

## ON THE WAY WITH PURVĪTIS: THE PATH OF TATJANA KAČALOVA

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### Abstract

The article reiterates the main research path trodden by art historian Tatjana Kačalova (née Rosenschild-Paulin, 1915–2010) whose investigations on the art of Vilhelms Purvītis (1872–1945) in particular and Latvian landscape painting in general, carried out since the 1960s under Soviet occupation until the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the independent Republic of Latvia, are important landmarks in the local history of this scholarly discipline.

The historiographical lens is used for a biographical purpose – to create and contextualise an intellectual portrait of the researcher by considering a blend of various perspectives: relationships between Kačalova's multicultural background and her commitment to the construction of Latvian national canon in the arts; comparison with imperial Russian, Baltic German, imperial Soviet, and Latvian exile approaches; institutional factors from the Art Academy of Latvia to Soviet centralised science policy and issues of book industry; strategies of internationalisation in source research and interpretation; the role of interdisciplinary interests and the researcher's first artistic education; the immediate and retrospective reception of Tatjana Kačalova's manuscripts and publications; implications and afterlife of her scholarly endeavours today.

**Keywords:** *historiography of art history, landscape painting, Tatjana Kačalova, Vilhelms Purvītis, Art Academy of Latvia, Soviet and post-Soviet context of research*

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## Introduction

One of the shared territories of the written word and the visual arts is the research texts of art historians. They are useful not only for acquiring information about the topic under discussion and for understanding the research process in a historiographical context, but also for creating a professional portrait of the researcher, especially if little autobiographical evidence is left.

A revealing source in this respect is Professor Tatjana Kačalova's (1915–2010) research into the life and art of landscape painter Vilhelms Purvītis (1872–1945), the first rector of the Art Academy of Latvia. This preoccupation continued from the early 1960s, when Kačalova chose Latvian landscape painting as the subject of her scientific work, to the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when her book on the local development of this genre in the period of 1890–1915 was published [Kačalova 2004].

In this article, the research path of Tatjana Kačalova (Figure 1) is reiterated exploring her publications and manuscripts in the light of both the circumstances of their formation and the general research context of Latvian art history. The author has been Professor Kačalova's student in the early 1990s and subsequently worked in related areas where their paths crossed until 2010 when Latvian art historians



Figure 1. Professor Tatjana Kačalova with guests at her 80th anniversary reception in the Rector's office of the Art Academy of Latvia. Painting on the wall – *Suburban Scene* (ca. 1928) by Vilhelms Purvītis from the collection of the Latvian National Museum of Art. Sitting under the picture – art historian Māra Lāce. 1995. Photo: Laimonis Stipnieks. Art Academy of Latvia Information Centre, coll. K-54.

mourned the death of their academic Grandma [Ābele 2010b, 2010c]. Archival sources are researched in public collections, most notably the Information Centre of the Art Academy of Latvia and the Latvian State Archive of the National Archives of Latvia. Biographical details of Vilhelms Purvītis correspond to the information available in the artist's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary book [Slava 2022]. It contains a monographic study, *Landscape with a Painter* [Ābele 2022: 385–529], as a tribute to two outstanding women, and this article may answer why one of them is Tatjana Kačalova.

**“(...) we have never had such a fundamental work on the history of Latvian art”**

On 5 July 1966, the staff of the Department of Art History of the Latvian SSR State Academy of Art discussed a manuscript about which the art historian and painter Romis Bēms (1927–1993) summarised: “The general impression – we have never had such a fundamental work on the history of Latvian art” [Mākslas vēstures katedra 1966: 148]. It was the dissertation *Purvītis and His School* of senior lecturer Tatjana Kačalova for the degree of Candidate of Science in Art Studies at the Ilya Repin Institute of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture of the USSR Academy of Arts in Leningrad (now St Petersburg) [Kačalova 1966a]. The meeting decided to recommend it for defence, which took place on 19 January 1967. The two-volume treatise became the basis for an inseparable union in the history of the Art Academy of Latvia, linking two of its professors across time (Figure 2).

When Tatjana Kačalova, research associate at the Latvian SSR State Museum of Latvian and Russian Art (now Latvian National Museum of Art), applied for a teaching position in the history of foreign art at the Art Academy in 1959, the woman of 44 had experienced enough to last a lifetime, just the career of an art historian still was at the beginning of the road. In the first working year at the Academy she proposed the history of Latvian landscape painting as the subject of her dissertation [Mākslas vēstures katedra 1960: 3], planning to complete her research by the middle of the 1960s. In 1963/64, a refinement of the topic was agreed, focusing on Purvītis and his school [Mākslas vēstures katedra 1964: 44].

Among dissertations by art historians from Latvia during the Soviet period, Kačalova's treatise was the single explicitly personality-centred work. Moreover, it highlighted a figure that was not unanimously accepted and nevertheless could not be overlooked by Soviet power. On one hand, Purvītis died as a displaced person in the last winter of the Second World War in Germany, having abandoned Riga, where he had been one of the symbolic pillars of Latvian sovereignty. On the other hand, a large-scale treatise about him could confirm Soviet claims on the cultural capital of this artistic figure. Although such considerations were far from Kačalova's approach, they help to realise how she was allowed to stay on her chosen track. As



Figure 2. Volumes of Tatjana Kačalova's candidate dissertation *Purvītis and His School* (1966) at the Art Academy of Latvia Information Centre. Photo: author of the article.

there were no opportunities to defend dissertations in art history in Latvia and in Latvian throughout the whole period of Soviet rule, Kačalova's ability to elaborate her manuscript in Russian was an advantage making the progress towards the aspired qualification smoother than in other cases.

Furthermore, Purvītis was an offspring of St Petersburg Imperial Academy of Art, awarded with the Grand Prix for his 1897 graduation piece of Ukrainian-born Professor Arkhip Kuinji's (1841–1910) Master Class and elected Academician in 1913. Seen in the desired light, Latvian painter could be “welcomed back” in the city of his alma mater, using this bond for highlighting the dependence of Latvian national art on Russian foundations. In 1962, the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Purvītis' birth was celebrated with an exhibition of his paintings at the State Russian Museum in Leningrad, where old people were said to treasure memories about his early career [Literatūra un Māksla 1962]. Having left museal work in 1960, Kačalova did not contribute to this event supervised by her former boss Arturs Eglītis (1907–1996). However, her files at the Art Academy of Latvia Information Centre hold a copy of the Leningrad exhibition catalogue [Eglītis 1962], crisscrossed with the owner's notes and corrections.

### Flashback one. The painter and his researcher as contemporaries: Missed encounters

Latvian bookshelves at the time contained two portfolios of colour reproductions of Purvītis' paintings [Siliņš 1943; Sudrabkalns 1946] and a book about Purvītis by his former student, painter and art critic Oļģerts Saldavs (1907–1960). This work was a presence-evoking fruit of the Khrushchev Thaw, achieving the goal “to focus on the great artist in general and in large strokes, in order to keep his monumental figure and its importance in Latvian painting before the eyes of our generation” [Saldavs 1958: 4]. Previously, a monograph by art historian Jānis Siliņš (1896–1991) [Siliņš 1944] had failed to go to print due to the return of Soviet army in 1944 and its author spent the second half of his long career on the Western side of the Iron Curtain (see below). In the spring of 1944, however, Latvian readers received a collection of essays about an international selection of artists – Purvītis in Latvia, Leo König (1871–1944) in Germany, Edvard Munch (1863–1944) in Norway and Frans Masereel (1889–1972) in Belgium – by artist and essayist Kurts Fridrihsons (1911–1991) [Fridrihsons 1944]. The second of the portfolios mentioned above [Sudrabkalns 1946] consisted of colour plates that were prepared for Siliņš' forthcoming book in advance during Purvītis' 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary exhibition in 1942.

Unlike Siliņš, Saldavs and Fridrihsons, Tatjana Kačalova had never met her protagonist. An indirect meeting, however, did take place when the magazine *Atpūta* (Leisure) featured images of paintings by the famous Professor Purvītis and Tatjana Rosenschild-Paulin, an art student of Russian origin [Atpūta 1934, 1935]. Her Symbolist compositions were praised in the exhibitions of Konstantin Vysotsky's (1864–1938) art studio, inspiring reviewers to predict her brilliant future in the stardom of art [see Ābele 2025: 117]. Having travelled to Paris with a purpose to learn modern religious painting in the studio of Maurice Denis (1870–1943) in 1936, she returned to Riga, assisted her teacher Vysotsky and married pianist, organist and composer Nikolajs Kačalovs (Nikolaj Kačalov, 1911–1997) in November 1937.

In January 1938, Kačalova applied for painting studies at the Art Academy of Latvia and was enrolled in the second year of the programme but she did not return after the summer break and gave birth to her first child at the end of the year [Ābele 2025: 130]. When Ingrīda Burāne asked Professor Kačalova “if when you were studying painting at the Academy you had the chance to meet him” or observe him in the corridors of the Academy, her answer was “no” [Burāne, Kačalova, Ogle 2001: 5]. Although it is easy to misinterpret Tatjana Kačalova as a student of Purvītis [see, e.g., Petre 2019], the general painting and drawing classes she attended were run by Valdemārs Tone (1892–1958) and Kārlis Miesnieks (1887–1977) while Purvītis worked with students of his Landscape Master Class and did not appear in her orbit

[Ābele 2025: 134]. In 1942, when Purvītis' 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary exhibition was taking place in the Riga City Art Museum, the Kačalovs family was expecting their third daughter and the fourth was born in 1944, the year when Purvītis was bound to lose the cargo of his paintings that neither reached the destination in Germany nor showed up later.

### **Flashback two. Tatjana Kačalova's first steps in the field of art history**

At the end of 1944, soon after Soviet army's reconquest of Riga, the Faculty of Philology of the Latvian State University launched a study programme in art history that was closed in 1951 [see Kalnačs 2023]. At the beginning of 1948, Tatjana Kačalova received the first diploma of the programme and started working at the Latvian SSR State Museum of Latvian and Russian Art (now Latvian National Museum of Art). The subject of her graduation paper was Impressionism, and the titles of her paintings in a 1948 exhibition of works by Soviet Latvian artists [Valsts Latviešu un krievu mākslas muzejs 1948: 7] manifest a turn to nature impressions.

In the early post-war years, the Kačalovs became active supporters of the Roerichist movement, and on 24 March 1948 Nikolajs Kačalovs was arrested during a visit to Moscow for participation in the transfer of theosophical literature [Dreimane 2021: 261, 266]. During the mass deportation on 25 March 1949, his wife, children and mother-in-law were forcibly resettled from Riga to Siberia. Having lost her mother just after reaching the destination in the Tomsk Oblast', Tatjana Kačalova remained the only care person for her daughters in harsh conditions [Konstante 2017: 679–681]. Although her last painted landscape studies [see, e.g., Konstante 2017: 680] date from the later phase of this exile [Burāne, Kačalova, Ogle 2001: 10], her further life and work were brimming with art and nature in a different way.

The touring exhibition of Nicholas Roerich's (1874–1947) paintings in 1958 belonged to obvious signs of the Thaw. Working with this project, the reinstated Kačalova authored four articles about Roerich's art [Kačalova 1958a, 1958b, 1958c, 1958d]. In these publications, attention should be paid to values that became essential for her perception of art, including musical evocations in painting: "(...) he raises the sonority of the colours and gives the lines and the composition a certain musical rhythm" [Kačalova 1958a]. Purvītis had been Roerich's fellow student in Kuinji's master class, and Kačalova most likely had read her "guru's" praise to his Latvian peer: "A sensitive colourist, Purvit [Purvītis] captured the spring awakening like no other." [Roerich 1936] Although Professor Kačalova in her late years was reluctant to speak about the Roerich-inspired phase in her formation and pointed to Russian art historian Vladimir Levinson-Lessing (1893–1972) as her instigator to explore Latvian landscape painting [Šteimane 2005: 12], this link between Roerich and Purvītis may have been instrumental in turning her focus to its central figure.

### **From profound source analysis to reflections on musicality in painting**

Tatjana Kačalova based her exploration of the subject on profoundly researched visual and written sources, the list of the latter taking up more than 50 pages of the dissertation's appendix and even including Riga German press publications from the period of Nazi occupation. The conceptual scope of the treatise was highlighted by a particular motto for each chapter, mainly from the legacy of Western European painters, evoking a broad international context beyond the borders of the Russian (and Soviet) empire. Thus the Chapter III about the period of 1897–1905 was introduced by Paul Cézanne's (1839–1906) statement that “the real, prodigious study to undertake is the diversity of the scene offered by nature” [Kačalova 1966a; English translation from Danchev 2013: 337]. It was a fragment from Cézanne's letter to émile Bernard (1868–1941) on 12 May 1904, preceded by words about the Louvre as “a good book to consult” that should, however, be “only a means” [see Danchev 2013: 336–337].

Biographical errors were caused by lack of access to Latvian diaspora sources, which explains, for example, the extension of Purvītis' life by some months. Nevertheless, the scale of Kačalova's analysis of his oeuvre really surpassed everything that had been written about Latvian artists. The conclusion of the work was largely devoted to reflections on musicality in painting. Kačalova summarised that “Purvītis is remarkable for bringing the “musicality” of landscape almost to the level of the monumental and decorative painting of the old masters. This is particularly evident where the conceptual content of his landscape paintings resonates with the work of [poet] Rainis (...)” [Kačalova 1966a: 506] Like most of Kačalova's accomplishments starting from Symbolist paintings she composed as a young adult, this treatise was unobtrusively daring.

### **The Purvītis monograph 1971**

During the discussion of Tatjana Kačalova's dissertation manuscript, Rasma Lāce (1923–2008), the head of the Art History Department, noted that the work “requires scientific effort and concentration on the part of the reader”, so “it will have to be simplified when it is being prepared for publication” [Mākslas vēstures katedra 1966: 149]. In 1964/65, Kačalova had submitted a manuscript of a monograph on Purvītis to the publishing house *Iskusstvo* (Art) in Leningrad [Mākslas vēstures katedra 1964: 44]. However, this work was not promoted for publication there. In the meantime, Latvian audience had encountered the alliance of this author and subject in two articles in the magazine *Zvaigzne* (Star) [Kačalova 1961, 1966b].

In 1966, when she was finalising her dissertation, Soviet readers received the first edition of the two-volume monograph about Isaac Levitan (1860–1900) by Aleksey Fëdorov-Davydov (1900–1969) [Fëdorov-Davydov 1966]. A complete publication of Kačalova's study might have looked like a sibling of this comprehensive book but the *Liesma* (Flame) publishing house in Riga at the turn of the 1970s worked with a greatly abridged version of the manuscript.

Kačalova's book *Vilhelms Purvītis* [Kačalova 1971] (Figure 3) was published in Riga in August 1971. Its print run of 20 000 copies, exceptional from the viewpoint of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, was not extraordinary in Soviet Latvian book industry but higher than the average in the arts' section. Kačalova invited the readers to discover Purvītis as a painter who not only applied "Kuinji's principle of generalisation of natural impressions" and "Levitan's lyrical perception of nature" to the task of creating a Latvian image of nature, but also "borrowed from contemporary and partly classical art of Western Europe" means of expression that "contributed to the further development of all Latvian painting" [Kačalova 1971: 5]. It was a clear assertion of equality between Russian and Western artistic impulses.

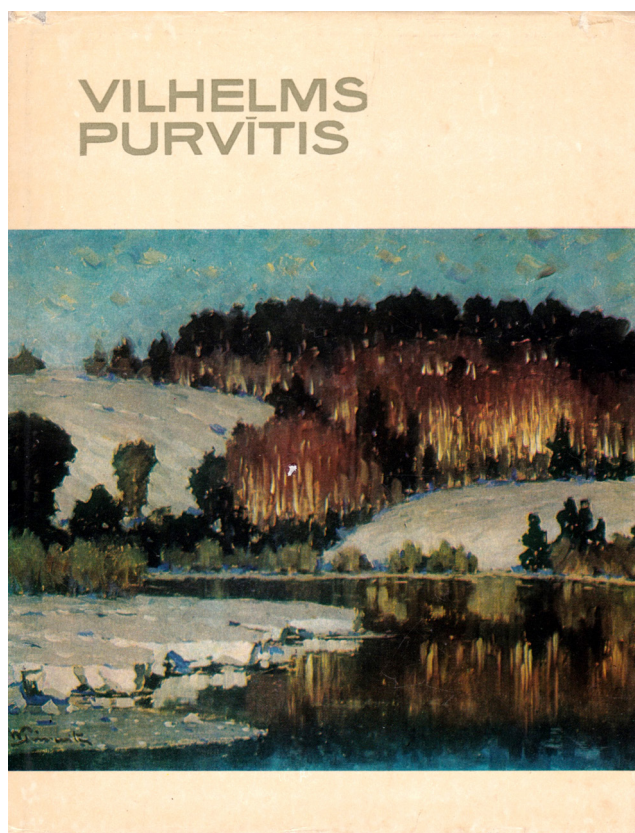


Figure 3. Tatjana Kačalova's book *Vilhelms Purvītis*. Riga: Liesma, 1971. Image on the dust jacket – *When Forest Wakes Up* (ca. 1930) by Vilhelms Purvītis from the collection of the Latvian National Museum of Art. Book design by Arvīds Jēgers.



Retrospectively, tributes to Tatjana Kačalova for establishing “a new level of interpretation” and prioritising “specific art-historical issues” that “remarkably distinguished these texts from previous post-war monographs” are paid by Eduards Kļaviņš [Kļaviņš 2014: 19], highlighting her dissertation and monograph as important milestones in the research history of Latvian art. In a particular survey on Latvian artists’ monographs, Stella Pelše describes Kačalova’s 1971 book as a proof that “the genre of the monograph becomes more serious, moving away from the twin traps of fictionalisation and ideologisation in the direction of the thoroughness (...) and focusing on the works and their formal qualities as a dynamic whole” [Pelše 2012: 95].

Almost every documented contemporary opinion contains critical remarks about the printing quality of the book. In a discussion of 1970–1972 art book production, three speakers at the Latvian SSR Artists’ Union agreed that the most comprehensive work was Kačalova’s monograph, but pointed to alleged inaccuracies in dates and titles, and expressed their regret about typographic failures and missing numbering of images [Literatūra un Māksla 1972]. In another review, art historian and journalist Ausma Balcerbule (1927–2010) found the fusion of a popular presentation and academic study not to be entirely successful, indirectly suggesting that the book still remained too scientific [Balcerbule 1972].

One of the exile representatives of Purvītis School, painter Jānis Gailis (1903–1975), wrote from the USA to his peer Jānis Sudmalis (1887–1984) in Liepāja, Latvia: “Purvītis’ new monograph makes me very sad. The same with everyone I’ve shown it to. It’s a small book, half the size of mine. The pictures are small, postcards, most of them half the size of a postcard. (...) The writer, as you say, belongs to an older generation, but I’m not familiar with the name.” [Gailis 1971] Nevertheless, this work turned another exile personality into a constant admirer of Kačalova’s writings. In 1977, novelist Gunars Janovskis (1916–2000) in England revealed to his colleague Zigmunds Skujiņš (1926–2022) in Riga that “I like Kačalova’s approach, attitude, narrative (...). I have appreciated her from the time of the Purvītis monograph” [Janovskis 1977].

Kačalova’s study presented Purvītis’ achievements by the First World War more convincingly, while on the question of his creative activity in independent and then occupied Latvia, this book requires a critical ability to identify distortions or omissions caused by the ideological constraints of the time of publication. Compared to the thesis, the range of references was reduced, in some cases by a contrivance: to claim information obtained from a controversial source as having been found e.g. in an undated manuscript. Thus, Purvītis’ essay “My Way to Art” from the magazine *Ostland* [Purvītis 1942] became a find in the museum archive, where a Russian translation of this material is preserved, probably the work of Kačalova herself, omitting the final part of the publication, which mentioned Purvītis’ pupil Alfred

Rosenberg (1893–1946) from the years 1906–1909 in Tallinn – the notorious Estonian-born head of the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories in 1941–1945. Outlining the body of written sources, Kačalova pointed to articles from “Latvian, Russian and German magazines and newspapers of Purvītis’ lifetime” [Kačalova 1971: 5]. References reveal that she also explored French reviews about the exhibition of Latvian art in Paris in 1939 [Kačalova 1971: 197]. However, the post-war exile writings were a *terra prohibita*: even if the author accessed some sources of this group they had to remain invisible. The divide of the horizon becomes obvious in the information about Purvītis’ death, giving two dates – the incorrect 18 March 1945, preserved from Saldavs and the dissertation, in the main text and the correct 14 January 1945 in a footnote [Kačalova 1971: 123].

### The divided horizon: Tatjana Kačalova and Jānis Siliņš

Soviet Latvian and exile scholarship on Purvītis were represented by two personalities of a similar scale: Tatjana Kačalova in Riga and Jānis Siliņš in the USA. One may wonder whether Siliņš managed to identify Kačalova with art student Rosenschild-Paulin whose compositions “with fantastic motifs somewhat in the spirit of Vrubel” had attracted his attention [Siliņš 1934]. Although both of them had to deal with the loss of Purvītis’ works at the end of the Second World War, their positions were not equal. Siliņš had the advantage of having explored the doomed-to-perish major part of Purvītis’ paintings and interviewing the artist, whereas Kačalova dug much deeper in the turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup>-century published sources and archival documents in Latvia and Russia. Considering contradictions between their interpretations, it has been suggested that “Kačalova presumably had very poor German language skills and Siliņš most likely had difficulties with Russian” [Ceriņa 2018 (1994): 47, 111]. On the contrary, Kačalova’s knowledge of German was close to native level and Siliņš, having studied at the universities in Moscow and Kazan, kept practising Russian as art reviewer for Riga’s Russian newspapers in the 1920s and 30s.

As Siliņš committed himself to the work on his multi-volume *Art of Latvia* since the mid-1960s, his ex-wife Elza Siliņa (1895–1988) provided him with materials from the Soviet side of the Iron Curtain [Vanaga 2018: 205, 216]. Thus, the chapter on Purvītis contains references to Kačalova’s monograph, challenging some of her conclusions, most notably about Purvītis’ alleged initial indifference to French Impressionism and Post-Impressionism [Siliņš 1980: 127]. Importantly, Kačalova used the opportunity to close the divide, integrating Siliņš’ *Art of Latvia* into the historiographical background of her book about Latvian landscape painting at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century [Kačalova 2004: 10].

### Recurrent issues, new aspects, continuous obstacles

Tatjana Kačalova's monograph preceded the nation-wide celebration of Purvītis' centenary in 1972 when she honoured his legacy in public lectures and articles for Latvian cultural periodicals [Kačalova 1972a, 1972b, 1972c]. After the Purvītis Anniversary Conference, Latvian SSR Deputy Minister of Culture Helmārs Verners (1925–2009) reprimanded the organisers that “papers should also note contradictions, the existence of two cultures, and not only objective facts” [Valsts Mākslas akadēmijas Padome 1972: 74]. The “two cultures” was shorthand for antagonism between progressive and reactionary culture in capitalist society. Kačalova's point was that “on the occasion of the anniversary we should talk first of all about his creativity, about Purvītis' positive contribution to the development of Latvian culture” [Mākslas vēstures katedra 1972: 17 [7]]. This episode offers a glimpse into the complexity of navigation between the permitted and prohibited that belonged to the routine of all scholars who were bringing results of their research to the public.

Kačalova's road to her next monograph on landscape painting in Latvia in the Soviet period and doctoral degree for a dissertation on this subject spanned two decades. During the academic year 1974/75, the author reduced her dissertation manuscript from 750 to 350 pages and was going to finish it by the end of 1975 [Mākslas vēstures katedra 1975: 41 [2]]. However, for a long time it was impossible to have research results published in a particular book that became a requirement for obtaining the highest academic qualification. In the second half of the 1970s, art historian Skaidrīte Cielava (1920–2005) elaborated a review of 26 pages in order to conclude that Kačalova's manuscript “lacks a rigorous Marxist methodological approach, which would prevent artists from being isolated from society and their time” and “the author has a rather vague idea of the laws and contradictions of the development of our society, of art as a form of ideology and the dialectical progression of its processes” [Cielava, undated: 66 [24]]. In general, the reviewer found the manuscript unsuitable for a dissertation or a book. However, she suggested that biographical essays, “after getting freed from inaccuracies, entanglements and sophistry”, could become “rather nice little portraits” [Cielava, undated: 68 [26]].

Kačalova revised her initial proposal into a book *Landscape: Depiction of Nature in Soviet Latvian Painting* [Kačalova 1985], that enlivened Latvian art writing with elucidating analyses of paintings (Figure 4). When the Department of Art History discussed a new draft of her doctoral dissertation in 1988, Eduards Kļaviņš described the author's “ability to characterise all artists in relation to different aspects of their works of art” as a “surprising quality” that would “hallmark this work against the background of other writings by Soviet art historians” [Estētikas un mākslas zinātnes katedra 1988: 2]. The following year, dissertation was finalised

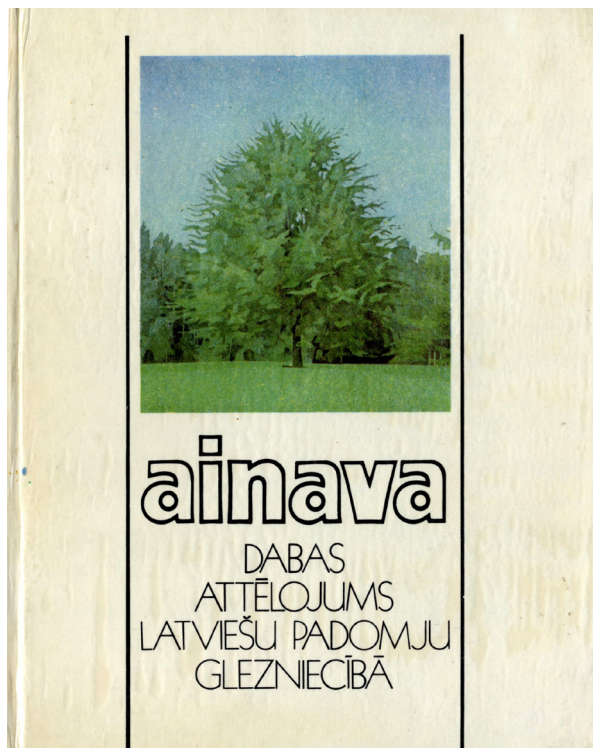


Figure 4. Tatjana Kačalova's book *Landscape: Depiction of Nature in Soviet Latvian Painting*. Riga: Liesma, 1985. Cover image – *Linden-Tree* (1974) by Bruno Vasiļevskis from the collection of the Artists' Union of Latvia. Book design by Dainis Lapsa.

[Kačalova 1989] and it brought the author the aspired doctoral degree in March 1990 [Literatūra un Māksla 1990], later recognised as *Dr. habil. art.* by the Latvian Council of Science. Thereby Tatjana Kačalova became the single art historian from Latvia to qualify for the highest degree before the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In these works, the silhouette of Purvītis was towering in the background of his former students. One of the perspectives in the researcher's approach to the key figure of her investigations was decorativeness. In 1982, the Art History Department discussed her manuscript *Decorativeness and Its Expressions in Soviet Latvian Landscape Painting*. The author had tracked this phenomenon, starting with the works of Purvītis and other pre-Soviet founders of Latvian landscape painting, comparing these pictures with analogies from the heritage of Russian and other foreign artists, as well as drawing parallels between fine arts and music [Mākslas vēstures katedra 1982: 46 [5]]. Although the Department recommended this study for publication as an article, it remained unpublished.

### Closing the circle across the landscape

The first decade of Latvia's regained independence simultaneously was the time of Tatjana Kačalova's professorship until her retirement in 2000. With themes concerning

Purvītis returning to the fore in anniversary commemorations [Kačalova 1992] and on other occasions, this time was marked by summaries and cross-sections of the theme that she outlined at conferences in Latvia and Germany. The explored aspects included: Purvītis and the formation of the Art Academy of Latvia; Purvītis' art in the context of Baltic German painting; landscape painting and Purvītis; landscape painting in Latvia around 1900 in general, as well as with regard to Neo-Romanticism and Art Nouveau; the work of Purvītis' student Kārlis Melbārzdīs (1902–1970) [Kačalova 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000, undated et al.].

Young colleagues, in their enthusiasm for new discoveries in source research, sometimes found these papers insufficiently verified. Re-reading them, however, provides insights worth pondering, even if they are not always supported by references. Thus, for instance, Kačalova concluded that “Art Nouveau did not subjugate Latvian art, but – and this seems very important – it oriented the mentality of Latvian artists in a way that, through its typical means of expression (decorativeness, rhythmicisation), awakened subconscious knowledge of these values accumulated since ancient times, contributing to the formation of national art” [Kačalova 2000: 73].

In 1999, the Art Academy of Latvia proposed the Culture Capital Foundation (CCF) to acknowledge Tatjana Kačalova's achievements with a lifetime scholarship, emphasising the focus of her research: “Her fundamental dissertation on Purvītis was a text of a completely different and unprecedented quality in comparison with the vulgarly sociological monographs on Latvian artists of the previous years (...). After earlier superficial and arbitrary generalisations, T. Kačalova's methodology of analysing works of art, which was oriented towards evidential interpretation and discovery of aesthetic values, was particularly impressive.” [Latvijas Mākslas akadēmija 1999] The Council of CCF acknowledged this contribution by granting her the deserved financial support.

At the turn of the millennium, Tatjana Kačalova experienced several events of Purvītis' research as a reader, visitor and spectator. She was not among the contributors of the monographic album that was published on the occasion of Purvītis' exhibition at the State Tretyakov Gallery of Moscow [Riņķe 2000]. The complexity and tension of the observer's role is revealed in Ingrīda Burāne's conversation with her at the exhibition of Purvītis works in the State Museum of Art in 2001 [Burāne, Kačalova, Ogle 2001]. Thanks to Kristīne Ogle's activities, the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century saw a rise in scholarship about the Purvītis Master Class of Landscape Painting and its alumni, taking up the school aspect of Kačalova's previous research [Ogle 2003, etc.]. The retired professor longed to see emergent scholars committing themselves to international research on Purvītis more ambitiously than she had managed to undertake this task in the 1990s [Burāne, Kačalova Ogle 2001: 3, 12].



Figure 5. Tatjana Kačalova's book *Latvian Landscape Painting at the Turn of the Centuries, 1890–1915*. Riga: Zinātne, 2004. Cover images – *Landscape / Elegy* (ca. 1904) by Johann Walter and *Spring Waters / Maestoso* (no later than 1911) by Vilhelms Purvītis, both from the collection of the Latvian National Museum of Art. Book design by Ināra Jēgere.

Under the guise of reconciliation with the retreat, Tatjana Kačalova worked on her last monograph about Purvītis and his time, exploring Latvian landscape painting of 1890–1915 [Kačalova 2004] (Figure 5). The researcher elucidated her subject in chapters about: the preceding developments in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century; relationship between Latvian landscape painting and Baltic German art at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; exhibition scene, iconography, relationship between classical pictures and study-like paintings; the phenomenon of mood landscape; international influences; and, most notably, the contribution of individual artists, starting with Purvītis. Regardless of a disputable division of painters into grand masters and petit masters of landscape, as well as some misattributions and errors, this book remains significant as the most comprehensive overview of its subject by now, rich in insights resulting from long years of commitment to the study of landscape painting.

The publishing house *Zinātne* released this title in late 2004, a short time before the author's 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 11 March 2005. The interval between the two events was marked by the award of the Artists' Union of Latvia to Tatjana Kačalova for her lifetime contribution to art history [Latvijas Mākslinieku savienība 2005: [2–4]]. Asked about research pursuits at the moment, the laureate told the newspaper *Kultūras Forums* that she keeps thinking about decorativity [Šteimane 2005: 12].

## Tatjana Kačalova and the early non-Latvian biographers of Purvītis

A series of exchanges between the retired Professor Kačalova and her young colleagues were related to biographical details of authors who had been writing about Purvītis in Baltic German and foreign periodicals. Some of the most often quoted sources in the 1971 monograph were articles by Roderich von Engelhardt (1862–1934), Wilhelm Sawitzky (1879–1947) and Susa Walter (1874–1945), three writers whose contribution to the local art criticism subsequently was brought out of the twilight of Baltic German cultural heritage as well as Mary Illyne, whose mystery was solved only in the wake of Purvītis' 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Exploring a number of hints and clues, it became possible to reveal that the important essay about Purvītis (Figure 6) in the British magazine *The Studio* [Iljina 1905] was authored by Marija Iljina (1885–1966), a Russian General's daughter from Lithuania, an anglophile and amateur photographer who had come to Riga for school, living next door to the artist and obviously attending painting classes in his studio.



Figure 6. First page of the essay *A Russian Painter*. *W. Pourwit* by Marija Iljina (Mary Illyne) in the journal *The Studio*, Vol. 33, No. 142, 1905, p. 285. Image – *March Day / Sunny March Day / March Sun* (no later than 1900, destiny unknown) by Vilhelms Purvītis.

Soon after the release of the publication, Iljina, aged twenty, became a lady-in-waiting in the Russian court; she served as a nurse in the First World War, lived in exile and died in Cannes in the year when Kačalova was finalising her candidate's dissertation in Riga [Ābele 2022: 388–389]. Thus, it turned out that Kačalova who was reticent about her baronial ancestry [Šteimane 2005: 12] is not the only Russian noble woman having contributed to promotion and research of Purvītis' art. Thereby her work can be discussed also in the succession of local non-Latvian writings on Purvītis where her most remarkable predecessors were Iljina and Engelhardt.

Iljina introduced Purvītis as a “Russian painter” [Iljina 1905: 285], and an imperialist attitude pervades her essay that at the same time contains valuable observations and insights about the qualities of Purvītis' art. Certainly, in terms of statehood Iljina was not wrong, and the Latvian painter in the international exhibition scene of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was an artist from Russia. Engelhardt changed the label from “Russian” to “Baltic” emphasising Purvītis' leadership in the Baltic Provinces and prioritising it to both imperial (Russian) and emancipating ethnic (Latvian) aspects [Engelhardt 1912: 184]. Kačalova positioned Purvītis among the founders of Latvian art, thus committing herself to the building of the national cultural canon. In general, she joined the strong 20<sup>th</sup>-century ethnocentric tradition in Latvian art history writing but in details her approach involved transnational interest in multicultural contexts. With the exception of dissertation texts, some articles for Riga Russian newspapers by the late 1950s and papers presented elsewhere in Soviet Union the main language of her publications was Latvian.

### The final perspective

Vilhelms Purvītis wrote that “the road [to art] itself is long, it has no end, and if there seems to be a goal on the horizon, it disappears into the distance as one gets closer. However, as long as the artist continues to follow his goal and remains faithful to his vocation, his service to art has not been in vain. When he gives up his goal, he also loses himself.” [Purvītis 1942: 24] The same could be said of the research path, and Tatjana Kačalova managed to follow it faithfully.

If it would be necessary to summarise her attitude concisely, the whole story might be replaced with two words – “Purvītis resounds!” The author of the article remembers them expressed by the lady of 82 in a discussion about attribution issues of the painter's works during his 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary memorial conference at the State Museum of Art in Riga in 1997. The venue of the event was the permanent exhibition of paintings, and the speaker left an impression of a conductor guiding the orchestra of painted landscapes. The scene and the phrase refer to Kačalova's inclination to identify analogies between visual and musical creativity. In Soviet Latvia, she was the only art historian continuously reflecting on acoustic associations evoked by



turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup>-century paintings, and this aspect of her interests in the guise of such notions as decorativeness still awaits profound investigation reaching beyond a memorial dedication [see Ābele 2010a: 39].

In comparison with other art historians born in the 1910s or 1920s and active in Soviet Latvia, Tatjana Kačalova's career was relatively fulfilled. In the "family tree" of Latvian art history, her reputation, marked by a combination of reticence, resilience, intellectual activity and aesthetic sensibility, epitomises a "precisely invested life", as art critic Inga Šteimane entitled her 2005 interview with Professor Kačalova [Šteimane 2005: 1]. She would not accept that the focus of interest is turned on her, not on Purvītis. However, it is worth trying to understand the complexity of her tasks in their time by looking at the less visible or previously unknown steps on her journey of discovery, as well as to experience the sense of artistic vibrance that permeates Kačalova's perception, encouraging us to engage her insights in a continuing dialogue. On one hand, her research on Purvītis, just as her teaching of foreign art history throughout the Soviet occupation period and beyond was a great benefit to the society. On the other hand, the time of wide international research opportunities came too late for a full spread of wings towards transnational visibility and expansion of these exploits. Therefore, and for the sake of good luck, it is necessary to be aware of her contribution as part of the continuing research adventure.

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