



National Museums in Latvia

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Summary

This article concerns the formation, institutionalisation and development of national museums in Latvia. The major foundational and restructuring events of three museums of national importance are described in relation to nation-building and state-making processes, including an overview of transformations in organisation and representational policies during the times of historical change related to both world wars and occupation regimes. In each of the case studies, the relative powers of individual, civic, academic, professional and state initiatives are examined. This article also includes an overview of the organisation of the structural interface between cultural policy and particular museums in particular periods of time, indicating the most important institutions and referencing the recognition or denial of different groups in this process. Selection and changes in the content of museums' collections and displays are also taken into account.

Since interest in popular antiquities or wonders of nature and artefacts of fine art were formed into collections available to the general public, national museums in the territory of (contemporary) Latvia have undergone several stages of development. To begin with, they represented the interests of the Baltic German upper class; then, being owned by one of the richest municipalities of the Russian Empire, Riga, they became the city's pride; in their next stage, they transformed into cultural treasuries of the emerging nation-state, and after that followed a period in which they served as local archives representing the pre-Soviet past under the conditions of the communist regime. Today, Latvian national museums have acquired the status of national representatives in the contesting arena of independent European countries. The following three museums are best suited to Eunamus research interests due to their historical role and contemporary status:

- The Latvian National Museum of Art
- The National History Museum of Latvia
- The Ethnographic Open-Air Museum

All three museums have played a significant role in the nation-building process; they continue to be influential in contemporary society and their very different histories provide a complex insight into the various paths taken to establish various forms of national museums. They all qualify as major national museums, covering complementary fields (history, art and ethnography).

Summary table, Latvia

Name	Inaugurated	Initiated	Actors	Ownership	Type	Values	Temporal reach	Style Location
National History Museum of Latvia	1894	1876	Civil society	Civil society (original) Independent state agency (present)	Archaeology, Ethnography, History	Historical territory of Latvia only	9000 BC to 1940	Existing premises at Riga Castle, a historical site of medieval origin in the Old Town of Riga.
Latvian National Museum of Art	1905	1816	Municipality	Municipality (original) Independent state agency (present)	Visual Art	Historical Latvia and the Baltic, Western Europe	18 th c. to the present.	Purpose-built neo-classicist building in the centre of Riga.
Ethnographic Open-Air Museum of Latvia	1932	1924	State	Independent state agency	Rural Architecture, Ethnography	Latvia only	17 th c. to the first half of the 20 th c.	A complex of re-located rural buildings, specially designated location on the outskirts of Riga.

Introduction

Administratively, the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire were divided into the *guberniyas* of Estonia, Livonia and Courland (from north to south, covering roughly present-day Estonia and Latvia), while Riga stood as the capital of Livonia and a major port and trading city on the eastern littoral of the Baltic Sea. The Baltic provinces consisted mainly of a German-speaking upper class and clergy, and a peasantry of Latvian and Estonian origin; the second half of the nineteenth century brought the rise of an urban proletariat due to industrialisation. The first museum initiatives in the region denoted the institutionalisation of the private collections of elite members of society around the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, representing regional or universal rather than national values. In the nineteenth century, Riga became one of the main seaports of the Russian Empire and an important railway transport junction and, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the city had grown by a factor of ten, being the second largest city in the western part of Russia after St. Petersburg. Although always a multinational city, it was largely predominated by the Baltic Germans in the nineteenth century. The municipality of Riga was an active player in the emerging scene of public representations – founded on a private collection, the city established its first museum in 1773, and developed an art collection through the nineteenth century, which later formed the basis for the National Museum of Art. The first initiatives were characterised by a regional outreach, focusing on the German culture area, rather than national or local representations. However, in the second half of the 1800s, in this biggest city of the *Deutsche Ostseeprovinzen Russlands*, the interests of various Russian Empire groups and classes met – the elite members of society with their collecting activities, the Baltic German learned societies, Latvian scholars (who under the circumstances were actually living and working in Moscow or St. Petersburg) and the early efforts to construct and articulate the new national consciousness of the emerging Latvian-origin intelligentsia and middle class. Although the scale of events was local, many activities were inspired by international experience and cooperation and were sometimes directly based on examples from abroad. Of the three main regions inhabited by the Latvian-speaking population, the most dynamic were Courland and Vidzeme (the southern part of Livonia); lagging behind in modernisation, and sometimes not fully recognised as Latvian, was Latgale (the *gubernyia* of Vitebsk, referred to also as Inflanty) in the east. This divergence could be explained by the abolition of serfdom there in 1861, whilst in Courland and Vidzeme this happened in 1819–20.¹ The differences in their pace of adjusting to socio-economic change was also later reflected in the initiatives of museal representation and in the content of the collections.

At the time, the language of administration was Russian, whereas the language of the local elite was German. In this period, the majority of academic and cultural practices were carried out by local learned societies and organised around the Polytechnic School of Riga or the University of Dorpat (located in contemporary Tartu in Estonia, in the northern part of Livonia) mainly by the Baltic Germans or other German-speaking members of society (including the upwardly mobile Latvians). Several Baltic German pastors, active in the Latvian Literary Society (*Lettisch-literärische Gesellschaft*) or the Society of Latvian Friends (*Latviešu draugu biedrība*) were carrying out research into Latvian linguistics, folklore and ethnography (Indāns 1996: 25; Stradiņš 1996: 20; Vīksne & Stradiņš 1997: 103). The year 1868 gave the opportunity for the foundation of the first Latvian

society organised on the ethnic principle of the Riga Latvian Society (*Rīgas Latviešu biedrība*; hitherto referred to as the RLS), which became the main Latvian socio-political and cultural centre (see Vīksne & Stradiņš 1997; Leimane 1996). The RLS was a typical product of the national awakening; national awakening here meaning the efforts of the intelligentsia and emerging middle class to articulate national ideas and raise the consciousness of the masses in Central and Eastern European countries where the dominating political power was not in the hands of the major ethnic group. The RLS was politically rather conservative; most of its activities concerned culture, arts, science, and education, and was dedicated to the representation of ethnic Latvians. In 1876, the Society first articulated an initiative to establish a Latvian museum with a nationalist agenda of representation of the ethnic majority; their collection later formed the basis of the Latvian National History Museum. The RLS was also closely linked to the establishment of the Latvian Art Promotion Society, which started its collection of ethnic Latvian art during the 1920s, contributing thus to the development of the Latvian National Museum of Art. From the mid-1880s, the RLS national commitment was paralleled by another more politically inclined movement - 'The New Current' (*Jaunā Strāva*). Politically to the left, it mobilised broad masses of workers in Latvia's industrially developed region using both nationalist and socialist agendas, and played a leading role in the 1905 revolution. The RLS lost its influence after the final goal of the national movement, the establishment of a nation-state, was reached.

The Independent Republic of Latvia was proclaimed after the First World War in 1918, although followed by two long years of the War of Liberation, when three different governments (Latvian national, Bolshevik, and Baltic German) were simultaneously claiming the right to rule the country. In 1920, a freely elected Constituent Assembly was convened and a liberal constitution was adopted; Latvian became the official language but, in the relatively multi-ethnic environment², the minorities were granted cultural autonomy and equal political rights. Parliamentary democracy ceased after a *coup d'état* established a nationalistic dictatorship in 1934 and the subsequent regime, that of Kārlis Ulmanis, lasted until 1940. Still, the interwar period saw substantial accomplishments in culture and education; concurring with the institutionalisation and recognition of museums and representative collections that were previously governed by civil societies and now were officially national, state-governed museums. First of all, an institutional and legal basis was created for national museums; subsequently national museums of history, art and rural life were reorganised or established according to the representational requirements of the nation-state. This period also brought the organisation (in some cases, establishment) of other museums, like the Museum of War, later incorporated into the State Museum of History, or the Riga City Museum of Nature that later became the Latvian SSR Museum of Nature (at present Natural History Museum of Latvia).

Prior to the Second World War, Latvia was occupied under the pretence of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Nazi Germany and the Stalinist regime and annexed (together with Estonia and Lithuania) by the Soviet Union in 1940. Moscow arranged political changes favourable to the Soviet regime with the help of the Red Army and various agents, and thus the sovietisation of Latvia began rapidly, including the nationalisation (confiscation from owners) of land, buildings, and various types of commercial or industrial enterprises. State and municipality institutions, including museums, were reorganised according to the new conditions. The fifteen

biggest museums were declared 'state museums', and a special committee was established with the purpose of taking over art, historical, and antiquarian items from private collections and public societies. The whole museum system was centralised, with the centre administering staff units (director and technical personnel) and distributing funds (Skoļa 1979: 5). These changes were interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War, and, because of the rapid invasion of Nazi German armed forces in 1941, Latvia became a part of Germany's *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, the Province General of Latvia. Once again, the sphere of culture was rearranged according to the current ideological regime, which for museums meant the foregrounding of the historical presence and supremacy of German culture in the region. The territory of Latvia was reconquered by Soviet forces at the end of 1944, at which time about 150,000 Latvians fled to the West. As a result of the war, the exiles and the Soviet repression that followed, the population of Latvia decreased by approximately 25 per cent; likewise the war inflicted heavy losses on the economy - many historic cities were destroyed, along with industry and infrastructure (cf. Cerūzis 2001). During the post-war occupation period, the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic was one of fifteen Soviet republics where total power belonged to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. By the end of 1950, almost all of Latvia's agriculture had been collectivised, i.e. organised into collective farms. The reorganisation of museums initiated in the 1940s was completed under the supervision of the newly established Commission of Cultural-Educational Institutions of the Council of Ministers of LSSR (*Latvijas PSR Ministru Padomes Kultūrizglītības iestāžu komiteja*). Museums were nationalised, staff changed and collections rearranged. Themes and narratives concerning class struggle, revolution and war, as well as positive influences of Russian and/or Soviet culture dominated the display policy, being the only legitimate practice of historical representation while some museums were closed or subordinated to others. In 1953, a new institution – the Authority of Museums, Fine Arts, and Protection of Monuments of the LSSR Ministry of Culture (*Latvijas PSR Kultūras ministrijas Muzeju, tēlotājas mākslas un pieminekļu aizsardzības pārvalde*) – was established to administer the sphere of tangible heritage. When the short period of the 'ideological thaw' in Moscow reverberated in Latvia in the second half of the 1950s, the so-called national communists moved to the top of Latvia's political elite and attempted to rejuvenate the role of the Latvian language and culture in society. Their defeat in 1959 marked the beginning of a new period that was characterised by total ideological and political control that was reflected in the museum system when similar museums were subordinated to a single central 'scientific-methodological' and administrative unit. The 60s gradually turned into a 'stagnation period' that continued until the 1980s, when the inability of the Soviet-planned economy to compete with the free market Western economy became progressively apparent, and the process of *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness) began mid-decade in the Soviet Union, led by Mikhail Gorbachev. The dissident movement that had been subdued in the first half of the 1980s became reactivated in 1986. The following years saw the emergence of various civic movements, among them the Latvian People's Front and the Latvian National Independence Movement as the most influential. These organisations and their subsequent rallies had a common goal: to reinstate democracy and political independence.³ The late 1980s brought about a loosening of censorship in the cultural sphere, allowing museums to create new displays challenging the Soviet version of Latvian history and representing national

values and narratives. In addition, pre-war national symbols like the anthem and the flag were re-established.

Following a failed military coup in Moscow, Latvia gained full independence in 1991, was admitted to the United Nations and switched to a free market economy. In 1995, Latvia became a member of the European Council and in 2004, fully joined NATO and the European Union. (Cf. Cerūzis 2001) Socio-political changes likewise influenced the existence of museums. On the one hand, the state ownership of national-level museums continued, while on the other hand, narratives and display policies changed significantly according to the ideology of the re-established independent state. The system of management and its legal basis were also changed; several new museums were founded (e.g. the Museum of Occupation representing the post-war period and regime). Some museums incorporated into others during the Soviet period regained their independent status (e.g. the Museum of War). This brought significant changes to the collections of national museums, while shifts in property ownership and a decrease of financial funds made an overall impact on the museum system.

National museums and cultural policy in Latvia

According to data from 2009, there are 83 accredited⁴ museums operating in contemporary Latvia, 36 of which are state-owned; in addition there are other, municipal and private museums. The collections of the museums considered national belong entirely to the state, their budget is composed as an integration of national financing, earned income, private, social and international donations. The Law of Museums, the main document regulating activities in the field, was adopted in December 2005 and several minor changes were introduced by legislative activities in 2007, 2008, and 2009. A previous version of the Law of Museums had been issued in 1997. The two main differences in these laws concern the administration of the museum system. The Law of 1997 stated the Cabinet of Ministers to be the higher institution that decides the establishment, reorganisation or liquidation of particular museums, issues legal acts concerning administrative structures and accreditation, and hires directors of state owned-museums. These competences are missing from the new version of the law. Secondly, the Law of 1997 established a separate institution, the State Authority on Museums (*Muzeju valsts pārvalde*), subordinated to the Ministry of Culture, to supervise museums and the National Holdings. This institution terminated its work in 2010 and currently, state-owned museums are subordinated to particular ministries, most of them to the Ministry of Culture. The Latvian Council of Museums is a consultative body established in order to promote the co-operation of institutions and decision-making on issues related to national strategy in the field of museums, their operation and the preservation of the National Holdings. The Latvian Council of Museums consists of representatives from particular museums as well as one representative delegated by the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, one representative delegated by the Latvian Association of Museums and the Minister for Culture (cf. Law of Museums 2005). While the 1997 Law operated with, and provided the definition of, National Holdings, i.e. virtual collection of items of national importance⁵, the 2005 Law has explained its take on national museums rather explicitly:

- 1) the collections of which territorially, chronologically and thematically comprise the whole State and are the most important and complete in the profile thereof; 2) the research work of which ensures a comprehensive research of the museum collections and research in scientific

disciplines; 3) the permanent and temporary exhibitions of which and other types of communication related to the operation of the museum ensure availability of the museum collections and comprehensive usage thereof for education and development of the society; and 4) which performs activities confirming that the museum is the leading institution in the field of museums. (Law on Museums 2005)

This particular definition derives from the Soviet modification of the interwar national museums and the consequently transformed heritage – they have been identified *post factum* when already possessing voluminous collections, infrastructure and research departments.

In Latvia, there is no single universal national museum, and therefore the three case studies presented in this report all play, or have played, an important role in the relationship between the state and the nation. National museums of art and history are also among the oldest institutions of their kind in Latvia, while the open-air museum is the most popular and historically representative. All three museums operate as state agencies, i.e. semi-independent units under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture. The oldest is the Latvian National Art Museum. The formation process of this museum could be considered to have been collection-driven. This case represents the development of a Baltic-oriented municipal art gallery into a national museum. It has undergone multiple reorganisations of the museum collections to concur with ideological changes in the cultural policy of Latvia in the twentieth century. The complications of history are also reflected in the interplay between the Museum's status and its prestigious building in the very centre of the capital. The establishment of the Latvian National Museum of History was comparatively more ideology-driven in that it derived from the call for national/ethnic representation. In this case, the complex network of relationships connecting the ideas of the emerging nation and its representation is studied in closer detail, mapping the roles of learned societies, particular personalities, and the agencies of the city and the Russian Empire in the early stages of the Museum's development. In comparison, the Ethnographic Open-air Museum represents museum-building practices within an established independent nation-state. Following examples from abroad, this initiative became localised to create a national representation.

Case studies in chronological order

The Latvian National Museum of Art

The initial foundation of several museums, a few of them with a contemporary national status, was based on the private collection of physician Nikolaus von Himsel (1729–1764). In accordance with his last will, his mother presented a collection of objects of nature, history and fine arts gathered by three generations to the city of Riga after his death. Consequently, the first public museum in the region was established on February 22, 1773 and named after its founder. However, the Himsel Museum (*Himselschen Museum*) lasted only until the early decades of the 1800s and its collections were redistributed between the newly established, more specialised museums.

An art collection had already begun to take shape in the Himsel Museum, and in 1816 it was deposited in a separate room, the so called City Art Cabinet (*Kunst-Kabinet*) on the initiative of another famous collector, Liborius Bergmann (1754–1823), a clergyman and board member of the Himsel Museum (Johansons 1974: 26). The Cabinet exhibited works of art from the Himsel

Museum, but also collected modern works on local themes and obtained portraits of prominent Riga citizens. The existence of a board qualified the Art Cabinet into a semi-independent institution (Šmite 2005: 329). In 1866, Riga City Council acquired 47 paintings from collector Domenico de Robiani, which formed the basis for the Riga City Art Gallery (*Städtische Gemälde-Galerie zu Riga*), institutionally established in 1868. The gallery opened to the public in 1869 in the local *Realgymnasium*. The Baltic German Riga Art Society (*Kunstverein zu Riga*) was founded in 1872, with the aim of popularising the visual arts, holding exhibitions and promoting the development of art in the Baltic provinces, as well as to form their own collections. The same year, the City Gallery and *Kunstverein*, which were led by the same city elder, August Heinrich von Hollander, moved together to new premises and then, from 1879 until 1905, leased their accommodation in a building owned by the Mayor of Riga. Being central agencies in the artistic life of Riga, both the Gallery and *Kunstverein* collections grew, while the question of a new construction that would meet the needs of the museum had been raised several times since the 1870s. There were several project competitions but the foundations of the building were only laid in 1903 and the museum was opened in September 1905, becoming consequently the foundational year of the City Art Museum (*Städtisches Kunst-Museum*). The name of the museum appeared in official circulation for the first time in 1904. Like the Gallery's premises, the Riga City Art Museum and *Kunstverein* also shared the new building. The collections consisted mainly of works by Baltic German and Western European artists.

The most important person in the first decades of the museum activities was Wilhelm Neumann (1849–1919), the architect and art historian. Neumann was the designer of the Museum building and had supervised its construction while also being its first director (1905–1919) (Šmite 2005: 331). Despite being named the City Art Museum, the underlying aim of this institution was to cater for the visual arts of all of the Baltic provinces, i.e. *Kurland*, *Livland* and *Estland* as they were known at the time. While the Riga City Art Gallery had exhibited all 347 works (its own and the *Kunstverein* collections together), Neumann evaluated the artistic quality of them before the opening of the new museum, and included only 234 in the core exhibition. The collection was methodically increased under Neumann's leadership, focusing on artists from the Baltic provinces, but also maintaining international contacts with museums and related organisations in Germany and Russia (Šmite 2005: 333). The Museum held about 60 exhibitions before 1918, only four of which were solo shows by ethnic Latvian artists. Requests for premises for joint exhibitions by Latvian artists were denied, sometimes leading to an open conflict and complaints filed by the Latvian Art Promotion Society (*Latviešu mākslas veicināšanas biedrība*, introduced in more detail below) to the Riga City Council (Šmite 2005: 332). Despite this, the Museum's catalogues were published in three languages: German, Russian and Latvian. As the main aim of the Museum was to 'educate the nation', free entrance was granted to groups of schoolchildren from its opening, and from 1914 museum regulations also permitted free entrance for group visits organised for factory workers (Šmite 2005: 333). During the First World War, the museum remained open, even though a number of artworks were evacuated to Moscow. However, the general organisation of exhibitions and other activities decreased, as did the flow of visitors.

The following changes in the museum's status correspond to the political upheaval and turmoil of the early twentieth century in the region.

The declaration of independence of the Republic of Latvia was followed, only two months later, by the invasion of Soviet Russia's Red Army and the establishment of the Latvian Soviet Socialistic Republic. The Latvian Soviet Government lasted less than half a year, although, despite this, the Museum was nationalised and given a new name appropriate to the regime: the Art Museum of Soviet Latvia (*Padomju Latvijas Mākslas muzejs*). The new institution operated under the supervision of the People's Commissariat of Education (*Tautas Izglītības komisariāts*). The head of the Commissariat's Art Section, writer Andrejs Upītis, invited a famous painter Vilhelms Purvītis to take on the responsibilities of museum director. This reorganisation of administration outlasted the *Bolshevik* regime when the Museum belonged again to the independent Republic of Latvia in the summer of 1919. With the establishment of independence, ownership was returned to the city and it was renamed accordingly as the Riga City Art Museum (*Rīgas mākslas muzejs*); the aims and tasks of the museum changed considerably, and attention was turned to the national art of ethnic Latvian origin (in contrast to the preceding Baltic German dominance) and its contemporary developments. The authority of Purvītis appeared to be so prominent that the question of his dismissal was never even raised, while the rest of the museum staff also retained their positions. Another initiative by the communists that was left unchanged was free entrance.

Vilhelms Purvītis (1872–1945) was the rector of the Latvian Academy of Art, head of its landscape master class, a lecturer at the University of Latvia and an active artist (Lāce 2005: 336). He made several journeys abroad familiarising himself with the organisation of museum activities in post-war Western Europe. Under Purvītis' leadership, the purposeful formation of a collection of Latvian art began. The Museum was interested in this genre in all its diversity, including works by both the deceased and currently active artists. From 1919 until 1940, the Museum's collection grew by 651 works, most of which had been purchased by city funds, and the re-arranged permanent display showcased ethnic Latvian art as well as historical Western European and Baltic German collections. The Museum hosted multiple temporal exhibitions and the modernised education system had increased the number of artists, while gradual improvement in the economic sector raised the number of visitors. The desire of the newly formed Latvian state for national self-affirmation gave impetus to a large number of exhibitions, and also encouraged creativity, while the 1920s and 1930s were likewise marked by a tendency to heighten the role of the artist in society - a certain fetishism for the artistic personality (cf. Lāce 2005: 337). The latter also applies to the personality of the director, who was successful in proposing to the city board and to other decision-making bureaucratic institutions various exhibition projects considered quite avant-garde at the time, or initiated by groups of totally unknown artists. Although exhibitions by ethnic Latvian artists formed the majority, alongside were prominent displays introducing the art of neighbouring countries⁶, the museum space was also open to the initiatives of other local nationalities, for example, Russian or Baltic German artists. The Riga City Art Museum was financed by the municipality and was located in a magnificent, purpose-built notable architectural monument in the centre of Riga.

In this period, there was another initiative of national importance relating to the depository of art. The Ministry of Education founded the State Museum of Art (*Latvijas Valsts mākslas muzejs*) in 1920. The collection on which this new museum was based consisted of about 300 items that

had initially been accumulated by the Latvian Art Promotion Society (*Latviešu mākslas veicināšanas biedrība*), founded in 1910 by the leading members of the Riga Latvian Society with the purpose of promoting and collecting ethnic Latvian art. One of its aims was also to establish its own library and museum (Cielava 1986: 79). Structurally, the Latvian Art Promotion Society was a section of the Riga Latvian Society but with its own statutes. The foundation of this organisation had probably been an indirect response to the city executives' refusal to organise the First Exhibition of Works by Latvian Artists in the City Art Museum (Lāce 2005: 336) as well as limited opportunities of membership for ethnic Latvian artists in the Baltic Artists Union (*Baltischer Künstler-Verband*).⁷ That particular exhibition eventually took place in the classrooms of *Realgymnasium*, as did the three subsequent general exhibitions of ethnic Latvian art, while the collection probably remained on the premises of the Riga Latvian Society. Consequently, the new state-owned Museum of Art, likewise founded in the capital, possessed a collection of national Latvian art, and in parallel a collection of foreign art evolved gradually. The State Museum of Art was located in the Riga Castle, and its director was a less well-known sculptor, Burkhard Dzenis (1879–1966). Whereas the City Art Museum continued to house the major exhibitions in their prominent museum building, The State Museum of Art still represented and promoted national art in both local and international arenas. Thus, in comparison, the position of the State Museum of Art appeared to be considerably inferior (and eventually short-lived), regardless of the relative supremacy of state ownership. According to the number of visitors (an average of 50,000 vs. an average of 15,000), the new museum was less popular than its rival.

Soviet occupation in 1940 initiated a profound reorganisation of museums in Latvia; this in turn affected the City Art Museum, which was transferred to state ownership a year later. Vilhelms Purvītis was dismissed from his duties as director, and the Board of Art Affairs of the People's Soviet of Commissars of the Latvian SSR (*Latvijas PSR Tautas Komisāru padomes Mākslas lietu pārvalde*) decided to join the two art museums. This envisaged the formation of one museum that would concentrate on the collections of Latvian art, while another would focus on foreign art. The reorganisation began in 1941, but was interrupted by the Second World War, being completed immediately after the war was over – when the collections of both museums were divided and systematised according to the new principles. Based on this division, professional Latvian art had to be transferred to the State Museum of Latvian and Russian Art (*Valsts latviešu un krievu mākslas muzejs*; for six months in 1941 also named the Museum of Soviet Art of the Latvian SSR – *Latvijas PSR Padomju mākslas muzejs*), while the foreign collections went to the State Museum of Western European Art (*Vakarēiropas mākslas muzejs*; now the Museum of Foreign Art). In the autumn of 1941, German forces occupied Riga and the Riga City Art Museum was returned to municipal ownership, the exhibits were transferred back and previously dismissed staff reinstated. Purvītis was reappointed to the post of director and held this position until 1944. The ideological significance of the museum is characterised by the attention that was again paid by the new ruling administration. The Culture Section of the Propaganda Department appointed chief director of Lübeck museum Hans Schröder to conduct additional supervision. Initially, there was a plan to create a German State Museum (*Deutsches Landesmuseum*) from the collections of the Riga City Art Museum and the State Historical Museum aimed at showing the significance of German culture in the Baltics (Lāce 2005: 340). The newly formed display was soon opened

for public viewing. However, Schröder was not pleased and the Museum reverted to its previous name, and the exhibits from the Historical Museum were returned. Obviously, warfare disrupted the functioning of the Museum to a certain extent. First, several halls were taken into use for the purposes of storing or displaying military maps. During the last days of the German occupation, more than 200 works of art were sent to Germany. Although most of them were returned, there were losses in particular collections. Nevertheless, the Museum generally kept rather busy with exhibitions and was relatively well visited. Huge joint exhibitions by local artists were held both in 1942 and 1943, there was also a retrospective of paintings by director Purvītis himself, and a multitude of more or less propaganda-related smaller exhibitions.

When German occupation was again substituted by the Soviet, the previously started reorganisation of the Museum continued. The new museum was named, according to the plans of 1941, the State Museum of Latvian and Russian Art. However, in some documents, this new institution was referred to as the State Museum of Latvian and Russian Art and the Art of Other Peoples of the USSR (*Valsts latviešu un krievu mākslas un citu PSRS tautu mākslas muzejs*), which may indicate a somewhat different orientation for the planned collection. The former establishment of the State Museum of Art, located in Riga Castle, was changed to the Museum of Western European and World Art (*Rietumeiropas un pasaules mākslas muzejs*). Although the collection of Russian art should have gone to this museum according to its historical composition, it remained in the prestigious former City Museum building alongside national Latvian art, as Russian art was ideologically considered a greater cultural phenomenon than Western European art according to these new regulations. The authorities actively encouraged the expansion of the Russian collection, initially even requiring its domination in the permanent display (Lāce 2005: 341). The rules and regulations of the organisation of a display in the Soviet era can be characterised by tough control and censorship – with a few insignificant exceptions in later years. Every exhibition had first to be coordinated with the Ministry of Culture and then, before opening to public, it was examined and approved by a representative of the ideological work section of the Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Party (*Latvijas Komunistiskās partijas Centrālā komiteja*). In the first decade after the war, any display of artworks belonging to the Classical Modernism of the interwar period, or in another ‘decadent style’ or created by authors who went into exile was out of the question. Later, especially after the so-called Khrushchev Thaw in the late 1950s and early 60s, more liberty was allowed. Still, countless shows were specially organised to honour the Great October Socialistic Revolution, Lenin’s birthdays, Communist Party congresses and other similar occasions. 1963 saw the establishment of the Combined Directorate of Latvian SSR Art Museums and Exhibitions (*Latvijas PSR Mākslas muzeju un izstāžu apvienotā direkcija*) and the State Museum of Latvian and Russian Art was incorporated as one of its structural units. This led to a higher level of centralisation in the field, which also led to the use of parts of the Museum’s collections for the purposes of the Directorate’s activities, including travelling displays – with the agenda of bringing art closer to people – and, eventually, to the renaming of the institution as the Latvian SSR State Museum of Art. The Museum’s collections increased particularly due to the reorganisations, and one third of the museum’s public space was transformed into temporary repositories. At the same time, the Museum acquired two affiliate facilities: the newly established memorial museums dedicated to two outstanding Latvian sculptors⁸. The 1980s, with the winds of change in the air, brought the next reorganisations. First, the Directorate acquired a huge

building in the Old Town of Riga where the temporary storage of artworks was arranged and the Museum's entire collection from the second half of the twentieth century was transferred. Thus the *Arsenāls* Museum of Art (*mākslas muzejs 'Arsenāls'*) was established, and the Latvian SSR State Museum of Art regained its exhibition halls. When the Directorate was renamed the Association of Latvian Art Museums in 1989, the latter was given a new name – the State Museum of Art, dropping Latvian SSR. At the same time, the Museum of Decorative and Applied Art (*Dekoratīvi lietiskās mākslas muzejs*, known as the Museum of Decorative Art and Design since 2006) was established and the whole collection of professional Latvian applied art was concentrated there (Lāce 2005: 342). In the late 1980s, the practice of approving and censoring exhibitions also disappeared and the Museum was again free to formulate its own display policy, which first led to the initiative of exhibiting works previously forbidden. The highest peak of these years was a huge exhibition of interwar Latvian art, held in 1989.

The restoration of independence in 1990–91 brought major changes in the Museum's life. Together with freedom of organisation, it saw a significant decrease in attendance, mainly due to the absence of the previous frequent excursions organised by schools or by institutions from other cities, as well as tourist visits from all over the Soviet Union. The Museum restored its cooperation with Western European museums and galleries, and the permanent display was changed to have a greater emphasis on the interwar period heritage. Later, a new section of Baltic German art was also included. In 1999, in accordance with the Law on Museums, museums in the association underwent a process of accreditation, which led to the reorganisation of the Association of Latvian Art Museums and the whole structure of the State Museum of Art, as well as the *Arsenāls* Museum. A unified museum of national status was established on the basis of these two museums, though retaining the name of the State Museum of Art. In 2000, the Museum was accredited by the State Board of Museums, which also provided confirmation that the Museum could operate as a state-acknowledged museum. That same year, a decision came to give independent legal status to individual museums. In September 2005, with the eventual merger of the *Arsenāls* Museum of Art and the State Museum of Art, a united museum of national importance was again created, taking the name the Latvian National Museum of Art (*Latvijas Nacionālais mākslas muzejs*). In 2008, a new branch, named the Museum of Roman Suta and Aleksandra Belycova (*Romāna Sutas un Aleksandras Beļcovas muzejs*), was opened. The most current development is the consolidation of all art museums: the Museum of Foreign Art and the Museum of Decorative Art and Design were joined with the Latvian National Museum of Art. All three museums now have a united administration and budget. As collection of the Museum of Foreign Art consists of artefacts from 5000 BC to the beginning of the twentieth century, this move may suggest a shift towards a new conception of a national museum in Latvia, a change of emphasis from the nation as an ethnic principle to the nation as owner of a collection.

The National History Museum of Latvia

While the establishment of the National Museum of Art was largely collection-based, the other two museums analysed in this report were originally initiated by the idea of national/ethnic representation. A detailed exploration of the beginning of the National History Museum reveals a complex landscape of conflicting and mutually complementary agendas beyond the representational efforts and practices in the second half of the nineteenth century in the *gubernija*

of Livonia. Members of Riga Latvian Society initiated the idea of a Latvian museum. Under the auspices of RLS, a number of cultural committees functioned, including a Scientific Committee. The establishment of this committee in 1869 was partially a response to the call for the gathering of Latvian ethnographic materials by the Imperial Society of Friends of Natural Sciences, Anthropology and Ethnography (*Императорское Общество Любителей Естествознания, Антропологии и Етнографьи*) of the University of Moscow:

The Department of Ethnography (...) has decided to start gathering ethnographic data about Latvians who inhabit a large part of the Baltic coastal region, as well as various data regarding Latvian families, homes and households; this task is part of an undertaking already partially accomplished: to perform ethnographic research among each nationality residing in Russia. (Leimane 1996: 56).⁹

The RLS Committee began gathering material and artefacts according to this agenda and the call for the collection of folklore and ethnographic material was translated from Russian into Latvian and German, and disseminated via periodicals. The Rumyantsev Museum (*Румянцевский музей*) in Moscow and the 1860s World Fairs in London and Paris inspired the idea for an ethnographic museum display, while the above-mentioned Imperial Society in Moscow also funded a collecting expedition. The first expedition in 1869 was a success that consequently popularised the Riga Latvian Society's activities and attracted supporters to their Museum later on (Leimane 1996: 58). The Riga Latvian Society's collection was first displayed to the public in 1872 within the Polytechnic Exhibition in Moscow. In 1876, the decision was taken to found a Latvian museum (*Latviešu muzejs*) that would stand in opposition to existing museums, with their Baltic German orientation: private collections/museums in Baltic German manor houses and homes in the city, or public institutions like the Himsel Museum, the Museum of the Province of Courland (*Museum der Provinz Kurland*, established in 1818) or the collections of the Society of Nature Researchers of Riga (*Der Naturforscher-Verein zu Riga*, founded in 1846, predecessor to the National Museum of Nature) (cf. Balode 1996: 48). During its first initial decades, the new museum accepted donations (money, inventory, etc.) and all items offered to it. Although the Museum¹⁰ was denied permanent facilities for either exhibition or storage, these collections slowly continued to grow, gathering objects of archaeological and ethnographic significance as well as exotic rarities, geological samples and herbaria. The first three curators of the new museum had received their education in Dorpat (Tartu), Estonia, either at the Teachers Seminar or the University of Dorpat (Leimane 1996: 61).

In 1888, a special Riga Latvian Society Museum Committee was established to maintain, systematise and catalogue the collection, and also to organise ethnographic expeditions for the Museum. The first short-lived ethnographic exhibition in Riga was opened in the Riga Latvian Society quarters in 1890. The RLS requested premises for their museum from the Riga City Municipality with no response, as a result of which the collected items were kept in boxes and lockers until 1892, when the RLS provided two rooms for the Museum in its quarters (Balode 1996: 49). After some reconstruction work, the Museum was made accessible to the public in the autumn of 1894, although for only an hour a day and two hours on Sundays (Leimane 1996: 64). From that date onwards, it was referred to as the Latvian Ethnographic Museum (*Latviešu Etnogrāfiskais muzejs*), although the Scientific Committee decided that the Museum should also

collect items related to the ethnography and history of one of the other two Baltic nations, Lithuania (Balode 1996: 49; Leimane 1996: 63). The Scientific Committee also adopted a plan to organise an exhibition of Latvian ethnography¹¹ to coincide with the Tenth Pan-Russian Archaeological Congress¹² in Riga in 1896 (Vīksna & Stradiņš 1997: 107). Members of Riga Latvian Society and Scientific Committee together with Baltic German researchers participated in the meetings to prepare the congress in Moscow in 1894 (Vanaga 1996: 38). The concept of the exhibition changed over the years: it was first intended to be a permanent display, i.e. a museum in closed venues, but the plan transformed into a fair with temporary buildings and entertaining shows. In order to prepare for this important event, the Riga Latvian Society reclaimed the artefacts that had been sent to Moscow in the 1860s and organised, as well, eleven scientific expeditions to collect items from several localities¹³ in Latvia in 1894 and 1895 (resulting in some 6000 ethnographic items). A special sub-committee was even established for the Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition under the honorary presidency of the Mayor of Riga, who prepared and distributed methodological guidelines and calls to all rural municipalities, priests and teachers, as well as published them in newspapers (Leimane 1996: 65). Eventually, more support and donations were received from the locations previously visited by the RLS Scientific Committee expeditions. During the preparatory period, teacher Sīmanis Novickis, the Museum curator from 1891 to 1902, explored related museums in Moscow and St. Petersburg, while another active committee member visited and established contacts with the Czech open-air ethnographic exhibition in Prague that opened in 1895 (Leimane 1996: 66; Vanaga 1996: 43; Ģinters 1974: 3). The Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition was displayed to the public from August 1st to September 15th, 1896. The exhibition, involving four buildings with materials displayed thematically in 18 sections, was a huge success attended by more than 45,000 visitors.

The Riga City Municipality turned down several of the Riga Latvian Society requests for premises to house a museum. Finally, the municipality provided land for construction in 1900. Plans for a combined museum and Latvian school of crafts were drawn up (Leimane 1996: 67). For the next nine years, Latvian Ethnographic Exhibition museum collections remained inaccessible to the general public. In 1902, the RLS purchased a new building and provided rooms therein for their museum. The Museum's new building was opened to the public in 1905, although for only two days a week (Balode 1996: 50). Its collection continued to grow, mainly through donations and a few smaller-scale expeditions. The Museum also took part in exhibitions in various European capitals and other towns in Latvia (Leimane 1996: 70). In 1913, the RLS commissioned another project for a specially designed museum and craft school building. Public donations enabled construction work to begin in 1914, but the First World War interrupted the work and the building was never completed. During the war, this Museum remained closed.

Following the declaration of independence and fall of the short-lived Bolshevik regime in 1919, the Riga Latvian Society transferred the Latvian Museum collection to the Latvian government (cf. Švābe et al. 1929–1930: 7835). All RLS collections were officially declared property of the state, to be supervised by the Department of Art of the Ministry of Education (Balode 1996: 50; Leimane 1996: 71). In 1920, the Museum was provided with rooms within Riga Castle and renamed the Latvian Ethnographic Museum. In 1924, the Museum was granted national status and was renamed the State History Museum. Regulations issued by the 1932 government defined a place for, and the importance of, the Museum in national cultural policy:

The State History Museum is the central repository for the nation's ancient artefacts, whose role is to collect, preserve, exhibit and popularise those Latvian cultural items and monuments that possess archaeological, ethnographic, historical or artistic significance, and that are in the Latvian national interests to be preserved and studied. (Leimane 1996: 71)

The curator and director of the Museum from 1902 to 1934 was a teacher, ethnographer, historian and cartographer Matīss Siliņš (1861–1942). He was also a board member of the Authority of Monuments (established in 1923), the supervising organisation of all the collections of Latvian museums during this period. Under the centralised administrative structure, three branches of the State History Museum were opened in 1937 in different towns in Latvia, and unique items from the Museum's collection were displayed (Cf. Skolis 1979: 5). In 1939, one more branch was opened (outside the capital, in Rundāle Castle) where items of religious (church) art were displayed. The collection of the State History Museum was expanded during the interwar period by materials from expeditions organised by the Museum and the Authority of Monuments. A public display was organised in four sections: archaeology, ethnography, numismatics, and religious art.

Following the Second World War, the collection, documentation, storage and exhibition work were transformed to comply with the policies of the Soviet Union. The Museum obtained state museum status according to the new legislation. The main structural changes brought about by the centralisation of the museum system were those caused by the various museums of the public societies, towns and schools being turned into departments of the State History Museum. This policy was also applied to the Ethnographic Open-Air Museum, subordinating it to the single centre of historical museums. Museum staff were trained in dialectic and historical materialism, introduced to the purposes of Soviet museums and to the new practices of the arrangement of exhibitions (Cf. Skoļa 1979: 6). During the German occupation, the Riga City History Museum was subordinated to the State History Museum. Many of the branches of the Museum were damaged during the war and closed. The most valuable collections were evacuated to Germany in 1944, although the majority of items were returned after the war. After 1945, the Museum was subordinated to the newly established Commission of Cultural-Educational Institutions of the Council of Ministers of the LSSR (*Latvijas PSR Ministru Padomes Kultūrizglītības iestāžu komiteja*) and its branches were organised as independent museums of local history (Skolis 1979: 6). The name of the museum was changed several times: the Latvian SSR Central State History Museum (1944), the Latvian SSR History Museum (1956), and the History Museum of Latvia (1989). Irrespective of the fact that some collections were given to other museums as a result of repeated reorganisation, the Museum's collection continued to grow from expeditions and archaeological excavations according to research plans. The Museum functioned as an active research institution by organising excavations and publishing the results of scholarly activities. The Museum's core exhibition covered territorial history from 9000 BC to 1940 AD. In the late 1980s, the Museum was actively involved in the events of the Third Latvian Awakening. For example, the exhibition 'Latvia between Two World Wars' (1988) enjoyed huge popularity and was attended by 300,000 visitors. Since the re-establishment of independence in 1991, the Museum as a whole has seen a

successful transition to the new working conditions. It was accredited in 2000 and again in 2004 as compliant with the state-level museum standards. Since September 2005, the Museum has been operating as a state agency and is officially titled the National History Museum of Latvia. The Museum is funded by the state budget, obtaining additional resources from its economic activities, donations, and state or European Union funds. Today, the Museum's collection includes about one million items, and its display is organised into five sections: archaeological, ethnographic, numismatic, historic, and the models section (reconstructions and copies). Every year, several exhibitions are held; the four sections of the permanent display mentioned above are: ancient history, the medieval period, the modern age (up to the end of the nineteenth century, representing both peasant culture and upper class culture), and contemporary history (up to 1940). The Museum has expanded by merging into its structure, the lake castle of Āraiši (*Āraišu ezerpils*, reconstruction of the Stone/Bronze Age settlement in northern Latvia) as well as the Dauderi Museum of Latvian Culture, the previous summer house of president Kārlis Ulmanis (1937–1940). At the moment a new depository is under construction in Riga.

The Ethnographic Open-Air Museum

In 1910, the idea of an open-air museum was discussed for the first time in the Baltic German-oriented Riga Society of Architects (*Arhitektenverein zu Riga*). This initiative was probably initiated by a visit that members of the Society undertook in the previous year to Stockholm and to the famous Skansen open-air museum. The envisioned museum was intended to represent rural buildings of the Baltic provinces (Indāns 1996:36; 1994: 82). However, these plans did not materialise at the time and other actors established the museum. In 1923, the government of Latvia passed a law on the protection of monuments of material culture, and for the implementation of this law, a Monuments Board was established by the Ministry of Education with the purpose of selecting, inventorying and cataloguing such monuments. In 1924, following a proposal by architect Pauls Kundziņš (1888–1983), the Monuments Board founded the Open-Air Museum (*Brīvības muzejs*). In that year, the Monuments Board had sent Kundziņš to the Nordic countries to explore Scandinavian open-air museums. He visited museums in Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark, and later published an extensive report as well as a plan for a similar museum in Latvia (Kundziņš 1925). The role and significance of Kundziņš in the inception of the Open-Air Museum cannot be overestimated. The grandson of a wealthy peasant and son of a pastor, he graduated from the classical gymnasium in Dorpat (Tartu, Estonia) and the Polytechnic Institute of Riga (he also studied in Munich and Rome) and eventually became a professor of architecture at the University of Latvia in Riga. He specialised in traditional architecture, published about 30 articles and educated generations of architects, some of whom continued his work at the Open-Air Museum (Indāns 1994: 78).

In a published proposal, Kundziņš grounded his ideas both in the national sentiment and the envisaged research potential of this kind of museum, pointing out how they would essentially appear closer to the natural historical environment represented. For example, when writing about Norway, he stated that, for him, the *Norske Folkemuseum* (the Norwegian Folk Museum) indicated particularly strongly that

a small nation embracing its past with a burning heart should also be able to create an exemplary storage that proves useful both for scientific research and for presenting

exuberant impressions from real life as well as fruitful inspirations from the remains of culture of the bygone times. (Kundziņš 1925)

In his project, he proposed the transportation of homesteads and social buildings, characteristic to the four main regions of Latvia, from their original locations to the museum grounds, where they could be re-constructed with additional displays of household items, traditional dress, etc. In 1928, after a request addressed to the Minister of Education by the Monuments Board landed property was provided for the Museum. In the same year, the first building was set up, and in 1932 the Museum, presenting six buildings, was opened to the public, although construction works lasted until 1934. Many public bodies also participated in the development of this Museum – different enterprises, student, youth and paramilitary organisations (Ģintars 1974: 7). By 1939, the already 40 objects represented all regions of Latvia.

During the Soviet occupation in 1940, the reorganisation of the Museum started with the renaming of the Museum to the Open-Air Museum of the State History Museum of the Latvian SSR Peoples Commissariat of Education (*Latvijas PSR Izglītības tautas komisariāta Valsts Vēstures muzeja Brīvdabas muzejs*) and its affiliation to the State History Museum. Thanks to personal contacts and lucky coincidences, the first year of the Soviet regime was spent in relative peace, perhaps due to the fact that a previous employee of the ethnographic department of the State History Museum worked in the Commissariat (cf. Ģintars 1974: 9). The Open-Air Museum continued to function during the German occupation; whereas a German army major was commanded to supervise its activities. Nevertheless, the occupation administration was not too interested in a museum that only represented Latvian (inferior in comparison to German) culture. However, descriptions and other materials were translated into German and the site was even visited several times by the General Commissioner of Latvia (cf. Indāns 2004). On the whole, the Museum was well attended (with 25,000 visitors in the summer of 1942, for example). Ethnographic fieldwork expeditions were also conducted and the publishing activities continued. The Museum was partially damaged in the last months of the war. Some buildings had been utilised by the army, and despite the objections of the local government, part of the Museum collection was evacuated by German administration to Germany at the beginning of 1945 (Ģintars 1974: 13). Several staff members also went into exile in the West, fleeing from the advancing Soviet troops (Priedīte 1994: 3). Thus ‘after the retreat of the German army and the arrival of the Soviet army, the Museum was desolate: many exhibits were damaged or lost, the inventory book was missing, although the buildings stood as before’ (Apsītis 2004).

The structural reorganisation (hiring of new staff members, affiliation with the State History Museum) and restoration of buildings damaged during the war started quickly after the war and the first new building was erected in the Museum in 1945. The first Soviet ten-year development plan was drawn up in 1952 by the Department of Conservation of Monuments of the Ministry of Culture of Soviet Latvia (*Padomju Latvijas Kultūras ministrijas Pieminekļu aizsardzības nodaļa*), simultaneously with the inclusion of the Museum on the list of Architectural Heritage of All-Union Significance, which meant state protection at the highest level. The new plan also included a novelty – the inclusion in the Museum of an exhibition and models that would portray rural life during the Soviet period (this also appeared in the next plan but was never implemented). In 1964, this institution was officially designated the Ethnographic Open-Air Museum of Latvia

(*Latvijas etnogrāfiskais brīvdabas muzejs*) (Ģinters 1974: 14). Previously, it had been referred to by several different names, among them the State Museum of Latvian Rural Life (*Latvijas Lauku dzīves valsts muzejs*). The Museum had its own administration and nine separate departments (ethnography, collection, chemical restoration, mass activities, construction, etc.). Due to the popularity of this museum, open-air departments were organised at museums of local history in different towns in 1952. In 1964, the Museum's next general plan of development and expansion was drawn up. However, following division into ethnographic regions during the Soviet period, the original structure of the exhibition remained unchanged. During this period, the representation of ethnic minorities, lower classes and hybrid elements increased as compared to the mono-ethnic exhibition of the 1930s (cf. Cimermanis 1978: 6). The latter was criticised for its bias, highlighting only architectural rarities and cultivating the propaganda of the lifestyle of wealthy peasants (cf. Ģinters 1974, Cimermanis 1978). Representation of all nationalities and social classes dwelling in rural regions, envisaged in the new plan, was successfully executed by installing multiple new buildings. By the 1970s, almost twenty percent of the buildings represented groups other than the ethnic Latvian population. Since its foundation, and especially during the Soviet period, the Museum hosted various ethnographic exhibitions and events, operating thus between the contesting agendas of national identity and official ideology so successfully that the Museum was even promoted to member of the Soviet committee for the International Museum Board by the USSR Ministry of Culture in 1976. The Museum also conducted research activities by organising numerous fieldwork expeditions and increasing its collection with items of tangible culture and textual material, films, photographs, and drawings. The main principle for collecting various items was the principle of being 'typical' to a particular district. Since 1970, the collection of items of contemporary folk art, especially ceramics and textile, increased significantly. The Museum gained international recognition, with open-air museums in Estonia, Ukraine, Georgia and Lithuania established according to the Latvian example (Jērāns 1988: 280). The Museum has been recognised with awards several times and has enjoyed great popularity with the general public, while its employees have included several renowned scholars who have actively participated in ethnographic fieldwork and research. The Museum has also gathered extensive archives of ethnographic material, including audio-visual material.

Following the re-establishment of independence in 1991, the Museum changed its policy according to the new working conditions. While structural changes were rather insignificant, display-wise adjustments concerned the removal of exhibitions dedicated to the cultures of 'the Soviet sister republics', although the representation of local diversity remained intact. The Museum was accredited in 2000 and again in 2004 as complying with state-level museum standards. Since 2005, the Museum has been operating as a state agency. Recently, two farmsteads damaged by fire have been renovated and one new farmstead constructed – a homesteader farm from the 1920s, representing the outcome of the agrarian reform that took place after the First World War and which expropriated landed property from the Baltic Germans. Currently the Museum occupies a territory of 87.66 hectares with 118 furnished buildings representing rural architecture and daily life from the end of the seventeenth century to the twentieth century. The Museum has two affiliated branches in northern and western Latvia.

Notes

- ¹ Closer unity with Latgale was established only after 1917. In addition to the gap in socio-economic development, political issues were also at stake. By having administratively formed a separate province within the Russian Empire, its relationship to other parts of Latvia remained a sensitive issue. The attitude of the Riga Latvian Society, the main body articulating the national aspirations, towards Latgale could be characterised as rather reserved.
- ² According to census of 1935, ethnic Latvians formed 77 percent of the population.
- ³ The largest rally was the Baltic Way (or Chain) on August 23, 1989, when about 2 million people gathered to stand with joined hands as a human chain that passed through the three Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania). This event commemorated the treacherous Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 1939.
- ⁴ According to the Law of Museums, a museum may be accredited if it conforms to these conditions: it has statutes or a similar document; an inventory of the museum collections has been performed; its premises, equipment and security systems guarantee the preservation of the museum collections; the collections are available to the public; and the museum has a strategy.
- ⁵ ‘As such the National Holdings are a national treasure; they shall be under national protection. The National Holdings are formed by the core of the collections of accredited museums of all levels as well as the museum-related objects of private collections or individual museum-related objects. Objects and collections of the National Holdings shall be included in a joint catalogue. Institutions and private persons, who possess or own objects of the National Holdings, shall ensure preservation and possibilities of usage thereof. The State shall grant budget resources for the maintenance, preservation and restoration of objects and collections of the National Holdings’ (cf. the Law of Museums, 2005).
- ⁶ Being the most prestigious exhibition space, the museum hosted various state-level exhibitions representing the art of, for example, Poland, Estonia, Belgium, Lithuania, Sweden, Norway, Italy, France, etc. In return exhibitions of Latvian art were organised abroad, thus the artistic exchange at some level symbolised the equality of independent nation-states.
- ⁷ The Baltic Artists Union, established in 1910 to promote the development of Baltic art by uniting artists living in the Baltic region and to popularise their work, was founded mainly by members of *Kunstverein*. Consequently, of about 40 active Latvian artists only nine were invited to the establishment of this organisation (see Cielava 1986: 77; Jaunsudrabiņš 1910: 3).
- ⁸ Both museums functioned quite successfully until they were closed in the mid 1990s and 2002 because of changes in real estate ownership: properties confiscated during the Soviet regime were handed back to the heirs of original (interwar period) owners. Collections of both memorial museums were included into the collection of the main museum.
- ⁹ Original quote from *Baltijas Vestnesis* 1869, 26.04 (33). Latvian material had also been sent to the large ethnographic exhibition organised in Moscow in 1867.
- ¹⁰ The museum’s purpose was ‘to tell the next generations about the culture, daily life and customs of our ancestors, thus also in a way serving for the research of our history, especially – cultural history’ (Balode 1996: 48).
- ¹¹ According to some sources, this exhibition also served as a model for the Ethnographic Open-Air Museum.
- ¹² The Congress took place between August 1st and 15th, gathering 627 accredited participants. It was the first scientific event on such a scale in Riga and also the first international congress with the participation of Latvian and Estonian delegates. The main organiser of the congress was the *Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Alterthumskunde der Ostseeprovinzen Russlands*.
- ¹³ Mainly Courland and Vidzeme; Latgale was considered less Latvian and therefore less representative.

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Annex table, Latvia

Name	Inaugurated	Initiated	Actors	Ownership	Type	Values	Temporal reach	Style Location
Latvian National Museum of Art								
Art Cabinet	1816		Municipality of Riga	Riga City	Paintings	Baltic (German), Western Europe	18 th -19 th c.	Premises of the city library
Riga City Art Gallery	1869	1868	Municipality of Riga, Riga Art Promotion Society	Riga City	Paintings	Baltic (German), Western Europe	18 th -19 th c.	Premises of gymnasium
Riga City Art Museum	1905	1903	Municipality of Riga, Riga Art Promotion Society	Riga City	Fine Arts	Baltic, Western Europe, Latvia	18 th -20 th c.	Purpose-built representative neo-classicist style building
State Museum of Art	1920		Municipality of Riga	Riga City	Fine Arts	Latvia, Baltic	18 th -20 th c.	Part of the Riga Castle
State Museum of Latvian and Russian Art	1945	1941	People's Soviet of Commissars of the Latvian SSR <i>et al.</i>	State	Fine Arts	Latvia, Russia	18 th -20 th c.	Purpose-built representative neo-classicist style building in the city centre
Latvian SSR State Museum of Art	1964	1964	Ministry of Culture <i>et al.</i>	State	Fine Arts	Latvia, Russia	18 th -20 th c.	
State Museum of Art / Latvian National Museum of Art (since 2004)	1989	1989	Ministry of Culture	Independent state agency	Visual Art	Latvia, historical Baltic, Western Europe	18 th -21 st c.	

National History Museum of Latvia								
Latvian Museum	1894	1876	Riga Latvian Society Science Committee	Riga Latvian Society	Archaeology, Ethnography, Miscellaneous	Latvia (mostly Courland and Livland)	13 th -19 th c.	Rented premises, two rooms
State Historical Museum (since 1924)	1920	1918	Ministry of Education	State	Archaeology, Ethnography, History	Historical territory of Latvia	9000BC-1920	Premises in the Riga Castle, historical site in the centre of the city (Old Town)
Latvian SSR Central State History Museum, Latvian SSR History Museum (since 1956)	1944	1941	People's Soviet of Commissars of the Latvian SSR <i>et al.</i>	State	Archaeology, Ethnography, History	Historical territory of Latvia	9000BC-1940	
History Museum of Latvia, National History Museum of Latvia (since 2004)	1989	1989	Ministry of Culture	Independent state agency	Archaeology, Ethnography, History	Historical territory of Latvia	9000BC-1940	
Ethnographic Open-Air Museum of Latvia								
Open-Air Museum	1932	(1910) 1924	Ministry of Education	Monuments Board	Rural Architecture, Ethnography	Latvia	17 th -20 th c.	Specially designated territory in the outskirts of Riga, complex of re-located rural buildings
State Museum of Rural Life of Latvia etc., Ethnographic Open-Air Museum of Latvia (since 1964)	1945	1940	People's Soviet of Commissars of the Latvian SSR <i>et al.</i>	State	Rural Architecture, Ethnography	Latvia	17 th -20 th c.	
Ethnographic Open-Air Museum of Latvia	1991	1989	Ministry of Culture	Independent state agency	Rural Architecture, Ethnography	Latvia	17 th -20 th c.	