

## "MADE IN LATVIA"

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"... just because my darling, 'made in Latvia'", sings the exile Latvian pop-group "Chicago Five" and this time I would like to sing along. The phrase, "made in Latvia", (which, as a rule, is used in English in an otherwise Latvian text) defines quite clearly the general co-ordinates of the "most contemporary" Latvian art. I shall try to elucidate this statement, presented as a "slogan" — I hope that it will enable us to understand the rather ambiguous position of the contemporary Latvian art in the enormous mass of "non-contemporary" (yet predominant) art. The following short explanation is meant to show why these very artists and not any others were invited to participate in the "Forma Anthropologica" exhibition. So we are loading works into a truck in Riga to send them to Tallinn, taking along **art or material for art**, all of which has either been made or will be made. And this very quality of being "made" as an accomplished and "moulded" work of art in its inevitably aestheticized state is one of the most significant features of contemporary Latvian art. Naturally, this is true of all Latvian art, not just the contemporary one — that's why it's "made in Latvia". Yet the works of six Latvian artists that were exhibited in Tallinn exist on the other side of the gulf which separates the "made-ness" of classical modernism (a **prevalent** tradition during the Soviet rule as well) from the forms and content inspired by the changes that took place in the **Western** art after the 1960s. Emphasizing the word "Western", I shall proceed to explain why I also used the word "made" in English. It is most likely a sign which tells us that contemporary Latvian art is well on its way to the international "world of art" or "market", and that it has undoubtedly adopted at least some of the categories of modern thinking.

The six artists chosen quite obviously work in the conceptual mode, despite their overwhelming sense of responsibility for "how the work will look like in the end". It goes without

saying, though, that the local background — either social, political, national, mythological, psychological or economic is still present (if only on the subconscious level) in their works (the choice of materials is often dictated by the miserable state of the economy, forcing one to walk instead of flying, although Olegs Tillbergs did manage to obtain the landing wheels of the TU-134 aircraft for the exhibition). This local background is still miles apart from the debates over the "simulations" and "virulence", the kind of background which is allegedly shaped by the mass media in the West. Reality in Latvia is terrifyingly real but the very horror of this reality turns it into an unreal dream, something like a mediaeval fairytale. Camp fires and barricades did look mediaeval in the capital of Latvia in 1990, just like in mediaeval times there is a shortage of the necessities of life (even of bread!), mysticism and astrology are rampant. Empty highways between Riga and Tallinn likewise have a ghostly mediaeval air because there is no petrol. After all, even the understanding of art is not too far from that of the Middle Ages — despite the painfully slow acceptance of classical modernism by the public taste. Art — this is still primarily a Tafelbild, an icon radiating beauty to improve men. Yet on the other hand, these six no longer too young artists live and work in Latvia, and there are more of their kind than six, perhaps as many as sixteen who, despite the presence of certain "made-ness", proper restraint and the narrative element in their works, exist as human beings and artists in this **contemporaneity** which has wrapped the whole world of ours into invisible nets...

In the middle of 1980s this generation firmly entered Latvian art. These avant-garde artists, as they are known now, enriched the means of art with the video and photo, installations, actions and performances. But I think that their greatest achievement lies in that their art was and will be of the kind which cannot be used in the interests of any



**ideology.** Besides all this, their work can be viewed as a commentary on the clumsy attempts to instrumentalize art. At this exhibition we wanted to look **different**, and as varied as this colourful world that contains many **incomparable** things. But the most incomparable of all is human passion which, once given an adequate form outside the human soul, invariably enthralled sensitive fellowbeings.

And so we dared to invite you to a "festival of passions" in these hard times. I do hope that the ignorant and the ones who lack human curiosity will forgive us...

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On this exhibition I intended to present art which only today can be created in Lithuania. Therefore, six altogether young artists have been chosen. Once again, for over a long period of time, it is the young generation who is not only to reflect art trends in Europe but also to participate, full and equal, in the discoveries and folly. Their sensibility is independent, related with their previous experience. Such immediate contact with death, suffocation threats alternating with waves of hope and joy, has formed varying attitudes, though not without a common denominator. Pathetic, histrionic and didactic are qualities totally unacceptable. The oppression of violence, confusion, naecosis as well as light have been touched upon but indirectly and discretely. The destructiveness can only be detected in the stern, constructively combined figures (Raila) or it looms over the picky pleasure of anxiety (Kampas). Everything has acquired a plurality of meaning. The paragons of virility have been cast in marble, yet they have also been turned into headless rag-dolls (Urbonas). The symbols of love and life do not smell of life at all, their beauty has an enchanting, even ominous and distressing effect (Gircys). The formulae of time can be dealt with only half-seriously (Narkevicius). The news of the calling path seems like a joyboat which is actually one massive piece inside and not suitable for entering (Kazemekas). One can seek for, and on some occasions also discover, the power of sensibility which weaves the distance of the past experience together with fun. The openness of this generation to the events of the reality is connected with the growing interest towards the enclosed inside of the self, which being intertwined with literature and art does not outrule a myth. Young as they are, they do not stand in awe of the elegant and the refined. Modern in form, colour and material enjoy the same rights as do the rough and rude. So unexpected has been the appearance of the younger Lithuanian art since our historic turningpoint.