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Painting as Existential Experience: the Work of the Painter Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas

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Abstract. *The aim of the article* is to study the life and creative work of the famous Lithuanian artist Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas in the context of socio-cultural phenomena of the late 20th century. *Results.* Paintings of Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas (1957–1993) give an impression of intriguing, temperamental, obscure and enigmatic creative work. The artist lived for a short time, as his life ended unexpectedly when he was only thirty-five years old. The painter is strongly etched in the memory of his contemporaries, and his personality, as well as creative work are intertwined with things that may not even exist. Nowadays, a lot of people talk about Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas and his paintings. This bright personality achieves more and more colourful tones, and is vividly portrayed. Art historians are interested in his artistic legacy. The artistic work of this painter remains a subject of interest and discussion among artists and art critics. It is fought over at public auctions, and in the shadow of the art market. After graduating from the Vilnius Art Institute (now the Vilnius Academy of Arts), the young artist was thrust into a period of political change. The liberation of Lithuania from the Soviet Union meant new opportunities and creative freedom for him and other artists. *Scientific novelty.* This article is the first attempt to analyse in detail the oeuvre of Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas, as during the period of political changes, his paintings became a symbol of creative freedom. *Conclusions.* In fact, this outstanding artist brought many innovations to Lithuanian painting. The painter intuitively found a new concept of abstract painting in Lithuania. His main idea was to improvise freely on a very large canvas, and to paint nature *alla prima*. Free colour improvisations in his work only appeared after long sessions in painting *plein air* workshops. Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas stood out because he did not care about subtle colour nuances, or even for the whole expressive colourist school of Lithuanian painting. His abstractions are like a short and precise message spoken aloud.

Keywords: Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas; Lithuanian painting; Kaunas S. Žukas Technical School of Applied Arts neo-expressionism; *plein air* painting; abstract painting; hippie subculture in Lithuania

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Introduction

Formative years of Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas as an artist and personality were in the 1970s and 1980s, an era known as Stagnation. His first paintings appeared in that inert atmosphere, during the slow collapse of the Soviet Union, while his greatest works were created when Lithuania regained its independence (1990–1993). Lithuanian painting of that time entered a limbo state: a new generation of painters emerged, with different creative approaches and a desire to shed the academicism that had been instilled in the Art Institute. When Jankauskas's artworks appeared at the first exhibitions in Kaunas, they immediately caught the eye of those interested in art. They openly contradicted the then-prevailing manner of Lithuanian painting, including dark or muted colours, indistinct emotions, and speaking in generalities. In the 1990s, the witnesses of the artist's work were well aware, that it resonated with the vibes of change and rupture of that turbulent, unique time. Even those who never met Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas, felt the freedom, the spirit of protest, and even much more in his paintings.

The painter spared neither physical, nor spiritual efforts. He seemed to be brighter than others, both a favourite and a negative figure. Yet this man was never colourless, boring, or opportunistic, simply working on every piece of work with care and devotion, as if it was his last one. Just look at the photos of a 16-year-old Rimvidas at the technical school, scraping wood or painting in the open air. Total immersion was in the process. It seems that painting and drawing relaxed his thoughts and loosened the knots of some uneasy experiences.

Recent Research and Publication Analysis. There are no comprehensive scholarly texts in Lithuania, devoted to the work of Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas, so this article is the first attempt to summarise the knowledge and to understand the significance of his work in Lithuanian art. Kristina Budrytė Genevičė (2008) has included his work in the field of research on Lithuanian abstract painting, but has not analysed it further. At the time when the artist was still alive, the popular press did not spare him any attention. There were interviews, exhibition presentations, and interpretations of individual paintings, which were eagerly produced by inspired art critics. All this material is a significant source of information and facts. It is analysed below. Archival material is an important source for this essay. The Archive of Lithuanian Literature and Art holds the notebook of Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas. The artist's relatives and friends kept some of his letters, which were used for the writing of this article. An important source is the friends of Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas, with whom the author had correspondence.

The works of Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas were exhibited at Kaunas artists' exhibitions (1986, 1989, 1990), national exhibitions of young artists (1989), and the shows of the Angis painters' group in Vilnius and Kaunas (1991, 1993). In 1988, his first solo exhibition took place at the Kaunas Artists' House, but it did not seem to be covered by the press. In 1990–1992, the first presentations of independent Lithuanian art in the West took place, and the master's artworks were included in the first group exhibitions in Linz (Walzer, 1991–1992), Tallinn (Jurėnaitė, 1992), and Frankfurt am Main. Little information is available about the exhibition Contemporary avant-gardists (Zeitgenössische Avantgardisten), in Frankfurt am Main. The organisers and location remain unknown. It was probably a commercial event held on the grounds of the Sheraton Hotel. The artworks never returned and Jankauskas was aware of it.

In the catalogue of the Forma Antropologica exhibition, the curator, Raminta Jurėnaitė (1992), described the mood of Kampas's paintings as a "prickly pleasure of anxiety" (p. 7). Perhaps because of the radiance of this emotion, early recognised and identified, the artist's name frequently appeared in critical texts, artists' discussions, and polemical essays on the state of Lithuanian art.

After the solo exhibitions at the Kaunas Picture Gallery (1991, 1993), around a dozen texts about Kampas and his work appeared in the city press. But more was written about his personality, lifestyle, the peculiarities of the creative process, and less about the essence of his paintings. The myth of the artist was already beginning to form, and he was described as an "asocial type" (sic!), visible both in public and in the "underground". It seems that the opposite was true — the painter was very sociable and active everywhere: in open-air workshops, at exhibitions, at noisy parties; and this was not the underground, but simply the life of young artists. According to Violeta Gustaitytė (1993), Kampas spoke of himself simply: "I am a painter, and that's all, painting is my way of living" (p. 4).

Painter Henrikas Čerapas (2010), a friend of the painter in his younger days, wrote that the artist's life completely corresponded to the spirit of the times, that a certain "asociality" was the norm of the "epoch of the turning point". After all, the 1990s marked a time of profound change in Lithuania. Rather, this "asociality" manifested itself as a resistance to the system, demonstrated by the entire generation that had then emerged — it was no longer the privilege of the marginalised alone" (p. 4).

The early loss of the already well-known artist sparked a wave of sentimental reminiscences and excessively improvisational texts in the popular press. Later, exhibition catalogues and books contained rather restrained and brief introductory texts. Today, they still testify to the positive and fairly correct view of this young painter that contemporaries had formed at the end of the 20th century, and this view has not changed substantially since then.

Notably, the artist's creative work did not sink into oblivion after his death, as is often the case. There have been several posthumous exhibitions (1994, 2004, 2006, 2018), and their reception in the popular press has been quite conventional, though, with no shortage of emotional comparisons that have been attributed to Kampas since the 1990s: painting is a trace of a weeping soul, a symbol of annihilation, etc. This narrative is still persistent and captivates art enthusiasts and professionals alike. However, it does not offer insight into the artist's influence on Lithuanian art or the value of his legacy.

In the following years, the paintings of Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas were viewed in a deeper and broader context by prominent foreign and Lithuanian art critics. The renowned British art historian Edward Lucie-Smith (2014) noted the affinity between the works of Kampas and Arūnas Vaitkūnas and linked both artists to late Lithuanian abstraction (p. 24). The Polish art critic Krzysztof Stanisławski (2014) regarded all expressive Lithuanian painting of the 1990s as part of the global trans-avant-garde, appreciated its "strength and originality", and considered Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas, Arūnas Vaitkūnas and the rest of the *Angis* group as its most serious representatives (p. 38). Milda Žvirblytė (2010), an art historian, agreed with her Polish colleague, noting that Kampas was a neo-expressionist artist (p. 11). Delving deeper into the changes in the Lithuanian conception of the landscape, Žvirblytė (2012) said that Kampas and

other members of *Angis* painted landscapes in their studios in the early 1990s, trying to transform them into a landscape structure, as they sought to “reveal absolutely different things in terms of content” (p. 9). However, it remains unclear what kind of content is in question. It would probably be unfair to miss the differences between the individual *Angis*'s group painters' concepts of landscape. Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas painted extensively en plein air, and the nature of Western Lithuania was a crucial part of his inner experiences.

A further section of the bibliography is the memories of contemporaries. Although very partial, they are useful in trying to grasp the atmosphere and mood of young artists in the unfavourable period of the 1970s and 1980s.

Written legacy of Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas must also be mentioned, as archived letters to sister Virginia Švirmickienė and a notebook from 1987–1988. The picture of a subtly feeling and deeply thinking young man emerges. Whomever he writes letters to, he seems to be a sincere and open person. The letters are atmospheric, sometimes melancholic, with one or two drawings. He would notice curious details and absurd situations in life, worrying about troubles at home and being separated from his people while serving in the Soviet army.

While living in Klaipėda and later serving in the Soviet army, the artist often wrote to his elder sister. In a letter from his school days, Rimvidas told her about his bleak home in Klaipėda, his school, and presents a poem of his own creation written in the style of Kristijonas Donelaitis. It looks like he found the Donelaitian hexameter quite easy to master, and the mood of the teenager was not so bad. In the same letter from 1971, we find out that a drawing of Rimvidas, a pupil of the Children's School of Art in Klaipėda, was well appreciated at an international children's art competition in Hungary. He writes to his sister: “I received a parcel from Debrecen. For some drawing. How remarkable, not that it's valuable, but to know that somebody wrote it there in Hungary. And my name is written in such a funny way, it's nice to read it, even though I don't understand Hungarian. They sent me very good books” (Jankauskas, 1971, p. 1). The letter concludes with a short question: does his sister still have his “wooden grampa”? Obviously, at that time, around 1971, Rimvidas was already doing some woodwork and discovering the wide realm of art.

The so-called diary of Rimas Jankauskas is a single notebook with brown calico covers. The entries are fragmentary, apparently written only occasionally, with long pauses. The notes begin with neatly written information important to a painter, such as standard frame sizes and descriptions of primers. The notes are divided into sections, which shows his seriousness about keeping notes. Section titles are: Planned Exhibitions, Material Costs, Programme, Income from Painting, Intended Projects, Landscapes, Still-Life Compositions, Repetition of Old Projects, Flaws, Methodology, Symbols.

The other part of the notebook contains coherent long texts about the Art Institute, the position of artists in the changing regime, and the Palanga plein-air workshops, which he enjoyed very much. Essays of Kampas about his recently completed studies at the Art Institute are very sarcastic and poignant. Caught in a sense of impending fundamental change, he thought in a visionary way about the future of Lithuania and the fate of its cultural heritage. He vividly discussed how Lithuania and its arts could develop, and he spared no criticism for artists in a hurry to make a quick buck.

Having read all the published and available material, the conclusion is that Rimvidas Jankauskas has not been forgotten. His work has withstood the pressure of history and remained intriguing and relevant to those who have seen it in exhibitions or private collections. But as the world and the values of humanity change by leaps and bounds, there is still a danger of being lost, overlooked, forgotten. This book, therefore, endeavours to provide a coherent account of the life and work of a talented artist, without resorting to questionable assumptions.

Aim of the article

The aim of the article is to study the life and creative work of the famous Lithuanian artist Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas in the context of socio-cultural phenomena of the late 20th century. Additionally, to relate his work to its socio-cultural context, to reconstruct his creative path, and to present a holistic view of his creative activity. This is necessary, since the stories of his contemporaries, passed down by word of mouth, continue to grow the legend of this exceptional Kaunas artist, often nicknamed Kampas, Bekampis, Kamputis¹. While realising the appeal and charm of legends and myths, we would still like an answer to the question: what is the place of this prominent painter in Lithuanian art? What determines its enduring popularity — the paintings, the fate of the author, the myth created by his contemporaries, or all of the above? It will be curious to find out, although probably difficult to explain, how this undoubtedly talented personality emerged in Lithuania at the end of the black Soviet era. Is his work still as influential as it seemed in the 1990s, the time of the fall of the Soviet Union and the Restoration of Independence? Apparently, the creative work of Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas radiated the power of a breakthrough, and marked that extraordinary time as a cultural beacon. Finally, is his mature oeuvre the end of some tradition of Lithuanian painting, the last expressive cry, or, perhaps, the foundation brick for other manifestations of modern art? This essay aims to look into the milestone works of Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas, as well as his environment, and to highlight his uniqueness without creating new legends.

Main research material

The beginning of the creative path. At the Technical School

In the summer of 1973, in the absence of any discussion with his family, Rimvidas Jankauskas, together with his classmate Vytautas Balsys (who would later become

¹ R. Jankauskas did not call himself Kampas (Lithuanian for “corner”), although he signed his paintings under this nickname. It originated in his early youth while studying at the Kaunas S. Žukas Technical School of Applied Arts (1973–1976, 1980). It was partly related to Jankauskas’s living conditions upon his arrival from Klaipėda. Additionally, the nickname stuck with him after a visit to the Kaunas Drama Theatre. One of the characters of the play was Bekampis (literally, “without a corner”, or homeless) — confused, barely sober, lyrical. Jankauskas used to jokingly repeat Bekampis’s line: “Where is my home?” All this resonated with his dire financial situation. At first, his friends began to call him Bekampis, then Kampas or Kamputis.

a famous Klaipėda artist), came to Kaunas and enrolled at the Stepas Žukas Technical School of Applied Arts, majoring in woodworking. The profession suited him, as Rimvidas was industrious and meticulous, and had already been introduced to woodworking at the Klaipėda Children's School of Art.

The atmosphere in Kaunas at that time was exceptional. In 1973, one year after Romas Kalanta's self-immolation in the garden of the Musical Theatre, tension lingered in Kaunas, and memories remained very vivid, although it was only possible to share them privately, and certainly not with everyone. The Soviet authorities intensified their focus on artists, and restricted their freedoms, while Kaunas was stifled by ideological surveillance. A strange microclimate also prevailed at the Technical School. The sense of freedom and the quest for individualism of students, still in their teens, who came from various parts of Lithuania, was mixed with the strict control of the Technical School administration. Duplicity and flattery, intimidation and lies. Young people instinctively resisted restrictions and sought to stand out from the grey crowd by their appearances and unfettered lifestyles. The system was ready to repress and break their destinies.

The Stepas Žukas Technical School of Applied Arts preserved the pre-war spirit of the Kaunas School of Arts, which had operated originally at the same place from 1922 to 1940. Both 16-year-olds and secondary school graduates would come to learn crafts at this historically important art school, transformed into a technical school during the Soviet era. The age difference of four or five years seems minor, but it was nevertheless significant as they matured, especially for the younger ones. The Žaliakalnis (Green Hill neighbourhood), Pelėdų Kalnas (Owl Hill Park), and the classrooms contained the unique aura of the former Kaunas School of Arts.

In the 1970s, there was no longer any prohibition against taking an interest in the pre-war modernists, the Ars group, and the expressive colourist Lithuanian painting tradition. Some of the olden-days teachers and artists, who impressed the young with their appearance, manners, and way of speaking, were still working at the Technical School. There were also some harsh servants of Soviet ideology, furiously trying to educate, and that contrast in behaviour had a very strong effect on students. Moreover, in the mid-1970s, several young artists who had graduated from the Vilnius Art Institute, including the painter Alfonsas Vilpišauskas, started working at the Technical School.

The impact that Alfonsas Vilpišauskas had on his students, some of whom aspired towards an artist's career over a role as a mere producer, was enormous. One such student was Rimvidas Jankauskas (see Figure 1). Vilpišauskas encouraged him and other budding talents to paint from life in Žaliakalnis and draw inspiration from nature. Together with his teacher, Jankauskas and his fellows would visit the M. K. Čiurlionis Museum to analyse Lithuanian folk art, its colours, as well as the paintings of Justinas Vienožinskis, Vladas Eidukevičius, and the Ars group members. This was likely the place where both the students and their teacher, Alfonsas Vilpišauskas, felt a sense of community and the attraction of real painting. Many years later, when Kampas returned to Kaunas after his studies at the Art Institute, Vilpišauskas became a close colleague while remaining an authority, and his adult former students invited him to join the Angis group. "We believed in him. He was a great teacher. His efforts bore fruit" (Žalpys, 2010), recalls Jonas Gasiūnas, a fellow student of Kampas (p. 130).

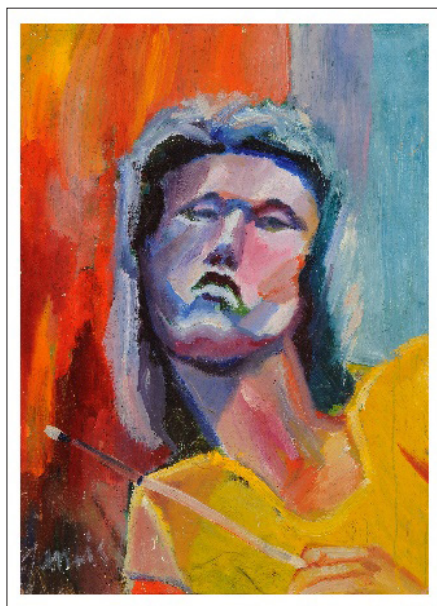


Figure 1. Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas.
Self-Portrait. 1981–1982. Oil on
cardboard, 53 x 38 cm. MO museum
(Jankauskas-Kampas, n.d.)

Like the rest of his company (now famous Lithuanian artists Vytautas Dubauskas, Jonas Gasiūnas, Vytautas Tamoliūnas, Jonas Arčikauskas et al.), Kampas admired hippies (Budrytė-Genevičė, 2022), but he and friends were mere “seasonals” since they’d bum around in the summer only (p. 176). This probably also played a role in shaping his worldview. The young man’s life at that time was intense — studies, friendships, romances, parties, books, one or two commissions for woodwork. The master used to lathe wooden clock parts for a watchmaker and thus earn a little money. In the summer, he hitchhiked like a true hippie. In a letter from 1976, a fascinating description of the artist’s wanderings could be viewed:

“As soon as my internship ended, I was awarded a scholarship. Well, of course, I made the most of it. The next day I was in Leningrad. As I left in a drunken state, I ended up in Leningrad with only a sweater and a folder for drawings. I had no addresses and no acquaintances. So, I pretended to be a drug addict (that’s what I looked like at the time) and went to a café where all the bohemians of Leningrad gathered. That is to say, artists, writers, poets, business people, drug addicts, and so on. With trembling hands (because I was hungover) I drank coffee and looked for friends. I succeeded. I quickly got a place to stay. And I met many interesting citizens of Leningrad. I visited poets and artists (not officially recognised). [...] I wandered around the Hermitage and came to one disgusting, egoistic conclusion that the Hermitage should belong to me alone, and others may go shopping. Don’t get me wrong, that was my impression. They are only happy to look at all the glitter. But the city of Peter is, in general, wow! Well, that’s so much about it. I came back after a week. And I started wandering around Lithuania,

all the Student Construction Camps. Our Technical School students have been scattered there, decorating. I hitchhiked. Eventually, I stayed in Belvederis near Veliuona. There I worked on the restoration of the family chapel of the Burbos Manor. I stayed for 1 ½ weeks, earned 46 roubles, and left for Klaipėda. Halfway there I met a hippie. We celebrated a bit and left. And we went far away. Now I'll give you the list of the cities we visited hitchhiking. Without paying a single penny:

Kaunas–Vilnius–BSSR

Molodechno–Minsk–Bobruysk–USSR

Chernihiv–Gomel–Kyiv–Ternopil–Chernivtsi–MSSR²

Soli–Kishinev–USSR–Odesa

And then back. In Odessa, we had 4 kopecks left. With which we returned to Kaunas. The journey was fascinating, difficult, and exhausting. In total, we covered 4000km. We saw things you never see on a sightseeing tour” (Jankauskas, 1976, p. 3).

There was enough time for reading. In the Soviet space, many desirable things might have been unavailable. Rimvidas Jankauskas was particularly interested in Ecclesiastes, Jack Kerouac, and read the classics of literature — Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, — loved his *Crime and Punishment*. He was not only a reader, he was able to admire and criticise those he disliked, and he also seriously delved into 20th-century drama, since he dreamt of studying stage design. Probably looking for a place to study further, he went to Leningrad: “[...] I was at the Theatre Institute for the entrance exam. The situation is fierce, 23 for 1 position in the department of stage design” (Jankauskas, 1976), he lamented in a letter to his sister (p. 2). In the summer of 1976, he had no idea that he would be expelled from the Technical School for allegedly inappropriate behaviour. And the system rejected him.

There is very little information about how Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas drew and painted at the Technical School, as everything is scattered. But there was hardly anything more special than academic tasks well done. His fellow student Elena Balsiukaitė-Brazdžiūnienė remembers the graphic nature of his academic drawings, the theatrical and slightly surreal compositions of long-legged girls. Imaginary long-legged women, the benchmark of the beauty of the 1970s, became the main subject of his wooden sculptures, precisely and elaborately made. However, such works were already then clearly at odds with the aesthetic taste developed in the Technical School.

A few months of autumn 1977 were spent working as a handyman in Kaunas Musical Theatre. A sad prospect awaited — two miserable years in the Soviet army.

In the Soviet army, 1977–1979

Rimvidas Jankauskas, like many other young people with greater goals, considered the Soviet army “an infinitely stupid invention”. In a letter to his sister, he comforted himself claiming that he was slowly getting used to it, “except, of course, not to the figures: 2 years, 24 months, 730 days. That’s AWFUL for me” (Jankauskas, n.d.-a, p. 3). Taken to Kaliningrad (later to Riga), he consoled himself at least with this being the former land of the Prussians, which he perceived as a land filled with antiquity and legends. The letters show that he tried his best not to get overly upset but in fact, he was withering away without more engaging activities and the Lithuanian press. His friend Elena

² BSSR, USSR, MSSR — former Belarussian, Ukrainian, Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republics.

Balsiukaitė used to send him some culture magazines — *Nemunas*, *Literatūra ir Menas*, *Kultūros Barai*, *Jaunimo Gretos*. Rimvidas enjoyed them very much, he would read every last word and then forward them to his friend. “In the army, the mind has nothing to do. [...] I am tired of thinking the same thoughts day after day. And then I start writing the same to you. Perhaps I am out of my mind? According to doctors, 65 per cent of people leave the army crazy. I’m worried about that. You see, while socializing with the ‘RUBES OF THE SOVIET UNION’ one can start to unhinge after a while indeed” (Jankauskas, n.d.-b, p. 1).

In the army, Kampas served as a painter. He had to decorate the “Lenin’s Room”, make propaganda posters, and write slogans. The painter tried to find happier activities, like illustration. Yet he overthought it: “I’m trying to illustrate. Surely, I understand this is unhealthy, kind of stealing from someone else. It’s like you’re making a detail from someone else’s blueprints. Maybe the upside is that you have to go deeper, to relate to the author. But it’s all poor, and my only hope it’s temporary” (Jankauskas, 1978, p. 4).

During his days in the Soviet army, a clearer vision of the artist’s future life emerged — to return to Kaunas S. Žukas Technical College of Applied Arts, to present his diploma work (which happened in the summer of 1980), and to prepare for the Vilnius Art Institute, the threshold of which had already been crossed by some of the students of the Technical College.

Stage of theatres

A year was spent at Kaunas and Vilnius theatres, preparing for the entry exams to the Art Institute. Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas was officially hired as a set designer at Kaunas Musical Theatre and Vilnius Youth Theatre. He worked quite closely with directors, creating posters and set designs for theatre performances. His presence in the theatre environment left traces in his later work.

Surviving drawings from this period — portraits, simple still lifes, and room compositions in pencil, pastel, and charcoal. These are dry and considerably stiff linear and tonal drawings, that any aspiring student with some training could make. Later, at the institute, Kampas will grow into a very good draughtsman.

Some of his first surviving paintings related to the theatre are *Dancers* and *The Pianist* (both 1983–1987). The artist painted what he observed in the theatre environment and backstage. The composition with dancers still resembles the image of a slender girl that he favoured during the Technical School years, but now with a clearer narrative present — the ballerinas in his painting are relaxed and resting. The composition with a pianist is more bizarre. A tiny figure is bent over the piano, and a somewhat chaotic environment reminds us of a backstage area. Yet the most striking detail is the hair, which for some reason was painted using collage elements, like long dried herbs. One can notice the desire to experiment, to act differently.

At the Vilnius’ Art Institute, 1981–1987

Upon his graduation from the Technical School in 1980, Kampas earnestly prepared for the entrance exams. He painted still lifes and consulted with a friend who was already studying at the Institute. Finally, the dream came true. In the autumn of 1981 Jankauskas-Kampas was admitted to the Painting Department. During the Soviet era, the State Art Institute in Vilnius was the only higher art school in Lithuania, hence numerous applicants and huge competitions for admission to the Faculty of Fine Arts. However, studies were often accompanied by disagreements with lecturers and

disappointment with the programme. During the six years of studies, the painter was taught by Šarūnas Milkevičius, Arvydas Šaltenis, Jonas Čeponis, and the true coryphaei of Soviet Lithuanian art, such as Sofija Veiverytė, Vladas Karatajus, Augustinas Savickas, Vincentas Gečas. In general, the relationship between students and teachers tended to be reserved, the atmosphere did not induce creativity but was instead rigid and ambiguous. In short, the 1980s at the Vilnius Art Institute were indeed a dull decade. As we now know, it ended with a “student revolution”, when Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas had already graduated.

Notes of Kampas contain many bitter words for the Institute. He described the years he spent at the Institute as the darkest period of stagnation for his generation: “During six years of study, without a painting experience, we looked with trust at the living famous names of the USSR. And only with the passing of the years did that naivety vanish, when the ‘taboo’ began to exceed the artistic possibilities. [...] But how can painting be limited not only in size but also in form?” (Jankauskas, 1987–1988, p. 31).

By “limitation in form”, the artist probably referred to the insistence on painting realistically, keeping in the mindset of lifelike compositions and shapes. According to Rimvidas Jankauskas (1987–1988), the slightest unconventional idea in a student’s composition was suppressed by the teachers’ phrase “don’t philosophise”, which meant “don’t try to be clever; only depict what remains inside the orbit of our thinking”, or rather what does not violate the principles of the Socialist Realism. Those were the ill demands.

Works of Kampas from the period of his studies are compositions based on the motifs of reality. He remains truly “limited in form” — he paints in a realistic, direct way, relying on drawing. There are hints of a narrative in those works, yet not developed. The expressiveness of the figures and their relationship are more appealing (*Under the Umbrella*, 1983; *Wedding Musician with a Flute*, 1983). Kampas leans towards photorealism, carefully colouring his pronounced compositions, perhaps to counter the painterly language introduced by his teacher Vladas Karatajus. The student’s drawings and compositions may now interest us in terms of structure and unexpected angles. The approach to objects and nature is attentive and quite conceptual (*Sledge*, 1981). However, his still lifes lack autonomy, as more of the student’s contribution to his studies than a creative statement for the future.

Although, the spontaneous nature of the painter was suppressed at the institute, his academic works (still lifes, portraits, nudes) still showcased his talents vividly. He was an excellent draughtsman. The artist would go and draw with another group after completing the assignment in his course fairly quickly. His fellow students have noted that Kampas used to work with a serious, rigorous approach and strived for good academic preparation. His work from the institute period is sound in the context of the academic programme, and a number of his works have been included in the Institute’s collection. Some are still preserved in the Museum of the Vilnius Academy of Arts.

It is a bit of a mystery as to which artists Kampas liked and admired at the time. His notes mention Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Arthur Schopenhauer, and a reproduction of one of Giorgio de Chirico’s works, which he carried around for seven years. The notes contain a Polish article on the sculptor Alberto Giacometti with a photograph of his work (a female nude). These are only fragments, too scanty to give a clearer answer as to which of the world’s cultural artefacts were of greater importance to the future artist. Edward

Hopper, the painter of American Regionalism, was also greatly admired by the students of the Art Institute in the Soviet era. Rimvidas Jankauskas's paintings of the study years seem to echo this admiration. For example, *City at Night* (1987) depicts a fragment of Lenin Avenue (now Gediminas Avenue) in Vilnius.

The subject of the painter's diploma work, *Mechanisers*, is typical of the Soviet higher school of fine arts. Jankauskas-Kampas chose the painter and rector of the Art Institute, Professor Vincentas Gečas, as the supervisor of his graduation work. This was a deeply considered choice of the disobedient student, to achieve a smooth completion of his studies. There was a rumour among students that the rector protected his "own" from being expelled from the Institute, even if they were involved in what in those days was officially called incompatible with the name of a Soviet student.

The doctrine of Socialist Realism was still prevalent in academia, so the graduate had to depict two people working, to compare strong male bodies to complex machinery, thus poeticising and glorifying the process of work itself. At the same time, however, it was imperative to show the totality of the academic training, the drawing and painting techniques, the ability to compose, to "mould" bodies, and to convey the language of faces and figures. In search of a more expressive composition, one also looked at some art magazines from socialist countries (there were hardly any other sources), listened to the professor (how else) and followed the professor's early paintings (from the 1960s).

The graduate was not satisfied with the result, and spoke of the work with self-irony: "I depict hard-working, hungover mechanisers, I pity them, and I want to shout to everybody: "Oh, how hard they are working" (Jankauskas, 1987–1988, p. 18). The painting was a tribute to the system he hated, as confirmed by many entries in his diary. The 1987–1988 entries contain bitter reflections on the years of study and poignant words addressed to the supervisor of his diploma work. He regarded the Art Institute as a didactic institution with an outdated stagnation-era management structure that hindered rather than helped the students (p. 19), and he left the institute in deep disappointment: "I am one of those whose 'behaviour is often incompatible with the ethical standards of a student' (as noted during my diploma work presentation). I am not proud of it. A year has passed since I left the meat grinder (so to speak, the Institute) in the form of mince and I am picking myself up little by little from the pothouses and gateways of Vilnius. It was necessary. It took counter-arguments to endure, even in the form of a half-prepared meatball. And I don't know how many more years it will take. Surely, this was not an alternative, everyone was doing their best. By losing their self-respect, by covering their face so they can't see anything, or by lulling themselves into existentialism, according to Uždaviny's" (Jankauskas, 1987–1988, p. 19). When writing in this way, the young painter had in mind his contemporary, the famous art critic at the time Algis Uždaviny's.

The quote above is a testimony to how deeply disappointed Kampas parted ways with the Art Institute, and to how much he struggled for other supports afterwards. Life also offered no warm shelter, inspiring environment, or at least a humble studio to paint in. Like every "young professional" trained in the Soviet system, Rimvidas Jankauskas was waiting for a job "by appointment". The system gave the artist an incredible opportunity to work as a handyman in Kindergarten (1987) in the town of Kapsukas (now Marijampolė). After a few months staying there, he gave up that job and returned to Kaunas.

Upon returning to Kaunas, 1987–1988

He was no stranger to the city, having previously studied at the Technical School of Applied Arts in the Žaliakalnis neighbourhood. Concrete owl sculptures, like a guarantee of stability, still rested on the fence of the school, just as they did when Kampas and his friends wandered around the streets and slopes of Žaliakalnis, looking for “Samuollian” motifs for their sketches. The legend of the Ars group, unveiled by the teacher Alfonsas Vilpišauskas, was kept alive in the memories of Kampas and his fellows who later formed the Angis group. Similarly, the exhibition of the Ars group at the M. K. Čiurlionis Art Museum was still an inspiring place. However, to readjust to life in Kaunas and enhance creativity, he required personal space and time.

On his return to Kaunas, Kampas, like many young artists, had no decent place to paint. In general, most young artists in Kaunas felt that the city’s atmosphere was still restrictive and discouraging. Some of them left the city to live and paint in the countryside (Eglė Velaniškytė, Audronė Petrašiūnaitė), while others (Arūnas Vaitkūnas, Eugenijus Varkulevičius, Algė Stankutė) chose regular wanders around Samogitia — the region favoured by the Ars members in the prewar period.

The slightly younger company of Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas (Česlovas Lukenskas, Naglis Baltušnikas, Aleksas Andriuškevičius, Elena Balsiukaitė-Brazdžiūnienė, Rolandas Karalius) was not prone to melancholic introspection. On the contrary, they actively sought to change the atmosphere of the city, the Artists’ Association, and even the very nature of art itself. The time had already come for the change of both Lithuania and its art. Rimvidas Jankauskas was an active participant in the discussions at the Kaunas Architects’ House. When the Post Ars movement was being formed, Česlovas Lukenskas invited several young Kaunas artists to join him, including Rimvidas Jankauskas, who was fully aware of the ideas of rinsing the boundaries between art and life, and art in the expanded field. However, as Česlovas Lukenskas told the author of this article, Kampas later decided to stay with the painters after all. The young Kaunas painters would occasionally meet at the Single Artwork Exhibitions at the Kaunas Artists’ House, and participate in national and young artists’ exhibitions at the Kaunas Picture Gallery. At the end of the 1980s, like-minded painters and architects gathered for bohemian pastimes in the Antis café. At that time, no one’s life was easy, especially the life of Kampas, who after a short stint as a lecturer at the Kaunas Art Institute (1989) firmly committed himself to being a freelance artist. It was a conscious choice of complete insecurity, poverty, and uncertain prospects.

Within the public eye, the painter quickly earned the label of a loud, bohemian character. Maybe it was because he had many friends in various social circles; while in the company of artists, he was the most visible and engaged in all activities. But this had nothing to do with the inner world of the young artist. Only his nearest friends knew him to be a learned and thoughtful man, with both the gene for intelligence and deep soul wounds.

The return of Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas to Kaunas, according to his fellow painter Henrikas Čerapas (2010), was “an inevitable confirmation of the historical regularity and the higher power guiding us” (p. 13). According to him, only in Kaunas, the city where they grew up while studying at the Technical School, “the city where the genesis and continuity of our Modernism lie, the city where you can see Vladas Eidukevičius’s motifs, and where the spirit of Antanas Samuolis still lingers in the lilac bush

of Žaliakalnis, and where the constructivist Mondrianesque logic of streets and the Great Workshop awaited him, Kampas could have painted the way he did, because, after all, there was no Baroque to weigh the spirit or to obstruct the scenery, and the workshop is what makes the painting” (Čerapas, 2010, p. 13).

From 1987 onwards, an intense phase of research began. His notes contain lists of “Intended Projects”, “Repetition of Old Projects”, and “Still Life Compositions” among others. Each entry is discussed and tagged with special graphic symbols. They mark whether an idea turns into a subject, a motif, or whether it is yet a mere emotion. Some of the ideas on the artist’s lists were implemented. The works painted during this period show his extravagance, woven from pop art, exoticism, and a surreal view of reality. There is a slight relaxation compared to the landscapes and still lifes of the Institute years (*Landscape; Trolleybus Terminal*, both 1985–1987). And while art critics of the late 1980s reproached many young painters for their uniformity and anaemic “spirituality”, the master’s small compositions with cats, spectacles, faces, or gloves were distinctive, eye-catching, both for the surprising pairing of the chosen objects and for the sharp colour combinations (*Chinese Motif*, 1984; *Morning Still Life*, 1987; *Untitled*, 1987–1988). The ideas in these paintings are enigmatic and rather obscure. It is difficult to explain what a Chinese box, a cat, and glasses have in common... All we know is that the individual objects in these compositions had a symbolic meaning for Kampas. According to his notes (Jankauskas, 1987–1988), for example, a black dog stands for sadness, and green gloves for aggression (p. 15).

There are several variations of the painting *Greenhouse*. At that time, around 1987, the master collaborated with Kaunas Drama Theatre on the play *Wolf Hunt* by Vidmantė Jasukaitytė. Kampas created a poster with the image of a greenhouse and presumably painted three versions of the *Greenhouse* at that time. All of them are greyish in colour, and this restraint makes the paintings stand out in the context of other works of the time. What is behind this seemingly domestic motif? Apparently, the motif had an unexpectedly delicate meaning in his mind: “The greenhouse is beyond reach; the warmth and the good are not for me” (Jankauskas, 1987–1988, p. 15).

During this period, the artist’s life and work were full of distractions, uncertainty, and reflections in writing. “To make something of high quality, one must have a strong conviction in it”, Kampas wrote in his notebook (Jankauskas, 1987–1988). “I would like to start from complete ignorance. Free of all ‘taboos’. I want to awaken my subconscious to gain clarity about my nature so that in the future, I no longer restrain myself or feel compelled to engage in actions that now cause me embarrassment” (Jankauskas, 1987–1988, p. 21).

The process of an artist turning inward to recreate the inner self is a slow and lengthy one. Observing nature and longer stays in open-air workshops helped the painter to “break free of all taboos” and “gain clarity about his own nature”. The Art Institute had discouraged him from nature, thus he needed to readjust his relationship with it, just to be able to reject it again, in the direction of greater abstraction. In the period 1988–1990, concrete images and representation abandoned his paintings; he no longer sought to reproduce reality, changing the very paradigm of his perception of painting.

A creative breakthrough in nature. Plein-air Sessions and Bridges

In 1988, Kampas painted the artwork *I’m Black*. Most of the painting is a plane of nuanced greenish-brownish hues, quite difficult to identify: is it a human torso or an

exaggerated detail with a tiny house visible in the distance? Is the phrase, “I’m black”, an expression of a temporary low mood or a more general feeling of detachment and loneliness? The enigmatic painting seems to mark the beginning of a new phase of his work, coinciding with, or perhaps partly determined by, heavy inner experiences.

Paintings of 1988–1989 contain dark, deep colour tones. It is worth noting that it was at this time that variations on one of his most prominent motifs, a bridge, appeared (*Untitled*, 1988–1989; *Bridge (Landscape)*, 1988–1989; *Untitled*, 1988–1989). He started painting bridges while still at the Institute, during his internship in Užventis. At that time, he painted both a mundane concrete bridge and the surreally fragile *Lorca Bridge* (1983). The painting adopts a narrow vertical format and recalls the elongated sculptures of Alberto Giacometti or the forms and colours of Salvador Dalí’s early paintings.

In the late 1980s, the bridge motif attracted him again. The plein-air sessions in Palanga, Cape Ventė, and Rusnė were of particular significance (see Figure. 2). He was drawn to the motif, both as a dark silhouette against an almost always lighter sky, as a symbol linking two shores, two spaces, and, finally, as a reference to certain personal memories. Simply put, he found the bridge motif fascinating and mysterious. He calls this attitude “metaphysics” in his notes: “My relationship with reality is very disturbed, so I lean towards metaphysics.” [...] I need to go into nature. It’s scary” (Jankauskas, 1987–1988, p. 41).



Figure 2. Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas. Footbridge. 1991. Oil on canvas, 49 x 59 cm, KMMF (Jankauskas (Kampas), n.d.)

In his notes (Jankauskas, 1987–1988) we find more of the criticisms of his own painting, which Kampas calls “flaws” — “ignorance of technology”, “lack of colouristic

imagination”, and a tendency to “colour the mood” (p. 14). Observing natural motifs and the changes in light and colour over time, the painter dives into contemplation and inner reflection. The environment of Lithuania Minor was of great significance to him, and he would return to it time and again during his plein-air sessions: “The beautiful stern land, the groves of oak trees, the hillforts. When you are in the woods, you find yourself in another world, it seems that a lone horseman is about to appear. Or you’ll come across a sacred altar. [...] So far, this is the only source of “spiritual nourishment” (Jankauskas, n.d.-b, p. 2).

More than ten years later, Rimvidas Jankauskas again had the opportunity to observe the shores of the Curonian Lagoon, only this time in a completely different state of mind. Between 1989 and 1992, he took part on several occasions in plein-air painting workshops on the Lithuanian seaside, either officially organised by the Lithuanian Artists’ Association or simply by a group of close friends. In Palanga, Kampas created some energetic, temperamental studies with a rich sense of colour (Dunes; Footbridge, both 1991). According to Gražina Kliaugienė, an art critic who was present at the time, the plein-air exhibition revealed that this young artist was different from the others, because “the energy bursts from within”.

The 1990s was a turning point in Lithuania — the Soviet Union collapsed and a threshold of history was reached. Euphoria and beautiful hopes were mixed with a sense of uncertainty, both in the artistic communities and in society in general. Artists continued to gather for plein-air events, but their aims were already free of ideological charge. The freedom to create was exhilarating. Plein-air sessions offered artists the pleasant feeling of togetherness.

In the spring of 1990, Kampas painted various small studies at a plein-air workshop in Cape Ventė organised by photographer Gintaras Stulgaitis. He experimented with colour, the character of the brushstroke, the rhythmicity of gesture, and a completely new way of seeing the environment. New in the sense that he was no longer concerned with the precise capture of reality, but more interested in conveying the spirit of nature, the change of light and colour — in fact, quite common tasks of plein-air painting (Untitled, 1990). At the same time, the artist saw and already captured in his studies the important motifs and moods of his future large canvases (Footbridge, 1991; A Small Footbridge, 1991; Sketch for a Composition, 1992 [a boat with a man]).

Then something else happened in Cape Ventė. During a painting session, at the age of thirty-three, Kampas felt a glimpse of death. As the painter Elena Balsukaitė-Brazdžiūnienė (2023) recalls, “there he must have been given a serious and fatal signal of the end — a heart attack. He kept to himself, disappeared on the pier for days, drew something, and painted some studies. [...] There we were, all of us, looking across the bay. Once we even tried to cross the Curonian Lagoon in a tin boat, but we failed. I remember when we came back, the four of us were rolling in the grass on the shore, laughing hysterically” (p. 2).

We now know that Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas had three years left before he “moved to the shores of the afterlife”. The painter was unaware of it yet, but he must have felt something deep and special. He comprehended what his painting ought to convey, to find a form and a way of expression. All other matters were reduced to the level of the bare minimum, and that was sufficient. “He was able to ignore and re-

ject a lot of commitments. He only needed space and time to paint”, said Elena Balsiukaitė-Brazdžiūnienė (2023, p. 2).

The Turning Point, 1989–1990

Kampas painted his first large-scale works in the village of Šalūgiškiai, Jonava District. He had yet to acquire a studio in Kaunas, the circumstances were far from desirable. Witnessing the artist’s troubles, Česlovas Lukenskas offered him the opportunity to work in the countryside during the summer. In the village hut, the two of them prepared primers and canvases and discussed art and the prospects of painting. “Rimas revealed himself as a sensitive artist. In that homestead, he broke free and woke up as an artist, declaring one morning that he needed very large stretchers for painting”, said Česlovas Lukenskas (2023, p. 1). He cut them out, put them together, and “it was as if Rimas came to life once more, I saw his thirst for painting, the thinning of the paint layer, the arriving at *alla prima*, when every stroke is successful on the initial attempt”, Lukenskas recalled the moment of an important creative transformation (p. 1). In the autumn, Kampas returned to Kaunas and, thanks to the Lithuanian Artists’ Association, set up a studio in the former synagogue at Šv. Gertrūdos Street.

Possibilities, Supports, Influences and Improvisations

Kampas admired the *Ars* artists yet failed to embrace their reserved expressiveness and the restrained muted colours of Lithuanian painting. He never intended to follow the traditions of Lithuanian painting alone. The artist liked Antanas Samuolis and made a copy of his *Yellow Woman* (1990), then ripped it, and later amended it. This is a good illustration of the constant drama that was going on in his life and work activity. The *Drunkard* (1989) is also linked to Samuolis; the manner of painting and the face of the portrayed man encapsulates everything that is known about modern painting, from Paul Gauguin to Karl Schmidt-Rottluff. Rimvidas Jankauskas’s artistic interests since the Art Institute included Giorgio de Chirico, Alberto Giacometti, and the Japanese masters of *ukiyo-e*. Later, he was interested in the New York School, especially Franz Kline’s hieroglyphic brushstrokes and Willem de Kooning’s rough painterly gestures.

Around 1988, he developed a shallow, but nevertheless an interest in mythology and Egypt. In this sense, Kampas represented his generation. In the more liberal creative atmosphere of the late 1980s, Lithuanian painting and sculpture tended to dive into various exoticisms and use retro forms from the earliest periods of art history. In his notes, the artist refers several times to Egypt as an object of interest and mentions painting the “Egyptian series”, about which no further information is available. Much later, Egyptian mirages would reappear in his imagery once again, e.g., abstraction *The Nile Turning into Blood* (1992).

Curiously, in his notes from Palanga (Jankauskas, 1987–1988), we find the artist’s attempt to formulate his creative credo. His writing is complex and not entirely graceful, his thoughts are jumpy. The master speaks of a combination of harshness, wrath, and poetry, of the “expansion of the mind” through poetry and plasticity (p. 39). Then the thought wanders, the British rock band T. Rex is mentioned. Quite unexpectedly, the band’s drummer, Paul Fenton, is addressed: “Sorry, Paul, but I’m not going to speculate on you” (p. 39). Perhaps Kampas was thinking about the parallels between painting and musical expression. Yet this only survives in fragments like the one just quoted. More often than not, Kampas’s paintings are referred to for their proximity to jazz and

colour improvisation, but the credo also hints at punk rock music. Knowledge of this music may have influenced the development of Kampas's tendency towards vital and spontaneous painting. However, the key element was his openness to the environment, the extraversion that in his more advanced years became a very lively, expressive sense of the world with a lining of melancholy and poetry.

For Lithuanian artists, the 1990s brought their first direct acquaintance with Western art. For several generations, it was common to learn about foreign art through the press, while eagerly turning the pages of the socialist countries' magazines and the art books brought from the West. Finally, in the 1990s, Europe's museums and galleries became accessible to many. First visits often amounted to a culture shock, and the original stories of those who saw them, just stories, were extremely important. In 1990, a friend who had returned from Germany told Kampas vividly about the German *Neue Wilde* — the painters A. R. Penck, Sigmar Polke, Anselm Kiefer, Gerhard Richter, the sculptor Günther Uecker — and the significance of the large format. Indeed, the artist was ready for a large-scale format. The size was determined almost simultaneously with the vision of a painting.

The experiences in Šalūgiškiai, authentic memories of nature, the wide spaces and waters of the Baltic Sea, and the dramatic sunsets at Cape Ventė had a significant impact. These impressions could have pushed the formats to expand more than the poor word-of-mouth messages about *Neue Wilde*. Naturally, Kampas was interested in contemporary painting and discussed it with his *Angis* group colleagues. Through the Western press, through travel, contacts and friendships with European artists, they were all somewhat familiar with the global trans-avant-garde movement in general and German Neo-expressionism in particular. The German *Neue Wilde* group seemed especially close, as the language of expressive art was well-known to Lithuanian artists. In addition, some of the artists in that group had biographies linked to the Eastern Bloc, so there was a certain affinity. However, it remains unknown what Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas (who had never been to museums abroad) admired in particular. His themes were very different from those of the German neo-expressionists. Parallels yet can be seen — the power of expression, the screaming colour combinations, the large sizes, and the bold decision to speak of a world without illusions.

Most of the artist's abstractions are remarkable for their painterly plasticity and colour combinations. Their making was pure improvisation from the first brushstroke. Kampas called such impulsively painted works by a word of his invention — “improveezes” — improvisations that emerge in the rapid, dynamic act of painting (see Figure 3). The free, non-committal improvisation with colours and brushstrokes gave him joy. According to Antanas Obcarskas' words in the album: “What a pleasure! I mixed bowls of paint, took a big brush, and loaded everything on the canvas” (Maksėlienė, 2009, p. 14). The brushstrokes, spread over a large area, are full of power and tension, and the stark colour contrasts are sometimes sudden and dissonant. The abstracts of 1990–1992 (*Black Cloud*, 1991; *Untitled*, 1991–1992) revealed the spontaneous side of Kampas's nature.

On the Verge, 1992–1993

Looking at the paintings of the final phase (1990–1993), one is struck first and foremost by their vividness, intensity, and vigour. These qualities are present in the colour combinations, the mood of the painting, and the rhythm of the brushstrokes.

From around 1990 onwards, the images became increasingly abstract. The expression of internal feelings in colours and rhythms came to the fore. In lively and boldly painted works, one can still find the elements of a nude, portrait, landscape, or still life, but all this is submerged in rich colours and broad, sweeping, chaotic strokes. More precisely, the picture plane is a projection of the artist's thought and open nerve, an unvarnished inner reality that is stated boldly, loudly, and vibrantly.



Figure 3. Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas. Triplet. 1991. Oil on canvas, 82,5 x 204 cm.
NČDM (Klusas, 2018b)

At the end of the 20th century, Kampas broke into the restrained and “spiritual” field of Lithuanian painting with his spectacular works. His impulsiveness, inner freedom, and boldness fascinated some and disturbed others, but these qualities brought him into the spotlight for years to come. The flatness of his work (the rejection of depth) bothered a few but the master merely laughed. “From the vantage of time, I can see certain benefits of this method – the first application is usually the most striking, and after that, it only gets worse. [...] Kampas deliberately pursued a different strategy, emphasising the primacy of emotional release, and the quality of his works therefore varies, but in general, his paintings, especially his earlier ones, are marked by decorativeness and automaticity that is somewhat similar to the abstraction of Gerhard Richter”, said the painter Henrikas Čerapas (2010, p. 3).

Vitality and energy of this great personality carried him toward deeper, more complex themes and approaches. It is no longer just a cosmos of impressive abstractions. The work created between 1992 and 1993 is twofold: flashy abstracts pulsating with colour and rhythm, and polysemic metaphorical paintings with more explicit references to meaning. Around 1992, it seems that gloomy vibes, similar to those seen in the 1988 painting, *I'm Black*, once again crept into his life and work. Only now the artist is much more open, his expressiveness seems to be spilling over the edges (*The Headless Horseman*, 1992; *Confluence*, 1993; *She*, 1993).

Lithuania suffered an unpleasant political setback at the time. After the presidential elections of 1992, the country reverted to the rule of the former Lithuanian Communist Party. For Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas, who valued freedom and truth, as for many other Lithuanians, this must have been painful. The economic situation grew

worse, and hardships were faced by virtually everyone. It was becoming evident that the artist would have to leave his synagogue studio to its rightful owners — Jewish community. This was understandable but rather disheartening news, as he had no other accommodation. The creation of two large-scale works *Goodbye, Synagogue* (1991) and *Abandoned Synagogue* (1993) is directly related to this life experience and the overall atmosphere of the period.

The synagogue, where the master took shelter, meant home to him. One can imagine the rush of feelings at the loss of the roof and studio. The artist was at one with the place, it inspired his creative ideas and evoked special visions: “Once I was sitting in front of the synagogue, under a lime tree. And a whole bunch of rabbis gathered, laughing, cackling... The hall was full of Jewish ghosts... Although it was only a hallucination, it came as a great shock to me. Since then, my relationship with the synagogue has changed — I started to sweep, clean, and wash around it. I acquired a Talmud” (Makseliënė, 2008, p. 105).

Goodbye, Synagogue is an abstract gestural composition, a sentimental farewell to the former Jewish house of prayer. The diagonal of the Žaliakalnis Hill and the yellowish morning light also play a role in the composition.

The artist returned to the subject of the synagogue almost two years later. He once mentioned that the synagogue was one of the key themes of his reflections and paintings, not just part of his personal troubles. In *Abandoned Synagogue* (1993), the interior of the temple was examined in coloured studies. In one of them, the columns were painted with the artist’s fingers, the paper was softened by rubbing, which reveals an inner tension. In the painting, the tension is hidden, buried in a sublime dialogue between blue and white. This blue-white relationship is vital to him. Kampas regarded the synagogue, as well as the Cape Ventė, as “eternal” subjects in his work, that were constantly reflected upon. The pieces on these two subjects were his evident effort to express something of great significance to both himself and others.

Kampas referred to the painting, *Calm Evenings at Cape Ventė* (1993), as his most sentimental work, although it is far from sentimental, and rather full of wrath (see Figure 4).

Apparently, the artist was alluding to his personal relationship with the place. In a conversation with Kęstutis Marčiulynas (1994), he described his spring visit to Cape Ventė: “I slept on the dry grass, recharged my energy, spent the night with the fishermen. I should go there again... Or maybe not. It’s all used up...” (p. 5). The painting explodes with colour contrasts, drama intertwines with expression, and the vigorous movement of the brushstrokes creates a tension that seems about to burst through the dark plane of the painting, like the stormy waters of the Curonian Lagoon. As the painter Elena Balsiukaitė-Brazdžiūnienė (2023) states, “[...] he was very close to that land, as he later put it, ‘the edge of the world’. [...] The experiences and the space with the huge nets in which the trapped birds, destined to be ringed, are fluttering, the black shimmering water of the lagoon at night, and the distant moaning of the lighthouse” (p. 2).

Black Sun also relates to the artist’s favourite Lithuanian seaside. Its impressions and colours have never left the painter’s mind. However, *Black Sun*, along with his other painting, *Crucified Apple Tree*, appeals more strongly to cultural traditions, to the viewer’s ability to read symbols and to understand the metaphorical language (see Figure 5).



Figure 4. Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas. (Calm) Evenings on the Cape Ventè. 1993. Oil on canvas, 190 x 300 cm. NČDM (Klusas, 2018c)



Figure 5. Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas. Crucified Apple tree. 1993. Oil on canvas, 150 x 380 cm. Private collection (Klusas, 2018a)

After all, symbols such as a figure in a boat, black or red sun, sunsets, river confluences, garden trees or horsemen are instantly recognisable and have been recurring in Western art for several centuries. Kampas used them to create canvases of epic ambition. They were easily grasped by a viewer who had grown up surrounded by the above-mentioned symbols. Perhaps this lies at the heart of the popularity of the master's paintings.

Conclusions

As a young artist, Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas experienced first Brezhnev's Era of Stagnation of the 1980s, and then a period of multiple changes (political perestroika, Reform Movement, economic blockade, cultural breakdown) that were challenging for him and Lithuania as a whole. He was an artist with heightened sensitivity, responding to his surroundings on both a physical and emotional level. The painter was apprehensive about the arts, particularly picturing, as well as the emergence of kitsch and the fate of architectural landmarks. The painter was deemed entirely unacceptable to the official authorities because he ridiculed their global bluff, and wore the mask of an unkempt bohemian. In the art circles, he was largely avoided, though his work appealed even to those who failed to understand him, feeling lonely, despite being everywhere.

Kampas was an avant-gardist in the art world of his day, for he was ahead of everyone else with a very small group of Kaunas artists. His best works revolutionised painting at that time, and his significance in painting is similar to the role of the Post Ars group in Lithuanian art in the 1990s. Both cases are distinctive and exceptional.

The artistic growth of Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas was quite sudden, especially considering the sense of confusion after his studies. In the five years following his graduation from the Art Institute, he developed an individual and philosophical conception of painting, in which the most prominent elements are personally explored themes, improvisation, inner freedom, and painting *alla prima*. The chosen themes correlate seamlessly with the painterly forms. In his painting, a concrete landscape is reduced to a mere suggestion. The capacity for generalisation and a broad perspective has led the artist towards abstraction, a path not uncommon in Lithuanian painting. Kampas stood apart from other abstract painters due to his indifference to the nuanced aspects of meaning and colour. His abstract works resemble simple, concise sentences, lacking any lyrical quality.

Storyline is also a significant factor in determining the uniqueness of this artist. For quite obvious reasons (the stigma of Socialist Realism), most Lithuanian painters avoided narrative, which was the prerogative of ideologised art. If they "philosophised", it was only in terms of the relationship of forms, colours and shades, not in terms of content. Future painters were brought up in a similar way. Kampas, on the other hand, did not shy away from deeper content; he was attracted by fantastic mythical plots from cultural history. The hints of a storyline in an image or the title of a painting made his works more comprehensible to those unfamiliar with a specific painterly language, resulting in considerable popularity, enduring legacy and lasting mystique.

Scientific novelty. This article is the first attempt to analyse in detail the oeuvre of Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas, as during the period of political changes, his paintings became a symbol of creative freedom.

Rimvidas Jankauskas-Kampas is one of the most profound Lithuanian artists of the late 20th century. The painter exhibited great vigour and candour, unafraid to reveal his colourful emotions and complex existential thoughts. He was also renowned for his unwavering dedication to painting as his life's main objective and mission.

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Conflict of interests

The author declares that there is no conflict of interests.

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Живопис як екзистенційний досвід: творчість художника Римвідаса Янкаускаса-Кампаса

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Анотація. *Мета статті* — дослідити життя і творчість відомого литовського художника Римвідаса Янкаускаса-Кампаса (1957–1993) в контексті соціокультурних явищ кінця ХХ ст. *Результати.* Картини Римвідаса Янкаускаса-Кампаса справляють незабутнє враження, оскільки його творчість є таємничою, темпераментною, малозрозумілою та загадковою. Попри те, що художник прожив лише 35 років, він залишив глибокий слід у пам'яті сучасників, а його особистістю і мистецькою спадщиною цікавляться мистецтвознавці. Художня творчість Римвідаса Янкаускаса-Кампаса залишається предметом інтересу та дискусії серед художників і мистецтвознавців. За нього борються на публічних аукціонах і в тіні артринку.

Закінчивши Вільнюський художній інститут (нині Вільнюська академія мистецтв), молодий художник потрапив у період політичних змін. Звільнення Литви від Радянського Союзу означало для нього та інших митців нові можливості та творчу свободу. *Наукова новизна.* У статті вперше детально проаналізовано творчість Римвідаса Янкаускаса-Кампаса, оскільки в період політичних змін його картини стали символом творчої свободи. *Висновки.* Видатний митець став новатором литовського живопису. Художник інтуїтивно знайшов у Литві нову концепцію абстрактного живопису, а його головною ідеєю було вільно імпровізувати на дуже великому полотні та малювати природу *alla prima*. Вільні кольорові імпровізації в його творчості з'явилися лише після тривалих занять у малярських пленерах. Римвідас Янкаускас-Кампас не дбав про тонкі колірні нюанси, зокрема про всю експресивну колористичну школу литовського живопису. Його абстракції схожі на коротке і чітке повідомлення, сказане вголос.

Ключові слова: Римвідас Янкаускас-Кампас; литовський живопис; неоекспресіонізм; пленерний живопис; абстрактний живопис; субкультура хіпі в Литві

