

NOTES ON SPACE

Monumental Painting in Estonia 1947–2012

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Introduction

Our research on murals in Estonia began in 2012 when the painter Tõnis Saadoja was commissioned to create a ceiling painting for the foyer of Theatre NO99 in Tallinn [see p. 95](#). Initially, Saadoja could think of only a few examples of ceiling paintings from Estonian art history. Neither contemporary art historical writings nor old journals helped him. It seemed as if this once popular and heavily state-sponsored genre had all but disappeared.

Tõnis Saadoja invited his friend, artist and photographer Paul Kuimet, to document the different stages of the painting process, resulting in a series of black and white photographs taken over a period of more than a year—a series which has achieved its own artistic value apart from the painting it documented. Together with Eero Epner from NO99, Tõnis and Paul approached Tallinn-based publisher Lagemik and graphic designer Indrek Sirkel with

an idea for a publication. Through numerous discussions they came to realise that Saadoja's monumental undertaking could be used as a tool for reactivating a forgotten legacy, and so the idea for the publication evolved into a subjective encyclopedia of monumental artworks in Estonia.¹ They contacted me, Gregor Taul, an art historian, to write an overview of the genre, and Alina Astrova, a writer and musician, to conduct a series of interviews with Tõnis to compliment Paul's visual documentation.

The book was intended to give a historical overview of the development of monumental painting in Estonia, and the theatre, which is known for staging original works with a keen social consciousness, would try to use it as a catalyst for discourse on commissioning public artworks.

In spring 2012, we gathered information on more than 200 monumental art works, about 150 of which proved to be still extant, and 120 of which we visited and Paul Kuimet photographed that summer. We selected almost 100 of them for the book, leaving out less representative works. The final selection wasn't based so much on art-historical logic — although it could be argued that a conceptual approach would be a suitable art-historical methodology for such a chaotic object of study — but rather on how the photographs complemented each other and how the works might contribute to the discussion on socialist and post-socialist spatial culture and its associations with photography. As the publication of the book coincided with the period when the “percentage act”² entered force in Estonia, providing greater opportunities for artists to execute works on commission, I decided to focus my writing on what useful lessons could be gleaned about planning public art from a time when it was a societal priority. In this essay, I will focus on the development of the genre during the Soviet period, attempting to show how many professional Estonian artists succeeded in outfoxing the ideological imperatives and turned the broad opportunities to their advantage.

Terminology

Before we begin examining the history, let's look at some of the terminology used in the book. The general term “mural” refers to works of art (paintings, mosaics, sgraffiti) executed on a wall. However, murals may or may not be painted directly on a wall: for example, a canvas painting affixed to a wall (*marouflage*) is also a mural. The term “mural” is synonymous with the term “wall painting”. Secondly, a “mural painting” is painted directly on a wall, whether as a fresco (mural painting executed upon freshly-applied, or wet lime plaster), a secco (the technique of painting on dry plaster with pigments mixed in water) or oil painting (using oil colours for painting on any material). The term “panel painting” or simply “panel” (*pannoo* in Estonian) refers to the rigid support or surface on which the painting (or mosaic) is done. Ironically, most of the 20th-century murals that we usually consider to be mural paintings are actually executed on panels and are hence removable.³

“Monumental painting” refers to the size and public functions of the painting, similarly to that of monumental sculpture. In the Soviet Union, “monumental-decorative art” was the umbrella term for public artworks with a generalized idea and broad social visibility. Although most of the Soviet period paintings represented in this book were officially called monumental-decorative-paintings, artists and critics would usually stick to the more direct “monumental painting”, hence the name of the book. Besides mural (*seinamaal*), “monumental painting” (*monumentaalmal*) is still the

most common term when referring to artworks which fall under the labels discussed here.

“Decorative painting” (as well as decorative art) is perhaps the most problematic and unfortunate term in this field. Already in the 16th century, Giorgio Vasari argued that any kind of decoration derives from painting, and decorative art has since had a secondary and negative status in art history. From this viewpoint, decorative paintings are not worthy of independent art status as they are intended to serve the needs of architecture and spatial design.⁴ However, it is hard to say whether the term “decorative painting” had a pejorative connotation in Soviet Estonia, as it was frequently used synonymously with “monumental painting”. In contemporary usage “decorative painting” (*dekoratiivmaal*) has all but lost its connection to large-scale spatial design and signifies (small-scale) ornamental, adorning or garnishing art or design.

The fundamental idea of the “synthesis of the arts” is the belief that architecture alone is not capable of providing a meaningful spatial design and hence unity is achieved through the interplay of various art forms. Late Soviet “synthesis of the arts” placed equal value on mural painting, ceramics, textile, stained glass and metalwork—all of these genres are represented in our book. Contrary to the capitalist world, it was common in the Soviet Union for applied artists to be involved in the fine arts, producing one-of-a-kind works for specific interiors.

I occasionally refer to murals as “public painting”. It is a term advocated by Finnish art historian Johanna Ruohonen, who claims that “the term public painting emphasizes the most important aspects of a public artwork—a public site, public functions, and a relationship with its audience”. Fundamentally she uses the term as it is widely used in the concept of public sculpture.⁵ Although the term has not been used in Estonia (*avalik maal* sounds obscure in our language), I see potential for it in English-speaking art history.

Monumental painting in the early 20th century

In the earliest days of the Estonian national art tradition in the late 19th century, artists painted mainly small-format easel paintings. Monumental paintings require an art consumer/patron with deep pockets and enough wall space to accommodate the works. The Estonian elite reached this level of development on the eve of World War I.⁶ The first site-specific paintings are associated with the work of the architect Karl Burman. In 1912, the Kalev Society and Sports Club building in Pirita, designed by Burman, was completed. For the hall and stairwell décor, he commissioned national-romantic themed murals (no longer extant) from August Jansen, Peet Aren and Aleksander Uurits. Aren became one of the most prolific producers of decorative paintings in the pre-World War II period. When the Passaaz Cinema was opened in Tallinn in 1917, Aren was commissioned to produce 16 modern paintings in bright colours to decorate the interiors.⁷

In the 1920s, the Fine Arts Endowment of the Cultural Endowment of Estonia sought avenues for popularizing art.⁸ In 1926, the Endowment succeeded in procuring a commission of artwork from Ado Vabbe, who painted the mural *Italian Comedy* (no longer extant) for the intermission promenade area in the Estonia Theatre. Contemporary accounts suggest it was one of the most well-executed monumental paintings in interwar Estonia. The Railway Administration, which also funded public artworks, commissioned

two monumental paintings from Peet Aren and Roman Nyman for the passenger waiting area of Tallinn's Baltic Station (no longer extant).

In the 1930s, private institutions joined in commissioning artworks, and Aren and Nyman, already renowned in this field, received the most commissions. In 1931, Heinmann Café opened in Tallinn; the interior design by Nyman featured exotic landscapes painted on the walls. (Art critics of the period panned the works, saying the painter had made too many concessions to saccharine bourgeois tastes.) Around the same time in Tartu, the Athena Café opened, featuring two panels painted by Aren: one with a southern dancer and another depicting a Harlequin figure and his beloved. Aren painted yet another monumental painting that year, *Dance*, for the Modern Cinema in Tallinn. In 1931, the Viljandi City Government commissioned a large panoramic landscape of Viljandi from the local artist Juhan Muks. This work is one of only a few decorative paintings from that era to survive into the present. Of the murals created in the 1930s, one of the most significant, artistically, was Villem Ormisson's *Lake Pühajärv*, after a well-known southern Estonian beauty spot, in the lobby of the Vanemuine Theatre (1939, no longer extant).

Monumental painting in the Estonian SSR

Reading transcripts of the congresses of the Soviet Estonian Artists Union, we can see how the state of monumental-decorative painting generally would always take precedence over other art developments.⁹ The problem of the synthesis of the arts, described at the time as an “urgent” matter, but now seeming like more of a soothing mantra, begs the question of whether all this was not just uttered as lip service—something obligatory and slogan-like tacked on to speeches of the era on the lines of “works are to be executed at a level worthy of the requirements of our people hard at work building socialism!”¹⁰ Was the synthesis of arts and, in that context, monumental painting, a conceptual framework foisted upon artists from above, or did it emanate from artists' sincere desire to prove and also test whether art in socialist countries really did belong to the people, as was claimed, and whether it was capable of influencing society.¹¹

The monumental-decorative art of this period was integral to the concerns of the Second Congress of the Union of Soviet Architects of 1955, where the over-lavish decoration of Socialist Realist architecture was deplored and which paved the way for the construction of prefabricated apartment blocks based on standardised floor plans.¹² In the course of the machine-like process of constructing the *mikrorayons*—city districts comprised of standardised buildings—Soviet urban planners and architects developed a methodology for integrating the arts into its new districts. Architect Boris Mirov explained it thus: “... for a long time, the aesthetic recipe for planning residential districts was a long-accepted notion of ours: positioning similar template-design buildings in a diverse manner in order to create a background on which unique architectural chefs d'oeuvre—the public and community buildings—stand out.”¹³ The “synthesis of the arts” was heralded as the principal underlying the architectural rhetoric of such buildings.¹⁴ The first public building to obtain a fashionable sgraffito frontispiece was the Kalev Sports Hall in Tallinn (1962) **p.9**. A year earlier, a sanatorium had been built in Narva-Jõesuu, where, unlike the Kalev Sport Hall's more robust depictions of athletes, the glass paintings on the façade and vestibules were graced by slender and perhaps even naïve

figures of holidaymakers ^{p.7}. The artist behind both of these works was Valli Lember-Bogatkina, who had become inspired by the monumental paintings she had seen with her husband Vladimir Bogatkin, also an artist, while travelling in East Germany in the 1950s.

Synthesis of the arts

There are two landmark works of the early 1960s “synthesis of the arts”. Lagle Israel’s pebble mosaic at Tõravere Observatory, depicting Estonia’s ancient starry sky with traditional local constellations (1962–64) ^{p.11}, was a labour-intensive work that made innovative use of materials. It is a vivid illustration of the zeal with which young artists at the time approached the task of incorporating monumental art into architecture.¹⁵ The other is Lepo Mikko’s scientific and technological-revolution themed ceramic mural in the lobby of the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR (1964) ^{p.13}. Mikko also made a contribution to monumental painting in his capacity as a teacher for many decades at the State Art Institute Department of Painting, where he supervised many later monumental artists. Mikko also authored, as an obligatory research work for maintaining his professorship, a textbook manuscript entitled *Monumental-Decorative Painting in the Estonian SSR* (1971), in which he strove to turn students on to new possibilities in the synthesis of interior and exterior architecture.¹⁶

In the 1960s, the synthesis of the arts also found its way into the so-called background architecture—the new housing built according to template designs. The images on the end walls of the buildings along Akadeemia tee in Tallinn’s Mustamäe district (Lember-Bogatkina, Fuks, Enn Põldroos, using a technique developed by Oskar Raunam) ^{p.14–15} are a classic example of this genre.¹⁷ Largely fuelled by this optimistic imagery, ceramic and metal murals proliferated over the next decade, although many of these products were derivative and represented a passing fad, often resulting in the concept of the synthesis of the arts becoming diluted by repetition and unprofessional disarray. The rift between the idealistic vision of a synthesis between artists and architects (“emotional explosions of architecture”, as Mart Port called it¹⁸) and the actual construction activity (large buildings such as the Endla Theatre in Pärnu and the Vanemuine Theatre in Tartu, constructed in 1967, lacked monumental works) provided fertile ground extensive discussion in the columns of the cultural weekly *Sirp ja Vasar* and at professional gatherings.¹⁹

The State Committee for Monumental-Decorative Art

The official Soviet response was to form a committee with a pompous-sounding name: “the State Committee for Monumental-Decorative Art of the Council of Ministers of the Estonian SSR”. The committee was formed in 1967 at the Ministry of Culture in collaboration between the Artists Union, the Union of Architects and the State Construction and Architecture Committee.²⁰ The committee’s statute states that it was formed in order to develop the synthesis between monumental-decorative art and architecture, for improving the level of design of cities and other settlements, city squares, parks and public buildings, and to conceptually and artistically guide developments in monumental and decorative art. According to the statute, representatives of creative unions, the State Art Institute of the Estonian SSR, research institutions, ministries and executive committees were among its members.²¹ The committee met almost every week until the end of Soviet rule.

Over the years the participants included: architects Dmitri Bruns, Voldemar Herkel, Udo Ivask, Allan Murdmaa, Valve Pormeister and Mart Port; artists Lepo Mikko, Enn Põldroos, Jaak Soans and Ilmar Torn; interior architects Vello Asi and Väino Tamm; applied artists and designers Jutta Matvei, Salme Raunam, Bruno Tomberg; and art historian Leo Gens—all undisputed experts in their respective fields.²²

One of the first successes of the committee was organising the creation of the Põldroos mosaic *Youth* [p.21](#) for the main building of Tallinn Polytechnic Institute—one of the best-executed works of monumental art in Soviet Estonia. As the genre dictated, *Youth* was a perceptive generalisation of the era's zeitgeist. The 1960s was a period when local youth called for the right to pursue their happiness: a pop-music based youth culture developed along Western models,²³ soft drinks and periodicals were branded Noorus (Youth), and the Noorsooteater (Youth Theatre) was established. All of these elements played a symbolic role, but the mosaic itself still appears fresh in its delicate approach to monumentalism. In 1971, the committee held a new competition for decorating the façade of the New Radio Building. Põldroos's mosaic mural *Radio Flower* [p.28](#), at first proposed for the exterior wall, was installed on the concert hall's end wall,²⁴ where, coupled with modern skylights and stylish furniture, it created an integral whole that epitomised the "synthesis of the arts".

Although, from the outset, the monumental art committee was intended to handle primarily long-term planning, and would together with the State Construction and Architecture Committee assemble a list of the most important public buildings that architects and artists could collaborate on in the earlier stages of design, the plans typically became bogged down in bureaucracy. The committee found it had to spend a great deal of time and energy curtailing the proliferation of proposed memorials and monuments, and organising the necessary competitions. Nevertheless, largely thanks to Voldemar Herkel, (the first deputy chairman of the Construction and Architecture Committee in the field of design and essentially the state architect of the Estonian SSR—an active member of the monumental art committee), the committee drew up a preliminary list of the largest sites to be designed with the idea of incorporating monumental artworks (Linnahall [p.61](#), Pirita Yachting Centre [p.44–45](#), Sakala Centre [p.62](#), University of Tartu Library [p.51](#)).

Many monumental-decorative artworks were produced under the committee's aegis and with the Ministry of Culture's funding: Naima Uustalu's ceramic mural *Gymnasts with Balls* on the outside wall of Secondary School No. 37 in Mustamäe, Tallinn; Merike Männi's tapestry *Our Time* and Olav Männi's embossed sheet copper portrait of Lenin in the sessions hall of the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party (1970); the interior design for the Viru Hotel restaurant featuring a tapestry by Mari Adamson as well as Aet Andresma-Tamm and Mare Lobjakas's ceiling lights (1972); the stained glass designed by Rait Prääts for St. Nicholas' Church Museum and Concert Hall (1972; [p.40](#))—the finest examples in this genre; Leo Rohlin's boldly executed ceramic mural on the external wall of the Economic Leaders' Institute (1978; [p.37](#)) in Mustamäe, Tallinn; Robert Suvi's mosaic mural in the lobby of Tallinn's Magdaleena Hospital, made of genuine smalti but artistically slight (1980) [p.38](#); the emphatically abstract murals on the end wall of the swimming pool (Leo Rohlin, 1980) [p.44](#) and in the fifth floor restaurant (Andresma-Tamm, Mare Lobjakas, 1980) [p.45](#) at Pirita Yachting

Centre; a tapestry in the meeting hall of the University of Tartu Library (Mall Tomberg, 1979); and a giant tapestry/stage curtain by Enn Põldroos in Linnahall (1982) [p. 61](#). Other works include Jüri Arrak's large-scale oil paintings for the Pioneers Palace in Tallinn (now called the Kullo Centre), which, together with canvases painted by Ilmar Malin in the editorial office of *Edasi* (now *Postimees* newspaper, 1983) and a striking Raphaelite pastiche done by Enn Põldroos for the main building of University of Tartu, *Universitas Tartuensis* (1982) [p. 51](#), comprise the modest share of Soviet Estonian public artworks that could be categorized as monumental oil paintings.

Other noteworthy monumental paintings accepted by the committee include the sgraffito at Aseri Ceramic Plant (1974) and Põdrangu Sovkhoz [p. 21](#), and the fresco for Rakvere Veterinary Centre (1976) [p. 33](#). The artist behind these is Eeva-Aet Jänes—one of the most prolific creators of monumental paintings—whose works are sometimes characterised by a fondness for excessive monumentalism and the larger-than-life. Jänes also produced frescoes in the Tallinn Motor Depot No. 2 (1970s), the cafeteria of the Kalev Confectionery Factory (1977) [p. 34](#), the Väike-Maarja Community Centre (1980) [p. 41](#), the lobby of the Tallinn Vital Statistics Department (1982; [p. 54](#)) and, in a later period, the chapel of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church consistory (1994) [p. 75](#).

In the case of Jänes's works, it should be mentioned that the Ministry of Culture was not the only institution to commission monumental paintings, although the ministry did deal with the most important and expensive works. Most decorative monumental paintings were commissioned independently of the Ministry of Culture and its expert committee and were mainly executed by Tallinn Art Products Factory Ars of the Art Fund of the ESSR and its subsidiary plant in Tartu. Kolkhozes and other customers contacted the Ars entities directly. Ars then found suitable artists or interior designers who would be a good match for the works commissioned. Sometimes the artists were also contacted directly by private customers. Such commissions resulted in Urve Dzidzaria's fresco *Time for Living on Earth* (1986) [p. 65](#) for the clubhouse of the 9th of May Kolkhoz in Väätsa and *To Get to the Spring* (1989) [p. 67](#) in the clubhouse of the Paide Motor Depot.²⁵

It may be assumed that the members of Tallinn Ars art council were less experienced and less strict in their application of the administrative principles. They may also have been financially craftier when it came to agreeing commissions for monumental paintings. It was good business to accept orders—the more, the better—and thus much art of little critical value was created, such as the Tallinn Vital Statistics Office's kitschy frescoes and Dolores Hoffmann's cloying stained glass compositions (1982).

Monumental paintings outside Tallinn

Completely *sui generis* examples of monumental paintings were created in Tartu, where architects, interior architects and art officials looked for suitable wall space where their artists with monumental aspirations (Elmar Kits, Ilmar Malin, Andrus Kasemaa) could execute large-scale paintings. In the 1980s particularly, when Modernist striving toward the synthesis of the arts was no longer salient or sincere, the outcome was grand and self-centred: i.e., traditional painting stood in opposition to bland Soviet walls. Noteworthy examples included Andrus Kasemaa's disturbing secco entitled *The Mahtra War* (1984) [p. 56](#), for the central building of the Eduard Vilde Kolkhoz in the village

of Peri. It was Kasemaa's first mural, yet he produced no preliminary sketches and immediately started committing his idea to the final surface using charcoal.²⁶ Kasemaa's second mural was produced, albeit with more preparation, for the hall of the Tartu metal plant Võit (Victory) (late 1980s, no longer extant).

After his large-scale oil paintings for the *Edasi* editorial office, Ilmar Malin produced public artworks for the central building of the Rakvere Motor Depot and Mooste Cultural Centre (a mural done in the national-romantic style, *Birth of the Võhandu River*, 1967; p.20), and for the lobby of the University of Tartu Faculty of Science and Technology. The latter, Estonia's most massive mural painting, *Strata Vitae* (1973) p.27, fits well in its surroundings thanks to interior designer Väino Tamm's skilful distribution of wall space and Malin's cryptic style of painting.

Of works connected to Tartu (or not connected to Tallinn, at least) we should mention the mosaic wall created by Ukrainian artist Vassili Tovtin for the cafeteria of Tartu Experimental Repair Factory (1974) p.29, whose exotic colour spectrum proved not only incomprehensible for the local audiences but entirely unacceptable,²⁷ and Lagle Israel's life's work, a mural composed of pebbles laid over 16 years, *Viljandi Primeval Valley* (1967–83) p.55 — a *mania grandiosa* that could not be fully accommodated in its original size in either the original planned location of Vanemuine Theatre or the later location of the Estonian University of Life Sciences Institute of Forestry and Rural Engineering.²⁸

A separate chapter in the history of Estonian monumental painting could be devoted to Elmar Kits, who made his first experimental forays in the genre in 1938 when he helped Aleksander Vardi execute a large-scale oil painting on the end wall of the main hall of the Estonian Students' Society building (partially extant). Of Kits's monumental paintings, the most effective ensemble pieces were his sgraffito at Tarvas Restaurant (1965) p.16. His frescoes at the breeding centre at Kehtna Kolkhoz's Keava unit (1969) p.22–23, the sgraffito *Three Maidens* (1970) p.25 at the Technical College of the Gagarin Model Sovkhoz (now called the Viljandi Vocational Training Centre) and his magnum opus, painted shortly before his death, *Harvest Celebration* (1971) p.26 at Riisipere Sovkhoz central building, were all undisputed achievements in the field of painting, although like most monumental paintings of the day they had little substantive significance regarding the synthesis of the arts.

Two positions regarding monumental painting

The question remains: is there any value in talking about a “synthesis of the arts” at all? As we have seen, that same question was salient during Soviet times. For instance, Enn Põldroos²⁹ repeatedly expressed the opinion that if painting was incorporated into architecture as an interior design element it could only fulfil a decorative role and this would be better achieved by utilising the conventional agents of spatial composition—construction structures, the texture of surface coverings, lighting or simply furniture, etc.³⁰ Põldroos believed that monumental art should be an indispensable part of the architectural environment rather than an additional design element and that it should be a product of the building's social function: a successful monumental painting would make use of the potential of architecture for dealing with the characteristic non-architectural aesthetic and ideological values of painting. In Põldroos's 1978 article on this matter, he regarded only the Estonia Theatre's ceiling painting p.2 and Ilmar Malin's ceiling painting in

the lobby of the University of Tartu's Faculty of Science and Technology ^{p.27} as monumental paintings that accorded with his vision. Although it may seem that Põldroos's view overlooked and perhaps excluded the synthesis of the arts, his belief in the supremacy of monumental-decorative art nevertheless suggests a philosophy which holds that an artwork established in a specific public space has self-evident significance.

Art historian Boris Bernstein laid out his own arguments on the matter in 1972,³¹ stating that the early 20th century was the peak of the “process of divergence” of art genres, when the boundaries between styles were washed away, leading to a break in consolidated, unitary stylistic development, and thereby making the synthesis of the arts impossible. It was precisely during that period that architecture, which had branched away from the “family tree” of the arts in a determined fashion, developed its increasing independence from other forms: a chasm arose between architecture and the arts, one that became increasingly difficult to bridge. At that time, the possibility of a style that could define the values of an era's art culture and encompass the wider culture had already been placed in doubt. In his summary, Bernstein maintained that thinking in this discipline should no longer rely on the categories and forms of bygone periods. For him, “Give art a wall!” was no more than a catchy, romantic and utopian slogan. There are no walls that are simply walls, he felt, because even a wall is an “artistic entity” that obeys its own laws. The wall (i.e. architecture) has its own developmental trajectory, and for that reason, there can be no going back to a time when the arts were fused organically into a single whole.

Postmodernist supergraphics

All discussion of a “divergence process” in the arts became obsolete with the dawning of postmodernity in culture. In Estonia, this coincided with the 1980 Tallinn regatta (part of the Moscow Olympics) and a boom in building construction. Caught in the embrace of architecture, urban design and supergraphics³² (which should be categorised more as design than as monumental painting), the “synthesis of the arts” made a powerful comeback in an updated form, whereby the interlacing of the content of architecture and the arts was no longer primary, but rather the dominance of images (and superficiality). Noteworthy supergraphics works created in Tallinn include those designed by Urmas Mikk at Liivalaia 3 (1987, no longer extant) and at Juhkentali 46 (1990, no longer extant) ^{p.70}, by Leonhard Lapin on the end wall of the former Tallinn Thermal Power Plant (1987, no longer extant) and by Rein Kelpman on the end wall of Vana-Posti 2 (1987, no longer extant). The fact that these and other supergraphics works were artistically successful may unfairly cast a shadow over the foundered monumental painting tradition of the previous decades: it should be remembered that artists in the 1980s were working in a less oppressive atmosphere.

There is a deep irony in the fact that the grandest work of Soviet Estonian monumental painting, the one which was most at odds with these new developments in art—the synthesis of the arts, experiments with form, media and content, and games with interior design, national subtexts and ideological control—was produced at this time. Evald Okas's 42.7-metre secco painting, *Friendship of the Peoples* (1987) ^{p.63}, executed for the History and Revolution Museum of the Estonian SSR in Maarjamäe Palace, is arguably the only Socialist Realist monumental painting of the late-Soviet period in Estonia.

Re-independent Estonia

Public paintings painted after Estonia regained independence make up the last part of our treatment. The first of these (the works by Enn Põldroos and Rait Prääts in the National Library) [p.72 & 74](#), Eva Jänes's fresco for the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church consistory's chapel [p.75](#), and Kai Kaljo's fresco in Abja Cultural Centre) [p.73](#) are in striking contrast to the playful pictorial language predominant in the late Soviet period. They leave a ponderous impression, retrospectively and, to a certain extent, restitutionally.³³ Although the heroic nature of these works stemmed largely from their architectural context, it is also evident that few of the new monumental paintings were a consequence of a (more conservative) commissioning client's desire to leave a lasting spatial mark.

The decade that followed (1995–2005) is characterised by the loss of state funding for commissioned artworks. The examples represented in the book are just as multifaceted as the clients. Well-known young artists such as Navitrolla [p.80](#) and Marko Mäetamm [p.87](#) were commissioned to paint murals in Tallinn pubs, but these were shortlived and lasted only until a new tenant arrived. Paintings by Hillar Tatar [p.78–79](#), Ott Lambing [p.82](#), Enn Põldroos [p.84](#), Peeter Mudist [p.85](#) and August Künnapu [p.86](#) were all painted on the artist's own initiative, and characterise a time when the earlier monumental paintings were fading from existence faster than new ones emerged.

Starting from the end of the 2000s, monumental paintings enjoyed a limited revival, at least in the context of nostalgic reminiscences of Soviet-era visual culture, this being related to re-assessment of the socialist era by a younger generation who had not experienced the same trauma as their forebears. A seminal part of this trend was a plan by the spirited Tartu city architect Tõnis Kimmel to enliven the walls of local Soviet-era housing districts with images reminiscent of the 1970s [p.89](#). The 2013 Tallinn Architecture Biennial, subtitled *Recycling Socialism*, provided impetus for similar projects elsewhere.

While the supergraphics in the Annelinn district of Tartu were a reference to the local tradition of mural painting, Martin Lazarev's logo for Guerilla Cinema [p.93](#) explored a completely different path, imitating the graffiti culture of Western cities and the kind of street art officially promoted in creative cities—where street artists have become brand names, travelling the world to fulfil large-scale orders from public and private institutions. Today, we see a surge in urban wall decoration, manoeuvring along the boundaries of street art, supergraphics and earnest monumental painting. The phenomenon may be understood in the context of the Postmodernist discourse on pictorial and spatial superficiality, as brought out by Fredric Jameson, David Harvey, Jean Baudrillard and other Western thinkers. In some ways, Tõnis Saadoja's ceiling painting at Theatre NO99 [p.95](#) engages in a similar picture-mania. It is almost supernaturally photogenic, and yet also represents a distinct, photography-based analysis of a visual image—or more precisely, of a monumental painting.

- 1 A. Astrova, E. Epner, P. Kuimet, I. Sirkel, G. Taul, *Konspekteritud ruum. Tõnis Saadoja laemaal Teater NO99s. Eesti monumentaalmaal 1879–2012* (Notes on Space. Tõnis Saadoja's ceiling painting in Theatre No99. Estonian Monumental Painting 1879–2012). Tallinn: Lugemik, 2013.
- 2 Officially titled the Commissioning of Artworks Act, the legislation stipulates that one percent of the budget for any state-funded (though not local government-funded) public building or infrastructure must be used to commission artwork. The aim of the legislation is to “aesthetically enrich public space through synthesis of art and thereby create a more human-friendly environment.” (See: www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/517062015013/consolide.)
- 3 Romy Golan has written the essential book about this phenomenon in recent Western art history: R. Golan, *Muralnomad. The Paradox of Wall Painting, Europe 1927–1957*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.
- 4 For a discussion about the position of decorative art within art history, see, for example, D. L. Krohn, *Beyond terminology, or, the limits of 'decorative arts'*. — *Journal of Art Historiography*, 2014, no. 11, pp. 1–13.
- 5 J. Ruohonen, *Imagining a New Society. Public Painting as Politics in Postwar Finland*. Turku, University of Turku, 2013.
- 6 A significant exception is Johann Köler's fresco in St. Charles Church in Tallinn from 1879, which was co-funded by the German and Estonian congregations.
- 7 A. Kartna, *Dekoratiivmaalide jälgedel* (Following the traces of decorative paintings). — *Kunst*, 1985, no. 67 (2), p. 27.
- 8 The Cultural Endowment of Estonia is similar to the state art funds set up in the Nordic countries, and is used to distribute a certain part of the state's tax revenue to artists, writers and composers among others. It was established as a department of the Ministry of Education in 1925. Professionals in their field were flanked by the MPs and cabinet members on the endowment's council in deciding the distribution of grants allotted twice a year until 1934. To prevent in-fighting within the small art community, the main funding went to joint exhibitions. The Endowment was abolished by the Soviets, and was reinstated in 1994. It is still the main mechanism for funding artists in Estonia.
- 9 Some examples: chairman of the Soviet Estonian Artists Union Jaan Jensen in the opening speech at the 12th Congress, 26 March 1964: “It appears that only now is monumental-decorative painting resuming movement from its doldrums.” ERA (National Archives of Estonia) f. 1665, n. 2, s. 438, l. 64; chairman of the Union of Soviet Estonian Architects Mart Port at the 13th Congress of that union on 24 April 1967: “Allow me to continue with a topic that has become traditional, the acuity of which has not diminished one bit over the course of this decade. And this is the synthesis between monumental-decorative art and architecture.” ERA f. 1665, n. 2, s. 511, l. 149; chairman of the board of the Soviet Estonian Artists Union Ilmar Torn in the opening speech at the 14th congress on 29 May 1969: “The old and much-talked-about monumental-decorative art problem has arisen before us from a new aspect. Up to now, we complained about social commissions, but now the dam has burst in monumental sculpture and a shortage of able hands and resources looms. At the same time, the monumental-decorative art issues are not moving.” ERA f. 1665, n. 2, s. 563, l. 25; Mart Port at the union's 15th Congress on 26 May 1972: “For this reason, please take these remarks only as a plea—to examine again and with special care all possibilities that exist and may open up in future in the republic to promote the construction of larger one-of-a-kind works and ensembles, alongside smaller-scale chamber art.” ERA f. 1665, n. 2, s. 776, l. 174.
- 10 Quoted from Mart Port's speech at the 15th Congress of the Artists Union. ERA f. 1665, n. 2, s. 776, l. 177.
- 11 Here three other aspects should be mentioned, which I am grateful to Ingrid Ruudi for making reference to. First of all, commissioning of monumental paintings meant additional income for artists, and thus there was competition for it. At the end of the 1980s, executing an extensive mural painting allowed one artist to travel in the US for several months with their family. Second, artists drew encouragement from the belief that mural paintings could really give the new architecture more of a human face. The third aspect pertains to the deeper level of the functioning of the Soviet Union—any proposed changes in cultural and educational matters had to be heralded for decades before they bore fruit.
- 12 C. Cooke, *Socialist Realist Architecture: Theory and Practice*. — *Art of the Soviets. Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in One-Party State, 1917–1992*. Eds. M. C Brown, B. Taylor. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993, p. 104.
- 13 B. Mirov, *Massilisest elamuehitusest* (Mass housing construction). — *Ehituskunst*, 1981, no. 1, p. 28.
- 14 “Architectural rhetoric was a key component of classic architectural paradigm. To fulfil it, all means of expression in architecture were used, and decor in particular—ornamentation, sculpture, relief, painting. The Soviet regime, which was typified by a bid to ideologize all of society, could not accept the abstract, cipher-like forms of modernist architecture. Hence the synthesis of the arts, which brought sgraffiti, stained glass, ceramic and metal murals to the facades and interiors of buildings.” K. Kodres, *XX sajandi Eesti arhitektuur* (20th century Estonian architecture). — *Sirp*, 1 March 2002.
- 15 A thorough overview of the inception of Lagle Israel's mosaic is provided by Niina Raid: see N. Raid, *Merekivideest mosaiiksein—suuliste rahvapärimate tõlgendamise kunsti keelde* (A mosaic wall of pebbles—interpreting oral folklore into the language of art). — *Kunst*, 1966, no. 2, pp. 63–64.
- 16 The information about the text mentioned here comes from the minutes of meetings of the State Institute of Arts Department of Painting: ERA f. 1696, n. 1, s. 148, l. 28 and ERA f. 1696, n. 1, s. 749, l. 6. The writing itself has disappeared or has been destroyed.
- 17 It should be noted that these wall panels bearing images (see p. 14–15) were made possible thanks to self-sacrificing lobbying efforts, and not due

- to interest on the part of clients and designers. As the procedure was time-consuming and was not compatible with the conveyor-belt method of building production, these images were among the few ever produced using this technique.
- 18 ERA f. 1665, n. 2, s. 776, l. 174.
 - 19 For more on this, see: M. Plees, *Kunst kaasaegses arhitektuuris. Väljavõtteid nõupidamise ettekannetest*: M. Eller, Ü. Sepp, E. Viires, U. Ivask, B. Tomberg, I. Kimm (Excerpts from meeting presentations). — Sirp ja Vasar, 23 May 1969; B. Bernstein, *Süntees ja aeg* (Synthesis and time). — Sirp ja Vasar, 7 May 1972; L. Gens, *Süntees ja aeg: mõttevahetuseks* (Synthesis and time: for exchange of ideas). — Sirp ja Vasar, 9 June 1972; U. Ivask, *Süntees ja aeg: mõttevahetuseks* (Synthesis and time: for exchange of ideas). — Sirp ja Vasar, 23 June 1972; E. Põldroos, *Süntees ja aeg: mõttevahetuseks* (Synthesis and time: for exchange of ideas). — Sirp ja Vasar, 14 July 1972; K. Lehari, *Süntees ja aeg* (Synthesis and time). — Sirp ja Vasar, 25 August 1972; J. Arrak, *Süntees ja aeg: tuleviku-fantastikat* (Synthesis and time: the fantastic future). — Sirp ja Vasar 13 October 1972; J. Matvei, *Kõige ühiskondlikum kunst* (The most social art). — Sirp ja Vasar, 27 July 1973.
 - 20 Being under the Soviet Estonian government gave the committee the right to intervene in monumental art matters throughout the Estonian SSR. The committee was engaged in organising competitions for monumental works, directly commissioning monuments, as an intermediary between artists and sites, and also a supervisory body that dismissed artistically unsuitable or poor projects.
 - 21 ERA f. 1945, n. 1, s. 528. A thorough overview of the work of the committee can be found in an unpublished article by long-serving member Jutta Matvei: J. Matvei, ENSV Ministrite Nõukogu Riiklik Monumentaalkunsti Komisjon ENSV Kultuuriministeeriumi juures (ESSR Council of Ministers State Monumental Art Committee at the ESSR Ministry of Culture). See also: J. Matvei, *Kui kunsti üle otsustasid professionaalid* (Back when professionals made the decisions on art). — Sirp, 2 September 2011.
 - 22 The committee also included members who were official arbiters of ideology—initially the head of the Estonian Communist Party's Central Committee cultural department Olaf Utt, and later a secretary with the same department, Viia Roosipõld (known among artists as the “anti-Põldroos”), thereafter Ago Tuuling. Matvei said they acted as ordinary committee members and only on a few occasions did changes have to be made to designs for ideological reasons.
 - 23 L. Kaljula, *Karm stiil Tallinnas. Kaasaegsuse ideoloogia hajumine sulajastu eesti kunstis* (Severe style in Tallinn. Divergence of the ideology of contemporaneity in Estonian Art during the thaw era). Master's thesis. Tallinn. Manuscript at the Tallinn University's Estonian Humanitarian Institute, 2012, p. 71.
 - 24 ERA f. 1797, n. 1, s. 871, l. 16.
 - 25 Urve Dzidzaria also created the fresco *Humans in Nature* and cycle of stained glass compositions *Annual Cycle* (1979–80; p. 43) for Habaja Sovkhoz. The motifs explored by this technically proficient artist nevertheless appear too unassuming in the field of monumental art to leave the impression of ensemble art. Her best works were the sgraffiti in the cafeteria of the demolished Estonian Academy of Arts building (1973 and 1981), which left an indelible impression in the national cultural memory.
 - 26 I. Malin, *Mees, kes ei mahu ruumi* (A man who doesn't fit into space). — Sirp ja Vasar, 5 July 1985.
 - 27 K. Sõster, *Tartu maalikoolkonna entusiastlik väljendus 1962–1985* (The enthusiastic expression of Tartu Art School 1962–1985). Diploma thesis. Tartu. Manuscript at the Tartu Art College, 2009, p. 15.
 - 28 See: A. Juske, *Eesti uuemast monumentaalmaalist* (New Estonian monumental painting). — Sirp ja Vasar, 13 April 1984.
 - 29 Enn Põldroos is one of the most important mid-to-late 20th century artists in Estonia. From the early 1960s, he took part actively as a leader and organiser in art circles. He is a well-regarded writer and popularizer of the arts, and also took on the role in artistic diplomacy in fundamental differences with ideology enforcers.
 - 30 Põldroos delivered a programmatic speech on this subject at the 14th Congress of the Artists Union on 29 May 1969. ERA f. 1665, n. 2, s. 563, l. 30–47. Later he developed it further in an article: E. Põldroos, *Monumentaalmaalist* (Monumental painting). — Sirp ja Vasar, 10 February 1978.
 - 31 B. Bernstein, *Süntees ja aeg* (Synthesis and time). — Sirp ja Vasar, 7 May 1972.
 - 32 A visual or textual design on an external wall, executed by painters based on a design by an artist or designer.
 - 33 A large-scale reordering of the landscape of memory took place in Estonian urban space in the early 1990s, with monuments and other markers from the previous period being removed both at state and private initiative, and with attempts made to replace them with new counterparts. The opening of the National Library, the repository of Estonian cultural treasures, played an important role in the restitution of the urban space.

Monumental Painting in Estonia: Notes



Elmar Kits, Evald Okas, Richard Sagrits
1947
Secco
Estonian National Opera
Tallinn, Estonia pst 4

The building of the song and drama society of Estonia was opened in Tallinn in 1913, a time when the city was part of the Governorate of Estonia in the Russian Empire. Tallinn—then called Reval, as the Estonian name was only introduced in 1918—had mainly been a German merchant and artisan town where Estonians became the ethnic majority only at the turn of the century. The demographics were also reflected in the architecture: inside the medieval city walls was a compact Hanseatic city, surrounded by German-owned banks, factories, society houses, etc. The Estonia Society acquired a plot of land in the heart of the city and had plans drawn up by Finnish architects Wivi Lönn and Armas Lindgren. This temple to culture, an example of modern national-romantic architecture, symbolised a shift in the balance of power in Tallinn and throughout Estonia.

From 1941 to 1944, the Republic of Estonia was occupied by Germany. In early spring 1944, the Red Army invaded Estonia. Bombing raids were carried out on Narva, Tartu, Pärnu and Tallinn. Narva was almost completely destroyed, while in the Estonian capital it is said that one-third of all buildings were on fire, with severe damage to the Estonia Theatre. After Soviet troops had occupied all of Estonia in late 1944, the Communist government decided to rebuild the theatre: the restoring a symbolic building allowed the regime to make a magnanimous gesture. A group of artists—Elmar Kits, Evald Okas and Richard Sagrits—were chosen to execute the ceiling painting. The thematic programme was prepared by the Arts Administration of the Estonian SSR. The 91-square-metre oval ceiling painting depicts the triumphant entry of the (Soviet) Estonian Rifle Corps into Tallinn, post-war reconstruction, collectivised agriculture and the annual Song Festival.

In its day, the painting served an indoctrinating function, intended to school the public on socialist art history. After independence was regained, some saw the painting as sinister and felt it should be covered over or removed. The fact that the three artists were and continued to be respected painters and that legendary actors from the Estonia Theatre were used as models for the work helped the public to accept the inevitable ideological side of the work. It remains controversial, but the ceiling painting's artistic value is also recognised.



Valli Lember-Bogatkina
Let's Go to the Great Celebration!
1950
Ceramic
Originally in the Estonia Theatre's buffet;
now located in the Song Festival Grounds
Glass Hall
Tallinn, Narva mnt 95

Valli Lember-Bogatkina graduated from the State School of Arts and Crafts in Tallinn in 1940, studying decorative painting. In the 1950s and 1960s, she became one of the Estonian SSR's most outstanding monumental painters; later she mainly worked in watercolour. This panel depicts a procession of Estonians clad in folk costume and headed to the Song Festival. The song festival tradition is one of the cornerstones of the Estonian national culture. The fact that song festivals were held in occupied Estonia in 1947 and 1950 suggested that the dictatorship was afraid to ban traditions outright and sought to make use of any mass gathering for ideological purposes. It was also Stalin's official strategy for keeping the multinational empire together: Soviet culture had to be national in form, socialist in content.

Art historian Harry Liivrand has described the work as Estonia's most famous mural done in mosaic. During the Soviet period, it was an essential part of any visit to the Estonia Theatre. Unlike the ceiling painting in the same location, after Estonia regained independence it was decided that this mural should be covered over. In 2003, it was taken down completely and moved to the Song Festival Grounds, where it is on display next to the artist's other works. In its new environment, it should be noted, it no longer functions as authentic ensemble art, but rather occupies a convenient place found for an inconvenient mosaic mural. This jovial picture with bright colours, removed from its original Art Nouveau and Neoclassical interior, appears out of place in the modern, functional environment.



Richard Sagrits
View of Tallinn
1955

Viktor Karrus
View of Moscow
1955

Marouflage
Formerly the Tallinn Airport passenger terminal,
now the airport administrative building
Tallinn, Lennujaama tee 2

From a semiotic perspective, airports are gates just like ports, train stations or the gate towers of medieval cities. The entrances and exits are spaces for active dialogue, between friends and strangers, a place where the host culture's basic values are mediated and translated for arriving visitors.

Visitors in the traditionalist waiting hall of the building built in 1955 were welcomed by paintings with views of Moscow and Tallinn. Moscow as depicted by Viktor Karrus is resplendent with modern trolleybuses, Pobeda cars (a symbol of post-war Soviet society), the Kremlin wall and the monumental university building—beacons of Soviet culture. Richard Sagrits's Tallinn scene depicts Toompea Castle (the historical bastion of central rule), the Tall Hermann tower with red flag fluttering from the top, and the adjacent Russian Orthodox Alexander Nevsky Cathedral. The juxtaposition of the two paintings signalled that a direct link to Moscow had become a cultural model for Tallinn. The tablets to each side of the paintings were once adorned with Soviet symbols: in the course of later restoration work, texts and coats of arms were removed.

The construction of the passenger terminal began right after World War II according to a design by architects Artur Jürvetson and Roman Koolmar, which was based on the local Functionalist traditions. The building was completed in 1955, taking on rich Historicist décor typical for the period (architect Paula Koido, interior architect Maia Laul).



Artist unknown
Ca 1955
Marouflage
Formerly the House of the Officers of
the Fleet in Tallinn, now the Russian Cultural
Centre
Tallinn, Mere pst 5

Before the war, a top-flight cinema called Grand Marina stood on the site of the officers' club, designed by Russian architect Aleksander Kuznetsov and built in 1954. The new building was no less grand than its predecessor, although the Neoclassicist architecture, gold-ornamented cornices, and plentiful reliefs—which nearly all living Estonian sculptors had a hand in creating—spoke the specific rhetoric of the occupation, which was foreign to local residents. This was the ostentatious Stalinist architecture period that would later be denounced by Khrushchev in 1955, along with other aspects of Stalinism. It is the most lavish example of the synthesis of the arts in Estonia, where architecture, fine arts, music and a linear park alongside the building were combined to form a whole in service of the ideal.

The ceiling painting in the 1000-seat hall depicts the victory of the Soviet naval fleet. The composition of the work is partially borrowed from the Estonia Theatre ceiling painting (see p. 2), but the execution is less skilled, like a poster illustration. The paint was applied to canvas strips that were then pasted to the ceiling. Unfortunately, the seams between the panels can be seen throughout the work. The imposing chandelier and the shadows it casts obstruct a clean view of the painting. Unlike the painting by Okas, Kits and Sagrits, which was applied directly to the ceiling and creates a classic *trompe-l'œil* effect—with its masterfully rendered sky creating a poeticised, albeit political, vision of a bright communist future—this picture, with its ships and fighter planes appears more blatantly propagandistic. This is understandable: at the Estonia Theatre, the occupying force needed to curry with the newly “liberated” people, whereas here, in an entertainment venue meant for the Soviet military elite, there was no need to do so.



Valli Lember-Bogatkina
1961/2000s
Oil on glass
Formerly the Narva-Jõesuu Inter-Kolkhoz
Sanatorium, now the Narva-Jõesuu Spa Hotel
Narva-Jõesuu, Aia 3

Narva-Jõesuu is a summer town in the north-eastern corner of Estonia, where St. Petersburg aristocrats built ornately-decorated wooden villas in the late 19th century. The small town maintained its renown as a resort during the Soviet era, when a number of abandoned aristocratic villas were replaced with modern sanatoria.

The Narva-Jõesuu Sanatorium, opened in 1961, was the most outstanding among them. The story of the building goes back to the 1930s, when architect Nikolai Kusmin entered an architecture competition for a beach hotel in Pärnu and won an award for his design. The building was constructed according to designs by Olev Siinmaa and Anton Soans, relying on Kusmin's ideas (among others), and Kusmin demanded that he be credited as one of the architects as well. Kusmin eventually had an opportunity to realize his vision of resort architecture 20 years later in Narva-Jõesuu, making bold use of the ideas from his Pärnu beach hotel design. The result is a striking public building that was one of the first in the Soviet era to return to the Modernist architectural qualities of the interwar era of independence. It is thus considered something of a bridge between pre- and post-war public architecture.

Whereas pre-war Modernism was typified by undecorated white walls, the new fashion dictated the idea of synthesis of the arts. Decorative paintings were commissioned from Valli Lember-Bogatkina, who designed sgraffito depictions of carefree holidaymakers on the building's façade, and similarly simple—perhaps even naïve—paintings on glass for the second and third floor foyers. The glass paintings have become lost to time, but were replaced by the artist more than a half century later with replicas made according to photographs of the originals.



Ants Vares
Kalevipoeg and Linda
1962
Mixed media
Kuressaare Airport
Kuressaare, Roomassaare tee 1

Ants Vares graduated from the Tartu Art School five-year programme in stage design in 1958. As was typical for artists in the Soviet system, he was then assigned a job posting: he became an artist at a local community theatre in Kuressaare. This mural painting, depicting the Estonian epic hero Kalevipoeg and his wife Linda, was executed in “severe” style. This is the name given to the liberal style of art that was predominant during the Thaw era of the 1960s, which distanced itself from the Socialist Realist idiom and borrowed from early 20th-century Modernism. Although the new style allowed artists to experiment in painting, the content of the images remained idealistic, even naïve.

Art historian Sirje Helme has written that, in the context of the Soviet Union, fear obliged people to opt for strategies different from those they might have imagined with the benefit of hindsight. One such strategy is the emphasis of features considered characteristic of Estonian art, exemplified here by the use of a traditional colour palette and a return to the classic artist Kristjan Raud's Kalevipoeg-themed works.



Valli Lember-Bogatkina and Margareta Fuks
Gymnasts
1962
Sgraffito
Kalev Sports Hall
Tallinn, Juhkentali 12

The Thaw era of the 1960s arrived at different times in Eastern Europe, depending on the nature of the local leaders. In Estonia, the Thaw is considered to have spanned the years 1956 to 1968. In the urban space, one of the most notable phenomena of the Thaw was the abrupt end to pompous Stalinism and the ensuing modernization of architecture, meaning that the discipline became subject to industrial production. Mass construction of houses, residential districts and cities was the only way for the Soviet system to cope with a housing shortage—something that also faced many war-ravaged Western countries on the capitalist side. The synthesis of the arts seen during the Thaw era—expressed in decorative and monumental paintings on the walls of apartment buildings and public institutions—was supposed to ensure that buildings were sufficiently “ideologically charged” without “architectural excess”. In the early 1960s, thousands of apartment blocks around the Soviet Union were decorated with monumental paintings, but soon these aesthetic and ideological garnishes became too costly for the command economy and far fewer were added by the end of the decade.

The two-colour sgraffito on the side of the Kalev Sports Hall building, depicting basketball players and a gymnast, is one of the last examples in Tallinn city centre to recall the monumental painting ideology. In 2017, the stadium underwent a major renovation and the mural was also restored.



Artist unknown
Sport
Ca 1962
Ceramic
Kääriku Sports Centre
Otepää Municipality, Nüpli Village

The University of Tartu’s Kääriku Sports Centre (architects Uno Tõlpus and Peeter Tarvas, 1962) was one of the first integrated architectural ensembles modelled on the latest Finnish architecture.

Contacts with Finland were re-established in the 1960s, and thanks to regular ferries between the two capitals, several groups of Estonian architects were able to visit. It was a site-sensitive and environmentally friendly approach where buildings were planted in the landscape in a manner that took into account their specific character and preserved natural conditions. The cohesiveness between indoor and outdoor areas was emphasised by the floor-to-ceiling windows in common areas.

The ceramic murals are found in the dining hall of the complex—a building that was designed to be a “flowing space” inspired by Finnish architect Alvar Aalto, with captivating views of the lake and surrounding forests. There are five works depicting athletic youths, and they are complemented by smartly-designed lights that express the freshest currents in interior design at that time. The murals have grown darker with age, but were originally richly polychromatic.



Lagle Israel
Estonians’ Ancient Starry Sky
1962–1964
Pebble mosaic
Tõravere Observatory
Nõo Municipality, small town of Tõravere

The mosaic, weighing about a tonne and consisting of 20,000 stones, depicts the night sky as Estonians might have seen it in ancient times, with 28 constellations according to local tradition. The labour-intensive work is vivid evidence of how young artists in the 1960s strove to fuse architecture and monumental art. There was much experimentation, with the primary trend being a graphic, linear style, and from there on they used sgraffito, glass painting, and ceramic and metal panels. Lagle Israel took an additional step and used natural pebbles found along the coast.

For over a year, in preparation for designing the work, Israel studied ancient celestial knowledge and modern astronomy, with an eclectic assortment of astronomy texts and maps, both old and new, piled high on her reading table. In parallel to reading theoretical texts, she relied equally on manuals on plastering and mixing cement. At the time, she lacked anyone to consult for technical advice, as the task called for an original, customised approach.

Israel used an astronomical chart of the northern sky as the basis for the work. Inscribing the correct position of the stars took weeks. Israel crawled across a 12-square-metre cartoon in the Tartu Art House studio to lay down the network of celestial coordinates and pinpoint the exact position of the stars. Polaris is the central point of the mosaic. On the right is Sirius, known in the Estonian tradition also as the Orjätäht (or Serf Star): here, the artist has depicted a thin slave girl walking laboriously—the rising of this star meant the end of an arduous day for the ancients. On the left is Kerakorv (Scutum or Aquila). At the bottom are Suur Look (Hydra and Canis Minor) and Karikas (Boötes). At the top-left we see the Väike Rist (Delphinus) and at the top-right, the Uus Sõel (Pleiades). The Milky Way transects the mosaic—a white underlay installed in the sky by the Great Father, one end in the cold northern lands, the other in the warm south, showing the way for migratory birds (the name of the galaxy in Estonian is Linnutee or Pathway of the Birds).



Artist unknown
Ca 1962–1964
Mural painting
Formerly the Central Library of the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR, now the Academic Library of Tallinn University
Tallinn, Rävala pst 10

During Soviet times, print publishers could choose from six typefaces. One of them was Zhurnalnaya Rublenaya, used here for the text “Teaduste Akadeemia” (Academy of Sciences), which greets those entering the institution’s library along with symbols of the Scientific-Technological Revolution.

The Academy of Sciences was more than just an honorary establishment in the Soviet Union. Unlike the West, where research was conducted mainly at universities, the Academy oversaw the top research institutes. As a result, many open-minded humanities scholars and scientists could be found in the corridors of this institution, which provided special permits giving them access to art and architecture journals from socialist countries, books from the West and interwar Estonian-era books that were otherwise forbidden. The foyer hosted art exhibitions, some of which were unashamedly avant-garde and viewed the regime ironically. The history of art in many socialist countries is laced with examples of how research institutes were often the places for exhibitions that pushed the envelope of what was acceptable. The Soviet system was brimming with contradictions and the situation in Tallinn was particularly extreme: the library was at the nexus of political life, with the headquarters of the Communist Party, a statue of Lenin, and the so-called political education centre standing across the street.

The entrance mural was “rediscovered” in 2005 during renovation works. The painting had been covered with a plaster layer in the course of changes made in the 1990s, by which time the 1960s space race had gone out of fashion. Next to the wall panel, the little square in front of the entrance is graced by a modest decorative sculpture called *Nucleus* (Henriete Nuusberg-Tugi, 1967), one of the first abstract outdoor sculptures in Tallinn.



Lepo Mikko
Science, Technology and Art
1964
Ceramic
Formerly the Central Library of the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR, now the Academic Library of Tallinn University
Tallinn, Rävala pst 10

Lepo Mikko studied painting in the 1930s at both the State School of Arts and Crafts in Tallinn and Pallas Art School in Tartu. In the 1960s, he developed into one of the most consistent apologists for the Scientific-Technological Revolution in Estonian art.

This revolution [the “STR”], was an ideological campaign that characterised the rule of Nikita Khrushchev and formed part of his push to catch and surpass the United States. The STR involved a radical restructuring of the USSR’s production capacity, with science at the heart of social relations. Manual labour was to be replaced with mechanisation of work, transforming the conditions, nature and substance of work. Integrating science, technology and production, the STR affected all aspects of human activity—education, daily life, culture, human psychology, the relationship between humans and nature. Mikko’s paintings mediated, reflected and interpreted these watershed changes in society, although it is hard to say from a present-day vantagepoint whether the artist saw the processes as exhilarating, hopeful or dangerous.

Mikko’s tranquil mood and calculating technical proficiency were well-suited to monumental painting. Although he executed only a few individual monumental paintings, he played an important role in the development of the genre both as a faculty member at the State Art Institute and as an expert in the work of the monumental-decorative art committee based at the Estonian SSR’s Ministry of Culture.



Valli Lember-Bogatkina, Margareta Fuks, Enn Põldroos, Oskar Raunam
1965
Paint poured into concrete panels
Apartment buildings
Tallinn, Akadeemia tee 4, 6 and 22

Mustamäe was the first district in Soviet Estonia to consist of prefabricated buildings located on a site where there had previously been no urban structure. Although such buildings are now much criticised, at the time of their construction they represented a cultural and economic advance. The war-ravaged capital needed to alleviate its housing shortages and Tallinners eagerly welcomed new homes designed by local architects.

These early examples of industrialised construction convey the cultural optimism of the 1960s. Town planners and artists alike believed it would be possible to create diverse neighbourhoods of the highest quality, with painted walls forming an open-air art gallery. Artist Valli Lember-Bogatkina had been travelling in East Germany where she came upon murals she thought could be applied in Estonia. Oskar Raunam had experience in decorative painting from the pre-war era. They teamed up with other artists and engineers to develop a state-of-the-art process for pouring paint into concrete panels.

However, it soon became evident that such a time-consuming project did not fit into the planned economy’s system of housing development. It was a short-lived experiment in creating an optimistic urban space. Of the four murals completed along Akadeemia tee, two have retained their original decoration, one has been covered with plaster, while the composition on one end wall has been marred by billboards.

The positioning and design of outdoor advertisements in Tallinn is governed by a City Government regulation that requires all ads on buildings that are under heritage protection to be cleared by the Tallinn Department of Culture. The Akadeemia tee murals are not under protection as historical monuments, thus the apartment associations can sell advertising space on the buildings’ windowless end walls.



Elmar Kits
1965 (removed in 2014)

Sgraffito

Originally the Tarvas Restaurant, at the time this photograph was taken a travel agency was located here. The building was demolished in 2014

Tartu, Riia mnt 2

Elmar Kits was one of the most important painters of 20th-century Estonia. He studied at Pallas Art School in independent 1930s Estonia, taught there after the war, and from 1950 until his death was a freelance artist in Tartu. His youth coincided with a time when the Paris school of art held sway, and an impressionist approach is predominant in his work. In the 1950s, he took advantage of a relaxation of strictures in artistic life. In his paintings, he synthesised various Modernist techniques that encouraged younger artists to experiment as well. He then made a decisive turn toward abstractionism. His 1966 solo exhibition in the Tartu Art House, where 105 paintings were displayed, was a true triumph for abstract art and one of the most important milestones for progressive art in the Estonian SSR in the 1960s. Besides easel paintings, Kits was also one of the most notable monumentalist artists of his time. He started working in the genre already in the 1930s and 1940s, but the best examples are from the 1960s.

The mural reproduced here once decorated the top Tartu restaurant, Tarvas. This painting can be considered his most effective attempt at synthesising painting and architecture (he was less concerned to integrate his other frescoes and sgraffiti them with the interior. The rhythm of figures in the image conform with the columns that were the dominant features in the hall, and the monochrome surface of the work interfaced well with the interior design. The jazz orchestra and carefree students depicted on the image went well with the university town's youthful atmosphere.

Tartu's old department store building, which was home to the sgraffito, was torn down in 2014. Although it was planned to display the work, which enjoyed heritage protection, at the new department store, the idea was scrapped due to lack of a suitable location. The work is now kept in the Estonian National Museum's depository.



Artist unknown
1967

Sheet metal

Originally the music department of Tartu Pedagogical School, currently not in use
Tartu, Salme 1b

The building constructed for the teacher training college's music department was completed in 1967 on the basis of standardised blueprints for a kindergarten. "Standardised" meant that a central Soviet architectural institute had developed a vision of an ideal preschool, and the production and maintenance costs were calculated down to the last detail. It was intended that all of Estonia's settlements would be filled with buildings built along these lines. However, in the case of buildings with public functions, local architects and officials managed to flout the pan-Soviet rules and create possibilities for the inception of independent-minded architecture.

This school building in Tartu is standardised. However, local architects and officials succeeded in adding a creative spark to the façade: a metal panel depicting children and a flock of birds. There is no record of the origins of the work or of the identity of the artist.



Anu Rank-Soans
1967

Ceramics

Formerly the central building for the Kurtna Poultry Breeding Experiment Station, now the Kurtina event and holiday centre
Kurtina Village, Keskuse tee 12

The central building of the Kurtna Experiment Station—its full name was the Central Institute for the Breeding of Chickens and Geese of the Estonian SSR (architect Valve Pormeister; 1967)—is considered one of the greatest achievements of 1960s Estonian architecture. Pormeister successfully utilised a number of natural materials in this building, with a resourceful floor plan and impressive form, and situated the building on the site so that it would meld well with the landscape.

The experimental station, created in 1950, was in the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Agriculture, which had limited economic resources for construction activity. Moscow scientists took note of the cutting-edge research being done by poultry breeders and, with their help, the breeders lobbied for additional funding for the construction of a modern headquarters. Architects of the period tend to recall the Soviet era as a time where the system could yield superb results if "the right people were in charge".

The building was built of extremely high quality and durable bricks (the architect was said to have kept watch on the construction site herself), and the material was ordered especially from abroad (Hungarian telephones, Finnish toilet bowls). The interior design was provided by the top designers of the era—Vello Asi and Väino Tamm. Today, little of the original interior design is left. One authentic period detail that has survived is Anu Rank-Soans's ceramic panel in the second-storey foyer, where glazed "eggs" of various colours make up playful figures on the poultry farming theme.



Valli Lember-Bogatkina
Trilobite
 1967
 Pebble mosaic
 Trilobiit Restaurant
 Kohtla-Järve, Tuuslari 10

Kohtla-Järve is an industrial city in north-eastern Estonia and a centre for oil shale mining (shale is the source of 95 % of Estonia's electricity). Miner and chemist were the most widespread professions among the residents. Although the city still has three major enterprises, the population has struggled to make the transition from command economy to free markets. Population drain, higher than average unemployment, a lower standard of living and declining urban space explain why, of all the interiors in this book, this workers' restaurant has authentically preserved its original appearance. It is not only the interior design and the tableware that is true to the period, but also the Czechoslovakian stereo system and speakers that are still in use today.

The mural was made with stones gathered from the local beach at Aa, and they depict a trilobite, an arthropod that became extinct hundreds of millions of years ago and is often found fossilised in limestone. Limestone is the national stone of Estonia; ubiquitous in northern Estonia, it was historically used to build the cities there. During the Soviet era, Estonia's largest mines and quarries were located around Kohtla-Järve, so it seems appropriate that the artist chose to depict a fossilised limestone arthropod in a panel for a workers' canteen. In the wider context of extracting natural mineral resources, the work references the relationships between animate and inanimate nature, people and the environment.



Ilmar Malin
Birth of the Võhandu River
 1967
 Mural painting
 Formerly the central building of Mooste
 Model Sovkhoz, now Mooste Cultural Centre
 Mooste, Lasteaia tee 3

Mooste Cultural Centre is a good example of a late-1960s rural building design where the architect has managed to introduce some local quality into the otherwise heavily sanctioned construction sphere. The mural on the end wall of the hall, by Ilmar Malin, further emphasised the identity of this tiny southern Estonian town and its inhabitants. The later addition of a basketball net provides a strange environment, but the space remains in constant use, so this painting may yet leave a small but lasting mark in the subconscious of the children growing up in Mooste.

Võhandu River is not only one of the longest in Estonia, but it is also the richest in terms of the legends and stories attached to it. Its mythic symbolism is clearly evident from the fact that part of the river is officially known as Pühajõgi ("sacred river" in Estonian). Ilmar Malin's painting depicts the legend of a famine and drought. Fortunately, a little boy learned some magic words from the ravens, which freed a spring from beneath the stones. The spring gave birth to the Võhandu River and saved the thirsty people.



Enn Põldroos
Youth
 1969
 Ceramic
 Formerly the Tallinn Polytechnic Institute,
 now Tallinn University of Technology
 Tallinn, Ehitajate tee 5

Enn Põldroos is one of the most important 20th-century monumentalist artists in Estonia. He studied painting at the State Art Institute of the Estonian SSR from 1952 to 1958, was a teacher at the Tallinn Pedagogical Institute from 1961 to 1966, and served as chairman of the Estonian Artists Union from 1985 to 1989 and 1995 to 1998. As an active social leader, he took part in Estonia's successful movement to regain its independence. Since 1998, he has been a freelance artist and writer, having published six novels and one memoir. Põldroos's career has always been followed by acclaim. After graduating from the Art Institute, he drew attention as an expressive innovator. His paintings are considered to among the most significant interpretations of the breakthrough processes taking place in art. Later, he cultivated and integrated elements such as Mannerist dramatism, Surrealism, Abstractionism, Pop Art and Hyperrealism into his own unique style. Already as a student, he began to take an interest in the synthesis of art and architecture, and the position of visual art in society. This idealism, adopted in the 1960s, has been associated with Põldroos's work throughout his long career.

This mosaic mural, executed on a plywood base with coloured glaze, is redolent of the "golden 1960s". Art historian Liisa Kaljula noted that it was a time characterised by the Scientific-Technological Revolution, space flight, the development of radio and TV, innovation in the theatre and the emergence of a youth culture. The 1960s was also a politically heady period, with youth on both sides of the Iron Curtain clamouring for the right to decide their own future. At the dawn of the 1960s, youth culture in the Soviet Union was still associated with sports and wellbeing, but as the decade progressed, pop music became the binding force, much as it was in the West. Popular products of the time included a lemonade called Noorus (Youth), the newspaper *Noorte Hää* (Youth Voice), and the Estonian Youth Theatre in Tallinn, which started performing around this time.



Elmar Kits
1969
Sgraffito
Formerly the Keava Breeding Centre of Kehtna Kolkhoz, currently the Animal Breeders' Association of Estonia
Kehtna Municipality, Keava Village

Located in the basement of a cafeteria at a breeding centre far from any urban centre, Elmar Kits's murals depict a Tuscan idyll. After a number of "Eurorenovations" (the term used in Eastern Europe for 1990s remodelling works, whereby traces of the socialist era were completely concealed) on the building, these eminent works of modern art, now constrained between wood particleboard panels in empty halls, seem especially absurd. There are no surviving photos of the interior in its day, so it is difficult to say whether they appeared odd back in 1969.

From a painting standpoint, the scene featuring youths enjoying a summer day in the shade of the trees is the best-executed. The chic "signori" sitting at the table are drinking wine, while the other characters appear to be picking oranges or other Mediterranean fruit. This bourgeois scene clashed with the everyday realities of rural life in the Soviet Union. The composition of the other painting, with its two symmetrical groups of figures, appears more experimental, but it may have been due to the arrangement of furniture in the interior.



Leo Rohlin
1969
Ceramic
Mereranna Sanatorium
Narva-Jõesuu, Aia 17

The sanatorium, designed by architects Pärtel Tarvas and Helgi Margna and built from 1969 to 1974, was commissioned by the USSR's Ministry of Machine Building and was intended as a holiday home for workers at secret military factories. Holidays along the hot and sunny Black Sea coast were not suitable for everyone, and the engineers from Moscow, Leningrad and other Soviet Russian cities were provided the cooler climate at Narva-Jõesuu.

Leo Rohlin, who at the time was about to graduate from the State Art Institute Department of Ceramics, was commissioned to design the artwork for the sanatorium. Pärtel Tarvas proposed to Rohlin that he execute his diploma thesis as a figural composition. The result is this mural, covering the sanatorium cinema hall's wall, depicting Soviet people on holiday.

As the sanatorium customers came from different parts of the Soviet Union, it was decided four years later to commission from Rohlin a map of the Narva area. It was installed in the sanatorium foyer. Rohlin prepared the work in what is known as "severe" style. He depicted the local region, but based the map on the Baroque appearance of the territory during the early 18th century—i.e., before Peter the Great's forces annexed Estonia to Russia. Although it might have been considered ideologically suspicious, the clients were satisfied with the work, and years later another mural was ordered from Rohlin for the same foyer (p. 57).



Elmar Kits
Three Maidens
1970 (removed from its original location in 2015)
Sgraffito
Formerly the Technical College of the Gagarin Model Sovkhoz, now Viljandi Vocational Training Centre
Viiratsi Municipality, Vana-Võidu Village

The three Graces (Aglaea—splendor, Euphrosyne—poetry, Thalia—music) are Ancient Greek goddesses of beauty and creativity, and their portrayal in Occidental art is inseparable from the male gaze in Western art history. Elmar Kits's 20th-century artistic influences may have included reproductions of drawings and paintings by Kazimir Malevich, Fernand Léger and Pablo Picasso. Like Kits's murals in Kehtna Kolkhoz's Breeding Centre (p. 22–23), this sgraffito appears out of place. What might the current agricultural school students think of these female figures, stylised nearly to the point of abstraction?

On the other hand, Kits's immensely personal paintings are not so strange: it was common in Soviet times for art to be commissioned for the diverse types of public buildings. For artists, commissions meant employment, earnings and public exposure; in return, the state secured their loyalty. The management of Vana-Võidu agricultural school, located close to Viljandi, considered the aesthetic education of its students to be especially important: several ceramic murals were commissioned for the assembly hall, hallways were adorned with metal murals, the walkways contained busts of the teaching staff, and a diptych by Efraim Allsalu, depicting Yuri Gagarin's famous space flight, towered over the administrator's desk.

In 2015, the Viljandi Vocational Training Centre underwent a full remodelling, and the Soviet-era addition to Vana-Võidu manor, where Elmar Kits's mural was located, was torn down. To preserve the work, which is under heritage conservation, the Academy of Arts conservation department developed a complicated technique for peeling the painting from the wall along with the layer of plaster it was painted on so it could then be "pasted" onto the new location. The photo shows Kits's masterpiece in its original location. As can be seen, it originally had its own space. In the new setting it is unfortunately obscured by café tables and table tennis.



Elmar Kits
Harvest Celebration
 1971
 Secco
 Formerly the central building of Riisipere
 Sovkhoz, now Riisipere Cultural Centre
 Riisipere, Nissi tee 53

This major work, painted on dry plaster, was completed half a year before Kits's death. The title refers to the seasonal agricultural rite, but the image is recognisable as a depiction of a biblical last supper. This painting is populated by various characters and motifs from the canon of early 20th-century modern art that had importance for Kits throughout his life: the Virgin Mary with infant Christ, Cubist accordion players, Paris book dealers and the Artist looking outside the plane of the scene's reality (the right-most figure).



Ilmar Malin
Serata Vitae (Layers of Life)
 1970–1973
 Secco
 Formerly the Tartu State University Faculty
 of Biology and Geography, currently
 the University of Tartu Faculty of Science
 and Technology
 Tartu, Vanemuise 46

Tartu native Ilmar Malin studied at the State Art Institute in Tallinn from 1948 to 1954 and worked as a teacher in Tartu Art School (1955–1973). In the early 1960s, he was a member of a biology work group that conducted field work in Central Asia, where the traditional techniques and folkloric wisdom of the local peoples left an impression on him. In 1966, he had an opportunity to visit Stockholm and its Moderna Museet, where the exhibitions nudged him toward Surrealism. In his works, avant-garde methods mingled with the depiction of a mysterious inner world. In Estonian art history, Malin is mainly known for his portraits and Surrealist paintings, but he was also an active participant in analysing theoretical issues in art and society, manifested by his multifaceted monumental works and many articles on the topic.

On the wall of the foyer of the Faculty of Science and Technology, he painted a composition with dinosaur fossils, minerals, trilobites, spiders, mice and wild pigs—a mix of microcosmos, macrocosmos and the artist's memories of expeditions to the Arctic Sea and Siberia. In the middle of the painting are human figures, perhaps suggesting that, from the standpoint of biology, human life is little different from that of a trilobite.

In the context of Malin's complicated life story (after graduating from secondary school, he served in World War II, fighting in 1943 as a volunteer in the Finnish army and, upon returning to Estonia in 1944, also in the German army; he was arrested the same year in Czechoslovakia and until 1948 was in a Soviet prison camp), his interest in nature may denote a kind of escapism: during the Soviet years, the humanities were politicised, but the hard sciences allowed many to escape the politics of the day and ponder the eternal constants.



Design by Enn Põldroos; executed by
 Enn Põldroos, Lembit Sarapuu, Rein Siim,
 Olev Subbi and Andres Tolts
Radio Flower
 1973
 Ceramic
 Formerly the White Hall of the New Radio
 Building, now the Estonian Public Broadcasting
 sound archive
 Tallinn, Gonsiori 21

The interior of the concert hall, raised on legs in the manner of Le Corbusier and erected on the side of the New Radio Building (architects Ado Eigi and Jüri Jaama, 1972) was one of the most stylish in Tallinn. Light came through fashionable skylights and an abstract mural decorated the end wall. Archive documents show that the architects' original plan was to install the mural on the building façade, but the committee that carried out the process of ordering the artwork found that it would not be sustainable given the local weather conditions.

Radio Flower is one of the Soviet-era monumental works that has lost its original spatial context. The former White Hall has now been partitioned into several rooms and houses the Estonian Public Broadcasting collection of audio recordings. The mosaic and the chairs designed in the 1970s, recall its earlier function.

Enn Põldroos was assisted in laying the mosaic by other notable young artists. The topic and title of the work, *Radio Flower*, characterize a time when technological progress was presented as bright and positive.



Vladimir Tovtin
1974
Smalti
Formerly the Tartu Experimental Repair Plant, now an office building
Tartu, Vasara 56

This mosaic, situated in the industrial suburb of Tartu, was part of the décor in the canteen of a factory that once produced buses and trucks for all of Soviet Estonia. The management showed their appreciation for the Estonian art of the day: various well-chosen paintings and sculptures were exhibited around the factory's premises.

For the canteen's end wall, the management had something special in mind, commissioning a mosaic from a virtually unknown Ukrainian artist. In fact, the artist never visited the site, but sent the material and a full-scale model over from his hometown. Once it had been assembled, the factory workers complained to the management that they found the new artwork too bright and abstract. Such flashy tonality is indeed rare in Estonian art.



Artist unknown
1970s
Metal
Office building of an auto-repair shop
Tartu, Vasara 52b

It remains a mystery who designed this wall's metal-rod composition and why. Local workmen do not remember, and the annals of art are silent on the matter. At first glance, they seem like metal doodles that could have been bent by mechanics during their spare time, but the form is distinctive of a professional designer's aesthetic sensitivity. This monumental composition, lost among suburban industrial buildings in Tartu, is one of the most vivid examples of outdoor art in the Soviet era and shows how multifaceted the field is.



Dolores Hoffmann
1975
Stained glass windows
St. Martin's Church
Valjala, Kiriku tee 1

Dolores Hoffmann, born in 1937 into an Estonian-German family in St. Petersburg, is Estonia's best-known stained glass artist, and has laid the foundation for an entire school of art. She graduated from the State Institute of Art in Tallinn as a painter in 1962, taking a particular interest in the synthesis of art and architecture. She was self-taught as a stained glass artist, as the State Art Institute lacked a professorship and competence in the area. She started studying the discipline through books smuggled from Finnish friends to Estonia (although the Helsinki-Tallinn shipping line opened in 1965, only Finns could enjoy unrestricted travel). Hoffmann has recounted that for many years, the catalogue of stained glass in Chartres cathedral was her "Bible and ABC book". When, after Estonian re-independence, she was finally able to travel to France and showed her portfolio to glass art experts there, they were astounded that an artist working so far away in the conditions of communist rule considered herself to represent the Chartres school.

Since the country's re-independence in 1991, Hoffmann has created stained-glass windows and glass paintings for churches in Elva, Heimtali, Helsinki, Iisaku, Kihelkonna, Ruhnu, Tallinn (Church of the Holy Spirit), Toila and Türi, among others. Her works can be found in Lyon's city hall, restaurants in Helsinki and St. Petersburg, Lukoil's headquarters in Moscow and many other public and corporate interiors. In 2010, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili commissioned stained glass works from Hoffmann for a new church in Batumi.

During the Soviet era, churches were in disfavour and had to operate in extremely constricted economic conditions. The execution of stained glass windows for St. Martin's Church in Valjala was an exception, as prior to perestroika no other congregation succeeded in commissioning modern monumental art. The art historical gem of Valjala Church is the ochre-yellow figural paintings located in the northern wall of the choir room dating from the early 13th century, which mark the beginning of monumental and decorative painting in Estonia. The figures in antique clothing are most likely the Apostles, who as witnesses to Jesus's miracles are seated under a heavenly Jerusalem colonnade.



Aleksander Igonin
Ca 1976
Mural paintings
Apartment buildings
Kohtla-Järve, Metsapargi tee 4 and
Kalevi tee 36

Kohtla-Järve is an industrial city in north-eastern Estonia founded in 1946 by the Soviet administration. Although most of its citizens are to this day involved in the chemical, metal, mining or textile industries, it is a shrinking municipality with a majority of the inhabitants living in Soviet era districts like the one here.

Despite the monotonous urban landscape, Kohtla-Järve has some of the most appealing supergraphics in Estonia. These were designed by Aleksander Igonin, a Russian-Estonian artist who after graduating from the State Art Institute in Tallinn decided to settle in this “peripheral” town—as he put it—to avoid being shaped by the transient fashions of the art world. For decades, he served as Kohtla-Järve’s most respected art teacher and the municipality’s urban designer. At least four of his murals still remain.

His images function as visual riddles in the urban space, inviting viewers to guess what lies behind the picture. After all, this was the initial and ultimate aim of a mural: to bring life and emotion back to the anonymous *mikrorayons*—residential complexes that functioned as a primary structural element of urban planning in the Soviet Union.



Eva Jänes
1976
Fresco
Formerly the Rakvere Rayon’s Station
for Veterinary Disease Control, currently
the Rakvere Veterinary Centre
Vinni Municipality, Piira Village, Nefi 2

Eva Jänes graduated from the State Art Institute with a diploma in painting in 1970. Starting in 1973, she became one of the most prolific Estonian artists in the field, designing and executing monumental paintings for community centres, churches and public institutions, including frescoes, secco paintings, sgraffiti, mosaics and stained glass windows. In Estonian churches, her mosaics and stained glass can be seen in St. Catherine’s Church on Muhu Island, Järvakandi Church, Tallinn’s St. John’s Church, Suure-Jaani Church, the chapel of St. Michael’s in Jõhvi, and—of the works pictured in this book—St. Paul’s Church in Tartu (p. 83). She also designed the chapel of the consistory or administration of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (p. 75). Eva Jänes is one of Estonia’s best-known Christian artists and a long-time force for the advancement of Christian art life, having compiled and designed over 50 exhibitions of sacral works by Estonian artists. At the same time, her own oeuvre of monumental and decorative art has been largely overlooked.

The veterinary centre fresco was the first extensive monumental painting commissioned from Jänes after her fresco for Tallinn’s Motor Depot No. 2. Based on the fact that the right-hand doors on the second-floor foyer led to the seed inspection rooms and the left-hand doors to the veterinary lab, the artist decided to model her work on the continuity of the biological cycle in nature. As repeating features, she chose symbolic plants, animals and butterflies.



Eva Jänes
1977
Fresco
Formerly the cafeteria of the Kalev
Confectionery Factory, now a furniture
showroom
Tallinn, Pärnu mnt 139

This was originally the canteen of the Kalev Confectionery Factory, and is currently a furniture showroom. The roots of the candy factory date back to the beginning of the 19th century. In the 1940s, several historic confectionery factories were consolidated and the name Kalev—referring to the hero of the national epic—was given to the new centralised institution. In 1957, a vast manufacturing complex was opened on an industrial site a few kilometres away from Tallinn’s centre. The 50-metre-long mural, of which less than a third remains, was added to the workers’ canteen 20 years later.

The frescos depict a rural feast—possibly a wedding party—which in some ways connects to the confectionery industry’s happy associations. On the other hand, Eva Jänes, who is an artist with a religious sentiment, managed to bring (moral) light and a sincere sense of happiness into an anonymous manufacturing site. Curiously, the work was added to the National Registry of Cultural Monuments under state protection in 1995. Presumably, it was not due to its artistic merit, rather its historical importance as a sign of Soviet era decoration. Despite being listed, two-thirds of the mural was destroyed during the turmoil of “cowboy capitalism” in the 1990s. The current tenants accidentally came upon the surviving parts of the artwork while removing plasterboards from a wall they were renovating.



Artist unknown
Ca 1978
Mural painting
Private house
Tallinn, Tartu mnt 153

This is one of the first buildings in Tallinn when approaching the city limits on the Tallinn-Tartu Highway. Although a modest single-family home with a child-like mural may seem trivial and unpretentious, it implies interesting symbolic meanings. Building a private house in the Soviet era was not a very common activity, and it signified personal and cultural independence. Individual projects for private houses, designed by architects working independently, constituted one of the very few legally acceptable forms of private entrepreneurship in the Soviet Union. Architects acknowledged this privilege and took responsibility for conserving and developing local building traditions. Hence, some aspects of architecture were particularly symbolic.

In some ways, this building is also suggestive of a legend about Tallinn's past. For over 700 years the capital was known by its Germanic name of Reval, which is said to have derived from a legend: after Valdemar II of Denmark had conquered northern Estonia, he went hunting on Toompea Hill (now at the heart of the city), but failed to kill a deer. Alas, to avoid becoming a royal trophy, the animal jumped off the cliff, from which story the Low German name *reh + fall* (deer's fall) became Reval. Perhaps this narrative of Tallinn's history helped to assure its citizens that nothing—not even Soviet rule—lasts forever.



Eva Jänes
1977–1978
Sgraffito
Formerly the Tamsalu Poultry Factory and
Põdrangu Sovkhoz, currently an office building
and warehouse
Tamsalu Municipality, Sääse

This large edifice is situated a long way from any city in a small north-eastern town with a population of less than 500 people. The neat architecture and notable sgraffito testify to the heyday of rural life and the financial success of the agricultural industry in Soviet Estonia. Rural men and women have since left for larger towns, and without people it has been very difficult to find new purpose to Soviet-era kolkhoz centres and other public buildings. This hall has been fortunate to find use as a warehouse, as a stable temperature is maintained and vandals are kept away.

The sgraffito was commissioned by the monumental-decorative art committee, an institution that managed the commissioning of the more expensive and central public artworks during the Soviet era. (The majority of the murals produced in Estonia were less costly and did not need committee approval). The committee consisted of talented architects, artists, designers and theoreticians who met on a weekly basis to discuss ongoing issues concerning public art. Their purpose was to find the right aesthetics for a given space—in short, to attain a synthesis of the arts.



Leo Rohlin
1978
Ceramic
Formerly the Estonian SSR Economic
Institute for Raising the Qualification
of Senior Workers and Specialists,
currently a general practice medical centre
Tallinn, Sütiste tee 21

The artist behind this mural, the grand old man of Estonian ceramics Leo Rohlin, described the chain of command for commissioning the artwork back then as follows: first the architect decided that he would like an abstract mural installed by the building entrance. The institute's leaders then contacted the Ministry of Culture seeking an artist who could achieve this. Instead of holding a competition, the ministry opted to commission a specific work for the ceramic plant in Tallinn's northern industrial area, and the management selected an employee of theirs, Leo Rohlin, to execute the mural. In turn, Rohlin then had to submit designs to the monumental-decorative art committee at the Ministry of Culture. After the members approved the design, the institute had to get final approval from the ESSR Council of Ministers (the government of the Estonian SSR).

When the artist was finally able to start work, he understood that an overhang would be built to shield the mural from rainfall. Later it turned out that the overhang would be situated away from the building to save costs, so the mural ended up exposed to rain. By the time this information reached the artists, it was too late to look for more weather-proof technical solutions. The chamotte brick used as the basic material has heroically withstood the passage of time, but the thin glaze crumbled away over the first few winters.



Robert Suvi
1979
Smalti
Formerly the National Hospital No. 4 of
the Estonian SSR Ministry of Health,
now the Magdaleena Outpatient Clinic of
East-Tallinn Central Hospital
Tallinn, Pärnu mnt 104

Robert Suvi studied painting at the State Art Institute in Tallinn from 1970 to 1976 and pursued further study in 1980–1981 in the field of monumental painting in Leningrad, where the artist could practise in a tsarist-era ceramic plant where the selection of colours was wider than was available in Estonia. Suvi's many commissioned works include the sgraffito in the assembly hall of the Tallinn Law Enforcement Special Secondary School, a fresco in the Merivälja Nursing Home's fireplace hall, the stained glass windows in the Baltic Station restaurant, the Tallinn restaurants Saku and Szolnok, and ice cream bar Vikerkaar.

This mural was commissioned after winning a competition organised by the Ministry of Culture's monumental-decorative art committee. The mural follows the elongated floor plan of the lobby and the composition of the panels is faintly reminiscent of electrocardiogram waves.



Artist unknown
Late 1970s / early 1980s
Mural painting
Apartment building
Tartu, Kalda tee 20

The main unit of Soviet housing construction was the *mikrorayon*: a neighbourhood flanked by larger arteries and built for 6,000–8,000 inhabitants, with residential buildings, a school, preschool and other service establishments of daily life which had to be located no more than 500 metres away from the homes. The aesthetic idea underlying the planning of a *mikrorayon* was that similar template-design buildings could be positioned in a diverse manner in order to create a background against which particular unique architectural works—the public and community buildings—would stand out. Unfortunately, the Soviet Union collapsed before those unique public buildings could be built and so the various *mikrorayons* often appear interchangeable. The protagonist of Estonian writer Mati Unt's 1979 novel *Autumn Ball*, which would become a feature film 28 years later (directed by Veiko Õunpuu), is a writer living in a *mikrorayon*, facing a typical predicament: "Eero stepped outside and found himself either in Mustamäe or Õismäe."

The university city of Tartu found a solution to this problem: to make orientation easier, decorative cartography was applied to the end walls of four buildings.



Rait Prääts
1979–1980
Stained glass windows
St. Nicholas' Museum and Concert Hall
Tallinn, Niguliste 3

St. Nicholas' Church is one of four monumental medieval churches in Tallinn. The church building was almost entirely destroyed during World War II, but the several-metre-thick walls survived, so the ruins were preserved (the rest of the block was cleared by bulldozers and the old buildings were either replaced with new ones or lots were left vacant). As the 1980 Moscow Olympics and the Tallinn regatta approached, it was decided to rebuild St. Nicholas Church and establish a concert hall and museum for older art—after a brief flirtation with the idea of an Atheism Museum.

A stained glass competition was held, and 27 entries were received. There were works in various styles: naïve and national-romanticism, Gothic, and ethnographic patterns. Rait Prääts's designs were the winning entry. As the sacral building was to have a new function after the restoration, he based his design on the spatial impact, the architectural shell of the building, and its high, narrow, vertical openings: for the window under the church tower, the artist emphasised colour tones and imagination; for the stained glass windows in St. Anthony's chapel, he used colour sparingly to ensure maximum light exposure and to provide a relatively calm space for exhibitions. For his programme of coloured stained glass, the artist proceeded from a geometric design system with a rhombus as its basic element. This thoroughly considered concept emphasised the symbolism of the four cardinal directions. The structure of the stained glass compositions in St. Anthony's chapel is oriented according to the movement of the sun: the motif is born in the east and takes on its final structure in the West.

Rait Prääts is one of Estonia's most esteemed stained glass artists. Like Dolores Hoffmann, most of his commissioned work has been produced abroad (France and Finland).



Eva Jänes
Days of Mary
1980
Fresco
Väike-Maarja Community Centre
Väike-Maarja, Pikk 2

In the Christian tradition, the feast days associated with the Virgin Mary fall on the following days: the feast of the purification of Mary, Candlemas (2 February), Annunciation (25 March), Assumption (15 August), Nativity (8 September) and Immaculate Conception (8 December). In Estonia these days mingled with pre-Christian feast days based on the annual cycle of farm work. The Christian and heathen rituals came together extraordinarily for Annunciation, when married women celebrated, went to the tavern and imbibed alcoholic drinks, which was supposed to bring vitality and a red-cheeked glow of good health. Traditionally, this is also a day when tricks are played on the opposite sex, games are played, there are ritual dances and other forms of merriment. Folklorists view the occasion as a social pressure valve that enabled people to release the pressure of their arduous work and the toil of everyday life. It provided opportunities for women to gather socially without men.

First mentioned in 14th-century annals, the settlement of Väike-Maarja is named after the Virgin Mary and it was thus natural for Eva Jänes, a Christian herself, to select the cycle of feasts of Mary as the theme of her fresco. The political officials of the Soviet regime could do little but nod their approval.



Urve Dzidzaria
Humans in Nature
1979–1980
Fresco

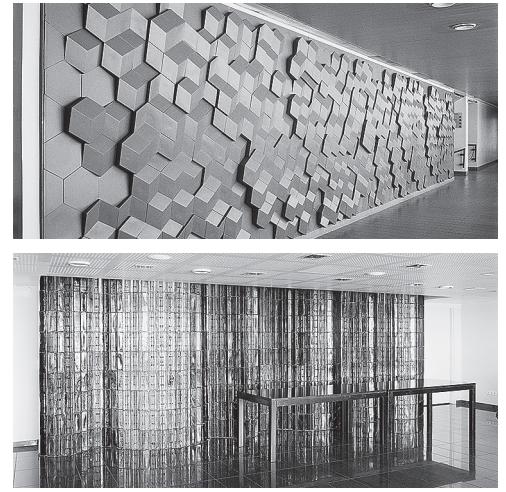
Annual Cycle
1979–1980
Stained glass windows

Formerly the central building of Habaja
Sovkhoz, now Habaja Village Fresco Centre
Habaja, Kose mnt 19

Estonia has a number of stylish Soviet-era interiors that are in danger of destruction as no new use has been found for the former kolkhoz and sovkhoz buildings. In some places, the interiors have been claimed for municipal or community centres, but they, too, have trouble maintaining the large buildings due to the limited funding from the state. In Habaja near Tallinn, however, the local leaders have managed to revive a long-empty sovkhoz centre and the complex has been given a grand new name—the Fresco Centre—after the painting by Urve Dzidzaria housed within.

Like other monumental works by Dzidzaria, this fresco communicates a search for peace, self-fulfilment and a return to nature. It depicts musicians with lutes, children talking to birds and bountiful orange trees, reminiscent of late medieval paintings and tapestries envisioning paradise. Compared to the monumental paintings in the Modernist canon, which were completed in the middle of the previous decade and typically referred to the Scientific-Technological Revolution, here we see the artist approach his subject in a new way. The previous emphasis on communitarianism and progressiveness has been replaced with introspective insight and a retrospective view of history.

The fresco is located in the former sovkhoz senior workers' lounge, while the rank-and-file workers had a separate cafeteria decorated with abstract stained glass windows executed by Dzidzaria on the theme of the changing seasons. The works have survived well and continue to add value to the interior today, although the skylights were scrapped during a 1990s renovation and the ceiling has been lowered, giving the room a somewhat claustrophobic feel.



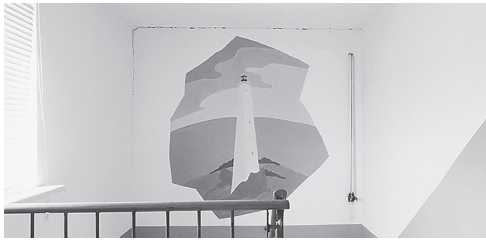
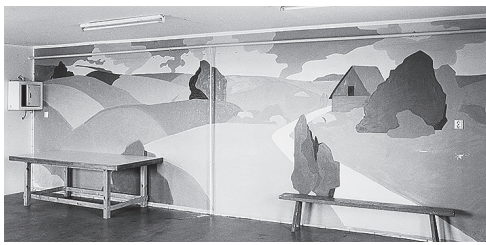
Leo Rohlin
1980
Ceramic

Aet Andresma-Tamm and Mare Lobjakas
1980
Ceramic, glass

Tallinn Olympic Yachting Centre
Tallinn, Regati pst 1

The 1980 Summer Olympics were to be held in Moscow, so Leningrad, Riga and Tallinn vied for the honour of hosting the sailing events. Tallinn prevailed. Dmitri Bruns, Tallinn's chief architect from 1960 to 1980, realised long before the Games were awarded in 1974 that the Olympics might one day be held in Moscow and so he "reserved" strategic locations in Tallinn for Olympic venues. Although the International Olympic Committee should not have allowed Moscow to hold the regatta on the territory of an occupied country—indeed, the specific event was boycotted by a number of countries—the instigators were Estonians themselves, who felt that hosting an Olympic event would benefit their capital and increase communications with the outside world. Over six years, 200 million roubles (roughly 420 million dollars by today's value) were invested in new buildings and infrastructure. Besides the Olympic village, a modern airport, a new central post office, the 26-storey Olümpia Hotel, the Lenin Palace of Culture and Sport (today's Linnahall), Tallinn TV Tower and several other structures were built.

The architecture of the yachting centre complex (architects Henno Sepmann, Peep Jänes, Avo-Himm Looveer and Ants Raid) includes examples of many of the architectural techniques of the late 20th-century, all synthesised with Constructivist design. The architects intended that the hotel, shaped like a catamaran, should not be characterised by fine art but rather architectural forms. A ceramic mural was commissioned for the aquatic centre's end wall from Leo Rohlin, which he designed in an Op Art style, with the tones of the tile glazes being of four different degrees of darkness, creating an optical effect. Although the entire complex was placed under heritage conservation in 1997 as a unique example of late Soviet architecture, the hotel's owners seriously damaged the mural by painting it green, and without asking the artist's permission. On the other hand, the glass composition in the dance hall, designed by two of Estonia's most recognised glass artists, Aet Andresma-Tamm and Mare Lobjakas, was restored in exemplary fashion just a few years ago.



Artist unknown
Early 1980s
Mural painting
Läätsa Harbour office building
Salme Municipality, Läätsa Village

These anonymous wall paintings are situated inside a rural harbour's office building on Saaremaa Island. This was one of the westernmost harbours of the Soviet Union at the time the paintings were completed, but today the boatyard is rarely used and the house has been neglected for years.

The picture on the left depicts an idyllic Estonian landscape with a solitary farmhouse. Family farming—the core of rural Estonian identity for hundreds of years—was replaced with collective farms by the Soviets during the 1940s. Within 30 years, the countryside had gone through a great transformation: dispersed settlement was replaced by tightly clustered villages filled with vast agricultural buildings and three-storied Khrushchovkas—typical apartment buildings developed during Nikita Khrushchev's rule. Just as the traditional landscape was disappearing for good, it became fashionable—and economically feasible—for urban dwellers in the early 1980s to buy run-down farm houses and turn them into summer houses.

The mural exemplifies the nostalgia for an idyllic past, but the image stands in stark contrast to the political reality the artist was facing at the time of painting.

Who was the creator of this painting? Perhaps a local autodidact who had recognised that it was better to generalize rather get into details? The result is sweet and naïve, but has an appeal that bears an interesting resemblance to the simplified imagery of Pop Art. All in all, it is a testimony to the eclecticism of the genre of public painting: in many cases, “art outside” is also “outsider art”.



Dolores Hoffmann
Television—a Window to the World
1980 (relocated within the building in 2012)
Stained glass windows
Tallinn TV Tower
Tallinn, Kloostrimetsa tee 58a

The Tallinn TV Tower was built for the Tallinn regatta, part of the 1980 Moscow Summer Olympics. The 314-metre-tall structure was designed by Moscow-based specialists at the State Design Institute of the USSR Ministry of Communications. An observation platform and restaurant were designed midway up the tower, with vestibules and a conference centre in a two-story building at ground level. Dolores Hoffmann's stained glass originally decorated the second-floor vestibule. Effective in both form and content, her work provided a new element in a technological space, creating an exhilarating visual prelude to the ascent to the observation deck.

The work represents TV reality, and especially how news broadcasts beam pain and suffering from all over the world to living rooms. What does footage of personal and collective struggles conjure up in viewers? Sympathy, solidarity, ambivalence or something else? Hoffmann seems to be suggesting that the TV is a screen that reflects the viewer's soul. She succeeded in designing a work that pleased Moscow officials—the composition depicts the global socialist struggle—yet also satisfied the artist's conscience. The work depicts the fate of the artist's own family and the entire world in the 20th century and yet expresses hope that new technologies will unite humankind.

In the course of renovation works completed in 2012, the stained glass windows were moved from the vestibule to the back wall of a new cinema hall. During screenings, curtains are drawn across the work, so the audience gets a brief glimpse for several minutes before and after the film. Previously, visitors could see the stained glass while waiting for elevators, now they see it before watching a 3D movie. American sociologists noted already back in the 1950s that families watching TV do not have conversations, and that interaction and bonding was promoted only in one limited sense: the fact that they were seated in the same room together.



Robert Suvi
Work and Holiday
1981
Fresco
Formerly the central building at Vambola Kolkhoz, currently not in use
Tarvastu Municipality, Soe Village

The architect of the headquarters of this former kolkhoz in southern Estonia is Raivo Mändmaa, a native of Viljandi. The building was completed in 1980 as an addition to the historical Soe Tavern. The architecture embodies postmodernity. It referenced the gabled roof of the old tavern building, added a large fresco to the hall and a stained glass window to the stairwell (also by Robert Suvi, no longer extant). It was one of the largest and most expensive frescoes of its kind, ignoring the usual constraints of good taste and artistic imagination. Today some critics regard the fresco as humorous, and value it for its camp qualities. The building is no longer in use and is slowly deteriorating.



Artist unknown
1980–1981 (destroyed in 2015)
Fresco
The hall of the Volta Factory Culture Club,
demolished in 2015
Tallinn, Tööstuse 47

The 140 square metre fresco decorated the end wall of a factory's culture club in northern Tallinn. The manufacturing complex, which was founded in 1899, took its name from the pioneer of electrical science, Alessandro Volta. During its heyday, the plant employed hundreds of workers who benefited from the culture club's selection of concerts, film screenings and social gatherings. The scale and energy invested into producing such a work demonstrate the value assigned to community in the workplace. The factory building is still in use, although the whole industrial complex is undergoing an intense gentrification process.

There is no information about the artist, though it is likely to have been a foreign student from another Soviet republic. This was the only mural in Soviet Estonia that borrowed its expressive iconography so clearly from the Mexican *muralismo* movement. Bearing in mind the factory's devotion to engines and electricity, the artist depicted the Sun, utopian power plants and heavy manual work. Interestingly, many of the figures were explicitly Olympian, such as Hephaestus the blacksmith or the Moirai depicted on top of the two doors. The whole composition was topped with a muscular and colossal figure of Zeus, which makes it quite astonishing in the Soviet public sphere.



Enn Põldroos
Universitas Tartuensis
1982 (relocated during the 1990s)
Tempera on canvas
Main building of the University of Tartu
Tartu, Ülikooli 18

Enn Põldroos considers this work, dedicated to the 350th anniversary of the university, to be one of his most important paintings. It is also one of the boldest pastiches in Estonian art history, as it is based on Raphael's 1511 *School of Athens* fresco at the Vatican's Stanza della Segnatura, in which the Renaissance master portrayed ancient philosophers. Põldroos approached his *Universitas Tartuensis* in the same way—portraiture—with 37 professors pictured. Like Raphael, Põldroos depicted all his subjects engaged in conversation. Unfortunately, the work, which was intended to be mounted under a specific ceiling arch, has been relocated, so the shape of this site-specific lunette now appears strange.



Evgeniy Olenin and Eduard Paskhover
1982
Ceramic
Soviet-era addition to Kreenholm Textile
Mill's worker housing
Narva, Joala 12

Narva lies on the west bank of the river of the same name, which forms a natural border between Estonia and Russia. This north-eastern Estonian city of 60,000 inhabitants is the country's third-largest. The Baroque historical centre built under Swedish rule in the 17th century was destroyed in World War II, but the grand textile plant built in the 19th century and workers' housing areas survived. In the early 20th century, the Kreenholm Textile Mill was one of the largest in the Baltic Sea region.

As the mill lacked sufficient Estonian personnel during the first years of its existence, around 300 skilled workers and senior personnel were hired from Germany and England. The founder, Ludwig Knoop, called for English industrial architecture to be used as an influence in building the housing for the imported workforce. The result was British-inspired red-brick Historicist-style residences for the specialists and plainer barracks for the workers. Besides housing, there was a school, sauna, police precinct and shops, Lutheran and Russian Orthodox churches, a market, fire station, large hospital complex and a clubhouse.

In the 1970s, the buildings at Joala 10 and 12 were joined by a three-storey unit connecting the Vital Statistics Department offices that spread across two separate buildings. The whole length of the new building's street façade was covered with a mosaic laid from tiny ceramic shards. The abstract composition with bright colours functioned much like a catalogue would in introducing the fabrics produced at the textile mill. The artists were the same Ukrainian monumental artists responsible for the mosaic on the façade of the administrative building on Kreenholm Island (p. 53).

The mural is a background for a bust of local revolutionary Amalia-Elisabet Kreisberg. Kreisberg was only 25 when she was elected to be the Kreenholm workers' elder in 1904. She represented the workers' interests in negotiations with the administration. The fearless young woman was extremely popular with her fellow workers and led the 1905 workers' strike. Kreisberg was arrested and died in prison the following year. The angular base of the monument and the square-sided column go well with the Constructivist composition of the mosaic, and a careful look reveals that the mosaic depicts events from Kreisberg's life (popular assemblies).



Evgeniy Olenin and Eduard Pashkover
1982 (destroyed in 2013)

Mosaic

Formerly the administrative and housing block for the Kreenholm Textile Mill's old spinning plant, demolished in 2013
Narva, Kreenholm Island

The first spinning plant was established on Kreenholm Island in 1857. The four-storey limestone façade faces the city centre and is visible from a long way down the river valley. In 1972, the four-storey administrative unit (pictured) was built, and a stylish overhanging roof faithful to the style of the period was added above the main entrance. Some years later it was joined by a mural commissioned from two monumental artists from Odessa, Evgeniy Olenin and Eduard Pashkover. The mosaic depicts three women at work on a textile production line. The depiction of three women, with their generalised forms, serve as symbols of an era recalling the mythology-inspired fresco at the Volta Factory (p. 50). Perhaps the artists here were also alluding to the Moirai, the three Fates of Ancient Greece who spun the thread of life?

After the restoration of Estonian independence and privatization, Kreenholm continued to operate for about 10 years as one of Europe's biggest textile mills, but the EU's free trade agreements with Asian countries made it hard to compete with cheaper-labour countries. The plant went bankrupt in 2010, and to pay off debts the entire area was sold to foreign real estate developers with long-term plans of turning the former factory buildings into a concert hall, shopping mall and studio apartments. In the first phase of the transformation, Kreenholm Island was cleansed of all removable Soviet-era features. The mural was consigned to this category, and was demolished along with the rest of the building in 2013.



Eva Jänes
1982

Fresco

Tallinn Vital Statistics Department
Tallinn, Pärnu mnt 67

Art Nouveau, that fanciful garden of delights, was given short shrift in the Estonian SSR up until the 1970s. But the style underwent a revival as Postmodernist culture dawned. Art historians Leo Gens and Juhan Maiste, and the artist and architect Leonhard Lapin, began publishing articles on the topic during the 1970s, and in 1978 Mai Levin put together an exhibition on *Art Nouveau in Estonia* at the Art Museum. By the 1980s, Art Nouveau—or Jugendstil, as it is known on this side of Europe—buildings were being revived. One of the first to be renovated, in 1982—a villa formerly belonging to the director of the Luther plywood factory (Nikolai Vassiljev and Aleksei Buby, 1910)—became the home of the Vital Statistics Department.

Jugendstil's "rehabilitation" led to the development of "Neo-Jugendstil" in interior designs of the 1980s, expressed in the Vital Statistics Department—popularly called the Palace of Happiness, as it was where marriages were registered—by even more maudlin decorative paintings, pink ceramic bricks, "retro" furniture and chimerical stained glass windows—combinations that might meet with derision from today's interior architects. But should the interior designed by interior architects Leena Zaporozhets and Silvi Uusbek endure a few more decades, it may become celebrated by art historians much as Art Nouveau was in its day.



Lagle Israel
1967–1983

Pebble mosaic

Estonian University of Life Sciences
Institute of Forestry and Rural Engineering
Tartu, Kreutzwaldi 5

This is probably one of the most labour-intensive monumental works to be executed in the Soviet period, taking an entire 16 years for the artist to complete. Lagle Israel squeezed the most from both herself and the material. As in the case of the University of Tartu observatory (p. 11), she would not allow any stone to be painted: here she used only pebbles in their natural colour, collected over the years from all over Estonia. She brought the limestone, worn smooth by the waves, from Saaremaa, and the red granite came from Ruhnu Island. She soaked stones for up to three years in iron-rich spring water to achieve a variety of colour tones.

This process was followed by sorting by size, shape and colour. She then had to fashion the concrete slabs, which required the ratio of cement to sand to be calculated carefully, and combined the concrete mix with paints (the concrete had to match the stones). The last stage was the placement of the stones in the concrete, which was done precisely according to the schematic designs and quickly before the base hardened. The artist said it took several days to lay just one panel (63 × 52 cm), sometimes requiring 14 consecutive hours of work. The mural was composed of 160 panels.

Originally the work was planned for the wall of the Vanemuine Theatre's café, but when a new construction company took over, the builders forgot about the mural. The artist was offered a hasty solution that would have left the mural largely concealed by the café's counter. Israel would have none of it, and thus she continued working on the mural for nine years not knowing where it would ultimately be installed, if at all. When the new academic building for the Agricultural University (the former name for the University of Life Sciences) was completed, it was proposed that the work be installed in a meeting room there. She agreed to the compromise but at a painful cost, as five metres of the work did not fit. In the Vanemuine Theatre, it would have been possible to admire the work at a distance, but in the much smaller meeting room with a table extending from wall to wall, this is not possible.



Andrus Kasemaa
The Mahtra War
1984
Secco

Formerly the central building of the Eduard Vilde Kolkhoz, currently Peri Village Centre
Põlva Municipality, Peri Village

Andrus Kasemaa's brutal painting style and unbridled violence can be shocking to those seeing it for the first time. The melee can be attributed to influences from Mexican monumentalism, but it can also be explained by the iconoclastic style and nature of Tartu art. Unlike ordinary monumental artists who first made sketches and often 1:1 scale designs, Kasemaa, a drawing virtuoso, started executing his ideas directly on the wall using charcoal, later following up with tempera paint. The impulsiveness of the artist's painting style is underscored by the fact that he has incorporated ventilation openings in the picture's own reality—they serve as gun barrels.

The painting depicts an armed revolt by Estonian peasants against a heavy-handed attempt by tsarist forces to quell a conflict between the country folk and the German landowners. The historical event was turned into a 1902 novel by Eduard Vilde, whose anti-imperial writing was celebrated in Soviet Estonia—not only this kolkhoz but streets, schools and a theatre were named after him. The mural painting is divided into four groups by theme and composition: the “indifferent ones” (the group of people on the left watching the action), the “rebels”, the “victims” and the “punishers”. The image quality of the groups is far from uniform: the “indifferent ones” have been painted realistically, but the “victims” are rendered grotesquely; some characters are even caricatures.

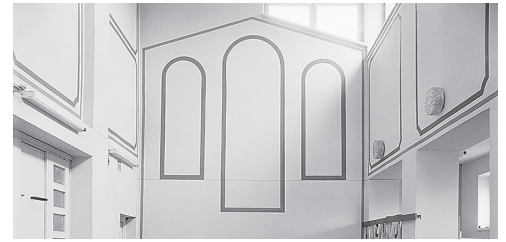
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Leo Rohlin
1985
Ceramic
Mereranna Sanatorium
Narva-Jõesuu, Aia 17

Sixteen years after his map of Narva-Jõesuu (p. 24), Leo Rohlin was commissioned to create a map of the Estonian SSR for the opposite wall of the sanatorium foyer. The first work gave visitors mainly from Russia an introduction to the local region through the exotic past, but the artist executed the new mural with a cleaner, clearer idea and style. The work depicts an ethnographic map of Estonia, which gives an overview of the cultural differences in the small country.

The sanatorium owners commissioned many artworks for the common areas of the establishment. In 1969, a latticed ceramic sphere by Rohlin (no longer extant) was installed next to the entrance, and in 1979, the Hoffmann mural *Starry Sky*, then Estonia's biggest stained glass work (4 × 14 m, no longer extant) was added to the first unit's foyer. In front of the building, the Armenian artist Mkrtiç Mazmanjan, who had studied sculpture in Estonia, designed an abstract metal sculpture reminiscent of a spiral shell and two seashell figures next to each other on the external wall. There were also other marine-themed metal structures in the interior. The sanatorium was one of the best examples of the synthesis of the arts, made possible by a fortuitous meeting between wealthy customer and ambitious architect. One part of the building now contains a hostel, while the other wing, the one with Rohlin's works, is not in use.



Ain Padrik and Aet Maasik
1985
Mural painting

Dolores Hoffmann
Estonian Landscape
1985
Stained glass windows

Formerly the central building of Raikküla Kolkhoz, now library and office building
Raikküla Municipality, Raikküla Village

The central building of Raikküla Kolkhoz, designed by Ain Padrik, is an interesting example of 1980s Postmodernist Soviet Estonian kolkhoz architecture, where the architectonics of the building were based on the interpretation of the architecture of the surrounding buildings. The Neoclassical main building of Raikküla Manor, with its grand six-column portico is a couple of hundred metres away; closer are the apartment buildings built according to standardised plans out of silicate brick. Padrik synthesised motifs from different eras and achieved a result that conformed to the vision of how the building should meld into the environment.

The space pictured, which leaves the impression of a house of worship, was designed to be a library. The architect and interior architect, both cognizant of art history, got the idea for the chapel-type design from manor architecture: the main buildings on Estonian and Livonian estates usually had a family chapel inside. The idea of the design was to offer visitors peace and quiet, and a library is a very good place for that. The library has since moved into a smaller adjacent room that is more cost-effective to heat. A local librarian says the so-called chapel is used only during elections, because voting booths can be set up effectively between the columns (which also create a striking impression of a church transept).

The same building also houses stained glass works by Dolores Hoffmann, which divide the interior into halves and can be seen from both sides. This photo shows the “correct side” of the stained glass, but from the other side, viewed from the spacious vestibule, the stained glass seems like an Art Nouveau stylization—quite apt in this Postmodernist kolkhoz building, laden with historical references.



Heli Tuksam
1985
Stained glass windows
Tallinn Book Printers
Tallinn, Laki 26

Tallinn Book Printers began activity in 1985 and was the first building in Soviet Estonia that was built exclusively for the printing and binding of books. The main entrance of the printing plant is decorated by a stained glass work that extends through two storeys, depicting printing and bookbinding artists, apparently from the early post-Renaissance era. The guild workers give the work of the masters working in the present building a historical ambience. Respect for the trade and the workshop can be seen throughout the building: The interiors here are always impeccably clean and, perhaps because of this tidiness, the original interior design has survived well and is now an asset in its own right.



Design by Enn Põldroos, executed by
Hilja Karri, Aino Stamm and Marika Hallangu
Lives of People
1985
Tapestry
Formerly the V. I. Lenin Palace of Culture
and Sport, currently known as Linnahall,
out of use since 2009
Tallinn, Mere pst 20

The monumental Linnahall (architect Raine Karp) near the Old Town of Tallinn is a favourite attraction for fans of Soviet Modernism. The Lenin Palace of Culture and Sport, built for the Olympic sailing regatta, was in operation for a little over twenty years and has since been abandoned, with layers of graffiti accumulating. A number of attempts to regenerate the building—which continues to be under heritage conservation—have failed. The city of Tallinn, which owns the building, and the state government continue to find ways to fix up the building, by planning to open a concert hall and conference centre there. For present-day architects, preserving the symbolic mega-architecture and putting it to good use appears to be a debt of honour to the Soviet-era architects. The significance of the ziggurat-shaped building to understanding Estonia's architectural heritage is underscored by the fact that the country's 2012 Venice Biennale entry was a Linnahall-themed exhibition, *How Long Is the Life of a Building?*

Enn Põldroos began preparations to execute the tapestry—around 500 square metres in area (50 × 10 metres) and with a weight of around 1.5 tonnes—in 1978, while the engineers were still working on the building's plans. The design phase, the preparation of 1:1 working drafts and the weaving itself took close to four years. The tapestry was woven by Art Products Factory Ars weavers, who started work in September 1981 and finished it in May 1985. Custom looms, 350 cm wide, were made especially for the tapestry, which consists of two parts. Of Põldroos's monumental works, this one appears to be most strongly influenced by the works of Mexican mural painters. This is probably no accident, as the shape of the Linnahall itself has been compared to the ancient architecture of Central America. As for the title, *Lives of People*, and the muscular figures expressing ancient ideals, these have been seen as a reference to Greek tragedy, centred on the polis, at the intersection of the private and public spheres of citizens' lives.



Rait Prääts
Colours of Creation
1985
Stained glass windows
Formerly the Political Education Building,
currently the meeting room of a law office
Tallinn, Rävala pst 12

Designed by Raine Karp, the political education centre later known as the Sakala Centre was demolished all but for a limited section, and replaced with a shopping mall in 2007—a signal example of the spatial reassessments that have taken place in post-socialist Tallinn. Originally a building with a superficial function, popularly called Karl's Cathedral after the Communist Party leader Karl Vaino, or the Leninite Cloister, the landmark developed nostalgic value for Tallinners in the 2000s after the initial euphoria of freedom had worn off. The state privatised the building on condition that the new owner would treat the architecture in a dignified manner. Unfortunately, a majority of the building was demolished with only a modest fragment of the onetime ensemble and the dominant tower surviving. As this part now houses a law office, it means one of the city's grandest stained-glass works is located in a space that is off-limits to the general public.

It took Prääts two-and-a-half years to execute the 72-square-metre stained glass work. The upper part of the work depicts colourful rainbows; in the middle section are visually richer figural thematic groups and the lower part has a stylised greyscale landscape. Characteristic Estonian natural forms are depicted: a sea cliff, groups of trees and drumlins, and iconic views of the Port of Tallinn and the Song Festival Grounds.



Evald Okas
Friendship of the Peoples
1987
Secco
Formerly the History and Revolution Museum of the Estonian SSR, now the Maarjamäe Palace, a branch of the Estonian History Museum
Tallinn, Piritä tee 56

Evald Okas, one of the co-creators of the Estonia Theatre ceiling painting (p. 2), completed this mural as part of the renovation of the Anatoli Orlov-Davydov summer estate as a history museum. The palace formed an ensemble together with the nearby Friendship of the Peoples Park and the Maarjamäe Memorial to World War II. As this was an important political site, the Communist Party's ideology department dictated precisely what had to be depicted on the painting: men and women clad in folk costumes of the Soviet republics, the celebration of their friendship and other ideological clichés of triumphant socialism.

Ironically, this late propagandist work was one of just a few unequivocally political mural paintings in late Soviet-era Estonia. When the museum and Okas's painting were opened, the night song festivals were already taking place at the nearby Song Festival Grounds. This was the Singing Revolution, when Estonians turned out spontaneously to sing patriotic songs, and eventually led to the restoration of independence in August 1991. The anachronistic quality of the mural painting comes from the fact that it was so long in the planning. Preparations for the museum started in 1975 and the work was commissioned from Okas in the Era of Stagnation. The History and Revolution Museum of the Estonian SSR was renamed the Estonian History Museum in 1989.

Until 2008, the controversial painting was concealed by a curtain. In 2016, renovation work began and is expected to conclude in 2018, the centenary of the Republic of Estonia. The estate's summer hall will be redesigned. Okas's mural painting will also be restored its presentation will be reconceptualised.



Jaak Arro and Epp-Maria Kokamägi
The Purple of Red Evenings
1987–1988
Oil on canvas
Formerly the Mai Cinema, now out of use
Pärnu, Papiniidu 50

The Purple of Red Evenings is the title of a collection of patriotic poetry by Hando Runnel published in 1982. The anthology and poem of the same name is considered among the most significant in recent Estonian history, as the poet succeeded both in outfoxing the Soviet censors and using the power of art to instil motifs that were understandable to the entire population. Estonians would read these and other Runnel poems by themselves, to friends and children, and set them to music; they became part of the everyday language. During the Singing Revolution, Runnel's subtexts were already visibly at the forefront of the independence movement. One such example is a wall painting by the married couple Jaak Arro and Epp-Maria Kokamägi, which translates an enigmatic linguistic motif into the language of painting.

Today, the composition seems overwrought; but at the time it expressed a dramatic experience of reality. In retrospect, the saw teeth—probably added on Arro's initiative—seem curious, though this particular ornament was extremely fashionable in the 1980s. From today's perspective the use of vivid red seems excessive, but the politics of that time explain the (ironic) use of the ideologically symbolic colour. The cover of Runnel's collection depicts a fiery red sun and advancing night.

Art history has shown that monumental paintings done in the latest fashion rarely stand the test of time. It is a genre whose success is defined by timelessness. Arro and Kokamägi's painting did, however, survive until 2014, when the cinema was closed. The complex is looking for a new owner but will likely be demolished.



Urve Dzidzaria
Time for Living on Earth
1986–1988
Fresco
Formerly the clubhouse of the 9th of May Kolkhoz, currently the Vana Tall guesthouse
Väätsa, Kooli 4

In the Soviet era, it was common for students at higher institutions of education to perform farm work on kolkhozy. The Art Institute had good relations with the 9th of May Kolkhoz in central Estonia, one of the most successful in the Estonian SSR. Art students picked potatoes, but sometimes they also got the chance to execute some commissioned works on the kolkhoz grounds.

Dzidzaria, who graduated specialising in monumental painting in 1976, was invited by the kolkhoz chairman, Endel Lieberg—holder of the title "Hero of Socialist Labour", to paint the fresco. With the Singing Revolution not far in the future, Dzidzaria depicted 19th-century national heroes and those from her own era. Like other frescoes by the same artist, she depicted herself in the painting.

The fresco is currently in poor condition: Dzidzaria did not consider the fact that there was a sauna on the other side of the wall—the heat stresses the plaster surface. Fresco is a demanding technique that depends greatly on the skills of plastering specialists, who must carefully prepare the treated surfaces one small area at a time, neither too wet nor too dry.



Valeri Vinogradov
1989
Mural painting
Tallinn University
Tallinn, Narva mnt 25

One of the explanations for the unprecedented upsurge in supergraphics is that until the late 1980s the municipality was supposed to spend a considerable part of its budget on propaganda (posters, slogans, flyers, flags, etc.), but during perestroika this money was quickly redistributed. It was quite a prize for an artist or designer to win a commission in those days: one author recalled that with the honorarium he took his family for a three-month trip around the United States. Although it must have been splendid for an artist to have his/her large-scale work exhibited in a public space, it was still strongly connected to the local concept of *khaltura*—potboiler work to earn extra money in parallel to one's main work. In most cases the supergraphics were not related to the artists' independent oeuvre.

This deteriorating geometric composition by Valeri Vinogradov on the end wall of one of the buildings of Tallinn University resembles the designs of early Russian avant-garde artists. Moscow-born Vinogradov studied painting in Tallinn's State Art Institute in the early 1980s and decided to stay in Estonia, where he has become an important figure in the art scene. Incidentally, something reminiscent of supergraphics is just discernible on the right side of the photo. This is an example of how property owners have had different layers of graffiti painted over in various tones.



Urve Dzidzaria
To Get to the Spring
1989
Fresco
Formerly the clubhouse of the Paide Motor Depot, currently offices and warehouse space
Paide, Pikk 42

Urve Dzidzaria's fresco in the clubhouse of a peripheral motor depot uses religious symbols to evoke a pilgrim's progress. For example, it depicts drivers leaving a Cubist, hostile city; they are on their way to a spring, but get stuck in a traffic jam. The rainbow symbolizes a bond of friendship between God and man, the air bubbles stand for sincerity or, instead, empty talk, and the ruined church arches speak of faith or lack thereof. The fresco with its cheery message is well-suited for the light-filled entrance hall and it was a deliberate contrast to the noisy parking lot and repair shop on the other side of the window.

The clubhouse was built for mechanics and drivers in central Estonia at a time when the "workers' paradise" was breathing its last, and no permanent function has been found for the building in independent Estonia. The entrance hall was used for years as a loading area, and the fresco was damaged considerably by cloth sacks rubbing against it.



Leonhard Lapin
Pantheon
1989
Oil on canvas, mirrors
Formerly Aruküla's Pääsulind Hobby Centre, currently Aruküla Free Waldorf School
Aruküla, Tallinna mnt 38

Leonhard Lapin is one of the most fascinating figures in the second half of the 20th-century Estonian art, being equal parts an innovator and conservationist, scandalist, transgressive artist and respected scholar. As an historian of architecture, Russian Constructivism was an intriguing material for him, but it also offered the innovator an opportunity to interface with avant-garde thought from the early 20th century.

From 1920 to 1978, a school operated out of the Aruküla manor house near Tallinn. The leaders of the local kolkhoz decided to convert the decaying property into the kolkhoz's own showpiece building. Lapin prepared the renovation project. The construction was protracted and works were completed only after the kolkhoz had gone under and the building had been handed over to the hobby centre. Since 1992, a school has again operated out of the building.

The Aruküla Manor was built in the 1820s as a long, single-storey Neoclassicist stone structure. Around the turn of the century, a timbered second storey was added on to the central part of the building and the façade was given a projecting central avant-corps with low triangular pediments. It appears Lapin used these pediments as a basis for renovating the manor ensemble—the triangle is encountered throughout the design, creating a metaphysical spatial impact. Lapin approached the historical monument from an unusually creative aspect: instead of conservation of details or different historical layers, he decided to rely on provocative contemporary techniques in which the Neoclassicist principle would be expressed in a new skin. *Pantheon*—referring to the sum total of the gods in a belief system—is a bold example of this approach. On one hand, the strict structure is a reference to the geometric principle from Neoclassicism, while on the other hand it fulfils a sacral function.



Reet Miitel
1993
Mural painting
Apartment building
Tallinn, Lastekodu 11

This supergraphics designed by Reet Miitel originally advertised a textile factory. The light-hearted triangles and shaded dots are typical of the period's graphic design and now appear nostalgic. The nostalgia is emphasised by its location beside the capital's central market, which many locals consider to exist in a time of its own—that is, late socialism.

Many similar designs were produced in Tallinn during the years 1987–1993 when Estonia was transforming from a socialist to a capitalist economy. Many supergraphics were early examples of commercial branding and as such represented a desire for Western imagery. Most of these wall murals were repainted a decade later when property owners had their houses insulated and replastered. Urmas Mikk, the main initiator of public art during the late 1980s, actually insisted on the gradual disappearance of supergraphics and promoted the idea of new artists perpetually redesigning worn-down walls. This, alas, was never realised.



Urmas Mikk
1990 (destroyed in the 2010s)
Mural painting
Apartment building
Tallinn, Juhkentali 46

Tallinn experienced a boom of large-scale supergraphics in the late 1980s. It was largely thanks to the graphic designer Urmas Mikk who then served as the municipality's urban designer. Mikk managed to turn the otherwise bureaucratic job (authorising façade restorations, managing advertising in public spaces, etc.) into a vanguard position, commissioning various murals in the city centre, many of which he designed himself. He was so productive that soon a couple of wall-painters in Tallinn started a private company producing mural paintings, which carried out many of the municipality's commissions. The mural was repainted in the late 1990s and the wall has since been used for commercial purposes.

This supergraphics no longer exists but was situated next to Tallinn's main bus station. The patterns left by bus tyres are the main motif of this design, which may be regarded as the skid marks of early capitalism. Initially, the text on the wall read "Mootor" (*motor* in Estonian), referring to the name of a bus company that began to operating long-distance routes in 1990. Although the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States ended in August 1991, it was in November 1989 that Moscow authorised the three countries to run their economies separately from the USSR. Hence, 1990 was the beginning of the transformation from planned financial system to a market economy. There had been no economic necessity for advertising under socialism, but it suddenly became a requirement that no one had any real expertise in.

Early corporate supergraphics were a dubious genre fusing public painting, urban design and commercial advertising. It celebrated advertising as something desirable—Western, elitist and awe-inspiring—while in practice remaining rooted in the slow and inefficient socialist model whereby a considerable amount of time was dedicated to surface appearance.



Mari Kurismaa
1990 (destroyed in 2014)
Mural painting
Commercial and residential building
Tallinn, Tatari 4

At the time this supergraphics was completed, the adjacent property facing Tallinn's Freedom Square was not yet built. The building's end wall thus faced the capital city's prestigious parade square. Ten metres to the right of the painting shown in the photograph, on a projecting end wall, was the second part of the composition that depicted a similar brick wall—its top end unfurled like a poster, creating the effect of a page being turned. Although Urmas Mikk, who commissioned the work, emphasised at the time that supergraphics were an apolitical genre, the objective of which was urban design, the wall could easily be seen as a reference to the Berlin Wall, which had recently been dismantled.



Rait Prääts
1990
Stained glass window
National Library of Estonia
Tallinn, Tõnismägi 2

The National Library of Estonia, which began construction in the late Soviet era and was opened in 1993, is one of the most enigmatic of Raine Karp's monumental public buildings in Tallinn. Similar to a number of other Tallinn projects whose construction dragged on during the 1980s Era of Stagnation, the completion of the National Library while the Singing Revolution was in full swing had symbolic importance for Estonians. Hundreds of people volunteered to assist with completion of the building.

The towering, narrow foyer of this temple of culture is one of the most unorthodox interiors in Estonian architecture, and evokes parallels to various holy sites around the world. The otherwise dimly lit foyer is illuminated by a massive rose window, which as a traditional design element in Gothic churches emphasizes its sacral quality. In the centre of the work, the glass artist Rait Prääts has depicted a river as a symbol of vitality and timelessness.

The fate of Raine Karp's major Tallinn works has been marked by controversy: the old Main Post Office and the Sakala Centre (p. 62) have been torn down and the future of the Linnahall (p. 61) is uncertain. The National Library building is the Karp building most consistently admired by locals and the architect himself is said to consider it his favourite.



Kai Kaljo
1991–1992
Fresco
Abja Culture Centre
Abja-Paluoja, Pärnu mnt 28

Kai Kaljo is one of the internationally best-known Estonian video artists, but few are also aware that she studied monumental painting at university. The surrealistic-tinged fresco shown in the picture is based on the books of Emily Brontë and Virginia Woolf—feminist themes also dominate the artist's later work. The painting is found in southern Estonia, in the Stalinist-era Abja Cultural Centre, built in an ornate Historicist style.

Kaljo has emphasised that in spite of the apparent monumentalism of the undertaking, the painting of a fresco is an intricate and time-consuming job, something more akin to applying mascara. In the late Soviet era, when Kaljo chose monumental painting—an unpopular speciality—it was considered an unpleasant, ideological area of study associated with propaganda imagery and *khaltura*—meaning work, often shoddy, done on the side. For Kaljo, choosing monumental painting meant taking the path of greater resistance, because it made it harder for her to be taken seriously as a real artist.

The cultural centre was built in the 1950s, based on a re-usable design by acclaimed Tartu architect Arnold Matteus. In Estonia, similar “cultural palaces” can be found in Antsla, Jõhvi, Keila and a few other places. The fresco turned the context of the construction-era zeitgeist—a time when the regime was still intimidating and violated civil liberties—on its head. Kaljo's paintings, which are full of psychoanalytical and Surrealist motifs, represent the situation in newly-independent Estonian society, where a great dam has broken and repressed personal and collective yearnings, desires and needs have been released.



Enn Põldroos
On the Border of Light and Shadow
1993
Secco
National Library of Estonia
Tallinn, Tõnismägi 2

This monumental painting, aligned on the same axis as Rait Prääts stained glass composition, is framed by Estonia's bedrock, limestone. Its colours correspond to the French tricolour, calling into mind the ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. It is a work that is about the apotheosis of the national culture. Enn Põldroos's earlier monumental paintings were characterised by a strict composition, but this work is painted in a freer style. Although the interpretations may seem arbitrary today due to changes in the political situation, both Põldroos himself and many of his contemporaries have noted that Estonia's restoration of independence had a galvanising effect on the entire generation of form-sensitive artists, leading them to question their own past personal styles.



Eva Jänes
1993–1994
Fresco
Chapel of the consistory of the Estonian
Evangelical Lutheran Church
Tallinn, Kiriku plats 3

During the restoration of the historical bishop's house located on Toompea Hill in Tallinn's Old Town (interior design by Aet Maasik), a chapel with a dolomite altar and painting done in fresco technique was built into a 300-year-old open chimney. The fresco's compositional programme is based on the Christian tradition, where celestial life goes along the east-west axis and worldly affairs are conducted on the north-south axis. Using the asymmetric ceiling space, the artist has created a *trompe-l'œil* effect that gives the small space the sense of having a towering ceiling.

Eva Jänes's monumental paintings are unlike those of her colleagues in that they convey a religious experience. The roots of her works lie in the Catholic tradition of church painting going back to the 13th century, and not in the synthesis of the arts inculcated in the Soviet era.



Urve Dzidzaria
Spring Prelude
1994
Fresco
Formerly the Nõmme Internal Diseases
Hospital, currently being renovated into
a home for the elderly
Tallinn, Lõuna 50

Michel Foucault has written of how hospitals as we know them today—as places where doctors provide medical care to patients—developed in late 18th-century Europe. Earlier hospitals were institutions taking care of people who were terminally ill (as well as for segregating people from society). Hospitals thus fulfilled a spiritual function (instead of doctors, clergy were primarily responsible for administering care) so that the most vulnerable members of society could receive their Christian last rites. The old saying that hospitals are for the dying, not for the living, dates back to that time. Modern hospitals were not only the result of the development of modern medicine, but were also modelled after military hospitals. Modern warfare made military training costly and countries did not want their warriors dying prematurely, deserting or fleeing from hospitals—they realised that order and discipline had to be maintained. According to Foucault, the modern hospital is a disciplinary space where the doctor's orders are paramount and patients are distinguished from other patients on the basis of medical guidance.

To this day, hospitals generally have hermetic white walls—after the religious iconography was forced aside, no artistic tradition replaced it. Artists who receive commissions of work for hospitals face the quandary of how to express the relationship between culture and the sick. How to represent pain and recuperation? It appears that the Dzidzaria fresco does not attribute healing properties to the city life outside. The work talks of a potential internal springtime, of a redemptive faith, hope and love that could give patients back their vitality. In this painting, health is a state of mind and a spiritual ideal.

The work has a nice rhythmic balance and fits well in the entrance hall of the Historicist style Stalin-era hospital building, harmonizing with the light from the window that once featured stained glass, also by Dzidzaria.



Urve Dzidzaria
Misty Morning
1995
Stained glass window
Lääne County Environmental Board
Haapsalu, Kilti tee 10

The well-preserved, well-proportioned office building, finely suited to its environment, showcases the use of Scandinavian-influenced wood architecture. The interior architect was Aate-Heli Õun. However, the only surviving parts of her original design are the metal lights in the foyer and the embossed copper mantelpiece. Grey shades are dominant in the interior, interrupted only by a red arc that cuts through the upper part of the stained glass.



Hillar Tatar
1990s
Mural painting
Haapsalu High School
Haapsalu, Kuuse tee 1

Hillar Tatar is a distinctive Estonian artist who graduated from the painting teacher speciality of the State Art Institute in 1972, then moved to a small town to work as an art teacher. When freedom came, he packed up and moved to New York, where he worked in the studio of an artist with Estonian roots—Kalev Mark Kostabi—at the so-called “Kostabi World”. Upon returning to Estonia, he continued teaching art at a grammar school in Haapsalu and painted murals inside the school with the help of his students.

At a passing glance, the two paintings would be unlikely to be considered the work of the same artist. The “epic poem” painted on plywood panels in the ground-floor foyer and introducing the history of the school is reminiscent in its sincerity and extravagance of some authentic work of outsider art, not painted for an audience but a reflection of the artist’s internal, personal life. On the other hand, the Pop Art mural painted in the antechamber of the cafeteria leaves the impression of a very style-conscious design that quotes from international antecedents. The composition is captivating; the content of the painting, eccentric in a good way. It is the kind of approach that might well be the best way to infect schoolchildren with the “art bug”.



Navitrolla
Ca 1995
Mural painting
The Pub with No Name
Tallinn, Suur-Karja 4

Navitrolla is one of the most popular painters in recent Estonian history. His recognizable style and commercial success in the 1990s was discomfiting for “serious” painters and art experts, who accused him of vulgarizing art and spoiling the tastes of the art public. Navitrolla’s Naivist paintings were considered to straddle the border between good taste and kitsch, although émigré Estonian Kalev Mark Kostabi, who embodied a similar approach, was held in high regard at the same time.

In fact, this mural painting came about when the two men met. Navitrolla was completing work on a commissioned mural depicting stylised clouds and animals. Kostabi was visiting Tallinn at the time and added the Surrealist figures that were his own trademark. The joint collaboration is no longer extant, nor is Navitrolla’s large mural painting *Very Old Tallinn*, but this modest picture in an alcove is still around, a reminder of the strange encounters and occurrences of the 1990s.



Dolores Hoffmann
1984–1996
Stained glass windows
Church of the Holy Spirit
Tallinn, Pühavaimu 2

The Church of the Holy Spirit is the only one of the four medieval churches in Tallinn’s Old Town that retains its original modest floor plan. This house of worship holds an important position in Estonian cultural history, as the first Estonian clergymen gave sermons here in the 16th and 17th centuries, playing a key part in the development of the written Estonian language.

The Lutheran congregation of the Holy Spirit continued to meet during Soviet times. They even managed to launch state-funded repairs of the church in the mid-1980s. The stained glass had been destroyed in World War II, so the pastor and later archbishop of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, Jaan Kiivit, commissioned new works from Dolores Hoffmann. The first work was completed in 1984, and the next ones followed during the Singing Revolution era, when the social role of the church briefly rose in stature and the number of members started growing. Hoffmann approached the assignment as a contemporary artist: she did not attempt to restore the effects of earlier works, but interpreted Scripture, Christian iconography and the medieval interior from a personal perspective. In the mid-1990s, this led to fundamental differences between the church and the heritage conservation authorities. Experts from the Ministry of Culture maintained it was an historic building and modern stained glass works were not suitable. The congregation and the artist countered by arguing that it was an interior that was in use by modern people and the church was an institution that had developed in step with society. The dispute was ultimately unresolved and the fate of the works was a *de facto* compromise—the Hoffmann works that were already in place were left in place, but the congregation was not allowed to install new ones in the window recesses.



Ott Lamping
So Alone and All Together
1996
Secco
Kärdla Cultural Centre
Kärdla, Rookopli 18

These two mural paintings by Ott Lamping—an art activist on Hiiumaa Island, population 8,000, and gallerist at Kärdla Cultural Centre in the island's capital—were painted in 1996, immediately after Lamping's return from studying at an art college in Vantaa, Finland. For his diploma thesis, he was allowed to execute a secco painting in the foyer of his hometown's cultural centre. The paintings appear abstract at first glance, but are actually hidden pictures concealing nude portraits.



Eva Jänes
1997 (removed in 2014)
Stained glass
St. Paul's Church
Tartu, Riia mnt 27a

The architecture of St. Paul's Church, designed by renowned Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen (1919), is a masterful example of the national-romanticist tinged Art Nouveau of the Nordic countries. After the church was built, the Estonian sculptor and St. Petersburg Academy of Arts academician Amandus Adamson was commissioned to sculpt an altar figure from Carrara marble, the idea for which was said to have the blessing of the Pope himself. The imposing altar composition, 3.5 metres high and weighing nearly 20 tonnes, was completed in 1923 and depicted Jesus with Mary Magdalene and the blind man of Jericho. The first companion symbolizes a soul yearning for release from the burden of sin and the other represents the sufferers of afflictions of the flesh.

The church burned during World War II and the marble figure melted in the intense heat. Restoration was carried out in the church during the Soviet period: the Museum of Sport was opened in one wing and the majority of the church hall became the depository of the Estonian National Museum's collections. The hall was partitioned and the congregation was allowed to use the smaller part near the entrance. The altar painting could not be mounted on the thin partition and the restoration of the sculpture was out of question, so it was decided to use an ascetic cross as the altar crucifix; it was consecrated in 1971. In 1997, Eva Jänes's stained glass works were added. The work fulfilled the function of altarpiece until 2013, when the Soviet-era partition was removed and the entire church underwent a renovation in keeping with Saarinen's original ideas. A suitable place could not be found for Jänes's work in the new interior design. It is now in the church's storage space, waiting for its chance to shine.



Enn Põldroos
1998
Secco
Estonian Artists' Association studio building
Tallinn, Hobusepea 2

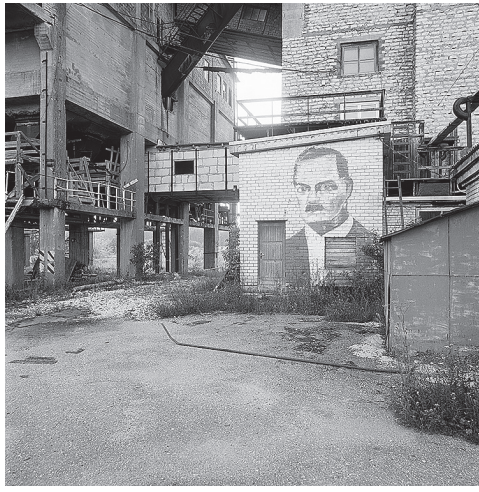
The mural painting is located in a historical metal-working building in Tallinn's Old Town, which the goldsmith Joseph Kopf ordered built in the late 19th century. Today it is home to galleries belonging to the Artists' Association and studios of jewellery artists. Põldroos's painting decorates the stairwell leading to the artists' work areas, depicting, appropriately enough, a temple to the Muses.

Põldroos's interest in working in the monumental art genre was spurred in the early 1960s by the fact that state-purchased artworks tended to be stored in warehouses after initial exhibitions, rather than remaining on public display. It appeared that art was destined for a closed circle—from studio to exhibition to vault, unable to break into the commotion of real life. This led Põldroos and other young artists to experiment in the field of public artworks, and prepared to do long night shifts in a precast concrete factory to achieve this, which resulted in the decorative images on Mustamäe apartment buildings (see p. 14–15). Since then, Põldroos has put great value on art that is constantly involved in the tumult of everyday life, and by his own admission he has tried to seize every opportunity he can to create such works. Although there is no longer a programme of state-funded art on the scale of the Soviet Union, and no local Medicis have taken its place, Põldroos has said that he believes art's *raison d'être* remains bound up in that connection with the everyday living environment. The painting pictured here is restrained in its form, but in the context of the artist's oeuvre, speaks of great respect for artist's profession.



Peeter Mudist
1999
Mural painting
Formerly Hänga Dairy production facility, now
abandoned
Torgu Municipality, Hänga Village

The man behind these paintings is Peeter Mudist, whose life as an independent artist was divided between Tallinn and Saaremaa. The artist, who was also highly regarded as an essayist, recalled painting at the dairy: "I kept on wanting to hold an exhibition there, until finally I just went and did it. I painted on the walls. It was an existential thing, not a financial or an artistic need. The question was to do it or not, because, after all, did every abandoned half-charred former dairy like that have to have an exhibition of paintings by Peeter Mudist or not? Why isn't milk being turned into butter there? Why do creatively inclined people who paint on the walls invade that space? Give people the work they need. On the other hand, that dairy is an inspiration for painters, stage directors, maybe a place where a choir could hold a mini song festival. Opening events come off particularly well. Young musicians from Laadla were invited to the opening of the cultural centre in that former dairy. Some of them looked exactly as if they had stepped out of the pictures I painted on the walls."



August Künnapu and Renee Puusepp
William Dunn
2001 (destroyed in 2015)
Mural painting
Estonian Mining Museum
Kohtla-Nõmme, Jaama 1

The mining museum complex in Kohtla-Nõmme represents and presents the industrial manmade landscape in its most authentic form. The former enrichment plant and pyramid-shaped heaps of mine waste are not the only massive architectons here; there are also building-size trucks that roar past the complex every now and again, serving the operational mine nearby.

August Künnapu—a painter trained as an architect—and architect Renee Puusepp, painted three wall murals for Kohtla-Nõmme during a 2001 workshop: Snow White, and portraits of President Arnold Rüütel and William Dunn. Dunn was a 19th-century Scottish industrialist who paved the way for the industrial mining of oil shale in Great Britain. Dunn may be considered a distant forebear of the Kohtla-Nõmme mine as well, as the town was the site of a large oil shale mine from 1937 to 2001. The year the mine closed was a gloomy one, with hundreds of locals losing their jobs. The elegant portrait of the gentleman on the wall of the enrichment plant offered a certain dignity and hope for the future. The real rebirth of the area came about in 2015, when the enrichment plant was turned into a modern museum building.



Marko Mäetamm
1992/2002
Mural painting
Woodstock Pub
Tallinn, Tatari 6

The Pegasus Café was the most popular hangout for Tallinn's cultural crowd during the Soviet era. After re-independence, it was privatised and the former interior was replaced based on the new owners' tastes. One businessman decided to turn the iconic café into a hippie-themed eatery. Inspired by Marko Mäetamm's pop-style lithography, he commissioned mural designs for all three storeys. Mäetamm realised that he would be *persona non grata* among his colleagues after executing such a wild idea, but it was hard to say no to the fee. The owner developed other priorities, the plan came to naught for the time being and the designs were shelved.

Ten years later, the same businessman contacted Mäetamm again and told him of his plans to open a pub called Woodstock at a different address. Mäetamm hunted for the old designs and executed murals based on them. Woodstock's street was at the epicentre of the April 2007 riots sparked by the relocation of a Soviet war memorial, and a number of the Mäetamm murals were so badly damaged that they could not be restored.



Valli Lember-Bogatkina

Mermaid

2006

Sgraffito

Formerly the Narva-Jõesuu Inter-Kolkhoz Sanatorium, currently the Narva-Jõesuu Spa Hotel

Narva-Jõesuu, Aia 3

Copies of Lember-Bogatkina's 1960s glass paintings (p. 88) can be seen on windows on the façade's second and third storey. In 2006, a new sgraffito was commissioned from the 85-year-old grand old lady of monumental painting to decorate the wall separating the hotel entrance and swimming pool. The image, an ode to an easy carefree life, pairs well with the sgraffito on the exterior of the building, which also depicts people on holiday and dates from 50 years earlier.

The exterior largely preserves its high modernist appearance, but the interior is comprised of a blur of styles trying to cater to the various clientele—well-to-do St. Petersburg guests and Nordic pensioners. For example, the restaurant's walls are covered with floor-to-ceiling reproductions of Edward Hopper paintings.



Concept by Tõnis Kimmel, based on historical works by Jaan Vahtra and Ado Vabbe, executed by Edgar Tedresaar

2009

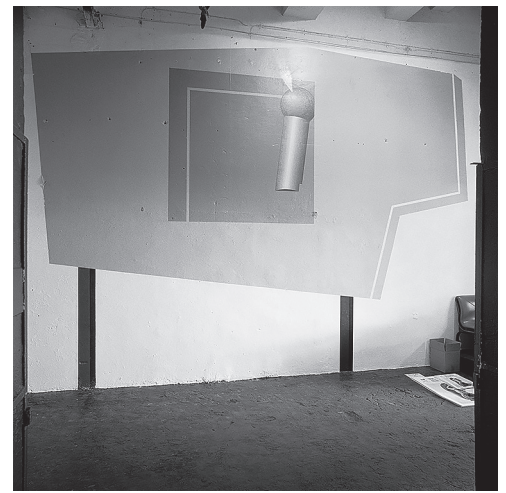
Mural painting

Apartment building

Tartu, Anne 55

Annelinn is Tartu's only integral Soviet-era district of prefabricated apartment projects, and is currently home to one-third of the city's population of 100,000. When in the mid-2000s apartment associations started renovations, the city architect proposed that the end walls of renovated buildings could be covered with supergraphics with a uniform concept. Kimmel maintained that the cultural context of the era should be borne in mind in decorating these buildings designed in the 1960s. Tartu's artists in that period were fond of 1920s Estonian Modernist works and so it seemed appropriate to garnish the outdoor areas of Annelinn with works by Jaan Vahtra and Ado Vabbe. The selected works dovetailed with the very 1960s idea of synthesis of the arts.

The southern wall of the building at Anne Street 55, seen on the photograph, uses an illustration done by one of Estonia's first avant-gardists, Ado Vabbe, for Henrik Visnapuu's poetry collection *Jumalaga, Ene!* (Farewell, Ene!, 1918). The north façade of the same building is adorned by the Futurist and poet Jaan Vahtra's *Perpendicular*, which was used as an illustration for the poet and later notorious politician Johannes Barbarus's 1924 collection of poetry, *Geomeetiline inimene* (Geometrical Man).



Kaido Ole

New model

2010 (destroyed in 2013)

Mural painting

Contemporary Art Museum of Estonia (EKKM) Tallinn, Põhja pst 35

The EKKM is an independently operated exhibition venue operating out of the former Tallinn Thermal Power Plant, and now one of the city's leading art institutions. (In the courtyard of the museum is a bookstore operated by Lugevik, the publishing house that put out this book.) According to urban legend, the museum came about as a protest against Kumu, the branch of the Art Museum of Estonia, opened in 2006, which presented itself as the national gallery as well as a contemporary art museum. Although the conflicts between the two institutions are no longer as fraught as they once were, the EKKM has not abandoned its playful attitude and continues to pursue an unconventional and bold programme somewhere in the zone between official art institutions and independent project spaces.

A good example of the EKKM's institutional manoeuvring is the story behind the mural *New Model*, painted by Kaido Ole in the ground-floor hall. The museum's mission includes the acquisition of contemporary artworks in order to display them in its permanent collection. It was therefore decided that Ole's mural should remain in place after the original exhibition. It was agreed with the artist that the work would be retained for three years, at which time EKKM would revisit the agreement and decide whether to extend the installation period or not. What actually happened was that the EKKM staff soon realised that the mural was a nuisance that got in the way of holding temporary exhibitions and had to be concealed using partitions. After three years, the work was excluded from the collection and painted over.



Kristi Kongi
Love Hurts
 2011
 Mural painting
 Former Haapsalu Lemonade Factory
 Haapsalu, Jaani 2

Kristi Kongi is a member of the younger generation of painters who made their debut in the early 2010s and has mainly drawn inspiration from the medium itself. She and her contemporaries make up a sort of bridge to the High Modernism movement of 1960s painting. Unlike her predecessors, whose art activity was limited to the canvas, Kongi has, since her first projects, taken in her whole surroundings. For instance, her 2011 work *Turbulence as a Method* chronicled the year-long process of painting, during which she covered with her signature bright colours the walls of an apartment she rented for the purpose.

The emotional associations between space and colours were also expressed by her total painting installation and performance as part of the Pigskin performance art festival in Haapsalu, where she painted over an entire club room. The title of the installation derived from a track of the same name by the Scottish hard rock band Nazareth, one of best known (and cheesiest) power ballads in history. Many of Kongi's works relate to the trauma of the recent past—only memories and photos remain of many site-specific painting installations after each exhibition or event closes.



Enn Põldroos
Scenes from the Life of Bygone Eras
 2011
 Mural paintings
 Mustla Library
 Tarvastu Municipality, small town of Mustla

Speaking directly to the public through lectures and newspaper columns, being a leader in the art scene and in society, and stepping successfully into the role of writer in the 2000s—all this has made Enn Põldroos one of the most influential Estonian artists today. Now, as an “old man”, as he describes it himself, he has withdrawn to an ancient farm in southern Estonia and opened a self-titled museum in a nearby small town. The creating of this museum, with its potential to become a unique establishment for presenting the art of the second half of the 20th century, emphasises Põldroos's sense of mission and his belief in concepts such as truth and beauty, which, as he writes in his autobiography, have been models for him just as much as the great Renaissance masters.

In his memoirs, he writes of narrative art: “The basic mantra in my heady youth was the conviction that there is nothing more terrible than art that tells stories. One of the main hallmarks of Socialist Realism was its literary quality—pictures described how happily working folk went about their business, how they coped successfully with their minor concerns. In my cultural world back then, only colours, forms, rhythms with their subtle effect on the subconscious could speak the language of art.” Põldroos goes on to ask from himself: “Have I become a betrayer of my youthful ideals? I now feel that there is much to learn from Reshetnikov [a Socialist Realist artist]. To some extent, such art involves poeticization of the quotidian. In most cases, storytelling results in a social dimension—something I have likewise avoided for a long time.”

As a gift to the renovated library in his new hometown, Põldroos painted pictures on the plastered-over windows, depicting life inside the building as it might have been in the late 19th century. The artist approached the mural paintings as a storyteller, even going so far as to bestow names on the characters: the gentleman administering a tongue-lashing on the left-hand image was christened Johannes Petersen, the local postmaster, which was considered a prestigious job back then. A strict man in temperament, Petersen is admonishing his daughter Elisa to read books instead of prettying herself for possible suitors. On the right is Doctor Saarman, an esteemed physician, a people person and music aficionado who is celebrating his birthday. The bagpipe player Mart, who has been cured by Saarman, has come to wish the doctor a happy birthday and thank him.



Design by Martin Lazarev
 2011
 Mural painting
 Apartment building
 Tallinn, Pärnu mnt 43

The logo, featuring a cross between a film reel and a fly, stands for Geriljakino (Guerilla Cinema), a pop-up cinema programme held during the Capital of Culture year in Tallinn. The organizers of Geriljakino distributed the symbol widely on stickers and posters and as stencil graffiti, but never totally let slip the mask of mystery and anonymity. The supergraphics on the wall of the building next to the legendary Kosmos Cinema in Tallinn alluded to the desire to promote synergy between mainstream and alternative cinema and urban culture. Tallinn's status as European Capital of Culture came during the years following the recession, and so it was decided early on to invest in people, not concrete. As a result, there is not much physical record of the Capital of Culture events in Tallinn. Perhaps the live events, as opposed to the artefacts, left an even deeper impression on the city's cultural life?



Design by Tartu Art College student
Heiki Arge and teacher Valentin Vaher,
executed by students from the painting
department
Estonian Cinema 100
2012
Mural painting
Apartment building
Tartu, Vallikraavi 6

This painting was a gift from Tartu Art College to the city and to Estonian cinema on the occasion of the latter's centenary, and depicts familiar Estonian characters and film stars. Although the first motion pictures were shown in what is now Estonia in the year 1897, the birth of professional cinema in Estonia is closely linked to Tartu in the first decades of the 20th century. In 1908, the first purpose-built cinema in Estonia—the Illusion Electric Theatre was opened, and in 1912, the first Estonian film was screened in the Imperial Cinema: footage shot by amateur photographer Johannes Pääsuke of barnstorming airplanes in the skies over Tartu. Pääsuke later called his photographic studio “the first Estonian cinema picture factory”.

The *belle époque* was also Tartu's golden age, when the city was the heart of the country's political and cultural life, and nostalgic traces of the era are still encountered in many places around the city. Tartu Art College, which offers a higher education in the monumental painting study area, has made a noteworthy contribution to the field in the form of murals by its students. In addition to romantic/sentimental murals, Tartu city centre is full of monuments and decorative sculptures that emphasise a longing for the city's former days. In Estonia, a dichotomy is occasionally still drawn between Tartu and non-Tartu folk: the city's monumental nature is so all-encompassing that it is either loved or not tolerated at all. Monumentalism in this context has to do with its commemorative function: spokespeople for the university town elevate memory high on a pedestal—both personal and collective.



Tõnis Saadoja
2012
Charcoal, acrylic, sandpaper
Theatre NO99
Tallinn, Sakala 3

The history of the theatre building in the city centre of Tallinn dates from 1936, when the Ministry of War of the Republic of Estonia acquired a vacant lot with the aim of building a multifunctional public building with an officers' casino, war ministry offices, banquet hall and official quarters for the war minister and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Construction started just before World War II according to a design by architect Edgar Johan Kuusik. Construction was halted when fighting began and the edifice was finally completed in 1947, when it was known as the Culture Centre of the Working People. Because of its ideological function, the building was lavishly decorated with Soviet symbols. The ceiling of the second-floor vestibule was designed with the intention of including a ceiling painting, which was not however executed at that time.

After Estonia restored independence, the Ministry of Defence moved into one wing and in 2004, Theatre NO99 took up residence in the other wing. The company is known for its radical theatrical style, and for stage and visual arts projects with a strong social message. One of the company's main aims is to initiate creative projects that address and explore developments in the public sphere. For example, it held a convention for a fictitious political party, built a straw theatre on an abandoned bastion in Tallinn to enliven the urban space, and commissioned this ceiling painting to spur discussion about public art.

The basis for the ceiling painting is a photograph of a forest taken by the artist. This double exposure—first photo, then ceiling painting—suggests the metaphor of a spyglass that either shrinks or enlarges the object depending on which way it is pointed. Saadoja's painting brings theatre-goers closer to a sublime experience of a forest—the background art becomes the foreground—while the vestibule and the whole of the theatre experience becomes lesser, secondary, even remote compared to nature. This simple, yet mysterious image invites a sense of participation as well as alienation.

The sketch for the painting was done in charcoal, by tracing. It then took the artist seven months to paint over the charcoal drawing with acrylic paints. Finally, the artist went over the entire picture with sandpaper, adding the impression of spherical movement.

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NOTES ON SPACE
Monumental Painting in Estonia 1947–2012

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