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Latvian Riflemen's Young Artists Circle *Daile* and its Members. Revision of the Current Interpretation

When reflecting upon the connection of early 20th century Latvians to Russia, the word «riflemen» is brought up most often. The riflemen frequently became mythologised characters, although, naturally, they were real persons, some of which – the so-called Red Riflemen with their discipline and fighting spirit – helped the Bolsheviks retain power in Russia. Their achievements have been much written about and variously interpreted depending on the author's political engagement. Regarding Latvian riflemen-artists, the information that can be found both in the publications of the 1920–30s and today is related mainly to those who served among the riflemen of independent Latvia. In Soviet Latvia meanwhile, starting from the mid-1950s, after the rehabilitation of the victims of totalitarian regime's repressions, an interest arose in those Latvian artists who served in the regiments of the Red Riflemen.

Art historian and artist Arturs Eglītis (1907–1996) organised *The Exhibition of Latvian Red Riflemen-Artists' Works* in 1959 in the State Museum of Latvian and Russian Art in Riga (Latvian National Museum of Art), establishing the perception of these artists as fighters. Evidently, this perception took hold, as it can be encountered in virtually every other publication, whose authors underline the combative aspect¹ of these artists-riflemen, which was also reflected in the titles of the articles (*Artist Fighter, With Palette and Rifle*).

¹ Sk.: *Sondoviča E.* Mākslinieks no Kremļa pulka [V. Andersons] // Rīgas Balss. 1986. 12. apr. N 86. 5. lpp.; *Spreslīs A.* Mākslinieks cīnītājs [K. Veidemanis] // Rīgas Balss. 1958. 10. apr. N 85. 5. lpp.; *Batura L.* Ar šauteni un paleti // Rīgas Balss. 1988. 7. sept. N 206. 5. lpp., u.c.

Part of these then-praised riflemen-artists were members of the Kremlin Studio or Latvian Riflemen's Artist Circle *Daile* [Beauty]. Through analysis and search for sources of information and critically reflecting on the existing interpretation of the subject, the author offers a look at the work of *Daile* and artists related to it, also, as far as possible, tracing their political beliefs.

Up to know, the broadest studies on the subject of Latvian Red Riflemen-Artists have been conducted by their contemporary Jānis Birzgalis (1898–1968). His memoirs — «Kad lielgabali runāja, mūzas tomēr neklusēja» [When Cannons Spoke, the Muses Did Not Remain Silent Either]² reveal many interesting details, but his personal involvement in the events and the lack of references make the article uncritical. Although, judging by the confirmation in the reminiscences of the daughter of rifleman, Krelmin's deputy commandant Miķelis or Mihails Baude (1885–1938), Zelma³, Birzgalis has written truthfully about V. Lenin's personal «blessing» to the creation of the studio of Latvian riflemen-artists. The newly-formed Soviet Russian state supported self-education. According to the contemporary, the studio was formed right after the riflemen regiment's stationing in the Kremlin⁴ — in May 1918⁵ or right after May Day, where for the first time all artistic efforts were brought together in creating the decorations, when, following Baude's initiative, the riflemen made «neat festival decoration and slogans»⁶. It was this collaboration that led to the idea about the creation of an official organisation — thus, on the 3rd of May 1918 young artists' circle *Daile* was established; it allowed the furthering of one's knowledge and promoted the creation of works of art⁷. Although the Kremlin was overpopulated (in 1918 it housed 1100 people, in 1920 — 2210)⁸, the newly-formed *Daile* was allotted premises in the Ascension Convent (*Вознесенский монастырь*). Under the conditions of general poverty and famine the artists-riflemen did not have to worry about materials, paints and canvases, as these were provided at the highest level — under the supervision of the manager of the Council of People's Commissariat Vladimir Dmitriyevich Bonch-Bruyevich (*Бонч-Бруевич Владимир Дмитриевич* (1873–1955))⁹. The protocol of the May 14th, 1919 meeting of the circle was signed by twelve participants, a similar number of visitors «from 10–15 people» — is also mentioned by Birzgalis¹⁰.

² Latviešu tēlotāja māksla. 1957 / Red. S. Cielava. Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, 1958.

³ Baude Z. Strēlnieku darbu izstāde // Cīņa. 1978. 2. sep. N 202. 3. lpp.

⁴ Al. C. Māksla. Strēlnieku gleznu izstāde // Krievijas Cīņa. 1918. 31. aug. N 133.

⁵ Birzgalis J. Kad lielgabali runāja, mūzas tomēr neklusēja // Latviešu tēlotāja māksla. Rīga: Latvijas Valsts izdevniecība, 1957. 254. lpp.

⁶ Baude Z. Strēlnieku darbu izstāde.

⁷ Государственный архив Российской Федерации (henceforth — ГА РФ). Ф. 410-р. Оп. 1. Д. 73. Л. 1.

⁸ Муров Е. А., Богомолова В. А., Девятков С. В. Московский Кремль — цитадель России. М.: ВВП, 2009. Quoted from: <http://kremlin-9.rosvesty.ru/news/81/>

⁹ Birzgalis J. Kad lielgabali runāja, mūzas tomēr neklusēja. 256. lpp.

¹⁰ Ibid.

He also claims that Voldemārs Andersons (1891–1938) was elected the head of the studio¹¹, although the author of this article has not found any documentary evidence to this fact. It is clear that already in this meeting sculptor Evgeny Vladimirovich Oranovsky (*Евгений Владимирович Орановский* (1880–1951)) was «unanimously selected» as chairman of the circle¹².

It must be added that the formation of the studio was not an extraordinary occurrence. Latvian riflemen regiments were notable for cultural activity, virtually each of them had a music, theatre or art studio, which facilitated self-improvement in spare time. Thus, in the 9th Riflemen Regiment alone, in addition to painting, the following options of spending free time were available – participation in meetings-concerts¹³, watching films on the cinematograph, singing in a choir, playing in the orchestra, studies in general education courses, theatre acting in an actors' society¹⁴.

The formation of art studio *Daile* of the Kremlin's 9th Latvian Riflemen Regiment can be seen as special due to its proximity to the center of power. The Bolshevik authorities, which distinguished themselves with a pronounced rejection and destruction of all that existed previously, could use the intelligent, artistically inspired Latvian riflemen, who organized various concerts and took to pencils and brushes in their free time, to improve their self-image. It also corresponded to the culture policy of the new power – i.e., Proletkult: self-education and the organization of amateur art activities among broad masses of proletarians. In any case, among artillery positions and buildings populated by the armed forces, corridors teeming with civil servants and the official reception rooms of state representatives an idyllic scene opened to the view – a Red Army soldier uses his spare time to improve his observation and drawing skills in plein-air. And it takes place only a few months after the revolution, showing that the new opportunities are not merely a pleasant combination of words. In her reminiscences artist Kārlis Veidemanis' wife Jelena Petrovna describes the impression that was left by the exhibition of Latvian riflemen that she saw while visiting the Kremlin: «Just imagine – at the very citadel of the revolutionary government – the Kremlin, an exhibition of paintings! And, how?! The stern, serious Kremlin guard debates questions of art»¹⁵.

The summer period had been productive for the circle, and the number of works had grown to such an extent¹⁶ that the necessity to organize the said exhibition had arisen. The newspaper announcement underscored that in the Kremlin, in «Novo-voznensky»¹⁷ Convent starting from September 1st, 1918 for one month an

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² ГА РФ. Ф. 410. Оп. 1. Д. 73. Л. 2.

¹³ A type of event where political activists said speeches, which were followed by a concert.

¹⁴ *Bāle*. J. 9. Latviešu Strēlnieka pulka īsa vēsture // Strēlnieks. 1920. N 3/4. 74.–75. lpp.

¹⁵ Latvijas Nacionālā mākslas muzeja Zinātnisko dokumentu centrs (Scientific Documentation Centre of The Latvian National Museum of Art; henceforth – LNMM ZDC). *Veidemane*. J. Atmiņas par Veidemani. 1. lp.

¹⁶ *Al. C. Strēlnieku gleznu izstāde* // *Ciņa*. 1918. 31. aug. N 133. 4. lpp.

¹⁷ This is the title used in the quoted source. Ascension (Russian «Voznesensky») Monastery is implied.

exhibition of approximately 15 artists, riflemen-painters of the 9th Latvian riflemen regiment with 130 to 140 works will be shown, highlighting the surnames of Andersons, Aleksandrs Drēviņš (1889–1938), Gustavs Klucis (1895–1938), Jūlijs Krastiņš (1882–1950) and Indriķis Birze. According to critic and writer Alvilis Ceplis (1897–1937) the exhibition was important because it announced new, previously unknown names in the field of art, but also because it «*revived the recently dormant Latvian art of colours*»¹⁸. Most likely, that was the reason why it earned reviews of three different authors, from which one also gave the number of participants – 16: Kārlis Avots or Avotiņš (1893–1950), Andersons, Baude, Veidemanis (1897–1938), Vilis Dvielis (1897–1969), Roberts Dzelze, Augusts Dīriķis (1894–1941), Klucis, Jūlijs Krastiņš, Augusts Pūce, Birze, Drēviņš, Krūmkoks, Eduards Rācenājs (1881–1938), Kokotanova and Aleksandra Kirheršteina¹⁹. Judging by references in another artist's biography, painter Jānis Strauts (1893–1982) also took part in the exhibition, although the critics have not mentioned his name²⁰.

All three reviewers of the exhibition – Ceplis, Pēteris Laviņš or Baumanis (1897–?), Pauls Vīksne (1894–1938) – used various criteria of evaluation while looking for echoes of the new, revolutionary art in the riflemen's works. If Ceplis evaluated professionalism and whether «the sense of the new soul and life» is reflected in the works, then Laviņš approached it literally and analysed the thematic content of the works and its incongruity to the new ideology: «All the old motifs: Roses at Night, Moonlit Night, Lilac Blossoms – and similar trifles of nature. <...> The temples of the former god have been painted, but the new workers' state has not been depicted. There is not a single reflection of proletarian ideas»²¹. Meanwhile Vīksna took a position equidistant from both of the above opinions and pointed out that «*the new art is not dry and formable from objects*», it forms from several components: ideals that educate, as well as formal qualities – expression, content, object, line and richness of colours²². Nevertheless, he also remarked that one should create «*not art for art's sake, art for art's independence, but art for the proletariat*» and criticised the exhibition for poverty of content as well as lack of ideology. The critics' demands though were as yet incommensurable with the ability of the studio's participants to realise them. Firstly, the period for the creation of the works – 4 months – has to be seen as too short for the crystallisation of «*the principles of the new art*», furthermore, the level of previous education of the riflemen-artists was very uneven. Secondly, the aim of the studio was self-education, the furthering of knowledge, where the main attention was directed towards improving craftsmanship, studying objects of still

¹⁸ Al. C. Strēlnieku gleznu izstāde.

¹⁹ Vīksne P. Gleznu izstāde // Jaunatnes Cīņa. 1918. 3. okt. Quoted from the State Archives of Latvia (henceforth – LVA). F. 2086. A. 2-v. L. 907. 1918. gads.

²⁰ In Jānis Strauts archive and writings this fact has been mentioned several times. See S48 in the Information Centre of the Art Academy of Latvia (henceforth – LMA IC).

²¹ Laviņš P. Gleznu izstāde // Krievijas Cīņa. 1918. 26. sept. N 155. 4. lpp.

²² Vīksna P. Gleznu izstāde.

lives and landscapes, which, in terms of thematic, inevitably led to the depiction of objects from riflemen's everyday lives and the environs of the Kremlin. Today, these works can be seen as interesting witnesses of history. For example, in the drawings of Veidemanis we find one of the architectural treasures demolished in 1929 — Chudov (Чудов) Monastery — or the scene of a monk's expulsion from the Kremlin. The drawing documents the actual events that followed the June 20th, 1918 decree of the Soviet People's Commissariats — all who do not belong to the Soviet authorities have to leave the premises of the Kremlin. It turned out that court servants had been residing along with the revolutionaries until that date; they had to leave their homes, taking only their personal belongings with them²³.

Texts reporting on the exhibition provide information about the nature and titles of the exhibited works: more than 20 works with the Kremlin's towers were on display, Andersons exhibited *On the Boulevard, Smolensk Market*, Baude — realistic quill drawings, Drēviņš — *Non-objective Painting No. 18* (black quadrangle), *Portrait, Card Player*; Klucis — landscapes, studies, self-portrait, various views, lilacs; Krastiņš — *Roses at Night* and Latvian motifs — Vidzeme, Old Riga, *The International*; Rācenājs — cubistic works, Veidemanis — *King's Daughter, Wind, Snowgrinders, Widow's Son*, drawings about the time of the Riga Front²⁴. The exhibition's visitors were greeted by widely divergent works, beginning with symbolic compositions, amateurish studies of reality and concluding with formal experiments. The titles and the works cited by the critics prove that sense of the importance of the events of «revolutionary history» was not characteristic to the participants of the Latvian riflemen-artists' studio. If they turned, as an exception, to more or less «military subjects», it was only as part of everyday life, for example, Andersons' *Riflemen Guarding the Kremlin* or *Portrait of a Latvian Rifleman* (both paintings from 1918) or Andersons' portrait²⁵ drawing by another rifleman²⁶. The archive left by Andersons also contains a sketch with bodies of the fallen in an environment resembling the Kremlin, which again captures the civil war in a seemingly dispassionate and matter-of-fact manner, without pretense to any critical interpretation. In the aforementioned exhibition Veidemanis had put on display a drawing from the trenches of Nitaure (village in Amata municipality, Latvia) in 1917, the time when he was a soldier of the 5th Zemgale Latvian Riflemen Regiment. It suggests that at this point there was no principled separation between the old/new armies among artists and hence ideological differences were not articulated.

²³ Муров Е. А., Богомолова В. А., Девятков С. В. Московский Кремль — цитадель России. М.: ВВП, 2009. Quoted from: <http://kremlin-9.rosvesty.ru/news/81/>

²⁴ The army of the German Empire held its position in the WW1 in the territory of Latvia, area of Riga, where it stayed for two years till 3rd September 1917.

²⁵ The work is not signed. The author of this text has determined it, based on similarities to photographs from the time.

²⁶ In the Latvian War Museum (Latvijas Kara Muzejs; henceforth — LKM) the album of drawings was held without author's attribution, but the style reveals similarities to the works of Mikelis Baude.

The exhibition resonated also beyond the walls of the Kremlin. Young Latvian sculptor Kārlis Johansons (1890–1929), who was in Moscow at the time, called it a «historic event». Despite the fact that the exhibition was already opened, in correspondence from the 5th of September 1918 Johansons encouraged another Latvian artist Niklāvs Strunke (1894–1966) to come from Riga to Moscow and bring along the works from his time with the riflemen, and then Johansons would show the album of sketches with projects for ceramics, and both could add to the exposition²⁷. It is not known, whether it actually happened, yet the fact itself seems significant — it was important for the young man to participate in the group exhibition of the Latvian riflemen-artists and to represent himself with works even if they were not related to war.

Loyalty to the Soviet government was strengthened by mutual benefit — in exchange for trust and protecting order, the Kremlin guards acquired special status, the above-mentioned material support and direct interaction with the very center of power. The often published photograph with four Latvian riflemen — Andersons, Johansons, Klucis and Veidemanis — in Lenin's car is the most telling proof of the privileges that the young challengers could enjoy. Even though the character of Lenin was surrounded by a democratic aura, not everyone had been given the opportunity to approach him personally in order to, for example, invite him to an exhibition, as it was done by Klucis²⁸. The collection of the Latvian War Museum contains two other photographs, which, judging from the appearance of the artists and the surroundings, have been taken in one photo session and suggest a special purpose for it. Andersons' diary has an entry on the 15th of August 1919, where he mentions that he has been photographed and filmed on cinematograph on the occasion of the graduation of the third Kremlin cadets²⁹. It is possible that the photograph was taken in the context of the Work Commune of Latvian Artists, which was officially established under the Bureau of Art Communes of the State People's Commissariat for Education on the 15th of January 1920³⁰ even though the actual co-works were carried out already in 1918. Although Johansons was not a member of studio *Daile*, he, nevertheless, as shown by the mentioned photo, could come near to the power elite of the Kremlin.

The newly found status provided also for more favourable work opportunities, as, in the words of Johansons, «a Latvian indeed has advantages with the Bolsheviks»³¹. Johansons had even been a candidate to a high position in the newly established structure of cultural life in Petrograd³². Meanwhile, Andersons, using the opportu-

²⁷ Johansons K. Niklāvam Strunkem. Quoted from Laikmets vēstulēs. Latviešu jauno mākslinieku sarakste. 174. lpp.

²⁸ Klucis G. Kāda eksperimenta anatomija. Izstādes katalogs / Sast. Derkusova I. Rīga: LNMM. 180. lpp.

²⁹ Andersons V. Dienagrāmata. 1919. gada 15. augusts. 53. lp. Privātais arhīvs.

³⁰ LKM, 9114 / 2305 VII.

³¹ Johansons K. Vēstule Taļļucim. 19. VI 1918. // LMA IC. J 59/3.

³² Johansons K. Vēstule Niklāvam Strunkem. 3.V.1918 // Quoted from Laikmets vēstulēs. Latviešu jauno mākslinieku sarakste. 170. lpp.

nity to access food reserves that was provided by his service, on the 25th of December 1918 got permission to transport a pood and a half of flour to his parents³³.

Still, the question is, who exactly were the participants of the exhibition? How appropriate were the expectations of critics to encounter works by authors, who «*have linked their work, as well as their future to the proletariat, to its struggle*»?³⁴ It is known that most of them had also served in riflemen's regiments before the revolution. For example, Klucis begun his military service on the 1st of August 1915³⁵, Andersons was mobilised³⁶ in the same year, too, while Veidemanis, having evacuated to Petrograd, was enlisted in the riflemen a year later than his comrades. The duties of the protection of the Bolsheviks were not particularly demanding, because even during the defense of Smolny (*Смольный*) Andersons, Klucis and Veidemanis managed to attend the Drawing School of the Imperial Society for the Encouragement of Arts (*Рисовальная школа императорского общества поощрения художеств*) lead by Nikolai Roerich (*Никола́й Константи́нович Рёрих*, 1874–1947).

The first part of Andersons' album of drawings³⁷ relates to the Smolny period — a time when the Bolshevik government and the riflemen were in Petrograd. The drawings record everyday life — the living room, cooking dinner, writing a letter — with short, concise captions, but several studies of models and riflemen can also be found, as well as engagement in sketching by some other rifleman — art enthusiast. That allows to conclude that the riflemen were organizing common art studies in their spare time even before Lenin's permission. In the album, where, judging from several dated sketches, a chronological order has been observed, the Kremlin period shows that studies of the environs are less frequent than the honing of skill in representing the human figure. Only once «military everyday life» has been captured — in a sketch of an artillerist's position in the Kremlin in May 1918.

Looking closer at each artist's individual participation in the war, it becomes evident that linking their biographies to the new government is not so straightforward. For example, the later prosecution case of Andersons describes in detail his service history, from which we learn that, following service in the Russian tsar's army, in 1917 he was transferred to the reserve riflemen regiment in Volmar (now Valmiera, city of the Latvian historical Vidzeme region). From there, only in the days of the October revolution he was sent to the defense of Smolny, in March 1918, in the function of riflemen-artillerist of the 9th Latvian Riflemen Regiment, together with the government he moved to Moscow³⁸. On the 4th of August 1918 with decree N 165/429

³³ LKM. 9112 / 2303 — VII.

³⁴ *Vīksne*. Gleznu izstāde.

³⁵ LKM. 8913 / 12707 — VII.

³⁶ Voldemārs Andersons. *Gleznu katalogs* / Atb. red. Н. Белова, А. Минтик. Maskava: Prometejs, 1936. 19. lpp.

³⁷ The original is held at the LNMM.

³⁸ ГА РФ. П-46617. Quoted from a copy of the Prosecution case held in a private archive — p. 12, second half.

he was transferred to the department of painting at the Free State Art Studios (*Государственные свободные художественные мастерские*)³⁹. A similar decree led Veidemanis to begin his studies⁴⁰. It has to be noted that several publications from the Soviet period stress the importance of the riflemen's exhibition, following which the most talented from the artists were sent to further studies⁴¹. The above-mentioned order reveals a much earlier enrolment at educational institutions, pointing towards the artists' initiative and priorities — studying, less fighting; furthermore, Veidemanis' State Free Art Studios card shows that he had been enrolled as a student⁴² already on the 1st of September 1918, right when the opening of the riflemen's exhibition was planned. On the 13th of October 1918, all three of them — Andersons, Veidemanis — together with Klucis, were relieved from the common dinner table due to a study trip⁴³; in the second half of October 1918 their service duties were officially suspended, therefore on the 15th of November they were transferred to Auxiliary troops⁴⁴. After Klucis had voluntarily transferred to the artillery brigade of the united company of Latvian riflemen defending Smolny⁴⁵ and Veidemanis had taken part in crushing the uprising of the Left⁴⁶ Socialist Revolutionary Party against the Bolsheviks, the artists' service status was maintained symbolically with the provision of food and housing, as in spring 1919 all of them were still counted among the soldiers of the 1st Latvian Riflemen Division, temporarily transferred to studies.

Another participant of the riflemen's exhibition — Dvielis, at the start of World War I moved to his parents who had evacuated to Petrograd. From there on the 19th of May 1916 he was enlisted in military service. After repeated training he was entered on a list of the 7th Bauska Riflemen Regiment, with which he took part in the heavy Christmas and January Battles on the Riga front at the turn of 1916–1917⁴⁷. Having experienced the unenviable situation of the Latvian riflemen, Dvielis took note of Bolshevik promises of peace and sided with them; He described it as follows: «The February 1917 Revolution surprises us at the front, after a while, the 7th Bauska Riflemen Regiment is replaced and we are stationed in Riga, in Citadele barracks, we carry the guard service and protect the commander-in-chief's residence. Following the celebration of 1 May, the 7th Bauska Riflemen Regiment is station on the front, on Ložmetējkalns, there are no battles: fraternisation, several times representatives

³⁹ LKM. 9106/2297 — VII.

⁴⁰ LNMM ZDC, N32. 7. lp.

⁴¹ See for example J. Birzgalis — 261. lpp.

⁴² LNMM ZDC. N32. 4. lp.

⁴³ Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīvs (Latvian State Historical Archives; henceforth — LVVA). P-699. F. 1. a. 68. f. 155. lp.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 192. lp.

⁴⁵ Российский государственный архив литературы и искусства (РГАЛИ). Ф. 681. Оп. 1. Д. 1118. С. 1.

⁴⁶ *Spreslis A.* Mākslinieks cīnītājs.

⁴⁷ LVA. 230. f. 3. apr. 18. l. 22. lp.

from Izkolastrel come and hold meetings. In one such meeting, the representative of that organisation invites me to join the party, I agree, I am elected to the company's committee»⁴⁸. On the 5th of January 1918 Dvielis was selected and transferred to Smolny Institute in Petrograd, where he worked as a secretary in the executive committee of the joint Latvian Regiment unit. In spring, together with the government, he moved to Moscow, continuing service in the 9th Latvian Riflemen Regiment in the Kremlin.

Although it is not known, whether Johansons took part in the discussed exhibition, it is clear that he was linked to the *Daile* group and it is worthwhile to dwell on him at greater length, as his biography is exemplary of the re-orientation of a national patriot to the internationalism propagated by the Soviet government at the time. As late as in October 1917, together with other soldiers and artists⁴⁹, Johansons was in the executive committee of the Latvian Army's National Alliance, whose aim was an independent state, fighting against Bolshevik agitation. It is difficult to find explanation for the radically opposite opinion that the artist expressed on the 19th of June 1918, writing in a letter to his sister: «I want to say that Latvia has already won. — That is: Latvians have found their spirit — (internally Latvian) and [it has] shown him the might and fully capable of life. Thus at present the Bolshevism of all Russia is only supported, held in Latvian hands <...> perhaps it is more correct that the “best sons of Latvia” at present remain outside of Latvia and fight for socialism, because, for Latvia, it will, at least after one hundred years, do no harm. Socialism and after that pure anarchy, it seems, will once triumph»⁵⁰. Later, in Moscow at the end of the year he had to give a public explanation about his connections to the nationalist organization, by writing that he had neither ideologically nor in any other way been linked to the National Alliance of Latvian Soldiers⁵¹, refuting his former affiliation. Such shifts can be explained by a youthful change of opinions. Furthermore, his correspondence with home shows, that he was fascinated by the active arts scene in Moscow and the good opportunities to earn a living more than nationalism or Bolshevik ideology.

Meanwhile, in the case of Andersons, thanks to the preserved diary, it is possible to come close to the artists' motivation for choosing to remain in Soviet Russia in 1919 instead of returning to the newly established Latvia. Thus, after an evening spent in the company of Latvian artists, Andersons wrote that doubts about returning to Riga had arisen: «V[eidemanns (here and henceforth author's remarks in square brackets. — S. K.)] also has grown a little uncertain, because I told him that [Vilhelms] Purvītis is not starting anything [the establishment of artists' workshops is meant]. Dr[ēviņš] says, that is clear, what kind of matter is it»⁵². The temporary

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ LVA. P-42. f. 1. apr. 13. l. 281. lp.

⁵⁰ Kārlis Johansons' letter to Rozālija Johansone on 19 June 1918 // LMAIC. J 59/3. N 11.

⁵¹ *Johansons K. Vēstule redakcijai // Krievijas Cīņa*. 1918. 29. dec. N 233. 4. lpp.

⁵² *Andersons V. Dienasgrāmata*. 1919. gada 10. maijs. 18. lp.

situation where borders and governments were still relative and changeable, was visible in the entry on the 23rd May 1919, made already after the retreat of the Pēteris Stučka (1865–1932) government⁵³ from Riga to Rēzekne: «I got sad news about the Riga left, where the matters are pretty bad for me. I thought of visiting another time, if there was an opportunity <...>, but now I am entirely cut off from there»⁵⁴. Nevertheless, in 1920 Andersons continued the correspondence with his relatives by sending letters to his mother and still keeping in mind the possibility of returning. The draw of cultural life was important. Thus, following a visit to the Big (*Bolshoi*) Theatre, he realised that he will not be able to enjoy performances of such quality, hence «*I will stay in Moscow as much as it will be possible. Although the life is more difficult, there are more enjoyments*»⁵⁵. It seems that for Andersons and his colleagues the main argument for staying in Soviet Russia was the huge activity of the arts scene and less the political beliefs. Former anarchist⁵⁶ Drēviņš has been very direct about it in correspondence: «Art has nothing to do with what various politicians discuss, left or right. Do not think that I praise the life here, it is only about art. In the workshops there are many, who do not have a shirt to wear and [unreadable] and the foot has not been washed for weeks, but they work like fanatics with greatest conviction and not because they are Bolsheviks, but because art lives here»⁵⁷.

Countering the myth about the members of the *Daile* exhibition and their participation in real battles, it has to be underlined, that Drēviņš was not even a rifleman and lived in Moscow since his evacuation in 1916⁵⁸.

Furthermore, being a Red Rifleman did not guarantee loyalty to the Soviet government – several participants of the exhibition chose to return to their motherland illegally during the show. On the 1st of October 1918, Dīriķis was discharged from the 9th Latvian Riflemen Regiment⁵⁹, while on the 4th of November Krastiņš was dismissed in connection with fleeing⁶⁰, the very same artist, who, according to the critic Laviņš, was the only artist in the entire exhibition who attempted to represent proletarian ideas in his work *The International*⁶¹.

⁵³ Stučka's government – Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic government supported by the Soviet Russia, ruled by chairman Pēteris Stučka, existed from December of 1918 till January of 1920. On the 31st January 1919 it controlled the maximum of Latvia's territory, except area of the city of Liepāja.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 31. lp.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 64. lp.

⁵⁶ Aleksandrs Drēviņš was a member of Latvian anarchist group *Liesma* [Flame]. Александр Древин в музейных собраниях / Сост. Т. Зелюкина. М., 2003.

⁵⁷ Aleksandra Drēviņa vēstule Konrādam Ubānam. – 1921. gada 23. febr. // LVA. 2086. f. 2. apr. 158. l. 9. lp.

⁵⁸ Two other participants of the riflemen's exhibition – Aleksandra Kirhenšteina and sculptress Kokotanova – also could have been rather distant from military affairs.

⁵⁹ LVVA. P-699. f. 1. apr. 68. f. 155. lpp.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 181. lpp.

⁶¹ Laviņš P. Gleznu izstāde.



*The young riflemen-artists' circle Daile in the Kremlin in 1918
(LKM. s-9082/4511-F)*



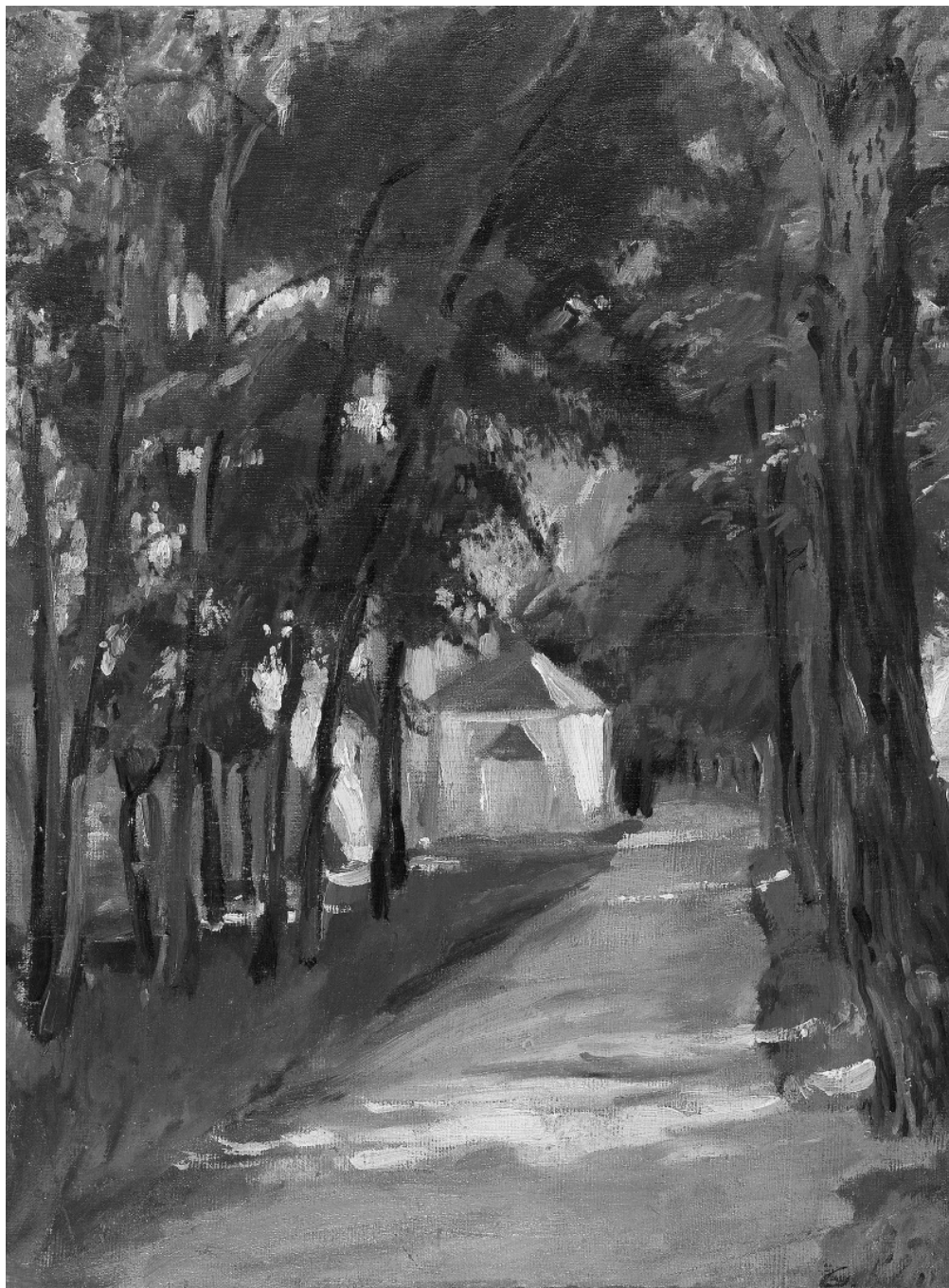
Vilis Dvielis in the Kremlin in 1918 (LKM. s-549-H)



From right to left Kārlis Veidemanis, Gustavs Klucis, Voldemārs Andersons, Kārlis Johansons in Lenin's automobile (LKM. s-9083/4514-F)



Voldemārs Andersons. Portrait of a Rifleman. 1918. Reproduction of the painting (LNMM. ZDC-MP-194(1))



*Gustavs Klucis. In Kremlin Garden. 1918. Oil on canvas. 57,5×40.
(LNMM. AG-2149)*



*Kārlis Veidemanis. King's Daughter. Reproduction of the painting
(LNMM. ZDC-MP-32(60))*

It has to be pointed out, that in case when the young contenders were thoroughly involved in military service, their engagement with art had to be postponed even for several years. For example, Dvielis was not sent to art studies, but instead to battles with the White Guard near Novokhopyorsk (*Новохопёрск*). Having healed the wound in his right foot, he was enlisted in the 6th Latvian Riflemen Regiment and during the 1919 battles near the river Melleupe (in The North Vidzeme) was captured by Estonians troops; there he narrowly escaped being shot. When the Latvian government mobilised forces for the fight against (October–November 1919) the army of Pavel Bermond-Avalov (*Павел Бермонт-Авалов*), he was enlisted in the 8th Daugavpils Infantry Regiment. Curiously, following the defeat of Bermond's army, Dvielis was sent to battle against the Bolsheviks, yet for some reason instead of the frontline he ended up in the Daugavgrīva Training Battalion. Following its liquidation, he was transferred to the Daudzevs Labour Company, which was dismantling the German-built narrow-gauge railway in Kurzeme. There he finally got

the opportunity to return to art — Dvielis acquired a set of watercolours, pencils and used his spare time for drawing as well as painting. Later, he enrolled as a record keeper in an aviation unit and worked there until 1922. While Dvielis lived through the changing circumstances of war, experienced imprisonment and real battles, his former regiment comrades had graduated VKhUTEMAS with diplomas. Having awaited a calmer moment, in 1921 the former soldier entered the Art Academy of Latvia. Later, towards the end of his life, when he had to fight for an increase of pension at the Artists' Union of the Latvian SSR, Dvielis expressed disappointment about his unsuccessful career: «If it had depended on me, I would not have been in Latvia. After the Civil War, I would have continued art education in the Soviet Union, so I hoped, but it turned out differently — I was wounded in battle»⁶². Nevertheless, he also understood the twist of fate, that, possibly, he had sacrificed a more successful career for living until old age, and Stalin's national purging, during which all Latvian graduates of VKhUTEMAS were executed, passed him by: «<...> *if I am still alive, that is only because I was captured*»⁶³.

It is not clear, how long the official existence of circle *Daile* continued, but most likely its activity dwindled naturally right after the end of the exhibition. The most active members — Andersons, Veidemanis and Klucis were sent to study and did not need the circle to enhance their skills. Meanwhile, the increased activity on the Southern Front required new forces and on the 6th of October 1918 the 9th Riflemen Regiment was sent to the Don thus depleting the already scarce numbers of the circle regulars. Another stage of activity can be seen only during the above-mentioned 18th of May 1919, when a chairman was elected, but the organization's further form of activity and its fate remains unclear, as a similar function was later performed by the art studio of Yakov Mikhailovich Sverdlov Club of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (*ВЦИК клуб им. Я. М. Свердлова*), which was headed by Andersons from 1920 until the January 1922 when his duties were taken over by Klucis. A decoration workshop was active within the studio⁶⁴ and its duties resemble the activities performed by the above-mentioned organisation, Work Communes of Latvian Artists⁶⁵.

As can be seen from the analysis of the available materials, Latvian artists who were related to *Daile* were more interested in professional self-improvement than in heroism on the battlefield, and even when they later recalled their riflemen past, they did so with a distance of time. Thus, in 1928 in an overview of Latvian artists' achievements on the 11th anniversary of the Revolution, critic, artist and former director of the riflemen's orchestra unit in the 9th Regiment, Pauls Irbitis (1890–1938) recalled the exhibition of 1918. He admitted, that the exhibition lacked artists'

⁶² LVA. 230. f. 3. apr. 18. l. 42. lp.

⁶³ Ibid. 44. lp.

⁶⁴ Четыре года клуба им. Я. М. Свердлова. 1919–1923. М.: Издание клубного отдела ВЦИК, 1924. С. 51. The author expresses deepest gratitude to Aleksandr Chistikov (Чистиков) for the opportunity to study the necessary chapters.

⁶⁵ LMA IC. A 16/1. N33. Izraksti par Mākslas komūnām.

reflections on the Revolution, furthermore – as can be understood from the text, he consulted with other authors and concluded: «And some among us also regret: too few sketches from the vivid moments of the time, almost daily we saw Lenin, Sverdlov and other leaders of the revolution, with deepest interest we followed the everyday life of the riflemen, but it only survives in memories – not on paper, not on canvas»⁶⁶. Irbītis also attempted to explain why the moment of such importance had not been sufficiently appreciated. According to him, «art stood too close at the sides of the destructive giant of the revolution. We saw the energy of his hands, felt his inner propelling heat, but could not grasp him in totality»⁶⁷. Nevertheless, several artists did turn to the depiction of the subject of the riflemen in later years, thus appreciating their past in retrospect. Some of them were active in the specially established organisation – Section of Former Latvian Riflemen – which undertook the popularisation of the riflemen among the general public by publishing books, organising festivals as well as exhibitions. Thus, several artists participated in the competition organised in 1933 on the design of a riflemen's lapel pin, likewise, a show of riflemen's monuments was organised. Later, with the formation of the national organisation *Prometejs* [Prometheus] and its arts section, the official lists of subjects relevant to Latvian artists were published.

There was also the opportunity to take a different approach to the subject matter of riflemen subject. Andersons, for example, painted one of his most notable thematic works *The Crushing of the Left SR Uprising on 7 July 1918 in Moscow* (*Подавление мятежа левых эсеров в Москве*) as a commissioned work, signing a contract with the Revolutionary Military Council (*Революционный военный совет*) for 1450 roubles⁶⁸.

It is clear that, at least as eyewitnesses, Latvian Red Riflemen-artists had an advantage in depicting these topics. But their participation in actual battles, if we consider the most notable professionals, has up to now may be overestimated. During the Revolution and the Civil War, they invested more energy in education, and later, in accordance with the requirements of the government, returned to the subject matter that partially corresponded to their past. Belonging to the riflemen was a part of these artists' identity, allowing them up until the years of repression to feel as shapers of important historic events.

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⁶⁶ *Irbīte P.* Ko devuši latvju mākslinieki līdz 11 revolūcijas gadam? // Krievijas Cīņa. 1928. 23. nov. N 129. 4. lpp.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ РГАЛИ. Ф. 2941. Оп. 1. Д. 53. Л. 1.

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