

Lithuania

### III. Independence: joys and troubles

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*Art Collecting in Lithuania: Every End is a new Beginning*

In the end of the ninth decade when the national movement started, and in 1990 when the independence of the country was restored, there started the so-called *crumbling* and *destruction* period which brought not only the long-awaited freedom, but also the cruel elements following it: wild capitalism, corruption, profiteering and organized criminality. At the beginning of the tenth decade there appeared several big art collectors who were able to satisfy their new hobby without great expenditures due to general reforms: when the Art fund was liquidated the artists were able to take back their works, otherwise the above collectors bought them for a trifle 'during wholesale'. Among them there appeared the new layer of collectors which was rather oppressed in soviet times – the priests.

One of such examples could be a story of a priest Ri ardas Jakutis: in 1993 there was published the catalogue of the collection of the priest, where it is written about the noble aims and his sacrifice to the society of this art admirer. But already in 2006 – he was no longer a priest but famous for his scandals art admirer – and the bailiffs tried to sell his collection in auction in order to cover 'the collectors' debts to the creditors. The fate of the other priest, Ri ardas Mikutavi ius, who managed to accumulate a rather valuable collection, was much more tragic: in 1998, during the times of unrestrained rage of *maffia*, the priest of Kaunas was cruelly killed, and his valuable art collection was stolen. Later on with the efforts of international cooperation this collection was partially gathered. It showed that collecting of old art is not only a pleasant hobby but also a very dangerous one.

Nevertheless, when the power in the country changed, the art life acquired quite new directions and acceleration: reformed Lithuanian Artists' Union lost any control of the artists; Art Exhibition House became the Centre of Contemporary Art and then started the active creation of independent artistic initiatives. Even in 1991 there appeared the first commercial art galleries – Vartai, Lietuvos Aidas–, which tried in independent and self-educated form to create a new art market. It was rather difficult to do it due to the above-mentioned tradition that was formed in soviet times – buying directly from the artists' studios. The galleries and the artists themselves could not define their status, market rules and obligations. Those problems remain delicate up till now.

Besides, like during inter-war time in Kaunas, the first economically sound buyers gave priority to the creation of elder generation artists which had already consolidated in Lithuanian art history. Therefore, there are not so many good examples of modernism in contemporary art market (it complicates the replenishment process of the 20<sup>th</sup> century art collection of National Art Gallery). Other buyers of art – are businessmen and industrialists who became rich rather quickly – and they choose art close to their taste, but the residual value, due to the overfilled market with the admired artists, remains rather doubtful.

Out of the phenomenon of the beginning of the tenth decade relationships between the artist and the collector we could point out the cooperation of the Renaissance prototype painter Šar nas Sauka and the collector, the owner of Maldis gallery Edmundas Armoška. The latter having in his collection not only internationally known antique pieces of art but also lots of examples of 20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> century Lithuanian art, was the first collector who opened a private Art Gallery in 2002. Once there was organized the exhibition of Antanas Samuolis, the classic of *Ars* group, and there rose (maybe the first) wide scandal concerning the authorship of the exhibition exponents.

A year later in the heart of Vilnius old city, when the municipality gave space, the house-museum of Kazys Varnelis, the famous emigrant artist, constructivist and minimalist was opened. Here there is exposed the international exhibition brought from the USA which consists of old graphic arts, painting, sculpture, Renaissance and later epochs furniture, East art collection, maps and other exponents. Among them – there are the pieces of art of Albrecht Durer, Francisco Goya, Giovanni Battista Piranesi and Vilnius painter Jonas Rustemas.

In 2005 a long-time collector, architect, professor Algimantas Miškinis presented to Kaunas M. K. iurlionis Art Museum a valuable collection consisting of more than 25 thousand pieces of art. Then it was an unprecedented event because Lithuanian National Art Gallery where the most important 20<sup>th</sup> century Lithuanian art works were stored, opened its door only in 2009 and this meant that up till that time the public had no possibility to get acquainted with a long period of Lithuanian art history.

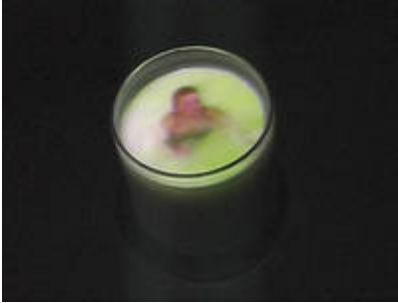
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Gintaras Didziapetris,  
Houses, 2006, c-print, 75x100  
cm, courtesy: Artist and Boris  
Symulevi



Jurga Barilaitė, Storm in a tea  
cup, 2003, video installation 7  
min. loop, courtesy: Artist and  
Danut and Alain Mallart

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