The Art of Identity and Memory: Toward a Cultural History of the Two World Wars in Lithuania, eds. Giedrė Jankevičiūtė and Rasutė Žukienė, Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016. 326 p. ISBN 978-161-8115-07-2

This volume is a collective study in the field of art history, written by a group of Lithuanian scholars who work on the history of architecture, music, the visual arts and literature. Although they employ extensively a ‘fact-based’ approach (XI), the volume has a clear conceptual focus, which holds together a collection of different and otherwise eclectic essays. Each of them uses a variety of methodologies, ranging from cultural studies and art history, to cinema and memory studies.

Thematically, the book explores the connection between war and art, by focusing on ‘the link between personal and social experience’ (X). The authors hold the view that both world wars had a considerable impact not only on the political and social landscapes, but also on the artistic landscape of Europe. By connecting the social and cultural processes of both wars, they try to contribute to the familiar thesis of the violent 20th century. The value of this study is that it sheds a light on a geographical area of Europe, in particular Lithuania, which is rarely studied in the West in First and Second World War studies. Moreover, the authors suggest that the exploration of the region, not only as a site of genocide, traumatic memory and rapidly shifting geopolitics, but also as a place with an intense cross-cultural life, is long overdue. They imply that both wars impacted on the local culture in a complex variety of ways, which could be studied by avoiding the ‘established approach based on binary oppositions’ (XI). Overall, they succeed in this, since most of the essays provide plenty of innovative insights, and tackle theoretical questions, in the fields of art history, literature and memory studies. The book is short, however, on delivering a comparative angle, despite its fragmentary efforts to compare cultural processes in Lithuania, Latvia, Russia and Ukraine. The editors’ claim that during the First World War, Latvia was ‘a field of battle with little actual military action’ (XIV) is surprisingly misleading.

One of the most difficult challenges in producing such thematic volumes is making the different chapters speak to each other. The editors have done a remarkable job in streamlining their styles and language. However, Western readers might have a difficult time recognising the names of local administrative units, people and places. The volume is not generous in providing biographical and geographical explanations. Nevertheless, this does not reduce its creativity and thoughtfulness.

In the first chapter, Laimonas Briedis follows the German art critic and journalist Paul Fechter, who was posted to Vilnius with the German army in 1916–1918. He suggests that this was one of the most creative periods in his artistic life. Working for a local German military newspaper, Fechter created a series of essays called ‘Wanderstunded im Wilna’. Through the fictional character of Paul Monty, he offered his readers (mostly German soldiers) a whole philosophy of *flânerie*: an Expressionist way of experiencing the city through walking. The chapter is strong on Fechter’s artistic background, but weak on analysing the contents of his travel accounts. One is left wondering to what extent Fechter’s emotions during his walks were shaped by his personal fascination with the city, and to what extent they were reflections of the cultural stereotypes held by German soldiers about the exotic East. But the essay is excellent at delivering the message that the war experience in the East influenced the artistic mind of Fechter and other German artists.

In Chapter Two, Laima Laučkaitė-Surgailienė traces artistic images of Vilnius’ Jews created by German army servicemen during the First World War. She documents impressively a variety of paintings and drawings based on their everyday life. Their artistic representations ranged from repulsion and ugliness to veneration and admiration, especially of the religious rites. She points out that German colonialism helped to shape the negative image, and that such a discourse was dominant. Yet she shows convincingly how some German soldiers were able to create highly positive works of art depicting Vilnius’ Jews. Somewhat disappointingly, the author does not offer any broader conclusions on the continuity or discontinuity of these images, except for a brief note that ‘in the interwar period this discourse had a great impact on the Jewish art of Vilnius’ (52).

One of the most interesting and thought-provoking chapters is by Agnė Narušytė (Chapter Three). She analyses several collections of photographs taken by the Lithuanian photographer Kęstutis Grigaliūnas, who collected images of various people repressed by the NKVD during the Second World War. She shows how prewar photographs of civilians incriminated them in the hands of Soviet investigators. People seen dressed in various uniforms of non-Soviet political organisations (such as the Riflemen) were often charged on the basis of these photographs. Narušytė questions her own (and our) view of these photographs, suggesting that, as viewers of them, we also become consumers of violence, even if for the purpose of compassion. But she also notes that the work of Grigaliūnas is of great value, because it ‘acknowledges memory and serves as a chilling warning for the future’.

Giedrė Jankevičiūtė (in Chapter Four) explores the art produced in Lithuania during the Second World War ‘as a narrative of everyday life’. The focus on everyday life is chosen in order to challenge the dominant narrative of traumatic memory and suffering. But her analysis shows that

it is almost impossible to avoid the dominant narrative, because the war permeated artists' work, even when they focused on non-violent aspects of life. She is very sharp in showing that ethnic Lithuanian artists were privileged during the Nazi occupation compared to Jewish and Polish artists, who were completely excluded from public life. She also notes perceptively that war-time artists tended to document their everyday reality, rather than interpret it imaginatively. They often chose irony (Kasiulis) and escapism (Kairiūkštis) to create a distance from the gruesome life during the war. But she also acknowledges artists who openly confronted violence and killing in their work (Belcova, Mikšys, Bak). This chapter also stands out for its attempt to look at the artistic work produced not only by Lithuanians, but also by Poles and Jews.

Chapter Five by Rasa Žukienė on the activity of exiled 'Baltic artists in Germany in 1945–1950' is a misnomer, since she analyses mostly the artistic work of Lithuanian Displaced Persons. She shows convincingly how the art scene among Lithuanian DPs was dominated by prewar styles of folklore and ethnic culture. There were some dissenters, like Julius Greimas, but they were in the minority. Žukienė also argues that most of this art was highly political, because the DPs tried desperately to justify their status as political refugees, and to show themselves as trustworthy recipients of the Allies' help. She focuses on the history of Freiburg School of Arts and Crafts, established in Germany in 1946, showing how much it depended on the goodwill of French officials. Painting portraits of them was one of the strategies that ensured the school's survival. She concludes that, after emigrating to the USA, most of these artists 'could not integrate ... into the new international art medium' (173). Their work remained poorly understood in the context of their new home country.

In Chapter Six, Rasa Antanavičiūtė tries to answer the question, why is there no public memory of the Great War in Lithuania? She focuses on state efforts at memorialisation, assuming that it is the state, not society, that forms the dominant public memory. Her conclusion is that the memory of the First World War 'does not fit into the heroic national grand narrative'. It is a thoughtful overview of the uneven process of the commemoration and forgetting of the First World War during the interwar, Soviet and post-Soviet periods. However, it does not reflect on the latest research on the public First World War memory in Lithuania, which shows that, alongside state efforts, some local groups have also tried to commemorate the war. The chapter would have benefited from a discussion of war veteran societies in interwar Lithuania, and a more critical questioning of the concept of the 'heroic national grand narrative'.

The coherent thematic structure of the volume is interrupted somewhat in Chapter Seven by Natalija Arlauskaitė. Surprisingly, it does not deal with Lithuania, but is devoted to an analysis of the Russian film 'Blockade' (2006), about the siege of Leningrad. The author takes on a set of largely

theoretical questions on various ways of representing the Holocaust and other traumatic events in cinema. The conclusion that the film 'remains within the limits of the victory myth' of the USSR barely connects with the thematic concerns of the whole volume. However, her contribution may be valuable to film critics who are interested in various forms of post-traumatic representations in film.

In Chapter Eight, Lara Lempertienė explores post-Holocaust narratives of the memory of Jewish Vilnius. One of her most interesting conclusions is that the narrative of the 'Jerusalem of Lithuania' that had existed since the 18th century became dominant only as late as the 1920s and 1930s. She focuses on various memorial books about Vilnius written after the First World War, and identifies two main memory narratives: one that emerged during and in the aftermath of the First World War (it greatly mythologised Jewish cultural and community life in the city), and one that formed in the wake of the Holocaust, and presented Vilnius as the site of a catastrophe. After the Second World War, they both merged with each other, and became 'the foundation for a much broader modern multilingual literature' (255).

The last chapter, by Rūta Stankevičiūtė, is an innovative analysis of the war-inspired musical culture. She compares two musical works, one by the emigre composer Vytautas Bacevičius and one by the Soviet-Lithuanian composer Eduardas Balsys. The author shows how their public reception, in spite of their artistic value, was shaped by postwar politics. Thus, Bacevičius never heard his piece performed, and became a victim of McCarthyism in the USA. Meanwhile, Balsys' work was popular in Soviet Lithuania and the Soviet bloc. However, it was dropped from concert repertoires after 1990, when it became associated with Soviet-style peace propaganda.

In conclusion, the volume is undoubtedly a fresh and welcome addition to the cultural history of both world wars in the East. It is commendable because it transgresses its own cultural thematic concerns, by addressing major questions pertaining to the history of the First and the Second World War, the nature of occupying regimes, the politics of resistance, collaboration and the traumatic memory. It is a very rare study, written by local researchers who present a set of little-known sources and materials on both world wars to Western audiences. Despite some minor thematic inconsistencies, it paints an impressively complex picture of a small East European country trapped by war. The volume should be of great interest to specialists working on social and cultural histories of world wars, art history, literary studies, memory and film studies in Eastern Europe.

Tomas Balkelis
Lithuanian Institute of History