

LATVIAN ART AT THE END
OF THE 20th CENTURY –
CRISIS OR NATURAL

Zigourd Konstant

1 Ganibu Dambis (Sverdlova) 9-11, Riga Latvia

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LAW-GOVERNED DEVELOPEMENT?

The culture of Latvia has very deep (old) roots and is based on an extremely rich, diversified folklore having an ethnographic and national art background. Intensively developed and systematized at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, it is still a source of inspiration (on the level of ideas, thoughts, and mentality) for professional artists today. At the same time, Latvian professional art does not have deep traditions, having been in existence for only one century. During this period, Latvian professional art has been influenced by various cultures - both eastern (Russian), and western (Paris and others), mainly through means of form and expression. However, in its deepest essence, the characteristic monumentality and equilibrium of the national mentality has been preserved.

Latvian culture suffered a tragic break in development during fifty occupied years, starting in 1940, when the U.S.S.R. annexed Latvia. The effect was also apparent in Latvian art. The authoritarian regime "encouraged" the ideological recipes of social realism, demoralizing artist and crippling the creative process.

A peculiar situation is now taking shape. The art process in Latvia is being defined by political motives and extremely rapid commercialization. The break in the normal process of development has been compensated with chaotic "dabbling" in post-war western modern art, by adapting styles and discarding them. The tendencies

of the nationalistic rebirth in politics and in the spirit of the

Latvian people become either exaggerated and theatrical in the form of art or completely disappear, internationalizing the creative process and its results.