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Vaiva MIKELIONYTĖ
Vytautas Magnus University, Faculty of Arts, Kaunas, Lithuania

POSITIONING THE CREATIVE WORK OF MIKALOJUS KONSTANTINAS ČIURLIONIS IN MODERN ART HISTORY: INSIGHTS FROM INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITIONS AFTER THE 1990s

Summary. Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911) is the Lithuanian artist probably most frequently presented to the international public. Since the 1990s, when the political and cultural situation in Lithuania changed, his paintings have been constantly showcased in various museums and galleries around the world, in both solo and group exhibitions mostly dedicated to art movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, these exhibitions have not yet been properly explored. The aim of this article is to analyse and critically evaluate the strategies and concepts of international exhibitions of Čiurlionis' art from the 1990s onwards, revealing the criteria for the selection and display of his works, as well as the place of Čiurlionis' art in the history of modern art.

The international exhibitions are analysed applying descriptive, historiographical, analytical and discourse analysis methods, and supported by the views of art historians Steven A. Mansbach and Piotr Piotrowski, who particularly were interested in disparities and complex differences between Eastern and Western modernism. Čiurlionis was educated and sought recognition in the cultural environment of Eastern and Central Europe, while most of his international exhibitions after the 1990s were organised by curators from Western Europe, which creates similar tensions reflected by above-mentioned authors.

Keywords: Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis, international exhibitions, modern art, symbolism, Baltic symbolism.

Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911) is the Lithuanian artist probably most frequently presented to the international public. After the 1990s, when the political and cultural situation in Lithuania has changed, his paintings are constantly showcased in various museums and galleries around the world in both solo and group exhibitions mostly dedicated to art movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

However, these exhibitions have not yet been properly researched: there only a few academic articles it is possible to mention on this topic. Vytautas Landsbergis presented several findings about exhibitions in Poland and Russian Empire at the start of the 20th century.[1] British conductor, violinist and musicologist George Kennaway reflected on the reception of Čiurlionis in Great Britain between 1919 and 1939.[2] However, these researchers focused only on the early reception of Čiurlionis' work.

The most recent research on international exhibitions of Čiurlionis' art was conducted by Rasa Andriušytė-Žukienė, who did a more extensive study raising questions about the strategies and concepts behind international exhibitions from the 1990s to 2013.[3] Some of these exhibitions were also reviewed in cultural media by such prominent Lithuanian art historians and cultural researchers as Giedrė Jankevičiūtė,[4] Laima Laučkaitė,[5] Helmutas Šabasevičius[6] and Stasys Goštautas.[7] Nevertheless, such reviews were more of an exception than a regular process.

In this context, it is clear that reflection about the international exhibitions of Čiurlionis' art is not extensive enough. Nevertheless, it is not possible to

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present an exhaustive analysis of all international exhibitions that took place after the 1990s in one scholarly paper, as more than 40 were organised. The main aim of this article is to critically evaluate the most common strategies of these international exhibitions, employing descriptive, analytical and discourse analysis to reveal the criteria for the selection and display of Čiurlionis' artworks. Through the prism of international exhibitions, this article seeks to answer the question: how is Čiurlionis' work situated in the history of modern art by different curators?

The concepts and display strategies of the exhibitions are analysed through the texts and images of the exhibition catalogues, press releases, reviews and photographs. The analysis is supported by views of art historians Steven A. Mansbach[8] and Piotr Piotrowski,[9] who particularly were interested in disparities and complex differences between Eastern and Western modernism. Čiurlionis was educated and sought recognition in the cultural environment of Eastern and Central Europe, while most of his exhibitions after the 1990s caught the interest of curators from Western Europe, which creates similar tensions reflected by the above-mentioned authors.

INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION OF ČIURLIONIS' SYMBOLIST WORLDVIEW

The assessments of Čiurlionis' work have varied, depending on different historical and political contexts, and the debates about his art have been of interest not only to art historians, critics and exhibition organisers, but also to politicians and public figures. This led to a labyrinth of interpretations, which often offered a rather narrow framework for understanding the artist's work.

During the interwar period, the most important goal was the construction and strengthening of the image of Čiurlionis as a manifestation of the national spirit. The international presentation of his work did not seem to be an important priority. The art historian and scholar of Čiurlionis' work, Rasa Andriušytė-Žukienė, has noted that the 1910s–1920s were particularly important for engaging in international art discussions and for presenting Čiurlionis' work in the context of the synthesis of the arts and abstract art that were topical at that time.[10] However, this was not properly realised; the prevailing view of Čiurlionis' symbolist worldview was closely related to the expression of the Lithuanian spirit as its main feature.

Soviet cultural policy imposed its own, rigidly ideologised and restrictive strategies for interpreting Čiurlionis' work.[11] Relations with Western countries were prohibited, but the M. K. Čiurlionis State Art Museum (M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art) still received interesting and valuable offers to exhibit Čiurlionis' works in renowned art institutions in Western Europe. Unfortunately, these ideas most often remained unrealised, due to the ideological constraints posed by USSR ministry of culture.[12] This had a very negative impact on the international reception of Čiurlionis' art.

The 1990s marked a new stage for Čiurlionis' wider recognition. Finally, the invitations from various institutions and curators to present Čiurlionis' work could be accepted freely. The opportunity to explore the themes of Čiurlionis' art in a broader context seemed very necessary and long awaited. It brought the hope to include Čiurlionis in global art history and rediscover his image as a multidimensional artist, not limited to certain nationalistic clichés born during the interwar period and successfully sustained during the Soviet times.[13] In most cases curators attempted to situate Čiurlionis not as a lonely genius, but one who shares many commonalities with other *Fin-de-Siècle* artists or even pioneers of abstraction.

A closer look at some of the exhibitions makes it possible to find out how the curators of various institutions position Čiurlionis' work in the history of modern art, and how serious are his role and achievements.

One of the first exhibitions held after Lithuania's independence that allowed to look at Čiurlionis' work in the context of European culture was the

exhibition "Time Becomes Space: Symbolists and Richard Wagner",[14] which opened on 15th of August in 1991 at the Marstall Exhibition Halls of the Berlin Academy of Arts. In October, this exhibition moved to Brussels, to the Maison du Spectacle –La Bellone.

Five paintings[15] by Čiurlionis were loaned for this exhibition, associated with the famous turn-of-the-century artists Max Klinger, James Ensor, Vincent van Gogh and Odilon Redon. The concept of the exhibition is rather poetically described as a desire to demonstrate how various artists have used different symbols to create a distinctive space where there is an opportunity to go beyond the physical world and break the traditional boundaries of a single artistic discipline to achieve an effect similar to that of music.[16]

Richard Wagner was the central figure of the exhibition. The exhibition spaces were divided according to his most famous operas: "Der Ring des Nibelungen", "Tristan und Isolde" and "Persifalis". In one of the essays in the catalogue, which provides the broader cultural context of the exhibition, American writer Susan Sontag links Wagner's creative ideas to the aspirations of the late 19th century artists. According to Sontag, it was Wagner's ideas that influenced a new conception of what art can do and what artists actually do, and that the artist's mission has links to religion or forms of therapy.[17]

This exhibition was a comprehensive and thorough presentation of the problematics of turn-of-the-century ideas, and presented Čiurlionis' works as an equal participant in the discussion with other artists. However, it is difficult to assess this discussion in any great depth, as the artists in the exhibition are often grouped together according to certain formal similarities. For example, Čiurlionis' "Thunderbolt" (1909) was exhibited alongside Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer's "Windshock" (1896–1898) and Camille Claudel's "Wave" (1900). One could probably argue that for this particular grouping perhaps some other artist could have appeared alongside Čiurlionis equally successfully.

However, this exhibition was one of the first organised after the 1990s when Čiurlionis' work was presented together with Western European artists. It allowed us to reassess and rethink the popular myth of the lone Lithuanian genius who is like no other.

Since the early 1990s the geography of international exhibitions including Čiurlionis' artworks expanded significantly. Twenty years later, after the first inclusion next to Western European artists in the context of Symbolism, Čiurlionis' paintings were presented in the 2012 exhibition "Dreams of Nature: Symbolism from Van Gogh to Kandinsky". This was a joint project between three institutions: the Ateneum Art Museum in Helsinki, the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam and the National Art Gallery of Scotland in Edinburgh.[18]

The concept was conceived by the French curator and art historian Rodolphe Rapetti and the British art historian Richard Thomson, who claim in the catalogue's introduction that this is the first book devoted exclusively to Symbolist landscapes in Europe.[19] The exhibition sought to convey the various subjective interpretations of landscape across the continent, "from Finland to Catalonia, from Belgium to Russia, Italy or Norway".[20]

In the introductory text, Rodolphe Rapetti claims that landscape is often associated with the Impressionists, who captured their sudden and instantaneous impression of nature and used the genre to show "the victory of spontaneity over academic sophistication".[21] By contrast, the Symbolists, who focused on content and narrative constructions, are not often associated with landscape painting. The exhibition sought precisely to rethink the history of landscape painting, showing that this genre was also important for the Symbolists, giving them the opportunity to express their ideas and their approach to art.

Čiurlionis is mentioned among the artists who placed great importance on musical composition: "Musical associations were taken up by other artists – the Lithuanian painter-composer Čiurlionis and the neo-impressionists Signac and Angrand among them – and the painterly means

of representing landscape using musical apparatus: regular horizons, harmonised tones and spacing of forms and voids operating in intuitive parallel with the notation and performance of a score".[22]

However, a more detailed analysis of why Čiurlionis is associated with these artists is not provided. It is more of a general observation, and there could have been many other artists besides these painters, as they were not the only ones who were exceptionally interested in the interpretation of musical composition in painting. If we look at the works of the artists featured in the exhibition, we will certainly not find many links between Čiurlionis' "Sparks" (1906)) or the "Sonata of the Stars" (1908) and Charles Angrand's "Seine at Dawn (The Fog)" (1889) or Signac's "The Descending Sun. Sardine Fishing. Adagio. Opus 221" (1891). They share a common idea of conveying musical structure in painting, but Čiurlionis' pictorial compositions seem to be much closer to musical structure, whereas in the work of the latter artists there seems to be only a faint hint of this effort, and the paintings are too attached to figuration.

A slightly more detailed analysis of Čiurlionis' work appears in the catalogue chapter "Into the Mystic" by Richard Thomson. "Sonata No. 6" (Sonata of the stars) (1908) is chosen as a work with similarities to the work of Wassily Kandinsky, František Kupka and Piet Mondrian. Čiurlionis' intellectual interests and method of painting are compared with the principles used by these 20th-century painters. Čiurlionis shares with these artists an interest in scientific and philosophical theories and an attention to traditional culture.

Nevertheless, certain facts are exaggerated in order to elevate Čiurlionis' cultural status: for example, that both Igor Stravinsky and Wassily Kandinsky admired him. Such assumptions are suggested by freely interpreted aspects of Čiurlionis' biography, such as the invitation to participate in the exhibition of the New Artists' Association of Munich in 1910. However, this invitation has not survived, and we only know of its existence through a letter from Sofija Kymantaitė to Mstislav Dobuzhinsky. And it is not clear who sent it, whether Kandinsky himself or another member of the art movement.[23] According to Laima Laučkaitė, Čiurlionis may have been caught by the New Artists' Association of Munich because of his exhibition at Makovsky's salon and its negative reception among critics. All artists were criticised, and Čiurlionis thus "fell into the same circle of art radicals and outcasts that opened the way for him to the German avant-garde exhibition in Munich".[24]

The psychiatrist Adolph Marburg is also named as a friend of Čiurlionis', from whom he might have learned about theosophy.[25] Marburg, however, was simply a lecturer at Warsaw's secret university, where Čiurlionis frequently attended lectures and participated in discussions,[26] and was one of many people in a certain cultural circle with whom Čiurlionis interacted, so it is hardly possible to make such a sweeping statement about the uniqueness of their friendship.

The "Sonata of the Stars" is appreciated mainly through its formal aspects, as an original achievement due to Čiurlionis' ability to create a purely cosmic image without using any real-world elements. According to Thomson, the painting could be compared to Albert Trachsel's "Island of Flowering Trees", as it also expresses a longing for a higher world.[27] However, this is again a very generalised comparison, because while Čiurlionis is praised for his rejection of real-world elements, Trachsel's work is much more dominated by figurative elements, and the link is not very convincing.

The entire chapter is dedicated to artists who look at landscape in a suggestive sense, transforming it into abstract forms. Although Čiurlionis' work is not purely abstract, the cosmic imagery he creates reflects a typical stance of early 20th-century artists to represent less and less of the physical world, and to creatively use colour and form to explore states of mind and spirit beyond the material world.[28]

Michael Spens, in his review in *Studio International*, gives a rather critical assessment of the exhibition. The main shortcoming is the curators' intention to

show a wide variety of symbolist landscapes from different cultures, which was not fully realised. Spens believes that the curators could have included more less well-known artists from Scotland, Finland or the Netherlands, as everything is limited to more or less familiar names.[29] However, Čiurlionis is cited as a prime example of "relatively unknown gems from other countries"[30] and, as the author of the review argues, the inclusion of such artists forces a rethinking of the canon and a reinterpretation of the history of the symbolist landscape.[31]

In the context of the exhibition "Nature's Dreams. Symbolism from Van Gogh to Kandinsky", inclusion of Čiurlionis art serves as an attempt to reshape the canon, but at the same time it achieves this only to a certain extent. The obstacle becomes the main focus on stylistic similarities.

Such focus becomes quite problematic when we approach differences between Western and Eastern modernism. The focus on the category of style was criticised by American art historian Steven A. Mansbach. According to him, the fundamental problem is the over-emphasis on the category of style, which has arisen as modern art has become increasingly interested only in the aesthetic sphere and has treated art history as a history of the transformation of styles. Style was perceived as a universal category, transcending national, geographical and other identities, thus justifying the universality of modernism.[32] However, the strategies of Eastern European modernism differed significantly from those of Western modernism. In Eastern Europe, political and social tensions were important as formal innovations, especially those of national liberation, national consciousness and the formation of national identity.[33]

It is clear that international exhibitions who attempted to integrate Čiurlionis' work in the global history of Symbolism managed to situate his work only through certain stylistic similarities to other Western European artists. But it did not give his art full service. Although recognised as an interesting artist, his representation was mostly limited to his similarity to more famous counterparts.

MUSICAL COMPOSITIONS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO ABSTRACTION

Čiurlionis' ability to construct visual imagery based on musical composition is one of the most popular aspects of his work recognised and highlighted by curators abroad. The most successful exhibitions in terms of dedication and attention to this theme are "Musical Analogies. Kandinsky and his contemporaries" ("Analogías musicales. Kandinsky y sus contemporáneos"),[34] "Visual Music. Synaesthesia in Art and Music since 1900", organised by the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in collaboration with the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art[35] and "Kandinsky –Cage: Music and Spirituality in Art" (Fig. 1).[36] These exhibitions situate Čiurlionis' work among the discussions about early abstractionists, who moved away from figurative image through depicting musical composition, but the opinions on the role and influence of Čiurlionis' art differ.

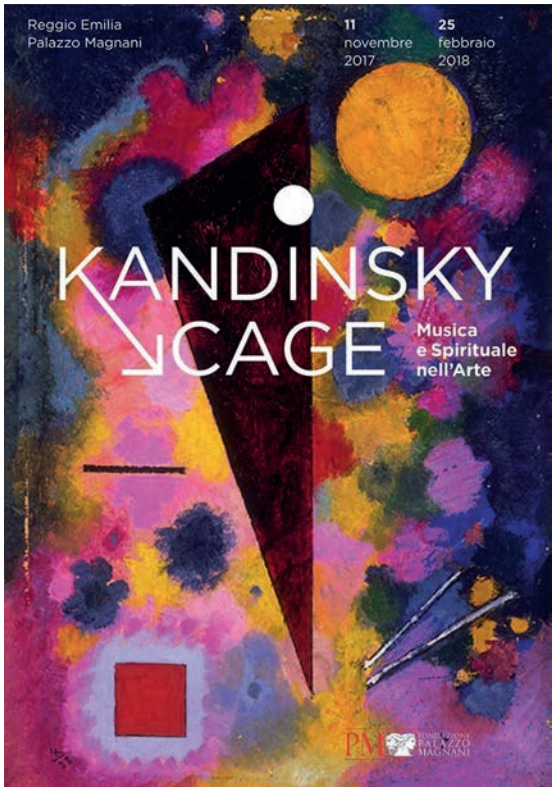

Fig. 1. Exhibition catalogue cover, "Kandinsky–Cage: Music and Spirituality in Art", 2017. https://www.palazzomagnani.it/en/exhibition/kandinsky-cage/

Curator Javier Arnaldo demonstrated a strong knowledge of Čiurlionis work and alluded to the debate and controversy initiated by Alexis Rannit whether Čiurlionis or Kandinsky should be considered a pioneer of abstract art.[37] Arnaldo recognised Rannit's claims were wrong, and has argued that Čiurlionis should nevertheless be interpreted in the context of figurative art and that his association with abstract art can only be conditional: "It is quite difficult to relate Čiurlionis' painting to abstract art, primarily because the visual language of his works is not reducible to the use of pure elements. Nevertheless, in some of his painted cycles, concrete details are interpreted in such a way that we can almost see a purely abstract image."[38]

Čiurlionis' achievements in some cases are much more prominent compared to other artists who were concerned with similar creative tasks: "The desire to create a musical image influences his work incomparably more than that of many of his contemporaries and predecessors, but it certainly has its origins in the poetics of Symbolism, from which the other famous pioneers of abstraction, such as Kupka, Boccioni, Malevich, and Kandinsky himself, originate."[39]

Arnaldo is also familiar with the music of Čiurlionis, and offers interesting original interpretations, linking the painting cycle "The Creation of the World" with the unfinished symphonic poem of the same name. He also emphasises the uniqueness of the fugues painted by Čiurlionis, arguing that by attempting to convey the musical tempos visually, Čiurlionis seemed to have anticipated Paul Klee's later experiments.[40] He also connects Čiurlionis' ideas with the French Symbolist Odilon Redon, although he admits that it is difficult to say to what extent Čiurlionis might have been acquainted with Redon's work.[41]

Similar theories and connections between the world of sounds and images were explored in the exhibition "Visual Music. Synaesthesia in Art and Music since 1900". Jeremy Strick defines the exhibition's core concept of "visual music" as an attempt to show an alternative history of abstract art in the last century, not following styles and movements, but presenting a coherent exploration of one idea.[42] The works in the exhibition cover a very broad spectrum, from paintings to light installations and experimental films, but they all share the common phenomenon of synaesthesia. Čiurlionis' work is presented alongside the very first attempts in the history of art to merge the two worlds of art and music. In the catalogue section "Music for the Eyes: Abstract Painting and Light Art", curator and art historian Judith Zilczer presents the origins of synaesthesia. This phenomenon was of interest not only to 20th-century artists, but also to scientists and theoreticians from different fields, such as the engineer Louis Favre, the colour theorist Maud Miles and the psychologist Alfred Binet.

James Abbott McNeill Whistler is credited with being the first painter to use musical analogies to create visual art. He is immediately followed by Čiurlionis and Arnold Schoenberg, who are presented as pioneers of visual music. As Zilczer says: "Although it is impossible to pinpoint the true origins of visual music, artists from Central and Eastern Europe are crucial to its emergence and dissemination. The two painter-composers brought together the world of late Symbolist musical cues and the riskier field of experimentation that transformed 20th-century painting."[43]

Zilczer interprets Čiurlionis' paintings "Sparks" (1906), "Sonata No. 6" ("Sonata of the Stars", 1908) and the cycle "The Creation of the World" (1905/06) as "multi-faceted compositions whose structural sequences roughly correspond to the music".[44] According to the curator, this musical structure distinguishes Čiurlionis' paintings in the context of the works of his contemporaries, the Russian Symbolists.[45] Zilczer also introduces the broader field of Čiurlionis' interests: theosophical literature, Lithuanian folklore, and the astronomy books of Camille Flammarion. All of this comes together in fantastic visions of the universe.

Čiurlionis' paintings are associated with Schoenberg's abstracted self-portraits, which he called "visions".[46] Alongside these two artists, Kandinsky

is identified as someone who continued similar ideas but managed to go further than either Čiurlionis or Schoenberg.[47]

Considering the size of the exhibition and the large number of authors, the reflection of Čiurlionis' work in the exhibition catalogue does not seem to be accidental, but important to show the origins of the fundamental conceptual category that constructs the exhibition – visual music. An unexpected link between Čiurlionis and Schoenberg emerges, and their works are identified as having had an undeniable influence on the further development of modern art.

The exhibition "Kandinsky–Cage: Music and Spirituality in Art" claimed to reevaluate the concept of "spirit" According to Davide Zanichelli, director of Palazzo Mignani, this concept is neglected, undervalued and sometimes even feared because of its links to religious dimensions and New Age philosophical ideas.[48] But this exhibition seeks to break free from such attitudes and look at the historically important period from the late 19th to the early 20th century, when artists and intellectuals, inspired by Rudolph Steiner's reinterpretation of Goethe's scholarly work "The Theory of Colours" sought to discover new links with spirituality through art.[49]

Most of the artists featured in the exhibition are associated with the German intellectual milieu, and their main interests are related to nature and scientific and spiritual pursuits, which are intertwined. The central figure of the exhibition is Wassily Kandinsky, who expressed these ideas not only in art but also in theoretical reflections. Works by Max Klinger, Paul Klee, Arnold Schoenberg, Mariana Veriovkina, Oskar Fischinger, Fausto Melotti, Nicola De Staël, Giulio Turcato and Robert Rauschenberg were also on show. In addition to paintings, musical scores, prints, small drawings and letters were also presented.

Martina Mazzotta, the curator of the exhibition, mentions that Kandinsky, interested in Čiurlionis' work, invited him to visit the Munich Academy, but due to Čiurlionis' illness, and a letter received too late, their paths never crossed. Once again, as in other exhibitions organised before, Kandinsky's role is somewhat overestimated. There is also a factual inaccuracy in the fact that Čiurlionis was not invited to the Munich Academy, but to the exhibition of the New Artists' Association of Munich. As already mentioned before, there is no factual evidence to suggest that it was Kandinsky who sent the invitation.[50]

However, Čiurlionis' interests in theosophy and mythology, as well as his focus on traditional culture, allow us to associate him not only with Kandinsky, but also with the other artists featured in the exhibition. Čiurlionis is compared to Schoenberg and Webern, for whom "music was a metaphor for the inner life".[51] Čiurlionis' pictorial compositions are linked to the work of Paul Klee in their emphasis on musical forms such as fugues and counterpoints.[52] The colour palette of Čiurlionis' works is compared to Steiner's ideas expressed in his work *Theosophy*: "they are the colours of the third aura, transparent and independent, embracing man like a cloud and expressing a part of his being: the spirit".[53]

Nevertheless, the contexts mentioned in this exhibition are based on Steiner's or Goethe's texts, but as Rasa Žukienė already mentioned, discussing Čiurlionis' retrospective held in 2010, these contexts are not specifically known to have influenced Čiurlionis.[54]

The exhibition "Kandinsky–Cage: Music and Spirituality in Art" could be an example of the struggles curators encounter while trying to include lesser-known artists in the main narrative of modern art history. Such struggle was accurately described by Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski, especially while trying to evaluate Eastern European artists in terms of artistic criteria shaped in Western Europe.[55]

Artistic standards developed in Western Europe are presented as self-evident and universal and creating the value system. In this case Eastern European

artists are appreciated only in how far they could be attached and conform to these standards. But in this process not all-important meanings can be expressed and reflected on. "The universal perspective, understood as a methodological tool, prevents one from reaching particular meanings of culture and from describing its regional, national and local identities."[56]

This is also evident in the case of Čiurlionis, when some of the facts of his biography are overextended and linked to certain contexts that can only be associated with him rather loosely, or the merit of his work is appreciated in terms of similarities with other more famous and already established names.

M. K. ČIURLIONIS AS A PART OF BALTIC SYMBOLISM

The previous analysis of the exhibitions demonstrated the difficulties posed to curators while trying to include the work of Čiurlionis in the canon of modern art history. The focus, mostly on stylistic elements of art and more or less on already established names, did not create enough space for discussion about rethinking of the canon. The inclusion of lesser-known names such as Čiurlionis only slightly pointed out this possibility.

It is worth asking whether a better strategy for representation of Čiurlionis work could be alongside the artists from a more similar cultural background? The example of this attempt is the exhibition "Wild Souls. Baltic Symbolism" at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris (Fig. 2).[57] It differs from all other group exhibitions by an attempt to present the definition of Baltic Symbolism. This show was curated by French art historian Rodolphe Rappetti, also one of the curatorial team members who worked on the previously discussed "Nature's Dreams. Symbolism from Van Gogh to Kandinsky".

This exhibition coincided with a historical event – the centenaries of the statehood of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Thus, the exhibition had a broader context and more attention not only from people in the art world, but also from political leaders. In the speeches that accompanied the opening of the exhibition, the ideas of the works of art were very often linked to the history of the Baltic States, and were imagined as an example of courageous people who fought relentlessly for their independence.

However, the term "wild souls", chosen for the exhibition, has received some criticism. Art historian Laima Laučkaitė, in her review of the exhibition, mentions that this choice "[...] reminds even the uninitiated in post-colonial studies of the colonists' attitude towards foreign, 'other' peoples, defining them as savage, primitive, inferior, uncivilised".[58]

The Lithuanian President at that time – Dalia Grybauskaitė, during her speech at the opening of the exhibition, also referred to the title, which she proposed to replace with "free souls".[59] Rasa Žukienė also disagreed with this description and, during a conference at the Musée d'Orsay, expressed that "Čiurlionis was not a wild soul".[60] Knowing the biographies and backgrounds of both Čiurlionis and the other artists featured in the exhibition, it

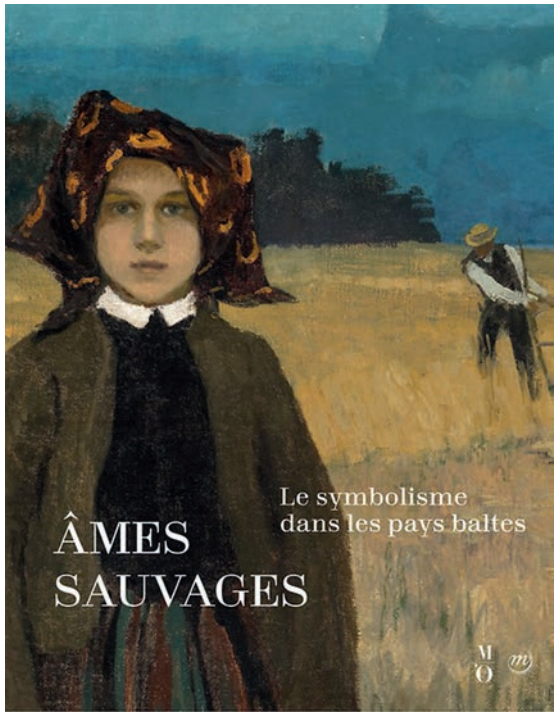

Fig. 2. Exhibition catalogue cover, "Âmes sauvages. Le symbolism dans les pays baltes," 2018. https://pro.boutiquesdemusees.fr/en/product/13546-ames-sauvages-le-symbolisme-dans-les-pays-baltes-exhibition-catalogue.html

is perhaps difficult to apply the concept of "wild souls", but as Laima Laučkaitė aptly pointed out, such a title is able to attract and interest of the Western audience.[61]

The works of Čiurlionis[62] were presented together with Antanas Žmuidzinavičius, Petras Kalpokas, Adomas Varnas, Vilhelms Purvītis, Janis Rozentāls, Kristjan Raud and Oskar Kallis. The focus on traditional culture and ethnic elements was identified as one of the most important stylistic and philosophical elements of Baltic Symbolism. The official press release of the exhibition states:

"The exhibition interprets the influences and resistance through which the artists invented a creative language suitable for revealing their intellectual world. Using elements from folk culture, folklore and local legends, as well as unique landscapes, the artists have created an authentically unique art form."[63]

The catalogue accompanying the exhibition offers a broader context, presenting the history of Baltic art in the context of international Symbolist trends. Rodolphe Rappetti, in his introductory essay "Terra incognita", presents the most important facts of the history of the Baltics and relates them to certain artistic aspirations. When discussing the issue of international recognition, Rappetti argues that all Baltic Symbolists, with the exception of Čiurlionis, are virtually unknown, not only to the general public, but also to the specialists.[64] This is because art history in the 19th and 20th centuries for a long time has focused on France and its areas of influence, and Symbolism was certainly not viewed favourably in the context of the Soviet regime.[65]

Rapetti argues that the history of art in the Baltic States encourages us to look at certain facts in a new light, and to understand Baltic artists as an important part of the same period of art history – Symbolism. Rappetti relates Baltic artists to the Western context not only through formal aspects and precise comparisons, but also by referring to the artists' educational history. Even if most artists were educated in Poland or Russia, their teachers often came from very different cultural contexts. According to Rapetti, the fact that Estonian artist Gerhard von Rosen studied in St Petersburg and at the Düsseldorf Academy, or that Čiurlionis studied in Warsaw and Leipzig, make it necessary to have a broader understanding of the cultural space in which the Baltic artists formed and worked, and to perceive Baltic art as an integral part of the European culture, and not just a typical local phenomenon.[66]An important aspect of Baltic Symbolism that distinguishes it from other "symbolisms" is its historical context, marked by national liberation movements and the search for national identity at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. All these influenced artists to turn to traditional folk culture and use unique motifs in their works. According to Rappetti, this tendency could be interpreted as "national romanticism", and in the context of the international traits of symbolism, it seems to be an original artistic trait.[67]

Čiurlionis' work is highlighted by the phenomenon of synaesthesia. As a professional composer and painter, Čiurlionis was able to combine these two spheres of creativity in a particularly unique way. According to Rappetti, Čiurlionis' art testifies to a fusion of the visual and aural universes that goes far beyond the simple musical titles given to paintings, as was the case with many of Čiurlionis' contemporaries.[68] Čiurlionis' pictorial compositions could be related to abstract art because of the conceptual approach, "if we understand this concept as the general tendency of Symbolism to abandon tangible reality, and not only as a system of formal elements".[69]

Rappetti's approach can be related to similar ideas that have long been considered in the presentation of Čiurlionis' work. He echoes a similar view by American art historian Robert Rosenblum, who saw Čiurlionis as one of the minor pioneers of abstract art, discovering abstraction through the aim, common to all the Symbolists, of expressing the non-material side of reality.[70]

"Wild Souls. Baltic Symbolism" presented already known facts and qualities of Čiurlionis work.

However, this time he found himself in a different context – among Baltic artists. As the art historian Laučkaitė noted, curator Rapetti has managed to put together a coherent narrative from quite different artists, something that a Baltic curator might not have been able to do.[71] His insight and interpretation made it possible to find more commonalities between Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian artists.

The reception of "Wild Souls. Baltic Symbolism" among Lithuanian art historians was mostly positive, but Laurent Le Bon, the president of the Centre Pompidou, in the interview for Lithuanian press was quite sceptical about the representation of three different countries under a common Baltic identity, which gives a quite homogenised view of the region and does not allow to reveal certain specificities.[72]

It is difficult to disagree, but in the case of international exhibitions and representation of Čiurlionis art, it is clear that to define particularly Lithuanian identity among other European artists is really challenging. As the examples discussed in this article have demonstrated, many curators relied heavily on the concept of universality while approaching processes of modern art history, and the specific local identity was not that important in most of the exhibitions. Čiurlionis' work has usually been appreciated for his distinctive visual style, or his ability to combine musical and visual ideas, which was a progressive approach at the start of the 20th century. The question of local specificity was not raised, as Čiurlionis was interesting to curators mainly in those aspects that allowed to relate him to the narratives dictated by Western European artists.

Compared to other previously discussed exhibitions, Rappetti's curatorial strategy in "Wild Souls. Baltic Symbolism" proposed a chance to shake up the established view of the modern art canon in a more productive way. The curator managed to show that modern art born away from major art centres is worthy of integration into the dominant discourse of modern art, and not just a local oddity. Rapetti also avoids a universalist perspective and manages to find links with Western European art processes integrating these similarities with the local specific socio-cultural context of the Baltic States.

CONCLUSIONS

The collapse of the Soviet Union has led to a renewed focus on the former communist bloc countries and their art. The work of Čiurlionis was no exception, and since the 1990s he became a very desirable artist in various international exhibitions.

These exhibitions were undoubtedly important events, which made it possible to introduce Čiurlionis' art to a wider audience, and interpret him as a distinctive, but at the same time, in some ways, typical, artist of the *Fin-de-Siècle* period. His interest in intersection between visual art and music also brought him closer to the first abstract artists.

It is not easy to summarise and unambiguously describe the influence of the international exhibitions after the 1990s on the appreciation of Čiurlionis' work. Looking at the broad geography and types of exhibitions, it is evident that the value and influence of Čiurlionis' work varies depending on the concept of the exhibition and the individual curator's approach. Art historians and curators such as Rodolphe Rappetti, Judith Zilczer or Martina Mazzotta prescribed Čiurlionis' art a prominent role in the context of modern art history, but this is nevertheless more the result of an individual curatorial project than it remains an established truth.

Čiurlionis could not be considered a marginal figure in the history of modern art, but his role is still difficult to define. However, the problem lies not only in the specifics of Čiurlionis' work, but also in the evaluation criteria and exhibition strategies, as well as in curators' willingness to deconstruct the established canon. If the exhibition seeks to rethink the settled criteria and carefully pursue to discover and present lesser-known names – Čiurlionis' art plays a slightly more important and prominent role.

It is perhaps not surprising that an artist formed in a different social and cultural context is usually associated with the famous names of the Western modern art canon according to stylistic traits that require a rather broad generalisation. In some cases, facts are interpreted too loosely or even erroneously, and Čiurlionis' cultural contribution to modern art is often emphasised by his links to more prominent figures in the art world. This becomes more important than a more detailed analysis of the peculiarities of Čiurlionis' work.

However, stylistic analysis is not sufficient. A more successful strategy for understanding the place of Čiurlionis' work in the discourse of modern art history is to present more artists from the same cultural context. "Wild Souls. Baltic Symbolism", curated by Rodolphe Rappetti, stands out from the other exhibitions because it specifically presents the context of modern art in the Baltic States as a whole, and offers an understanding of the social, historical and cultural nuances as the basis for the uniqueness of this art. The role of Čiurlionis is particularly strengthened in this exhibition, as it is possible to observe his similarities with some Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian artists, as well as his links with Western modernism. In this way, a nuanced version of the artist can be seen and better understood.

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[9] Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta. Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009).

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[12] In 1979, the French art critic and curator Serge Fauchereau sought to include Čiurlionis' works in the exhibition "Paris-Moscow 1900–1930" at the Georges Pompidou Centre but did not even have the opportunity to visit Kaunas, and in 1985, the Swiss curator Pontus Hultén wanted to borrow Čiurlionis' works for the exhibition "Futurismo e futurismi" at the Pallazo Grassi in Venice. However, the works were not allowed to be exported, and the exhibition featured reproductions of Čiurlionis' works, as well as information about Čiurlionis and photographs of his works in the exhibition catalogue.

[13] The aspect of Čiurlionis' image during different historical periods was discussed by Rüdiger Ritter "M. K. Čiurlionis ir lietuvių tapatumas" [M. K. Čiurlionis and Lithuanian identity], *Kultūros barai* 11 (2005), 76–80; Rasa Andriušytė-Žukienė, "*Čiurlionio kūryba šimtmečio perspektyvoje: dailėtyrinis ir socialiniai diskursai" [*Čiurlionis' creative work in the perspective of a century: social and art science discourses], in *Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911): Jo laikas ir mūsų laikas*, ed. G. Daunoravičienė, R. Povilionienė (Vilnius: Lietuvos muzikos ir teatro akademija, 2013), 441–462.

[14] Original title of the exhibition: *Die Symbolisten und Richard Wagner: Zum Raum wird hier die Zeit*.

[15] "Rustling of the Forest" (1904), "Vision" (1904–1905), "Summer" (1907), "Thunder" (1909) and the drawing "Rex" (1909).

[16] The concept was sent together with a letter from Regine Herrmann, Deputy Director of Akademie der Künste zu Berlin to Malvydas Sakalauskas, the director of M. K. Čiurlionis State Art Museum, 21 05 1991. The letter is kept in the archives of the M. K. Čiurlionis Collections Department (in M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art).

[17] Susan Sontag, "Wagner's fluids," in *Die Symbolisten und Richard Wagner*, ed. W. Storch (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1991), 94.

[18] The exhibition was originally held at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam 24.02.2012–17.06.2012 then later opened at the National Gallery of Scotland 14.07.2012–14.10.2012 and the Ateneum Art Museum 16.11.2012–17.02.2013.

[19] Rodolphe Rapetti, Richard Thomson, "Preface," in *Dreams of nature: Symbolism from Van Gogh to Kandinsky,* ed. F. Fowle (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2012), 12.

[20] Ibid., 12.

[21] Rapetti, Rodolphe. "Landscapes and symbols," in *Dreams of nature: Symbolism from Van Gogh to* Kandinsky, ed. F. Fowle (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2012), 17.

[22] Rodolphe Rapetti et al., "Preface," in *Dreams of nature: Symbolism from Van Gogh to Kandinsky,* ed. F. Fowle (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2012), 14.

[23] Laima Laučkaitė, "M. K. Čiurlionis V. Kandinskis ir M. Veriovkina S. Makovskio salone Sankt Peterburge 1909 m.," *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis* 59 (2010), 74.

[24] Ibid., 88.

[25] Richard Thomson, "Into the Mystic," in *Dreams of nature: Symbolism from Van Gogh to Kandinsky*, ed. F. Fowle (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2012), 166–167.

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[30] Ibid.

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[32] Steven A. Mansbach, "Methodology and Meaning in the Modern Art of Eastern Europe," in *Central European Avant-Gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910–1930*, ed. Timothy O. Benson (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Museum of Art and The MIT Press, 2002), 294.

[33] Ibid., 295

[34] The exhibitions were held at the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in Madrid and curated by Javier Arnaldo.

[35] Exhibition was held from 23 June – 11 September 2005 and curated by the team of Kerry Brougher, Jeremy Strick, Ari Wiseman and Judith Zilczer. Čiurlionis was represented by the cycle "Sparks" (1906), but the 13-painting cycle "The Creation of the World" (1905–1906) and "Sonata VI" (Sonata of the Stars) (1908) were presented in the exhibition catalogue.

[36] Original title "Kandinsky–Cage: Musica e Spirituale nell'Arte," the exhibition took place 11 November 2017 – 2 February 2018 and was curated by Martina Mazzotta at the Palazzo Magnani in Reggio Emilia.

[37] In 1949 at the Second International Congress of Art Critics, sponsored by UNESCO Estonian art critic Aleksis Rannit claimed that Čiurlionis created his first abstract paintings earlier than Kandinsky. More on this topic: Aleksis Rannit, "Čiurlionis: The first abstract painter of modern times," in *Čiurlionis: Painter and composer. Collected essays and notes, 1906–1989*, ed. S. Goštautas (Vilnius: Vaga, 1994), 210–221.

[38] Javier Arnaldo, "Symphonic Cosmology," in *Analogias Musicales. Kandinsky y sus contemporáneos,* ed. J. Arnaldo (Madrid: Fundacion Coleccion Thyssen-Bornemisza, 2003), 387.

[39] Ibid., 387.

[40] Ibid., 388.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Jeremy Strick, "Visual music," in *Visual music. Synaesthesia in art and music since 1900*, ed. O. Mattis et al. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 15.

[43] Judith Zilczer, "Music for the eyes: Abstract painting and light art," in *Visual music. Synaesthesia in art and music since 1900*, ed. O. Mattis et al. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 27.

[44] Ibid., 30.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., 31.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Davide Zanichelli, "*The Three Merits of an Exhibition,*" in *Kandinsky-Cage. Musica e Spirituale nell' Arte* (Milan: Skira, 2017), 2.

[49] Ibid., 2.

[50] Laima Laučkaitė, "M. K. Čiurlionis, V. Kandinskis ir M. Veriovkina S. Makovskio salone Sankt Peterburge 1909 m.," *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis* 59 (2010), 74.

[51] Martina Mazzotta, "Music and the Spiritual in Art. A Journey," in *Kandinsky-Cage. Musica e Spirituale nell' Arte* (Milan: Skira, 2017), 7.

[52] Ibid., 8.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Rasa Andriušytė- Žukienė, "*Čiurlionio kūryba šimtmečio perspektyvoje: dailėtyrinis ir socialiniai diskursai*" [Čiurlionis' creative work in the perspective of a century: social and art science discourses], in *Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911): Jo laikas ir mūsų laikas*, ed. G. Daunoravičienė, R. Povilionienė (Vilnius: Lietuvos muzikos ir teatro akademija, 2013), 455.

[55] Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta. Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989* (London: Reaction Books, 2009).

[56] Ibid., 24.

[57] The exhibition took place from 10 April – 15 July 2018.

[58] Laima Laučkaitė, "Lietuvos dailė Orsė muziejuje Paryžiuje. Paroda „Laukinės sielos. Baltijos šalių simbolizmas," *7 meno dienos* (29 June 2018), https://www.7md.lt/daile/2018-06-29/Lietuvos-daile-Orse-muziejuje-Paryziuje

[59] Ibid.

[60] Rasa Žukienė, "Čiurlionis au carrefour des cultures," public lecture at The Musée d'Orsay (May 3, 2018), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRISF3NdG_w

[61] Laima Laučkaitė, "Lietuvos dailė Orsė muziejuje Paryžiuje. Paroda „Laukinės sielos. Baltijos šalių simbolizmas," *7 meno dienos* (29 June 2018), https://www.7md.lt/daile/2018-06-29/Lietuvos-daile-Orse-muziejuje-Paryziuje

[62] Works exhibited: "Sorrow" (1906/07), Triptych "Fairy Tale" (1907), "Rex" (1909), "Lithuanian Cemetery" (1909), "The Past" (1907), "Summer" (1907)", "Sonata V (Sea Sonata)" (1908), "The Creation of the World (1905–1906)" and vignettes for the folk song "Twilight Darkens the Night" (III different versions) (1909).

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[65] Ibid., 17.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid., 21.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Robert Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Nothern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (London: Thames & Hudson), 196.

[71] Laima Laučkaitė, "Lietuvos dailė Orsė muziejuje Paryžiuje. Paroda „Laukinės sielos. Baltijos šalių simbolizmas," *7 meno dienos* (29 June 2018), https://www.7md.lt/daile/2018-06-29/Lietuvos-daile-Orse-muziejuje-Paryziuje

[72] Kristina Tamelytė, "Lietuva sužavėtas Pompidou meno centro vadovas: pristatyti jus kaip Baltijos šalį – klaida, jūsų tapatybė yra unikali," *Lrt* (November 17, 2023), https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/kultura/12/2126119/lietuva-suzavetas-pompidou-meno-centro-vadovas-pristatyti-jus-kaip-baltijos-sali-klaida-jusu-tapatybe-yra-unikali

Vaiva MIKELIONYTĖ
Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, Menų fakultetas, Kaunas, Lietuva

MIKALOJAUS KONSTANTINO ČIURLIONIO KŪRYBOS VIETA MODERNIOJO MENO ISTORIJOJE: ĮŽVALGOS IŠ TARPTAUTINIŲ PARODŲ PO 1990-ŲJŲ

Santrauka

Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911) yra bene dažniausiai tarptautinei visuomenei pristatomas Lietuvos dailininkas. Po 1990-ųjų, pasikeitus politinei ir kultūrinei situacijai Lietuvoje, jo paveikslai nuolat eksponuojami įvairiuose pasaulio muziejuose ir galerijose tiek personalinėse, tiek grupinėse parodose, dažniausiai skirtose XIX a. pabaigos ir XX a. pradžios dailės judėjimams.

Tačiau šios parodos dar nėra sulaukusios išsamesnio tyrinėjimo. Šio straipsnio tikslas – išanalizuoti ir kritiškai įvertinti nuo XX a. 10-ojo dešimtmečio rengtų tarptautinių M. K. Čiurlionio kūrybos parodų strategijas ir koncepcijas, atskleidžiant jo kūrinių atrankos ir eksponavimo kriterijus, taip pat Čiurlionio kūrybos vietą moderniosios dailės istorijoje.

Tarptautinės parodos analizuojamos taikant aprašomąjį, istoriografinį, analitinį ir diskurso analizės metodus, remiamasi meno istorikais Stevenu A. Mansbachu ir Piotru Piotrowskiu, kurie ypač domėjosi modernaus meno procesų Rytų ir Vakarų Europoje skirtumais. M. K. Čiurlionis įgijo išsilavinimą ir pripažinimo ieškojo Rytų ir Vidurio Europos kultūrinėje terpėje, o dauguma tarptautinių parodų po 1990-ųjų, kuriose eksponuoti jo darbai, buvo kuruojamos išskirtinai Vakarų Europos kuratorių, todėl kyla panaši įtampa, kurią reflektuoja minėti autoriai.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis, tarptautinės parodos, modernus menas, simbolizmas, Baltijos simbolizmas.

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Vaiva MIKELIONYTĖ

She is art historian, curator and coordinator of exhibitions, Head of Exhibitions of M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art. She holds a bachelor's degree in Art History (Vilnius Academy of Arts, 2012) and a master's degree in Art Curating (Vytautas Magnus University, 2021).

Coordinated the international exhibitions: William Kentridge "That Which We Do Not Remember" (curator: Virginija Vitkienė) (2022), "The Dark Arts: Aleksandra Waliszewska and the Symbolism from the East and North" (2023) (curators: Natalia Sielewicz and Alison M. Gingeras). Together with Auksė Petrulienė, she has curated the exhibition "Fairy Tale". Childhood in Lithuania in the Late Soviet period", 12 December 2024–2027 July 2025, in Kaunas Picture Gallery.

E-mail: vaiva.mikelionyte@ciurlionis.lt