

*Strand 1. The Art Nouveau Movement and National Identities (Art, Society and Thought)*

## Latvian Identity in Art Nouveau Architecture

Jānis Krastiņš

### **Abstract**

Among the variety of Art Nouveau formal currents, National Romanticism was one of the first implementations of the idea of national identity. In Latvia, the ideological basis of National Romanticism was formed by publications of writer Jānis Asars, painter Janis Rozentāls, architect Eižens Laube and others. National Romanticism flourished in architecture from 1905 to 1911 under the influence of Finnish architecture. The article explores the heritage of this style in Riga, Liepāja and other places of Latvia and creative legacy of most prominent Latvian as well as local German-Baltic architects.

Keywords: Early 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture in Latvia, Art Nouveau, National Romanticism

### THE ESSENCE OF ART NOUVEAU AND IDEA OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Art Nouveau came with a fundamentally new creative method in architecture. Contemporaries already emphasized also compliance with local conditions as the main quality necessary for new, modern art: “if we have an architect, then let him not build buildings in imitation of the ancient Greek, Gothic and Rococo styles ... We will not want to plant south palm trees in our north, and we will not expect orange fruit from our apple trees. But let him build us houses in a modern spirit, with forms and decorations that reflect our time and its demands”<sup>1</sup>. The author of the article, Latvian actor and director Pēteris Ozoliņš (1864–1938), who published his writings under the pseudonym Vidrižu Pēteris, also paid attention to the issue of the nation’s national identity. Mentioning the proposed new building of the Latvian ethnographic museum, he pointed out the need to “build a house that we could leave to our descendants as a characteristic monument of the nation’s modern individuality”<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> W-s (Vidrižu Pēteris). “Vēl kaut kas par moderno mākslu”, *Baltijas Vēstnesis*, 1900, 10. febr. (“Something else about modern art”, *Baltic Herald*).

<sup>2</sup> W-s. “Vēl kaut kas ...”.

The rise of Art Nouveau in late 19th and early 20th century coincided with the Latvians' second national awakening, which was also marked by a comprehensive flourishing of Latvian culture. An attempt to identify the Latvian cultural heritage was the Ethnographic exhibition held in Riga in 1896. Before it, since 1894, several expeditions were organized for the research and documentation of the vernacular architecture. The painter Janis Rozentāls (1866–1916), the architect Konstantīns Pēkšēns (1859–1928) and the architecture student Aleksandrs Vanags (1873–1919) were active participants. However, it took some time until the ideas of “Latvianness” began to be reflected in built environment. They were realized in National Romanticism – the formal trend of Art Nouveau, the name of which was actually created by contemporaries and which is generally accepted today.

In Art Nouveau architecture, especially in its earlier stage of development, building facades were often lavishly decorated, but ornaments do not determine the essence of this style. The starting point of the architecture became the functionally convenient layout and the use of appropriate building materials and structural methods, from which the building's shape derives. It was aptly described by the literary critic and publicist Jānis Asars (1877–1908) in 1904: “the building should not be constructed from the outside in, as it was done in the past, when only the imposing facade was taken care of, ... but it must be constructed from the inside out, the interior rooms must be completely useful and beautiful, and then the exterior of the building must be adapted to their layout.”<sup>3</sup>. At the same time, J. Asars emphasized: “Latvians need their own deeper artistic life, it is an undeniable fact ... especially recently, when the self-confidence of Latvians has grown”<sup>4</sup>.

## INFLUENCE OF FINLAND AND THE QUESTION OF NATIONAL STYLE

In early 20th century, the capital of Finland, Helsinki, was quite noticeable of its innovative architecture. It was not unfamiliar to many Latvian architects either. Bernhard Bielenstein (1877–1959), a German-Baltic architect from Riga, reported on his impressions at the Riga Architects' Society after visiting Helsinki: “In Helsinki, a series of stately, peculiar residential buildings and other structures have emerged; their convincing use of building materials and purposefulness of style create a bright, picturesque impression. Modern buildings are characterized by rough plastered surfaces, rough-hewn granite, vigorous fenestration and small dimensions of entrance doors. Particularly interesting are corner solutions, as well as roofs and turrets”<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Jānis ASARS. “Mākslas amatniecība”, *Jāņa Asara kopoti raksti : 1. sēj., 3. burtn.* Rīga: A. Raņņa grāmatu apgādība, 1910, p. 3–39: 26. (“Art Crafts”).

<sup>4</sup> J. ASARS. “Mākslas amatniecība”, p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> Latvian State Historical Archives (LSHA), Fund 2748, Description 1, Case 8, p. 79.

At that time, both Finland and Latvia had relatively similar economic, socio-political and other conditions. Both lands were under the rule of the Russian Empire – the entire territory of Latvia since 1795, and Finland – since 1809. National element in the general atmosphere of the local cultural life began to gain more and more importance precisely with the rise of Art Nouveau. True, already then and especially in later periods, the issue of national style was the subject of many discussions. The spectrum of theoretical views spreads from attempts to precisely define such a style to its complete denial. For example, the preface to a series of photo albums on Finnish architecture published in 1905 states: “there cannot be talk about any Finnish national style, because it, like a specific national style in general, has almost no prerequisites”<sup>6</sup>. Similar statements have also been made in Latvia, especially in the interwar period, when dozens of articles on the issue of national style can be found in periodicals: “in all Latvian construction so far, nothing can be strictly scientifically called Latvian style”<sup>7</sup>.

Contacts between Latvia and Finland were quite extensive and diverse. In 1904, architecture students Eižens Laube (1880–1967) and A. Vanags visited Helsinki. Finnish architects quite actively participated in various architectural design competitions for buildings in Riga. In 1912, Eliel Saarinen (1873–1950) won the design competition of the Riga Craftsmen’s Association house. The building has not been built, but apparently the coat of arms of the city of Riga became the prototype for E. Saarinen, creating the emblem of the Union of Finnish Cities. In 1912–1913, the house of the Swedish consul Karl Ekblom was built in Liepāja, at Dzintaru iela 23 according to the project by Lars Sonck (1870–1956). Riga architect Viktor Unverhau (1874–1936) worked in L. Sonck’s architectural office in Helsinki from 1906 to 1909.

In 1905, J. Rozentāls published a series of articles about Finnish art in the journal “Vērotājs” (Observer). He emphasized that in Finland, where the architectural heritage of ancient times is relatively poor, it is possible to speak of a characteristic, specific nationally Finnish architecture “only concerning the events of the last years, on efforts to adapt to local conditions and the nature of the land”<sup>8</sup>. He called the latest phenomena in Finnish architecture the “new Finnish style”, which “is not based on

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<sup>6</sup> Nils WASASTJERNA. *Finsk Arkitektur : Exteriörer och Interiörer = Suomalaista Rakennustaidetta : Ulko- Ja Sisäkuvia = Baukunst in Finnland : Aussen- und Innenarchitektur = La Nouvelle Architecture en Finlande : Facadas et Interieurs. I.* Helsingfors: Helios, 1905.

<sup>7</sup> Jūlijs LŪSIS. “Svarīgs posms latviešu arhitektūras attīstībā”, *Izglītības Ministrijas Mēnešraksts*, 1934, Nr. 10, p. 313–322: 315. (“An Important Stage in the Development of Latvian Architecture”, *Monthly of the Ministry of Education*).

<sup>8</sup> Janis ROZENTĀLS. “Par Somijas mākslu”, *Vērotājs*, 1905, № 3, p. 364–373: 364. (“About Finnish Art”, *Observer*).

any particular models, but has grown out of its era and the spirit of the nation“<sup>9</sup>. He paid attention also to the importance of the building material.

The building material has a certain importance in the artistic expression of architecture, although it itself has not been the source of the formal language of the style in any era. A proof of this is the well-known genesis of the antique order implemented in natural stone, although its shape derived from wooden structure<sup>10</sup>. J. Rozentāls, paying attention to verism (truthfulness) in architecture, noted that such finishing material as plaster is still widely applied due to its cheapness and practicality, “with the only difference that it is no longer used as a surrogate for more worthy materials – to imitate granite or marble in the facades of houses – but the aim is to achieve effects that reflect the nature and character of this material. When using it, one tries ... to achieve picturesque effects through variations of smooth or rough textures”<sup>11</sup>. Generalizing the latest features of Finnish architecture, J. Rozentāls pointed out: “ornaments ... are used very restrained or are tastefully gathered in a place where they gain weight and meaning .. Often the flora and fauna of the own country can be seen there, and various strange fantasy creatures as well”<sup>12</sup>.

The importance of decorative elements since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century has been one of the main subjects in professional discussions on architectural stylistics. According to J. Rozentāls’, “it has not been experienced that ornaments alone would have been sufficient to create an architectural style”<sup>13</sup>. However, describing one of the icons of Finnish National Romanticism, the *Pohjola* insurance company building in Helsinki (1899–1901, architects Gesellius, Lindgren & Saarinen), he discerned that its architecture had “national motifs most in the decoration”, but the overall “impression is New-American”<sup>14</sup>. Consequently, J. Rozentāls came to the question: “What is the influence from elsewhere in this art, how big is the individual contribution and how much of it access the foundations of the national feeling of the people?”, to which he himself answered: “there is nothing from that external nationalism, which once upon a time disguised itself with national forms and thought that it had achieved a national style, nor a copyist of foreign and past styles, but artists with a lot of independence, gifted personalities. .. They receive their impressions from everywhere, wherever they find something useful and good, .. and no less from the old art of the Finns, with which they stand in close connection, and which they do not copy, but transform

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<sup>9</sup> J. ROZENTĀLS. “Par Somijas ..”, p. 373.

<sup>10</sup> Auguste CHOISY. *Histoire de l'architecture : Tome 1*. Paris: Gauthier-Villars, Imprimeur-Libraire du Bureau des Longitudes, de L'école Polytechnique, 1899, p. 280.

<sup>11</sup> J. ROZENTĀLS. “Par Somijas ..”, p. 369.

<sup>12</sup> J. ROZENTĀLS. “Par Somijas ..”, № 4, p. 491–501: 499.

<sup>13</sup> J. ROZENTĀLS. “Par Somijas ..”, № 3, p. 370.

<sup>14</sup> J. ROZENTĀLS. “Par Somijas ..”, № 4, p. 495.

according to the contemporary needs and aesthetic taste, which is developed on the basis of the study of the folk spirit”<sup>15</sup>.

J. Rozentāls’ assessments and findings were repeated a few years later by E. Laube. He also underlined importance of processing the material, folk traditions, individuality of the artist, etc. adding that it would not be appropriate to “dress up these new needs in some old-fashioned clothes made for other need in other time”<sup>16</sup>. As one of the techniques for obtaining high-quality architecture, he paid attention to the correct use of building materials, and, like J. Rozentāls, also did not exclude the importance of ornament: “until now, plaster was used as an imitation of stone. .. When we delve into the nature of the plaster, we see that it is a kind of skin or cover that fits tightly to the wall and protrusions on it. .. Coarser and finer processing and embellishment with ornaments can be used”<sup>17</sup>. J. Rozentāls, describing the Finnish pavilion at the 1900 World Exhibition in Paris as a model of the new Finnish national architecture, emphasized the importance of the roof shape, which “has acquired an important role in the composition of the façade”<sup>18</sup>. E. Laube also drew attention to this issue, only trying to explain it with climatic conditions: “The steep roofs, which are able to drain snow and rain, are especially striking in the north, whereas in the south, houses with flat roofs are built. .. Since we live closer to the north, it is natural for our climate to create houses with steep roofs”<sup>19</sup>. Steep roofs are indeed one of the most characteristic features of the Latvian vernacular architecture, but if their shape derives solely from climatic conditions, they should be even steeper in Finland. The facts show the opposite: in the vernacular architecture of both Finland and the entire Scandinavia, the roofs are significantly flatter than in the Baltic region, while in several districts in Germany (Mecklenburg) or Austria (Carinthia) traditional rural buildings are much steeper than in Latvia.

The roots of each formal stylistic phenomenon can obviously be found in the mentality and cultural heritage of each nation, which E. Laube pointed out similarly to J. Rozentāls: “Each nation always has its own traditions, a certain collection of forms, which one generation inherited from the previous. ..we Latvians have been given the opportunity to immerse ourselves in the spirit of our ancestors, and the more we do it, the more the old spirit will be renewed within us and will take over each of us and all our lives, our works in a renewed, stronger way. Then also our buildings will show a

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<sup>15</sup> J. ROZENTĀLS. “Par Somijas ..”, p. 496.

<sup>16</sup> Eižens LAUBE. “Par būvniecības stilu”, *Zalktis*, 1908, № 4, p. 145–148: 145. (“About the Construction Style”, *The Grass Snake*).

<sup>17</sup> E. LAUBE. “Par būvniecības ..”, p. 146.

<sup>18</sup> J. ROZENTĀLS. “Par Somijas ..”, p. 492.

<sup>19</sup> E. LAUBE. “Par būvniecības ..”, p. 147.

character that will be completely independent, Latvian”<sup>20</sup>. Like J. Rozentāls, he also recognized the need to creatively interpret everything useful from abroad: “it would be very wrong if we closed ourselves against all foreign. .. Our task is to independently process everything we see and to listen first of all to voices, which express our Latvian feeling, and which the spirit of the times slowly whispers to us”<sup>21</sup>.

Similar phrases were repeated by E. Laube in a whole series of publications later, during the interwar period of the 20th century, when Latvia was an independent state. He reminded also that external influences should not be given up, but everything “must be provided with a Latvian spirit”<sup>22</sup>. As the head of the Commission for Architectural Issues of the Latvian National Construction Committee, in an official document addressed to the chairman of the Committee, he recommended introducing the “Latvianism theory” into the curricula of schools, as well as “supplementing the building regulations with requirements that buildings constructed should be designed in the Latvian national spirit”<sup>23</sup>.

Evaluating the implementation of the idea of national identity in the Latvian culture, the most noticeable contribution can obviously be recorded in the early 20th century. National Romanticism architecture of the period is easily visible in the urban environment. It forms a significant part of the extremely rich Art Nouveau heritage of Riga. In addition, these buildings “indicated the Latvians' ability to go beyond narrow parochial, revivalist goals, to assimilate a wide spectrum of international developments with a vitality that created their own distinctive Latvian New Style, and themselves influence the progress of modern art further afield”<sup>24</sup>.

## THE EARLY PERIOD OF NATIONAL ROMANTICISM IN LATVIA

National Romanticism flourished mainly in the national outskirts of the great empires, which often surpassed the metropolises in terms of economic and cultural development. In early 20th century, Latvia was also such a place. Its territory was administratively divided between three governorates of tsarist Russia. The strong Russification carried out by the Russian government and the repressions after the so-called revolution of 1905 contributed to the various activities of the second national

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<sup>20</sup> E. LAUBE. “Par būvniecības ..”, p. 147.

<sup>21</sup> E. LAUBE. “Par būvniecības ..”, p. 147.

<sup>22</sup> E. LAUBE. “Latviskais arhitektūras stils tagadnē”, *Dzīvei pretim*, Rīga: Izglītības Ministrijas mācības līdzekļu nodaļa, 1936, p. 224–232: 228, 230. (“Latvian Architectural Style Today”, *Toward Life*).

<sup>23</sup> LSHA, Fund 1632, Description 2, Case 2005, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Jeremy HOWARD. *Art Nouveau : International and National Styles in Europe*. Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 1996, p. 188.

awakening, which was reflected in the unprecedented growth of Latvian culture in all areas of the arts. It was natural, because “things that could not be said openly could be channelled through the arts”<sup>25</sup>.

Obviously, it is no coincidence that the first National Romantic buildings in Riga were built in 1905. All their projects were signed by K. Pēkšēns, but architects E. Laube and Augusts Malves (1878–1951) also made a certain contribution to their architecture. E. Laube was the official assistant of K. Pēkšēns in 1906 and 1907<sup>26</sup>, and A. Malves – from 1906 to 1909<sup>27</sup>, but both worked in his office much earlier, while still being architecture students. E. Laube has published a list of his works<sup>28</sup>, which accurately records the projects developed with his participation in the office of K. Pēkšēns.

The best-known joint work of E. Laube and K. Pēkšēns is the school building in Riga, at Tērbatas iela 15/17 (Fig. 1). It is included in the cultural canon of Latvia as a symbol of Riga Art Nouveau architecture. The building was built by the poet, lawyer and educationist Atis Ķeniņš (1874–1961). There are almost no ornamental details in the finish of the facade. A picturesque expressiveness is provided by variations of different building materials – rough and smooth plaster, ceramic tiles, red brick masonry. The travertine with which the ground floor and pilasters are coated was sourced from the vicinity of the Staburags cliff located on the left bank of the Daugava River (after the construction of a hydropower plant in 1970, the cliff is under water). The publishing house of the magazine “Zalktis” was also located in the building.

In the same year 1905, according to the project of K. Pēkšēns and E. Laube, an apartment house with shops was built at Aleksandra Čaka iela 26. Its facade is decorated with the inscription „Mans nams – mana pils” (“My house is my castle”), as well as two decorative panels with stylized motifs of ethnographic ornaments.

A wide range of different finishing materials and an expressive massing with stylized Latvian ethnographic motifs integrated in the general composition, are also characteristic of the apartment house owned by K. Pēkšēns himself at Kronvalda bulvāris 10. The building was built in 1907, and E. Laube also took part in the

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<sup>25</sup> Pekka KORVENMAA. “Lars Sonck”, *Japan Architecture + Urbanism*, 1985, №7, p. 67–77: 68.

<sup>26</sup> *Album Academicum des Polytechnicums zu Riga 1862–1912*. Riga: Jonck & Poliewsky, 1912, S. 452.

<sup>27</sup> “Malvess, Augusts”, *Latviešu Konversācijas vārdnīca : XIII* (A. Švābe, A. Būmanis, K. Dišlērs, red.). Rīga:, A. Gulbis, 1935–1936, 25557. sleja.

<sup>28</sup> “Dr. arch. h. c. E. Laubes veiktie arhitektūras darbi”, *Latvijas Arhitektūra*, 1940, № 4, 133.–139. lpp. (“Architektural Works by Dr. arch. h. c. E. Laube”).

development of its project. Another of the earliest works of National Romanticism is the apartment house at Lāčplēša iela 4, built in 1905 according to a project signed by K. Pēkšēns, but the analysis of the rendering of the project drawings shows that it was drawn by A. Malvess.

In the diversity of formal trends of Riga Art Nouveau, parallel to National Romanticism, the so-called Perpendicular Art Nouveau developed. It was definitely influenced by the German architecture of the time, where this trend was named *Warenhausstil* (Style of the Department Stores). At the same time, it adapted something from the German *Heimatstil* (Homeland Style), which tried to postulate the features of Germanic culture reflecting both the Middle Ages and the language of vernacular architecture. Often this “homeland style” architecture was very close to the expression of Latvian National Romanticism. The idea of local uniqueness, which is inseparable from the search for national identity, is also clearly encoded in the Perpendicular Art Nouveau. A brilliant proof of the ideological significance of the Perpendicular Art Nouveau in the context of national identity issues is the history of the non-alcoholic society “Ziemeļblāzma” (Northern Lights) house at Ziemeļblāzmas iela 36 (now the culture house “Ziemeļblāzma”), constructed in 1909–1913.

## CONTRIBUTION OF THE MOST NOTABLE NATIONAL ROMANTIC ARCHITECTS

### **Konstantīns Pēkšēns**

K. Pēkšēns was one of the most prominent and productive Latvian architects of all times. Iconic National Romanticist buildings by K. Pēkšēns are at Katoļu iela 35, Maskavas iela 131 (both 1907), Bruņinieku iela 71, Kalupes iela 19A, Tallinas iela 28 and 30 (all 1908), Veru iela 3 (1911), etc. Several buildings of K. Pēkšēns, along with the definitely “Latvian spirit”, reflect also features of the German *Heimatstil*. These are mainly small scale, mostly wooden buildings, among them the master’s own summer house in Jūrmala, at Krāslavas iela 1/3. The Baltic German architect Arthur Moedlinger (1880–1961) was co-author of the building.

An outstanding joint venture of K. Pēkšēns and A. Moedlinger is the Riga Merchants’ Mutual Credit Union bank at Tērbatas iela 14 (1909). In its architecture, the Perpendicular Art Nouveau language organically merges with the elements of National Romanticism. Stained glass windows made by the painter and glass artist Kārlis Brencēns (1870–1951) adorn the stairwell. They symbolize education, transport, trade, seafaring, etc. themes. Portrait of Krišjānis Valdemārs (1825–1891),

the initiator of the Latvian revival movement, national economist and publicist is between the ground and the first floor.

The restrained facade of the apartment house at Krišjāņa Barona iela 5 (1909), shaped in the typical Perpendicular Art Nouveau stylistics, has no ornamental details. On the other hand, the ornamentally gorgeous apartment house at Brīvības iela 172 (1910–1911) “looks like a typical Art Nouveau building with features of National Romanticism”<sup>29</sup>. Several reliefs made in a naive manner adorn the facade of the building, figures having acquired the appearance of Latvian farmers.

### **Eižens Laube**

Eižens Laube – a practicing architect, pedagogue and theoretician – was one of the most visible figures in Latvian 20th century architecture. His early works were immediately noticed. In the 1909 yearbook of the Riga Architects’ Society, pictures of apartment houses at Alberta iela 11 and Brīvības iela 47 and 62 designed by E. Laube were published<sup>30</sup>. Today, all these buildings are known as classics of the National Romantic heritage. Already in 1940, they were named “the stateliest houses built in 1909”<sup>31</sup>.

However, Latvian painter, pedagogue, art critic and ethnographic ornaments specialist Jūlijs Madernieks (1870–1955) had a different vision. In his review of the contents of the 1907 yearbook regarding the nobly restrained and elegantly balanced architecture of the facade of the house at Alberta iela 11, he stated: “..the facade of this house should be considered a failure, .. the house is one incoherent patchwork”<sup>32</sup>. Paradoxically, in the shape of steep roofs of E. Laube’s buildings, J. Madernieks saw an imitation of the German patterns, not the obvious association with Latvian vernacular architecture. E. Laube’s some other buildings also earned devastating rating by J. Madernieks.

Around 1910, sharp attacks on National Romantic architecture also spread out in Finland. Helsinki architects Gustav Strengell (1878–1937) and Sigurd Frosterus

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<sup>29</sup> Harijs TUMANS. *Antīkie tēli Rīgas ielās*, Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds, 2022, p.164. (*Antique Images in the Streets of Riga*).

<sup>30</sup> *Jahrbuch für bildende Kunst in den Ostseeprovinzen : III. Jahrgang*. Riga: Der Architektenverein zu Riga, 1909, p. 76–81.

<sup>31</sup> Pauls KAMPE. “Īss pārskats par profesora Dr. arch. h. c. Eižena Laubes būvniecības darbību līdz pasaules kara sākumam”, *Latvijas Arhitektūra*, 1940, № 4, p. 105–117: 110.

<sup>32</sup> Jūlijs MADERNIEKS. “(Māksla) : Baltijas mākslas gada grāmata (1909. g.) : (Beigas)”, *Dzimtenes Vēstnesis*, 1910, 11. jūnijā. (“(Art) : Baltic Art Yearbook (1909) : (End)”, *Motherland’s Herald*)

(1876–1956) dedicated various pamphlets to this style<sup>33</sup>, and there, as in Latvia too, this style was replaced by other formal trends of Art Nouveau relatively quickly, already around 1911. This was facilitated by the general dynamics of the development of ideological and artistic currents of that time, as well as the new fashion in architecture – Neoclassicism. That’s why “National Romantics themselves had undoubtedly begun to adopt a more modern idiom of expression”<sup>34</sup>.

Also E. Laube turned to use of classical language: he “still considered the tradition based on classical art to be viable – with its vocabulary, it can be useful for the expression of contemporary as well as national ideas in individual works of the architect. He was occupied with the search for national style and ways of its expression”<sup>35</sup>. The most notable and characteristic works of E. Laube’s National Romanticism, apart from those already mentioned, are apartment houses with shops at Krišjāņa Valdemāra iela 67, Brīvības iela 37, Aleksandra Čaka iela 83/85, as well as Lāčplēša iela 70, 70a and 70b (all 1909), and Ģertūdes iela 23 (1908). The very tall, cubic corner turrets of the last two buildings resemble an idealized image of an ancient Latvian castle. Their expressive massing and articulation of architectural elements anticipates the language of the Modern Movement of the second half of the 1920’s.

### **Aleksandrs Vanags**

In the creative heritage of Aleksandrs Vanags, National Romanticism dominates. His assistant Pauls Kampe (1885–1960), who worked for some time in A. Vanags’ office, published an extensive study dedicated to the architect. It is stated in it, that the study trip to Finland that A. Vanags made in 1904 together with E. Laube was of great importance in the architect’s professional development: “love for the homeland .. awakened in them the belief that they had found here the beginning of a national monumental architecture. Local building materials and Latvian folk art should have helped promote and develop this new approach”<sup>36</sup>.

A. Vanags began his independent architectural practice (he opened his office in 1906) with the supervision of construction works of an apartment house at Andreja Pumpura iela 5 and Jura Alunāna (now Ukrainian Independence) iela 2a. Its project was

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<sup>33</sup> Nils Erik WICKBERG. *Finnish Architecture*. Helsinki: Otava 1962, p. 85.

<sup>34</sup> Mikkola KIRMO. *Architecture in Finland in the 20th century*, Helsinki: Finnish–American Cultural Institute, 1981, p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Jānis SILIŅŠ. *Latvijas māksla 1800–1914 : II*. Stokholma: Daugava, 1980, p. 374 and 375.

<sup>36</sup> Pauls KAMPE. “Aleksandra Vanaga dzīve un darbs”, *Izglītības Ministrijas Mēnešraksts*, 1929, № 5/6., p. 497–515: 501. (“The life and work of Aleksandrs Vanags”, *Ministry of Education Monthly*)

developed by Helsinki architects Gustaf Adolf Lindberg (1865–1906) and Knut Wasastjerna (1867–1935).

In the same year, 1906, the first building independently designed by A. Vanags was built at Brīvības iela 58. In its architecture, a certain impression, but not imitation of the architecture of the previous building can be felt. The overall image of the building is very generalized, even heavier than that of the possible sample, but, unlike it, A. Vanags also used ornaments: the facades of the building at Brīvības iela 58 have a wide frieze of zigzag herringbone-type Latvian ethnographic ornament under the cornice. Motifs of ethnographic patterns also adorn the entrance portal.

Other most expressive works of A. Vanags in the manner of National Romanticism are apartment houses at Krišjāņa Barona iela 30 (1907), 37 (1911) and 62 (1909, Fig. 2), Ģertūdes iela 26 (1908) and Bruninieku iela 115 (1909), etc. P. Kampe made a significant contribution to the creation of the architecture of a whole series of similar buildings.

In the whirlwind of political events, when Riga was occupied by the Bolsheviks at the beginning of 1919, A. Vanags was arrested for alleged counter-revolutionary activity and on March 19, together with dozens of other falsely accused people, he was shot in the Riga Central Prison. Latvian culture lost an outstanding personality, but has preserved his memory, remembering that “for this man, working for the welfare of his nation has always been the most sacred task of life”<sup>37</sup>.

### **Pauls Kampe**

Until recently, Pauls Kampe was known almost exclusively as a pedagogue and architectural historian. The only information about his creative works so far known was the indication in the fifth yearbook of the Riga Society of Architects that the author of the houses in Riga, at Aleksandra Čaka iela 70 and Krišjāņa Valdemāra iela 73 is A. Vanags in collaboration with P. Kampe<sup>38</sup>.

According to the architect’s biographical data, since 1910, while performing military service, he lived for some time in Liepāja<sup>39</sup>. During researching of Liepāja Art

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<sup>37</sup> P. KAMPE. “Aleksandra Vanaga ...”, p. 512.

<sup>38</sup> *Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst in den Ostseeprovinzen : V. Jahrgang*. Riga: Der Architektenverein zu Riga, 1911, p. 108, 109.

<sup>39</sup> *Album Academicum...*, p. 577.

Nouveau architecture, the original project of the building at Peldu iela 33 was found<sup>40</sup>. It was signed by P. Kampe in 1911. The building is an elegant example of National Romanticism, which stands out with a noble restrained and balanced architecture of the facade.

An apartment house in Liepāja, at Republikas iela 26/28, has almost analogous layout, but the architectural finish of the facade of this building has a series of details that are almost identical as on the facades of the apartment house in Riga, at Aleksandra Čaka iela 70. This clearly indicates that this building is also the work of P. Kampe. Moreover, the facade composition of the building at Republikas iela 26/28, is strikingly similar to the facade of the apartment house in Riga, at Ģertrūdes iela 63, the project of which was signed in 1910 by the architect Alexander Schmaeling (1877–1961), but the rendering of the elevation has several specific nuances that are peculiar to P. Kampe (for example, flower boxes on window sills depicted in the shape of a cloud). Actually, P. Kampe worked also in the office of A. Schmeling, where “as a student and a young architect he .. independently designed several tasks”<sup>41</sup>. Comparative analysis of the layout and architectural elements of these buildings has allowed with a very high degree of reliability at least 11 more buildings in Liepāja and 17 in Riga attribute to P. Kampe.

In several facades of these buildings, one of the most noticeable details are massive Egyptian columns. They apparently reflect Art Nouveau’s general penchant for exotic forms, while at the same time showing an unshakable strength and self-confidence, qualities so necessary to express quiet resistance to existing power. It was one of the basic ideas of National Romanticism. At Krišjāņa Valdemāra iela 69, P. Kampe has replaced the originally designed “Egyptian” column with a pillar in a shape typical of vernacular buildings. This house together with the buildings at Krišjāņa Valdemāra iela 67, 71 and 73 form the most compact and impressive ensemble of National Romanticism in Riga.

### **Augusts Malvess**

Augusts Malvess, similar to P. Kampe, has so far been better known as a pedagogue and building materials specialist, but in the early 20th century, quite a lot of buildings were built according to his projects throughout the central part of Latvia. Characteristic architectural language of A. Malvess was based on the use of various building materials in order to achieve artistic expression, while convincingly

<sup>40</sup> Private archive of the pharmacist Kaija Liepiņa.

<sup>41</sup> Pauls KUNDZIŅŠ. “Profesors Dr. arch. un Dr. ing. Pauls Kampe”, *Arhitekts* (Latvijas Arhitektu biedrības – LAB – izdevums), 1960, № 10, p. 25.

embodying the idea of national architecture. Many such buildings he designed in the office of K. Pēkšēns until 1909, when he opened his own office. Facades of these buildings usually display contrasts of various unusual textures and colours. Quite often, vertical bands made of red bricks, and natural stone rustication on the lower floor is used as well.

Typical National Romantic buildings created in A. Malves's own office are at least 7 apartment blocks in Riga and two in Cēsis, among them Plauciņš' house at Raunas iela 10 (1911). All they are characteristic of "adherence to solid construction" and "rational use of natural materials"<sup>42</sup>.

A very expressive work of A. Malves in a rural environment is the building of the Rauna Agricultural Society in Rauna, at Rīgas iela 1 (1909, Fig. 4). The facades of the building display plaster of various textures, red bricks and rustic of local limestone. They are benchmark of the architectural principles of A. Malves.

The works of A. Malves are also buildings of various associations in Smiltene, Dzērbene, Sigulda and Alūksne, and a school in Sēja parish. In 1931, his most important theoretical work – "Technical dictionary of building materials, construction works and constructions" (in Latvian, German and Russian) – was published<sup>43</sup>. It was an important contribution to the professional terminology of the Latvian language.

### **Other architects**

Ernests Polis (1872–1914), traditionally having been considered the most characteristic master of Neoclassicism, actually most of his around 40 designs shaped in typical language of perpendicular Art Nouveau, but apartment houses at Vidus iela 4 and Elizabetes iela 14 (both 1909) are iconic examples of National Romanticism. Individual architectural details, the forms of which are rooted in the sense of vernacular architecture or ethnographic ornaments, can be found in quite a lot of his works. Apartment house with shops at Aleksandra Čaka iela 67/69 (1912) has an expressive cubic massing and an effective corner turret, which, similar to the buildings designed by E. Laube at Ģertrūdes iela 23 or Lāčplēša iela 70b, is associated with the image of an ancient Latvian castle. In many of his buildings, a touch of

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<sup>42</sup> J. SILIŅŠ. *Latvijas māksla...*, p. 380.

<sup>43</sup> Augusts MALVESS. *Tehniskā vārdnīca būvvielām, būvdarbiem un konstrukcijām ar pielikumu ģeometrijai un mehānikai = Technisches Wörterbuch betreffend Baustoffe, Bauarbeiten und Baukonstruktionen mit einem Anhang für Geometrie und Mechanik = Технический словарь строительных материалов, строительных работ и конструкций с приложением по геометрии и механике*, Rīga: Autora izdevums, 1931. 688 pp.

Neoclassicism and a restrained sense of Latvian feeling are displayed at the same time.

Stylistic elements of National Romanticism appear intermittently in some apartment houses in Riga by architect Mārtiņš Nukša (1878–1942). A very generalized, even austere shape, but certainly belonging to National Romanticism is the building of the Latvian Association in Talsi, at Lielā iela 19/21 (1910–1912), designed by him.

All the formal trends of Art Nouveau are represented in the works of the prolific architect Oskars Bārs (1848–1914). Apartment houses designed by him in Riga, at Artilērijas iela 52 and to some extent also at Daugavpils iela 48, Stabu iela 16, Vārnu iela 20 (all 1910) and Klusā iela 21 (1912) present almost iconic language of National Romanticism.

Architect Jānis Alksnis (1869–1939) designed more than 140 multi-storey apartment buildings, several banks, association houses and other buildings in Riga. The hallmark of his artistic language is Perpendicular Art Nouveau, but in many examples his buildings reflect the artistic expression of National Romanticism as well. Relatively “pure” examples of it are apartment houses with shops at Marijas iela 18 (1908) and Brīvības iela 160 (1909).

The language of National Romanticism less or more directly is also reflected in a number of works by local German-Baltic or Jewish architects active in Riga. They are: Erich von Boetticher (1880–1980), Bernhard Bielenstein, Rudolf Philipp Dohnberg (1864–1918), Arthur Moedlinger, Nikolai Nord (1880–1934), Paul Mandelstamm (1872–1941), Solomon Nudelmann (1877–?), etc. Max Theodor Bertschy (1871–1935) created several such buildings in Liepāja. Vivid examples of National Romanticism of canonical shape are the apartment house in Riga, at Skolas iela 10 (1909) designed by the architects Wilhelm Roessler (1878–1949) and Guido Bertschy (1878–1933), but especially – Church of the Cross in Riga, at Ropažu iela 120 (1909) created by outstanding architect Wilhelm Bockslaff (1858–1945) together with Edgar Friesendorff (1881–1945). In the unusually diverse work of W. Bockslaff, the language of Latvian National Romanticism is also clearly expressed in the architecture of the Āgenskalns water tower in Riga, at Alīses iela 4 (1912), and the apartment house at Nometņu iela 47 (1909).

## CONCLUSIONS

The search for national identity was a typical phenomenon of many countries in the 20th century. It flourished in the national peripheries of the great empires, embodying in National Romanticism as one of the brightest formal currents of Art Nouveau.

In Latvia, National Romanticism developed under the certain influence of the Finnish architecture of that time, acquiring regional characteristics. The idea of national identity in the architectural heritage of Latvia has been implemented not only in the examples of National Romanticism, but also in other formal currents of Art Nouveau.

The period of National Romanticism in Latvian architecture was from 1905 to 1911, but even after that, the formal expression characteristic of it often appeared in the architecture of many Art Nouveau buildings.

Vivid works of Latvian National Romanticism were created both by Latvian, and local German-Baltic architects. National Romanticism is not only a narrow expression of a separate art field of a nation, but an integral part of the general culture of humanity.

## **Curriculum Vitae**

Jānis Krastiņš

Born in 1943, in Riga, Latvia. Architect, Dr. habil. arch. (1991), Professor, Head of the Department of History and Theory of Architecture, Riga Technical University. Full member of the Latvian Academy of Sciences (1994). Member of the Latvian Association of Architects (1970). Professional awards: Förderungsbeitrag des Camillo Sitte-Fonds (Austria, 1985), the Jānis Baumanis Award in Architecture (Latvia, 1989), Fulbright Award (USA, 1994), the Great Medal of the Latvian Academy of Sciences (1998), the Baltic Assembly Award (1998), Riga-award (2002); decorations “Al Merito della Repubblica Italiana” (2004) and the Cross of Recognition (2012), Cultural Heritage Great Award (2013), Award of the Cabinet of Ministers (2016), Honorary member of ICOMOS (2020) etc. A number of architectural projects and investigations of cultural monuments. More than 720 publications (in 21 country), among them 31 books on different architectural issues.