

## Profit rather than politics: the production of Lenin monuments in Soviet Latvia

Sergei Kruk

To cite this article: Sergei Kruk (2010) Profit rather than politics: the production of Lenin monuments in Soviet Latvia, *Social Semiotics*, 20:3, 247-276, DOI: [10.1080/10350331003722745](https://doi.org/10.1080/10350331003722745)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350331003722745>



Published online: 14 Jun 2010.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 211



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Profit rather than politics: the production of Lenin monuments in Soviet Latvia

Sergei Kruk\*

*School of Communications, Riga Stradiņš University, Latvia*

*(Received 6 October 2008; final version received 5 December 2009)*

The archived documents on outdoor sculpture commissions in Soviet Latvia reveal that the thesis of art having been colonized by the Communist party is too simplistic. Sculptors and architects had vested business interests in monument production. Until the mid-1950s, the cream of academically-educated Latvian sculptors was sidelined by Russians who mass-produced concrete replicas of statues portraying Lenin or Stalin. The majority of the works came through the mass production of works of visual propaganda in the *Māksla* art factory. Also, less-talented local sculptors were able to find a role satisfying the demand for cheap, decorative sculpture. Looking for ways to access this market, the local art elite invented aesthetic and semiotic arguments in support of the original, locally-made, Lenin sculptures that would be cast in permanent materials and could serve as the spatial organizers of new communist rituals in the urban environment for which they won municipal commissions resulting in the reconstruction of central squares in Latvian towns. What this means is that artists driven by their mercantile interests and not by ideology played an active part in elaborating the aesthetics of communist ideology, and therefore provided support for the dominant discourse of power relations.

**Keywords:** Soviet; socialist realism; sculpture; communist ritual; monuments; economy of arts

#### Introduction

In Latvia, in 1990, there were 84 outdoor sculptures and busts of the founder of the Soviet communist state, Vladimir Lenin. For most Latvians his stern image has been associated with the ideological indoctrination and Russification imposed by the totalitarian regime on their country since it was incorporated into the Soviet Union from 1940 to 1991. Documents containing information about the commissioning of these monuments, however, suggest quite different origins of many of these sculptures. Many were designed and erected as a result of sculptors' own personal financial, rather than ideological, interest. Lenin's dominant role in the national narrative was used by them as a politically irrefutable argument in support of steady commissions for outdoor sculptures. This was irrespective of the fact that the state could allocate limited resources for this kind of visual propaganda. I will lay out my argument for this interpretation of events in a chronological order.

---

\*Email: [sergei.kruk@gmail.com](mailto:sergei.kruk@gmail.com)

### Stalin supports modest forms of concrete sculpture: 1945–1953

Owing to the pompous designs by Sergei Merkurov that were influenced by the ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian art, Stalinist sculpture is associated with the colossal “Assyro-Babylonian” style. Outsized figures of Lenin and Stalin, erected on the main artificial waterways and in the spacious squares of the largest cities in Russia, marked the centre of imperial power. Meanwhile the periphery, including Latvia, experienced a modest, even primitive style of visual propaganda.<sup>1</sup> Smaller concrete and bronze replicas of illustrious monuments or crude original sculptures cast mostly by Russian and Ukrainian amateurs performed the same ideological function. These were not integrated into the urban environment as dominant architectural elements, but were used in banal locations such as cramped public parks and factory yards (Komarova 2005; Kruglova 1952). The industrial-scale replication of these depreciated the aesthetic quality of the artwork, and, since they used cheap materials, weather conditions further spoiled their forms. Nevertheless, albeit cracked and regularly repainted, the statues accomplished their task perfectly. They met the main requirement of ensuring the leaders’ presence even in the most peripheral places (Figures 1 and 2), and state officials would always display the leader’s busts and sculptures in order to prove their loyalty.

The political and ideological task assigned to the plastic arts during this period led to the emergence of a vast state-run market. A group of renowned socialist realists residing in Moscow monopolized the distribution of contracts for image production controlling the key institution supervising the plastic arts – the Organising Committee of the USSR Artists Union (AU) appointed by the government in 1939 with the task of summoning (“organizing”) the AU’s founding congress. The members of the Committee delayed the congress until 1957. Acting without an elected council and statutes during these years, they managed the government-allocated resources for their own private profit. The replication of



Figure 1. Sergei Merkurov. Lenin monument at the factory Sarkanā Zvaigzne in Riga, mass-produced concrete replica, 1950. Reprinted from the album *Padomju Latvija*, Latgosizdat Publisher, 1950.

## Strādnieki, kolchoznieki, inteliģence!

### Mobilizēsīm visus spēkus mūsu partijas XX kongresa lēmumu realizēšanai, dižajam komunisma uzcelšanas uzdevumam!

(No PSKP CK Aicinājumiem)

#### GODA SARAKSTS

Sakarā ar Lielās Oktobra sociālistiskās revolūcijas 40. gadadienu rajona Darbaļaudu deputātu padomes izpildu komiteja apbalvojuši ar Goda rakstiem sekojošus biedrus:

**Ernu Jānu m. Brūnīti**, rajona bibliotēkas vadītāju — par labu darbu organizācijā;

**Ieļu Ernestu m. Zaļkalni**, rajona bibliotēkas lasītāvas vadītāju — par labu darbu;

**Jāni Reiga d. Jansonu**, veco revolucionāru — par aktīvu sabiedrisko darbu;

**Jāhoku Dāņa d. Vigantu**, veco revolucionāru — par aktīvu sabiedrisko darbu;

**Kāri Jānu d. Zvaigzni**, rajona finansu nodaļas vadītāju — par finansu darbu labu vadību rajonā;

**Jāni Kārja d. Sīklānu**, rajona ceļu daļas vadītāju — par labu darbu un aktīvu sabiedrisko darbu;

**Emmu Kārja m. Sīvēri**, rajona izpildu komitejas grāmatvedi — par labu darbu;

**Birutu Edivarda m. Gailli**, Yates ciema Darbaļaudu deputātu padomes izpildu komitejas sekretāri — par labu darbu;

**Mitū Kārja m. Druviņu**, Smiltēnes II septiņgadīgās skolas skolotāju — par ilggadēju un sekmīgu mācību un audzināšanas darbu;

**Voldemāru Roberta d. Gailli**, rajona vecāko zemes ierīkotāju — par labu darbu;

**Austu Voldemāra m. Ruķu**, Smiltēnes ZVT skolotāju — par labiem sasniegumiem deju kolektīvu vadīšanā;

**Olgu Jānu m. Smukuli**, Smiltēnes ZVT mācību saimniecības lopkopt-šlauceju — par pilna izstrādātumu pīdno pārziņģēšanu;

**Jāni Kristapa d. Svāpēri**, Smiltēnes ZVT mācību saimniecības pārvaldnieku — par sasniegumiem darbā;

**Mariju Dāvida m. Dzītnu**, Smiltēnes ZVT mācību saimniecības cūkkopi — par panākumiem darbā;

**Robertu Augustu d. Čerņu**, Smiltēnes vidusskolas skolotāju — par labiem panākumiem mācību un audzināšanas darbā;

**Martu Pētera m. Vanadzī**, Smiltēnes vidusskolas skolotāju — par ilggadēju un panākumiem bagātu mācību un audzināšanas darbu;

**Bruno Aleksandra d. Āboltiņu**, rajona remontu un celtniecības kantora krāsotāju — par labu darbu;

**Atsu Arvīda m. Rodi**, rajona finansu nodaļas inspektori — par labu darbu;

**Jānu Grigorija m. Karlini**, rajona finansu nodaļas galveno buģeļa grāmatvedi — par labu darbu;

**Mirdzu Jānu m. Kamoliņu**, rajona finansu nodaļas vedko buģeļa inspektori — par labu darbu;

**Jāni Pētera d. Andersonu**, pilsom un Lielā Tējas kara dalībnieku — par aktīvu sabiedrisko darbu;



**Heronimu Adolfa d. Rožeku**, kolchoza „Lidums” valdes priekšsēdētāju — par kolchoza strāvjas augšupejas nodrošināšanu;

**Aleksiju Aleksandra d. Antonovu**, kolchoza „Leģina ceļš” valdes priekšsēdētāju — par kolchoza strāvjas augšupejas nodrošināšanu;

**Velu Jānu m. Bērslāņu**, Pļānu ciema Darbaļaudu deputātu padomes izpildu komitejas sekretāri — par aptuņģu un ilggadēju darbu padomju aparātā;

**Faulini Jānu m. Spārģi**, komunālā kombināta dzirtniecības strādnieki — par labu darbu;

**Jāni Jānu d. Puļģiņu**, komunālā kombināta strādnieku — par labu darbu;

**Arvīdu Roberta d. Rūsi**, Grundāles sakaru nodaļas priekšnieku — par labu darbu;

**Mitū Alfreda m. Spoliņu**, rajona sakaru kantora pastnieki — par labu darbu;

**Dāņu Kārja m. Putrāli**, rajona sakaru kantora telefonisti — par labu darbu;

**Intu Viktora m. Tolēniņu**, komunālā kombināta frizieri — par labu darbu;

**Augustu Spriņa d. Mānīnieku**, rajona remontu un celtniecības kantora galdnieku — par labu darbu;

**Jāni Pētera d. Mūsiņu**, rajona remontu un celtniecības kantora strādnieku — par labu darbu;

**Jāni Jānu d. Čirvīli**, rajona remontu un celtniecības kantora namdari — par labu darbu;

**Ernestu Frīda d. Gruzņu**, rajona remontu un celtniecības kantora namdari — par labu darbu;

Par labiem sasniegumiem darbā un sabiedriskajā dzīvē rajona Darbaļaudu deputātu padomes izpildu komiteja apbalvojuši ar Goda rakstiem vairākus nēķā 200 rajona kolchozniekus, mehānicātorus, strādniekus, kalpotājus un inteliģences pārstāvjus. (Turpinājums sekos)

#### Veselības aizsardzības teicamnieki

Ar PSRS Veselības aizsardzības ministrijas pavēli rajona slimnīcas galvenais ķirurģis Jānis Alberta d. Nelders apbalvots ar krūšu nozīmī „Veselības aizsardzības teicamnieks”.



**Rajona pirmrindas ļaudis:** apakšējā rindā (no kreisās uz labo) rajona veskala sekotās vadītāja Marta Ustupe, Smiltēnes MTS IV traktoru brigādes brigādieris Kārtis Zaļkalns, kolchoza „Sarkand' zvaigzne” lopkopte-šlauceja Olga Čerbu, Smiltēnes MRS motorsāģis „Druģba” vadītājs Pēteris Gaumīģis, rajona rūpniecības kombināta audzēja Marija Kīrsteine; augšējā rindā (no kreisās uz labo) Druģu septiņgadīgās skolas direktors, fizkultūras teicamnieks Arvīds Treimanis, rajona sakaru kantora telefoniste Dāņa Putrāle, kolchoza „Uzvara” laukkopis Edmunds Znots, kolchoza „Kaiģa” cūkkope Valģis Vēriģis un rajona slimnīcas galvenais ķirurģis Jānis Nelders.

**A. Makstma un H. Hereberģa fotomontāģa**

Figure 2. For small provincial towns, modest concrete statues were the handy icons to localize the nationwide political communication. A newspaper from Smiltene included a photograph of the Lenin statue in a collage honouring the foremost toilers and farmers on the eve of the Revolution Day. Reproduced from *Smiltēnes Kolhozniks*, 6 November 1957.

canvases and sculptures provided the artists with additional copyright fees; the low prices of industrially-produced art reduced competition (Afanasyeva, Afiani, and Vodopyanova 2001; Kruk 2008; Yankovskaya 2003; Zezina 1999).

The incorporation of the three Baltic countries into the USSR in 1940 expanded the market for political imagery, but national artists were faced with the already existing corrupt system. They were discriminated against financially – in 1948, their fees were halved (compared with the ones paid in Moscow and Leningrad) – and in 1949 the more or less transparent procedure of the state commission was abandoned.

Between 1948 and 1954 only concrete statues of Lenin and Stalin carved by Russian and Ukrainian sculptors, replicated in their own workshops, were being unveiled in Latvian towns. Projects of local artists were not funded even if they claimed to carry appropriate political messages.

Moscow clearly denied Latvian initiative to express loyalty to Russia by re-installing the equestrian monument of Peter I in Riga (unveiled in 1910 and evacuated at the outbreak of the World War I in 1915). The Riga City Council itself could not find money for the announced intention to restore the Victory Column commemorating the 1812 war against Napoleon (erected in 1817, dismantled in 1936). It took 40 years to fund the building of the World War II Victory Monument in the Victory Park in Riga. In 1946, the construction of a 28 meter x 30 meter Arch of Victory in the destroyed medieval central square of the city was also delayed due to lack of funds; a year later, Moscow rejected the project as too expensive. In 1948, the Central Committee of Latvia's Communist Party (CC LCP) condemned Latvian architects and builders for "gigantomania", extravagance and spendthrifts.<sup>2</sup> The withdrawal of the possibility of any locally-produced monumental propaganda from the agenda resulted in rejection of another two ideologically significant projects – a granite monument to the "father" of Latvian literature Rainis, and a memorial to the fallen Soviet soldiers.

The ideological output of Riga's sculptors was very poor in quality. A bronze bust of Sergei Kirov by Moisei Grinshpun, unveiled in June 1952, was considered so miserable that the CC LCP immediately ordered its replacement.<sup>3</sup> In September of the same year, officials prohibited the erection of a Lenin bust cast by Aleksandrs Gailītis in Limbaži for the same reason. The design of a Stalin monument in the capital city was entrusted to a prominent Latvian sculptor, Aleksandra Briede. Despite the generous financial support, the project lagged behind the schedule. The sculptor presented a full-scale clay model for approval in October 1954, one year after the planned unveiling. However, de-Stalinization policy, announced in February 1956 by the 20th congress of the Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU), killed the project.

In the post-war decade, Latvians did not witness purposeful totalitarian indoctrination by the means of aesthetically seductive original monuments.<sup>4</sup> The artistic quality of visual propaganda was doomed to failure because the talented Latvian artists were discriminated by the economy of arts discussed in the next section.

### **Mass production of visual artwork at the factory *Māksla***

The manufacturing of political propaganda art as well as national art and craft on an industrial scale was mainly based at the arts production facilities *Māksla* ("Art").

It was established in 1945 to replace the cooperative of Latvian artists founded by the Soviets in 1940, and continued to operate under the Nazi occupation. Concentration of human and material resources in a single factory permitted economy of scale and was a handy financial tool for the ideological control of the arts. It is important to bear in mind that the Russian intellectual tradition attributed the messianic role of agents of social change to the “creative intelligentsia”: it was believed that the literati, artists, theatre and film directors possessed extraordinary skills to mobilize the nation. Accordingly, the power-holders sought either to enrol them in the state service or keep them away from active politics. The Communist Party had no legal tools to influence the non-party artists directly, although it was entitled to supervise the activities of the Artists’ Union. Hence the artists were to be persuaded to join this organization. The AU statutes guaranteed its members lucrative jobs at *Māksla*. Part of its enormous income was to be awarded to the members creating original artwork in the form of grants. However, for *Māksla*’s business strategy, the market was more important than the ideological objectives set by the party: private individuals and state institutions were indifferent to academic art and they preferred low-cost, mass-produced artistic goods. For example, in 1953 a commission of prominent experts was highly critical of what they viewed as the anatomic deformity of a plaster bust of Stalin modelled by a mediocre sculptor for the indoor decoration of an institution. The customer was dismissive of the harsh criticism: “The sculpture is OK for the decoration of the hall. We do not set any other objectives for this bust”.<sup>5</sup>

During 1951–1956, the annual profits of *Māksla* reached 1.4–1.8 million roubles (\$0.4–0.5 million), but it was of little benefit to the Latvian AU. The factory was supervised from Moscow by the Soviet Fund for Arts, which managed the economic activities of the USSR Artists’ Union. In 1955 the factory employed 300 artists, of whom only 42 were AU members (the Latvian AU counted 213 members); only 163,467 roubles were allocated for financing unique artwork.<sup>6</sup>

The factory’s annual revenues (see Table 1) suggest that customers demanded the artworks (stained glass, chandeliers, tapestry, etc.) for decorating public establishments and private apartments; the customary and ceremonial design for institutions, factories, collective farms, schools, polling stations and military units (information stands posting practical and political information to the employees, etc.; Figure 3); as well as the copies of portraits of state leaders, artists and scientists, canvasses by *peredvizhniks* and socialist realists. Sculptors – professors and students of the art academy as well as their less-talented amateurs – profited from modelling decorative sculptures in plaster for subsequent replication in concrete. Placed in urban squares and in parks, the naturalistic images of children, workers, animals and sportsmen beautified the communist environment and simulated the promised prosperous life; sculptures on highways were intended to reduce the monotony of driving. The images of sportsmen, besides promoting a healthy lifestyle, entertained male gaze – many were of female figures, with sometimes boldly emphasized body parts (Figures 4 and 5). Small plaster bas-reliefs and desktop busts of the fathers of communism – Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin – as well as of scientists, artists and literati, demonstratively framed the ruling ideology.<sup>7</sup>

In 1957, the artists producing profitable works at the factory had the highest average wages (1800 roubles a month), whilst the academically-educated painters and sculptors from among the AU members earned 1200 roubles.<sup>8</sup> *Māksla* drew up the

Table 1. Breakdown of *Māksla's* revenue, 1952 and 1955

Product	Revenue (thousands of roubles)	
	1952	1955
Applied art (ceramics, woodworks, leather, mintage, weaving)	4398	5869
Design (practical information and political propaganda stands, etc.)	2494	2494
Portraits (copies)	1045	1353
Sculpture (replicas)	863	913
Baguettes and frames	680	350
Canvases (copies)	268	61
Original sculpture <sup>a</sup>	686	594
Original canvases	162	330
Original applied art	–	65
Total revenue	10,596	12,029

Note: <sup>a</sup>For example, plaster etalons of desktop busts and outdoor decorative sculptures for further replication, bronze fountains and the Stalin monument in Riga.

Source: LVA, f. 232, apr. 1, l. 22, lp.16; l. 32, lp. 73.



Figure 3. Aleksandra Fišere-Sakša. Lenin bust on the ceremonial square of the factory VEF in Riga, 1970, forged copper. Photographs of the distinguished employees are posted on the “Honorary stand”. Until the end of the 1950s, portraits were being commissioned to *Māksla's* painters. Design of such installations provided a great deal of *Māksla's* revenue. This square was conceived and the bust was cast by the amateurs attending the artists’ studio run by the factory VEF. On the eve of the inauguration, the professional artists criticized the design for aesthetic drawbacks, notably the placement of the bust in front of the portraits. Courtesy of the Centre for Documentation of Monuments.

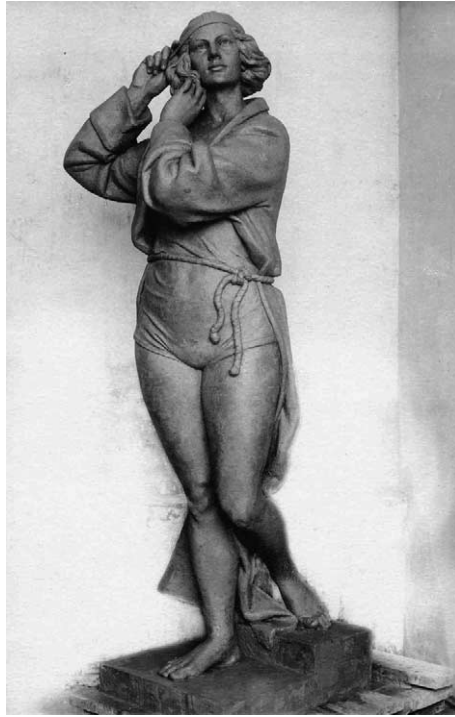


Figure 4. Alberts Terpilovskis. *Before swimming*, plaster model for mass production in concrete, h = 2.5 metres, 1954. Courtesy of Latvia State Archive.

pay rates – which favoured the technical executors, putting at a disadvantage the creators of original art. For stonecutting work alone the factory consumed up to 90% of the budget allocated for the creation of a sculpture whereas the sculptors believed the manufacturing costs should not exceed 25% (Zemdega 1952, 5). An artist copying the ideologically significant canvas *Lenin proclaiming the Soviet governance* was paid 2200 roubles, whilst the author of a unique landscape earned just a little bit more – 2500 roubles.<sup>9</sup> Reproduction of statesmen in military uniforms covered with decorations and medals, as well as canvases depicting battles, were considered technically complex and consequently were better remunerated.

The academically-educated art elite scorned the mundane low-brow work produced by *Māksla* (Figure 6). Consequently their less-talented colleagues, whose outstanding marketing aptitudes compensated for their low professional ambitions, took over the more lucrative jobs. The state controller accused *Māksla* of corruption and nepotism. The leading daily newspaper *Cīņa* concluded, with bitter irony, that the art the factory knew best was “the moneymaking art” (Slaidiņš 1950, 4). The AU archive reveals the details of this “art”. The chair of the factory’s Art Department, Aleksandrs Gailītis, was paid a 3000-rouble authorship fee for a small portrait sculpture *Volodya Ulyanov* (Lenin as a boy) (Figure 7). Later he awarded himself another contract for producing 200 copies of this sculpture, now renamed *A reading boy*. The title was subject to change because the mass production of Lenin’s image required special license of censorship in Moscow controlling conformity to the canonical representation – a time-consuming procedure with an uncertain outcome.





Figure 5. Ashot Partizpanyan and Moisei Grinshpun. *A discus thrower*, plaster model for mass production in concrete, h=2.5 metres, 1952. Courtesy of Latvia State Archive.

Thus, formally, Gailītis's contract dealt with a mass production of an ordinary boy's image whilst the fee of 16,000 roubles was calculated for replicating a politically significant portrait. The state controller was astounded by the impressive fee of 14,000 roubles paid to Ashot Partizpanyan and Moisei Grinshpun for a mediocre sculpture, *A discus-thrower*<sup>10</sup> (Figure 5). By comparison, in 1956, an academic sculptor was paid a 32,000 rouble fee for the design of an original three-meter Lenin sculpture in bronze.<sup>11</sup>

Nikita Khrushchev's administration (1953–1964) inherited the unsettled rivalry between the factions of artists. Increased regulation of the arts market improved the status of academic artists, but subsequent setbacks of the state economy compelled the government to curtail expenses for visual propaganda. Khrushchev's cultural policy will be discussed in the next section.

#### **Khrushchev starts paying for aesthetics but ends with thrift: 1954–1965**

In 1954 the CC CPSU, responsible for drafting the cultural policy and supervising the AU, cleansed the organizing committee of the Soviet AU. Stalin's favourite painters and sculptors were accused of non-democratic management and corruption. Amongst other worries, the Communist party was concerned with procuring jobs for the increasing number of sculptors graduating from the Academies of Fine Arts: in 1954, the AU counted almost 900 sculptors working in the USSR,<sup>12</sup> but the lion's

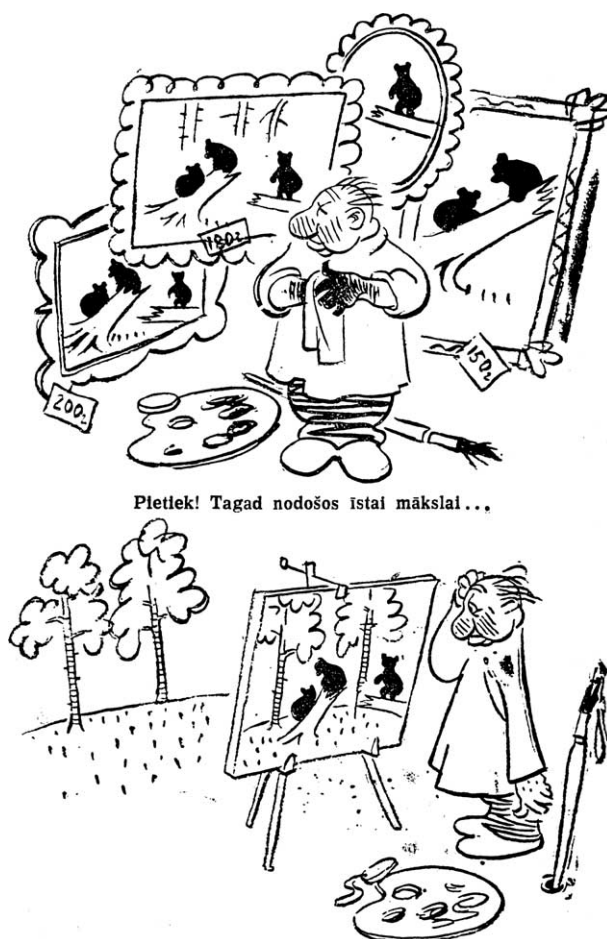


Figure 6. “Enough! Now it’s time to engage myself in the real art ...”. Cartoonist Uģis Mežavilks has depicted an artist copying a canvas by *peredvizhnik* Ivan Shishkin, *Morning in a pine forest* (1889), representing bear-cubs – the most telling Soviet metaphor of low-brow tastes. Reproduced from the weekly *Literatūra un Māksla*, 16 February 1957.

share of contracts went to fewer than a dozen of them (Afanasyeva, Afiani, and Vodopyanova 2001, 316). The reform of the central institution permitted the province to act in support of local interests. The decree “On Regularization of Commissioning of Artwork”, issued by Latvia’s government on 25 August 1954, secured the rights of the AU members. Local sculptors were awarded four contracts for Lenin statues in concrete. Nevertheless, the uncoordinated legal provisions and the lack of financial capacity precluded establishing institutional mechanisms that would permit a smooth implementation of formal decisions.<sup>13</sup>

De-Stalinization, announced at the 20th congress of the CPSU in February 1956, sanctioned intellectual attacks on the Stalinist aesthetics and justified a more determined reform of cultural policy. Secretary of the Central Committee responsible for ideology, Dmitry Shepilov, in public speeches supported the artistic freedom and stylistic diversity. Latvia’s AU members, convened at the Union’s regular congress in



Figure 7. Aleksandrs Gailītis. *Volodya Ulyanov* (alias *A reading boy*), plaster, h = 0.52 metres, 1952–1954. Courtesy of the Art Academy of Latvia.

March 1956, accused *Māksla* of fraudulence. Latvians complained about the lack of workshops and the excessive appetite of their Muscovite colleagues who monopolized state commissions. Gradually, the state introduced considerable economic stimuli and protected the AU members from market competition. In 1956 the USSR government decentralized the state commission and accorded 35 million roubles annually for the acquisition of artwork. On the eve of the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution, 58 state contracts worth half a million roubles were distributed among Latvian artists, and 12 painters and sculptors were given monthly wages of 1500–3000 roubles. Latvians were awarded two contracts for casting Lenin statues in bronze and granite for placing in town squares. Renunciation of the dogmatic interpretation of history exonerated many local intellectuals previously labelled as “nationalist” or “bourgeois” ideologists. Altogether, 33 Latvians were readmitted into the national narrative and immediately listed as persons deserving a bust or sculpture in a public space. In 1957, the government set up long-term plans to guarantee commissions for sculptors and architects. One year later, the conference of Baltic sculptors in Riga demanded that the state should grant them access to bidding for the large-scale contracts awarded outside their region in the immense Russian Federation – that had until this time been the domain of Russian artists only.

Decentralization of the art business in 1958 put *Māksla*'s profit under Riga's control. In 1960, the Soviet government more than doubled the budget for commissioning and acquiring artwork – from 35 million to 80 million roubles. Artists' unions and ministries of culture in the individual Soviet republics were given the right to order monuments and control the appropriation of funds where they felt necessary.

As a result of these political and economic changes, visual propaganda increased. At the end of 1950s Latvian officials considered more than 50 proposals for World War II monuments, busts and sculptures of the eminent Latvians. In a joint decree

issued on 13 October 1959, Latvia's Council of Ministers and the CC LCP reflected upon the new outlook: "The construction of monuments is the most important state affair of high political and cultural significance".<sup>14</sup> The document warned about corruption as the business of monument-building was still lacking transparency. Enterprising managers squandered the funds allocated for visual propaganda, commissioning amateur sculptors without competitive bids. Flamboyant projects increased expenditures, already out of control because of the absence of price-lists and tariffs. The state controller reported continuous theft of deficit materials and also corruption in *Māksla*.<sup>15</sup> To try to tackle this problem, the government introduced supervising institutions to put the system in order. From then on the Central Committee's permission was to be required for all projects; proposed designs were to be evaluated in a competition; the Ministry of Culture was entrusted with general responsibility for the expertise.

Attempts to put the arts industry in order, however, failed. Time and again the AU complained that its members could not access the contracts nor were they invited to design and decorate public buildings and the adjacent space. This was also at a time where the state economy was not performing well either. To balance the budget of Latvia, on 5 June 1961 the government of Latvia cut the funds allocated for construction of monuments in that year by 61%. Finally, on 28 September 1961, the USSR Council of Ministers and the CC CPSU adopted a joint decree "On the Elimination of Excessive Spending of State and Public Funds in the Construction of Monuments".<sup>16</sup> The decree acknowledged "serious drawbacks and blunders" and stopped construction of all but the most important monuments. In Latvia, 15 projects were "temporarily halted", another 23 were annulled, and only five projects were given the go-ahead. The most radical decision was the introduction of the Kremlin's monopoly on issuing construction permits in the whole country. Starting from 1963, the federal Soviet government halved the annual state subsidies for commissioning and acquiring artwork.

Khrushchev's cultural policy – prohibition of replication practices and refusal of naturalism in favour of original, stylistically diverse sculptures in permanent materials – strengthened the position of the academically-educated Latvian sculptors. Nevertheless, the decline of the Soviet economy warned the artists that the ideological nature of their state was not a guarantee of a steady commissioning of visual propaganda; sculptors had to procure the demand for their fine art themselves. Support did, however, come from those art scholars who advocated the inclusion of monuments in rituals introduced and promoted by the government at the time as a way of fostering a sense of the shared communist community and culture. Becoming the masters of spatio-temporal structuring of the Soviet world, sculptors increased their power to market their artwork. In the next section, I will discuss the transformation of the practice of ritual in the Soviet Union.

### **Communist rituals**

The experimentation with communist rituals in the 1920s failed to captivate the population. Experts in arts and entertainment sought to supplant the religious *rites de passage* with the invented ceremonies of "red christening", "red wedding", "red funeral", and so forth. But these evaporated as the ideology was not successful in introducing a new national narrative built around these ideals, myths and values (Stites

1991; Rolf 2006). From the 1930s onwards, Stalin's image functioned as the central symbol of the collective identity, whilst the repressive state apparatus ensured social cohesion from within. However the denunciation of Stalin's crimes by the 20th Congress of the Communist Party, in 1956, deprived the collective identity of its key symbol. At the same time, the reform of the secret police impaired the state's capacity to control society.<sup>17</sup> Liberalization of home politics under Khrushchev's leadership in 1953–1964, known as "The Thaw", triggered social activity, especially among urban intellectuals.

In 1956, the world witnessed anti-communist movements in Poland and Hungary, and the domestic Soviet public sphere itself experienced an intellectual boom. *Ad hoc* assemblies of students and intellectuals displayed a capacity to enact new non-official and non-sanctioned rituals, suspected by the authorities of undermining existing power relations. For example, the monument to the Soviet poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, unveiled in Moscow in 1958, attracted people to the regularly scheduled poetry readings. Jazz and rock-'n'-roll fans coalesced around the new collective identities, whilst the relaxation of ideological constraint facilitated the church's increase in popularity.

Since a shared class identity failed to induce the acceptance of communist values, the Communist Party put ideological education on the agenda: the state envisaged convincing citizens to interiorize a positive attitude towards the existing social order and participate in its maintenance. Quasi-religious identification with Stalin as the nation's leader was to give way to the conscious and emotional involvement of individuals in the communist community. Public ritual integrated in the private life events – coming-of-age, wedding and the like – proved to be a handy medium for propagating and strengthening a sense of personal relationship to the state.

The Soviet ritual, in a Durkheimian consensual normative sense, had to maintain the collective beliefs corresponding to modernity and instil the ethos of industrialization. David Kertzer (1988), however, maintains that material symbols rather than values or opinions are in the centre of a ritual. Material objects express the content symbolically; or, to put it in semiotic terms, signifiers have a more important place and power than the signified. "The visible sign represents an invisible presence, it manifests a deep structure or law which otherwise escapes the senses and could not hold (fascinate) the imagination or soul of its subjects to the order of natural forms" (Goodrich 1991, 235). Veneration of signifiers was not alien to the communist ritual. Commemorating the anniversary of Lenin's death in 1952, journalist Mikhail Zorin described his visit to the Lenin Mausoleum in Moscow in terms of a meeting of regional and social sections of society and their identification *qua* the nation. A resident of Riga and Siberia, a peasant, an intellectual and a soldier meet at Lenin's body, which functions as a material object structuring the communion ritual. Since the body cannot be present in all corners of the country, elsewhere it is represented by monuments to which awe is transferred. In Riga "atop the pedestal Lenin stands as a living man", wrote Zorin (1952, 4). Flowers put at the foot of the monument inspire life in bronze; the ritual of sacrificing flowers is to be repeated in order to maintain life.

Recently I was witnessing a group of schoolchildren laying flowers at the monument. With care, they put a large wreath, and then everybody put one fresh flower on the cold stone plate. The youngest boy probably was ten, eleven years old . . . From early childhood the Soviet citizen feels love for and confidence in Lenin. It has been so and it will continue through generations. Flowers cover the red granite as a symbol of immortal life, of eternal life. (Zorin 1952, pp. 4–5)

The mummified body and its bronze replica strike the viewer with awe because they enshrine the knowledge indispensable to the revolutionary improvement of the world. Zorin's article "In Lenin's name" tells about the agricultural and industrial enterprises that successfully bring about communist transformations. The gauge of their progress is Lenin's name/word:<sup>18</sup> these enterprises not only follow the word uttered by Lenin and act in his name, but also carry his name in their designation. By tending and honouring the monument, people preserve and protect the name/word which is infused into their everyday acts.

Veneration of Lenin's image could, however, not compete with the truly religious rituals. Observations made by the party officials in Latvia's Catholic province of Latgale revealed that the citizens ignored the state holidays.

In the village of Gaisma people do not celebrate the revolutionary holidays; on the Labour Day and the Revolution Day peasants were working, they did not cook the holiday meal at homes, only party meetings were organised. The club was closed.<sup>19</sup>

Another report mentioned that a village set All Souls' Day on 1 November as a day off, whilst the Revolution Day was a workday. The Communist Party leadership was displeased that one-half of all weddings in the Catholic province were celebrated in the church.

Conformity with collective rhythms or calendrical cycles is an indicator of the loyalty to social order (Bourdieu 1977). Khrushchev's ideologues believed that the citizens could be connected to the communist community symbolically by the repetitive use of ritual objects (sharing a holiday meal) and structuring time (visiting a club). The party leadership instructed the designers of alternative secular rituals to borrow splendour and solemnity of religious ceremonies.

Among the Soviet republics, the government of Latvia was the first to introduce new rituals such as name-giving, coming-of-age (receiving a passport) and commemoration of the dead (Fišers and Juškēvičs 1964; Zavarina 1970).<sup>20</sup> The city of Valmiera initiated the integration of monuments in rituals: the Department of Public Education staged a torch procession of schoolchildren to the sepulchral monument of 11 Young Communists executed by the counter-revolution in 1919; in this "sacred place", as the officials named it, the affiliation ceremony for the Young Communist League (*komsomol*) took place.<sup>21</sup> In 1971, the government suggested Valmiera's initiative as a model of patriotic education for all of Latvia. Sculptors and architects promoted Lenin and World War II monuments as spatial organizers for the new rituals. Here *rites de passage* took place (admittance to *oktyabryata* at the age of seven, to Young Pioneers at the age of 10, to *komsomol* at the age of 14, the coming-of-age festivities upon reaching 16), newly-wed couples laid flowers, and cyclic state holidays were celebrated (Kravinska 1987) (Figure 8). The Lenin Museum in Riga and the Mausoleum in Moscow were popularized as the destinations of unique pilgrimages.

The replacement of the church by a monument as a place for performing the collective identity ensured a steady commission of artworks. Hereafter examined archival documents prove that the creative intelligentsia, seeking to satisfy its business interests, took various initiatives in the aesthetisation of ideology.

### **Brezhnev cedes to artists' lobby: 1966–1982**

Khrushchev's dismissal from power brought about another reform of visual representation. The new leader, Leonid Brezhnev (1964–1982), reintroduced the



Figure 8. Coming-of-age celebration at the foot of Lenin monument in Valmiera, 1961. Courtesy of the Valmiera Museum of Local History.

idea of monumental propaganda. The decree “On the Regulation of Design and Construction of Monuments”, adopted on 24 June 1966, decentralized the production of outdoor sculptures and assigned supervision of all works to the ministries of culture in the Soviet republics. Moscow retained the right to screen and sanction the most important monuments requiring large investments, whereas local artistic elites got legal monopoly of the contracts issued by the government, municipalities and enterprises in their republics.

In September 1966 the Latvian Ministry of Culture set up the Committee on the Supervision of Monuments charged with the expertise of new designs and on the site control of construction works. Five of its 11 members were actively involved as designers of monuments. During the business trips to Latvian towns, the experts found that the technical and artistic quality of the concrete statues of Lenin erected in 1947–1960 was very low (all statues of Stalin had been toppled by 1962). Sculptors advised the municipalities to erect new statues made from bronze and granite. Improvement of Lenin’s image would have broadened the job opportunities for sculptors, although the 1966 decree did not provide a special state budget for visual political communication. Rather, this was to be financed by the surplus profits of municipalities or enterprises. Artists had to convince as many institutions as possible that it was a good idea to replace the concrete statues.

The academic conference on the arts held in Riga in December 1967, attended by Latvia’s scholars and artists, advanced a new conception of outdoor sculpture. Scholar Tatyana Kachalova asserted that the modern industrial city could not

accommodate a sculpture in the round. Instead, it should be succeeded by a monolithic monument designed for a single visual angle and coordinated with the surrounding urban scenery.

Lenin's approaching centenary in 1970 offered a perfect pretext for introducing the new three-dimensional art. The Ministry of Culture summarized the proposals of artists in a letter addressed to the Council of Ministers on 10 July 1969.<sup>22</sup> Artists had demanded that the government required municipalities to improve the quality of Lenin statues: to replace the old statues, modify the placement of figures *vis-à-vis* other elements of urban architecture, restore the pedestals, landscape the surrounding space and adjust them to current ritual needs.

An event in the industrial town of Jēkabpils in south-eastern Latvia provided unexpected political support for the artistic initiative. On 18 July 1969, without warning, the city authorities, by night, dismantled the concrete statue of Lenin in order to submit it for the renovation advised by the Committee on the Supervision of Monuments. Lenin's abrupt disappearance irritated a local communist so much that he rushed to write a complaint to the secretary-general of the CC CPSU, Brezhnev. The Kremlin readdressed the letter to the Latvian Communist party apparatus. Fearing that the negligence of Lenin's image could be interpreted as outrageous offence to the political order, the local party leadership acted in order to avoid future problems of the same kind. In a special decree it conferred the Ministry of Culture exceptional rights to supervise the restoration of remaining 36 concrete statues and busts, as well as the design and construction of new Lenin monuments.

Promotion of Lenin's three-dimensional image, known as the "plastic *Leniniana*", secured a special role for the statues in urban semiotics. A plan for 1961–1965 (halted by a 1961 decree) proposed the erection of 14 war monuments and two Lenin monuments, whilst, in 1966–1970, a go-ahead was issued for 19 war monuments and 24 Lenin monuments.<sup>23</sup> The Moscow daily *Pravda* reported: "Every town in Latvia aspires to beautify its best square with an original sculpture of Lenin. The best sculptors in Riga are to carve the monuments" (Ivanov 1969, 6). Later, art scholars contended that Lenin monuments were the tools ensuring political communication and education, and therefore they become the urban compositional and ideological centres, positively influencing the architectural and artistic design of towns and villages (Cielava 1981; Savickis 1970; Šusts 1977).

Statistics suggests the Latvian origin of this initiative. In 1970–1987, Latvians erected 21 Lenin monuments, whereas Lithuanians erected four and Estonians only one (*Yezhegodnik Bol'shoy Sovetskoy Etntsiklopediyi* 1971–1988). Furthermore, the Latvian school of sculpture established by Teodors Zaļkalns (1876–1972) promoted a uniquely stern style that results from the rough treatment of massive granite blocks. His students applied this technique even to bronze: ignoring its fluidity sculptors often practiced grinding and polishing instead of casting. Artists strove against the round realist portrait sculpture, and by the 1970s had succeeded with the introduction of the monumentally stringent laconic images that were architectonically adapted to the surrounding urban environment (Balcerbule 1972; Čaupova and Savitskaya 1973; Kachalova 1970; Savickis 1972) (Figures 9–17). In the mid-1970s, Russian scholars criticized what they called a "monumentally geometrical template". They challenged Latvian colleagues to explore the expressivity of easel art and the tonality of handwork in order to saturate the industrial city with human emotions, to





Figure 9. Aleksandrs Gailītis and Jānis Lukašēvičs. Lenin monument in Smiltene (replicated in Seda, Preiļi and at a factory in Riga), concrete, h  $\approx$  2.5 metres (figure), 1957. Courtesy of the Centre for Documentation of Monuments.



Figure 10. Juris Mauriņš. Lenin monument in Balvi, granite, h = 6 metres, 1973. Courtesy of the Balvi Region Museum.



Figure 11. Jānis Zariņš. Lenin monument in Ventspils, bronze, h = 6.5 metres (figure), 1975. The sculpture is being dismantled from the 14-metre-high column on 25 August 1991. Photograph by Vitālijs Makkars. Courtesy of the Ventspils Museum.

learn from the playful “neo-baroque” style evolved in Moscow, Armenia, and Lithuania (Lebedev 1977; Svetlov 1976; Voronov 1979).

The government and party leadership was concerned with the expansion of *Leniniana*. The waste of money and inadequate treatment of the canonized image caused concerns among the officials and they sought to moderate the zealous demonstration of loyalty by the province. On 21 January 1967, the USSR Council of Ministers set up a bureaucratic filter: henceforth, all designs of Lenin’s image were to be controlled and accepted by the Monumental Sculpture Committee under the auspices of the USSR Ministry of Culture in Moscow. Four times the ministry ignored Riga’s invitations to evaluate and accept the projects – six granite and two bronze figures, and 11 bronze busts.<sup>24</sup> Without this sanction, the factory *Monumentskul’ptura* in Leningrad refused to cast the models in bronze, thus endangering the unveilings timed for the Lenin centenary in April 1970. The members of the Committee arrived in Riga only in September 1969 – one year after the first invitation had been sent by Latvians.



Figure 12. Ojārs Siliņš and Arvīds Voitkāns. Lenin monument in Valka, granite, h = 6 metres, 1975. Courtesy of the Centre for Documentation of Monuments.

In July 1967, the local government decree stressed that the municipalities were authorized to spend only the non-planned surpluses in their budgets to finance the monuments. Several applications were rejected because the municipalities intended to use their regular budget or to collect donations from enterprises (illegal in the USSR). Some applicants expected state budget support for their supposedly important political initiatives. Moreover, the monopolist contractor *Māksla* lacked production capacities and materials to meet the increasing demand for monument-building. In June 1969, a government official responsible for screening the applications even suggested halting the issue of permissions. Three years later, overburdened with commissions, *Māksla* asked the government to stop the boom in monument-building. Over the course of six years, 63 permits had been issued for different sculptures, busts and memorials.<sup>25</sup>

The case of one monument erected in the second-largest Latvian city, Daugavpils, reveals the battle for commissions with rivals from other Soviet republics (Figure 18). The city council signed an agreement with a Russian sculptor from Leningrad, Alexander Chernitsky, in 1960. The project was halted after the governmental decree on resource-saving was passed in 1961. After its lifting in 1966, the Latvian Committee on Supervision of Monuments immediately banned the design, which it described as off-grade. However, in 1969 in the daily *Pravda*, Latvians learned that Chernitsky was continuing his work (Ivanov 1969). Daugavpils presented the granite



Figure 13. Juris Mauriņš. Lenin monument in Jūrmala, bronze, h=10.5 metres, 1977. Courtesy of the Jūrmala City Museum.

Lenin as a *fait accompli*. Riga's experts advanced a scathing critique: the figure is heavier than the pedestal; the head is disproportionate in relation to the body; it was carved separately and attached to the body; the left leg and the back are anatomically inaccurate; the colours of granite blocks differ; Lenin looks absurd wearing a greatcoat and winter cap in the local climate. Despite this critique, voiced by Riga already in 1966, the design had been accepted by the experts of the USSR AU branch in Leningrad. The head sculptor of the branch, Pavel Yakimovich, rejected all reproaches, defending his colleague and countryman.

I think that disproportionate attention is paid to some details. For example, it was argued that the leg, which emerges from the coat, points in the wrong direction. Yes, it is so. Last time I noticed it because somebody directed my attention to it. Today I did not notice it at all because the monument has the most important feature – the colour, the imagery. It is very important. It is granite, not bronze, it cannot carry decorative features.<sup>26</sup>



Figure 14. Arvīds Voītkāns. Lenin monument in Madona, forged copper, h=6 metres, dolomite pedestal, h=7 metres, 1977. Courtesy of the Centre for Documentation of Monuments.

This event repudiates the concept of a centralized commanding cultural policy in this immense country. The municipality ignored Riga's prescripts while overtly the Leningrad sculptors treated the province as a market for their low-grade products. The state administration withheld from interfering in minor conflicts between the rival groups of artists. By voicing the aesthetic arguments, Latvian experts pushed away the profit-seeking visitors from this market and secured high remunerations for the native sculptors. Often experts suggested the improvement and redesigning of projects; the time-lag increased overall costs of design and casting; the large size of statues secured the proportional increase of authorship fees.<sup>27</sup> In 1969 and in 1976, the Ministry of Culture of USSR admonished officials for the violation of legal provisions, unreasonable gigantism and the concomitant squandering of resources. The Latvian government, in its 1974 and 1979 decrees, reasserted that moderation was important in visual propaganda. In 1981, Latvia's Ministry of Culture proposed to return to the Stalinist practice of replicating busts and sculptures. The ministry admonished the contractors for inflating the prices as they adapted the central squares to ritual use.



Figure 15. Ļevis Bukovskis. Lenin monument in Kuldīga, granite, h=3.6 metres (figure), 1980. Detail. Dismantling of the monument in 1990. Photograph by Modris Rubenis. Courtesy of the Kuldīga Region Museum.

Artists responded by advocating strong ties between urban art and politics. In December 1982, the Architects' Union held a conference entitled "The Ideological and Educative Value of Architecture and Monumental Art". Professor of architecture Ivars Strautmanis, the author of several monuments, argued that "the ideologically most significant monuments should be given the most advantageous space of urban structure" (Strautmanis 1983, 2). The conference leaves no doubt about the intention to restructure all towns around Lenin's image:

For our towns it is most important that the architectural reconstruction of town centres is functionally and compositionally related to the most significant monuments – first of all to the monuments of Lenin. In this way the urban space acquires a central ideological accent, which strengthens and improves the general compositional structure of the town.<sup>28</sup>

Implementing the ideas voiced at the conference, the president of the Architects' Union, Gunārs Asaris, urged the government to pressure the municipalities into replacing the concrete statues "with ideologically and artistically invaluable monumental art works, which respectful of urban conditions would unveil Lenin's image with dignity".<sup>29</sup> Listed were 18 statues and 13 busts cast in concrete. Under the pressure of architects, the government charged the Ministry of Culture with scheduling the replacement work.

### **Andropov seeks to stop wastefulness: 1983 and beyond**

On 12 April 1983, Latvian towns were saved from unnecessary expenditures. Moscow banned both the designing of new monuments and the completion of those that had been begun. Four months after Brezhnev's departure, his successor



Figure 16. Alīna Veinbaha. Lenin monument in Ludza, granite, h = 5.8 metres (figure), 1981. Courtesy of the Centre for Documentation of Monuments.

Yuri Andropov launched another reform of visual propaganda. The decree asserted that many monuments were needless, “especially when many citizens expect improvement of their housings”.<sup>30</sup> Henceforth Moscow issued only “exceptional” permissions. Latvia demanded the go-ahead for finalizing eight Lenin and nine war monuments that had already received huge investments – altogether costing one million roubles.

In 1986, Mikhail Gorbachev lifted Andropov’s ban; Latvians resumed the construction of a gigantic monument of the October Revolution, envisaging a bronze statue of Lenin in front of the 32-metre-high red granite wall representing the revolutionary flag located at the newly-designed area of government buildings in Riga. The masters of monumental art – sculptor Alberts Terpilovskis, and architects Gunārs Asaris, Oļģerts Ostenbergs and Ivars Strautmanis – had already finalized the project before Andropov’s decree. The question was: why did Riga need a second huge Lenin monument at a cost estimated to be two million roubles? Architect Strautmanis had argued that a 24-storey hotel recently built near the Lenin monument of 1950 had changed the urban space. The sculpture was deprived of its dominant role and had become inadequate. “Obviously Lenin’s image is to be



Figure 17. Dzidra Jansone. Lenin monument in Preiļi, bronze. Unveiling ceremony in 1987. Courtesy of the Preiļi Museum of History and Applied Art.

activated in the monument of October Revolution”, he concluded (Strautmanis 1983, 2). The project, announced back in 1966, envisioned a large square for mass meetings and military parades, but the end of the USSR precluded its implementation (Figure 19).

Proclamation of the Republic of Latvia, on 21 August 1991, was marked by the toppling of almost 80 outdoor statues and busts of Lenin.<sup>31</sup> Today Latvian artists and scholars disclaim their contribution to the maintenance of power relations. The Academy of Fine Arts Professor Skaidrīte Cielava (1994, 77) dedicated only nine lines to the monumental *Leniniana* in her 80-page monograph on the Soviet Latvian plastic arts. The boom of Lenin sculpture is explained as the colonization of plastic arts by state power (Čaupova 2006; Cēbere 2007). However, the central state and party authority was not alone in deriving benefit from the *Leniniana*. The lower echelons of political and economic management demanded a semiotic of power enabling a handy communication with the centre and their rank-and-file subordinates; the professional artists took advantage of the opportunity to satisfy their aesthetic ambitions in developing the local school of stern monumentality, which also guaranteed, by virtue of its laboriousness, a considerable increase in fees.

### The practical use of Lenin monuments

Lenin monuments were not just “reminders” that prompted memory. As material objects, statues provided a dramaturgical logic to the ritual structuring of social relations. Analysed retrospectively, the attempt to consolidate Soviet people around the propagated communist values failed. However, this failure is no reason to flatly





Figure 18. Alexander Chernitsky. Lenin monument in Daugavpils, granite, h = 6.5 metres (figure), 1970. Courtesy of the Centre for Documentation of Monuments.

deny the pragmatic efforts of the plastic *Leniniana*. Scholars contend, against Durkheim, that the achievement of consensus about values is not the aim of a ritual. Steven Lukes (1975) holds that those who sponsor rituals seek to construct relations of domination. “[P]laces marked by monuments are not only produced by but also produce ideology, and they may reproduce specific forms of social positioning and cohesion in time and space” (Earle 1997, 153). Town centres marked with massive Lenin statues unambiguously notified Latvians as to who was entitled to signify the world and arrange the public acts.

David Kertzer stresses that some political rituals produce bonds of solidarity without requiring uniformity of belief: “Solidarity is produced by people acting together, not by people thinking together” (1988, 76). When individuals participate

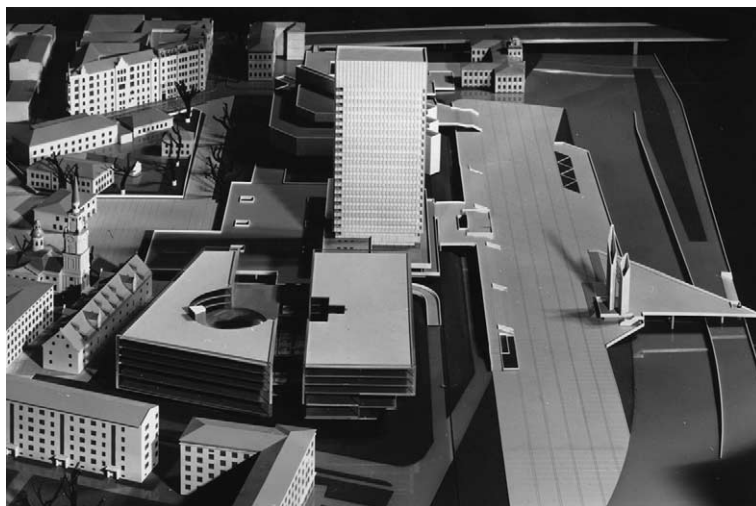


Figure 19. Design of the Republic Square in Riga with government offices and a large space for mass meetings consisting of a tribune for the state leadership (leftward) and the October Revolution Monument with Lenin statue (rightward), early 1980s. Courtesy of Latvian Museum of Architecture.

in the organization and performance of rituals, they attest the social values merely by virtue of doing things in the face of their peers. This approach to ritual admits the importance of habitual horizontal and bottom-up communications. For the heads of municipalities and enterprises, a statue or a bust of Lenin was a message of their loyalty addressed to the centre, as well as an object facilitating the ritualistic expression of loyalty by their subordinates.

The Soviet arts policy suggests another pragmatic aim of the ritual staged around the monument. The *Great Soviet encyclopaedia* recalls that Lenin's plan of monumental propaganda facilitated the collaboration of artists with the communist authority (*Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya* 1974, 551). Relations between the master and his artists—who were endowed with the power of prophets in Russia—were moved from the delicate and contested field of ideology into the more pragmatic field of economics. Since the customers were prepared to pay for the signs carrying the signified “loyalty”, the material signifiers turned into the objects of market exchange.

The nepotism of Soviet political culture permitted a group of enterprising individuals to seize control of the key institutions handling the contracts and public funds for the visual propaganda (cf. Kostyrchenko 2009, 210–211). As a result, the state authorities were losing ideological control of the financial incentives conceived as a medium of political supervision and guidance of the ever-increasing number of academically-educated artists. Six times, from 1948 to 1986, the government radically changed the policy related to monumental propaganda. Certainly, for the population, the change of visual representation was a demonstrative message attesting to the corrections of the political course undertaken by the leadership. But there is a more elementary reason behind the cultural policy: by affecting the production of material sign-forms, the reforms settled relations between rival factions of the creative intelligentsia. Discriminated against in the state art market during Stalin's rule,

Latvian sculptors invented aesthetic arguments to discredit the policy of a then-dominant caste of their colleagues residing in Moscow who monopolized the commission of artworks. Latvians were proud that in the pre-Soviet decades they had enjoyed freedom to practise modernism. In a haughty manner, they now criticized the naturalist portrait sculpture in the round so dear to Russian socialist realists and condemned the industrial replication of monuments in concrete. During the Khrushchev years, talented local artists gained access to the state commissions; but as the economy worsened, the government stopped the erection of outdoor sculptures. When Brezhnev renewed the monumental propaganda, the artists, to use capitalist terminology, launched a business project to secure the demand for art in conditions of volatile economic conjuncture. Lenin's outstanding role in the communist narrative ensured successful marketing of his images.<sup>32</sup> Semiotic arguments in support of Lenin monuments as the ideological centres, and of structuring the urban space around a statue, united sculptors and architects in their efforts to secure commissions. Aesthetic arguments in support of fine original monuments carved in permanent materials and respectful of Latvian cultural tradition limited the number of potential contractors able to meet the elevated quality standards.

In addition to the top-down ideological indoctrination, Soviet outdoor sculpture facilitated the bottom-up communication of loyalty. Demand for the statues had created the market of ideology. Sculptors and architects integrated the discourse of fine arts into their bargaining for their business interests and in the final account plastic arts invested in the reproduction of the dominant discourse of power.

### Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Inta Carpenter, Rita Ruduša-Case, Ruta Akmentiņa, Anna Bogdāne, Ingrīda Burāne, Inese Helviga, Krišjānis Jantons, Ilze Martinsone, Indra Orehova, Ingrīda Štrumfa, Indra Vilistere, Silvija Voite, the staff of the Latvia State Archive and the Centre for Documentation of Monuments for their kind assistance. Also, the author gratefully acknowledges the anonymous reviewers whose comments enabled the restructuring and improvement of the argument of the present version of this article.

### Notes

1. Russian blogger Dmitry Kudinov runs a photographic gallery of almost 4000 Lenin monuments. [http://community.livejournal.com/ru\\_lenin/](http://community.livejournal.com/ru_lenin/).
2. The construction of the Hotel Riga was estimated at 40 million roubles, whilst the Arch of Victory would have cost 7 million. The campaign against "formalism" in Soviet architecture was launched in March 1948 with a practical purpose. The post-war reconstruction required reducing the costs of design and building bloated by the pompous pre-war Stalinist pseudo-classicism, whilst at the same time responsibility was to be shifted to the shoulders of architects and constructors in order to save policy-makers in the top echelons of the Communist Party. The Victory Monument project was revived in 1960 but was immediately abandoned as the economy of resources was announced in 1961. A new competition was announced in 1976, and the monument was erected in 1985.
3. The plaster bust was modelled for an art exhibition, where it received harsh academic criticism. Nevertheless, the producer suggested this image for the in-door decoration of the Riga city council. In order to save time and money before the imminent municipal anniversary, the city used it as a model for casting the outdoor bronze bust. Low-grade casting work decreased the resemblance to the prototype even further.
4. Memorials in the war cemeteries were the only ones that the government and the Communist Party mandated. Local municipalities were obliged to budget erection of the modest commemorative signs produced on an industrial scale. Mostly these were

- architectural constructions – concrete and brickwork parallelepipeds, cubes, obelisks accompanied by bas-reliefs and inscriptions.
5. The Centre for Documentation of Monuments, archive file “Documents on Lenin and Stalin monuments”, p. 4.
  6. Latvian State Archive (LVA), f. 230, apr. 1, l. 5, lp. 25. Figures designate the stock, folder, file and folio number of archival documents.
  7. The busts represented eight Latvian and 16 Russian scientists, literati and composers; among the foreigners were Chopin, Schubert and Beethoven.
  8. LVA, f. 233, apr. 1, l. 49, lp. 31.
  9. LVA, f. 232, apr. 1, l. 37.
  10. LVA f. PA-101, apr. 18, l. 202, lp. 11–16. Partizpanyan was talented at marketing his own work aggressively, ranging from a fountain to Stalin statues. Being a member of the Riga City Council, he convinced the municipality to finance the construction of a decorative fountain in the city market. The sculptor was paid an advance but never accomplished the work.
  11. LVA, f. 232, apr. 1, l. 37.
  12. In 1954 the Latvian AU had, among its full members, 31 sculptors; in 1960 their number doubled, reaching 64.
  13. The idea of a monument to the poet Rainis was revived but the bureaucratic coordination of complex artwork delayed the chiselling by another 10 years. The Ukrainian government refused to provide equipment for the transportation of a granite block weighing 100 tons. The Kremlin’s interference was needed to achieve such an agreement with Karelia in 1964. The monument was inaugurated on Rainis’s centenary in 1965 on the square formerly assigned to a Stalin’s statue. The 50th anniversary of the first Russian revolution of 1905, which generated the workers’ revolts in Riga, provided a calendrical opportunity for the representation of local events and a collective portrait of the common people. The government issued a decree on construction of three monuments one month before the celebration hoping to accomplish the work in a year. Two monuments – now allegoric compositions rather than naturalistic portraits – were unveiled in 1959, and the third one in 1975.
  14. LVA, f. 232, apr. 1, l. 52, lp. 18–19.
  15. It should be reminded that, in the state-controlled economy, private individuals had no direct access to a variety of consumption goods. Construction materials – concrete, marble, granite, tinplate, paint – were distributed primarily to the state institutions whose managers used to sell them, through illegal schemes, to private customers for building summerhouses, carving gravestones, and so forth.
  16. LVA, f. 270, apr. 3, l. 732, lp. 82. Adoption of the decree coincides with the decisive iconoclastic act. After the condemnation of Stalin’s policy by the 20th congress of CPSU in 1956, in several cities Stalin’s monuments were moved to less important locations. For example, in November 1958 in Kaliningrad, his statue on the central square was replaced with the one of Lenin. Stalin was placed in a peripheral park. At the end of the 22nd Congress of CPSU on 1 November 1961, Stalin’s body was removed by night from the Mausoleum to be buried near the Kremlin wall. The Government of Russia’s Federation crossed Stalin monuments off the list of the state-protected arts heritage, legalizing the dismantlement of remaining statues in 1962.
  17. The release of Gulag prisoners started immediately after Stalin’s death in 1953; seven years later the Gulag was abolished. Promotion of the Voluntary public order patrols from 1959 was an attempt to delegate a portion of everyday social control to the community.
  18. The Latvian word *vārds* designates “name” and “word”.
  19. LVA, f. PA-101, apr. 26, l. 85, lp. 396.
  20. In 1964, Latvia’s government established a committee to introduce secular traditions. As the committee was not allocated a budget, its members neglected practical activities. In 1969 the government decree “On the Improvement of the Introduction of the Soviet Traditions” corrected this defect by paying more respect to the objectified content of rituals. Discussing this document, an official said that in order to compete with the religious memorial ritual at a cemetery, his municipality sponsored a secular commemoration of the dead: an orchestra was hired and amplifiers were set up. “All this stuff however was rather expensive”, he stressed (LVA, f. 270, apr. 3, l. 4015, lp. 145). The decree mentioned solemnity, emotions and artistic performance as the factors increasing

- the charismatic effectiveness of secular rituals. To attain this purpose, the government invested in building solemn “nuptial palaces”, the production and marketing of musical instruments, festive garments for newly-weds, children and adolescents, and the printing of high-quality wedding and coming-of-age certificates. Training courses for the leaders of ceremonies were established, with a budget to pay the fees to actors and musicians.
21. LVA, f. 270, apr. 3, l. 9203, lp. 95–96.
  22. LVA, f. 270, apr. 3, l. 4227, lp. 131.
  23. LVA, f. 230, apr. 1, l. 536, lp. 60–63.
  24. One more granite sculpture was being carved by a Russian sculptor from Leningrad. The monument in Jēkabpils was added to the list after the incident of August 1969. In order to comply with the schedule of celebrations, a bronze replica of another sculpture was erected here. This was the only case when the Central Committee ordered, and the government financed, the construction of a Lenin monument in a provincial town. Celebrating Lenin’s 100th anniversary in April 1970, only one-half of scheduled monuments were unveiled; five others were erected during 1973–1980.
  25. LVA, f. 270, apr. 3, l. 4944, lp. 10.
  26. LVA, f. 678, apr. 2, l. 964, lp. 24–25.
  27. For the 10.5-metre-tall bronze sculpture of Lenin in Jūrmala (1977), Juris Mauriņš was paid 24,000 roubles (16 annual incomes of a white-collar worker), and was awarded the State Prize (Figure 13).
  28. LVA, f. 273, apr. 1, l. 206, lp. 36–37.
  29. LVA, f. 270, apr. 3, l. 10158, lp. 10–11.
  30. LVA, f. 270, apr. 3, l. 9819, lp. 334.
  31. In 1990 Latvia counted 42 outdoor Lenin statues, 37 busts, five head compositions, and one bas-relief, and designing of nine monuments was in progress (Cēbere 2007). The decree of the secessionist Council of Ministers of Latvia, adopted on 17 January 1991, deleted the images of Lenin from the register of historical and artistic patrimony deserving special protection. The document listed 30 figurative monuments, five busts and one memorial plaque (LVA, f. 270, apr. 7, l. 2336, lp. 56–57). The monuments representing communists of Latvian origin retained their high status. The gradual dismantlement of the obsolete concrete Lenin monuments started in summer 1990, whilst the full-scale iconoclasm broke out right after Latvia’s secession from the USSR. The World War II memorials and monuments were not affected; nevertheless, from time to time discussions on dismantlement or displacement of some of them emerge in the public sphere.
  32. During 1970–1987 only five figurative monuments to Latvian artists and politicians were unveiled.

### Notes on contributor

Sergei Kruk holds a doctoral degree in information and communication sciences from the Université Paris II – Panthéon-Assas. At the Riga Stradiņš University he teaches discourse analysis and semiotics. Currently he is researching the cultural policy of the Soviet Union. He has published articles on visual semiotics and a book (in Latvian) analysing the state policy of culture and the semiotic concepts of music elaborated by the Soviet scholars and communist ideology.

### References

- Afanasyeva, E., Yu. Afiani, and Z. Vodopyanova eds. 2001. *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura. 1953–1957. Dokumenty* [Office of the CC CPSU and culture. 1953–1957. Documents]. Moscow: ROSSPEN.
- Balcerbule, A. 1972. Veiksmīgi atrasts mērs [A good standard is found]. *Literatūra un Māksla*, December 2.
- Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya*. 1974. [Great Soviet encyclopaedia]. 3rd ed. Vol. 16. Moscow: Sovetskaya entsiklopediya.
- Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Čaupova, R. 2006. Politisku faktoru un administratīvu lēmumu loma tēlniecībā [Role of the political decision-making in the plastic art]. In *Māksla un politiskie konteksti* [Art and political contexts], ed. D. Lāce, 156–65. Rīga: Neputns.
- Čaupova, R., and V. Savitskaya. 1973. Evolyutsia latyshskoi shkoly vayaniya v poslednem desyatilētiyi [Evolution of the Latvian school of sculpture during the last decade]. In *Sovetskaya skulptura nashikh dney* [Soviet sculpture nowadays], ed. S. Valerius, 130–61. Moscow: Sovetsky khudozhnik.
- Cēbere, G. 2007. *Lenin in Latvia*. Rīga: Raktuve.
- Cielava, S. 1981. *Latviešu mākslinieku ņeņiniāna* [Leniniana by Latvian artists]. Rīga: Latvijas PSR Zinību biedrība.
- Cielava, S. 1994. *Latvijas tēlotāja māksla pēc II pasaules kara* [Latvian plastic arts after the World War II]. Rīga: LR Izglītības ministrija.
- Earle, T.K. 1997. *Chiefs come to power: The political economy in prehistory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Fišers, R., and B. Juškēvičs. 1964. Padomju sadzīves tradīciju attīstība Latvijā [Evolution of the Soviet mundane traditions in Latvia]. In *Arheoloģija un Etnogrāfija*, ed. K. Straziņš and A. Drizulis vol. 6, 207–24. Rīga: Zinātne.
- Goodrich, P. 1991. Image, aesthetic and common law. *Law and Critique* 2, no. 2: 233–54.
- Ivanov, O. 1969. Pamyatniki nad ploshchadyami [Monuments over the squares]. *Pravda*, June 27.
- Kachalova, T. 1970. Pilsēta un monuments [City and monument]. In *Latviešu tēlotāja māksla* [Latvian plastic art], ed. A. Belmane and I. Ņefedova, 91–8. Rīga: Liesma.
- Kertzer, D.I. 1988. *Ritual, politics, and power*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Komarova, O. 2005. Politiko-massovaya skulptura vozhdēy sovetskoy vlasti v kontekste leninskogo plana monumental'noy propagandy [Political mass sculpture of the Soviet state leaders in the framework of the Lenin's plan of monumental propaganda]. In *Aktual'niye voprosy istoriyi Sibīri* [Current topics in the history of Siberia], ed. V. Skubnevsky and Yu. Goncharov, 282–5. Barnaul: Az Buka.
- Kostyrchenko, G. 2009. *Stalin protiv "kosmopolitov". Vlast' i yevreiskaya intelligentsiya v SSSR* [Stalin against "cosmopolites". State authorities and the Jewish intellectuals in the USSR]. Moscow: ROSSPEN.
- Kravinska, M. 1987. Vēstures un kultūras pieminekļu izmantošana sociālistisko svētku un ieražu norisēs [Use of the monuments in socialist rituals]. In *Sociālistiskie svētki un ierāžas* [Socialist holidays and rituals], ed. A. Cimermanis, 150–61. Rīga: Zinātne.
- Kruglova, M. 1952. *Monumenty v arkhitekture gorodov* [Monuments in the urban architecture]. Moscow: Gosudartsvennoye izdatel'stvo literatury po stroitel'stvu i arkhitekture.
- Kruk, S. 2008. Semiotics of visual iconicity in Leninist "monumental" propaganda. *Visual Communication* 7, no. 1: 27–56.
- Lebedev, V. 1977. O nekotorykh tendentsiyakh nashei skulptury [On some trends of our sculpture]. In *Sovetskaya skulptura '75* [Soviet sculpture, 1975], ed. V. Tikhonov, 82–8. Moscow: Sovetsky khudozhnik.
- Lukes, S. 1975. Political ritual and social integration. *British Journal of Sociology* 9, no. 2: 289–308.
- Rolf, M. 2006. *Das sowjetische Massenfest*. Hamburg: Hamburg Edition.
- Savickis, P. 1970. *Jaunākais latviešu padomju tēlniecībā. Palīgmateriāls lektoriem* [News of Soviet Latvian sculpture. Manual for lecturers]. Rīga: Latvijas PSR Zinību biedrība.
- Savickis, P. 1972. Materiāla problēmas tēlniecībā [Problem of the material in sculpture]. *Literatūra un Māksla*, September 30.
- Slaidiņš, K. 1950. Vēlreiz par kombināta Māksla mākslu taisīt naudu [Once more on the factory's Māksla moneymaking art]. *Cīņa*, June 10.
- Stites, R. 1991. Bolshevik ritual building in the 1920s. In *Russia in the era of Nep*, ed. S. Fitzpatrick and A. Rabinowitch, 295–308. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Strautmanis, I. 1983. Par arhitektūras un mākslas mērķtiecīgu dialogu [On the purposeful dialogue between architecture and art]. *Literatūra un Māksla*, January 14.
- Šusts, V. 1977. Latviešu monumenālistu ņeņiniāna [Leniniana by Latvian sculptors]. *Latvijas PSR Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis* 7: 121–8.

- Svetlov, I. 1976. Sovetskaya skul'ptura 70-kh godov i yeyo kritika [Soviet sculpture in the 1970s and its critic]. In *Sovetskaya skul'ptura '74* [*Soviet sculpture, 1974*], ed. I. Svetlov, 6–18. Moscow: Sovetsky khudozhnik.
- Voronov, N. 1979. Sovetskaya monumetal'naya skul'ptura 1960–1980 [Soviet monumental sculpture 1960–1980]. In *Sovetskaya skul'ptura '77* [*Soviet sculpture, 1977*], ed. I. Svetlov, 78–90. Moscow: Sovetsky khudozhnik.
- Yankovskaya, G. 2003. “Koyekakery”. Povsednevnyaya zhizn' khudozhnikov stalinskoj epokhi [“Anyhowers”. The everyday life of the Stalin era artists]. *Rodina* 7: 83–6.
- Yezhegodnik Bol'shoy Sovetskoy Etntsiklopediyi*. 1971–1988. [*Annual supplement to the Great Soviet encyclopaedia*]. Moscow: Sovetskaya entsiklopediya.
- Zavarina, A. 1970. Padomju sadzīves tradīciju attīstība Latvijas pilsētās [Evolution of the Soviet traditions in Latvian towns]. In *Arheoloģija un Etnogrāfija*, ed. A. Bīrons, H. Strods, and A. Stubavs, vol. 9, 195–210. Riga: Zinātne.
- Zemdega, K. 1952. Daži mūsu tēlniecības jautājumi [Some problems of our sculpture]. *Literatūra un Māksla*, November 23.
- Zezina, M. 1999. *Sovetskaya khudozhestvennaya intelligentsiya i vlast'v 1950–1960 godakh* [*Soviet artistic intelligentsia and the state authorities in 1950–1960s*]. Moscow: Dialog-MGU.
- Zorin, M. 1952. Ļeņina vārdā [In Lenin's name]. *Literatūra un Māksla*, January 22.