of the nineteenth century is when Mexico "introduces the Pre-Hispanic Indian to itself" in the construction of a national art.[413] In the 1870s and 1880s, Mexican painters cast episodes of indigenous history in European classicizing forms in order to demonstrate the parity of ancient Mexico as a bedrock of advanced civilization with ancient Greece and Rome. Such works were meant not only to foster pride and a sense of community among Mexico's various peoples at home, but perform a double function on the international stage. This double function satiated foreign demand for markers of authenticity, while also

[412] Ibid, 107.
[413] Ibid, 90-95.

striving to transcend externally imposed hierarchies which deemed Mexicans and all South Americans as inherently inferior to Europeans.

Whereas earlier paintings presented monks and missionaries—Europeans—as liminal figures, by the late 1880s and 1890s, exhibition paintings pivoted specifically on the pathos of indigenous persons and the concomitant demonization of the Spaniards. The power of Leandro Izaguirre's canvas *The Torture of Cuahutemoc* (**Figure 3.15**), for instance, is entirely dependent upon the anguish of the chained central figures. In this painting there is no room for ambiguity, advancing instead a binary of good and evil, indigenous American and European. Although these specific paintings may not have ever come to Europe—they were displayed at world fairs in the United States—similar images abounded in the pavilions of Mexico, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Chile and the Central American nations at world fairs in Europe. In fact, European fair commissioners often would demand that South American countries specifically featured indigenous peoples and their visual, material and architectural heritage.[414] Displays of these countries were often the collaborative international efforts of experts in the nascent fields of anthropology and archaeology, capitalizing on what Sven Schuster has called the "spaces of global knowledge" at these world fairs.[415] The availability of this global knowledge manifest at these venues extended to visual culture—in the visibility of ancient indigenous American culture, the prevalence of grand canvases heroicizing native bodies and revealing the brutality of the *conquista*—and could have certainly played a role, or at least establish a telling

[414] Shelley E. Garrigan, *Collecting Mexico: Museums, Monuments and the Creation of National Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 29-64.
[415] Sven Schuster, "The World Fairs as Spaces of Global Knowledge: Latin American Anthropology and Archaeology in the Age of Exhibitions," *Journal of Global History* 13 (2018): 69-93.

parallel in Köler's own artistic visions of Baltic history and the place of Estonians and Latvians therein.

We have already seen how Lydia Koidula's 1866 retelling of *The Last Incas of Peru* and understanding of global colonialism informed photographic production among the Estonian intelligentsia. Even more concrete connections with the Americas existed in the realm of painting. When the Bremen Bourse Hall sought to decorate its interior in the late 1860s and early 1870s, city commissioners wanted a grandiose image reflecting the city's historical significance as an important Hanseatic town, emphasizing the pivotal role of Bremen merchants in global commerce. As Ulrike Plath has revealed, a scandal emerged as to the most appropriate motif for the hall in 1870. The first option was no less than a scene of Christopher Columbus "discovering" the Americas by Otto Knille. At least one commentator remarked that "one would not be able to find a more fitting theme for Bremen and its trading hall because Bremen's significance today relies on America and it is precisely America which is the fulcrum and center of gravity of the town's commerce."[416] By depicting the pivotal moment of "discovery," Bremen could present itself as a gateway to the New World.[417] Yet the European powers which had dominated the Americas since the early sixteenth century did not include colonial Germans. Immediately emerging as a more compelling option was a scene of Bremen merchants founding the city of Riga in 1201. While there were talks considering a motif specifically depicting early nineteenth-century Bremen, it could not compete with the allure of a colonial theme,

[416] Plath, "Bremeni börsihoone maal," 346.
[417] Ibid, 346.

since many held the opinion that "medieval sailors, soldiers, clergy, half-naked Estonians and red Indians are undoubtedly more picturesque than people in our knitted clothes of the 1820s."[418] Another commentator remarked, "It is impossible to overestimate the abstract, cosmopolitan, non-national dimension of a Columbus painting. Preferring the Baltic to the Atlantic retains a more characteristic dimension, namely that a Baltic theme is more fitting to elevate the national sentiment of Germans, which such a picture should awaken anyways."[419]

In the aftermath of these debates, the young painter Peter Jannsen would be tasked with creating a mural depicting the founding of Riga. The end result was a colossal but now destroyed painting entitled *The Colonization of the Baltic Provinces by the Hansa* (**Figure 3.16**). Envisioning the German conquest of the Baltic as a prelude to the European conquest of the Americas was popularized by the widely read German historian Heinrich von Treitschke. He had argued in 1862 that "our *Volk* on our own narrow land had given a model of the two principal directions of colonial politics [of conquest and assimilation], which later on led the Brit[on]s and Spaniards to [similar] success in the vast spaces of America."[420] For Treitschke, what was at stake was demonstrating that Germans had not assumed their role among colonizing powers too late in the present day, but rather too early in the medieval era, leading many to forget their determining role. Janssen's painting rectified this situation. By inscribing the word *colonisation* under his work, Janssen rid any doubt of the true

[418] Ibid, 346.
[419] Ibid. 346.
[420] "Unser Volk auf enger Stätte jene beiden Hauptrichtungen kolonialer Politik vorgebildet, welche später Briten und Spanier in den ungeheuren Räumen Amerikas mit ähnlichem Erfolg durchführten." Quoted in Plath, "Bremeni börsihoone," 373.

nature of the historical German presence in the Baltic. That Riga was cast as a "discoverable" land replete with pagan savages akin to the Americas fully demonstrated, moreover, that the similarities between the colonial Americas and the colonial Baltic were not just metaphorical, but in fact two sides of the same coin. Most significantly, however, is Janssen's decision to emphasize Riga as a port city. By emphasizing trade and commerce, Jannsen obscured the violence which took place in the original encounter.

Johann Köler's colossal canvas *Lorelei Pursued by Monks* now appears to be much more globally inflected. What is so significant about the image is how Köler transforms the notion of encounter and colonial conquest from his Mexican contemporaries deploying similar strategies towards similar ends. For Parra, depicting a monk as a liminal, ambiguous figure was pivotal in legitimizing Mexico's creole elite, who strove to dissociate themselves from Spain and their European heritage, and identify instead as *americanos* in order to bolster the urgency of Mexico's independence in the early nineteenth century. For Izaguirre, by contrast, it was more important to articulate violence more clearly and along unambiguous racial and cultural lines. Despite their focus on the exploitation of Mexico's native populace, neither artist claimed indigenous heritage.[421] Köler, by contrast, approached the idea of conquest from a decidedly indigenous perspective.

[421] There exists a common predicament in Latin American modernism wherein the artists heralding the native body, whether as a marker of national identity, a symbol of advocating progressive styles, or even a tool of social critique, were rarely of indigenous background. Montgomery, *Mobility of Modernism*. Michele Greet, *Beyond National Identity: Indigenism as Pictorial Strategy in Andean Art, 1920-1960* (State College, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009).

Rejecting the notion that Lorelei was an evil seductress, Köler has instead emphasized the malevolence of the monks, whose terrifying faces are lit by the flames they carry. The artist himself possessed an ambiguous relationship to the church. While Köler had transformed the humble peasant Villem Tamm into Christ for his 1879 fresco at Tallinn's Dome Church (chapter 1), and was involved in many church commissions, he was also critical of how the bible was used to discipline and control Estonians still into the present day, long after the abolition of serfdom. As Tiina-Mall Kreem has explained, "[Köler] had an academic education, traveled widely throughout Europe, came into contact with peoples of various faiths, and lived a large portion of his life outside of Estonia. He saw clearly how Baltic Germans deployed the church and the teachings of Christ to curb Estonian national sentiments and maintain the lowliness of the peasantry."[422] Köler's painting seems to have functioned simultaneously as a grand mythological painting as much as an allegory of the Baltic conquest. In this context, Lorelei embodies much more than the threatened woman as a synecdoche for the threatened nation. She embodies the ambiguity of the legitimacy of indigenous culture in the nineteenth century.

Lorelei's nudity certainly functions as an image of a sultry nymph for those familiar with the German myth, yet her body is also exposed and vulnerable. She has a sense of unease, unsure if she will escape the grasp of the monks and join her fellow nymphs. In the original tale, an accidental fall from the rock kills Lorelei, but Köler suggests that it may instead be the monks who wish her harm. Eternally caught

[422] Tiina-Mall Kreem, *Viisipäraselt ehitatud. Luterlik kirikuehitus, -arhitektuur ja –kunst Eestis Alexander II ajal (1855-1881)* PhD. Diss. Tallinn: Art Academy of Estonia, 81.

between the monks and her fellow water nymphs, Lorelei may also be an allegory of Köler's own frustration with the stagnation of the decolonial movement at home. Historians routinely frame the late 1880s as a strange lull in the cultural and social impact of the decolonization movement, given the implementation of new Russification reforms—Russian was enforced as the primary school language precisely this year in 1887—and the early deaths of many of its most prominent figures, including Köler's close friend and colleague Carl Robert Jakobson in 1882, Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald in 1882 and Lydia Koidula in 1886.[423] Lorelei's twisted body thus conveys a commentary on the uneasy nature of indigenous identity in the nineteenth century. Just as Köler's Mexican contemporaries cloaked indigenous history in neoclassical frameworks and within Eurocentric ideas even as they reject European identity, so too does Köler clothe his ambivalence about Baltic history—and perhaps more importantly, the direction of a Baltic future—within a German mythological framework.[424]

Despite, or perhaps because of the grandiosity of the canvas, *Lorelei Pursued by Monks* did not sell in Vienna. One Viennese critic considered the painting to be a "fantasy of color" by a young artist rather than the work of an experienced painter, while another deemed it to be a "sensational picture saturated with brutal effects."[425] Nevertheless, Köler's ability to procure a personal exhibition in a large European capital added to his prestige at home in the Baltic Provinces, and, perhaps most surprisingly, he would be the subject of numerous reports in the Latvian paper *Balss*

[423] Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*, 76.
[424] Widdifield, *Embodiment of the National*, 110.
[425] Erm, "J. Köleri teoste näitus," 117.

the same year.[426] A Latvian named Bernards translated a series of biographies about Köler from a Russian paper, declaring the artist to be "one of Russia's best painters (*daiļkrāsotājs*)" who "earned the greatest fame as a man of [the] Estonian people [and] always had deep feelings for his compatriots."[427] We have already examined Köler's reception in Estonian-language newspapers, but Latvian writers also extolled the artist, considering him to be a close compatriot given his origins in Livland and his experience with commissions in Cēsis.[428]

Köler would feature in the Latvian-language press again when the Riga Art Society organized nine of his works to be exhibited in 1892. This event prompted *Balss* not just to introduce exhibits to Latvian public but also present the City Painting Gallery and activities of the Riga Art Society in general, urging in conclusion: "Anybody with at least some interest in art should notice and inspect the works by our famous neighbor."[429] Lamenting "if only we Latvians had such a painter," this author could not imagine that change was indeed on the horizon, it was merely brewing first in St. Petersburg.

Rūķis and the Ascent of Latvian Painting

If we consider the field of painting to have been in a state of permafrost for most nineteenth-century indigenous Balts, then the images of Johann Köler, Artūrs

[426] We have examined discussion of Köler as a "master" artist in the Estonian press, but the Latvian-language press routinely reported on him. Material is little acknowledged because of the language barrier between Estonians and Latvians. "Jānis Ķēlers" *Balss*, 27 May; 3 June; 10 June; 17 June, 1887.
[427] "Jānis Ķēlers", *Balss*, 27 May 1887.
[428] Ābele, "Artistic Life," forthcoming.
[429] "Rīgas Mākslas Biedrība un Igauņu mākslenieka profesora Kelera gleznojumi (bildes)," *Balss*, 13 May 1892. *Baltijas Vēstnesis* also wrote extensively about the exhibition.

Baumanis, and even Bernhard Borchert in the late 1880s were its green shoots, indicating that the ice had already begun to melt. While the successful careers of Jūlijs Feders, Kārlis Hūns, and Jānis Staņislavs Roze were clear examples that Latvians could be professional painters already as early as the 1860s, the mere existence of these painters did not equate significant indigenous engagement with the medium as such. By contrast, the new imagery of Baumanis demonstrated that painting could not only be the product of indigenous Balts, but that its subject matter could be distinctively indigenous as well. Once such representation had occurred, it became all the more plausible to capitalize on the power of this affirming ethos. Already familiar with photography, Latvians and Estonians of the early 1890s could begin to claim painting as their newest realm of achievement. Nowhere was the contemporaneity of the medium more apparent than at the 1896 Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition in Riga. As we will explore in greater detail below, the exhibition accomplished something extraordinary: it demonstrated the unassailable historicity of the Latvian people. As the author Nikolajs Puriņš aptly described in his 1901 *Latvians Approaching the Twentieth Century* (*Latvieši 20. gadu simtenim atnākot*):

> It is undeniable that the Latvian people belong among those people whose rapid development, both economically as well as spiritually, is moving forward with an unstoppable vigor and sparkling alertness. As is visibly clear, the life of the Latvian people is thriving, blooming in every which direction, purely and rapidly, just as a plant once kept in darkness and constricted air then happily blooms into dense foliage after being carried outside into the sunlight and the free nature of God. This comes as a joy to every true friend of the development of humankind.[430]

[430] Nikolajs Puriņš (Puriņu Klāvs), *Latvieši 20. gadu simtenim atnākot. Kritisks pārskāts par latviešu tautas dzīvi mūsu laikos* (Riga: Kalniņš and Dentschmann, 1901), 4.

While Puriņš's botanical metaphors burst with a sense of unbridled optimism, his decision to frame his people within "the development of humankind" was a deliberate rhetorical choice which embraced a narrative of progress in order to reject the idea that Latvian culture would invariably go extinct. Puriņš could wax poetic about Latvian progress in 1901 in a way which did not seem possible even in the mid-1890s. Indeed, Puriņš's rhetoric sounds especially bold when we consider that just under a decade earlier, Jānis Krodznieks, considered the first Latvian historian, declared:

> Our *tauta* has not had a phase during which it has been a notable leader, a bearer of culture, and a purveyor of enlightenment; it has had to act as others have wanted and others have commanded [...] Nonetheless Latvians have carried a certain weight in the Baltic past, which, though passive, has turned the course of this land in certain directions. To research and understand the passive role of Latvians is our assignment and obligation.[431]

The 1896 Ethnographic Exhibition would play a pivotal role in shifting not only Latvians' perceptions of themselves, but, just as importantly, how their neighbors perceived them as well. Commonly deemed the "newest" or most "contemporary" element of the fair, the art section (*dailes nodaļa*), and painting in particular, offered the most tangible, exciting and compelling evidence of how Latvian self-perception was already changing. Seen collectively, the images displayed how even a purportedly "passive" history could foster pride, and this history, and historicity, communicated that they had a future.

[431] Quoted in Andrejs Plakans, "Looking Backwards: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries in Inter-war Latvian Historiography," *Journal of Baltic* Studies 30 no. 4 (1999): 294-295.

One would not be remiss to question how painting could suddenly prove so viable a medium for Latvians in 1896. After all, as one Latvian commentator remarked in *Latviešu Avīzes* after seeing the exhibition, "Latvians hardly knew their painters up to now, some could not even imagine that we have quite a few young talented painters."[432] To understand the radical new viability of painting, we must understand the emergence of the collective Rūķis, the group charged with organizing the art display.

Recently discovered archival information from the 1920s magazine *Mūzikas Nedēļa (Music Week)* has upended long-held scholarly perceptions of the genesis of Rūķis. Originally thought to have been formed by a cluster of Latvian art students at St. Peterburg's Imperial Academy of Arts—an idea I have erroneously propagated elsewhere—the collective emerged from a desire to foster a broader sense of community among bright-eyed Latvian youths dedicated to honing their skills in a variety of cultural fields.[433] As the biographer Mārtiņš Augusts revealed:

> In order for the new [Latvian arrivals to St. Petersburg] to become closer to one another and further develop their spiritual powers as the days went on, Latvian youths united by singular efforts and similar goals founded 'The Group of the Friends of Latvian Art,' (*Latvju Mākslas draugu pulciņš*) on 19 January 1891 in the building of the Jesus Congregational School, in order to become closer to their people and *strengthen their faith in their future*" (my emphasis).[434]

While it is well known that the group included visual artists—notably the academy students Janis Rozentāls, Ādams Alksnis, Johann Walter, and Julius Blumenthal, as

[432] "Latviešu etnogrāfiskā izstādē. II," *Latviešu Avīzes*, 4 September 1896.
[433] Bart Pushaw, "Art and Multiculturalism in Estonia and Latvia, circa 1900," *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Art*, ed. Michelle Facos (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), 364.
[434] Martins Augusts, "Atis Kauliņš (Bindu Atis.) (3. turpinājums)," *Mūzikas Nedēļa* no. 19-20 (1927): 216.

well as design students from the Stieglitz Technical School, including Rihards Zariņš, Jūlijs Jaunkalniņš, Gotlībs Lapiņš and Jānis Lībergs—it also included Jēkabs Ozols, Dāvids Mīlītis, Atis Kauliņš and Pauls Jozuus, Latvian music students from the St. Petersburg Conservatory. Together, the group would "collectively suggest topics, present them, and then discuss them. This kind of activity promoted not just national aims, but also helped to cultivate a mutual taste and understanding of art." Initially at the helm of Rūķis was Kārlis Pētersons, a teacher at the local Latvian Jesus Congregation of the imperial metropolis. In addition to his pedagogical work, Pētersons also dabbled in folklore, ethnography, and publishing. Understanding the interdisciplinary network of Rūķis—combining painting, design, music, folklore, and ethnography—elucidates the significance of its name: *rūķis* means "gnome" or "dwarf" in Latvian. Kristiāna Ābele has suggested that *rūķis* was a suitable name for the coterie as it evoked a creature who is *gan stiprs, gan niprs*, as strong as it is frisky.[435] Eduards Kļaviņš has noted that *rūķīši* (pl.) even featured prominently in the works of these artists.[436] The humorous and playful name suggested the group's small but feisty nature, colored by an exuberant youthful optimism.

Under the strict censorship laws in the Russian Empire, Rūķis was actually an underground venture, a secret organization of sorts, making it all the more alluring to the young bohemians who ventured to find it.[437] During meetings, Rūķis artists would submit artworks to be evaluated and discussed by all members. Since no records of

[435] Ingvilda Strautmane, Santa Lauga, "'Rūķis' - leģendāra latviešu mākslinieku apvienība Pēterburgā," *Kultūras Rondo*, 3 February 2016.
[436] Ibid.
[437] Kristiāna Ābele, "Artistic Life," *Art History of Latvia IV: The Period of Neo-Romanticist Modernism, 1890-1915*, ed. Eduards Kļaviņš. Riga: Institute of Art History of the Latvian Academy of Art, 2014, 57.

the content of these meetings exist, studies are reliant on the memoirs of the Latvian sculptor Gustavs Šķilters, written during the patriotic ethos of the young Latvian state in the 1920s. Šķilters's 1924 article "Memories about Rūķis" (*Atmiņas par Rūķi*) has been particularly important in determining the ethos of the organization, especially his remark that "a strong national spirit and patriotic enthusiasm prevailed in Rūķis. Without Rūķis, the good of its members, who had grown up in German or Russian circles, and [did not belong to] a great people, could have wandered off and become lost to us Latvians."[438] What is important about Šķilters's observation is that he suggests the early 1890s as a pivotal moment, yet not one that was predetermined. He casts the rise of Rūķis not as the natural product of the national "awakening," but rather a mini-revolution, a flurry of activity which prevailed despite precarious circumstances. Šķilters thus suggests something akin to what Latvian historian Toms Kiķuts has recently argued about this period: it was a camaraderie born out of a collective spirit which drove the impetus for cultural programs in the 1890s rather than an underlying ethnic, racial, or national agenda.[439] Realizing that identity could be fluid even within the "patriotic" environs of Rūķis helps to contextualize how the young Johann Walter, who had previously only "spoken German and looked at German art" could join, and later head, the organization.[440]

Šķilters also offers insight into what Rūķis debates may have discussed. "[The composer] J[azeps] Vītols taught Latvian language and had composed patriotic

[438] "Rūķī valdija stipri nacionāls gars un tautiska sajūsma. Bez Rūķa dažs labs no biedriem, kurš bija uzaudzis vācu jeb krievu aprindās un nebija liels tautietis, būtu varbūt atklīdis un mums latviešiem zudis." Gustavs Šķilters, "Atmiņas par Rūķi," *Ilustrēts žurnāls*, 3 March 1924.
[439] Ķikuts, "1896. gada Latviešu etnogrāfiskā izstāde," 76-77.
[440] Ābele, "Artistic Life," 58.

'Midsummer festivals' (*Līgo svētkus*) for orchestra. [Ādams] Ālksnis, [Janis] Rozentāls, [Artūrs] Baumanis and [Pēteris] Balodis painted themes from folk life. Others searched for paths to the heart of the folk (*ceļus uz tautas sirdi*) each in their own way, researched expressive modes of patriotic art, and tried to maintain and depict a national spirit, mentality and hue in their works."[441] In Latvian-language media, there was a renewed interest in what a Latvian version of history might be. In 1886, a writer in *Mājas Viesis* decried how the field of Latvian history was cultivated mostly by Russian, Polish and German historians, and that even the adage "whoever does not understand the past will not understand the present" was lost among most Latvians.[442] Just two years later, Andrejs Pumpurs would publish *Lāčplēsis* (*The Bear Slayer*), the Latvian national epic. Thus, when considering what these Rūķis discussions might have entailed, it is important to realize Baumanis had already painted *Horse of Destiny* and created his illustrations for *Terra Mariana* in the midst of these discussions about history and, just as significantly, years before Rūķis ever formed. Ālksnis, whom Šķilters characterized as bookish and the *de facto* head of the group, was the close friend and former roommate of Bernhard Borchert before the latter graduated from the Academy in 1888. Therefore at the genesis of Rūķis, there already existed tangible, material evidence attesting to how a Latvian perspective on history and identity could assume pictorial form.

One of the earliest manifestations of Rūķis's ideology appeared in the Latvian journal *Austrums*. Founded in 1885, *Austrums* advertised itself as a "scientific and

[441] Šķilters, "Atmiņas."
[442] "Iz Latviešu-Leišu vēstures," *Mājas Viesis*, 1 May 1886.

literary monthly." Originally printed in Moscow, the magazine's editorial staff would relocate to the Baltic town of Jelgava (and capital of Kurland Province) in 1888, where its popularity among a Latvian readership markedly increased. The magazine would commission artists to create illustrations for their stories, often translations of popular Russian and German literature, as well as new works in Latvian. The monthly also included a special section with image inserts, full-page featured images which would be accompanied by a brief explanatory text. By the end of 1891, *Austrums* would inform its readers to be on the lookout for illustrations by "our young artists, students of the St. Petersburg Academy and the [Stieglitz] Central School."[443] One number featured drawings of Latvian mythology by Artūrs Baumanis (**Figure 3.17**). Accompanying one poem is a drawing depicting a god, ostensibly Pērkons the god of thunder, impatiently waiting for a male youth to fill his cup with wine or mead. With a crown of oak leaves on his head, a flowing beard, and golden arm bands snaking around his biceps, Pērkons exudes a regal air. The weapons and a helmet lay scattered across the foreground suggest he might have just returned from battle. The figuration of Pērkons resembles the distressed Latvian pagan in Baumanis's illustrations to *Terra Mariana.* In the earlier drawing, an icon of Pērkons is destroyed during the conquest. In this later drawing, intended solely for a Latvian audience, Baumanis restores the deity's original dignity. What is interesting is the same issue also devotes colored illustrations by the ethnographer Mikus Skruzītis, who contributed an image of two Latvian women in two different types of folk costumes (**Figure 3.18**). Skruzītis, though not trained as an artist, would contribute a variety of ethnographic

[443] *Austrums*, advertisement, not paginated, December 1891.

drawings, ranging from costume illustrations to didactic knitting patterns he had collected from various rural Latvian communities. He would also write articles, one of which, in the October 1892 edition of *Austrums*, featured "Kristaps Kolumbs" (the Latvianized version of Christopher Columbus) on the anniversary of four centuries since sustained European contact with the Americas. Given how often Estonian and Latvian writers compared their historical situation to that of Native Americans, it may come as a surprise that Skruzītis argued that the native inhabitants of North America "had never achieved significant culture, but had instead been a people of hunters."[444]

For the author, the most recent scientific research had revealed that "in North America, just as in Northern Europe, the further south one goes, the more high-cultured its peoples are."[445] He described the Aztecs and Incas as testimony to this, pointing out the sophistication of their architecture and material culture. Skruzītis's position on the "cultured" status of a people was thus clearly indebted to the extant remains of its material culture, remains the author himself was assiduously cataloguing, illustrating, and publishing. It was the absence of grandiose material objects Skruzītis noticed among indigenous Americans and knew well among his own people that explained their similar historical trajectory. What had suddenly changed about this comparison in the nineteenth century was the enforcement of reservations and brutal assimilationist schools in North America, while the Baltic Provinces witnessed the opposite, a growing increase in Latvian- (and Estonian-) centered cultural groups, newspapers, and schools. Also inherent in this comparison between

[444] Mikus Skruzītis, "Jaunās pasaules atradejs," *Austrums*, 1 October 1892, 296.
[445] Ibid.

the Americas and Europe is a discourse about the inferiority of "northernness" likely indebted to the theories of Hippolyte Taine, who argued for the historical superiority of southern Europe—ancient Greece and Rome—over northern Europe as a result of "the physical structure of the country which has stamped the intellect of the race."[446] Nevertheless, Skruzītis's focus on the significance of ancient visual and material culture as a testament to civilization would find an equal urgency to bring contemporary Latvian art beyond the black-and-white pages of *Austrums*, and exhibit it directly to a Latvian audience. In 1894, Rihards Zariņš had wondered:

> Could our painters and sculptors not organize an exhibition sometime, preferably in Riga, at the building of the Riga Latvian Society? The most suitable time would be in the summer around the time of the special meeting of the Academic Commission, where, as it is known, a large portion of educated Latvian people are meeting, who would understand and could respect the endeavors of our artists. At this kind of exhibition, a buyer could certainly be found for one or another picture or sculpture, not only from the Latvian side but even from other nationalities. Through such an exhibition Latvian artists could come into closer contact with the Latvian people, and if an exhibition would be repeated every year, then this connection would never be lost, but would grow and take and be of great blessing for both sides.[447]

Though a possibility occurred with the organization of Jelgava Agricultural Society in 1895, a letter Rūķis artists had written to its organizational committee went unanswered.[448] To be sure, this exhibition featured objects labeled as *mākslas darbi*,

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[446] Nicholas Parkinson, "From Enlightenment to École: Tracing the Idea of Scandinavian Art in French Art Criticism," *Kunst og kultur* 4 (2015): 206-215. See also Michelle Facos, *Nationalism and the Nordic Imagination: Swedish Art of the 1890s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 110-111. Taine's 1871 *Art in Greece* would play a pivotal role in determining European ideas about inherent cultural and racial differences between the polarities of North and South.
[447] Kristiāna Ābele, "Templī pie šūpļa. Jaunās nacionālās gleznieciības pirmizrāde Latviešu etnogrāfiskās izstādes dailes nodaļā," *Indivīds. Vēsture. Nācija. Latviešu etnogrāfiskajai izstādei – 120.* ed. Sanita Stinkule (Riga: Latvijas Nacionālais Vēstures muzejs, 2017), 82.
[448] Ibid, 83.

artworks, but its most commanding display in this category were artificial teeth.[449] Instead, Rūķis would be invited to participate in a new undertaking, displaying works at the 1896 Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition. The exhibition was part of the tenth Russian Archaeological Congress. Occurring since 1879, the Congress was meant to unite scientists of the Empire, including historians and archaeologists, no doubt influenced by the overwhelming success of the 1867 Ethnographic Exhibition in Moscow. A similar exhibition had taken place in Vilnius in 1893, and Warsaw was to be the following venue in 1899 (it would happen in Kiev instead). The location of these exhibitions in the western borderlands of the Russian Empire was, of course, a deliberate move meant to dissuade cultural separatism from Russia. The Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition was thus one element of a larger spectacle. As Toms Ķencis has mentioned, it is instructive to understand the Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition more as a large pavilion within a fair, yet instead of the global environs of the world fairs, this spectacle was focused solely on a multicultural status of a single political entity.

The exhibition committee for Riga had affiliates elsewhere in the Baltic Provinces, including Jelgava, Tallinn, and Tartu. The congress delineated its displays into discrete sections: Prehistoric Monuments; Ethnographic and Geographic Monuments; Arts and Crafts; Domestic, Public, Judicial and Military Objects; Church History; Writing and Language; Byzantine and Western European Archaeology; and Baltic Archaeology. The last field was among the newest, and it would prove formative in the creation of the congress committee itself, which would count a

[449] Ibid, 83.

number of Latvians among its members, including Jēkabs Ziemelis, the first Latvian archaeologist.[450] Like the historian Krodznieks, Ziemelis also considered his field to be of ideological importance, for archaeology, he contended, could be deployed to "reveal truths," and counter the idea that Latvians were merely "savages who dressed in furs with clubs in their hands, opposing higher culture and its bearers."[451] Indeed, as Mikus Skruzītis had routinely emphasized in *Austrums,* material culture could function as a testament to civilization instead of barbarity. In fact, Skruzītis himself would play a significant role in developing a separate Latvian exhibition, shoring up funding not merely from the Riga Latvian Society, as would be expected, but also German- and Russian-dominated institutions, such as the board of the city of Riga, and even individual Baltic German nobles.

Skruzītis was directly influenced from the Czechoslavic Exhibition in Prague in 1895. As Marta Filipová has explained, the exhibition was meant to distinguish Czech culture, and especially that of the peasantry, as the inheritors of a grandiose pan-Slavic tradition noticeably distinct from the domineering culture of Bohemian Germans. In order to assert these claims, "the 'national' culture of the countryside was studied in its regional diversity, which was meant to show its richness, the maturity of the nation in the process of emancipation, the ability of folk culture to compete with (or in fact, supersede) Germanic culture and indeed, demonstrate its genuine Czech character."[452] The appeal of the exhibition to Skruzītis is obvious. He

[450] Anda Bērziņa, "Pirmie Latvijas senatnes un mitoloģijas attēlojumi mākslinieku darbos un to saikne ar arheoloģisko materiālu," *Mākslas Vēsture un Teorija* 20 (2017): 16-35.
[451] Jānis Ciglis, "Viskrievijas X arheoloģiskas kongress Rīgā un tā nozīme Baltijas senatnes pētniecībā," *Latviešu etnogrāfiskā izstāde 1896*, ed. Sanita Stinkule (Riga: Neptuns, 2016), 97.
[452] Marta Filipová, "Peasants on Display: The Czechoslavic Exhibition of 1895," *Journal of Design History* 24, no. 1 (2011): 17.

witnessed the exhibition at its end in October of 1895. What most amazed him, however, was not merely the spectacle of Czech culture on display as such, but the collective power that made it possible. The project was the result of the collaboration of Slavic-speaking peoples all throughout the Czech lands, one completely unburdened by Germans and German perspectives. He hoped something could be similarly achievable among his fellow Latvians.

Skruzītis's long collaboration with *Austrums* meant that he was already familiar with Rūķis as well as their aims and ideologies. The same month that Skruzītis had visited Prague, he had also informed the exhibition committee that "in the name of artists in St. Petersburg, the young artists J. Rozentāls is promising twenty-five to thirty oil paintings for the ethnographic exhibition, for which the artists do not ask for any assistance besides transportation costs."[453] It remains ambiguous, however, as to whether Skruzītis or Rūķis took these first steps. Nevertheless, the participation of Rūķis artists would not be confirmed until April 1896.[454] Rozentāls would graduate from the Academy a month later in May, and returned to Riga that summer. By July, he was participating in committee meetings for the exhibition as a representative for the art section. Tellingly, one of his first suggestions for the committee was to create enlarged photographs of groups of images in local museum collections. Thus even as a recently graduated painter, Rozentāls, like many of his Latvian and Estonian colleagues, propagated the use of photography as the most immediate and accessible form of visual culture. Though Rozentāls's suggestion

[453] Quoted in Maija Ārena, "Jaņa Rozentāla ieguldījums Latviešu etnogrāfiskās izstādes tapšanā," *Indivīds. Vēsture. Nācija. Latviešu etnogrāfiskajai izstādei – 120.* ed. Sanita Stinkule (Riga: Latvijas Nacionālais Vēstures muzejs, 2017), 97.
[454] Ibid.

would prove too expensive, photographs would nevertheless play a pivotal role in introducing the works of the late Latvian painter Kārlis Hūns at the visual arts display.

As it would happen, Rozentāls would not only serve as a Rūķis representative at the committee, but would be the individual concerned with organizing and decorating the art space as a whole. As such, it comes as a slight surprise that the artist would later claim that "whenever it will come to write the history of Latvian art, then it must start with 1896, where paintings by Latvian artists were exhibited at the Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition in Riga for the first time."[455] As we have seen in this study, 1896 was certainly not the beginning of "Latvian" art. Even if painting had reached a wider public at the exhibition, such an assertion dismisses the endeavors of earlier Latvian painters and, most importantly, the variety of cultural figures who engaged in other kinds of media besides painting. This is strange because Rozentāls would in fact include images by earlier Latvian artists, not only through photographic reproductions, as was the case with Kārlis Hūns, but also by including the paintings themselves. In fact, Jānis Staņislavs Roze's photographic painted portraits of Riga Latvian Society figures, images credited with "activating" painting among the Latvian intelligentsia in the 1880s, would appear in the art section, and indeed are some of the most distinguishable elements of the few extant photographs of the fair (**Figure 3.19**).

The inclusion of Roze and Hūns in Rozentāls's curated version of Latvian art also gave the slightest bit of historicity to Latvian painting. Newer research has also

[455] J. M. [Janis Rozentāls], *Vērotājs* 6 (1904) 749-754, 7 (1904), 862-873.

suggested that some of the paintings on display may have been created specifically for the exhibition, namely Artūrs Baumanis's painting *The Spirits of Zemgale* (**Figure 3.20**). By 1896, Baumanis's *Horse of Destiny* had been around for nine years. *The Spirits of Zemgale* demonstrates how Baumanis shifted his sources from history towards folklore. In the silver rays of the moon, the spirits of heroes past assemble around the powerful Viestars, who guides a boat down the Lielupe River towards Mežotne from his impressive castle at midnight on midsummer's eve. Art historian Edvārda Šmīte has convincingly argued that Baumanis likely created the painting in collaboration with his close friend, the poet Eduards Zeibots, who wrote a poem on the same theme in the same year. Baumanis and Zeibots spent most of 1896 together in Sloka, where they would engage in discussions about Latvian history and mythology.[456] And indeed, the stanzas of Zeibots's poem "The Spirits of Zemgale" closely resemble Baumanis's subject matter, especially "Jo pusnaktī sentēvu kapi / Pie Mežotnes atdaras / Un senoju varonu gari / Ap Viestaru pulcējas," which literally translates to "At midnight the graves of our ancient fathers / Will open by Mežotne / And the spirits of ancient heroes / Will gather around Viestars."[457] A few reviewers commended that Baumanis's painting would certainly "leave an impression on every Latvian" and was a testament to the fact that "Baumanis has the gifts of an artist, especially in the composition of fantastical paintings."[458] While Baumanis's reverence for the Latvian past is not surprising, his skeletal rendering of the figures

[456] Šmite, "'Zemgaliešu gari,'" 26-27.
[457] Quoted in Šmite, "Zemgaliešu gari," 25-26.
[458] "Latviešu etnogrāfiskā izstāde," *Mājas Viesa Mēnešraksts*, 1 August 1896, 627.

would stand in vast contrast to the painting which by far commanded the most attention at the display: Janis Rozentāls's *After the Service* (**Figure 3.21**).

Similar to most of his fellow Latvian artists, Rozentāls came from a rural background, growing up in the small town of Saldus, about halfway between Riga and the coastal town of Liepāja. While a student at the Imperial Academy of Arts, Rozentāls often returned home, recording the people and simple quotidian activities of his native town. Saldus and its inhabitants thus became central in *After the Service,* which was Rozentāls's graduation piece from the Imperial Academy of Arts. In Rozentāls's painting, peoples of all social classes stream forth from the village church. In the foreground, an elderly peasant man hobbles along the cobblestone with his pious wife at his side. Near them, a beggar woman and child plead for spare change. Dress distinguishes the women, either in peasant garb wearing headscarves or tight black bodices over billowing white sleeves. Under the tree on the left-hand side, two boisterous young men, wearing their Sunday best, peer over the crowd, perhaps gazing at one of the young maidens floating down the stone stairs.

It is difficult to overestimate how novel Rozentāls's painting would have been in Riga in 1896. Here was a Latvian who had become a professional painter, depicting Latvian people for a Latvian audience. When we consider that Latvian writers lamented the absence of Latvian painters a mere four years earlier, the 1896 Ethnographic Exhibition truly must have been a revelation. One writer wrote extensively on the painting. His commentary is one of the most in-depth Latvian perspectives on contemporary Latvian art we have encountered in this study so far.

> *Pictures* (*Bildes*) also belong among those things every visitor to the exhibition first see, their high quality visible already on the walls of

> the first rooms. In one Riga German newspaper, an exhibition visitor had said that the exhibition would be worth visiting alone solely for seeing just one painting, J. Rozentāls's *After the Service*. And really this picture earns a lot of attention. We had the possibility to see this picture earlier in St. Petersburg at an art exhibition, where it had earned a gold medal. We also liked it this time as well, yet it left a greater impression for us here at the Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition, where the entire surroundings and circumstances elevate the image's meaning and loveliness. It is lovely simply as something that you have not really seen before, but it is also a heartfelt and sincere view of Latvian life that the artist shows us in this picture. Latvian people are leaving their old, beloved church after the end of the service. Others come by the doors of the church, others have already passed the gates […] I see many faces here, all of them alive, all well-known. The entire view is altogether so real, so attractive, that we cannot see anything wrong with it.[459]

The critic here describes Rozentāls's painting in great detail, but perhaps most significant is the declaration that the "surroundings and circumstances" of the exhibition transformed the meaning of the painting. Occasional art critic Matilde Jureviča-Priedīte described her experience in the art section as nothing less than an epiphany: "Rarely in my life have I been so happy about something. I was inspired. I was stunned by solemn, serious and sweet feelings of joy, peace, and gratitude. I was standing there, in the Latvian national temple, and, even more, by the cradle of Latvian painting."[460] Looking at the few extant images of the exhibition—

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[459] "Pie tām lietām, ko katrs izstādes apmeklētājs vispirms aplūko, piederi arī *bildes*, kuras bagatā mērā puško pirmās rūmes sienas. Kādā Rīgas Vācu laikrakstā bija kāds izstādes apmeklētājs izsacies, ka izstādi būtu vērts apmeklēt, ja tur vairāk neka nebūtu kā tikai viena bilde, J. Rozentāla 'Pēc dievkalpošanas.' Un tiešām ši bilde pelna lielu ievērību. Mums bija atgadījums šo bildi jau senāk redzēt Pēterburgā, mākslas izstādē, kur viņa bija izpelnijuses godalgu. Arī toreiz viņa mums ļoti labi patīka; tatšu lielāku iespaidu viņa pie mums atstāja te Latviešu etnografiskā izstadē, kur visa apkārtne un apstākļi vēl savu tiesu cēļā bildes nozīmi un jaukumu. Jo tas nav nekas cits, kā daudz redzēts vienkārši jauks, bet turklāt svētsvinigs un pazildinošs skats iz Latviešu dzīves, ko mākslinieks mums šajā bildē rāda. Latviešu ļaudis pēc pabeigtas dievakalpošanas atstāj savu veco mīļo baznīcu. Citi nāk vēl nule pa baznīcas durvim, citi jau izgājuši pa vārtiņiem. [...] Daudz seju te redzam; visas kā dzīvas, visas labi pazīstamas. Viss skats kopā tik patiess, tik pievilcīgs, ka nevaram gana viņā noskatīties." "Latviešu etnografiskā izstādē," *Latviešu Avīzes,* 4 September 1896.

[460] Quoted in Ābele, "Templī pie šupļa," 94.

unsurprisingly published in *Austrums*—it is clear how prominent Rozentāls's painting really was (See **Figure 3.19**). Kristiāna Ābele has thus labeled *After the Service* as the display's "patriotic altarpiece."[461] Jurevičа-Priedīte would also describe the artist's *From the Graveyard,* a work similar in appearance and theme to *After the Service*, and also on display at the exhibition as painted "so precisely, so lively […] from the life of one's own people" that "here each figure, each face and feature is familiar to us, we can even guess every churchgoer's spirit and character."[462] Elsewhere I have argued that the peasants of Rozentāls's paintings fostered a feeling of familiarity for Jurevičа-Priedīte, a sentiment the reviewer associated with solidarity for her fellow Latvian people and a desire for the advancement of their culture.[463] This reading is not incorrect, but it is too simplistic. What is more important was her perception of Rozentals's *mode* of painting, for it manifested the artist's ability to articulate the peasant as a living entity.

Numerous reviews of Rozentāls's paintings at the exhibition emphasized the life-like quality of the Latvian people in his images. One observer commented that "From Janis Rozentāls we see very correctly depicted Latvian villagers coming from the church, where *not a single face is foreign, they are all Latvian* (*tur nav neviena svēšāda ģimja, tie visi ir latviski*), really, just like those you see and meet while coming home from church, each feature is so accurately depicted that one thinks that there really are Latvian church-goers in front of you" (my emphasis).[464] Similar to

[461] Ābele, "Artistic Life," 60.
[462] Matilda [Matilde Jurevičа-Priedīte], 'Baltijas mākslenieku gleznu izstāde Majoros', *Vērotājs* 10:1 (1904): 1281–1287. Quoted in Eduards Kļaviņš, *Art History of Latvia*, 95.
[463] Pushaw, "Art and Multiculturalism," 355-356.
[464] "Latviešu etnogrāfiskā izstāde," *Mājas Viesa Mēnešraksts*, 1 August 1896, 625-627.

Jurevičа-Priedīte, this critic also emphasized an astonishment at the familiarity of the figures. Despite the recent and welcome groundswell of publications on the Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition, what remains underemphasized about Rozentāls's painting and its critical reception in the Latvian press was the socio-cultural context in which Latvians could recognize themselves *physiognomically*.

Among the various suggestions Rozentāls made to the exhibition committee was the idea that Rūķis artists could make chalk and charcoal drawings of Latvian "types" based on photographs.[465] These drawings were displayed in the anthropology section, and largely based on the some of the hundreds of photographs Jānis Krēsliņš had taken during ethnographic exhibitions across Latvian-speaking areas in 1894 and 1895. Krēsliņš was the only artist on the expeditions and his photographs of Latvian peasants offer insight into indigenous self-representation valued for important display. Krēsliņš, specifically commissioned by the Riga Latvian Society, had just as much at stake in the exhibition as those more often heralded painters.

Krēsliņš's photographs fall into three categories: full-length portraits of Latvian peasants (**Figure 3.23**), intimate frontal and profile portraits of one or two peasants emphasizing the sitter's facial features (**Figure 3.22**). As the Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition was sponsored by the All-Russian Archaeological Congress, it was understood that Krēslinš's photographs should consist of as many "ancient" depictions of Latvians (in full folk regalia) as everyday people (in more common dress). Despite the fact Krēsliņš augmented his photographs with anthropological descriptions, Inta Pujāte contends that we should read most of his images specifically as portraits and not

[465] Ibid, 97-98.

as studies of types.[466] Reading the corpus of portraits as a whole, Pujāte concludes that Krēsliņš was able "to win the trust of his sitters, irrespective of their position in society" given the care and nuanced approach with which he crafted each individual image.[467] That Krēsliņš's images include as many portraits of women in their finest folk regalia as well as young girls in their finest Victorian dresses belies the sincerity Pujāte sees in his work. At the same time, the anthropological notes accompanying these photographs would play a pivotal role in the exhibition. The photographs and their detailed notes were used as the bases to make papier-mache mannequins of Latvian types which became some of the most enduring images of the exhibition as a whole. To be sure, Krēsliņš included many staged images of working peasants (**Figure 3.24**), but he also took many portraits of peasant families within distinctive settings. The diversity of Krēsliņš's expedition photographs not only attests to the variety of approaches within self-representation in a context made by Latvians and for Latvians, but they also underscore the exoticizing, if not dehumanizing content of the earlier essentialist approaches by Baltic German photographers.

Inta Pujāte and Aija Brasliņa have emphasized that the repeated idea that Janis Rozentāls depicted his figures "correctly" (*pareizi*) was indebted to how pivotal photography was to the young Latvian painter, even in some of his earliest compositions.[468] What is often unremarked, however, is the fact that the word for

[466] Inta Pujāte, "Jāņa Krēsliņa fotogrāfijas kā latviešu tautas portrets," *Jānis Krēsliņš: Latviēsu tradicionālo kultūras vērtību izzinātājs* (Riga: Neputns, 2014), 53.
[467] Ibid, 54.
[468] Inta Pujāte, "Iluzorā pasaule. Fotogrāfija un portrets 19. gadsimtā," *Portrets Latvijā. 19. gadsimts*, eds. Inta Pujāte and Dainis Bruģis (Riga: Neputns, 2014), 259–281. Inta Pujāte, "Starp tradīciju un moderno: Fotogrāfija Jaņa Rozentāla daiļraidē," *Studija* 109, no. 8-9 (2016): 19-23. Brasliņa and Slava, *Janis Rozentāls.*

portraiture in Latvian, *ģīmetne*, located the significance of portrayal solely in a person's *ģīmis*, literally "physiognomy," but more colloquially a person's face. Therefore in the Latvian reception of *After the Service* and other Realist paintings by Rozentāls, we witness a significant shift in indigenous discourse about visual culture as a whole. If portrait photography from the early 1860s through the 1880s erased visual markers of race and ethnicity for socially ascendant Latvians and Estonians, by the 1890s, it became suddenly possible to recognize a Latvian solely by their countenance, determined by a Latvian's lived experience, regardless of social class. Indeed, Rozentāls does capture Latvians from Saldus donning an array of clothing types, demonstrating a new social diversity to Latvians by the 1890s. By emphasizing Latvians as contemporary, multifaceted living (*dzīvi*) beings and rejecting Realism's need to reveal social unease and conflict, Rozentāls's painting affirmed the overall ethos of the 1896 exhibition: change for Latvians was apparent in every field and their social ascent was boundless.

For all the novelty Rozentāls's painting might have been, however, its subject was far from original. In fact, not too far from the painting was a photograph on display, taken by the Estonian Evald Allas (**Figure 3.25**). Entitled *Muhu Church*, the photograph depicts a group of elder Estonian peasants—predominantly men—standing in front of a church. A dark triangle in the upper right corner of the photograph indicates something, or someone, had unknowingly obfuscated the lens. Allas's image was part of a series of ethnographic photographs produced under the aegis of the Estonian folklorist Oskar Kallas, one of the most significant Estonian cultural figures of the twentieth century and later diplomat in the interwar era. Kallas

was at the forefront of developing the Estonian Folk Museum. Although the museum would not be complete until 1909, Kallas was adamant about collecting peasant material culture and, just as importantly, teaching his fellow Estonians why this culture was important to preserve. In 1894, for instance, he displayed objects from wooden spoons to multicolored woolen socks during the year's pivotal song festival in Tartu, and stressed that "collecting these objects channels ahead aggressively, since now is the last time to get them, since even folk clothing is disappearing."[469] Photography played a crucial role in these endeavors, and Allas, a young theology student, would assist Kallas in extending the geographical range of the collection by travelling to the islands of Muhu, Hiiumaa and Saaremaa. Indeed, Allas's *Muhu Church* seemingly confirms Kallas's worries. Most of the men wear contemporary woolen jackets and cotton pants, instead of the distinctive orange-and-pink woolen designs so typical within Muhu handicrafts. When the Estonian Learned Society organized a display of Estonian islander folk costumes, photographs, and historical watercolors at the same archaeological congress in Riga, its small size failed to garner any attention, paling in comparison to the grandeur of the Latvian exhibits.[470] While the success of the Latvians would be inspiring for Estonians in the larger realm of folklore and ethnography, it did not necessarily hamper the development of a new Estonian art.

[469] Oskar Kallas, "Eesti muuseumi asjus," *Eesti Postimees*, 5 July 1894.
[470] Piret Õunapuu, *Eesti Rahva Muuseumi loomine ja väljakujunemine*. PhD diss. University of Tartu, 2011, 50-51.

Confronting the Peasant Painter

Folklorist Toms Ķencis has called attention to the fact that the breakthrough of Rūķis artists in an ethnographic setting "bypass[ed] the realm of 'pure' fine art dominated by the Baltic German elite."[471] However, one would be remiss to assume that such "pure" realms were solely accessible to Baltic Germans. In fact, just months before the Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition opened, the Riga Art Society featured drawings by the Estonian artist Kristjan Raud. Though the Riga Art Society had organized a show featuring works by Johann Köler just four years earlier, Raud's presence as an Estonian artist in a display of the predominantly Baltic German society was still important. It may have even been frustrating to the coterie of young Latvian artists eagerly seeking exhibition opportunities. Estonian researchers have never discussed Raud's Riga debut, perhaps a result of ethnocentric traditions which have traditionally restricted art historical investigations to the boundaries of twentieth-century nation-states. As such, the commentary of the Baltic German artist Friedrich Moritz in *Düna Zeitung* is worth quoting at length here:

> The Art Society has been issuing a number of drawings for several days. The sense of the artist is accustomed to putting every new artistic production that he sees into a group of works of art already known to him, so that he can master the new value by comparing it with what is already there—[but this instinct] is completely helpless against these drawings. Here some works are reminiscent of Schwind, others are reminiscent of L. Richter, while others might have been made by Rethel, and even a Rembrandt-like hand-drawing we believe to see before us. A farmer, seen from behind riding a sledge, shows a truth of life with such little means of expression only the Japanese people own. And all these sketches are drawn by a man who, growing up in the country as a son of a peasant, scarcely ever had the opportunity to form his artistic idiom from any model, who created everything from

[471] Toms Ķencis, "The Role of Folklore in the Formation of Latvian Visual Art," *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 65 (2015): 60.

> the depths of his mind without any guidance - because he could not help it!
>
> Christian [Kristjan] Raud, now a student of the Petersburg Academy, is the highly gifted artist to whom we owe this interesting work. After graduating from a district school and the teacher training college in our university town [Tartu], Raud was forced to work as a primary school teacher for five years before he was able to devote himself entirely to art. Completely penniless, and limited savings now exhausted, he feels that the Petersburg Academy does not provide the right ground for his artistic individuality, and his heart's desire, to be able to educate himself with the art treasures of foreign countries, seems to be at an unreachable distance.
>
> His sketches, published in the Kunstvereine, constitute only a small part of the material by which Raud's talent can be measured."[472]

Besides the brief mention that Raud was the "son of peasant," there is no discussion of his ethnic background. It may have even been irrelevant. What Moritz emphasized instead was Raud's incredible versatility. Consider *Bagpipe Player*, a charcoal drawing of around 1896, perhaps one of those on display in Riga (**Figure 3.26**). Raud certainly possessed the ability to draw with descriptive detail and authenticity, but his lines, especially on the floor and along the back wall are chaotic. Though his scene of Estonian peasants in a wooden structure listening to folk music is visually legible, there seems to be just as much emphasis on the materiality of charcoal, its contact with the now-yellow paper, evidence peeking out even in the darkest corner of the room and the thickest application of charcoal. Charcoal is, as its name implies, charred coal, the black residue of carbon and burnt matter in the absence of oxygen and thus water. Charcoal is thus an artistic medium created with smoke and it is precisely this miasma which Raud captures in his drawing. For Raud, charcoal

[472] "Im Kunstverein," *Düna Zeitung*, 29 February 1896.

enabled him to create an expressiveness beyond the objectifying detail of oil painting. The sharp postures and skeletal faces further suggest the artist's attempt to convey the gravity of their condition. Raud fully utilizes the expressive range of charcoals, from very faint and light to the darkest black, but ultimately the materiality of charcoal clings to the paper, staining it, as if the medium itself is a visual and material signifier of the desperate situation for most of the peasantry.

In *Alone (In the Farmhouse),* Raud reveals the paper only sparingly, on the left side of the drawing where the last bits of light linger on the wall before sunset, as well as in the handles of the wooden axes strewn across the floor (**Figure 3.27**). An elderly woman sits alone on a bench, folding her hands in her lap, and slightly hunching forward. A small cat on the left of the drawing is her sole companion. Otherwise, the sense of solitude and even heartache is achingly palpable. She becomes engulfed by the space. Here Raud becomes concerned not so much with describing the state of the peasantry as much as conveying emotional experience. It must have been Raud's ability to convey the pathos of his subjects with such unrelenting conviction that led Friedrich Moritz to extoll the artist's drawings on display in Riga.

Unlike their Latvian counterparts, Estonian artists were not centrally organized in the 1890s and fewer Estonians trained in St. Petersburg. The Baltic artists who attained acclaim as professors in Düsseldorf were from Estonian areas, so Estonians could make connections with artists and teachers in Germany more easily than in Russia proper. But staunch academicism reigned in German art academies at the end of the nineteenth century, leading many young Estonian art students, who

yearned for education in more modern techniques, to quit their studies. Success at art academies catapulted the careers of many Latvian artists, who often garnered their first awards and critical acclaim with their graduation works, as we have seen with Janis Rozentāls. Many Estonians, on the other hand, did not finish state-sponsored academies, and thus lacked the professional contacts facilitated by an academic education. Such difficulties meant that the institutional change in the art scene of Estonian towns was left to individuals, rather than to the power of collectives or societies as in the Latvian case.

Despite these differences and initial difficulties, professional Estonian painters did emerge in the 1890s and were occupied with the same concerns as their Latvian brethren, namely the representation of peasants. Kristjan Raud was also a twin, and his brother, Paul, was an accomplished artist in his own right. In the summers between 1896 and 1899, Kristjan and Paul Raud would travel around the islands off the Estonian coast, especially on the Pakri Islands and Muhu alongside the Estonian sculptor Amandus Adamson. Paul Raud, who had studied art in Düsseldorf, debuted at an exhibition in his hometown of Rakvere in Northern Estonia in 1894. Unlike his brother Kristjan, Paul Raud was well integrated into Baltic German circles and made his initial earnings primarily as a portrait painter of noble Baltic German families. While on their sojourn through the Estonian islands, Adamson and the Raud brothers were particularly entranced with rural islander life, creating portraits articulating the encounter between peasant villagers and cosmopolitan artists. Amandus Adamson's sculpture *Muhu Fisherman* found such immediate acclaim that it was purchased as part of the art collection of Tallinn's Estland Provincial Museum in 1892 (**Figure**

3.28). It may also be one of these island trips which is captured in Kristjan Raud's drawing *The Artist in the Village (My Brother Paul Working)* (**Figure 3.29**). Raud continues his interest in peasant interiors, yet with a radically different subject matter, Estonians curiously gazing at another Estonian painting a canvas. Beda Stjernschantz, a Finnish artist who also travelled around these Estonian islands in 1895, once noted that the local villagers were so entranced by two painters that so many would congregate around the windows that the room would become completely dark.[473] Stjernschantz's recollection suggests a stereotypical idea of the Estonian peasantry, equally dimwitted as they were dumbfounded by the appearance of a professional painter. In Raud's drawing, by contrast, these Estonian men gaze intently, learning perhaps for the first time about how an artist creates a composition, renders perspective, or mixes oil paints. The format of the canvas on the easel is ambiguous, and could be either portrait or landscape. Paul Raud himself painted many portraits of the Estonian encounters, and this smaller work could be *Man with a Sickle* (**Figure 3.30**), an image which bestows a degree of dignity and honor to the humble peasant man diligently working long hours in the field. Raud's thick impasto here is typical of his style in the mid-1890s, and rejected the precision preferred by his academic training in Düsseldorf. Thus both artists, Kristjan Raud in his drawing, and Paul Raud in his painting, reveal a novel idea to the majority of the Baltic Provinces: Estonians could also appreciate painting.

[473] Itha O'Neill, ed., *Beda Stjernschantz. Ristikkoportin takana. Bakom gallergrinden* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2014).

The works of Kristjan and Paul Raud would be featured in Riga at a significant if modest show which opened on the grounds of a rented apartment on Basteja Boulevard in December 1898. It would be this display, rather than the 1896 exhibition, that would begin to change discourse about the art world in manner more inclusive of the local population. While institutions such as the Latvian Ethnographic Exhibit were seminal in the initial display of art by Rūķis artists, the main exhibition venues were facilitated by the Riga Art Society (Ger. *Rigaer Kunstverein*). Founded in 1871, the Society had dissipated by 1890 and was revitalized primarily under the aegis of the physician and art lover Roedrich von Engelhardt (1862–1934) in 1893. The Society brought a stream of high-profile exhibitions of famous international artists, including Arnold Böcklin, Akseli Gallen-Kallela, and Anders Zorn. Baltic German artists also became active in the Society, and the presence of Baltic German painter Gerhard von Rosen (1856–1927), among others, strengthened the Society's focus on promoting local Baltic artists independent of their ethnic origin. In the aftermath of the revolution, Rosen would emerge as a seminal figure in the conception of a unified Baltic art. In December 1898, the Society opened the first Riga Art Society Salon in a rented apartment. While museums existed in Jelgava (Kurland Province Museum) and Tallinn (Estland Province Museum), plans to build an art museum in Riga, the largest city in the region, were consistently delayed and would not see completion until 1905, as we explore in the following chapter. The premiere exhibition of the Salon featured works by Baltic Germans from all three Baltic Provinces, including Bernhard Borchert, Oskar Hoffmann, Oswald von Sass and Rūķis members Vilhelms Purvītis and Johann Walter. It was at this exhibition

where the critic Teodors Zeiferts first complained about the ways Baltic German artists depicted Estonians and Latvians "as if from another world." The perceived contrast between Baltic German artists and Estonian or Latvian artists would have been especially prominent at this exhibition, since over two thirds of the works were by Latvian artists, and Johann Walter and Vilhelms Purvītis had created the majority of them (**Figures 3.31, 3.32**). For Zeiferts, the lyrical evening landscapes of Purvītis and Walter were clearly "views into a Latvian world" and reflected Latvian "wisdom and work." Unlike with Baltic Germans, Zeiferts contended, neither Purvītis nor Walter used the word "Latvian" in the titles of their work because a Latvian spirit already radiated from the canvas: "If before now you cannot distinguish a Latvian based on birth, education, communication and language, you can now do so by looking at their paintings, by looking into their soul, where their Latvianness (*latvietība*) originates."[474]

Zeiferts was not unaware of the thorny issue of connecting Walter's paintings with Latvian identity. According to his name, Walter seemed to be Baltic German, but in reality his father was a Germanized Latvian merchant originally from the estate of Bērzmuiža, while his mother hailed from the German Kurau family in Riga.[475] Walter's mixed identity prompted Zeiferts to ask in his review of the 1898/1899 Riga Art Society Salon, "Is the artist Walter a Latvian or a German? What does that mean? Namely it means that an interest in art has awoken in the people."[476] And although the ethnicity of Johann Walter may have sparked debate, the most significant

[474] Zeiferts, "Pēdējas Rīgas Mākslas."
[475] Kristiāna Ābele, *Johans Valters* (Riga: Neputns, 2006).
[476] Zeiferts, "Pēdējas Rīgas Mākslas."

commentary came from a Russian man from St. Petersburg visiting Riga. He was astounded that over two thirds of the works on display were by Latvian artists. For him, it was astonishing because as he wrote in German:

> More than once, we were forced to hear the opinion that the Latvians were a degenerate, worn out and dying people. This much is true: a people from whom such talented, original, thoughtful artists [...] emerge, cannot be regarded as degenerate. On the contrary, the Latvian folk, once subjugated in their own land, but now having entered normal living conditions, have a moral liveliness and a rich spirituality.[477]

This commentary may be the most significant evidence of the power of visual culture in changing public opinion in the colonial Baltic Provinces. The paintings by Purvītis and Walter fundamentally disproved the tenets which drove the centuries-long racialization of Latvians as inferior *Undeutsche*. Instead, Latvians and Estonians could now claim their space as equals alongside their Baltic German neighbors and colleagues, and this parity was visible and apparent to visitors outside of the region.

Conclusion

Riga, in all its might and splendor in the late nineteenth century, was undoubtedly the economic and cultural hub of the Baltic Provinces. For artists living in Estland or Northern Livland, however, the cities of Tallinn and Tartu were also art centers in their own right. Perhaps in an effort to balance the regional-cultural scale, the Tartu-based Baltic German painter Reinhold von Moeller (1847–1918) initiated discussion on the creation of the Society for the Promotion of the Interest in Art through Travelling Exhibitions (Ger. *Verein zur Förderung des Kunstinteresses durch*

[477] "Ein russisches Urtheil über den Rigaschen Kunstsalon," *Düna Zeitung*, 7 January 1899.

Wanderausstellungen) in 1899. Founded officially (in Riga) in 1900, the Society of Travelling Exhibitions brought the wealth of Riga-based exhibits throughout the entire Baltic Provinces, not only to the larger cities of Tallinn, Tartu, Liepāja, and Jelgava, but, just as importantly, to Koknese, Majori, the Estonian-Latvian border town of Valga/Valka, Pärnu and Haapsalu. The main aim of the Society of Travelling Exhibitions was to disseminate a love of art among inhabitants of the provinces who would otherwise have little, if any, access to art, a love the Riga Art Society was already fostering. The artworks at these exhibitions in the smaller towns were by no means inferior to those regularly on display in Riga or Tallinn. As one commentator in *Baltijas Vēstnesis* noted regarding an exhibition in the small town of Koknese in 1904, 'This first art exhibition in the countryside turned out to be surprisingly wide-ranging and comprehensive in regard to the paintings; it is richer and more versatile than many painting exhibitions in the cities."[478]

These travelling exhibits also exposed Estonian artists to contemporary Latvian painting, undoubtedly a significant encounter for Estonian artists who saw similar aspirations and critical success among their Latvian colleagues. That Latvian art emerged as a cohesive entity in the midst of Baltic German cultural dominance and was accessible to Estonians before Estonian art collectives came into being is a fact which has received little attention, but likely exerted a strong influence on Estonian painters. This would be particularly formative for a name almost completely lost to art history: Albert Thomson (**Figure 3.33**). In the 1890s, Thomson shuttled between Tallinn and Paide, a small town in Järvamaa province in central Estonia. By

[478] K., "1. mākslas izstādes atklāšana Koknesē," *Baltijas Vēstnesis*, 28 June 1904.

1897, he was studying at the school of Benjamin Bluhm in Riga and would eventually work under the direction of Paul Gerhard von Rosen, one of the most influential Baltic painters at the turn of the century. Following a series of Estonian artists who turned to German schools instead of Russian ones, Thomson would train briefly in Düsseldorf and Berlin before returning to Riga by 1901. Then, Thomson trained under Purvītis until his premature death at the agea of twenty-eight in June of the year. His death would have a notable impact in Paide, where Thomson had actually taught other two promising Estonians: Rudolf Lepik and August Roosileht. Upon Thomson's unexpected death, the trilingual *Paide Teataja* published a poem entitled "The Death of a Young Artist":

Üks mees on lahkund sellest ilmast	A man has left this world
See kurvastust tõi palju rahvale	This brought sadness to so many people
Suur mehisus ja tarkus paistis tema silmast	What wisdom and manliness radiated from his eyes
Nüüd kõik see läinud puhkele!	Now it has all been laid to rest!
Mikspärast surm just teda kutsus?	Why did death call for him?
Just seda tähtsat Eesti meest?	Just this important Estonian man?[479]

What is so important about Thomson's brief life is that it refutes many ideas ingrained within Baltic art history.

Hailing from the Paide and Türi area, Thomson trained with leading local artists in the Baltic Provinces, artists who actively displayed their works in the regional exhibitions which sought to bring the fine arts into smaller towns. Moreover, the fact that *Paide Teataja* lamented the loss of Thomson in 1901 is further testatement to how normalized the figure of the Estonian artist had already become. In 1903, Ants Laikmaa would famously call for the establishment of an Estonian art

[479] "Ühest andekast, tundmatust, noorelt surnud eesti kunstnikust," *Olion* 6 (June 1932): 75.

society which would "serve all of the people, fulfil the needs of art, and open the world of art to our people with excellent exhibitions."[480] In direct response to Laikmaa's call to arms, the young Estonian writer Gustav Suits lamented that the very notion of Estonian art was strange, despite the success of contemporary Estonian authors and composers.[481] Indeed, Suits's reaction seemed to confirm Laikmaa's desire to form an art society in the first place. But as the rise of Thomson can attest, "excellent exhibitions" were already occurring, whether they were specifically dedicated to the fine arts or not.

Even reviews of exhibitions organized by the Tallinn Agricultural Society around 1899 were excited in mentioning that "we got to know one or two [Estonian] youths studying painting at the exhibition, whom we can expect great things from in the future."[482] Names such as Thomson or Pühmann do not evoke the same grandeur as Raud or Laikmaa, yet their archival existence reveals the extent to which we rely on extant artworks to construct our art historical narratives. It suggests that Estonian painting was far more intertwined with Riga, Latvian art, and Baltic culture than is currently acknowledged. Embracing the multiethnic outlook of this new Baltic exhibition culture, Teodors Zeiferts ended his review of the pivotal 1898-99 Art Salon in Riga with a note that 'it may indeed come as a blessing that all of the Baltic peoples will be united together in art."[483] Art exhibitions did appear to advance a kind of social parity, yet the extent to which it would last would soon be tested.

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[480] Hans Laipmann [Ants Laikmaa], "Üleskutse," *Teataja,* 17 November 1903.
[481] K. Wahur [Gustav Suits], "Kujutawast kunstist' Eestis ja Kalewipoja piltidest,'" *Linda,* 11 December 1903, 918–923.
[482] "Mõni sõna Põllutöö näitusel," 1899.
[483] Zeiferts, "Pēdējas Rīgas Mākslas."

Chapter 4

Symbolists and Scientists: Transcending the Native Landscape

> "It does remain a widely acknowledged truth that an artist can and may abstain from participation in ethnic conflicts and any national politics without any harm to his ethnicity."[484]
> *Rīgas Avīze*, 1905.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Latvian painter Vilhelms Purvītis was the most famous contemporary artist from the Baltic Provinces. Given the novelty of painting among Latvians circa 1896, it is astonishing how quickly Purvītis was able to make a name for himself on the international stage. Between 1898 and 1904, Purvītis consistently received invitations to display his canvases abroad, exhibiting them in such diverse venues as Mir Iskusstva, the Vienna Secession, the 1900 World's Fair, and later staging one-man shows across Germany, France, and England.[485] Such was his popularity that it garnered a feature article in the internationally read art magazine *The Studio,* where critic Mary Illyne admired how his paintings revealed how he "loves nature in all of her moods, and sees and feels her poetry. For him there is beauty everywhere: in the seemingly uninteresting peasant's cottage of his native Kurland, in the solitary tree growing in the countryside, in the pale moonlight of a winter landscape."[486] For his native Baltic audience, Purvītis's critical success abroad was especially important because he achieved it with paintings of Baltic nature (**Figure 4.1**). The artist's popular landscapes were able to speak to all of the diverse populations of the Baltic Provinces and transcend cultural boundaries. This came to a

[484] "'Dienas Lapa' un mākslinieks V. Purvītis," *Rīgas Avīze*, 29 August 1905.
[485] Ābele, "Artistic Life," 88-92.
[486] Mary Illyne, "A Russian Painter: W. Pourvit," *The Studio* 142 (1905): 287.

screeching halt in 1905. When a worker's strike in St. Petersburg snowballed into an empire-wide revolution by 1905, newly forged relationships between Baltic Germans, Estonians, and Latvians became dramatically strained. What had been class struggle in Russia proper between the tsarist aristocracy and marginalized, illiterate peasants translated into multiethnic strife in the Baltic Provinces. Many Estonians and Latvians saw Baltic Germans as collaborators with the oppressive Romanov regime, and some even ransacked and destroyed German manor houses.[487] Many Baltic Germans, on the other hand, saw peasant uprisings as an indication of the truly savage and barbaric nature of the degenerate *Undeutsche*.[488] 1905 appeared as a decisive moment for political and cultural change, but in the wake of seemingly intractable ethnic divides, Purvītis declared allegiance to neither side, remarking, "I recognize only the individual element, ask only for personalities, and will leave it to history to resolve the national question."[489] Since violence occurred along ethnic lines—in an act of desperation, loyalist Baltic Germans called upon tsarist punitive troops to kill Estonian and Latvian revolutionaries—any neutrality on the issue seemed impossible. Neutrality from such a beloved public figure as Purvītis created shockwaves across all sides of the Baltic intelligentsia.

[487] Toivo U. Raun, "Violence and Activism in the Baltic Provinces during the Revolution of 1905," *Acta Historica Tallinnensia*, 10 (2006): 48-59.
[488] For Camilla von Stackelberg, a schoolgirl in Cēsis during the revolution, the trauma of the violence left "a feeling of anxiety which I could not master for years and which forever altered my perception of the Latvians." Anders Henriksson, "Minority Nationalism and the Politics of Gender: Baltic German Women in the Late Imperial Era," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 23, no. 3 (1996): 217.
[489] "Der neuer Künstlerverein und die radikale Petition der lettischen Intelligenz," *Düna Zeitung*, 18 August 1905.

Kristiāna Ābele brought this debate to the fore in her groundbreaking scholarship in 2006.[490] This debate has been vital in reshaping narratives of Baltic art because it reveals the severity of the tensions among artists in the multiethnic Baltic Provinces and how art was deployed in ethno-political conflicts. We have seen how exhibition circuits both before, during, and after 1905 revealed that multiethnic relations were not, in fact, "shattered beyond repair."[491] What is at stake if we take seriously Purvītis's claim to leave the "national question" (*nationale Frage*) to historians? In a sense, this question requires us to move beyond the accepted idea that national identities are invented constructs to foster community belonging. To this end, historian Tara Zahra's notion of "national indifference" in her conception of "imagined non-communities" is especially revealing regarding Purvītis's neutrality. "National indifference" encapsulates the phenomenon that the majority of populations across Europe's multiethnic empires were largely unconcerned with the aims of a thin slice of nationalist elites.[492] Zahra reveals how the issue of national indifference loomed so large over the course of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth that

[490] Kristiāna Ābele, "Tautieši un novadnieki. Nacionālais jautājums un teritoriālā identitāte Latvijas mākslas dzīvē 19. gs. beigās un 20. gs. sākumā," in *Māksla un politiskie konteksti*, ed. Daina Lāce (Rīga: Neputns, 2006), 39-63.
[491] I have also addressed this issue more concisely elsewhere. Bart Pushaw, "Artistic Alliances and Revolutionary Rivalries in the Baltic Art World, 1890-1915," *International Journal of History, Culture, and Modernity* 4, no. 1 (2016): 42-72. Suzanne Pourchier-Plasseraud incorrectly describes interethnic relations in her recent book *Arts and a Nation: The Role of Visual Arts and Artists in the Making of Latvian Identity, 1905-1940* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2015), 49.
[492] Tara Zahra, "Imagined Non-Communities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis," *Slavic Review* 69, no 1. (2010): 93-119. Her findings may well also apply to other cases of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century nationalism—many artists around the globe wanted to escape the looming presence of the nation or homeland—but we need to proceed with caution and vigilance in applying theories which work in European case studies to other parts of the world.

nationalist activists could only hope to eradicate it by labeling any "infidelity" as a grave issue committed by "renegade" nationals.[493]

Thinking about national indifference allows us to approach landscape painting more holistically, without essentializing the issue of ethnicity or national identity as the sole factor at play. Landscape enjoyed tremendous popularity among audiences both at home and abroad. In the years around 1900, artists around the world drew on native traditions in an effort to express distinctively national or regional modernisms. However, the generic and shared qualities of landscapes made the genre a surprisingly slippery slope for maintaining both an international and national reputation. In multicultural contexts, this slippage created a multivocality within landscape paintings, wherein multiple audiences could read what they wanted to into the works, regardless of the aims of their creators. Therefore I aim to steer clear of assuming every Baltic landscape produced in this period was inherently about Baltic, Latvian, or Estonian identity. Reading landscape painting through the lens of critical race art history, Jacqueline Francis has argued that the genre functioned for Malvin Gray Johnson, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, and Max Weber as a "traditional artistic convention to continue modernist experimentation minus the specter of identity politics."[494] It is this path that two young Baltic painters, the Latvian Emīlija Gruzīte and the Estonian

[493] Per Bolin and Christa Douglas have recently extended Zahra's analytical framework onto the case in the Baltic Provinces. Their focus emphasizes the relationship of Baltic Germans to overarching ideas of the national and conclude that Zahra's term is only partially applicable, especially given the deliberately national framework of Baltic German societies after the events of 1905-1906. Strangely, Bolin and Douglas avoid including Estonians, Latvians, Russians, Jews and other inhabitants of the region in their analysis, thereby siloing Baltic Germans. Per Bolin and Christa Douglas, "'National Indifference' in the Baltic Territories? A Critical Assessment," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 48, no. 1 (2017): 13-22.

[494] Jacqueline Francis, *Making Race: Modernism and "Racial Art" in America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 10.

Konrad Mägi, would follow, but their modernist experimentation has been either ignored or explained as an emblem of "hybrid modernity" typical in the art of lesser-studied parts of the globe.[495]

Departing from Purvītis's neutrality after 1905, and with the findings of Francis and others in mind, this chapter examines three case studies concerning how Baltic painters approached the landscape. I will first contextualize the state of landscape painting in the Baltic through a discussion of the lunette paintings by Vilhelms Purvītis and Gerhard Rosen adorning the walls of the newly opened Riga City Art Museum (now the Latvian National Museum of Art). Despite their prominent placement in the museum, the murals have not received a joint analysis, partially because Rosen, as a Baltic German painter, has been historically ignored within scholarship.[496] Understanding how Baltic artists worked within regional and national frames of the landscape in official commissions reveals what Gruzīte and Mägi wanted to transcend. The following section is an extended analysis of Emīlija Gruzīte's most important extant work, *Fantastic Landscape*, which has barely received even a cursory treatment.[497] Instead, I reveal how the landscape is

[495] Baiba Vanaga says of Emīlija Gruzīte that too few of her paintings survive to conclude anything about her painting style and that it remains a crucial research question. Baiba Vanaga, "Sievietes mākslinieces," 217.
[496] In fact, the last holistic treatment of the murals was in a short chapter entitled "Monumental Painting" by Anšlavs Eglītis in a volume of art history published in Latvian in 1936. Anšlavs Eglītis, "Monumentālā gleznieciba," *Mākslas vēsture III: Lietājamās mākslas*, 1936, 376-378.
[497] Eduards Kļaviņš summarizes Gruzīte's painting in one sentence, "In yielding to her imagination, Gruzīte could reach a stage of irrational fantasy in a proto-Surrealist composition with ghostly anthropomorphic structures lit from the side in a forest of dark vertical spires." "Consolidation of Neo-Romanticist Modernism. Radicalisation and Neo-Traditionalism, 1905-1915," *Art History of Latvia IV: Period of Neo-Romanticist Modernism*, ed. Eduards Kļaviņš. (Riga: Art History Institute, 2014), 329. Baiba Vanaga briefly describes the color and style of the painting and suggests there may be influences from the Lithuanian painter Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis, as I examine below. She devotes no more than three sentences to the painting. Vanaga, "Sievietes mākslinieces," 215.

remarkable not only in its stylistic and thematic innovation, but how its creation transgressed the same gendered biases which have kept Gruzīte in the dusty shadows of art history. If the first two sections address crucial, yet undervalued landscapes, the last casts a radical reevaluation of some of the most iconic landscape paintings in the Baltic: the early works of the Estonian painter Konrad Mägi. Drawing from emergent theories of ecocritical art history and environmental history, I demonstrate how the form and content of Mägi's early landscape paintings should not be seen merely as examples of a (poorly-defined) "hybrid modernity," but rather as deeply intertwined with fragile ecologies, creating a new urgency regarding historical understandings of the relationships between nature and culture far beyond the confines of the national.

The Failure of Regionalism at the Riga City Art Museum

As the dust began to settle in the Baltic Provinces and across the Russian Empire after the failed revolution, artists began searching for new modes of reconciliation. With a 1905 debut exhibition featuring prominent Baltic German, Estonian, and Latvian artists, the Riga City Art Museum seemed at first to offer such a space. The ethnically diverse roster of artists at the museum seemed to belie the ethnic violence of the revolution. But the attempts at regional unification in the museum were just beginning. After the exhibition closed, Eduard Kupffer, one of the museum's architects, lamented that the museum's most beautiful decorations were still incomplete: a series of six lunette paintings adorning the walls of the upper vestibule of the building. The museum planned to commission the "premiere artists of

the town" to complete them.[498] Kupffer was vague on which specific artists would garner the commission, presumably because revolutionary tumult had not yet settled, and artists were still fleeing the violence in the Baltic Provinces in drones. It was not until June 1907 that the press revealed that the lunette mural paintings would depict the capitals of the three Baltic Provinces on one side, and three "characteristic landscapes" on the other.[499] The idea that the museum's murals would depict areas from across the Baltic Provinces reflected the regionalist aims of the museum's first director and principal architect Wilhelm Neumann (1849-1919), who sought to make the museum the premiere art center for all three Baltic Provinces.[500] The fact that all commissioned mural paintings were landscapes, rather than historical events or genre scenes reinforces the degree to which landscape was marshaled immediately as a unifying regionalist aesthetic in the public sphere in the wake of the tumultuous times of 1905-1906. In the aftermath of the revolution, history painting was out of the question. It would have been practically impossible to find an episode of Baltic history that incorporated Estonians, Latvians, and Baltic Germans without reference to institutionalized serfdom, manorial systems, or colonial conquest and oppression. It is presumably for this reason that Bernhard Borchert, who often painted scenes of medieval Baltic and Russian history, did not receive the commission despite his popularity at the time and his tendency to paint colossal historical canvases. In 1910,

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[498] Eduard Kupffer, "Das neue Kunstmuseum der Stadt Riga," *Düna Zeitung*, 22 March 1906.
[499] "Das städtische Kunstmuseum," *Rigasche Zeitung*, 13 June 1907.
[500] The Riga museum was the first museum dedicated only to art, but there were two other museums which served as primary exhibition venues in the other two Baltic capitals, Tallinn (Reval) and Jelgava (Mitau). On the Kurland Province Museum, see Elita Grosmane, "Piemirsts fenomens Latvijas kultūras vēsturē: Kurzemes Provinces muzejs," *Pilsēta. Laikmets. Vide*, ed. Rūta Kaminska (Rīga: Neputns, 2007), 99–107. On the Estland Province Museum, see Tõnis Liibek, ed., *Eestimaa Protvinsiaalmuuseum ja muuseumitraditsiooni algus Eestis.* Tallinn: Eesti Ajaloomuuseum, 2013.

Janis Rozentāls would create colossal friezes of ancient Latvian deities on the façade of the Riga Latvian Society Building, but as they were also commissioned as an unabashed expression of Latvian nationalism, they were distanced from the realities of the region's multiethnic population.[501] In comparison to the potential of violence incited by large-scale history or genre painting in the public sphere of the museum, landscape seemed assuredly neutral. Over the course of 1907 and 1908, however, the innocuous rural landscapes and views of the region's three capitals in their final form adorning the museum's walls would be fiercely scrutinized.

In his search for potential artists to complete the murals, Neumann made a logical choice in Gerhard von Rosen. In 1902, Neumann characterized him as "the most beloved landscapist in the Baltic art world."[502] Born in Rakvere in Estland Province, Rosen spent his youth in Tallinn and would study art in St. Petersburg in the late 1870s. He taught still-life and landscape painting at the Jung-Stillung school after settling in Riga in 1891 and became one of the most active members of Riga's burgeoning art scene, joining the board of the Riga Art Society in 1892. He also demonstrated remarkable empathy for his Estonian and Latvian contemporaries. When an issue arose in the Riga Art Society as to whether to disseminate exhibition information in Latvian as well as in German and Russian at exhibitions in smaller towns, Rosen was the only board member besides Purvītis, and the only Baltic German, to vote in favor of making information more accessible by additionally publishing in Latvian.[503] Unusually for his time, Rosen displayed a genuine desire for

[501] See Howard, "Latvian National Romanticism," and Pujāte, *Janis Rozentāls*, 98-101.
[502] Neumann, *Baltische Maler und Bildhauer*, 167. Eduards Kļaviņš mistakenly refers to Neumann's later 1908 *Lexikon baltischer Künstler* as the source for this quote.
[503] Ābele, "Artistic Life," 108.

equality for all inhabitants of the Baltic Provinces, even if his tone was at times tinged with an aristocratic flair (by social standing, he was also a baron).

When it comes to Rosen's artworks, however, art historians have painted a less flattering picture. Eduards Kļaviņš has cast a pejorative assessment of Rosen's paintings, deeming his style "naïve," "outdated," and reluctantly "dragged" into the twentieth century.[504] This view privileges a teleological narrative of development towards a modernist style, which unjustly ignores artists like Rosen who were more conservative in their painterly practice. Thus, we must be careful not to assume that conservative style renders artworks devoid of significance or meaning. Mai Levin has described Rosen in more neutral terms, rightly singling out his 1906 *Landscape with Body of Water* (**Figure 4.2**) as a prime example of *Stimmungslandschaft*, moody landscapes pulsating with an evocative lyricism, which, in her view, most resembled his colleague Vilhelms Purvītis.[505] Purvītis was indeed the other painter whom the museum commissioned to paint the remaining three murals, but in his scathing critique of the project, doctor and art patron Roedrich von Englehardt contended that the technique and artistic conception of the two artists were "almost diametrical," and with disastrous results.[506]

At the Riga City Art Museum, Rosen painted a view of Riga (**Figure 4.3**), a cityscape of Tallinn (**Figure 4.4**), and the rocky limestone cliffs on the Northern shore of Estonia (**Figure 4.5**). In both cityscapes, the distinctive silhouettes of soaring

[504] Kļaviņš, "Consolidation of Neo-Romanticist Modernism," 285-287. Klaviņš's treatment of the style of Latvian printmaker Rihards Zariņš, who also preferred nineteenth-century realist figuration, is interestingly devoid of pejorative adjectives.
[505] Mai Levin, "Hääbuv baltisaksa kunst," *Eesti kunsti ajalugu 5: 1900-1940*, ed. Mart Kalm (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstiakadeemia, 2009), 73.
[506] Roederich von Englehardt, "Die fresken im städtischen Kunstmuseum," 16 August 1907.

medieval churches and cathedrals dominate the skyline. Rosen's *Riga* depicts the city as viewed from the other side of the River Daugava, which courses through the capital. Clouds billow over the city and in between the spires on this summer day, the blustery wind guiding a pair of boats southwards down the river. The artist painted *Reval* in a similar manner, depicting the city from the Gulf of Finland, where more sailboats float near the harbor. What differentiates *Reval* from *Riga* most significantly is the band of rocks emerging at the water's surface in the former. This slight detail is actually a major geological difference between the riverbanks of Riga and the northernmost shores of the Baltic Provinces. So significant was this difference that Rosen's choice for a "characteristic landscape" for his third painting was the nearby chalk cliffs by Paldiski in Northern Estland. As we will discover, the unusual preponderance of stones across Estland Province would prove formative in later landscapes by Konrad Mägi.

Rosen's Impressionist vision of the Northern Estonian coast radically differed from his cityscapes. Jettisoning the panoramic view used for Riga and Tallinn, Rosen closely cropped his coastline image, emphasizing the soaring height of the cliffs as well as the variegating sizes and textures of the stones and earth in the right-hand corner. Rosen's dazzling arrays of shimmering blues, oscillating between aqua and turquoise tones in the sky and water, to the subtle mossy-green shadows on the cliffs, also distinguished this scene from the other two cityscapes, whose color schemes are more monotonous. Englehardt disliked the subject matter, finding medieval architecture to be a cliché representation of both cities. [507] Even worse, Englehardt

[507] Ibid.

thought, was the towering steeple of Oleviste church on the left of the painting, which dominates Tallinn's skyline to this day. Although an immediately recognizable element of the city, the church appeared here as miniscule and "unsightly."[508]

Englehardt blamed the overall failure of the project on Neumann. It would have been especially infuriating (if not also humiliating) for the director that this commentator also critiqued the medieval architecture of Rosen's cityscapes as passé. Neumann had dedicated much of his scholarly efforts to writing an architectural history of the Baltic Provinces, demonstrating the value and importance of its medieval and early modern heritage.[509] However, the popularity of medieval and early modern heritage of the Baltic Provinces as motifs in the visual arts had first risen to prominence almost a century earlier, when Baltic Germans raptured with "an obsession with local themes" sought to elevate architectural monuments and ruins to foster regional patriotism.[510] Despite or perhaps because of the medievalizing tendencies in vogue elsewhere in the years around 1900, Englehardt was disappointed that yet again another cliché of medieval architecture featured in Rosen's images of Riga and Tallinn.

But all was not lost. For Englehardt, Purvītis's contributions were the project's saving grace. By August 1907, Purvītis had only finished two of the three paintings: one depicted an autumnal scene of ruins in Koknese, and the other an

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[508] Ibid.
[509] Kristina Jõekalda, "Art History in Nineteenth-Century Estonia? Scholarly Endeavors in the Context of an Emerging Discpline," *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi* 24, no. 3-4 (2015): 115-149.
[510] Kristina Jõekalda, "Balti pärand ja maalilised varemed. Kujutav kunst kui kohalikkuse 'leiutamiseks'. Baltic Heritage and Picturesque Ruins. Visual Art as a Means of 'Inventing' the Local," *The Artist and Clio. History and Art in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Tiina-Mall Kreem (Tallinn: Kadrioru Kunstimuuseum, 2015), 426, 452.

evening cityscape of Jelgava, the capital of Kurland Province. In *Jelgava* (**Figure 4.6**), Purvītis presents a cropped view of a lonely moonlit market square cast in shadows. The gabled houses are pressed together at the foot of the bright church tower, as if sleepy and lost in dreams. On the right, a façade of a brown three-story building anchors the composition. Within the deep azure blues of the night sky and the interplay between brilliant moonlight and creeping shadow, Englehardt found "a fabulous silence in the picture, as if the soul of the small town has gone to sleep exactly at 10 PM."[511] This intimate, lyrical portrait of Jelgava was a drastic stylistic departure from the distant, impersonal, and generic views of Rosen's *Riga* and *Reval*, yet it was more up-to-date with contemporary artistic practice. Purvītis's *Jelgava* encapsulates the captivating, if not also ominous images of the evening city as an eerie mood pervades its empty and deserted streets. In doing so, the artist sought to evoke the "soul" of the town rather than rely on naturalist mimicry. Purvītis was able to achieve this modernizing approach in *Jelgava* even while portraying, at Neumann's behest, recognizable architecture, such as the city's church and town marketplace.

Purvītis's *Koknese Castle Ruins* (**Figure 4.7**) was equally evocative. A splendid autumn evening mood permeates the dramatic *Koknese Caste Ruins*. Englehardt's description of the painting was markedly sophisticated:

> In the air, the clouds still breed like fluttering, light robes, but down below the forest and castle slumber. The massive effect of the silhouette of the stronghold with the remains of the walls and the concentrated masses of trees on the left strengthen the steep descent on the right side of the castle and deepen the view of the distant forests on the horizon. This picture is wonderfully balanced, it is composed and has style. The torn movement in the air reinforces the impression of the landscape, and also the bends, which have become one with mountain and country. And just in the remains of the walls,

[511] Englehardt, "Die fresken."

> a further elimination of details is likely to heighten the effect: what has lasted for centuries has again become nature.[512]

The balanced composition was an especially welcome reprieve from Rosen's panoramic views of the Baltic capitals, which arguably had the effect of minimizing their architectural splendor rather than celebrating it. Although Rosen's seashore scene featured a more dramatic composition and balance than Purvītis's murals, it received no such commentary from Englehardt, raising questions about the author's biases. Englehardt was a key patron of Purvītis—one of the Baltic Germans Purvītis had alluded to in the 1905 press scandal—but Englehardt's relationship to and opinions of Rosen remain unknown. Nevertheless, Englehardt felt compelled to pit the two artists against each other, to Rosen's detriment. The dashes of red and orange on the trees Purvītis's *Koknese Castle Ruins* heightened the autumnal mood of the painting, which he appreciated in a contrast to the banal summery tone in Rosen's three paintings.

For his last image, Purvītis would paint a winter scene of a Kurland landscape (**Figure 4.8**). Here Purvītis deployed a panoramic view of the western countryside blanketed in snow. His style is indicative of a decorative turn in his approach to landscape.[513] We can see this decorative form in the dense masses of clumped trees in the foreground, in the slender, soaring birch trees, and even the sinuous curves in the interplay between shadow and light just at the door of the orange-roof houses on the left. Art historians have drawn Purvītis's stylistic decoration in *Kurland,* and his thematic emphasis on the cityscape of the soul in *Jelgava* as examples to demonstrate

[512] Ibid.
[513] Eduards Kļaviņš, *Vilhelms Purvītis* (Riga: Neputns, 2014), 55.

that Rosen's contributions "are not up to the quality of the nearby paintings by Purvītis."[514] Again we see a tendency in art historical scholarship which assumes stylistic innovation as the only indication of progress, and in doing so, elevates the work of a Latvian artist to more importance than that of his Baltic German contemporary. This also detracts from Rosen's use of similar forms and colors in his other works, such as his 1906 *Landscape with Body of Water*—note, for instance, the faint pinks cast by the setting sun over the melting snow juxtaposed with icy blues in the shadows against the winding river. For Kļaviņš, Purvītis's *Kurland* is indicative of the beginning of the "canon of the ideal 'Latvian' landscape."[515] But one detail in Purvītis's last mural painting creates intriguing questions about this "ideal."

When Purvītis created the museum murals at the Riga City Art Museum, he was still living in Tallinn, as if "banished" from Riga in the fallout of the press scandals of 1905. He would return to Riga only once he was offered a job as the director of the Riga City Art School in 1909. The occasions Purvītis spent in Riga to paint the murals were specific trips in relation to the museum's commissions. That Purvītis otherwise avoided Riga in these years is an important factor in understanding what I see as a subversive element in his otherwise innocuous painting of the winter countryside: the buildings. These buildings are part of Kazdanga palace, an area where Purvītis and Walter spent much time in the years between 1899 and 1905, and painted some of their most iconic works. Purvītis and Walter stayed at the Kazdanga palace at the behest of Baron Karl von Manteuffel, who would serve a major patron

[514] Kļaviņš, "Consolidation of Neo-Romanticist Modernism," 287.
[515] Kļaviņš, *Vilhelms Purvītis*, 55.

for both artists. However, Manteuffel would regretfully admit later in his life (while living in Nazi Germany) that he specifically supported outstanding non-German artists in the region in a colonizing endeavor to Germanize them—he even titled his memoirs *My Colonization Work in Kurland*.[516] Furthermore, the Kazdanga palace itself, which housed artworks by Walter and Purvītis, would be among the manor homes destroyed in the violent uprisings of the revolution. Why would Purvītis include these buildings, small as they may be, in his image of the landscape at the Riga City Art Museum?

Ābele has emphasized that Purvītis's *Kurland* mural "is not about buildings and the palace but about the undulating scenery with a wide vista, very specific to that area and epitomizing the beauty of [Kurland] for early-20th-century people, both Germans and Latvians."[517] What I want to claim about these buildings is not so much that they were the subject of or detract from the regionalist aims of the mural paintings, but rather that in their miniscule size in the composition, they functioned as a subversive, unnoticeable, and personal commentary on the national question. Baltic manor houses were an architectural manifestation of Baltic German elitism, long considered "foreign" to the region's indigenous inhabitants. It was for this reason that so many were destroyed in the heat of revolutionary turmoil. Purvītis's connection to the manorial elite, however, was obviously more complex. His winter scene undoubtedly fulfills "something quintessential in [Baltic peoples'] vision of the native country," as Ābele rightly claims, but we cannot ignore the fact that the small

[516] Karl von Manteuffel, *Meine Siedlungsarbeit in Kurland* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1941), 8. Quoted in Ābele, "Artistic Life," 103.
[517] Kristiāna Ābele, E-mail correspondence with the author, 15 February 2017.

buildings are the same area which revolutionaries, agitated by the injustices of the socialized racial hierarchy in the Baltics, gleefully destroyed. Since the houses are such a miniscule element of the mural, they eluded the attention of viewers then as they do now. Nevertheless, their inclusion suggests that Neumann's idea of unifying regionalism could not ease the area's multiethnic strife.

The murals of the Riga City Art Museum were riddled with problems because of the secretive nature of their creation. There was no open commission call, with a display of proposed sketches, nor a place for the public (or at least a committee of cultural attaches) to evaluate ideas beforehand.[518] The museum might have been deliberately quiet about the murals since it employed Purvītis, who still had a bad reputation among the city's Latvian intelligentsia. Whatever the reasons, the deliberate exclusion of public participation in the commissioning and creation of public monumental painting was, at least for Englehardt, "not customary in a land of culture." Instead, this secrecy suggested that regionalist *Heimat* landscape painting was increasingly out of touch with what the public wanted to see. After Englehardt's incisive critique, the Riga press seems to have never commented again on the murals, revealing that they either awoke little interest among the public, or that museum visitors were more interested in the actual displays in the museum, and the murals faded into the background (**Figure 4.9**). If landscape was supposed to be a unifying aesthetic genre, it was unable to foster collective belonging in the public sphere in the wake of 1905. Instead, artists such as Emīlija Gruzīte would chart an inward,

[518] Englehardt, "Die fresken."

individualist turn away from the concrete representation of land and nature and towards the mysterious nature of the soul.

Death Becomes Her: Emīlija Gruzīte's "Predilection Towards Mysticism"

After 1905, Emīlija Gruzīte also made a dramatic shift in her painterly practice, but unlike other artists, her development was not indebted to the political circumstances surrounding the revolution. Instead, we must understand her changes directly in tandem with her reception in the press, a relationship which quickly became rocky once she read the harsh review Jānis Poruks wrote about her painting *Broken Pines* in 1903. Devastated by the review, she wrote to her close friend, the esteemed poet and playwright Aspazija (Elza Pliekšāne, 1865-1943), asking her to defend it and explain the political context and literary sources of the work.[519] Aspazija was also the wife of Rainis, the author of the inspirational poem, and she had met Gruzīte when she and her husband, Alfreds, joined the office of *Dienas Lapa* to work as journalists. Gruzīte turned to Aspazija not only because she had influence as a towering literary figure in Riga or because she happened to be married to Rainis. Earlier in September, Aspazija had already publicly encouraged the support of Gruzīte when she announced her arrival on the Riga art scene:

> Latvian artists have already had to contend with horrible conditions, but they also have received help through stipends and loans. It is quite different with women. It is unheard of that any Latvian woman would have a received such benefits. In this respect, even if she is talented, she is not deemed worthy enough to resemble even a vocational student who studies for years, yet never receives allowance money. How many women also have to contend with

[519] Vanaga, "Sievietes mākslinieces," 214.

> family traditions and old prejudices, which deny even the smallest funds to compete with men and work and in careers?[520]

Aspazija was a formidable force in the fight for women's emancipation in the Baltic Provinces and as a prominent Latvian cultural figure herself, was highly aware of the intersections of gender and ethnicity and its associated privileges or stinging lack thereof.[521] Indeed, the struggles of a Latvian woman striving to be professional were not entirely synonymous with her Baltic German female contemporaries. Gender differences exacerbated the centuries-long systematic exclusion of Latvians and Estonians from suffrage and other basic rights for centuries. Nevertheless, it does not appear that Aspazija ever published anything in the press in defense of Gruzīte. She did, however, purchase *Broken Pines*, which remained in the possession of her shared estate with Rainis until it was donated to the Riga Museum of Literature and Art sometime after her death in 1943. If we read Gruzīte's choice of subject matter, visual language, and inspiration in *Broken Pines* against emerging Latvian feminisms in the early twentieth century, the painting does not merely declare a "nationalist" stance, but, more significantly, proclaims that a (Latvian) woman can assert a distinctive and valuable political voice in cultural realms, much as Aspazija herself would do in her own poetry and plays.[522]

The *Dienas Lapa* circle was one of the most politically progressive Latvian collectives in Riga, becoming a bastion of Marxism and Social Democracy in the

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[520] Aspazija, "Latviešu gleznieciībā pieradies klāt jauns spēks," *Dienas Lapa*, 4 September 1903.
[521] On the emancipation of Latvian women in literary spheres, see Linda Kusiņa, "Sieviešu jautājums un sievietes tēls latviešu rakstniecībā 1870-1920," Ph.D. diss., University of Latvia, 2013; in art, Baiba Vanaga, "Sieviešu emancipācija Latvijā un diskusijas par sieviešu pievēršanos profesionālajai darbībai," in her dissertation, 95-112, and in history generally, Vita Zelče, *Nezināmā: Latvijas sievietes 19. gadsimta otrajā pusē* (Rīga: Latvijas Arhīvistu biedrība, 2002).
[522] Astrida B. Stahnke, *Aspazija: Her Life and Her Drama* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984).

early twentieth century and championing complete Latvian cultural autonomy from Baltic German and Russian spheres. This was the same paper which would embroil Purvītis in scandal two years later in 1905. The fact Gruzīte and Aspazija also worked together as journalists in this newspaper has been mentioned in passing, but, I argue, it played a crucial role in Gruzīte's self-fashioning. It was in the offices of *Dienas Lapa* where Gruzīte held her first exhibition in 1903. It is also likely the site of a rare, enigmatic photograph of the artist dated the same year (**Figure 4.10**)

At first glance, we see a recumbent nude woman on a floral patterned lounge. Behind her are an array of small landscape studies in oil nailed to the wooden wall paneling, framing ten photographs of people, presumably close colleagues and friends. One specific photograph captures our attention, placed in an ornate frame of sinuous, botanical Art Nouveau curves, with blossoming flowers on the top. Once we notice the paintings attached to the wall, it becomes obvious that the figure is holding a palette and three paintbrushes, begging us to consider if she painted these pictures. The paintbrushes in her hand point directly to her collarbone, where we notice a cross necklace dangling from her neck. This symbol of piety, innocence, purity, and demure interiority aligns with the styling of her hair, relatively in order and pulled back into a pompadour, contrasting greatly with her stark nudity. Cheekily, Gruzīte avoids our gaze, furrowing her brow ever so slightly as she stares out into the distance, holding an awkward pose for the camera. It is needless to say that Gruzīte's pose is reminiscent of recumbent odalisque figures, but she does not lay here passively. Gruzīte's confused face indicates the confoundedness around her dual status in the photograph, holding a palette and brush like the artist subject while

sitting naked and exposed as an alluring artist's model. In her positioning, Gruzīte challenges us to consider what is at stake when a woman's desires and professional ambitions conflict with social expectations.

The deliberately staged nature of this photograph is ever more apparent as we examine the photographs and paintings behind her. Upon closer inspection, we can identify the man portrayed in the ornate decorative frame: it is none other than Vilhelms Purvītis, Gruzīte's rumored teacher (much to his chagrin!). The fact that the six images attached to the wall are all landscape studies was likely no coincidence. Given the prominent position of the photograph of Purvītis, and that it sits on top of an elevated object, perhaps a dresser draped in fabric, it appears that what Gruzīte created was a makeshift altar to the artist.

Gruzīte may have drawn inspiration for this staged photograph from a poster advertising an exhibition of the Riga Art Society in 1901 (**Figure 4.11**). The poster depicts a nude white woman applying her paintbrush onto an empty white canvas. Her reddish-brown hair is pulled back and away from her face in a bun, with a strand dangling on her cheek. Behind her, a green sun illuminates the scene as decorative, dark soaring poplars frame the image. Underneath her, stylized flower buds sit poised on snaky black vines, ready to burst through the soil and bloom once the painting is complete. The designer of the poster presumably chose to depict a nude painting woman to advertise the show because the 1901 salon would be the debut for six (Baltic German) women who had just returned to Riga from their studies abroad: Eva Margarete Schweinfurth (later Borchert), Anna Hellmann, Martha Hellmann, Frieda

Neumann, Hildegard von Haken and Thekla Stahl.[523] Much as Gruzīte emulated centuries-old imagery of odalisques in her photograph, so too does this poster reify the well-worn trope of a generic, idealized nude white woman as an allegory of art and beauty. That the poster transforms this ideal into a creative force must have seemed particularly absurd to the women in the city aspiring to become professionals, not because it was uncommon for them to do so, but because the image was likely created by a man. Although the author of the poster is unknown, one can be confident in this deduction when one compares the poster with a definite example of women's own self-representation (**Figure 4.12**). Anna von Wahl (1861-1935), a Baltic German painter living in Tartu later renowned for her "enchanting" and "delicate" landscapes, was part of the Society for Women Artists while living briefly in Berlin.[524] Sometime between 1897 and 1901, Wahl created a poster for one of the Society's exhibitions. The difference between the Riga and Berlin posters is startling. In Wahl's poster, a woman stands confident and tall, gazing directly at the viewer as she firmly holds the paintbrush in her hand. Unlike the woman in the Riga poster, Wahl's artist is, of course, fully clothed, here in a peach-colored smock with an orange pastel smattered with yellow, blue, and white paint, and her hair a slightly more saturated orange. The fact that the figure occupies so much space in the image emphasizes the professionalism to be expected from the works displayed at the Berlin show. Gruzīte presumably never saw Wahl's poster, but the difference it articulates in the (self)representation of a professional artist is revealing of the gendered biases at play

[523] Ābele, "Artistic Life," 69. For more on these artists specifically, see Vanaga, "Sievietes mākslinieces," 167-176, 182-185.
[524] Rein Loodus, *Kunstielu Eesti linnades, 1900-1918* (Tartu: Greifi Trükikoda, 1993), 61-62.

in Riga and elsewhere across the Baltic Provinces.

There may be another layer in Gruzīte's potential inspiration from the Riga Art Society exhibition poster. The Society's exhibitions at the Basteja Boulevard apartment was where Purvītis regularly exhibited and where he made his Riga debut in 1899. Purvītis, as we know, was not pleased with the incessant rumors circulating in the press that he was Gruzīte's mentor. An ambitious and determined woman, Gruzīte created a fake altar with Latvia's darling landscapist at its center, as if to suggest that the blessing of Purvītis was the only necessity on the path to become a professional artist. With palette and paintbrushes in hand, and the surrounding small landscape studies as testament to her skill, Gruzīte imitates the naked painting woman endorsed by Riga's official art associations in a biting visual satire on the boundaries between women's professional ambitions and their social expectations. In the liberal atmosphere of the *Dienas Lapa* editorial space, Gruzīte, with her sardonic expression, would have met encouragement from Aspazija and other progressive colleagues. If the photograph was indeed connected in some way to the newspaper, it reveals a harbored resentment of Vilhelms Purvītis at the newspaper long before the scandal broke out under the auspices of the revolution in 1905.

Gruzīte's whereabouts and activity during the upheavals of 1905-1906 remain unknown, but she began exhibiting works in Riga again in 1907. What Gruzīte exhibited is also a mystery, but her show received brutal critiques in the Latvian press, especially from Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš, who scoffed, "I do hope the ancient prophets will not resent me, but with a sound conscious, I must say that the people will never await foretold women artists because a weak dilettante will never exceed

the threshold – If Emīlija Gruzīte does not believe me, be noble and show me with your works."[525] Gruzīte, of course, did not hold back, saying she simply could not take the critique seriously because it was too generic and did not focus on specific artworks or concrete problems: "If I display my works out in public, of course I am not afraid of serious critique, harsh as it may be. […] I urge you to show me the mistakes, if there even are any," she snapped.[526] "The entire exhibition was a mistake," Jaunsudrabiņš replied.[527] Gruzīte never responded.

Baiba Vanaga has suggested that this second wave of brutal criticism encouraged Gruzīte to step out of the spotlight as an artist and focus on her career in journalism. In 1909 she would move with her husband to Kuldīga in the western countryside, where they would work on the editorial board of the paper *Kuldīgas Vēstniesis*. Vanaga has argued that her retreat from painting suggests that art was more of a hobby conducted in her free time.[528] But the difficulty Gruzīte faced did not discourage her from art making completely. In fact, while she was living in Kuldīga, Gruzīte would channel her trials and tribulations into completing her most compelling extant work, *Fantastic Landscape* (**Figure 4.13**)

In *Fantastic Landscape,* a canvas of misty lavenders, dark cobalts, and dashes of periwinkle, we see a series of clustered, vertical column-like forms topped with spheres. These ambiguous forms assume anthropomorphic proportions, bathed in the shimmering silver light of the moon. Gruzīte framed the scene with dark soaring

[525] Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš, "Emīlijas Gruzīt gleznu izstāde," *Latvija,* 21 December 1907.
[526] Emīlija Gruzīte, "Emīlijas Gruzīt gleznu izstādes lietā," *Latvija,* 27 December 1907.
[527] Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš, "Godāto redakciju lūdzu nodrukāt šo paskaidrojumu," *Latvija,* 2 January 1908.
[528] Vanaga, "Sievietes mākslinieces," 215. Vanaga comes to this conclusion because museums collected so little of her works, but exhibition records and newspaper articles suggest she created many artworks.

poplars, trees found at cemeteries and synonymous with death. This connection to death is heightened in the immediate foreground, where the steep stony stairs, speckled with iridescent jewel tones, recall the poplar-framed entrance of Arnold Böcklin's well-known *Island of the Dead* (**Figure 4.15**). Böcklin's painting would become famous almost immediately upon its completion in 1880 and would inspire artists for almost forty more years.[529] Böcklin entered Gruzīte's orbit when the Riga Art Society sponsored a show dedicated to him in Riga in 1903. Janis Rozentāls also wrote an in-depth essay on the significance of Böcklin in the respected Latvian art magazine *Vērotājs* that same year.[530] What made Böcklin's mournful painting so endearing was the simplicity of its stoic, melancholic mood; it was famously known as "a landscape over which one could dream."[531] A single, rocky island appears like a somber monument rising from silent waters. A forested grove of poplars shrouded in dark shadow awaits a bereaved wife, who travels with her beloved for the last time. What exactly is among these dark poplars on this island of the dead, however, remains enticingly ambiguous. If Gruzīte was aware of Böcklin's famous painting, her own *Fantastic Landscape* may be an exploration of the island's ominous interior, revealing precisely the area most concealed in Böcklin's painting. This connection to Böcklin is important not merely because it demonstrates her sophisticated awareness of Symbolist art trends—in its ambiguity and opaque references, Gruzīte's canvas is a

[529] Radosław Okulicz-Kozaryn, "Predilection of Modernism for Variations: Čiurlionis's *Serenity* among the Different Developments of the Theme of *Toteninsel*," *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis* 59 (2010): 93.
[530] Janis Rozentāls, "Arnolds Beklins," *Vērotājs* 2 (1903): 236-243.
[531] Michelle Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 58-59.

Symbolist landscape *par excellence*—but more importantly, this connection foregrounds the importance of death.

Themes of death, decadence, and degeneration permeated the Symbolist musings of artists in the Baltic Provinces as elsewhere across the globe, but rarely in the Baltic context did it take the form of landscape imagery. Gruzīte may have drawn her decorative color scheme from the late landscapes of Arkhip Kuindzhi, Purvītis's main teacher in St. Petersburg, or the even the lilac-colored crystalline forms of Mikhail Vrubel. The only contemporary painters in the Baltic Provinces to depict such melancholic landscapes were the Latvian artists Pēteris Krastiņš and Rūdolfs Pērle, neither of whom would exhibit similar works until 1911.[532] Art historians have suggested the otherworldly paintings of Lithuanian composer and artist Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis as a possible point of inspiration for Gruzīte.[533] Čiurlionis's 1905-1906 *Creation of the World VI* (**Figure 4.16**) similarly features periwinkle stony cliffs and semi-botanical beings rising from primordial waters. Čiurlionis's works were included at an exhibition of Lithuanian art in Riga in 1910, which Gruzīte may have seen if she had traveled from her Kuldīga country home to the bustling Baltic metropolis that spring. But Gruzīte's *Fantastic Landscape* differs from Čiurlionis's work in its focus on death rather than creation. Gruzīte's shimmering anthropomorphic figures are rigidly petrified, frozen at the entrance of a forest of crystalline lavender stalagmites. Thus, within the context of her Baltic

[532] In Baiba Vanaga's dissertation on women artists living in the territory of Latvia between 1850 and 1915, only one other artwork out of the 279 examined, concerns death, and it is a 1909 print of a skull by Sonny Brutzer.
[533] Vanaga, "Sievietes mākslinieces," 215; Okulicz-Kozaryn, "Predilection of Modernism," 94-95.

contemporaries, Gruzīte's landscape is outstanding in its innovation and originality, a feature which critics initially lauded in her works back in 1903.

If Böcklin's *Island of the Dead* inspired Gruzīte in her subject matter, it certainly did not influence her style. This divergence is most notable in the thick impasto of the painterly periwinkle strokes which comprise the frozen crystalline figures. A similar dappled technique continues in the foreground of the painting, but in horizontal dabs. Upon closer inspection, there is a dazzling array of nuances in the iridescent colors decorating the surface, oscillating between pinkish lavenders, mute violets, and just the slightest hint of sky blues. Her forms in the lavender columns in the back are noticeably bulkier, suggesting that this endless fantastical forest may be more geological than botanical, more inanimate than pulsating with life. By viewing her application of paint more closely, we can see an utter lack of blended color (**Figure 4.14**). Instead, some brushstrokes clearly demonstrate where she had just recently mixed her brush with light sky blue with traces of dark purple remaining. One may argue that these unblended strokes evince Gruzīte's struggle with color balance and harmony, which critics had once pointed out before as an issue with her competency in oil painting. But to assume some sort of naiveté on Gruzīte's part functions as a way to dismiss her accomplishments and the seriousness with which she practiced her craft. Though gendered biases explain why some critics may have scoffed at such style, her subtle gradation of muted pastel colors and loss of contour is precisely what creates the shimmering jewel tones of this otherworldly scene, further emphasizing its mystery.

In a pioneering 1936 article about the first Latvian female painters, then doctoral candidate Ženija Sūna-Peņģerote stated that Emīlija Gruzīte had a "predilection towards mysticism," and a now-lost spring landscape she exhibited in 1904 was painted "in decadent colors."[534] Here Sūna-Peņģerote deliberately connects Gruzīte's artworks to Symbolist aesthetics. If we acknowledge the dominant tones of Gruzīte's palette as on a spectrum of blues—from midnight cobalts to diaphanous lilacs—the idea of "decadent colors" may become clearer. Art historian John Bowlt has isolated blue, when painted with a lack of contours and without strict linear definition, as a particularly evocative and ethereal color among Gruzīte's contemporaries in St. Petersburg, such as Pavel Kuznetsov (**Figure 4.17**).[535] On a similar spiritual level, Wassily Kandinsky would describe blue as having "a centrifugal movement (like a snail retreating into its shell) and moves away from you."[536] But what does it mean to call these colors decadent? According to Michelle Facos, decadence was the pessimistic branch of Symbolism, the one that believed the world to be "enmeshed in a hopeless downward spiral," whereas the more optimistic side of Symbolism saw salvation in the natural and supernatural world.[537] I argue that what Emīlija Gruzīte created with her range of colors in *Fantastic Landscape* intertwines Symbolism's poles of pessimism and optimism.

Emīlija Gruzīte's "predilection towards mysticism" was likely an acknowledgment of her interests in spiritualism, theosophy, and the occult. In the

[534] Ženija Sūna-Peņģerote, "Pirmās latviešu gleznotājas," *Sieviete*, 1 June 1936.
[535] John Bowlt, *Moscow & St. Petersburg 1900-1920: Art, Life, and Culture* (New York: Vendome Press, 2008), 212.
[536] Ibid, 212.
[537] Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context*, 65-66, 91.

decades around 1900, such developments as the discovery of microbes and electrical currents illuminating the night created an urgency to understand the mysteries of invisible realities. Many sought solace in the porous boundaries between science and spirituality, and theosophy offered a compelling path forward into the unknown. Theosophy aimed to reveal the essence of occult truths through a syncretic blend of belief systems from around the world, but its impetus derived from American spiritualists in the 1870s, who claimed they saw evidence of life after death through encounters with spirits of the deceased. In her 1888 *Secret Doctrine*, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, one of the founders of Theosophy, argued that science and religion were united in their simultaneous "yearning of the imprisoned human soul for intercourse with supernal spheres."[538] Theosophy thus expanded upon the ideas of spiritualists and the notion of life after death, and specifically offered a variety of possibilities for reincarnation.

Augusts Baltpurviņš's 1905 short story "Austra" was the first time ideas of the occult were made available in Latvian.[539] As a journalist and someone keenly interested in mysticism, Gruzīte would have likely read the story in the popular monthly *Mājas Viesis*. The story recounts the love problems of a young woman, Austra, who becomes intrigued by the possibility of contact with the afterlife. Confounded by the elaborate Russian prose of Andrei Belyi's "Symphonies," she asks her friend Arturs, "What does it mean that everything repeats in eternity?" "That not everything is lost in death," he responded. Arturs explains the idea of

[538] Ibid, 101-103.
[539] Anita Stašulāne, "Teosofijas un antroposofijas ietekme: latviešu un krievu literatūra 19. gs. beigās un 20. gs. sākumā," *Salīdzinošā literatūrzinātne Austrumeiropā un pasaulē. Teorijas un interpretācijas* (Riga: Latvijas Univertātes raksti, Literatūras un folkloristika zinātne, 2005), 10.

reincarnation to Austra: "Just as a master melts old, useless metals and pours them into new forms, so does nature—eternity—forge old individuals into a single mass, out of which new beings are formed." [540] She ponders what life could be reincarnated as other beings, a grass snake slithering across the earth, or as a blossoming flower, but ultimately remains skeptical of the idea. Later, as Austra realizes the toll her harmful relationship has taken on her psyche, making her feel weak, powerless, and undesirable, she reads of her former lover's later misfortunes, smiles hopefully, and the story ends as she dives into Andrei Belyi's "Symphonies." Her choice to seek salvation and redemption in the secrets of spiritualism, the afterlife, and the possibilities of reincarnation, ensconced in elaborate and deliberately opaque Russian prose, reveals the liberating possibilities of an intellectual inward turn towards the self and critical thinking about death. On a larger cultural plane, Baltpurviņš's story recalls the topical struggle of women's emancipation, and reveals how deep intellectual engagement offered an enlightening and liberating path from oppressive realities which gendered social roles had normalized. Gruzīte may have found a kindred spirit in the character of Austra, not in a desire to liberate herself from the chains of romantic desire, but in seeking solace in the spiritualist possibilities of the afterlife and the alternative world it offered. In this sense, we can read Gruzīte's *Fantastic Landscape* as an otherworldly liminal zone, precisely that area where reincarnation may take place, casting these ghostly figures not as macabre entities of death and destruction, but crystalline cocoons of rebirth. For Gruzīte, such a place,

[540] Augusts Baltpurviņš, "Austra," *Mājas Viesa Mēnešraksts*, 1 March 1905, 191.

although dark and ominous, was not terrifyingly grotesque, but rather beguiling in its mystery and beauty.

Gruzīte constantly faced critics who misunderstood her paintings, doubted her talent, and dismissed her as a dilettante. In truth, we should not be surprised by her tenacity in returning to painting after constant dismissal. In her sardonic self-fashioning in photography and her open attitude towards public critique in the press, Gruzīte was insistent and resilient in demonstrating the legitimacy of her professional ambitions and her drive to improve as an artist. That many of her contemporaries maintained that she was a mere copyist and amateur bespeaks the gendered biases of the Baltic art world because such criticism elides the fact that Gruzīte's *Fantastic Landscape* boldly departs from many of her Baltic contemporaries in form and content. Even the most recent art historical scholarship similarly echoes a narrative of the artist as an overzealous self-promoter, and fail to take her seriously. It is therefore surprising that feminist revisions of Baltic art history are unaware of the fact that Gruzīte was the only woman of her era in the Baltic Provinces to engage so thoroughly with the sophisticated, thorny, and contradictory ideas within Symbolism. Indeed, Gruzīte's *Fantastic Landscape*, like many Symbolist works, contains a multitude of intertwined meanings that were available in differing degrees to the painting's various viewers. Taking cues from Jacqueline Francis, I suggest that Gruzīte's Symbolist ambiguity approached the highest level of creativity and modernist experimentation possible within the traditional convention of landscape painting, without verging into complete abstraction. As such, Gruzīte's *Fantastic Landscape* is a testament to the possibilities of what the "native landscape" could be,

leaving open whether it even had to be native at all. Moreover, if Gruzīte's painting was not "national," it was not "international" by default. Her specific engagement with and commentary on the Baltic landscape canon as developed by Purvītis evinces her ultimate rejection of overtly native subject matter. Deeming a work such as *Fantastic Landscape* as "international" in its impulses is harmfully ambiguous, obfuscating her complicated relationship with the Baltic art scene. Instead, Gruzīte's work prompts us to question her connection to Symbolism more globally, as well as the gendered spaces of the local Baltic art establishment. Gruzīte's "predilection towards mysticism" heralded a new direction in what landscape painting could do, moving decisively away from the generic collectivism of *Heimat* painting towards a personal, internal space of spiritual contemplation, a landscape of the soul.

"Are They Not Alive?" Konrad Mägi's Micro-Ecologies

By 1914, the critic Friedrich von Stryk had reached his limits with the darker, decadent musings of Baltic artists. After the latest exhibition of Estonian art in Tallinn, he joyfully remarked, "It is a particular pleasure to see such refreshing, positive art just when pessimism threatens to poison it."[541] Stryk's comments referred to the exuberant colors of the sunny island landscapes the painter Konrad Mägi had created during the blustery summer days on the islands of Saaremaa and Vilsandi earlier that year. Stryk commended how Mägi "depicts the beaches of our homeland in crisp, resplendent colors, everything complete in the radiance of the sun, in the

[541] Friedrich von Stryk, "Meie kunsti elu," *Vaba Sõna* (Tartu: Noor-Eesti trükk, 1914), 104.

clear, cool air as if he endows our Northern summer with an invigorating power."[542] In his painting *Vilsandi* (**Figure 4.18**), named after one of the islands, such colors correspond to the electric flashes of pinks in the clouds, brilliant white sand juxtaposed with layers of red sandwiched among deep violet tones, the speckles of orange and purple dotting the stony shore, and even the astonishing array of blues in the water. Konrad Mägi's modernist landscapes of Estonian nature saturated in exuberant hues has made the artist a household name across Estonia. Scholars likewise consider his paintings "one of the most important cornerstones of Estonia's pictorial identity."[543] In this respect, Mägi maintains the same reputation in Estonia as Purvītis does in Latvia, in that the landscape paintings of both artists are intimately interwoven with a national school. Even more so than Purvītis, Mägi decidedly avoided the national question, but he never seemed to face the consequences of his choices in the same way his Latvian colleague did. One of the reasons for this discrepancy is that Konrad Mägi was of a younger generation than Purvītis, and would not make his Baltic debut until 1910. Between 1904 and 1912, Mägi worked outside of the Baltic Provinces, and thus he played no role whatsoever in the formation of art education opportunities, societies, and exhibition venues for ethnic Estonians. By the time Mägi displayed his first canvases to the Baltic public in 1910, there were already "Estonian" exhibitions separated from touring regional Baltic shows. Mägi was thus never enmeshed in Baltic German patronage to the same extent, nor did he need to be, as Purvītis had been just a few years earlier.

[542] Ibid, 104.
[543] Eero Epner, *Kuldaja värvid. Eesti maalikunst Enn Kunila kogust* (Tallinn: Sperare, 2014), 20.

Ever since the first monograph on Konrad Mägi was published in 1932, scholars have been careful to distance Mägi from the national aspirations of the majority of his compatriots. Instead, they cite his singular confluence of various modernist styles and the artist's cosmopolitan nature as an indication of the international relevance of his paintings. In her timeless 1979 monograph on Mägi, Evi Pihlak argues that it was Mägi's "international attitude and translation of slightly Frenchified painterly problems" that distanced his works from the prevailing development of a national artistic ethos.[544] Simultaneously, Pihlak stresses that "Mägi was the first artist who dared to approach our rather gray and timid nature with the tools of twentieth-century modern art, discovering an unexpected treasure trove of picturesque value."[545] Paradoxically, researchers and curators celebrate Mägi's national indifference to the native landscape as an admirable virtue, while also maintaining the importance of his paintings as they revealed "the local peculiarity" of Estonian nature in manner unforeseen to his contemporaries.[546] Seeking to escape the quicksand of these national-international, local-global binaries, Eero Epner has urged us to consider Mägi instead through his innovation within the principles of modernist art, thereby focusing first and foremost on the painter's "colors, composition, light and touch"—the exact opposite appraisal for Gruzīte.[547] Such a formalist approach, however, ignores what I consider to be the most fundamental aspect of Konrad Mägi's paintings: his connection to nature.

[544] Evi Pihlak, *Konrad Mägi* (Tallinn: Kunst, 1979), 80.
[545] Ibid, 80.
[546] Ibid, 80.
[547] Epner, *Kuldaja värvid*, 20.

Landscape would remain central to Konrad Mägi as he forged a career as a professional artist. Mägi spent most of his life constantly returning to nature as an unending, powerful source of inspiration, but his interaction with and understanding of the natural world remains surprisingly poorly understood. To that end, critics did, of course, understand the stylistic innovations and distinctive appearance of Konrad Mägi's paintings. Indeed, as the art critic Hanno Kompus declared in 1916, "no one had seen our landscape with such eyes before."[548] Far beyond praising Mägi's treatment of "Estonian" nature, Kompus instead suggested that what Mägi had seen exactly was "the landscape's secret life."[549]

Outside of the Baltic context, art historians have begun to question preconceived ideas of the representation of land as merely emblematic of nature as nation, turning instead towards such critical issues as conservation and animal rights in the visual arts. This turn has spawned ecocritical art history. For American art historian Alan Braddock, ecocritical art history stems from the methods of ecocriticism, which emphasizes ecological interconnectedness, sustainability, and environmental justice in cultural interpretation.[550] This environmental turn has also infiltrated Baltic studies, creating what Ulrike Plath has called the "greening" of Baltic history.[551] Plath has argued that environmental approaches can provide incredible insight into the colonial dimensions of Baltic history and transcend

[548] Hanno Kompus, "Eesti kujutav kunst 1916," *EKS-i Aastar*. (Tartu: IX, 1917).
[549] Ibid.
[550] Alan Braddock, "From Nature to Ecology: The Emergence of Ecocritical Art History," *A Companion to American Art*, ed. John Davis, Jennifer Greenhill, and Jason D. LaFountain (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 447-467
[551] Ulrike Plath, "Food from the Garden: Greening the Baltic History of Modernity," Rachel Carson Center Lunchtime Colloquium, 15 January 2015.

national divisions of ethnicity or language. Given that Konrad Mägi produced a vast number of his landscapes outside of Estonia—such as in the Norwegian countryside, the Normandy coast, and Italian islands—most of his artworks are typically not read through the lens of nature as nation. However, even these works bound Mägi to national narratives today through curatorial venues. Through the celebration of his style and constant discussion of his genius, he becomes the posterchild for Estonian art, the Estonian master *par excellence*. His landscapes and even portraiture are trumpeted for the promotion of the nation and of Estonianness both in Estonia and abroad, despite his consistent avoidance of the national question.[552] I do not want to suggest that I disagree with the scholars who have written on Konrad Mägi. On the contrary, I find their studies incredibly nuanced and sophisticated. Rather, I aim to build on their works, and reveal enticing new dimensions to and potential alternate readings of seemingly well understood artworks. I argue here that Konrad Mägi's early landscapes are specifically informed by contemporaneous currents in ecology, geology, nature conservation, and, to a lesser extent, that most visual of scientific tools, the microscope. Reading Konrad Mägi's early paintings through an ecocritical lens is not merely an effort to nuance ideas of the nation, but a critical and urgent method to tease out the deep and heretofore ignored environmental impulses of turn-of-the-century Baltic culture.[553]

[552] Even I have deployed Konrad Mägi's landscapes for such purposes in my catalogue *Conductors of Colour: Music and Modernity in Estonian Art* (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstimuuseum, 2016), 10-11, 16, 22-23, 28-29.

[553] I have expanded ideas for the possibilities of ecocritical art history, but do not address the works of Konrad Mägi in my article, "Living Stones and Other Beings: Earthen Ecologies within Baltic Visual Culture, 1860-1915," *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi* 27, no.1-3 (2018): 107-129.

Our story begins in 1908, when Konrad Mägi found himself stranded in Norway. Having suddenly run out of money during a short trip to Oslo, Mägi was too poor to even afford a trip back to Paris, where he was hoping to continue previous studies. Instead, the young artist stayed in Norway for two years. The artist's letters reveal little about his paintings, focusing instead on his struggle to make ends meet. Many letters suggest the dire straits of his situation, and he often felt as though he was sitting at death's door: "It is hard to know whether or not I am dead, since I certainly am not alive."[554] Despite what he may have discussed with his friends and patrons, this two-year sojourn in Norway was also one of Mägi's most creatively productive periods, where he variously experimented with Neoimpressionist brushwork, the sinuous curves of Art Nouveau stylization, Symbolist evocation, and brilliant color palettes. It was in Norway where Mägi became a full-fledged artist.

Mägi's *Norwegian Landscape with Pine* (**Figure 4.19**) is the artist's most famous work from this period. With blazing colors, a bold sense of stylization and ornamental—almost "cellular"—structures, Mägi radically individualized his approach to the landscape. His pines are not towering stoic trees of eternity. Instead, they possess a degree of sinuous elasticity, with one tree snaking diagonally across the foreground. Even more striking is Mägi's color palette, here with saturated blue lakes, hunter green clusters of pine needles against a searing orange background, and streams of lavender dispersed among stylized orange, yellow, pink and white clouds. Until then, this palette was hardly associated with Nordic landscapes. Mägi cultivated a distinctive and individual style in the paintings from his Norwegian sojourn.

[554] Rudolf Paris, *Konrad Mägi* (Tartu: Ed. Roosi Kirjastus, 1932), 34.

Scholars often talk about his painterly practice in this period as being "ornamental," likely indebted to the original 1910 reviews from Norwegian critics, who commented on the "plastic power" of the artist's landscapes, and how the works' "stylized forms evoked a decorative feeling."[555] With his decoration, however, Mägi accomplished more than an adherence to stylistic trends.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Mägi's early landscapes is his grid of interconnected spherical shapes and multicolored cellular structures, all characterized by three colored sections: a bold color outline, a secondary, more muted layer, and a small dot in the center. These shapes also appear in another painting produced around the same time called *Norwegian Landscape (Bog Landscape)* (**Figure 4.20**). Closer inspection of this second landscape reveals that even elements of water in *Norwegian Landscape (Bog Landscape)* are full of these colorful, circular forms. Indeed, in both of these paintings, Mägi imbues all of his clouds, mountains, stones, trees, and leaves with these repetitive multicolored cellular shapes, which suggests an interconnectivity between the different elements of the natural world. These elements beg the questions: what are these forms, why do they look like cells, and where might Mägi have drawn the inspiration to depict nature in this manner?

The winding lines and otherworldly array of kaleidoscopic colors, ranging from dark olive greens to pastel pinks, have led some scholars to believe that his paintings are likely a mystical mirage or an evocation of an emotional experience rather than a stylized reworking of a reality.[556] Instead, I contend that the key to

[555] "Eesti kunst Norra näitusel," *Postimees*, 5 May 1910.
[556] Pihlak, *Konrad Mägi*, 55.

understanding what Mägi accomplished with his brazen colors and bold stylization lies in the titles of his paintings. Since these landscapes were painted in Norway, art historians have viewed these works as emblematic of so-called cult of the North which developed among the native Baltic intelligentsia at the turn of the century.[557] What Baltic artists admired about Norway was that it achieved international acclaim specifically through its high culture. The plays of Henrik Ibsen and the music of Edvard Grieg contributed to this popularity. In the visual arts, Edvard Munch, Christian Krohg, and Erik Werenskiold were the clear champions of Norwegian culture. Not only did Norwegians create popular culture, but they *exported* it to Europe rather than absorbing it from the continent. As critic Bernhard Linde argued in the journal *Eesti Kodu* in 1910, "we [Estonians] must curiously examine the successful cultural developments of this small people" who had just attained independence from Sweden in 1905.[558] However, prioritizing the importance of the cultural exchange between Nordic and Baltic cultures in this period similarly keeps Konrad Mägi's Norwegian landscapes mired in a broader idea of cultural nationalism. What is important about the title of these paintings is not that they speak to this cultural connection, but rather to a specific place. If we examine these paintings through the lens of ecocritical art history, we must prioritize the ecologies of the landscapes Mägi painted, which require us to understand the environmental realities of the region. This understanding will in turn reveal—in a departure from all other

[557] Kersti Koll, *Eesti kunstnikud Põhjamaades* (Tallinn: Eesti Pank, 2007).
[558] Bernhard Linde, "Wäikesed läbilõiked Norra kunstist," *Eesti Kodu* 17 (1910): 351.

scholarship on the artist—that these canvases were created from deep engagement with and observation of the natural world.

Mägi bathed his rugged landscapes in a searing orange light, eternalizing the ephemeral and evanescent nature of Nordic dusk, perhaps even recalling Edvard Munch's acidic combinations of swirling reds and oranges. But these kaleidoscopic colors are far from fantastical; they have a specific ecological origin in the Northern climes of Norway: lichen. Deeply incised fjords and vast rugged mountain ranges characterize some of Norway's most distinctive landscapes, which include dramatic topographical (and cultural) differences between the sea and agricultural coastal areas and the country's mountainous interior.[559] Mägi never painted coastal areas in Norway, and many Norwegian paintings feature valleys and mountain ranges. In the high altitudes of the country's desolate rocky outcrops, cliffs, and mountains, one of the most abundant life forms is lichen, leading some to declare Norway as a "land of lichen" as it is home to 2,000 of the world's 16,000 different species.[560] There is an incredible diversity of colors within these two thousand species, and one of the most visually striking variants in the mountainous forests of Scandinavia is the glowing orange microalgae known locally as *violstensalg* (literally, violet stone algae), in Latin as *trentopohlia*, a threadlike algae which has evolved from an aqueous existence to persist on the humidity in the air (**Figure 4.21**). Although it is most common in tropical areas, it also appears especially on stones across Norway,

[559] Michael Jones, "The 'Two Landscapes' of North Norway and the 'Cultural Landscape' of the South," *Nordic Landscapes: Region and Belonging on the Northern Edge of Europe*, eds. Michael Jones and Kenneth R. Olwig (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 283-299.
[560] Skjalg Woldstad, "Høy kunnskap om lav," *Forskning.no*, 17 September 2012, accessed 20 February 2017.

Sweden, and Finland. Biologists believe this specific alga derives its orange or burnt red glow from carotenoids in fatty cells, which function as a storage of nutrients—the color disappears when the alga dies.[561] Upon closer inspection, stones covered in *violstensalg* also house smaller, grayish specks. In a zoomed photograph of one such stone (**Figure 4.22**), we can see a faint gray circular form ensconced in another white circle in a sea of blazing orange—the same multicolored ovoid cellular shapes Mägi painted in his landscapes. These three colors represent the symbiosis of fungi and algae which create lichen.

In their miniscule size, lichen require close examination in order to be understood properly. The artist's fascination with lichen evinces a deeper interest in micro-ecologies, and the persistence of life on rugged, inhospitable terrain. What is remarkable about these landscapes is that Mägi created an intimate snapshot of these micro-ecologies, rejecting the otherwise predominant panoramic views of nature in the Nordic countries. His tendency to paint close-up views of the region's colorful topography in the foreground evokes subtle mysteries of local moss, fungi, and lichen. The difference of Mägi's cropped, intimate view becomes especially apparent in comparison with the works of Swedish painter Helmer Osslund, who painted areas of Northern Sweden under similar latitudinal and topographical conditions (**Figures 4.23**). Osslund deployed a panoramic format in order to celebrate the grandeur of the wilderness of Sweden's northernmost province, a technique inherited from a National Romantic tradition of artists who strove to represent the beauty and distinctive culture

[561] Monika Myrdahl, "*Trentopohlia.* Röda grönalger på land," *Månadens kryptogram* 3, no. 11 (1999), Naturhistoriska Riksmuseet.

of their native land.[562] Instead, Mägi highlights miniature details by placing them in the immediate foreground for our scrutiny, as if to echo the function of a magnifying glass to reveal pulsating life forces beyond our line of vision.

Mägi was well aware of the visualizing potentials of the microscope—while living in St. Petersburg he was briefly on the editorial board of a magazine entitled *Rays*, in reference to "truth-revealing" power of x-rays—but he may have derived an artistic interest in the possibilities of microscopy from Ernst Haeckel's *Kunstformen der Natur*. Published in parts between 1899 and 1904 and widely read in artistic circles, Haeckel's study was comprised of images directly indebted to the discovery of microbes through microscopy in the 1870s. One image in *Kunstformen der Natur* specifically features lichen (**Figure 4.24**), where Haeckel focuses his attention on lichen's spores and stems appearing at once both botanical and coral-like. Although these images do not approximate the lichen types Mägi painted, they do evince alluring artistic elements of these fungal microorganisms. A life-long champion of Charles Darwin, Haeckel created his illustrations as a testament to his own evolutionary theories, especially his theory of monism, which stated that a single common substance connected all life forms, with no distinction between plant and animal life.[563] In Mägi's paintings, we see a material manifestation of this essential interconnectedness of natural forces in the repetition of his cellular ovoid forms not only on stones, but also in the clouds, trees, and leaves, as well as in the focus on lichen as symbiotic organisms.

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[562] Facos, *Nationalism and the Nordic Imagination,* 162-163.
[563] Robert Michael Brain, "Protoplasmania: Huxley, Haeckel and the Vibratory Organism in Late Nineteenth-Century Science and Art," *The Art of Evolution: Darwin, Darwinisms, and Visual Culture*, eds. Barbara Larson and Fae Brauer (Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2009), 92-123.

Mägi's interest in revealing microscopic ecologies may have deeper roots than in the kaleidoscopic colors of lichen dotting Norway's mountainous forests. The American environmental historian Robert Smurr has shown that most pressing issue in nature conservation discourse in the nineteenth-century Baltic Provinces was surprisingly not endangered flora or fauna, but rocks. One reason for this derived from the fact that the northern half of present-day Estonia had and maintains today the highest percentage of glacial erratic boulders in all of Europe, and in the middle of the nineteenth century, they were disappearing at an alarming rate. For this reason, the most popular and widely-read Estonian-language primers in the nineteenth century also emphasized an empathetic understanding of inanimate beings in the natural world. In his text "Life within Stones," prominent nationalist and educator Carl Robert Jakobson writes, "The stones we trample on by foot every day also have their own life. Although they do not eat, and do not have a heart pumping blood through their veins, a secret power constantly unites their different sides, so they will not disintegrate into dust."[564] Here Jakobson reveals a magical, mystical property within stones which was perhaps instilled within Konrad Mägi as a child, who later felt drawn to express this pulsating inner life of inanimate nature on canvas.

Another visual source available to him in Estonia provided scientific evidence about what this life force could be: Richard Aavakivi's *The History of Our Earth*, a geological history book published in Estonian in 1900. One illustration immediately provides striking similarity with Mägi's cellular forms (**Figure 4.25**), depicting life

[564] Carl Robert Jakobson, "Elu kivide sees," *Kooli lugemise raamat: kolmas jagu* (Tartu: H. Laakmann, 1876), 55-56.

forms found within chalk cliffs. Side A is labeled "underwater chalk, magnified 1,500 times" and side B labeled "chalk from the Libyan desert, magnified 1,500 times," revealing aqueous life forms in radically different parts of the earth. In his book, Aavakivi explains:

> Over time and under the right conditions, plants can create great sedimentary layers out of coal and peat. Over the course of millions of years, small sea creatures can give birth to entire islands and pieces of land. Chalk cliffs in England, for instance, have also nourished tiny sea creatures. These little creatures are so small that they can only be seen with a magnifying glass.[565]

Importantly, Aavakivi invokes the development of beings and organisms across vast periods of time, flourishing in the most unexpected of places. In this sense, Mägi's multicolored lichen-covered stones, which also unusually flourished in the Nordic Arctic tundra, could also be evidence of sedimentary layers of the earth; the diversity of colors would then signify multiple tectonic shifts in the planet across millennia. The earthen layers of Mägi's paintings might reveal what one scholar has called "layers of the drama of planetary history long before humans stepped onto the stage."[566] Contemporary critics invoked comparisons to such theories when viewing the artist's images. Hanno Kompus remarked in 1916, "Take, for instance, Mägi's stones, these famous 'orange stones,' which are no longer even stones, [but] soft and weightless, like lazily lounging mollusks"[567] For Kompus, orange-colored stones—in what he perceived to be a non-naturalistic color—evoked a sense of vitality as well as ancient, geological time. Kompus's comparison of orange stones to mollusks reveals

[565] Richard Aavakivi, *Meie maakera minevik*. Tartu: 1900.
[566] Maja Fowkes, Reuben Fowkes, "Cracks in the Planet: Geo-Ecological Matter in East European Art," *Extending the Dialogue*, eds. Urška Jurman, Christiane Erharter, and Rawley Grau (Ljubljana: Igor Zabel Association, 2017), 145.
[567] Kompus, "Eesti kujutav kunst."

the ways in which stones were a first step in extending lifelike microcosm qualities to other elements of the natural world, such as the sky and clouds.

Beyond representing the earth, Mägi alluded to slow time through the utter absence of people. When psychiatrist Dr. Juhan Luiga saw these paintings in 1911, he declared them to be "metaphysical, 'otherworldly' in the complete sense. To me they seem like cutouts of the cosmos, the edge of the world, as a more joyously colorful world of the future, where humankind lives only as spirits."[568] For Luiga, the paintings existed as visions of metaphysical realms of intertwined ontologies. In such a space, we can see how the tree on the right in *Norwegian Landscape (Bog Landscape)* has branches and leaves that clump together to form lungs, empowered by the effervescent orange forms pulsating through botanical capillaries like blood cells enriched with oxygen. The repeated boldly outlined cellular form which Mägi employed in every aspect of the landscape—which I have argued he could have derived from an array of sources, including Nordic lichen, native folklore, geological history, and the visualizing power of the microscope—do indeed imbue both Norwegian scenes with a sense of harmonious unity. For Mägi, this unity reflected a greater awareness of ecological interconnectivity.

According to Isabel Wünsche, this impulse towards emphasizing such ecological interconnectivity was fundamental to Russian art circles in the early years of the twentieth century.[569] Mägi did receive his initial training in St. Petersburg and was close with Russian-speaking artists later while living in Norway. We can trace a

[568] Juhan Luiga, "III. Eesti kunstinäituselt," *Päevaleht*, 4 January 1911.
[569] Isabel Wünsche, *The Organic School of the Russian Avant-Garde: Nature's Creative Principles* (Surrey, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015).

similar development in conceptualizing such a relationship with nature in the work of Mägi's contemporary Elena Guro (**Figure 4.26**). Guro shaped her creative practice from "the breathing of the earth and the filament of the clouds" in order to reveal "how the universe breathes."[570] In an effort to explain her interest in painting stones bursting with Expressionist bravado, she noted "it is not at all by chance that I return constantly to inanimate objects … each object has its own soul, put into it by its creator, the author, or received…from surrounding life."[571] Wünsche has argued that this tendency towards transcending anthropocentric ideas about the natural world developed in the connections between Russian and Nordic artists in the 1890 and early 1900s. It was precisely in this circle where Mägi initially developed his artistic acumen before leaving the Russian Empire in 1907. This more holistic connection with the natural world among artists in Northeastern Europe is markedly different from prevailing ideas about art and science in France, where, as Alison Morehead has recently revealed, Symbolist formal experimentation became intertwined with implicitly anthropocentric ideas about the human body and its pathologies.[572] This distinction is important because it suggests that we should not evaluate the pictorial language of Mägi's early landscapes as "slightly Frenchified," as other scholars have suggested.[573]

After Mägi returned to the Baltic Provinces in late 1912, he spent the summers of 1913 and 1914 on the islands off the Estonian coast in an effort to treat his

[570] Ibid, 60.
[571] Ibid, 60.
[572] Alison Morehead, *Nature's Forms and the Search for Symbolist Form* (State College, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017).
[573] Pihlak, *Konrad Mägi*, 80.

rheumatism.[574] He spent much time on the tiny island of Vilsandi, which became renowned across the Russian Empire for its remarkable biodiversity. All of Mägi's Vilsandi landscapes feature brilliant colors, a general Neo-Impressionist painterly idiom, and often, but not always, a lighthouse (**Figure 4.18**). This lighthouse was overseen by Artur Toom, a budding ornithologist who was seminal to later conservation legislation in interwar Estonia. The island and its struggling bird population became the impetus for the establishment of the Saaremaa Society of Nature Admirers in 1913, the first nature conservation group in Estonia.[575] The very same summer Mägi worked on Vilsandi and surrounding islands was the period environmental historian Robert Smurr has characterized as when the Society "began its work energetically, and its monthly meetings filled with eager participants."[576] The Society excursions would have been hard to miss on the tiny island, and likely emboldened the artist's interest in the representing the natural world.

Art historians often note how the artist's island landscapes reveal his close approach to nature "in all of its miniature details," but do not connect this interest with his earlier Norwegian landscapes.[577] Surveying his extant island landscapes as a whole, we can see that the artist's focus shifted from animating rocks to a shimmering seascape and its surrounding flourishing life. This focus is evident in the artist's choice to title one of his island paintings *Sea Kale* (**Figure 4.27**), a shift towards

[574] Konrad Mägi, Letter to H. Leokonen, From Kihelkonna to Viljandi, pt. 14 VI 1914. KMKO F. 224, M 65:42.
[575] Robert W. Smurr, "Perceptions of Nature, Expressions of Nation: An Environmental History of Estonia," PhD diss., University of Washington, 2002, 95-96.
[576] Ibid, 111.
[577] Pihlak, *Konrad Mägi*, 75; Ene Lamp, "Noor-Eesti kunst," *Eesti kunsti ajalugu 5: 1900-1940,* ed. Mart Kalm (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstiakadaeemia, 2009), 162-163.

botanical subjectivities. Here in the immediate foreground, white blossoming flowers burst forth from exuberant turquoise leaves, their brilliance ever strengthened by the muted tones of the sandy soil underneath. Although we see different vegetal subjects, such as yellow blossoms or distinctive orange moss dotting the outer fringes of the landscape, it is still the sea kale which dominates over half of the canvas. Despite what its name may imply, sea kale is not akin to kelp or seaweed and does not grow underwater, but it is often found on coasts. In Estonia, however, the plant is quite rare. Sea kale was rarely listed in botanical guides of local plants at the turn of the twentieth century, but it became markedly better known in the interwar period.[578] In July of 1938, the paper *Uus Eesti* published brief promotional material for summer traveling, entitled "Sea kale – the most beloved and rarest plant to the visitors of the Vilsandi Bird Reserve." The news announced:

> Whatever interest Vilsandi may offer with its birds, [the island's] lush and rare plants surprise and entice strangers even more so … The tourists of today are especially interested by the large bushes of sea kale ... one of the rarest plants on our shore. ... Now it is the time when sea kale is in blossom, its wide, dim green leaves are succulent, sprouting from strong stems with large, white blossoms. Tourists love to take pictures between the plants and every island visitor wants to remember forever the sweetly fragant sea kale blossoms.[579]

While this passage is revealing in the co-opting of botanical organisms under the auspices of a national tourism industry in the late 1930s, the document is also illuminating insofar as it discusses the rarity of the plant, and, especially, its seductive

[578] Gerhard Pahnsch, *Beitrag zur Flora Ehstlands* (Tartu: Verlag der Dorpater Naturforscher Gesellschaft, 1881); Johann Kunder, *Looduse õpetus. Koolmeistritele ja koolidele. Teine raamat: Taimede riik* (Tartu: Schnakenburgi trükk, 1882); Eugen Niclasen and Johannes Aidas, *Kodumaa õiskaswud* (Tallinn: M. Schifferi trükk, 1907).
[579] "Merikapsas – kõige armastatuim ja haruldaseim taim Vilsandi linnuriigi külastajaile," *Uus Eesti*, 18 July 1938.

fragrance during the summer months. Mägi's experience decades earlier may not have been too different on the small, secluded island. The artist's decision to title his canvas after botanical subjects was a notable shift away from anthropocentric connections with the land through place names. The title suggests that Mägi deployed brilliant and brazen colors as a visual tool to communicate not merely his own personal perceptions of sight and smell on the island. Rather, color conveys the communicative power of the island's ecologies and, in this painting specifically, the power of fragrant sea kale blossoms hoping to lure in potential pollinators. It seems that the sensorial dimensions of the canvas and its exuberant colors were perceptible for at least one critic, who asked his readers after seeing Mägi's island landscapes, "And those intoxicating, blossoming giant flowers – are they not alive?!"[580]

The greatest indication of a continued interest in micro-ecosystems between Mägi's Norwegian works and his Estonian landscapes is manifest in *Landscape with Red Clouds* (**Figure 4.28**). Brazen orange and yellow tones of the setting sun illuminate the sky. Waves of seafoam green and deep violets in distinctive horiztonal dabs—akin to the brushwork in Emīlija Gruzīte's *Fantastic Landscape*—lap at the shore under colossal rolling red clouds. But the real subjects of the painting are the plants and stones compressed together in the immediate foreground. What is perhaps most striking about this combination is how dull the greens of the juniper plants and single, rising tree appear in contrast to the burst of reds, oranges, and yellows in the background. The dull colors of the plants allow the multicolored dabs of paint on the stones to shine through. Coastal stones on the islands of Vilsandi and Saaremaa are

[580] Kompus, "Eesti kujutav kunst."

often covered in faint orange moss, but in *Landscape with Red Clouds* what we see is not a direct transcription of nature, but rather a deliberate deployment of uneven painterly dabs in a range of colors from pinks and reds to silvers and perwinkles to invigorate powerful stones. Indeed, color operates in *Landscape with Red Clouds* specifically to highlight those elements of the natural world not perceived as "living": the sky, the water, and rocks. One critic seemed to grasp Mägi's intentions immediately, noting that "his colors bring forth an inaminate nature teeming with a sort of life which will never extinguish."[581] In almost all of his early landscapes, the artist's exuberant colors were not only a choice to render these works stylistically relevant. For Mägi, color was a liberating tool through which he could reveal his discoveries of the secrets of the earth, whether in the surprising tenacity of the micro-ecologies of glowing orange lichen in the Norwegian mountains, or the rare bushles of fragrant blossoming sea kale on the Baltic coast. Mägi illuminated these minute microcosms in order to visualize greater forces of the natural world and draw attention to our own connectivity with the powerful forms of nature.

Conclusion

Focusing attention away from deliberate questions about ethnicity and nationality reveals important and surprisingly ignored processes which played formative roles in the development of Baltic art. In the aftermath of the revolution, the idea of a unifying aesthetic through the shared native landscape began to lose its relevance, as manifested in the confusion and poor reception of Gerhard Rosen's and

[581] Johannes Kangro-Pool, "Eesti kunsti näitus Tallinnas," *Vaba Sõna* (Tartu: Noor-Eesti, 1916), 82.

Vilhelms Purvītis's public mural paintings at the Riga City Art Museum. Artists became increasingly curious to understand the natural world beyond the confines of patriotism and the power of the homeland. Despite continued rejection and dismissal, Emīlija Gruzīte funneled her creative energy into creating an otherworldly landscape of the soul, steeped in mystical ideas about spiritual contact with the afterlife, and the liberating possibilities of reincarnation. Her spiritual inward turn towards mysticism echoed a larger discourse about women's emancipation in the Baltic Provinces and the struggle to be taken seriously as a professional. Far from naïve or unsophisticated, Gruzīte's *Fantastic Landscape* could have only appeared through serious intellectual engagement with contemporary ideas about death, the occult, and theosophy. Her deployment of muted color schemes of cobalts, lavenders, and periwinkles in painterly dabs purposefully evokes mystery and ambiguity, transcending narrative sources she had relied on in her paintings earlier in her career.

Konrad Mägi pursued a parallel path to Gruzīte, seeking to reveal the secret powers of life in the natural world. Mägi deployed color to express unending vitality, whereas Gruzīte evoked beguiling death. Mägi's choice to paint with brilliant hues did not derive simply from the styles he encountered while working outside of the Baltic Provinces. Far more significantly, Mägi turned towards exuberant color in order to express what he had experienced through close, intimate encounters with nature. Brazen colors functioned as a way to capture, evoke, and eternalize life forces, whether in the real micro-ecologies of lichen, fungi, and algae, or in the pulsating vitality within nature's more mysterious, inanimate objects such as stones. Examining landscape beyond parochial ideas of "Baltic" art reveals how the genre ushered in

new possibilities for men and women of Latvian and Estonian descent in the early twentieth century. No longer tethered to speak for their "race," Gruzīte and Mägi engaged equally pressing issues of their day through the traditional medium of landscape in order to explore, probe, and illuminate the mysteries of the world around them.

Conclusion

The Global Ramifications of Baltic Coloniality

Surprise and suspicion pervade the fraught moment of encounter depicted in Jānis Staņislavs Roze's 1884 canvas *Arrival of the Merchants on the Daugava River* (**Figure 5.1**). Nowhere is the sense of bafflement more prominent than with the figure in the center of the canvas. He gazes so intently at the pages of an open book that his eyes almost bulge out of his sockets. In comparison to neutral faces of the other figures, the appearance of the man viewing this book verges on the excessive. At first glance, this man, and the woman tentatively gazing over his shoulder, seem to be entranced by the array of material riches laid out on the wooden table before them: a metal jug; brilliant red, blue and yellow fabrics; glistening beads; leather-bound books; even a small sphere attached to a gold chain. Some figures have apparently already purchased items from the merchants. Tucked in a corner at the center of the left side of the canvas are two women, one with a distinctive, albeit anachronistic nineteenth-century Estonian headdress, fondling their newly purchased beads. Encouraging this mercantile trade are two men behind the table. One swathed in green reaches his hand out to a man clad in thick fur pelts. His gesture at once welcomes and beckons visitors forward, pointing to the material bounty he wishes to sell. However, even this interaction between merchant and visitor is strange. The man clad in fur pelts and birch bark shoes hunches forward, pointing to a pile of fox pelts on the ground. Is he surprised to acquire them? Has he been caught in the process of stealing them?

Roze's painting is not merely a depiction of mercantile exchange, but rather the historical moment of the first contact between indigenous Balts and Teutons. The red crucifix form on the billowing white flag of the harbored ship reminds us that these merchants bring not merely material splendor from elsewhere, but spiritual purpose as well. Given the known outcome of this encounter, however, the men disembarking with spears and what appears to be an axe assume a sinister dimension, foreshadowing the grim result of this encounter for the unknowing peoples on the shore. This shadow becomes all the more affecting upon the realization that Roze based the composition of his painting entirely upon Ludwig von Maydell's original black and white print of 1839 entitled *The First Arrival of the Bremen Merchants in the Mouth of the Daugava, 1156*. Roze has meticulously reproduced every element of Maydell's print in his painting. One may wonder why Roze did not manipulate Maydell's image toward different ends, as we have seen in the works of Artūrs Baumanis and Bernhard Borchert.[582] Given the region's conditions of coloniality, why would a Latvian artist reproduce so faithfully a dated and ideologically fraught Baltic German representation of local history? The answer may lie in the main difference between the two images: color. Maydell's thin black lines and austere use of modeling and volume yearn for color. By transforming the black and white print into a colorful painting, Roze dramatically enhances the image's legibility. This painterly transformation of the original is indeed reflective of the Latvian idea of *krāsot* in the 1870s and 1880s: the job of the painter, the *krāsotājs*, is to bestow color onto an image in order to enliven it. Therefore it is color which highlights the

[582] See chapter three.

affective elements of this first encounter: the curiosity, the excitement, the bewilderment, but also the suspicion, the hidden agendas, and impending violence. Color highlights the main group of figures interacting on the shores of the Daugava, but it also functions as a tool for Roze to bathe the disembarking armed merchants in a dark, ominous shadow. It is thus a subtle deviation, appearing to echo Maydell's print with stunning accuracy—itself a testament to Roze's skill—yet manipulating color so as to heighten the image's emotive power, one perhaps especially legible for a Latvian audience.

Roze's image narrates the beginning of the colonial encounter between indigenous Balts and Teutonic merchants and missionaries. Although his scene is vaguely historical, on a larger plane it re-presented this encounter of peoples as an encounter of materials. This was a juxtaposition with which Roze was intimately familiar in the present moment of 1884, as his own artistic practice negotiated a similar fluidity between and across the materials of oil painting, photography, and printmaking, often resulting in multimedia images which deny easy categorization. It is no coincidence that Roze's depiction of this cultural and material encounter took place on the Daugava River, on whose banks the city of Riga would be founded in 1201. As port cities of the Hanseatic League, Riga and Tallinn had long fostered cultural and material exchange. What this exchange meant in the colonial Baltic of 1884, however, had a much more global resonance. Simultaneously on the opposite side of the world, Yokohama functioned as a similar a site of cultural and material convergence, fostering a distinctive and experimental confluence of media in contemporary visual production. To be sure, the underlying ideologies of the

encounters of Yokohama and Riga were radically different. The power relations endemic to the colonial conditions in Riga and elsewhere across the Baltic Provinces were curtailed in Yokohama, which was sanctioned as a separate, controlled zone of cosmopolitanism. But if we remember that the dramatic urbanization of Latvians and their sudden omnipresence in the city of Riga also occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century, there emerges an urgency towards mediating the city as an intercultural zone regarding its visual production as well.[583]

Since the abolition of serfdom so radically transformed the possibilities for Latvians and Estonians in the nineteenth century, it is all too tempting to ascribe all of their cultural production of the period to a teleological narrative from "national awakenings" to political independence in the wake of World War I. Yet a growing cohort of art historians, especially Kristiāna Ābele, Laima Laučkaitė, Linda Kaljundi, and Tiina-Mall Kreem repeatedly stress the urgency of the "entangled narratives" manifest in the visual culture of the multiethnic Baltic Provinces.[584] By emphasizing the power relations inherent to the region's colonial hierarchy, and specifically seeing these differences through the lens of race, I have sought to recover the agency of early Latvian and Estonian cultural producers. At the same time, I have endeavored to portray Baltic Germans as advocates of a diverse array of opinions regarding the social changes and demographic shifts of their shared homeland. An emphasis on port cities can be illuminating for our concerns with the colonial Baltic Provinces given their potential to converge multiple cultures, identities, languages, faiths, and subject

[583] Toivo Raun, "Riga and Tallinn in the Late Tsarist Era: Multiethnicity and Social and Political Change," *Hungarian Studies* 29 (2015): 63-72.
[584] Ābele, "The Picture of the Period 1890-1915," Laučkaitė, *Art in Vilnius*, Kaljundi and Kreem, *Ajalugu pildis.*

positions. Port cities are often sites where these categories are constantly negotiated, normalized, and even made banal. Looking at port cities of the Swahili coast in this period, Prita Meier has convincingly argued for the futility of ascribing distinctly "local" or "native" characteristics of visual and material culture in such spaces. She writes that "things, houses, and even people on the Swahili coast are relational loci, brimming with all sorts of different cultural traditions that cannot be traced back to one place or society—even when they *look* distinctly 'Middle Eastern' or 'foreign.'"[585] What unites material production along the Swahili coast for Meier is a shared interest towards expressing a cultural politics of "elsewhere." Is this not the same idea which confronts nineteenth-century studies as much as art history's global turn: the trouble of explaining the constant negotiation between the local and global, national and international, without imposing a cultural hierarchy, or reinforcing the dichotomy of center and periphery?

If we understand global interactions of the nineteenth century as becoming increasingly dense at a newly unprecedented rate, then it comes as no surprise that so many different cultural figures, wherever they found themselves in the world, sought to root the "elsewhere" at home in order to convey the civilization, contemporaneity, modernity, and/or cosmopolitanism of their native society. We see this in the striking homogeneity of the formal choices made in portrait photography from the Baltic Provinces of the Russian Empire to the Arab Provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The tendency to read these forms as markers of modernity simply for their similarity to

[585] Prita Meier, *Swahili Port Cities: The Architecture of Elsewhere* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016), 10.

forms geographically European in origin not only enforces Eurocentrism, but it denies the agency of those who embraced such choices. If we take art history's global turn as an ethical imperative, then the nineteenth-century Arab man donned in a three-piece-suit and monocle should no longer function principally as an example of modernity in "unexpected places," but modernity period.[586] Since materials and formats of art were so transnationally shared in the nineteenth century, we must take seriously Joan Kee's call to think beyond medium as "affirmation of stylistic or cultural difference."[587] Instead, she advocates unpacking how medium and materiality manifest negotiations with what it means to be contemporary. For Kee, emphasizing contemporaneity in visual production rather than contending with the fraught baggage of "modern art" functions as a "means of levelling a field whose unevenness continues to obstruct a clear view of the world at large."[588] One could argue that all artworks are, of course, contemporary, and that emphasizing "contemporary art" in a historical setting is the *modus operandi* of the art historian. But I read Kee's idea to become familiar with contemporaneity as complementary to the methodology I have charted in this study: drawing from a critical awareness of a shared time period rather than restricting context and knowledge to discrete geographies. In other words, contemporaneity is another way of approaching simultaneity and similarity of the period. In this way, it is natural to discuss Yokoyama Matsusaburō and Jānis Staņislavs Roze as contemporaries.

[586] Phillip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004).
[587] Joan Kee, "Contemporary Art in Early Colonial Korea: The Self-Portraits of Ko Hui-dong," *Art History* 36, no. 2 (2013): 393.
[588] Ibid, 415.

Roze's *Arrival of the Merchants on the Daugava River* allows us to realize the depth of his intellectual involvement with decolonial thinking. This involvement is manifest not only in his distinctive multimedia portraits discussed earlier, but even in his imagings of local history in the more "conventional" medium of oil on canvas. Such a reading casts him not merely as one of the most important artists of the Baltic Provinces, but as one whose material fluidity and artistic practice were reflective of urgent global notions of what it meant to be contemporary circa 1884.[589]

Art and Independence

The chaos of World War I presented a unique opportunity for the disenfranchised populations of Europe's crumbling empires. In the toppling of the tsarist regime in Russia in 1917 and the defeat of the German Empire in 1918, Estonian and Latvian leaders recognized a decisive moment and declared independence from the Russian Empire. While independence was not formally recognized by other states until 1920, the declarations of 1918 clarified the intentions of Estonians and Latvians, now the overwhelming majority in urban spaces. In the wake of the polarizing national imagery produced by Baltic artists since the 1880s, but especially in the wake of the 1905 Revolution, it seemed few were interested in any kind of reconciliation. In Estonia, however, the declaration of independence was actually titled a "manifesto to all the peoples of Estonia," (*Manifest kõigile Eestimaa rahvastele*), a clear distinction from the ethnocentric "Estonian people," (*Eesti*

[589] It is worth considering that Roze's scene on the Daugava was contemporary with the Berlin Conference, and its inauguration of a similarly grim encounter of peoples and materials towards alarming ends, especially on the Congo River.

rahvale). The second point of the document declared "the rights of ethnocultural autonomy for all minorities living in the Republic, including Russians, Germans, Swedes, Jews, and Others."[590] Therefore it is perhaps not surprising that local Baltic German and Russian artists produced the most blatantly nationalist propaganda paintings, such as Erna Brinckmann's images of the war or Nikolai Kalmakov's *24 February 1918* (**Figure 5.3**).[591] The latter features bursting bundles of the blue, black, and white (*sini-must-valge*) tricolor flag of the young republic and the Estonian-language dates inscribed in the corners, as well as a sprawling map revealing the contours of the new state—itself decisively rejecting the borders of the tsarist-era Baltic Provinces. The details of Kalmakov's painting reflect a protracted engagement of the Russian-speaking subject with the demands of the Estonian-majority state. This engagement was not contradictory, an aspect all too often forgotten after 2014 when the international media wrongfully cast Estonia or Latvia as "the next Crimea."[592]

As is well charted, Latvians and Estonians adopted new universalizing avant-garde strategies, initially rejecting the nationalist aims of their new countries. All the more impressive, the first exhibition of Estonian Cubist and Constructivist paintings premiered in Võru, a small town that obtained electric lighting only in 1915. Hardly any "Baltic barons" would have lived here, and the exhibition was met with positive critical acclaim, especially among the nation's young modernist critics. Drawing over

[590] *Manifest kõigile Eestimaa rahvastele*, 24 February 1918.
[591] Kaljundi and Kreem, *Ajalugu pildis,* 219-241.
[592] For a typical and incorrect sensationalist take, see Josh Rubin, "NATO Fears That This Town Will be the Epicenter of Conflict with Russia," *The Atlantic*, 24 January 2019. For a story more reflective of reality, see Carmen Gray, "Fearing Russian Influence, Estonia Turns to the Arts," *New York Times,* 11 January 2019.

one-thousand attendees over four days in a town of four-thousand people, the exhibition signaled that "art" was far from a foreign concept among the peasantry.[593]

Coloniality at a Crossroads

In the tumultuous and ambiguous space between the First World War, Wars of Indpendence and the construction of new states, Baltic coloniality found itself at a crossroads. Understanding how the parameters of coloniality changed so rapidly in this period is perhaps best understood by examining Baltic artists' interactions with the wider world, especially their writings and depictions of other colonized peoples. In the nineteenth century, Estonians and Latvians routinely compared their situation to other peoples in the colonial encounter. By the early twentieth century, however, the networks of imperialism had brought many Europeans into what one historian has called "promiscuous intimacy" with materials and objects from almost every corner in the planet.[594] In an effort to understand this sudden influx of foreign cultural production on display in Europe, a radical study of African art emerged: *Iskusstvo Negrov*, or *Art of the Blacks,* by Vladimir Markov.

Markov, an alias for the Latvian artist and writer Voldemārs Matvejs, had originally composed his study in 1913, but his untimely death in 1914 delayed the publication.[595] Historian of African art Z. S. Strother has lauded the study as

[593] August Alle, "Kunstinäitus Wõrun," *Waba Maa,* 23 February 1923
[594] Z. S. Strother, "The Politics of Face in the African Art Photography of Vladimir Markov," *Vladimir Markov and Russian Primitivism: A Charter for the Avant-Garde*, eds. Jeremy Howard, Irēna Bužinska, and Z. S. Strother (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), 85.
[595] The publication is thus contemporary with Carl Einstein's *Negerplastik,* which he also began in 1913.

transformative for its radical humanization of Africans. She argues that Markov's study is remarkable particularly for its photographic corpus. Markov took photographs of African sculpture for his study in a close-up manner which emphasized the face of the figures, a rare method of photographing objects when the idea of a close-up did not yet exist for person let alone figural representation. His decision to highlight the faces of these sculptures endowed them with personality and humanity, and decisively removed them from the realm of "ethnographic fetishes" as European institutions had often presented them. (**Figure 5.4**). As such, Markov's study deliberately rejected European ideas of Africans as "savage" or "uncivilized" and, remarkably for its time, included oral histories told by Africans as an indicator of the complexity and sophistication of their societies.

What is important for us about Markov's study is Strother's observation that "unexpectedly, it has proved important to recover Markov's status as a Latvian in the Russian Empire [...] to appreciate the distinctive tenor of his response to African sculpture."[596] Strother further notes, "not unlike many European-educated Africans at this period, Markov conceptualised his recovery of identity as a voyage back in time, both pre-modern and pre-Christian."[597] Her familiarity with African art and history is what helped her forge this unexpected and surprising parallel between Africans and Balts educated under colonial systems. Our assumptions about race in this period, and in terms of cultural production under colonialism, strongly discourage such

[596] Strother, "The Politics of Face," 96.
[597] Ibid, 97.

comparisons and parallels; yet Strother found this connection immediately apparent given her inherent rejection of a Eurocentric framework of analysis.

The kind of empathy found in Markov's writing and photography also extended into Baltic art. Elsewhere I have argued for a similar function of the "politics of the face" in the Orientalist portraiture produced by Estonian artist Ants Laikmaa while he lived in Tunisia between 1909 and 1911.[598] Laikmaa was the first Estonian artist to travel outside of Europe when he traveled to Tunisia, then under French colonial rule, where he stayed for almost two years. When political instability forced Laikmaa to remain longer than expected in Tunis, he likened the situation directly to the strife between the multiethnic population at home in the Baltic Provinces related to the Revolution of 1905. The artist developed an empathy for indigenous Tunisians, who, like Estonians and Latvians, sat at the bottom of a racialized social hierarchy and lived under colonial rule. This empathy is reflected in his portrait *Black Boy* (**Figure 5.5**). The artist reserved the most beautiful and delicate nuances of color—a practice indebted to Laikmaa's delicate yet decisive handling of pastels—for the face, where he painted subtle blues in curvilinear concert with the boy's physiognomy. The juxtaposition of a touch of white and blue against the dark black of the boy's eyebrows emphasizes the boy's subdued musculature.

Laikmaa presented black beauty at a time when European art academies often deemed Africans "unpaintable" or presented them as the "black exotic," aestheticized enslaved persons and servants serving as visual foils to white Europeans. In

[598] Bart Pushaw, "Imetlus ja tunnustus. Ants Laikmaa Põhja-Aafrikas. Admiration and Acceptance: Ants Laikmaa in North Africa," *Ants Laikmaa: Vigala & Capri*, ed. Liis Pählapuu (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstimuuseum, 2015), 37-53.

Laikmaa's portrait, however, exoticism is less blatant, presumably because, as the artist noted, he felt a friendly camaraderie with his subjects. Perhaps it was because he did not travel to Africa as a Christian missionary, then the most common way Balts came into contact with African people, that his work was never created under the pretenses of a "civilizing mission" and its attendant racial hierarchies.

Notions of racial superiority dramatically changed in the interwar era as the conditions of coloniality disappeared not only politically with the emergence of the new nation states of Latvia and Estonia, but also socially and culturally.[599] In each young, fledgling republic, both artists and the state strove to consolidate a distinctive national identity in pictorial form with greater urgency than ever before. Under these impulses, discourses about race in the independent Baltic states transformed significantly. When the Latvian National Museum of Art in Riga was under renovation between 2013 and 2015, the administration elected to reproduce a series of beloved masterpieces on the construction fencing in order to ensure that Riga's public could still enjoy some of their favorite works, including Aleksandra Beļcova's 1925 painting *Black and White* (**Figure 5.6**). Seeing Beļcova's painting in such close proximity, however, revealed an awkward, and heretofore seemingly ignored fact: there is a colossal difference in the size ratio between the young woman sitting on the floor and the woman lounging on the couch. The young woman in the foreground of the painting is so close to us that it is impossible to ignore her vacant stare and discomfort in comparison to the woman fanning herself on the couch as she rests her

[599] Björn M. Felder and Paul J. Weindling, eds., *Baltic Eugenics: Bio-Politics, Race, and Nation in Interwar Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, 1918-1940* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2013).

feet on a fluffed up pillow. The woman draped in a flowing purple frock and shimmering black silk pants is Biruta Ozoliņa-Krauze, the sister of one of Beļcova's friends, and her skin radiates with a porcelain white shine. Behind her, a wooden image of a seated bodhisattva figure rests peacefully on a pedestal, while white lilies, a traditional sign of purity and innocence, turn their fragrant blossoms towards Ozoliņa-Krauze. But there is nothing truly peaceful or innocent about Beļcova's painting, the title of which, *Black and White*, makes painfully clear.

Many of the objects in the painting would have been alluring exotic items in 1920s Latvia: the woman's luxurious purple and black silk clothing, her embroidered black flats, the bodhisattva figure, and, most importantly, the seated Thai woman in the foreground. The Thai woman—whose name remains unknown to me—was a wet nurse for Biruta's son in Siam and Biruta felt the need to bring her back to Latvia (a problem in itself). Yet nothing more has ever been printed about this Thai woman besides the fact that she adds a flair of exoticism typical in the age of Art Deco.[600] Given the painting's title, this Thai woman is "black" whereas Biruta is "white." The painting thus not only manifests Latvian ideas of the foreign and exotic, but reveals racialized power relations between the two women. The white woman wears luxurious clothing from a far off land, while the "black" woman wears nothing more than a dirty white tank top, as if she sits there only to be a counterpoint to Biruta's elegance and grace.

For Ozoliņa-Krauze to wear Asian clothes and have a Thai servant would have been indicative of her class and status as a cosmopolitan world traveler in her

[600] Natālija Jevseveja, *Aleksandra Beļcova* (Riga: Neputns, 2014), 57.

time. For the artist Beļcova, there was nothing out of the ordinary about painting such exoticism—it was glamourous. Around the same time, Beļcova, alongside her artist husband Romans Suta, founded a porcelain company in Riga, *Baltars*, where they merged painted stylized geometrical motifs with a range of subjects from modern aviators to Latvian peasant weddings and African masks. The fact that Beļcova's encounters with and representation of African and Asian cultures are rife with colonialist exoticism in the 1920s is unsurprising. What is important about these representations is that they reveal what occurred in the interwar era: for the first time, Latvians and Estonians were admitted into whiteness.

Here it bears keeping in mind Steven Mansbach's insistence on the co-existence of progressive modern forms and conservative cultural politics.[601] As Björn Felder, Ken Kalling and Leiu Heapost have revealed, eugenics would prove formative as a method to secure the future of these states, whose small populations were considered especially vulnerable to degeneration. By the rise of the authoritarian regimes of Latvia's Kārlis Ulmanis and Estonia's Konstantin Päts in 1934, it was clear each country sought to homogenize its population into singular "racial states."[602] The extent to which this racial discourse influenced cultural production among the global networks of the interwar era is a fruitful field of future inquiry.[603] Most exemplary of this radical new racialization was the casting of Latvians as historical

[601] Steven A. Mansbach, *Advancing a Different Modernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).
[602] Björn M. Felder, "Eugenics, Sterilisation, and the Racial State: The Baltic, Russia, and the Global Eugenics Movement," in *Baltic Eugenics*, 18.
[603] An important realm of arena where this discourse manifests most clearly in visual production is book design. See, for instance, James H. Fraser, *Publishing and Book Design in Latvia 1919-1940: A Rediscovery* (Riga: Neputns, 2014), 57, 72-73, 94, 103, 113-115; I am at the beginning of investigating these ideas from the intertwined perspective of gender and race in "White Women Facing the Exotic and the Erotic," *Creating the Self: Emancipating Woman in Estonian and Finnish Art*, ed. Anu Allas. (Tallinn: Eesti Kunstimuuseum, Forthcoming 2019).

conquerers and colonizers regarding the short-lived Curonian "colony" on Tobago in the seventeeth century, what Harry C. Merrit has cleverly called "the colony of the colonized."[604] Historians have recently reinterpreted these interwar discourses, yet their visual ramifications—especially in light of the way race functioned as a visual marker of difference—await further research.[605]

Coda

Art history still has difficulty facing the reality that modern art was produced everywhere. The Eurocentric roots of our discipline, and our ingrained habits to compare and contrast, continue to produce a hierarchy even as *The Art Bulletin*, the discipline's leading scholarly journal, has been contending with "breaking" or "bursting" the canon since the early 1990s. Despite this supposed embrace in scholarly discourse, modern art remains surprisingly uncharted globally. Meanwhile, museums churn out exhibition after exhibition as if the visual culture of smaller countries or cultures are merely new flavors of the month, exciting but ultimately ephemeral, all too often leaving little impact on the field at large. Yet exhibitions should not be the sole venue for judging change in the discipline. There must be greater awareness among scholars of modernism across entrenched cultural divides. I

[604] Harry C. Merrit, "The Colony of the Colonized: The Duchy of Courland's Tobago Colony and Contemporary Latvian National Identity," *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 38, no. 4 (2010): 491-508.
[605] Karin Jekabson-Lemanis, "Balts in the Caribbean: The Duchy of Courland's Attempt to Colonize Tobago Island, 1638 to 1654," *Caribbean Quarterly: A Journal of Caribbean Culture* 46, no. 2 (2000): 25-44; Imbi Sooman, Jesma McFarlane, Valdis Tēraudkalns, and Stefan Donecker, "From the Port of Ventspils to the Great Courland Bay: The Couronian Colony on Tobago in Past and Present," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 44, no. 4 (2013): 503-526.

have found solace in the experience the comparative literature scholar Christopher Bush:

> The idea [of embracing multiple modernities] is not to *extend* the Anglophone sense of "modernism" to encompass the whole world, but to recognize the extent to which Anglo-American modernism —so often treated as modernism *tout court*— was constituted by chronological and geographic segregations that were very often defense mechanisms against the recognition of simultaneities, similarities, and direct connections that in fact made it what it was. […] [After trying to acquire mid-career training in Japanese modernism], the topic […] thus led me not to another modernism, but to many other modernisms: not just to the multiplicity of Japanese "modernisms" (no small or uncontested thing), nor even just to the contiguous worlds of, for example, Japan's many colonies, but also toward a much larger conversation about comparative and connected modernisms and modernities. I found I had new things to say to my colleagues working on Latin American and Middle Eastern literatures, for example, but more importantly *I think I was able to listen to them better* (my emphasis).[606]

Bush's realizations perhaps find their best application in art history in the work of Piotr Piotrowski. An outspoken advocate of fixing art history's inequities, especially in relationship to the historical marginalization of Eastern Europe, Piotrowski avidly sought to create a "horizontal" art history. Such a perspective is a history that is "deprived of any domination; must be open for both all peripheries and all centers, seen probably as peripheries as well, or at least on equal footing with the peripheries. […] these sorts of studies are more heterogenic and less homogenic, more open and less exclusive, more plural and less hegemonic."[607] When we strive to understand rather than judge, and investigate rather than dismiss, we find that the similarities that unite disparate cultures otherwise divided by geographies and languages reflect a

[606] Bush, "Fielding Questions."
[607] Piotrowski, "East European Art Peripheries," Piotr Piotrowski, *Globalne ujęcie sztuki Europy Wschodniej* (Poznań: Dom Wydawniczy REBIS, 2018).

deep desire to be taken seriously and to be treated with respect. I have proposed here a method of being able to "listen better" to each other across fields, across geographies, across languages, and across time. If art historians want to embrace the global turn in all of its complexities, we must actively seek to fill the lacunae in our own training and background ourselves. Doing so not only betters one's visual knowledge, but it deepens one's empathy, a goal towards which we should always strive.

Figures

The dissertation document that follows has had referenced material removed in respect for the owner's copyright. A complete version of this document, which includes said referenced material, resides in the University of Maryland, College Park's library collection

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Figure 0.2 Sally von Kügelgen, *Portrait of Count Paul von Medem,* 1896. Oil on canvas. Rundāle Palace, Pilsrundāle, Latvia.

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Figure 1.3 Rudolf Berendhoff, *Estonian Bride*, 1863. Oil on canvas. Estonian History Museum, Tallinn.

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Figure 1.14 August Weizenberg, *Vanemuine*, 1886, white marble. Art Museum of Estonia, Tallinn.

Figure 1.15 Eduard von Gebhardt, *Koknese Altarpiece*, 1893. Reproduced in *Jahrbuch für bildende Kunst in den Ostseeprovinzen*, 1913, p. 56.

Figure 1.16 Ants Laikmaa, *Christ on the Cross*, after Eduard von Gebhardt (figure 1.1), 1901. Oil on canvas. Altar painting in Pärnu-Jaagupi Church, Estonia.

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