

Things We Make. In Search of Intersections Between Artist-Curator Work and Networks as a Form of Immaterial Labor in 1980s Latvia

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This paper examines the intersection between the practice of artist-curator and networking as forms of immaterial labor in 1980s Latvia, using the houses of creativity and the exhibition series *Gadījums* (*Happenstance*, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988) as a point of departure. It focuses on the artist-curator as a pivotal figure in shaping artistic processes during the late Soviet era. Their labor contributed to new forms of exhibiting, staging, and representing art in Latvia, while also engaging with the broader socio-political transition in the 1980s. As a case study, the *Gadījums* exhibition series is analyzed within the context of networks cultivated in the houses of creativity (*jaunrades nams*). To illustrate the specific nature of a house of creativity in Latvia, the paper examines the Dzintari House of Creativity in Jūrmala. The aim is to explore how artists engaged with and utilized networks and other creative strategies that led to the development of curatorial approaches and methods in the 1980s Latvia.

Keywords: artistic labor, artist-curator, immaterial labor, networking, houses of creativity, Soviet art.

Introduction

State socialist cultural policy has long been historicized through a binary framework—official ideology and centrally commanded institutions versus self-organized resistance. However, over the past decade, many historians have shifted focus toward artistic work and labor under socialism as a networked social practice.¹ This paper contributes to this scholarship by analyzing a Latvian case through an exploratory study of the intersection between “artistic” and “curatorial” practices as they emerged through networks organized within and across formal institutions. It outlines the position and role of the artist-curator in late Soviet cultural policy, emphasizing networking—an often-overlooked aspect of artistic labor—through the lens of immaterial labor.² As a case study, the paper examines the role of “houses of creativity” (*jaunrades nami* in Latvian, *dom tvorchestva* in Russian), which were run by centrally administered state institutions such as the Arts Fund and the Artists’ Union of the USSR. Houses of creativity served as key sites for artist networking—an ephemeral practice that can be traced through the *Gadījums* exhibition series, held in Riga in 1985, 1986, 1987, and 1988 at various locations.

Much of the existing scholarship on art under communism has focused on the division between official and unofficial art.³ It has placed a heavy emphasis on unofficial networks—avant-garde, nonconformist, and experimental artistic processes due to their innovative nature and frequent opposition to the restrictive systems of the Soviet regime.⁴ Such emphasis

- 1 Examples of relevant literature include: Klara Kemp-Welch, *Networking the Block. Experimental Art in Eastern Europe. 1965–1981* (The MIT Press, 2019); *Art Beyond Borders: Artistic Exchange in Communist Europe (1945–1989)*, eds. Jérôme Bazin, Pascal Dubourg, Piotr Piotrowski (Central European University Press, 2016); and Piotr Piotrowski, “The Geography of Central/East European Art,” in *Borders in Art*, ed. Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius (Institute of Art, 2000).
- 2 The term is coined by Maurizio Lazzarato, referring to labor that “produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity.” See Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” in *Radical Thought in Italy*, eds. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (University of Minnesota press, 2006), <https://www.e-flux.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/2.-Maurizio-Lazzarato-Immaterial-Labor.pdf>.
- 3 See Igor Golomshtock, *Unofficial Art from The Soviet Union* (Martin Secker & Warburg, 1977); Norton Dodge and Alison Hilton, *New Art from the Soviet Union: The Known and the Unknown* (Acropolis Books, 1977); and *Nonconformist Art: The Soviet Experience 1956–1986*, eds. Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Dodge (Thames & Hudson, 1995).
- 4 For example, see Piotr Piotrowski, *In The Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989* (Reaktion Books, 2009); and Kemp-Welch, *Networking the Block*.

is also evident in Latvian art historical research.⁵ However, revisionist approaches⁶ have challenged this binary, emphasizing the gray areas and liminal spaces of art during the late Soviet era. The present paper aligns with this perspective, considering how these seemingly separate spheres functioned as interwoven elements of a broader artistic ecosystem.

The approach is supported by network analysis, which helps to connect and bridge different modes of relationship across formal and informal spaces. According to Alena Lebedeva, “network analysis is concerned with how to locate people in occupational, educational or personal networks, how to estimate whom and what they know, the resources to which they have access and the social constraints affecting their behavior.”⁷ How can the connection between networkedness and artistic practices be traced? How did these networks evolve into curatorial practices? To investigate the networking possibilities provided by formal institutions in Latvia, the paper examines the Dzintari House of Creativity (*Dzintaru Jaunrades nams*), located in Dzintari, Jūrmala. This house of creativity played a crucial role in the development of artistic practice by facilitating access to immaterial aspects of labor—friendship, kinship, and mentorship. Officially established as a venue for artistic exchange, comparable to a contemporary residency center, houses of creativity played a significant role in the production, display, representation, and visibility of art. The article raises several key questions: Why were houses of creativity important for the work of the artist-curator? And how did artists utilize the networking opportunities they provided?

- 5 See Valdis Āboliņš. *The Avant-garde, Mailart, the New Left and Cultural Relations During the Cold War*, eds. Ieva Astahovska and Antra Priede-Krievkalne (The Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, 2019); and Laine Kristberga, “Intermedial Appropriation as a Theoretical Framework for the Analysis of Performance Art in Latvia in the Period of Late Socialism (1964–1989)” (PhD diss., Art Academy of Latvia, 2019).
- 6 Among many sources, see *Dropping Out of Socialism: The Creation of Alternative Spheres in the Soviet Bloc*, ed. Juliane Fürst and Josie McLellan (Lexington Books, 2018); Mari Laanemets, “Between Western Modernism and Soviet Avantgarde. Artistic Practice in Eastern Europe. A Case Study on Estonia, 1969–1977” (PhD diss., Humboldt-Schriften zur Kunst und Bildgeschichte, 2011); and Susan E. Reid, “Destalinization and the Remodernisation of Soviet Art: The Search for a Contemporary Realism, 1953–1963” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1996).
- 7 Alena V. Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 104.

Curatorial history is a relatively recent field within art historical scholarship. Its foundational definitions and historical trajectories have been established by several authors.⁸ Paul O'Neill, for example, argues that curatorial discourse emerged in the 1960s, marking a shift from curating as an administrative and caretaking practice to a more performative and mediating role akin to artistic practice.⁹ Yet, it remains unclear when curatorial history can be meaningfully discussed from an Eastern European perspective. Scholars such as Edit András, Beti Žerovc, Mária Orišková, and Maari Laanemets¹⁰ have contributed to the debate on curatorial work, particularly in relation to exhibition history. Beyond the study of art exhibitions, the field of curation before 1989 remains largely underexplored within the context of Soviet and socialist studies. While there might be various reasons for this, which I will not elaborate on here, one prevailing assumption is that curatorship, as part of Soviet culture, did not exist before 1989. For instance, Lithuanian scholar Julija Fomina has argued that, due to "centralized and regulated procedures of organizing visual art exhibitions," there "were no novelties in the exhibition making and the search for more individual or innovative ways of presenting art."¹¹ In contrast, I propose that if we view curatorship as a broader discursive practice, we can identify its presence within both individual and institutional activities during the Soviet era. By linking artistic labor, networking, and curating, this paper addresses the need for a new curatorial history in Eastern Europe. I argue that artists were engaging with and defining curatorial tasks long before the term *curator*

8 See, for example, Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (The MIT Press, 2016); Beatrice Von Bismarck, *The Curatorial Condition* (Sternberg Press, 2022); Maria Lind, *Selected Maria Lind Writing* (Sternberg Press, 2010); and Dorothee Richter, *Curating: Politics of Display, Politics of Site, Politics of Transfer and Translation, Politics of Knowledge Production. A Fragmented and Situated Theory of Curating* (Independently published, 2023).

9 O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating*, 87.

10 See Beti Žerovc, *When Attitudes Become the Norm: The Contemporary Curator and Institutional Art* (AC Books; Iza Editions, 2017); *Curating "EASTERN EUROPE" and Beyond: Art Histories through the Exhibition*, ed. Mária Orišková (Peter Lang AG, 2014); *Exhibiting the "Former East": Identity Politics and Curatorial Practices after 1989. A Critical Reader*, eds. Cătălin Gheorghe and Cristian Nae (Artes Publishing House, 2013); and Mari Laanemets, *Between Western Modernism and Soviet Avantgarde*.

11 Julija Fomina, "Curatorship of Art Exhibitions in Lithuania: Concepts and Evolution" (Summary of PhD diss., Vilnius Academy of Arts, 2015), 6.

entered the local (Latvian) art discourse in the 1990s. However, as this is a pilot study, further research is needed to examine this subject in depth.¹²

In defining the term *artist-curator*, this paper aligns with the idea that artistic and curatorial practices are interconnected rather than distinct or oppositional;¹³ that curating can be seen as an extension of artistic practice;¹⁴ and that the artist can actively take on the role of presenting and disseminating their own work, thus becoming a curator.¹⁵ The central argument here is that, in the late Soviet era, curatorial practice should be approached as experimental, innovative, and thought-provoking, and that was often initiated by the artists themselves. One of the aims of this paper is to define that curatorial realm, focusing particularly on networking as a central strategy.

From a labor perspective, this study engages with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "symbolic capital"—the value an individual holds within the culture sphere.¹⁶ This "symbolic capital," as Bourdieu explains, is "to be unrecognized as capital and recognized as legitimate competence, as authority exerting an effect of (mis)recognition, e.g., in the matrimonial market and in all the markets in which economic capital is not fully recognized, whether in matters of culture, with the great art collections or great cultural foundations, or in social welfare, with the economy of generosity and the gift."¹⁷ In line with Bourdieu, sociologist Katja Praznik has analyzed how the mythology of the art world in socialist Yugoslavia perpetuated the archaic notion of the artist as genius, thereby obscuring the recognition of

12 Currently conducted as part of doctoral studies at the Estonian Academy of Arts.

13 O'Neill discusses Theodor W. Adorno's notion of the dialectic between culture (artists, authors, producers) and administration (managers, organizers, curators) that is prevalent in the field of curatorship, noting that "from an Adornian perspective, those most responsible for culture and its organization—the artist and the curator, respectively—can be seen as oppositional agents." O'Neill argues that this approach should be challenged, suggesting that today curatorship represents "a far-reaching category, encompassing various organizational forms, cooperative models and collaborative structures." O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating*, 88–89.

14 Celina Jeffery, *The Artist as Curator* (Intellect, 2015), 7.

15 Elena Filipovic, "Introduction," in *The Artist as Curator: An Anthology*, ed. Elena Filipovic (Walther König, 2018), 7.

16 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Forms of Capital* (Greenwood, 1986), https://home.iitk.ac.in/~aman/soc748/bourdieu_forms_of_capital.pdf.

17 Bourdieu, *The Forms of Capital*, 18.

artistic labor under socialism as legitimate work.¹⁸ Similarly, this article addresses the un-recognition of artistic work as labor—particularly that of the artist-curator, whose immaterial work was often not perceived as a labor.

The artist-curator: an independent figure at work

“To exhibit is to find friends and allies for the struggle.”

Edouard Manet¹⁹

The genesis of curatorial discourse in the West over recent decades can be traced to key events in the late 1960s, such as Lucy R. Lippard’s “number shows” and Harald Szeemann’s landmark exhibition *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* (1969). These and similar exhibitions introduced the idea of the curator as author—someone who does not merely manage exhibitions (previously and primarily seen as an administrative or caretaking role within museums), but who also actively shapes them in collaboration with artists. Accordingly, curating came to be understood as a creative and collaboration-oriented process that extends beyond art itself, encompassing intangible labor as well as education, knowledge production, and information exchange. O’Neill identifies several key stages in the development of Western curatorial discourse: from the late 1960s onward, curating began to extend the historical avant-garde project; by the late 1980s, an exhibition-based model had emerged, positioning the curator as an author; and in the 1990s, curatorial discourse became consolidated, giving rise to a formal history of curatorial practice.²⁰

This shift in curatorial discourse has also reshaped how the artist’s role in historical processes is understood. Historians now acknowledge that prior to the professionalization of curating, artists played a fundamental role in crafting many outstanding exhibitions, addressing the nature of art, the boundaries of artistic expression, and modes of institutional critique.

18 Katja Praznik, *Art Work: Invisible Labour and the Legacy of Yugoslav Socialism* (University of Toronto Press, 2021).

19 George H. Hamilton, *Manet and His Critics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1954), 106.

20 O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating*, 9.

21 Alex Gawronski, “Curated from Within. The Artist as Curator,” in *A Companion to Curation*, eds. Brad Buckley and John Conomos (Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), 232.

Figures such as Marcel Duchamp and Kazimir Malevich are among the most prominent examples. As artist Alex Gawronski points out: “Curating was a means of staking a wider sociopolitical position as an artist. (...) Artists seized the exhibition medium as a means of propelling their formal, conceptual, and political concerns into a wider public arena.”²¹ But how should the concept of artist-curator be defined? And how might this definition be applied to the context of late Soviet art in Latvia?

In Western curatorial discourse, numerous attempts have been made to define the nature of the artist-curator. Art historian Celina Jeffery, for instance, describes curating “as an extension of artistic practice, manifested in multiple ways: the curation of one’s own work; the curation of objects outside the art museum; or curation as a means to explore a shared or collaborative process, idea or thematic central to the artist’s own practice.”²² Curator Elena Filipovic expands on this, situating artist-curated exhibition within the broader discourse of exhibition making:

If it is easy to see that artist-curated exhibitions can trouble our very understanding of such notions as ‘artistic autonomy,’ ‘authorship,’ ‘art-work,’ and ‘artistic oeuvre,’ what might be less evident is that they also complicate what counts as an ‘exhibition.’ Many artist-curated exhibitions—perhaps the most striking and influential of the genre—are the result of artists treating the exhibition as an artistic medium in its own right, an articulation of form. In the process, they often disown or dismantle the very idea of the ‘exhibition’ as it is conventionally thought, putting its genre, category, format, or protocols at stake and thus entirely shifting the terms of what an exhibition could be.²³

O’Neill further describes contemporary curating as a “durational, transformative, and speculative activity, a way of keeping things in flow, mobile, in between, indeterminate, crossing over and between people, identities, and things ...,”²⁴ thus also referring to the practices of artists-curators. Curatorship as an extended practice encompassing network structures has been addressed by numerous scholars and curators. Curator Maria Lind, for example, defines the curatorial work “as a way of thinking in terms of

22 Jeffery, *The Artist as Curator*, 7.

23 Filipovic, “Introduction,” 8–9.

24 O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating*, 89.

interconnections: linking objects, images, processes, people, locations, histories, and discourses in a physical space like an active catalyst, generating twists, turns and tensions.”²⁵ Slovak art historian Mária Orišková adds that “Exhibition does not solely mean an individual perception of an individual work by an individual viewer, but the creation of relations and the sharing of experience, which can exceed the exhibition itself.”²⁶

Taking these notions as a point of departure, I examine the intersection of artistic and curatorial practice primarily as a form of immaterial labor that was engaged with, performed, and practiced by artists in 1980s Latvia. This labor was so embedded in artists’ daily routines—so commonplace and visible—that it often was not considered work. Responsibilities such as networking became an inherent part of artistic practice, regardless of whether they were viewed as artistic, curatorial, or a hybrid of both. This paper investigates that terrain further, identifying characteristics of artist-curator practice in this historical context. As Praznik points out, “invisible labor, this unsightly cog running the wheels of the art world, is one of the most formidable contradictions of Western art.”²⁷ While one might argue that this does not apply to communism—since it ostensibly freed art workers from exploitative capitalist structures—Soviet ideology merely concealed its own forms of exploitation under the guise of equal distribution. As Praznik suggests, artistic labor in the Soviet system operated under principles similar to those in the West—emphasizing creation as an exceptional act rather than recognizing it as labor. Artistic labor was mystified, “following the historical attachment to the idea that artistic practice is not work but creativity emanating from artistic genius.”²⁸ Taking this into account, it becomes necessary to examine artistic practices from the late Soviet era through a demystifying lens. This means considering not only the completed artwork as a product to be distributed and presented, but also the entire process of its creation—“discovering the often mundane detail of

25 Maria Lind, “The Curatorial,” in *Performing the Curatorial. Within and Beyond Art*, ed. Maria Lind (Sternberg Press, 2012), 63.

26 Mária Orišková, “Curating ‘Eastern Europe’: From the Politics of Representation to Collaboration and Networking,” in *Curating “EASTERN EUROPE” and Beyond: Art Histories through the Exhibition*, ed. Mária Orišková (Peter Lang AG, 2014), 7.

27 Praznik, *Art Work*, Loc 130, Kindle.

28 Ibid., Loc 140, Kindle.

how art-related activities happened and tracing the encounters that formed the web of connections that made ideas circulate and things happen.”²⁹

Networking, in Bourdieu’s terms, functions as a symbolic economy employed by art workers. Historians have long recognized that artistic labor has always involved relationships—whether personal or institutional—that serve as tools for access and resources. Even in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the romantic ideal of the artistic genius was forged,³⁰ artists relied on networks. A relevant concept here is “attachment,” proposed by literary scholar Rita Felski, who describes it as a mode of joining, connecting, and meeting.³¹ Attachment, in this sense, fosters relationships that evolve into networks and systems, which can then be utilized or leveraged in various ways. However, networks also function as invisible relationships. To understand how these attachments are organized, Klara Kemp-Welch’s notion of “a point of passage” is useful. She refers to Polish artists Jarosław Kozłowski and Andrzej Kostołowski, who created NET—an international artistic network that operated between private homes, studios, and other alternative spaces, where artistic propositions were articulated—“spaces which people and objects passed through at various rates of intensity—places that generated further encounters and exchanges.”³² Such examples illustrate how curating and networking often intersect.

How did artists in Soviet Latvia utilize networks to their advantage? How did they integrate networking into their practices, effectively curating exhibitions and projects in the process? Kemp-Welch points out the importance of distribution, suggesting it could serve as a method to counteract the alienation experienced within Soviet reality.³³ Artistic processes and the communication structures they entailed can therefore be viewed as modes of dissemination, with curatorial practices operating as hybrid forms that actively shaped these processes. This perspective applies not only to the underground art scene but also to the broader Soviet art system, including that of Latvia.

29 Kemp-Welch, *Networking the Block*, 4.

30 One of the key works that cemented this view is Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

31 Rita Felski, *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (University of Chicago Press, 2020), 8.

32 Kemp-Welch, *Networking the Block*, 156.

33 *Ibid.*, 3.

The houses of creativity: a case study of the Dzintari House of Creativity in Jūrmala

“... the ideal in art was a creative house. There, artists could create exhibitions that were reviewed by experts from Moscow, Leningrad, and elsewhere.”

Ilze Konstante³⁴

Since the 1920s, the communist government of the Soviet Union gradually established a centrally controlled administrative system for the arts. The Communist Party institutionalized artistic life through state-dominated unions, where artist participation was mandatory. While these unions were designed to promote the creative activity of members by providing material assistance, they simultaneously imposed ideological control. On one hand, the system guaranteed financial support and regular commissions for “state artists,”³⁵ and on the other, it subordinated creative freedom to the ideological interests of the state, consolidating Socialist Realism as the dominant aesthetic. Soviet cultural policy deliberately created a system that made individuals dependent on state institutions. Artist’s work was shaped by collegial relations—a network of committees, advisory boards and bureaucratic control mechanisms. Although significant scholarly work has been conducted on Soviet cultural policy by both Western and Eastern European researchers,³⁶ the relationship between artists and state institutions remains an area requiring further investigation.

The Artists’ Union of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR) was established in 1941 following the Soviets occupation of Latvia.³⁷ It

34 Ilze Konstante, “Latviešu māksla ir diezgan pakļāvīga,” interview by Tomass Pārups, *Arterri-tory*, February 7, 2018, https://arterritory.com/lv/vizuala_maksla/intervijas/21255-latviesu_maksla_ir_diezgan_paklaviga/.

35 The term “state artist” is discussed by Caterina Preda in *The State Artist in Romania and Eastern Europe: The Role of the Creative Unions*, ed. Caterina Preda (University of Bucharest, 2017).

36 See, for example: Sergejs Kruks, *Par mūziku skaistu un melodisku!* (Neputns, 2008); Ilze Konstante, *Stāļina garā ēna Latvijas tēlotājā mākslā. 1940–1956* (Neputns, 2017); Eglē Rindzevičiūtē, *Constructing Soviet Cultural Policy: Cybernetics and Governance in Lithuania after World War II* (PhD diss., Linköping University, 2008); and Anne White, *De-Stalinization and the House of Culture: Declining State Control Over Leisure in the U.S.S.R., Poland and Hungary, 1953–89* (Routledge, 1990).

37 Centralization of the Latvian art field had already begun prior to the Soviet occupation. In 1938, under the authoritarian regime of Kārlis Ulmanis, “the task of ensuring ‘the

reported directly to the Organizational Committee of the Artists' Union of the USSR (*Orgkomitet*) in Moscow. While there is a wealth of research on individual Artist Unions³⁸ across the Soviet republics, little is known about how these unions were interconnected—specifically, which maintained closer ties and which remained more isolated. A vast administrative infrastructure facilitated networking within the Soviet Bloc, allowing artists to engage in cultural exchange.³⁹ However, the Soviet administrative system of mobility was not solely intended to support artistic work or provide recreation and retreat, but rather reward loyalty and encourage the production of work that served ideological purposes.⁴⁰

One of the official sites for cultural exchange within the Soviet Bloc was the house of creativity, sometimes also referred to as an artists' house. According to Soviet ideology, these institutions offered state artists both space for work and opportunities for leisure. In the Soviet realm, work and leisure were intertwined—leisure was framed as an essential factor contributing to productivity. As David Crowley and Susan E. Reid explain:

Leisure without labor was like dessert without savory; a fully human, rounded life consisted of both, not least because unalienated labor, quite unlike alienated

national education of society' was delegated to the Chamber of Literature and Arts, a professional corporation with state-approved representatives who organized artists and supervised large representative exhibitions." Măra Traumane "Instructive, Dramatic and Corrective Collectivity: Socialist Realism in the Mirror of Collegial Debates. A Case Study of Documents of the Artists' Union of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic, 1944–55," *Art Margins* 8, no. 1 (2019): 31.

- 38 See also: Ilze Konstante, *Staļina garā ēna Latvijas tēlotājā mākslā. 1940–1956* (Neputns, 2017); Carmen Rădulescu, "Uniunea Artiștilor Plastici. Între control politic și arta neangajată" [The Romanian Artists' Union. Between Political Control and Independent Art], in *Forme de represiune în regimurile comuniste* [Forms of Repression in Communist Regimes], eds. Cosmina Budeancă and Florentin Olteanu (Polirom, 2008); Alice Mocănescu, "Artists and Political Power: The Functioning of the Romanian Artists' Union during the Ceaușescu Era, 1965–1975", in *History of Communism in Europe* vol. 2 (2011); and *Avatars of Intellectuals under Communism* (Zeta Books, 2011).
- 39 Covered in scholarship such as Klara Kemp-Welch, *Networking the Block. Experimental Art in Eastern Europe, 1965–1981* (Mit Press, 2019); and *Art beyond Borders. Artistic Exchange in Communist Europe (1945–1989)*, eds. Jérôme Bazin, Pascal Dubourg Glatigny, and Piotr Piotrowski (Central European University Press, 2016).
- 40 On mobility in the Soviet Union, see, for example: Kathy Burrell and Kathrin Hörschellmann, eds., *Mobilities in Socialist and Post-Socialist States: Societies on the Move* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

drudgery under capitalism, was a path to self-realization. In an oft-cited passage in *Das Kapital*, Marx described communism as a realm of freedom and fully human existence in which both leisure and work would satisfy the intellectual, social, and material needs of the individual. (..) A visit to the house of culture or the cinema, or a Sunday spent listening to Tchaikovsky in the local Park of Culture and Rest would reinvigorate the worker in readiness for the great challenges in the workplace and for building socialism.⁴¹

To secure artists' welfare and equip them for creative work, the Ministries of Culture of the USSR and the Artist's Unions, as well as other institutions, established a legal framework to secure material benefits.⁴² Artists and their families were entitled to medical care, financial allowances and loans, assistance in purchasing housing or cars, as well as access to retreat houses⁴³ across the USSR or in the LSSR.⁴⁴

The need for a structure such as the houses of creativity was justified by the argument that artists working on state commissions required optimal conditions for creativity—free from domestic concerns, with direct access to studios and models.⁴⁵ Houses of creativity were established as early as the 1940s and managed by the USSR Art Fund. They were typically located in picturesque settings—on the shores of the Black Sea or the Baltic Sea, along lakes or rivers. Artists could stay for up to two months (though the duration varied over time) and received full board, including three or four meals a day, a studio, and all necessary materials for their work. At the end of their stay, artists presented a debriefing exhibition to showcase the work

41 David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, "Introduction: Pleasure in Socialism?" in *Pleasures in Socialism. Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc*, eds. David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (Northwestern University Press, 2012), 30.

42 See, for example: Sergejs Kruks, *Par mūziku skaistu un melodisku!* [On the Music Beautiful and Melodic] (Neputns, 2008); and Ilze Konstante, *Staļina garā ēna Latvijas tēlotāja mākslā. 1940–1956* (Neputns, 2017).

43 I have used the term "retreat houses" as a direct translation of the Latvian *atpūtas nami*, which in this article is further used synonymously with "creative houses."

44 Agija Ābiķe-Kondrāte, "LPSR Valsts drošības komitejas un represīvo institūciju darbība radošo profesiju pārstāvju veselības aprūpes, radošā darba un atpūtas nodrošināšanā," *VDK zinātniskās izpētes komisijas raksti, Totalitārisma sabiedrības kontrole un represijas*, no.1 (2016): 2, https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/lu_portal/projekti/vdkkomisija/070_AbikeKondrate_2015gads_VDK-un-represivo-instituciju-darbiba-rakstnieku-veselibas-un-atputas-nodrosinasanaPSRSLiteraturasfonds.pdf.

45 Konstante, *Staļina garā ēna*, 273–74.



1. Dzintari House of Creativity, screenshot from the TV film *Padomju Latvija*, no. 20, 1958, Digital Archive of Audiovisual, Photo and Audio Documents of the Latvian State Archives of Audiovisual Documents

Kūrybos namai „Dzintari“, kadras iš televizijos filmo *Padomju Latvija*, no. 20, 1958, Latvijas valstybinis audiovizualinių dokumentų archyvas

they had produced.⁴⁶ These houses were created in locations such as Palanga (Lithuania), Senezh and Tver (Russia), and Gurzuf (Crimea, Ukraine), among others.⁴⁷ Each site was carefully chosen for its natural surroundings, whether near beaches, forests, or other landscapes, believed to inspire and renew creativity. One such example is the Dzintari House of Creativity (initially known as *Jaunrades un atpūtas nams Nr. 2* in Latvian and *Dom tvorchestva i otdiha No. 2* in Russian⁴⁸), located in Jūrmala, a popular resort city. Throughout the Soviet era, the Dzintari House of Creativity hosted artists from a variety of disciplines, including ceramics, sculpture, textile, painting theatre, cinema and television, and poster art (print art). It was established

46 Vera Otdelnova, “Putj oficialjnovo sovetskovo hudozhnika” [The Path of State Artist], *Arzamas*, <https://arzamas.academy/materials/2497>.

47 Konstante, *Staļina garā ēna*, 274.

48 The house bore this name from 1945 until 1969, when it was renamed *Jaunrades un atpūtas nams Dzintari* (1969–1975), *T. Zaļkalna Mākslinieku nams* (1975–1992), and *Dzintaru Mākslinieku nams* (1992–1999). See Latvijas Mākslinieku savienības Dzintaru Mākslinieku nams, fund 246, State Archive of Latvia (LVA). Further in the text I use the name “Dzintari Creative House.”

in 1945 following a decision issued by the USSR Artists' Union in Moscow on April 5. The newly formed Art Fund of the Latvian SSR was assigned to oversee its management.⁴⁹

Two buildings on Turaidas Street 13 in Dzintari were originally designated for artists and musicians. In 1947, additional venues were added, allowing the Dzintari House of Creativity to welcome more visitors—not only from Moscow but from across the entire USSR.⁵⁰ Archive materials reveal that during Stalinist times, one of the sites used by the Dzintari House of Creativity was a mesmerizing Art Deco villa built in the 1920s. Footage from the television program *Padomju Latvija* (Soviet Latvia)⁵¹ showcases a beautiful two-story house with a well-kept garden, portrayed as an oasis for rest and relaxation. [Fig. 1] Without the late 1950s timestamps, viewers might assume the footage depicts a pre-Soviet bourgeois lifestyle, with carefree residents painting and playing board games. It is important to note that these original villas (later repurposed as houses of creativity) once belonged to wealthy Latvian businessman and entrepreneurs⁵² before their properties were nationalized following the Soviet occupation. As Crowley and Reid highlight:

(...) the nationalization of land—and the way buildings and places were given new uses and meanings, even when the physical configuration of those spaces was little changed—indicate that space was subject to political interests. The period saw pervasive efforts to permeate not only places of work and public ceremony but also the most intimate spaces of the everyday with ideological meaning.⁵³

By the 1960s, new premises were constructed specifically to serve the needs of houses of creativity, designed in the Soviet modernist style. [Figs. 2 and 3] The project was led by Nikolaj Šelomov, a leading Russian architect of the Central Scientifically Experimental Design Institute of the

49 Konstante, *Stalīna garā ēna*, 274.

50 Astra Krūmiņa, “Dzintaru mākslinieku nams. Vēsture. Funkcijas. Nozīme” (MA thesis, Art Academy of Latvia, 2000), 6.

51 *Padomju Latvija*, no. 18 (1950); no. 37 (1951); no. 20 (1958); no. 28 (1966).

52 The house described above in the text belonged to real estate owner F. Nārums, who had a large fishing business. See *Jaunā nedēļa*, no. 20, May 20, 1927, 7; Konstante, *Stalīna garā ēna*, 275.

53 Crowley and Reid, *Socialist Spaces*, 2.



2. Postcard, Dzintari House of Creativity, photo by D. Gedzjuns, published in *Liesma* magazine, Riga, second half of the 1960s, Jūrmala City Museum Archive

Kūrybos namai „Dzintari“, atvirukas, D. Gedzjuno nuotrauka, publikuota žurnale *Liesma*, Ryga, XX a. 7 deš. II pusė, Jūrmalos miesto muziejaus archyvas



3. Dzintari House of Creativity (at the time called T. Zaļkalns USSR Art Fund House of Creativity), photographer unknown, 1977, Jūrmala City Museum Archive

Kūrybos namai „Dzintari“ (tuo metu vadinti T. Zaļkalnio TSRS meno fondo kūrybos namais), nežinomas fotografas, 1977, Jūrmalos miesto muziejaus archyvas



4. Catering hall at Dzintari Creative House, photographer unknown, 1966–1971, Jūrmala City Museum Archive

Kūrybos namų „Dzintari“ valgykla, nežinomas fotografas, 1966–1971, Jūrmalos miesto muziejaus archyvas

Building and Architecture Academy of Soviet Union (*Centralnij Nauchno-issledovatel'skij projektnij institut Akademii gradostroitel'jstvju i arhitekturi Sovetskovo Sojuza*). Šelomov collaborated with a team of renowned local architects and artists⁵⁴ whose contributions were significant. Artists were responsible for designing the interior furnishings and decorative elements, creating modern, contemporary pieces for the time. Many artworks were integrated into both the interior and exterior of the building. The new five-story house featured accommodations, a museum, a health treatment facility,⁵⁵ and a large catering hall.⁵⁶ [Fig. 4] A key feature of the Dzintari House of

54 Local press mentions several artists, including architect Marta Staņa (1913–1972), responsible for interior; Georgijs Kruglovs (1905–1984), sculpture; N. Viļumaine (ceramics), Artūrs Mucenieks (1912–1984) and Ģirts Vilks (1909–1983), both stained glass. Sculptors Aivars Gulbis (1933–2024), Arta Dumpe (1933–), and V. Blunova reportedly worked on the interior and exterior. See “Šeit atpūšas mākslinieki,” *Rīgas Balss*, no. 137 (June 6, 1966), 5; “Jaunrades nams Dzintaros,” *Māksla*, no. 4 (October 1, 1961), 49). However, sources are inconsistent, and further research is needed to clarify the artists’ involvement.

55 Baiba Vērpe, “Large-Scale Buildings of the Resort Establishments of the Soviet Period and Their Present State in Jūrmala City, Latvia,” *Architecture and Urban Planning* 17, no. 1 (2021): 41, <https://doi.org/10.2478/aup-2021-0003>.

56 “Šeit atpūšas mākslinieki,” 5.

Creativity was the ceramic stoves built to meet the needs of ceramists. Since the mid-1950s, Dzintari had been a meeting center for ceramic artists. From its early years, it cooperated with the Riga Porcelain Factory, the ceramic laboratory of the Art Academy of the LSSR, and the art and production factory *Māksla* (Art). In the 1950s USSR, it was the only all-union creative and production base for the experimental work of sculptor-ceramists. Artists explored various techniques—including porcelain, faience, majolica, glaze, and glass—and created samples of tableware, decorative dishes, and small sculptural objects. Among the residents of Dzintari were prominent artists such as the animalist Alexei Sotnikov (Russia), a student of Vladimir Tatlin; avant-garde artist Anna Leporskaya (Ukraine), who studied under Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin and Kazimir Malevich; and Boris Smirnov (Russia), a constructivist architect, photographer,⁵⁷ and designer, among many others.

Today, very little information is available about the inner workings of the Dzintari House of Creativity. Key questions remain: How were artists selected? How was the creative process structured? What did artists accomplish during their stay? How were their works exhibited? One of the rare accounts comes from a master's thesis written in 2000 by ceramist Astra Krūmiņa, who managed the Dzintari House of Creativity in the late 1990s, during a period when state funding had been withdrawn, leading to its decline. According to Krūmiņa, every artist's residency at Dzintari culminated in a reference exhibition⁵⁸ evaluated by a commission from the USSR Artists' Union.⁵⁹ [Fig. 5] Each artist was also required to leave behind an artwork as part of their participation.⁶⁰ Since the 1950s, so-called creative groups were formed, bringing together artists from different disciplines—ceramics, small-format sculpture, poster art, and others—to work at the Dzintari House of Creativity simultaneously.⁶¹ The results were presented in exhibitions, either at the house itself or at other venues in the surrounding area.

57 Vera Otdelnova, "Istochnik tvorcheskikh sil," *Arzamas*, <https://arzamas.academy/materials/2493>.

58 Krūmiņa, "Dzintaru mākslinieku nams," 5.

59 Ābiķe-Kondrāte, "LPSR Valsts drošības komitejas un represīvo institūciju darbība," 15.

60 Astra Krūmiņa, interview by Maija Rudovska, personal archive, March 14, 2025.

61 According to Krūmiņa, the groups did not work together but focused separately on their respective art media. However, there were interactions and time spent together during meals, evenings, and other moments when artists familiarized themselves with each other's work (Krūmiņa, interview).



5. Exhibition at Dzintari House of Creativity. Group led by Russian sculptor Aleksandr Belashov [Александр Михайлович Белашов]; in the foreground, a work by Lithuanian artist Violeta Skirgailaitė, photographer unknown, 1968, Jūrmala City Museum Archive

Paroda kūrybos namuose „Dzintari“, priekyje – Violetos Skirgailaitės kūriniai, nežinomas fotografas, 1968, Jūrmalos miesto muziejaus archyvas

Krūmiņa's recollections primarily highlight the positive aspects of her time at Dzintari House of Creativity. She writes:

The fantastic atmosphere in the group, the wonderful colleagues from the most remote parts of the USSR, the carefree life with water treatments, mountains of salads and fried potatoes, slide screenings, and intense creative work even at night—these memories accompany everyone who has worked at the Dzintari House of Creativity House even once. [...] Dzintari has a special meaning in my creative life because it was then, without thinking about the technological difficulties that had hitherto plagued me, that I was able to find my direct handwriting in ceramics. [...] It was in Dzintari that I began to use ornamentation, complex surface treatments, minimal glazing, mass reduction and tinting in my work, and I have stuck to these techniques to this day.⁶²

62 Krūmiņa, *Dzintaru mākslinieku nams*, 92–93.

Krūmiņa's positive recollections of her time at Dzintari in the 1980s are understandable, as this period was generally more permissive, allowing for greater artistic freedom. The National Awakening movement was beginning to take root within many formal institutions, including the Artists' Union of the LSSR, which oversaw the Dzintari House of Creativity. By the 1970s, and especially in the 1980s, the Artists' Union had become a progressive driving force in Latvia. This decade offered relative creative freedom, especially in the field of applied arts—a freedom that was not always extended to fine art disciplines. Ceramics, as mentioned before, flourished at Dzintari, supported by workshops built in the 1960s specifically for this discipline. Ceramists faced less ideological pressure, as their work was often seen as decorative rather than politically charged. For example, the leading ceramist Pēteris Martinsons, who oversaw many creative groups at the Dzintari House of Creativity, had already been freely experimenting with different techniques and forms since the 1960s.⁶³

Structurally, houses of creativity can be compared to palaces of culture. Similar to workers' clubs, which the state used to regulate and control the masses through leisure activities, houses of creativity were spaces where artistic practices could, in principle, be monitored and controlled. However, this oversight was often exercised by the artists themselves, many of whom held influential positions within the Artists' Union, the Arts Fund, and other cultural institutions. This created a dynamic in which artists, in addition to pursuing their individual art practices, also acted as organizers, teachers, masters, and mediators of ideas, blurring the boundaries between artistic and what could be perceived from today's perspective as curatorial work.

Although the Dzintari House of Creativity was a hub of active creative exchange—facilitating the sharing of ideas, knowledge, skills and influences—it must also be understood within the broader Soviet colonial project. As Konstante reminds us, the house was initially intended to “host comrades, who received work retreats by the leading USSR institutions”⁶⁴ and who needed time and space to complete commissions for the

63 Pēteris Martinsons' (1931–2013) should be considered more broadly for his interdisciplinary influence on the Latvian art scene. Educated in architecture, he transferred his knowledge and experience to ceramics, where he fostered greater interest in architecture-related issues.

64 Konstante, *Stalīna garā ēna*, 274.

socialist party. This function is clearly evident in archival footage from the late 1950s.⁶⁵ Access to houses of creativity was largely available to artists holding higher positions within formal institutions and their networks. These networks required a certain degree of loyalty to the state authorities. Alignment with the system provided a range of advantages, including access to exclusive professional relationships and networks. Often, these relationships operated within what is known as the *blat* system. According to Ledeneva, “*blat* networks originated in long-term relationships and consisted of regular access to each other’s resources rather than just favor-for-favor exchanges. Needs were also generated by these networks, for they would throw up unexpected channels by which resources could be obtained.”⁶⁶ Further research is needed to understand how these types of networks functioned within Soviet Latvia’s formal institutions.⁶⁷ However, it is reasonable to speculate that, with the process of de-Stalinization, followed by the Thaw, and later *perestroika* in the 1980s, houses of creativity became more open. They increasingly served as spaces for cultural exchange, where artists could learn about developments in other Eastern Bloc countries and transfer this knowledge to the local art scene. Krūmiņa notes that “international groups and symposia were of particular importance, as they gave artists from foreign, then socialist countries, the rare opportunity during the Soviet period to get acquainted with the work of artists from other countries.”⁶⁸ She recalls that 1973 was a particularly important year, when the Dzintari House of Creativity hosted artists from Soviet Bloc countries such as Hungary, Poland, South-Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, GDR, and even Mongolia and Cuba.⁶⁹ These interactions facilitated active networking and helped shape a cultural policy that directly benefited artists able to exploit these network structures.

65 *Padomju Latvija*, no. 18 (1950); no. 37 (1951); no. 20 (1958).

66 Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours*, 115.

67 Even in an interview with Krūmiņa, the question of how artists were selected to work at the Dzintari Creative House remains unanswered, as she does not recall the selection procedure (Krūmiņa, interview).

68 Krūmiņa, *Dzintaru mākslinieku nams*, 22.

69 *Ibid.*, 12.

When networks enable exhibitions: the case of the *Gadījums* exhibitions

How did houses of creativity serve Latvian artists, and in what ways did they function as platforms for further artistic and curatorial expression? One of the primary formats for artists to engage with the public and present their work was through exhibitions. The *Gadījums* exhibitions, analyzed in this chapter, were not official showcases of works produced under the auspices of a house of creativity, as outlined in the previous chapter on the Dzintari House of Creativity. Instead, these exhibitions emerged organically from networks and friendships fostered during artists' residencies at houses of creativity. Although the *Gadījums* exhibitions remain absent from official Latvian art history records, they were significant experimental events at the time that explored connections not only among local artists but also across the Soviet Union. Additionally, they presented a mix of different artistic media within a single space—a completely novel approach at that time.

A total of four *Gadījums* exhibitions took place in Riga at various locations between the mid-1980s: the first in 1985, followed by exhibitions in 1986, 1987, and 1988. All were curated by the artist couple Zoja Frolova (originally from Ukraine, who moved to Latvia in 1984) and Jānis Jākobsons (Latvia). At the time, both were in the early stages of their artistic careers and actively sought to connect with artists from other Soviet republics. They built these networks through personal encounters during visits to houses of creativity mostly in Senez. Reflecting on the 1980s, Jākobsons acknowledges that his desire to travel was driven by dissatisfaction with what he perceived as the prevailing “complacency” of the Latvian art scene at the time. He wanted to travel and explore art institutions in other Soviet republics and engage with artists working in diverse media, particularly textile art—a field subject to fewer ideological constraints than the more heavily regulated mainstream disciplines of painting, sculpture, and graphic arts.⁷⁰

The *Gadījums* exhibitions featured a variety of artistic media, including painting, sculpture, print art, photography, and installation. At the time, installation art was gaining momentum within the local art scene, making

70 Jānis Jākobsons, interview by Maija Rudovska, personal archive, June 17, 2024.



6. Poster cover for the exhibition *Gadījums I* [*Happenstance I*], 1985, photocopy by Maija Rudovska, Archive of the Art Academy of Latvia

Parodos *Gadījums I* plakatas, 1985, fotokopija, Latvijas daiļes akadēmijas archyvas

Gadījums an important experimental platform. These exhibitions were held as part of Art Days, an annual and important local event organized by the Artists' Union of the LSSR. However, the character of *Gadījums* remained informal rather than institutional. Unlike traditional Art Days exhibitions, which typically showcased officially sanctioned works, *Gadījums* was built upon self-organized networks. For example, the first *Gadījums* (hosted at the Central Printer's Club) included participating artists from Vilnius, Kharkiv, Yaroslavl, and Riga—a network formed through shared experiences at the house of creativity in Senez (Russia), where the artists formed affinities and an interest in each other's work.⁷¹ Latvian art historian Irēna Bužinska described the exhibition as “the first attempt to introduce our viewers to artists from other republics in connection with the works of the new generation of Latvian artists. As the first feedback shows, such contacts

⁷¹ *Liesma*, no. 6 (June 1, 1985), 14.

are necessary and needed by everyone—both the artists themselves and the audience.”⁷² Artists participating in the first *Gadījums* included Rimvydas Kepežinskas (Vilnius), Raimundas Sližys (Vilnius), Petr Konnikov (Yaroslavl), Natalia Mironenko (Kharkiv), Anna Bētiņa (Rīga), Dace Lielā (Rīga), as well as the organizers Jākobsons and Frolova. [Fig. 6]

The networks underlying *Gadījums* were based on friendships, shared artistic interests, and mutual curiosity. Jākobsons and Frolova deliberately explored the potential of the house of creativity networks, using them as a foundation for artistic and curatorial opportunities. Their partnership itself embodied a cross-cultural dynamic—Jākobsons, a Latvian-born artist, and Frolova, originally from Ukraine, were drawn together by a curiosity about each other's backgrounds. One might wonder: what criteria determined the selection of the artists for the *Gadījums* exhibitions? Jākobsons explained, “We were all brought together by chance or accident. That's why the exhibition is called what it is, but it could just as easily be another phrase or motto.”⁷³ However, a closer analysis suggests that these events were far from random. Instead, they were intentional, organized with a certain idea in mind. Latvian art historian Ainārs Ikstens also observed, “Jānis Jākobsons with his peers reminds again that the project, which started four years ago, was not a whim of a moment, but rather an intentional programmatic action, which with the passage of time is variable.”⁷⁴

Over time, *Gadījums* evolved, with certain artists and experimental practices gaining prominence. For example, in the third *Gadījums* (hosted at the Theatre Museum), installation art became more central as young and promising Latvian artists such as Oļegs Tillbergs, Ausma Neretniece, and Juris Ņikiforovs brought new approaches to the exhibition format. Indeed, installations and objects by Tillbergs are among the first examples of this medium appearing in officially organized exhibitions.⁷⁵ Bužinska characterizes the exhibition as a game where artists play “with materials, the viewer and his feelings, assumptions about what can and cannot be placed in the museum halls, and in its showcases.”⁷⁶ [Fig. 7]

72 Irēna Bužinska, [untitled], *Literatūra un Māksla*, May 1, 1985.

73 Bužinska, [untitled].

74 Ainārs Ikstens, “Izstāžu nedēļa,” *Padomju Jaunatne*, December 16, 1988, 14.

75 Ibid., 68.

76 Irēna Bužinska, “Gadījums-3,” *Literatūra un Māksla*, no. 26 (1987): 8.



7. Oļegs Tillbergs,
Smoke House, from
the exhibition
Gadījums III, 1987,
private archive of
Oļegs Tillbergs;
special thanks to
Neputns publishing
house

Oļegs Tillbergs,
Rūkykla, iš parodos
Gadījums III, 1987,
O. Tillbergo privatus
archyvas, speciali
padėka leidyklai
„Neputns“

The *Gadījums* exhibitions can be interpreted as an effort by a group or network of artists to come together and showcase their individual works within a shared space—seemingly formed by random, chance encounters. However, they can also be understood as the deliberate shaping of a new exhibition format, driven by the artists themselves. This format followed fluid, contact-based principles that were often intuitive. Some *Gadījums* exhibitions incorporated specific themes or conceptual frames. For example, the fourth *Gadījums* was subtitled *A Place That Doesn't Exist* (“Vieta, kuras nav”). This raises an important question: can an intuitive approach be considered a form of structure, a method, or a curatorial approach? As Filipovic notes, the artist ultimately constructs the exhibition as a form, which prompts a reconsideration of what actually constitutes an exhibition.⁷⁷ In this sense, the *Gadījums* exhibitions deliberately avoided a unifying theme or overarching concept. Instead, relationships between artworks emerged from a kind of energy, allowing connections to be formed through the viewer's perception

77 Filipovic, “Introduction,” 8–9.



8. Oļegs Tillbergs, *Aurora*, from the exhibition *Gadījums IV*, 1988, Archive of Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art

Oļegs Tillbergs, *Aurora*, iš parodos *Gadījums IV*, 1988, Latvijos šiuolaikinio meno centro archyvas

rather than dictated by curatorial intent. This approach was characteristic of the 1980s, a period marked by increasing artistic self-determination despite ongoing censorship and restrictions. Latvian art historian Santa Hirša observes: “It can be assumed that the cultural flourishing of that time was positively driven by both external, culturally and politically liberalizing conditions, as well as an internal artistic breakthrough—its revival through the aesthetics of resistance, with which a broad segment of society could identify.”⁷⁸ However, artistic expression often remained veiled and intuitive. Hirša adds that “stepping outside conventional exhibition spaces signaled the adoption of new forms of artistic communication, accompanied by a general breakthrough in artistic quality and innovation across many fields.”⁷⁹ This is also true for *Gadījums*, where the exploration of new, non-traditional spaces encouraged the development of the artist-curator model. [Fig. 8]

The *Gadījums* exhibitions were not ad-hoc or improvised events; rather, they were intentionally open structures, shaped by artist-led

78 Santa Hirša, *Oļegs Tillbergs. Jaguar XJ6* (Neputns, 2025), 32.

79 Hirša, *Oļegs Tillbergs*, 32.

networks. While this openness made them less formal—the works displayed could essentially be in any medium or form—they were also highly conceptual, fostering intercultural connections that transcended local artistic discourse.

Conclusion

This article has argued that artistic practices in late Soviet Latvia encompassed a diverse range of activities, including curatorial work. Local, national, and international networking—an ephemeral yet vital practice—played a key role in Soviet curatorial and creative practices. Artistic exchange within the USSR provided various opportunities for artists to develop their creative practices, present artwork in exhibitions or other formats, and establish connections—most often through informal relationships and kinships. However, this kind of labor—embedded within formal structures—has largely remained invisible and undervalued, often unrecognized as labor at all. From today's perspective, this lack of acknowledgment of the artist-curator's extensive work has shaped the understanding of curatorial discourse, contributing to the ongoing marginalization of curatorial practice within Soviet studies.

The intersection of networking, artistic labor, and curatorial work manifests as an intangible practice that, as this article argues, emerged in contexts where artists found support and opportunities for professional growth. Houses of creativity played a crucial role in fostering these practices. Although officially modeled—like workers' clubs—as spaces for recreation, I emphasize that recreation was instrumentalized by the Soviet system. These spaces for rest and relaxation were not intended to offer a break from labor but rather as a means of revitalizing or complementing it. Houses of creativity should therefore be seen as places designed to sustain and reinforce artistic production, supporting various kinds of labor. The Dzintari House of Creativity in Jūrmala serves as a compelling example, demonstrating how such institutions facilitated cultural exchange among artists. This, in turn, created favorable conditions for cultural policy initiatives, shaping broader artistic processes and influencing the art environment as a whole.

As Ābiķe–Kondrāte notes: “Both the writers’ and the artists’ houses of creativity were experiencing internal changes linked to the political changes in the country. This was already happening in the 1970s, and in the 1980s it continued to grow. The more freethinking mood also reflected in the work of the creative personalities.”⁸⁰

This article reveals that the networks played a crucial role in artistic practices and facilitated artists’ entry—whether intentional or not—into the realm of curating. This is demonstrated through the analysis of the *Gadījums* exhibitions, held in Riga in the mid to late 1980s. Examining the making of these exhibitions and their resonance reveals the kinships and relationships forged within the environment of houses of creativity, which illuminate the work of the artist-curator in 1980s Latvia. The *Gadījums* exhibitions exemplify how modes of networking evolved into exhibition formats as artists sought new and fitting ways to achieve self-representation and autonomy. Within these experimental formats, art media such as installation and object-based art slowly gained recognition in the late Soviet art scene of the 1980s. These findings also support the argument introduced at the beginning of this article: curating in late socialism can be approached as a broad and expanding practice—one that was experimental, playful, and stimulating, often initiated by the artists themselves.

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80 Ābiķe–Kondrāte, *LPSR Valsts drošības komitejas*, 15.

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Santrauka

Tai, ką sukuriame. Ieškant sąsajų tarp menininko kuratoriaus darbo ir bendradarbiavimo tinklų kaip nematerialios veiklos formos XX a. 9 dešimtmčio Latvijoje

Maija Rudovska

Reikšminiai žodžiai: meninė veikla, menininkas kuratorius, nemateriali veikla, bendradarbiavimo tinklų kūrimas, kūrybos namai, sovietinis menas.

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama menininko kuratoriaus padėtis ir vaidmuo vėlyvuoju sovietiniu laikotarpiu, akcentuojant bendradarbiavimo tinklų kūrimą kaip neretai pamirštamą meninės veiklos aspektą, interpretuojamą per nematerialios veiklos perspektyvą. Menininkas kuratorius prisidėjo prie naujų meno parodų rengimo, pristatymo ir reprezentacijos formų Latvijoje, kartu reaguodamas į platesnius XX a. 9 deš. socialinius-politinius pokyčius. Kaip atvejo analizė straipsnyje nagrinėjamas kūrybos namų (latv. *jaunrades nami*, rus. *dom tvorčestva*) vaidmuo. Šie namai priklausė iš centro administruojamoms valstybės institucijoms, tokioms kaip Dailės fondas ir SSRS menininkų sąjunga. Siekdama iliustruoti kūrybos namų specifiką Latvijoje, straipsnio autorė nagrinėja Jūrmalos kūrybos namus „Dzintari“. Ši institucija atliko svarbų vaidmenį vystant menines praktikas, suteikdama prieigą prie nematerialių veiklos aspektų – draugysčių, artimų ryšių ir mentorystės. Straipsnyje keliama svarbūs klausimai: kodėl kūrybos namai buvo svarbūs menininko kuratoriaus darbui? kaip menininkai naudojo kūrybos namų teikiamomis galimybėmis kurti bendradarbiavimo tinklus? Analizei pasirinktas parodų ciklas *Gadijums*, kuris vyko įvairiose Rygos lokacijose 1985, 1986, 1987 ir 1988 metais.

Autorė teigia, kad bendradarbiavimo tinklų kūrimo, meninės veiklos ir kuratorystės sąsają atskleidžia nemateriali praktika, kurios kontekstuose menininkai ieškojo paramos ir profesinio tobulėjimo galimybių. Vietiniai, nacionaliniai ir tarptautiniai tinklai suteikė įvairias galimybes, leidžiančias menininkams vystyti savo kūrybines praktikas, pristatyti savo darbus parodose arba kitais formatais ir kurti formalias bei neformalias santykių ir bendrystės struktūras. Kūrybos namai vaidino labai svarbų vaidmenį skatinant šias praktikas – jie veikė kaip erdvės, palaikančios ir stiprinančios

meninę produkciją bei įvairias veiklos formas. Tai taip pat leido menininkams žengti į kuratorystės sritį. Straipsnyje minėti aspektai analizuojami per parodų ciklą *Gadijums*, kuris iliustruoja, kaip bendradarbiavimo tinklų kūrimo formos evoliucionavo į parodų formatus, menininkams ieškant naujų ir tinkamų būdų saviraiškai ir autonomijai įgyvendinti. Šie pastebėjimai patvirtina ir pagrindinę straipsnio tezė: kuratorystė vėlyvuoju socializmo laikotarpiu gali būti vertinama kaip įvairi ir besiplečianti praktika – eksperimentinė, žaisminga ir stimuliuojanti, dažnai inicijuojama pačių menininkų.