

Ornamentation using the circle-and-dot or sun design is an old indigenous tradition. The possible semantic interpretation connected with solar symbolism corresponds to an interpretation of amber as a sun-stone. A very interesting feature is the combination of Baroque forms with this archaic ornament on two *kniepķeni* from the Parishes of Rucava and Medze (Fig. 7: 1, 2).

The *kniepķens* consists of three parts, each of which developed at a different time. A degree of continuity in traditions, reflected in the origin of particular parts of the *kniepķens*, appears in Latvian archaeological material. The basis for the archaic tradition seen in Latvian ethnographic costume is the dress of the indigenous groups, which even seemed archaic to a 13th century German chronicler. In the Middle Ages, restrictions based on social strata, and the hatred of the estates and all that was German on the part of the Latvian peasants, created conditions that permitted certain elements of this archaic set of components, recorded in the 13th century, to remain in use up to the early 19th century.

*I would like to express my gratitude to the staff of the Latvian History Museum, particularly the Head of the Ethnography Department, I. Ziņģīte, for advice and support in the preparation of this article.

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CONTEMPORARY AMBER ART IN KALININGRAD

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Starting from the beginning of the 1990s new conditions for the amber industry in the Kaliningrad area have been created. They were determined by the following factors. First of all, the monopoly of the only enterprise - Kaliningrad Amber Factory, which has had an exclusive right on extraction and processing of amber for more than half a century, was liquidated. According to the decree of the regional administration of 1992, it became possible for private companies and individual entrepreneurs to receive license on these kinds of activity. All of a sudden amber has ceased to be a "state stone" and turned out to be available for a broad army of professional artists and amateurs.

In the second place, the threat of competition with foreign manufacturers of adornments started to play a significant role. After the liberalization of foreign trade in Russia, a flow of imported bijoux came to the country, including amber goods from Poland and Lithuania. Thus, the local manufacturers were forced to begin fighting for the consumer.

Thirdly, tastes and preferences of a mass buyer have changed. Gone were the times when millions of adornments of one kind, produced by the local Amber Factory, could be sold without difficulties. More and more attention started to be paid to hand-made goods, one-off items or small-scale production goods.

Fourthly, a new type of customer has appeared - banks, major private companies, the Church and ordinary rich people. They could afford buying or ordering large and expensive items.

Fifthly, finally, the region's links with foreign countries sharply have expanded. Entrepreneurs and artists from Kaliningrad, those involved in the amber business, initiated trips to neighbor countries in order to participate in exhibitions, fairs and competitions. For instance, the number of Russian participants at the annual *Amberif* exhibitions in Gdansk is increasing now year by year. Some of the local manufacturers directly focus on the foreign market. It is true though, that the enclave situation of the region has a negative impact. Local artists feel strongly their isolation from the "mainland". Distances and border difficulties hinder and sometimes even make impossible their participation in an all-Russian art process.

All of the conditions that has just been mentioned not only contributed to modernization of amber industry and market but also had a huge impact on development of amber art in the Kaliningrad region.

Kaliningrad jewelry school

Since most of the older generation artists had come to former Eastern Prussia from Moscow, Leningrad and Krasnoye Selo, initially the local school of artistic processing of amber developed in the direction of traditional Russian jewelry. For a long time the artists saw amber as a component of a precious adornment, just a simple "substitute" to jasper, agate or malachite and paid major attention to metal framing. This was the way how beautiful complicated adornments were cre-



Fig.1. Lyubov Serebryakova Hair-comb "The Bird", 1995. Ambers, cupro-nickel. Length 21,5 cm. Kaliningrad Amber Museum

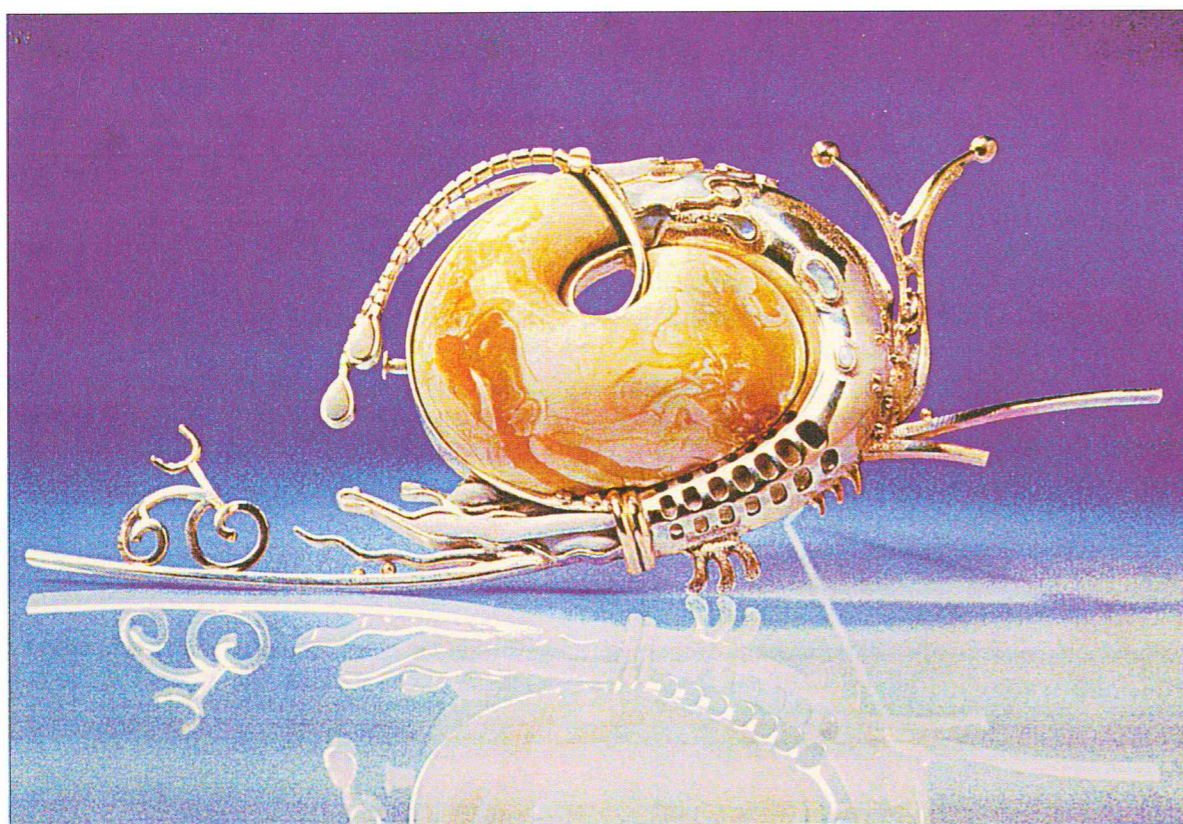


Fig.2. Natalia Lapinus Brooch "Snail", 1999. Amber, silver, leather, mother-of-pearl. Length 12 cm. Private collection.

ated using advanced jewelry techniques as blackening, sawing, filigree, etc.

Gradually our artists learned about and adopted a totally different approach, which was developed in the Baltics. In Latvia and Lithuania amber has always been considered a self-sufficient stone and a very minimal processing has been used. The Baltic masters did not seek to give to it a required form but to reveal its natural beauty. They usually preserved its natural form, relief, substance and sometimes even an oxidized crust.

Such combination of these two approaches can be considered the most specific peculiarity of the local school of art processing of amber. The leading Kaliningrad jewelers (members of the Artists's Union of Russia – E.Lis, G.Losets, L.Serebryakova, R. Benislavski, F. Krasavtseva, L.Sakharova, N.Zhutikova) in their works have always received initial inspiration from amber as stone itself. Its rich colors, the variety of forms and original pattern functioned as a stimulus to creating framing which would stress the natural beauty of the gem. It also should be mentioned that the metal framing never lost its importance and helped reveal the artist's plot.

The current period of development of art of jewelry in the Kaliningrad region is marked with search for new forms and variety of styles. It is important that older masters, which started working in 1960-70s, now look for new means of expression. In the recent years Lyubov Serebryakova ceased to use traditional jewelry techniques and embarked on new paths. She now bends and stamps the metal which enables her to create design projects where one can feel the adjustment of geometrical structures, and where the laconic, modest forms dominate ("The Bird" hair-comb, 1995) [Fig 1]. The artist intensively experimented with molding until she finally worked out her own approach which allows to achieve exquisite and original art.

Truly up-to-date are the works of Natalia Lapinus, a young jeweler. This artist is capable of producing a harmonious and poly-semantic image. Her sophisticated compositions, created with the use of various little bars, incrustations, kinetic details as well as some contours of stylized objects, form a new artistic reality. The "Snail" brooch, that was showed at an international exhibition in Germany (1999) can be considered as an example of such work [Fig 2]. Also interesting are experiments with forms and techniques of Liudmila Sakharova, one of the leading jewelers of the Amber Factory. The adornments she produces stand out because of their impeccable silhouette lines,

rational constructions and thorough technical execution of details. This time apart from creating traditional women adornments (necklaces, bracelets, pendants), the artist is more devoted to original plastic art compositions – souvenirs made of amber.

Applied art

The tradition of production of applied art of amber has its roots in the German art of the past centuries. From 1950s masters of the Kaliningrad Amber Factory produced various boxes, powder-cases, vessels, clocks etc. Of these the famous are the "Galore" vase – one meter high, the casket called "The friendship of nations", the model of the "Lenin" atomic ice-beaker as well as other articles, that are now on the exhibit in the Kaliningrad Amber Museum. All of them are perceived today as ideological symbols from the Soviet times.

Along with such paraded items there are real art pieces. The artist, which has been working in this area for a long time is Gennady Losets, an outstanding talent. He is perfectly armed with a plenty of technical approaches and capable of working not only with amber but also with wood, metal, bone and other materials. His elegant and exquisite boxes, pipes and snuff-boxes are reliable and comfortable to use. They are especially attractive because of the thoroughly chosen decorations: original amber mosaics, carved plates, incrustations etc. A set called "Oriental" (1996) is a good example of his art [Fig. 3]. Moreover, Losets is the only of the local masters who learned to colour amber using old-times techniques. As a result the carvings look more expressive and voluminous.

The demand for large and expensive amber items, that developed quite recently, united a whole group of younger artists, which specialize in many-leveled mosaic caskets, amber clocks and vessels, as well as richly decorated desk sets. Such articles, while looking very impressive, are more often eclectic and imperfect when it comes to technique. Though it should be mentioned that in this group there are remarkable articles made with great craftsmanship and taste. In this connection, one should think of boxes and lamps of Boris Serov, extremely graceful decorative vessels of Andrey Veretelnik [Fig. 4] and some others. In fact, it was the series of table clock made by Yury Lopatkin that can be regarded as the most interesting and unexpected art product in the last years.

The artist sometimes borrows the general silhouette of his creations from masters of the XVII-XIX centu-



Fig.3. Gennady Losets
Smoking set "Oriental"
(pipe, snuffbox), 1996.
Amber, cupro-nickel, wood.
Length of the pipe 16 cm.
Height of the snuffbox 9,5 cm.



Fig.4. Andrey Veretelnik
Decorative bottles, 1999.
Amber, wood. Height 7,5 cm,
12cm, 8,5cm, 6,5cm.
Private collection.

ries. However, every time he produces his own genuine composition. He himself makes technical decisions (he is a mechanic engineer by profession) and adorns the clocks with original decorative details. That is why his clocks are never simply copies of old-times articles and they look quite modern.

Probably the best of Lopatkin's oeuvres is the "Hour-glass" clock (1999). The frame reminds of the hour-glass, but in fact this is the mechanical clock with a very unusual rotating horizontal dial in the upper part. The clock mechanism is installed in the lower part. The foundation of the frame is decorated with amber intaglio with allegorical images of four elements in it - Water, Fire, Earth and Air [Fig 5].

The form of the "Venetian" clock (1996) was loved by the Italian masters of the beginning of the XIX century. The frame of mahogany wood is everywhere covered with amber mosaics. The dial is made of walrus bone. There are carved carnival masks on its sides. The frontal intaglio called "Success and Consent", situated under the dial, expediently contributes to the overall composition [Fig. 6].

In total, the artist produced 18 absolutely different clocks. Remarkable is the fact that despite persistent requests from the customers (he has quite a lot of them) to do copies of the favorite items, he continues to experiment and search for new forms.

Carving on amber

For a long time local artists perceived amber exclusively as a precious stone. Only most talented masters managed to reveal and use the richest pliant qualities of the Baltic gem.

The first to "carve" amber was Ernest Lis, the principal artist of the Amber Factory. He produced some beautiful cameos where he applied "bony" amber as if trying to underline its multi-layer character by preserving some roughness of the stone and sometimes its natural crust. For further expressiveness the artists uses contrast of a smoothly polished image of a figure or face with a relief surface around them. E.Lis is able to see a shape of an animal in a peculiar natural piece of amber or to show a face of an ancient man with his eyes mysteriously screwed up at us from a large deformed drop (sculpture "From the darkness of ages", 1984) [Fig. 7].

In the 1990s the carving has become very widespread. The access to amber as good stone for processing attracted many young artists to amber industry. It is for them that carving becomes the main direction of work.

Among the artists of new generation the genuine talent of Andrey Kavetski stands out quite clearly. The figures and sculpture sets that he creates are full of life and it is possible to see fine workmanship in them. His most known oeuvre is a composition called "Concerto for piano and orchestra", which consists of tens of insect musicians carved of amber pieces. So naive and full of good humor it attracted attention at the international amber exhibition in Germany in 1999 and then was purchased by the Amber Museum in the city of Ribnitz-Damgarten. Recently the artist has become more interested in religious subject-matters. It was him who produced an expressive multi-figure composition based on an Evangelic subject - "The Adoration of Magi" [Fig. 8].

One probably would not find analogs to abstract compositions of Igor Zalyaldinov in which amber organically goes well together with precious sorts of wood. The sculpture "The Baltic tale" (1999) with a large piece of amber put in it and its fantastical structures, reminds of legends which reveal the origin of amber stone [Fig. 9].

"Romantic project"

Further, the birth and active performance of an informal group of amber artists called "Romantic project" (first and only in the history of the region) can be called the most remarkable event of the last years. It united such artists as N. Almazova, A. Yuritsyn, E. Tchekmarev, and it was Igor Brasiunas who became an ideologue of the group. Later other carvers joined it.

All these different people were united by desire to give carving a status of the leading trend in artistic processing of amber and overcome "the resistance of the material". As a matter of fact, amber is soft and pliant stone and at the same time its carving is very difficult. Its multi-color character levels the relief and hide the true dimension. "The problem with amber processing", - Brasiunas says, - "lies in the fact that amber simultaneously absorbs and reflects the light to the extent that even the silhouette of the object becomes dissolved." Thus, members of the group try to find their own approach to amber and learn to create sculptures of full value.

The first exhibitions of the "Romantic project" (1998, 1999) demonstrated the wish of the group members to step out of the circle of traditional images and canons, i.e. production of numerous boring "fishes", "elephants" and "mushrooms". These "Romantics" worked out their own associative world, in which mythology, religion, philosophy and free poetic feeling converged. Their work also disclosed a tendency to variety and sophistica-



Fig.5. Yury Lopatkin Table clock "Hour-glass", 1999.

Amber, silver, walrus bone, mahogany. Height 24 sm. Private collection.

Fig.6. Yury Lopatkin Table clock "Venetian", 1996.

Amber, silver, walrus bone, mahogany. Height 14,5 cm. Private collection.

tion of the form, including production of abstract compositions, inclination to decorative manner, a bit superfluous at times. The carving has become more exquisite, somehow referring to articles made of bone, though fine adjustment of details on amber is almost invisible.

The "Sphinga" sculpture (1998) by I. Brasiunas is in a way a central work for the whole group. Elegant figure of a mythological creature in motion is made in good traditions of bone carving. The impression of dimension here is created not by means of sculpture but rather by graphic means. The through nicks in stone play role of the line of the pattern. Because of these nicks the low relief and fine carving become more noticeable [Fig. 10]. The outer framing, which has more relief and of darker color (due to the preserved natural crust) adds dynamics and sense of completion to the entire image. His other work – a flask called "The Warrior" (1999) is closer to traditional examples of fine plastic arts. The cork of transparent honey amber is designed as a figure of the warrior and it goes very well with predominantly white frame of the vessel. The artist was successful in showing the expres-

sion of a warrior stunned in waiting for the battle [Fig. 11].

The open-work carving of Natalia Almazova is genuine and refined. For her art she often chooses subject-matters connected to local Baltic myths and legends. However, she does not reproduce them literally but with the use of associations. Specially for audience of her works she writes small novels, in which she tries not to explain but rather add original written association to the image.

Another master, Alexander Yuritsyn, has become known before his involvement in amber art. He used his experience in production of intaglios made of yellow transparent amber. The artist also explores optical qualities of the stone: convex from the front side, the stones expand the carving and give it additional dimension. In sculpture works he is more into relative, more abstract forms. His expressive composition "Tempest" (1993) is an example of such approach [Fig. 12].

Development of amber industry

Along with changes in amber art, the situation with mass production of amber articles has also changed. The

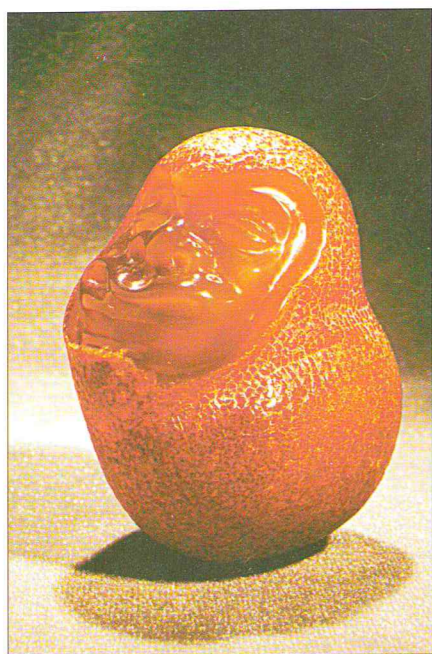


Fig.7. Ernest Lis Sculpture "From the darkness of ages", 1984. Amber. Height 7,3 cm. Kaliningrad Amber Museum.

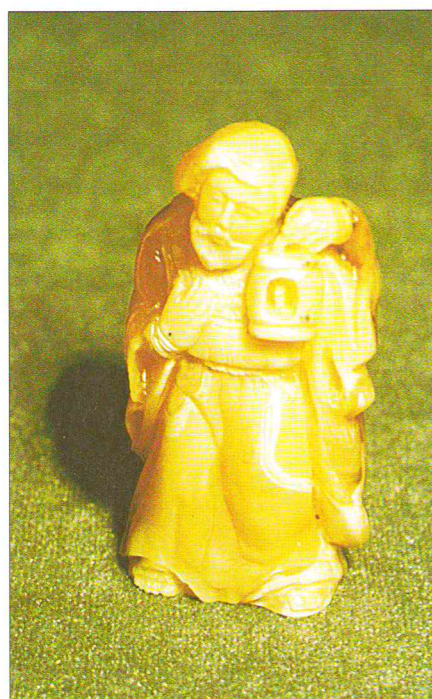


Fig.8. Andrey Kavetski Fragment of a plastic composition "The Adoration of Magi", 2001. Amber. Height 7,5 cm. Private collection.

cancelled monopoly on extraction and processing of amber stimulated intensive development of the private sector. Tens of smaller jewelry workshops appeared which quickly react to market changes. Already today they act as competitors to the former Factory-monopolist.

Each of such workshops tries to find its own niche on the consumer market. Very often they copy the experience of the Polish and Lithuanian manufacturers. Some specialize in adornments of molded silver. Others use amber with insertions of insects and plants in jewelry they produce. The third are occupied with production of amber caskets, chess, vessels, smoking attributes and other applied objects. It is worth noting that the majority of the workshops manufacture items either in one copy or in small series. This increases the product attractiveness in the eyes of customers.

New manufacturers use not only large pieces of amber, which constitutes not more than 10%, but also try to utilize tiny parts with the use of the high technologies. The real example of this activity is an iconostasis in the *Krestovozdvizhenski* Cathedral in Kaliningrad. The columns of the iconostasis are covered with amber bits of various colors which makes an ornament in the form of climbing vine. The space between the icons and the golden gates is decorated with insertions, medallions and stained-glass windows, created of small amber plates, filled with special transparent substance. The combination of sparkling amber parts with ornamental design, traditional for Orthodox churches, creates an exceptionally solemn and festive mood.

Summarizing characteristics of the situation in the amber industry in the Kaliningrad region in the last ten years, it is the intensive development of the art of stone-carving that should be mentioned along with successful production of applied amber art. When it comes to the art of jewelry, it needs to be said that Kaliningrad masters are still clearly behind their colleagues in Lithuania, Poland and Germany.

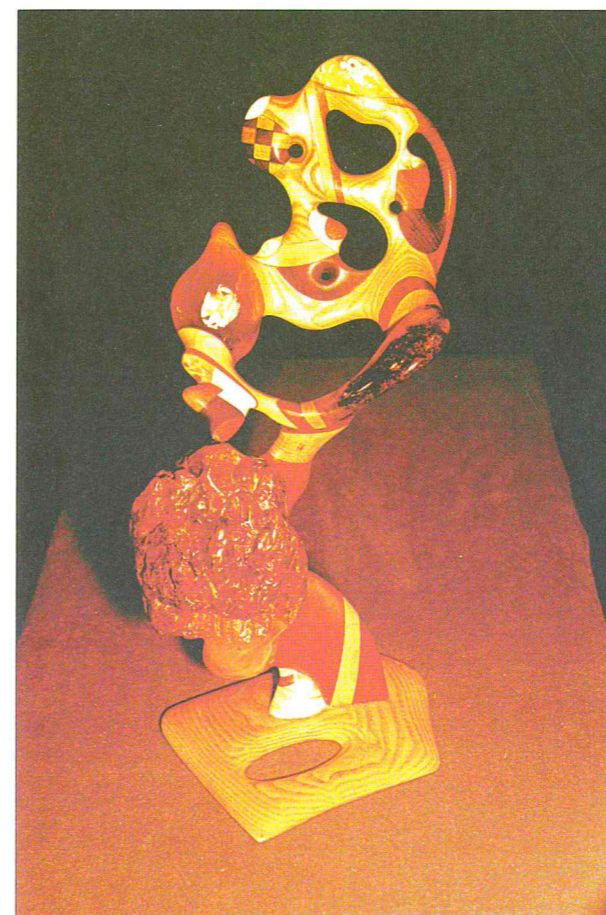


Fig.9. Igor Zalyaldinov Sculpture "The Baltic tale", 1999. Amber, wood. Height 40 cm. Kaliningrad Amber Museum.

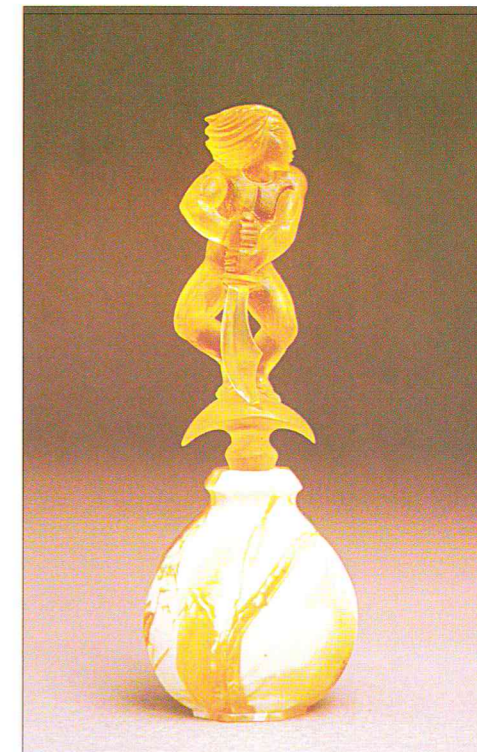


Fig.10. Igor Brasiunas Sculpture "Sphinga", 1998. Amber, silver. Height 12 cm. Length 13,6 cm. Kaliningrad Amber Museum.



Fig.11. Igor Brasiunas Flask "The Warrior", 1999. Amber. Height 8,9 cm. Private collection.

AMBER JEWELRY OF SIGITAS VIRPILAITIS: POSTMODERN APPROACH

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Fig.12. Alexander Yuritsyn Sculptural composition "Tempest",
1993. Amber, wood. Height 12 cm. Length 9 cm.
Private collection.

Amber jewelry, among 20-century Lithuanian jewelry design have drawn a special attention. Before the Second World War they used to be manufactured by small craft workshops of cities and towns. Later on, based on authentic models of artists, they started to be mass-produced at the factories "Daile" in Klaipėda and Vilnius. Amber, unlike any other material has received huge interest from both - professional and amateur artists.

Search for the national identity at the end of 19 c. related amber with a national symbol. According to Pilė Veljataga, a Lithuanian art historian, *amber as a national symbol, the image of Lithuanian women wearing amber necklaces was formed at the end of 19 c. - beginning of 20 c. by writers and poets of national liberation movement*¹. Along with truly original works, created by artists, were also, unfortunately, some works, which turned this material into banal object of pseudo-national kitsch. At any rate, there are no indifferent people for amber: it is either loved, or hated.

During the 60s and 70s amber received huge attention by "fathers" of contemporary Lithuanian jewelry - Feliksas Daukantas (1915-1995)² and Kazimieras Simanonis. While during the postwar period amber was devaluated to the level of a cheap raw material, they brought back traditions, dating back to the Antics, when amber was considered a semi-precious material. The artists strived to put emphasis on natural plastic qualities of the mineral, seeking forms, revealing them optimally. The amber in the creative work of F.Daukantas acquired minimalist forms, unlike

K.Simanonis, who used refined, rich sculptural shapes, close to the baroque plasticity. The uniqueness of these amber jewelry pieces made by the artists has been determined by a creative use of Art Nouveau esthetic principles, which brought up primary qualities of the decorative material along with use of cultural traditions, from ethnographic, baroque, Art Nouveau up to functionalism.

However, in the second part of the 70s, when F.Daukantas and K.Simanonis started to be simulated on a mass scale, amber works gained boring, repetitive shapes. Although there was a demand for Lithuanian amber and had been valued in the former USSR, in the long run it acquired the image of souvenir output, something for the mass taste. During that period, new generations³ among Lithuanian jewelers, as P.Veljataga says, became obsessed with a belief that this stone *cannot be used for a real, precious piece of jewelry (...) unraveling a decorative quality of a piece of amber did not appear an interesting task for the young generation (...) the amber disappeared from professional art horizon for long*⁴.

A similar situation of "over-satiation with amber" was developing in other countries, where it had been popular (Germany, Poland, Latvia). Mr.Ulf Erichson, Director of amber museum Ribnitz-Damgarten wrote: *although even several interesting new sculptural amber tendencies emerged, creators of jewelry were little interested in this material*⁵. However, when in the 90s the aforementioned museum took up an initiative to once again make professional artists interested in amber, the popularity of this material has significantly increased in the