

## Latvia's Next-gen Graphic Artists

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Conception of graphic art, is widely increased in nowadays, because of persistent acquire of new ideas and art practices, which is key feature of modern art. As a result, variety of graphic art grew heavily—constantly acquiring new aspects and experimenting with new materials, but also not forgetting about classic techniques of graphic art. That is why Latvia's contemporary art is rich with outstanding graphics artists, which is masters of their profession. But time goes and everything sees it's end, and on Latvia's art horizon start to appear new faces and new talents of Latvia's graphics art, which already had their opportunity to demonstrate highest level of their mastery and creativity, not only in Latvia, but also on international level. Living in a rhythm of modern fast-paced technology and innovation era, Latvia's graphic artists, still say "Yes!", to classic techniques of graphic art—linocutting, lithography and drypointing. However, they are open-minded persons and like to experiment with new techniques (for example—digiprint), or if it is suitable for their idea—combine them, to reach their goal. Aim of this paper is to get acquainted with Latvia's next-gen graphic artists, their ideas and views, as well with results of their creative, acquiring brief review of Latvia's graphic trends in general. As a result reader will become familiar not only with Latvia's domestic artists and their creativity, but also will get general review of the current trends in the world of graphic art, which is not only classic, but also very innovative, regarding of new materials and techniques.

**Keywords:** graphic, graphic's techniques, Latvia's modern art, graphic artists

### Latvia's Graphic Art in Nowadays

Graphic art is very specific and interesting form of art, with many definitions, for example: "*Graphic art is variation of fine art, which is summarized end product, consisting elements of drawing and printed image*"<sup>1</sup>. Other graphics definition were offered during graphics exhibition "*Vielmaiņa*" (or "*Metabolism*")<sup>2</sup>, based on Vienna definition (adopted in 1960-ties) defines graphic art as "*piece of art, by artists "touch" separated from cliché, signed and implemented in certain amount*"<sup>3</sup>. There are several techniques for graphic art, for example, linocutting, lithography, xylography, etching etc.—these techniques often is considered as a classic elements, and therefore, base components of graphic art, which is also major direction in Latvia's art. There are plenty of

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<sup>1</sup> *Виды изобразительного искусства* [http://art-zs.ru/?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=73:2](http://art-zs.ru/?option=com_content&view=article&id=73:2) [20.03.2016]

<sup>2</sup> Grafikas izstāde "*Vielmaiņa*" bija skatāma Latvijas Nacionālā mākslas muzeja Baltajā zālē no 2009. gada 1. oktobra līdz 8. novembrim.

<sup>3</sup> Jankovska, Z (2010). *Grafikas attiecības ar laiktelpu Latvijā*. <http://www.studija.lv/?parent=3315> [22.03.2016]

examples to prove this, not only through the artistic activities from different Latvia's graphic art generations, but also activities as a community—establishing “*Grafikas biedrība*” (or “Graphic Association”) in 1994, but later in 2010 founding “*Oforta gilde*” (or “Etching Guild”).

However, constantly increasing diversity of possible presentation ways and options, gradually affect natural evolution of graphics as an art genre in Latvia. Trying to be modern and cope with pace of time, especially Latvia's New generation's graphic artists, are widely influenced by new vibes of modern art. There are several examples that prove this modern tendency—like graphic exhibitions “*Metabolism*”, “*Grafika—S*” (or “Graphic—S”)<sup>4</sup>, 16th triennial of Tallinn's graphic art exhibition “*Literacy—Illiteracy*”<sup>5</sup>. Many presented graphics artworks, were created in a big variety of techniques, not only classic, but also in a new ones, for example animations, digiprints, installations and video-installations.

Presented artworks differ from traditional perception of graphic art, which is obvious evidence that classic trends of graphic art evolves and Latvia's graphics artists are quite open minded towards modern vibes. As a result, new elements of graphic art are likely to appear, but at the same time traditional elements of graphic art—lines, dots and squares also are quite common. Simultaneously, usage of multimedia elements constantly increase trying to offer new experience to the viewer.

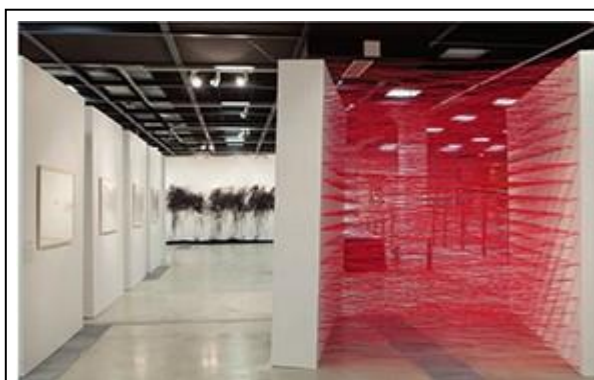
Although, there is no general opinion about it—does it is still good and appropriate for nowadays artists art performances, or it is little bit too much. For example, artist Katrina Sauškina thinks, that “*there should not be limits for the artists, to present his masterpiece*”, which basically means, that artists is free to run any technique, material or even mix genres, if it is suitable for his idea<sup>6</sup>. At the same time scientist of art, Santa Mičule points: “*Often artworks that is announced as a graphics have only associative link to its origins, which can confuse the viewer*”<sup>7</sup>. But opinion of critique of art, Zanda Jankovska, is short: “*Among the techniques of graphics prints on the podium also lies examples of digiprints*”, which is loaded with full disagreement to what has been witnessed. Great examples of modern graphic art, which can visualize given opinions, were presented on exhibition “*Graphic—S*” (2014), with lots of artworks and graphics installations made by Latvia's top artista. (Picture 1, picture 2).

<sup>4</sup> Žurnāls “Studija”, nr.2, 2014.g. <http://www.studija.lv/?parent=7158> [22.03.2016]

<sup>5</sup> Žurnāls “Studija”, nr.2, 2014.g. <http://www.studija.lv/?parent=7158> [22.03.2016]

<sup>6</sup> Petraškevičs, J. 2009. Izstādes katalogs “*Vielmaiņa: Laikmetīgā grafika*”, izdevniecība “Neputns”, 81.lpp.

<sup>7</sup> Žurnāls “Studija”, nr.2, 2014.g. <http://www.studija.lv/?parent=7158> [22.03.2016]



Picture 1. View from exhibition “Graphic—S”. Publicity photo. (2014)



Picture 2. D. Boitmane. “Metamorphosis of sounds”. Installation. Publicity photo. (2010)

Shown examples aren't typical presentation of graphic art, but, they were exhibited in exhibition, dedicated to graphics, therefore, in some ways, it is accepted as graphic art. But such acceptance doesn't mean that original or classic techniques soon will be replaced by its modern counterparts, it just shows overall situation of modern graphics orientations (or suspected orientations).

Classic techniques of graphics continue to evolve, constantly absorbing modern vibes, with no sign of decline. Recent exhibition “*Strong water. Etching art guild—5*” and art symposiums in Daugavpils Marc Rothko Art Center is a good example to this trend<sup>8</sup>. The previously mentioned exhibitions, such as “*Metabolism*” and “*Graphic—S*” also are good example. These exhibitions gathered many Latvia's artists from New and Old graphic arts generations, presenting interesting masterpieces made in big variety of techniques, like—linocutting, lithography, xylography (or woodcutting), etch, drypointing etc.

However Latvia's graphic arts classic techniques, shouldn't be considered, only as a local product, and are well known beyond countries borders. For example at Bavaria's city of Bad Steben graphic museum, were held exhibition “*Grafik aus Lettland*” (2012)<sup>9</sup> (or “Graphic from Latvia”), representing collographies of Paulis Liepa, mix graphics techniques of Juris Petraškevičs, linocuttings of Janis Murovskis etc. Similar activity of Latvia's representatives were seen on “*XI Baltic sea countries graphic art biennale ‘Kaliningrad—Königsberg’*” (2013)<sup>10</sup>. Where several artists from Latvia's delegation receiver all around positives reviews, medals and awards—Latvia's exhibition for good curator work received special award, artist Līva Rūtmāne won “Grand Prix”, but Reinis Eglītis achieved medal for most original solution in work techniques<sup>11</sup>. Participation of other Latvia's graphics artist—Guntars Sietiņš in Cologne's “*Art. Fair. 2014*” (2014)<sup>12</sup> are also worth of mention, as well as several Latvia's artists' works of art, created in mecoink technique, which was included in prestige

<sup>8</sup> *IV Starptautiskā Latgales grafikas simpozija izstāde—nauda.*

<http://www.rothkocenter.com/ekspozicija/iv-starptautiska-latgales-grafikas-simpozija-izstade-nauda> [21.03.2016]

<sup>9</sup> Vanaga, A 2012. *Latvijas grafika Vācijā.* <http://www.artterritory.com/print.php?lang=lv&id=1662&print=1> [19.03.2016]

<sup>10</sup> *Latvia Receives Several Awards at the Baltic States Biennial of Graphic Arts “Kaliningrad—Königsberg”.*

<http://www.lma.lv/eng/new-2/index.php?parent=757> [27.03.2016]

<sup>11</sup> *Latvijas māksliniekiem vairāki apbalvojumi biennālē Kaļiņingradā.*

<http://www.delfi.lv/kultura/news/art/latvijas-maksliniekiem-vairaki-apbalvojumi-biennale-kaliningrada.d?id=43657967> [27.03.2016]

<sup>12</sup> Kaže-Zumberga, R 2014. *Latvieši ārvalstīs. Notikumu apskats.*

[http://www.artterritory.com/lv/zinas/4210-latviesi\\_arvalstis\\_notikumu\\_apskats/](http://www.artterritory.com/lv/zinas/4210-latviesi_arvalstis_notikumu_apskats/) [28.03.2016]

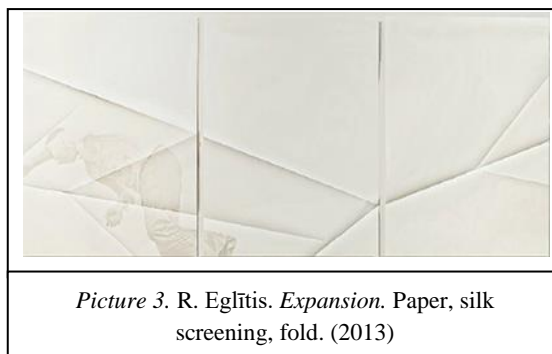
exhibition “*Time of the Mezzotint: Colours beyond the stars*” of Tokyo Jozo Hamaguchi (1909-2000) museum of art.<sup>13</sup>

Given examples of successful representation of Latvia's graphics art, were all about their classic vibes and techniques, which demonstrates that classic graphic art is here to stay, and are quite adaptive to today's tendencies. Despite new techniques and ways of presentation (graphic installation digiprint and video installation) classic elements of graphic art, are still popular, refusing to become part of old-school art. It has a strong, solid background, which will not be abandoned despite all modern and (in some ways) mainstream art presentation tendencies.

### Latvia's New Generation of Graphics Artists

Previously mentioned highly awarded activities of Latvia's graphics artists weren't achieved and represented only by members of older generation, but also by new ones, and despite their new age, they also can greatly contribute to development of classic graphic art's techniques. Many of them have participated in the above mentioned exhibitions and art events here in Latvian or abroad, exhibiting their works next to the old generation graphics artists.

Many of them, just recently graduated their universities and art colleges and are very eager to prove themselves with many fresh ideas and concepts. I would like to mention such artists as Ieva Nagliņa, Mārīte Elksne, Lāsma Pujāte, Maija Mackus, Liene Bondare, Ausma Šmite, Elīna Alka, Reinis Eglītis, Paulis Liepa and many other talented individuals. (*Picture 3*)



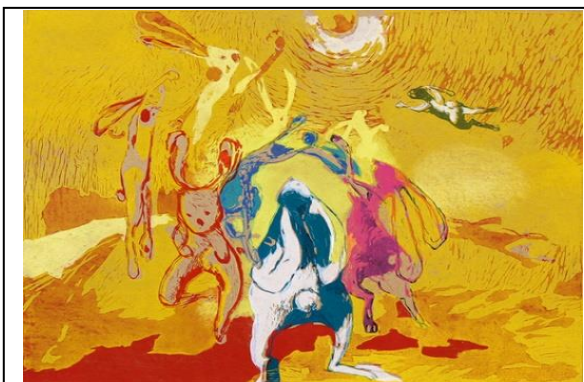
*Picture 3. R. Eglītis. Expansion. Paper, silk screening, fold. (2013)*

Classic techniques (linocutting, lithography, drypointing or collagraphy) and materials are quite popular and widely recognized among Latvia's new generation artists, as they like to experiment with known techniques, as well mix them to acquire something new. (*Picture 4*).

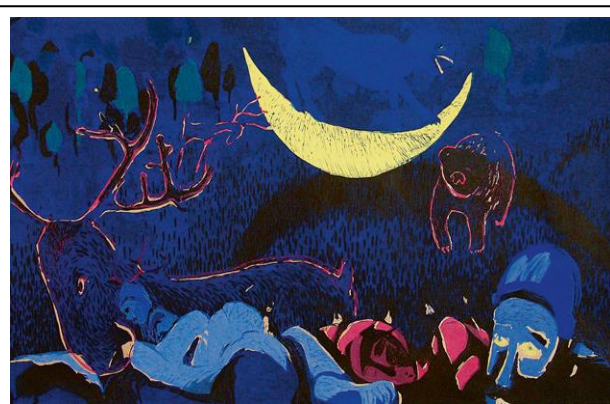
<sup>13</sup> Kaže-Zumberga, R 2014. *Latvieši ārvalstīs. Notikumu apskats*.  
[http://www.artterritory.com/lv/zinas/4210-latviesi\\_arvalstis\\_notikumu\\_apskats/](http://www.artterritory.com/lv/zinas/4210-latviesi_arvalstis_notikumu_apskats/) [28.03.2016]



Picture 4. M. Elksne. Artwork form cycle “*Today's weather will be sunny*” Linocutting. (2006-2009)



Picture 5. M. Mackus. *Sporiņš*. Linocutting. (2010)



Picture 6. M. Mackus. *Sporiņš*. Linocutting. (2010)

But some artists of Latvia's graphics new generation may be highlighted especially, like **Mārīte Elksne** (1979)—graduate of Latvia's Art Academy\* (Master degree (2006), bachelor degree (2004) in visual and plastic arts—graphics). Participated in “*International Baltic sea countries graphics biennale ‘Kaliningrad—Konigsberg’*” (Russia, 2008), Baltic countries modern graphics exhibition “*Power and Man*” (United Kingdom, 2006) and in many other artistic activities on local and international level<sup>14</sup>. Her colorful artworks series, made in linocutting technique, “*Today's weather will be sunny*”, gain special praise on exhibition “*Grafik aus Lettland*” at Bad Steben graphic museum (Germany, 2012)<sup>15</sup>.

\* hereinafter LMA

<sup>14</sup> Petraškevičs, J. 2009. Izstādes katalogs “*Vielmaiņa: Laikmetīgā grafika*”, izdevniecība “Neputns”, 68.lpp.

<sup>15</sup> Vanaga, A. 2012. *Latvijas grafika Vācijā*. <http://www.artterritory.com/print.php?lang=lv&id=1662&print=1> [19.03.2016]



General artworks presentation idea is to give impressions or to recall everyone's childhood memories and all that is related to it. At the same level this artworks contain several layers of information, which at some point may looks very symbolic or very philosophical, because it constantly reminds something very warm and cuddly, but also something that have to be forgotten and should remain in a past, and chosen graphics techniques strengthens these impressions. Colors are light and warm; artwork is completed with high level of accuracy and precise. (See *Picture 4*).

**Maija Mackus**—LMA graduate (Master degree (2009), bachelor degree (2003) in visual and plastic arts—graphics, studied at University of Castilla-La Mancha (Spain, 2008), participated in several group exhibitions in Latvia and abroad, representing Latvia's graphic artists on exhibition "*Signs of the times*" (Belarus, 2008) and in Erasmus student exhibition "*No teremos permission*" (Spain, 2008), stand out element in Macka's style is plasticity of presented characters, (*Picture 5*, *picture 6*), how they collaborate and give true impression liveliness and sense of movement, as well as the vivid use of color and detailed workmanship.



*Picture 7. A. Šmite. From artworks series Heart of steel. Lithography. (2011)*



*Picture 8. E. Alka. Untitled. Coloured lithograph. (2012)*

**Ausma Šmite**—LMA graduate (Master degree (2011), bachelor degree (2009), studied in France as well (2007), Won a special award for curator work at "*XI International Baltic sea countries graphics biennale 'Kaliningrad—Konigsberg'*" (Russia, 2013), also were participant of art residency in Belgium (2016) and Finland (2013), Participated in several group and solo exhibitions in Latvia and abroad (United Kingdom, Germany and Japan), for example triennial in Poland (2011) and biennale in Lithuania (2014) and Canada (2011) etc. Since 2013 is member of "Graphics camera" union<sup>16</sup>.

The artist mostly works in a lithography technique, forming very fine, but also unrealistic characters, with lot of details and high level of precise. (*Picture 7*).

**Elīna Alka**—LMA graduate (Master degree (2012), bachelor degree (2010), in visual and plastic arts—graphics), participated in several exhibitions in Latvia and abroad, for example applied hers works of art for

<sup>16</sup> Ausma Šmite. <http://www.ausmasmite.com/curriculum-vitae/> [01.04.2016]

exhibition “*Migration*” at Latvia’s Republic Permanent Representation office to the European Union in Brussels<sup>17</sup>.

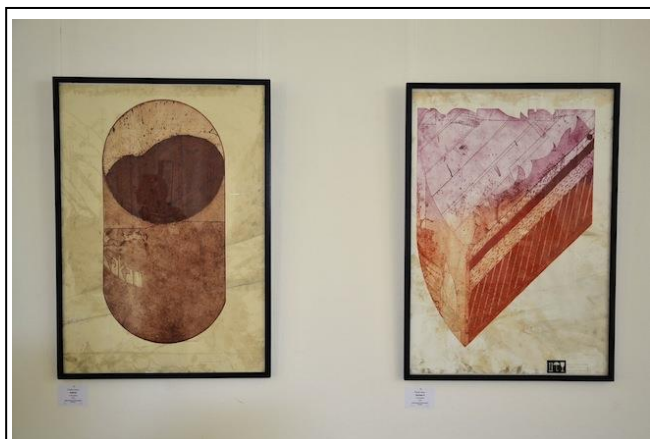
Artists attracts attention with unusual approach in lithography making. All artworks looks light, soft and smooth. Landscapes are popular theme in artist’s creation list, and is produced quite often, which mostly looks like gentle watercolor paintings. (*Picture 7*).

Quite possible, that brightest representative of Latvia’s new generation graphic artist is **Paulis Liepa** (1978), which is especially worth to mention. Also LMA’s graphic department graduate. In addition, possible oldest from already mentioned artists.

During his artists carrier, he made several personal exhibitions in Latvia, Estonia, Russia (during *X International Baltic sea countries graphics biennale “Kaliningrad—Königsberg”* (2011), as well participated in to the graphic arts related international events, such as—International graphic triennial in Krakow (Poland, 2015, 2012, 2006), 1st Kaunas International Printmaking Biennial “*Culture Line*” (Lithuania, 2015), as well as many other major arts event across Europe (Germany, United Kingdom, Estonia) and outside its borders (Canada)<sup>18</sup>.



Picture 9. P. Liepa. *Pasta*. Collography, Artwork from exhibitions “Still life” (2012).



Picture 10. P. Liepa. *Tomatesuppe, Kuchen II*. Collography. Artworks from exhibition of Latvia’s graphics in Graphics museum of Bad Steben. (2012)

Artworks that greatly attracted attention were collographies of P. Liepa (*Picture 9, picture 10*), which, may be considered, as major technique, he works with. P. Liepa, argues that his working materials in this techniques are so simple and typical, that “all could be found on a shelves of simplest household store”<sup>19</sup>. In some sort, it is true, because P. Liepa artworks have certain qualities of roughness, but at the same time, these artworks inspire. As well, giving good representation of how much cardboard material can differ, allowing to create something very small and accurate.

<sup>17</sup> Žurnāls “Studija”, nr.6, 2012.g. <http://www.studija.lv/?parent=7549> [29.03.2016]

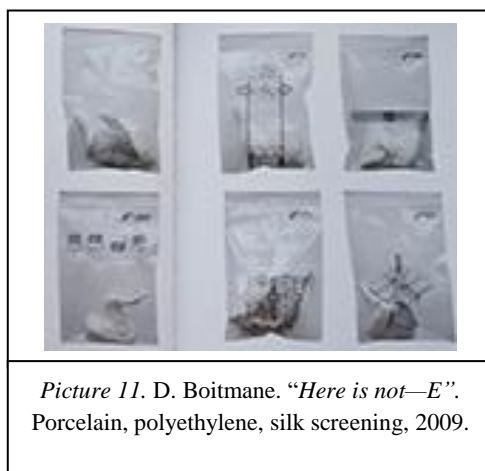
<sup>18</sup> *Paulis Liepa*. <http://www.makslaxogalerija.lv/eng/artists/paulis-liepa/cv-120/> [03.04.2016]

<sup>19</sup> Iltner, A. 2012. *Lēzenais grafikas process*.

[http://artterritory.com/lv/teksti/intervijas/1711-lezenais\\_grafikas\\_process/](http://artterritory.com/lv/teksti/intervijas/1711-lezenais_grafikas_process/) [04.04.2016]

However, if we increase artwork presentation techniques, which rarely is considered as classic techniques, a number of artists that is worth to mention increase significantly, because from this point of view, graphics artwork can be almost anything.

In such case Diāna Boitmane and her philosophical masterpiece “Here is not—E” (*Picture 11*) is worth to mention, because in this artwork artist combined with graphics seemingly incompatible things—installation, formation and silkscreen (as representation of graphics). There is very little information about this artist and hers further creative activities, but general idea that she presents is very innovative and fresh.



*Picture 11. D. Boitmane. “Here is not—E”.  
Porcelain, polyethylene, silk screening, 2009.*

Along with D. Boitmane, there are several other non-classic graphic artists who stands out of the crowd—Lita Liepa, Eva Lilendelfe-Meldere, Līca Rūtmane etc., all of them participated in several graphics exhibitions offering very interesting and atypical graphics presentations (video installation, photography’s and animations).

## Conclusion

There are several key characteristics that is related to nowadays Latvia’s graphic art. First of all, there is need to make it clear—classic graphic and its techniques is here to stay, with stable background and active artists. Despite modern vibes graphics techniques is still interesting to modern artists, which continue to develop its core elements. Along with several representatives, some aspects of classic graphic art, are about to change or modify (which is believed to be temporary), but the essence will remain. Brightest artists of Latvia’s graphic arts, continue to work with original techniques of graphics, despite modern trends and recently acquired ways of presentation. Many Latvia’s graphic artists is well known beyond countries borders on international stage, which is good sign that classic graphics in Latvia have enough space for grow, and still have a lot to offer and a lot to discover.

Yes, there is new ways of art presentation and even more is yet to come, which significantly increased definition of graphic art. However, these new elements should not be considered as something bad for modern graphics in general, just because, many of us refuse to call it as a classical elements of graphic art. Nothing stays still, and graphic art constantly adapts to modern ways of presentation, absorbing suitable elements—for artists it is new ways, to present their ideas to publicity, but for viewers it may become a new point of view.



Artists, which creative activities were examined is only small fraction of Latvia's graphic art, which is good proof, that graphic art in Latvia is on rising tide and even more new and highly talented individuals will follow, brave enough to implement new techniques, themes and ideas.

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