The Past is Open to the Future: Lithuanian Folk Pottery 1861 - Present

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THE PAST IS OPEN TO THE FUTURE:
LITHUANIAN FOLK POTTERY 1861 - PRESENT

A Thesis
Presented to
Faculty of the Department of Folk Studies
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
Anthony Stellaccio

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THE PAST IS OPEN TO THE FUTURE:
LITHUANIAN FOLK POTTERY 1861 - PRESENT

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In 2011, following several years of in-country research, I published a book on Lithuanian folk pottery. I enrolled in the Folk Studies master’s program at Western Kentucky University (WKU) in 2014, well after my research and book had been completed. In the present study, I use my newly acquired knowledge of folklore in my previous work to revisit Lithuanian folk pottery.

In my previous work, I had sought to create a picture of “authentic” Lithuanian folk pottery that was confined to the narrow temporal borders of 1861-1918. Here I deconstruct conventional ideas about authenticity, as well as culture and heritage, in order to expand my study to three additional periods: the interwar period of independence (1918-1940), the Soviet period (1940-1990), and the post-Soviet period (1990-present).

Examining additional epochs of folk pottery production, I search for the commonalities and continuities binding together both objects and makers through seemingly disparate eras marked by dramatic political, social, and economic ruptures. To do this I examine the interconnected roles of political ideology, revised historical narratives, cultural policy, socio-economics, and concepts of
cultural identity. Sifting through these various facets of national identity, I ultimately find that it is in the consistent nature of the adaptations that folk potters and artists make to the dramatically changing circumstances where consistent patterns are found. It is in these circumstances that people must survive, as individuals, a culture, and a nation.

This study relies upon three central components: My previous research, texts related to folklore and cultural theory, and a wealth of new interviews conducted in Lithuania between September and November of 2015. Utilizing these tools, I move beyond my previous aim of reconstructing a period of history to engaging with art and culture as living, dynamic phenomena that are ever-changing and present but which possess roots in history and tradition.
INTRODUCTION

Before I came to the Folk Studies Department at Western Kentucky University (WKU), I spent nearly seven years of my life in Lithuania. While there, I devoted a great deal of time to the study of folk pottery and the composition of a book, *Lithuanian Folk Pottery: Inside and Out*. The ostensible, overarching purpose of this work was collecting, synthesizing, archiving, and making accessible to the English-speaking world a phenomenon of ceramic art little known even within Lithuania. Embedded within this objective, however, there was also my intent to capture and reveal some aspect of an essential Lithuanian-ness obscured by years of Soviet occupation, threatened by the impending onslaught of European assimilation and globalization, but incontrovertibly fixed in fired clay by folk potters at a pivotal historic moment of national self-assertion and expression (the period of National Reawakening and, later, independence, which collectively lasted from approximately 1861 until 1940). To use a word that, for folklorists, is highly stigmatized for its uncertain meaning and its congruent ability to distort and mislead, I wanted to delimit one aspect of “authentic” Lithuanian culture. I began my research in August 2004, only three months after Lithuania’s official entry into the European Union (EU).

Lithuania achieved Independence from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1990, meaning that for the fourteen years prior to its entry into the EU, and for one of only a few similar historical epochs, Lithuania was not a part of any larger or official political, economic, or cultural union. During this
time, the processes of recuperation, modernization, and Westernization were thought by some to be slow in comparison to the expected rate of change under the auspices of the EU, but the nation did make strides in economic and cultural rehabilitation, self-determination and self-definition. Thus I positioned my own work at a pivotal historic moment that was seemingly analogous to the previous period of official independence, 1918-1939. I little doubt that as an untrained scholar, an aspiring artist, and an impressionable young man with at least somewhat romanticized notions of travel, belonging, art, and culture, that this correlation influenced the direction of my research. In many ways, my effort was thus akin to much work done in folklore, whether it sought to preserve the last vestiges of a culture thought to be going extinct, aimed to rescue folklore from the figurative (or literal) fire, or attempted to instill a therapeutic dose of empowering nationalism.

In this case, the search for authentic Lithuanian folk pottery would be redemptive, filtering out the accrued influences, anomalies, and perversions of native craft. In the end, I would reveal an accurate picture of a codified, culturally distinct pottery tradition and, with that image, proactively fortify Lithuania’s national heritage and identity. The idea of the image here is of the utmost importance because my training, prior to my study of folklore, was rooted exclusively in the visual arts. Consequently, it is with images, their analysis and production, that I was primarily concerned.

To create an image of “Lithuanian-ness” in folk pottery produced at a specific point in history, I sought to describe the historical parameters of the
Lithuanian folk pottery tradition, to document its internal diversity, and to illuminate and explore the boundaries of its defining features. This investigation began with a review of the major political, social, economic, aesthetic, and technological developments that gave rise to and exerted influence upon the Lithuanian folk pottery tradition. The advent of ceramics in Lithuanian territory from approximately 5000 BCE, the decline of pottery production in the Metal Ages, the appearance of European artisans and technology and a subsequent resurgence of ceramic production in the Middle Ages, and the manufacture of *faience* by ruling elites in the 17th and 18th centuries: on the timeline of Lithuanian ceramics all of these periods precede the emergence of what I considered to be the nationally representative pottery tradition. In my book I refer to this period of emergence as a renaissance: “a period of quantitative increase and technological advancement in pottery production during which a culturally distinct language of pottery forms and ornamentation came into being” (Stellaccio 2011:54). Originally, my opinion was that the timeline for this tradition ended, at least symbolically, in 1940. 1940 marks the onset of WWII and successive occupations by Nazi Germany and the USSR, the latter lasting nearly half a century. I set this marker based on the physical evidence of aesthetic decline and its correlation with the structural political, economic, and cultural changes implemented by the Soviet government.

The great convenience of lacking an education in folklore is that it allowed for the tidy packaging of a tradition, with recognizable characteristics and relatively clear temporal and geographic borders, as described above.
Convenience, however, is closer to consumption than it is to truth. As Michael Moss states in *Salt Sugar Fat*, convenience it is “the great additive… the controlling denominator of consumer acceptance or demand” (2013:21).

Consequently, my book on Lithuanian folk pottery is likely a bit more popular in nature than I would care for it to be, as it takes for granted a number of folklore’s central and defining, internal points of scholarly debate. Who are the folk? What is folk art? What is the relationship between the “folk” and the nation? What is a nation? What is heritage and who does it belong to? What is tradition? How much can tradition change? What is authenticity? And even, what is culture? Such questions and many more like them are unaddressed but implicit in the assertions I made in my previous work. Explicitly stated here, these questions help to circumscribe points of scholarly investigation and to navigate the ethical and political terrain of cultural representation. Folklore in the post-modernist age, after all, at least if I have it pegged correctly, is not about packing but unpacking: disclosing the nature of the assumptions which influence analysis and categorization in order to flush out cultural, racial, gender, and similar biases; to neutralize the ethical and political implications of said biases; and by dissecting the nature of the investigation and its tenets, to lay bare the dynamics of culture and cultural phenomena in a way that attempts to avoid deterministic, misleading, and limiting interpretations of other people’s culture.

Lithuania is my second home, if I have any home at all, and it is likewise an endless source of fascination and inspiration that has fed me personally and professionally. Naturally then, my feelings towards the country have always
included respect, gratitude, and love. What I owe Lithuania then is an honest reassessment of the work that I did there. Based on new fieldwork conducted in Lithuania between September 1, 2015 and November 15, 2015, and enabled by the investigative and theoretical tools acquired during my study of folklore at WKU, such a reassessment is the purpose of the present report. In the course of this reassessment I will also address one of my own central research questions: whether my the sense and understanding of Lithuanian folk pottery that I gained in my previous work mirrors that of native potters and scholars. This report shall, conveniently, also serve as the thesis requirement for my Master's degree in folk studies.

Of course, the present study cannot hope to be a fully comprehensive review and analysis of Lithuanian Folk Pottery: Inside and Out or provide a complete picture of Lithuanian folk pottery. Nor can this thesis hope to answer questions such as “who are the folk?” “what is authenticity?” or “what is culture?” in a terminal way (and I do not believe anyone can or even necessarily should). What I have examined is how asking such questions reshapes my study and understanding of Lithuanian folk pottery and whether my original assertions on this topic can remain intact in light of a broader understanding and knowledge of the discipline of folklore.

The following thesis includes, in its first chapter, a discussion of two contemporary cultural phenomena in Lithuania: the reconstructed Grand Dukes’ Palace and the Vilnius Potter’s Guild. This examination identifies themes present in the contemporary Lithuanian cultural landscape for the purpose of framing the
ensuing discussion of Lithuanian folk pottery. The second chapter offers a reexamination of the period I define as a folk pottery renaissance, that being the period 1861-1918. In the third chapter I examine the commercial interwar period of folk pottery production (1918-1940) and the era of Soviet occupation (1940-1990). In examining the Soviet period in Chapter 3, I take a broad look at the changing guises of folk pottery: factory production and the emergence of professional, applied-art ceramics. Linking folk and applied art reveals how such things as Soviet cultural policy, modernization, developments in education, and other factors influenced the course and role of folk culture in Lithuania, at least where ceramics is concerned. Looking at the post-Soviet era in Chapter 4, I introduce and investigate three contemporary folk potters, Silvestra Šufinskienė, Ėčeslovas Gudžius, and Vygantas Vasaitis.

This text in its entirety is based on a series of twenty-four interviews, most conducted in Lithuania between September 1, 2015 and November 15, 2015. These interviews included curators, fine artists, folk potters, officials at the Lithuanian Commission for UNESCO, historians, officials at Lithuania’s Ministry of Agriculture, educators, and members of the Vilnius Potter’s Guild and Crafts Guild. I conducted the interviews in English and Lithuanian and they were transcribed and translated either by my assistants, Enrika Cabrera and Aistė Turolevičienė, or by me. The literature consulted for this thesis fell into several different topical areas: folklore theory and history, heritage and the heritage industry, tradition, Lithuanian culture, Soviet cultural policy, nationalism, art, and
cultural memory studies. Of course, I also utilized my own book and its original source material.

As it takes on a great deal of information in a limited amount of space, this report is necessarily abbreviated and incomplete. It does, however, illuminate the successes and failures of my previous work, better reveal the relevant cultural processes at work in Lithuania and what role folk pottery plays in them, negotiate the presumed authority of my previous scholarship by amplifying the voices of locals, and offer a unique opportunity to reflect upon and provide at least limited commentary on the value of an education in folklore. Most importantly, it will reveal the greater dimension of my topic, Lithuanian folk pottery, and provide inroads to continued research in the future.
Hitherto trained as a fine artist but untrained as a scholar, one of the major objectives of this paper is to bring my previous study of Lithuanian folk pottery into my present engagement with the theoretical framework of the folklore discipline. Reexamining past studies, adding new data, expanding and revising conclusions, and identifying new paths of investigation I am, quite literally, bringing my own past into the future.

As I apply what I have learned as a student of folklore I broaden the scope of work I once thought complete. Indeed, by undoing the limitations imposed by narrower intellectual horizons I am able to deconstruct the rigid, late 19th to early 20th century, temporal frame in which I originally placed Lithuanian folk pottery. Freed of myopic notions of both authenticity and the mechanisms for constructing culture, my revised conception of Lithuanian folk pottery places it squarely in the active continuum of Lithuanian history and the Lithuanian present. This is yet another way in which I, in this thesis, situate the past in terms of the present and future.

In seeking an understanding of Lithuanian folk pottery in the present and future tense, broader contextualizations become not only possible but necessary. By examining everything from contemporary, popular attitudes towards icons of culture to official cultural policy in Lithuania (the two sometimes at odds), the dynamics of the Lithuanian folk pottery phenomenon and my earlier assumptions about them become clearer and, alternatively, more complex. Examining such
factors has, however, meant going not only beyond the frame I once set for Lithuanian folk pottery but also into other, symbolic manifestations of Lithuanian culture that it has been possible to decode and extrapolate from. What is deciphered in contemporary Lithuanian culture then re-frames my previous study of Lithuanian folk pottery, once consigned to the past and now re-viewed as one of many forms of interwoven, living culture and heritage.

This is “heritage,” described by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett as “a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past” (1998:150). This larger frame is discernibly embodied in the reconstruction of the Grand Dukes’ Palace, one of Lithuania’s largest and most controversial cultural icons. The Palace stands next to the equally iconic, historic cathedral in the center of Vilnius, Lithuania’s capital. With these two buildings being the geographic and symbolic epicenter of culture and identity in Vilnius and Lithuania, they are also the point where my thesis will begin.
THE PAST IS OPEN TO THE FUTURE PART I:
IN THE SHADOW OF THE GRAND DUKE’S PALACE

If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.

-TS Eliot
Europe baptized its last pagans, the Lithuanians, only in 1387. Vilnius Cathedral, the central architecture of Lithuanian Christianity, was not built at this date but in some way represents the moment at which Lithuania, upon entering the Christian world of Europe, emerged out of a remarkable political, economic, and cultural isolation. With the acceptance of Christianity, Lithuania integrated with Europe, acquired Europe’s recognition of statehood, and was henceforth awarded European privileges. Thus, while the Lithuanians of today may celebrate their fervent Catholicism along with their historic paganism, the Cathedral is, arguably, a symbol of assimilation that was, as a political necessity for ruling elites, not entirely voluntary. Next to the Cathedral stands the reconstructed palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania.

Prior to its destruction, the Grand Dukes’ Palace, which existed before 1387 as a series of wooden castles, represented statehood in a different way: it was a symbol of Lithuania’s political viability and accomplishment. The palace also was, although not unproblematically, the epicenter of Lithuania’s self-governance and sovereignty. Comparatively, the Palace was capable of standing as an internal, self-validating symbol of Lithuania’s identity, while the Cathedral represents Lithuania in Europe, an external validation of the Lithuanian state that existed (in historical documents) since 1009.

The Tsarist Russian forces occupying Lithuania from 1795 until 1918 razed the Palace between 1799 and 1801. This destruction represents a key
stroke in the erasure of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from the political map of Europe. In 1983, during the period of Glasnost and Perestroika, at which time the Soviet Socialist Republic of Lithuania made its push for independence from the Soviet Union, Lithuanian officials first introduced the idea of reconstructing the Palace (initially as a national gallery). No doubt the reconstruction of the Palace and the independence movement were interrelated, “[c]onfirming [Pierre] Nora’s point that temporal and topographical memorial sites emerge at those times and in those places where there is a perceived or constructed break with the past” (Gillis 1994:8). In 1987, three years before Lithuania became the first Soviet Republic to declare independence, systematic excavations of the palace territory began. In 2002, reconstruction of the Palace began and it was partially completed by 2009. In 2009, Lithuania’s millennial celebration occurred and the EU designated Vilnius as a Cultural Capital of Europe.

What now stands is a reconstructed Palace, no longer the home of Lithuania’s rulers but a museum and cultural center where performances, lectures, and other events take place. The new Palace is also the encasement for the conserved ruins of the previous structures, which constitute the literal and figurative foundation of the current building. Not least of all, the Palace is now one of Vilnius’ most trafficked tourist sites.

As a symbol, the Grand Dukes’ Palace stands for Lithuania the historic state, which disappeared repeatedly throughout history, as well as the modern nation that exists today. The distinction here is of note, however, with the historic state and modern nation being quite different. The former was one of Europe’s
largest empires, at its height stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea and
reigning over diverse lands and peoples as a model of progressive
internationalism. The modern nation is confined to a reasonable interpretation of
its ethno-lingual borders and to a size the equivalent of West Virginia.

The banner hanging on the front of the Palace to welcome visitors reads,
in both Lithuanian\(^1\) and English, “THE PAST IS OPEN TO THE FUTURE”
(Figures 1-2). The message of this text invokes the asymmetrical images of the
historic Lithuanian state and the modern nation just as the standing image of the
building itself seeks to reconcile them by linking the two in historical perpetuity.
As Vydas Dolinskas, director of the Palace Museum said in 2013, “[t]he History of
Lithuania between Vytautas Magnus (15th century) and Jonas Basanavičius (late
19th century) used to be a blank page for us, but now, within the auspices of the
Palace, we can fill it in, domesticate our history, make it our own, and see its
continuity” (Jablonskaitė 2013). The “us” Dolinskas speaks for here is Lithuania,
and the “domestication” or cultivation of collective memory is invoked as an
essential component for nationalism and nationalist politics.
Maurice Halbwachs established the idea of collective memory in the mid-20th century by suggesting in *La Mémoire Collective* (1950) that a society can have a memory much as individuals can. Working from this idea, Jan Assmann distinguishes between two types of collective memory: communicative and cultural. Communicative memory is the oral transmission of memories in everyday life. Cultural memory, Assmann says, is “a kind of institution. It is exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that… are stable and situation transcendent: They may be transferred from one situation to another and transmitted from one generation to another” (2010:110-1).

Assmann states that cultural memory exists “only in constant interaction, not only with other human memories but also with ‘things.’” He also emphasizes that “[o]n the social level, with respect to groups and societies, the role of external symbols becomes even more important, because groups which, of
course, do not ‘have’ a memory tend to ‘make’ themselves one by means of things meant as reminders such as monuments, museums, libraries, archives, and other mnemonic institutions” (2010:111). This is a way of understanding the Palace; as an embodiment of cultural and thus collective memory, the intention of which is to fortify the present and provide a historical foundation for the future. Just as when the collective memory of Lithuania’s distant past was an essential component of the identity invoked in resistance to both Tsarist and Soviet occupation, today to remember is to endure, and reclaiming the past is the ultimate victory and a confirmation of independence. The reconstruction of the Grand Dukes’ Palace was not, however, a simple act of reclaiming history. Instead it is a highly problematic phenomenon of reinterpreting and revising history and national identity, which the following discussion should help illuminate.

In 2004, in the book Memory and Architecture, Mark Jarzombek published a study of the reconstruction of Dresden, Germany, the city immortalized in Kurt Vonnegut’s Slaughterhouse Five. In WWII, the Nazis controlled Dresden and added their indelible mark to the city with appropriations of old constructions and new building. Allied forces then bombed Dresden and damaged it substantially. Adding another layer, the Soviets controlling Dresden after WWII rebuilt the city in a Marxist Modernist style. In both of these periods the appearance and identity of the city was shaped and even fundamentally altered according to then current politics and ideology. At the time of Jarzombek’s study, yet another remodeling of
Dresden was underway, this time undertaken in an independent, reunified Germany and in preparation for the city’s eight-hundredth birthday in 2006.

In 2006, multiple Dresdens existed simultaneously in “the still-potent, bricolaged layers of (the city’s) mnemonic structure” (Jarzombek 2004:54). The reconstruction, however, threatened to obscure this polyvocal identity by reconstituting certain aspects of the pre-WWII city and dismantling evidence of the Nazi and Socialist eras. This reconstruction was done while simultaneously and selectively conserving, reconstructing, rearranging, and modernizing. In essence, the reconstruction was a complex manipulation of history and identity that, if not explicitly motivated by ideology, had substantial ideological implications. According to Jarzombek, the reconstruction was conceptually and politically faulty in its attempts to revise history, creating not so much a new city as a site of competing narratives and a scene of conflict between memory and modernity (2004:51-2).

Before the reconstruction was complete, an article appearing in the Boston Globe in March 2005 ran the following headline: “Dresden Builds a Future: German City Reconstructs its Demolished Past.” This is little more than a paraphrase of “the past is open to the future,” though the parallels do not end here. Within Dresden, the reconstruction of the Frauenkirche Church became a particularly potent symbol “of the city’s past, survival, and rebirth” (Jarzombek 2004:55). The Allies destroyed the Church in WWII and the Socialists used its stones as a memorial to Allied atrocity, projecting new meaning upon them through an act of commemoration. When the international community, in a spirit
of atonement, rebuilt the church in a reunified Germany, the stones of the original building and former Socialist monument were, and not without controversy, embedded into the new structure. As it has now become an important tourist destination within Dresden, Jarzombek describes the new church as “central to a narrative in which political symbolism, regional identity, and international tourism are conflated” (2004:55). This is an apt way to describe the Grand Dukes’ Palace in Vilnius as well.

In *The Myth of Santa Fe*, Chris Wilson critiques the city’s architecture, regulated both by law and public opinion, as a highly selective and restrictive effort to artificially maintain a contrived and heavily romanticized but highly marketable historic image of the city. As Wilson points out, the effort to essentially freeze this image of Santa Fe is also a political problem as its maintenance glosses over a complex and contested history of ethnic and racial struggle. Suppression of the city’s organic evolution by an aesthetic dictatorship also tends towards division and dichotomy, drawing socioeconomic lines that favor gentrification and disenfranchise minority populations.

Like the Frauenkirche Church in Dresden and the architecture of Santa Fe, the Grand Dukes’ Palace is a politically, ideologically and economically driven historical intervention. Indeed, the Palace can be described with the same words used by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett to describe the complex transformation of Ellis Island into a historical monument and tourist site. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes: “Abandoned, the site became an evocative ruin. Restored, it has become a repository of patriotic sentiment and exemplar of
institutional memory under the aegis of corporate sponsorship” (1998:9). The construction of the Palace likewise produced an array of political and conceptual problems.

On a political level, it is common knowledge that, despite propagandist rhetoric attempting to place the project within a democratic milieu, the reconstruction of the Grand Dukes' Palace was a product of oligarchy. Specifically, the Palace was the pet project of Lithuania’s first post-Soviet president, and later prime minister, Algirdas Brazauskas (1932-2010). Brazauskas, a former communist party member, initially intended the Palace to be the new presidential quarters, which would reconstitute the locus of Lithuanian governance (and in this way preserve the Palace’s historic function). Brazauskas did not realize this goal but the project remained under his influence.

Construction of the Palace was highly problematic. First, costs soared to three to six times original estimates. The present estimated cost of the reconstruction is up to 100 million Euros, an amount covered mostly by taxpayers in an already economically handicapped country. Second, construction was of dubious quality and done by government-friendly construction companies. Third, Lithuanian decision-makers consistently neglected to consult the higher-bodies to which they were in principle accountable. Consequently, the project could not escape accusations of “Soviet-style embezzlement, cronyism and pompousness” (Žemaitis 2013). No doubt, the site remains a symbol of these things for the project’s detractors.
To make matters worse, in 2006, the Palace’s project designers decided to destroy parts of a 19th century structure on the Palace grounds. They saw this structure as incongruous with a vision for the reconstructed Palace that was, in fact, never quite clear. Only after the intervention of the International Council on Monuments and Sites’ (ICOMOS) former president Michael Petzet (in post 1999-2008), did project overseers reconsider the house of the merchant Šilosbergas as legitimate evidence of the site’s history (Rimkutė 15). Ultimately, designers incorporated the skeleton of the 19th century structure in the current design (Rimkutė 15).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was also embroiled in Palace controversies as the Šilosbergas house, not to mention the entirety of the Palace grounds, are included on UNESCO’s list of World Heritage Sites as part of Vilnius’ Old Town. The Lithuanian government voluntarily put Vilnius’ Old Town and, by default, the Palace reconstruction project, within UNESCO’s purview. However, “the Lithuanian government… never informed UNESCO about the project… (and) the government ignored UNESCO’s recommendation not to rebuild the Palace” (Rindzevičiūtė 2010:201).

UNESCO’s opposition to the project centered not only on the controversy surrounding the Šilosbergas house but also on arguments concerning the Palace’s authenticity. “Indeed, it is clearly indicated in the first Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (1977) that the authenticity criterion should be met” (Rimkutė 12). Here authenticity is
defined as a “measure of the degree to which the values of a heritage property may be understood to be truthfully, genuinely and credibly, expressed by the attributes carrying the values” (Stovel 2007:23). Expressive attributes are defined as design, materials, function, setting, etc. Referred to as a test of authenticity, the revised Operational Guidelines of 1980 do allow historic facsimile reconstruction “if it is carried out on the basis of complete and detailed documentation” (UNESCO 1980). The Declaration of Dresden is similar, stating “[t]he complete reconstruction of severely damaged monuments must be regarded as an exceptional circumstance which is justified only for special reasons resulting from the destruction of a monument of great significance by war. Such a reconstruction must be based on reliable documentation of its condition before destruction” (ICOMOS 1982). This means that a reconstruction is permissible if it is an authentic copy, a term in circulation within Lithuania and used frequently by those interviewed for this study.

The concept of the “authentic copy” can also be framed in the language of “representative authenticity” used by John Dorst in his study of Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania. Dorst refers to representative authenticity as the “oxymoron upon which the conservancy/museum depends” (1989:49). For Dorst, representative authenticity is emblematic of a kind of paradox, “again diagnostic of postmodernity, where both the thing and the idea of the thing are produced; a physical object is produced, but its materiality becomes equivocal in that it is inscribed with the simulacrum of the thing it purports to be” (1989:65). By insinuating that an entirely or mostly new structure can be authentic by virtue of
its reference to past structures, this postmodern paradox further complicates the determination of authenticity by subjectivity and degree.

In defense of the Palace, archaeologist Gintautas Rackevičius, who was intimately involved in the project and remains a fairly staunch advocate of it, estimates that approximately one-third of the present building is, in his own words, “authentic” (Interview by the author, 2015). This hardly roots the Palace in conservation theory and policy in a way satisfactory to the political bodies governing world heritage. Moreover, the scientific basis of the Palace reconstruction is undeniably faulty: it is based on a paucity of archaeological information collected at the site of the castle during excavations, a limited number of historical documents, and an incomplete set of artist renderings of its facades. It was for this reason that the National Union of Lithuanian Restorers selected the newly opened royal residence as the worst reconstruction project of the year in 2009. However, the group also cited “damaging and irreversible additions to authentic ruins, rushed archaeological work, and a lack of detailed vision of the Palace before the beginning of the reconstruction works” (Rimkutė 14). Critics also found fault with the interior of the building for its “reliance on guesswork and analogies in the sphere of internal arrangement and detailing” (Rimkutė 14). This last point adds further credence to Eglė Rindzevičiūtė’s determination that, “[f]aced with an all-too-evident lack of sources, it was made clear that the rebuilding of the Palace sought to reconstruct not ‘the authentic’ building, but ‘the image’ of the original Palace” (Rindzevičiūtė 2010:198). Here it is possible to interpret “image” in Dorstian terms, as “an idea... ideological
discourse… [and] assemblage of texts” (1989:3). Admittedly, this definition is fitting for the “image” of Lithuanian folk pottery that I sought to create in my own previous work.

As described by Rindzevičiūtė, the Palace is defined by a separation between its symbolic image and the authentic form that it references but fails to realize. Arguably, the conceptual gap between the authentic building and the image is the same space in which public skepticism about the reconstruction remains entrenched and UNESCO voiced its opposition to the project. But in an interview, Milda Valančiauskienė, Culture Programs Coordinator at the Lithuanian National Commission for UNESCO, breaks with policy dogma to illustrate an approach that moves away from notions of authenticity. In this shift, Valančiauskienė embraces more democratic “on-the-ground” cultural politics.

Valančiauskienė states in her interview:

In Lithuania many folklorists like using this word ‘authentic,’ one thing which is authentic and another is not authentic, or original. And me as a practitioner of folklore, because I’m participating in this kind of activity, I understand what they have in mind when saying that… but the thing UNESCO emphasizes is that everything depends on community will, if it is really very important for them, if they think it’s part of their identity, (then) it is valuable already. It doesn’t mean it will be included on UNESCO’s representative list, but it represents part of a cultural life, cultural activities, and it is valuable. (Interview by the author, 2015)

In essence, Valančiauskienė’s comments touch upon an ongoing debate in discussions of heritage. As Laurajane Smith relays, there is no single perception of heritage and meaning and this contradicts “the ‘conserve as found’
ethos… Some Japanese historic buildings may be regularly and entirely rebuilt with modern materials and techniques without compromising their heritage values or sense of authenticity” (2006:55). The importance here is on active meaning, symbolic representation, and the ability of material or tangible heritage to provide “a physical representation of those things from ‘the past’ that speak to a sense of place, a sense of self, of belonging and community” (Smith 2006:30). However, sidelining discussions of authenticity in favor of community will and identity does not draw unproblematic equivalences between the authentic object and cultural symbolism in the case of the Palace.

Adding to her critiques of the Palace’s authenticity, Eglė Rindzevičiūtė points out that “[t]he legitimacy of the Palace was further complicated by a lack of anchoring in literary narratives, folk tales, or legends. In this way, at the turn of the twentieth century, the Palace simply was not part of banal Lithuanian nationalism. It was difficult, if not impossible to mask the fact that the Palace was a project generated by a small, but influential fraction of the political and cultural elites” (2010:201). The argument that Rindzevičiūtė is synthesizing here, which undermines the stability and reliability of the Palace as an image or cultural symbol, is one that also considers the asymmetrical images of the Lithuanian state and the Lithuanian nation.

In the history of the Lithuanian state, an ethnically Lithuanian dynasty of monarchs ruled from the 13th through 16th centuries. In the 16th century, however, under the auspices of a disadvantageous and not entirely voluntary union with the Kingdom of Poland, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and its ruling
class undertook, or underwent, a process of cultural and linguistic Polonization. The stigma of the Polonization period is felt in Lithuania even today with, as just one indication, an ongoing movement to de-Polonize Lithuanian surnames. From the early 16th century on, Lithuania’s rulers were not necessarily Polish, but they were not ethnically or culturally Lithuanian either, and they typically aligned themselves with the seat of power in the Kingdom of Poland. Indeed, the Grand Dukes’ Palace suffered as much from its neglect by Lithuania’s rulers and their prioritizing of Polish concerns as it did from its physical disembowelment by Imperial Russia at the turn of the 18th century.

The cities of Lithuania also underwent a transformation initiated with Lithuania’s opening to Europe, a process beginning much earlier than Polonization. A disproportionate population of urbanites, entrepreneurs, and craftsmen was ethnically variegated, with heavy concentrations of Poles, Jews, and Germans. By the turn of the 20th century, socioeconomic and cultural divides developing over centuries created an externally non-ethnic Lithuanian state. As Thomas Lane relays, “[Lithuania’s] large estate owners were Polish or Polonized Lithuanians who identified with Poland, its peasantry was divided between Lithuanians, Belarusians and Poles and its commercial activities were carried on by Jews,” (2002:xvii) which meant “there was virtually no ethnic Lithuanian middle class or proletariat” (2002:xxvii).

An 1897 census revealed that 87 percent of Lithuania’s population lived in small towns and villages, and of this rural population 73 percent can be classified as peasants (Kiaupa 2002:196). In turn, the rural peasant population constituted
93 percent of Lithuania’s native Lithuanian speakers. It was precisely this peasantry, under directives from an elite intelligentsia centered in neighboring Prussia, that was the firmament of Lithuanian nationalism in the 19th century. Consequently, the center of power reconstructed in Vilnius in 2009, the Grand Dukes’ Palace, and specifically the 16th-18th century iteration upon which it was modeled, represents the height of political, socio-cultural, and economic segregation upon which Lithuanian nationalism ultimately pivoted.

In her study *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania: Memory and Modernity in the Wake of War*, Violeta Davoliūtė, speaking of the pre-20th century Lithuanian peasantry states: “the vast majority of Lithuanians had never been to Vilnius and had very little by way of cultural representations to give them any idea of what it was like. In Lithuanian folklore, for example, Vilnius is encountered less frequently than Riga or Tilsit” (2014:28). Consequently, and where the Palace in particular is concerned, “[t]he nineteenth-century Lithuanian nationalist press was not particularly concerned about the Vilnius castles because they were situated in a Polish and Jewish-dominated urban milieu. For this reason the Vilnius castles were seen as less appropriate components of ethnic Lithuanian heritage than rural castles” (Rindzevičiūtė 2010:194).

Given this interpretation, it can be odd then to hear so many 20th century Lithuanians complain about the reconstructed Palace, particularly its furnishings, which consist of historic objects (authentic European analogies) “designed to represent the typical European palace culture from different architectural periods” (Rimkutė 10). That the objects are foreign seems infertile grounds for criticism
when there has long been acknowledgment of the Palace’s inherent foreignness. Indeed, it seems it was reasonably well known that, historically, very little about the Palace, from its furnishings to the people living there, was likely to have been Lithuanian. That was simply not the fashion.

What the Palace relies on in order to function as a cultural symbol and center is not, however, historical accuracy. Indeed, historical accuracy is often subjugated in the construction of public and, particularly, national monuments. As David Lowenthal writes in his study *Identity, Heritage, and History*, “when national identity seems at stake heritage supersedes history” and this coopting by heritage “exaggerates or denies accepted fact to assert a primacy…” (1994:53). This skirting of historical accuracy is in turn aided by what Benedict Anderson referred to as collective amnesia: the necessity of selectively forgetting contrary facts and events in the formation of national identities (1983:204). Collective amnesia is not only a feature of imagined national identities, which Anderson argues are actively constructed. Rather, “critics who argue that traditional memory sites actually discourage engagement with the past and induce forgetting rather than remembering” (Lowenthal 1994:16) have also pointed out the amnesia factor. Without the restrictions of historical fact, the Palace is able to operate as a cultural symbol fueled by what Smith refers to as “conservative and nostalgic messages about the past that often identify… significant national achievement[s]… as uncritically representative of history” (2006:159).
What dissonance is indicated in public criticism of the Palace arises in the conflict between historical accuracy and this emotional, nationalistic drive to revise history through the reimagined structure. But this historical revision is something the structure comes closer to achieving through its external image than through the conspicuous and contradictory foreignness of its internal arrangement. One exception to this, within the alienating foreignness of the Palace’s interior, is a series of five, locally-made replicas of 16th century tile-stoves. Tile stoves are masonry heating stoves covered in ceramic tiles.
As one walks through the Grand Dukes’ Palace, particularly when one moves to the top two floors of the building and its displays of archaeological finds give way to the reconstructed residential quarters (when authentic finds give way to facsimile), one encounters a litany of foreign objects: armor from Germany, Italian furniture, French tapestries, and the like. A series of rooms in the long string of contiguous spaces hosting such artifacts is also punctuated by the presence of tile-stoves. The tile-stoves are not only massive but are featured prominently in conspicuous, almost intrusive, interpretative signage. This signage summarizes each room and dedicates considerable space to a description of its respective tile-stove and an acknowledgment of its makers. The tiles for each replica were made by very different groups of local artists: the faculty of the Vilnius Art Academy, the staff at the ceramic factory Dvarcioniu Keramika, and, among others, the Vilnius Potter’s Guild (Figures 3-4).


Dainius Strazdas and his partners, Elena Aleksejeva and Laura Sodeikaitė, established the Vilnius Potter’s Guild in 2003. This was the year when, through a municipal, cultural and aesthetic rejuvenation initiative, the group received a subsidized studio space in Vilnius’ bohemian Užupis district. The design of the studio, with its hanging shelves and rustic furnishings, is generically based on historic, medieval models. The internal arrangement of the studio is highly intentional and includes the following features: replicas of objects from the Middle Ages and Renaissance. These are grouped categorically and constitute the display in the gallery space, which is the first room entered from the outside; replicas of overtly foreign works and in-progress commissions that are clearly segregated from the other display items framing the workspace in the second room, and; a massive wood, medieval-style potter’s wheel that sits in plain view at the front of the workspace. Near the wooden potter’s wheel is a small electric wheel (an occasional necessity) that is discreetly placed and almost unnoticeable behind an enormous table of heavy wood construction in the center of room (Figures 5-6).
The Guild’s studio is not unlike the Palace in that it is a space conveying meaning through symbolic motifs and visual cues “according to the principles and ideology of recreational ‘living history’” (Dorst 1989:42). Both constructed spaces are recreations meant to inspire romantic images of history in which the viewer can participate. Dorst describes this in the frame of “Post-modern cultural production” as “an elaborate stage set in which one can imagine and enact the idea of a way of life” (Dorst 1989:46).

It is important to clarify that present in Dorst’s conceptual analysis are notions of cultural consumption and commercialization, for which there is a great deal of available language. First, geographer Mark Gottdiener conceptualizes “the ‘themed environment’ as a characteristic of Western consumer societies” (2001:5). Dean MacCannell uses the term “staged authenticity” (1976:91-108), a commodified form of “heritage” described by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett as an
image (like the “image” of the Grand Dukes’ Palace) that “is not inauthentic but a mix of the old and the new” (1998:150).

To be certain, the image of itself that the Guild maintains is available for consumption within a local and international market for cultural heritage. Indeed, the Guild survives by generating revenue where it can, from its student clay courses, sponsored restoration projects, and from the tourist market. As a case-in point, at the outset of my research, a group of American tourists entered the Guild with their hired Lithuanian tour guide who regularly brings people to see a “real workshop” (Author’s field notes). Undeniably, the Guild is part of the heritage tourism industry.

The Guild’s studio, in addition to being a business and a locus of identity, is also an administrative center. This location serves as the base for the groups various activities, which include: organization of an annual summer camp on the grounds of historic Trakai Castle. In Trakai, local and international guests (myself included) and students, often those pursuing fine arts degrees at the Vilnius Art Academy, produce replicas of the Neolithic pottery made in Lithuanian territory; participation in local and international art and craft fairs (where Guild members are often found in medieval garb); offering clay classes for children and adults; working on commission; and from their studio gallery, selling replicas and interpretations of historic ceramic artifacts (typically medieval, renaissance, and folk). In this case, folk refers to the pottery made by, used by, or associated with the ethnically Lithuanian, rural peasantry of the 19th and 20th centuries.
Among the Guild’s most serious activities are archaeological excavations and the conservation of historic kilns and ceramics, the latter often focusing on tile-stoves in historic, aristocratic manors. Also included is perhaps one of the Guild’s most significant accomplishments, the re-introduction of a leaven firing technique (Figure 7).³ Used in the production of utilitarian pottery, leaven firing appears in Lithuania’s medieval urban centers as well as in 19th and 20th century folk production.


With the revival of the leaven-firing technique as a case-in point, the impact of the Guild on perceptions of the relationship between craft and cultural heritage in Lithuania is, arguably, substantial. For example, since the reintroduction of the leaven process in Lithuania by the Guild it has, somewhat retroactively, become a centerpiece of traditional Lithuanian ceramics, a staple technique for contemporary potters creating “national” art, and endemic at craft and culture fairs. One might refer to this as a revival or reinvention of a Lithuanian tradition. Yet, the leaven-tradition is not specifically Lithuanian.
Rather, leaven firing is found throughout the region in Russia, Belarus, Poland, etc. Furthermore, it is uncertain whether the medieval urban craftsmen who were the tradition’s earliest known practitioners were also ethnically Lithuanian. Interestingly, the same is true of the stove-tile tradition that the Guild revived and nurtures as part of living Lithuanian heritage.

The arguments concerning the cultural identity of the stove-tile tradition are both vague and complex. On the one hand, stove-tiles in Lithuania underwent a process of localization the same way that many European craft traditions did, the spread of faience across Europe being an excellent example. However, the tile-stove, as well as the technology used to create stove-tiles, are certainly non-native. Even the materials (specifically glaze materials), imagery (often borrowed from widely distributed woodblock prints), and molds used to create them are likely to have been importations. Certainly in earlier periods, and likely for some time thereafter, even the craftsmen making these tiles were likely foreign. Consequently, in the case of leaven-firing, stove-tiles, and other examples, the Guild has done what it frequently does, which is to conflate local traditions and their historical tributaries with the contemporary national identity of a formerly multinational state. This is likely done to formulate easily consumed expressions of national heritage that are removed from questions of ethnicity, cultural boundaries, and historical accuracy. Such formulations are either one way of conceptualizing heritage or, like the Palace, are part of a long tradition of memory politics that seeks to weld together nativism and cosmopolitanism by
recasting traditional Lithuanian culture (Davoliūtė 2014:26). This argument, of course, concerns not only what the Guild does but what it is.

The original Vilnius Potter’s Guild was established in the 16th century, if not earlier, and defunct by the 19th century. Within this temporal frame not a great deal is known about the original Guild. What is known, from a limited number of surviving documents and artifacts, is that the group produced a great deal of decorative ceramics for urbanites and nobility including, of course, stove-tiles. Stove-tiles were the high mark of aesthetics and technology in Lithuania’s pre-19th century ceramic art. As such, and although there seems to have been some trickle-down, stove-tiles were, like the Palace itself, also elitist in nature. Stove-tiles are easily differentiated from folk production by the physical and social boundaries of class geography.

The contemporary Potter’s Guild is itself a historical reconstruction, but it is not just this. The Guild is also a recontextualization of tradition and history that, by reconstituting itself in a nationalist context, risks being revisionary. These revisions are, in essence, attempts to remarry the image, or the cultural symbol, and its “authentic” foundations. While such revisions of history may be politically motivated or have political implications, I do not, in my long relationship with the Guild, believe that the group has any such overt intentions. However, like the original Guild, the contemporary Guild works in the shadow of the Palace, and its involvement with its reconstruction is problematic. The Guild’s presence within the Palace and at the celebratory festivals that preceded its opening inserts,
perhaps artificially, a Lithuanian identity for the historic State’s craftsmen into a framework of revisionary, nationalist cultural politics.

In light of this discussion concerning historical revisions, it is interesting to reflect on Dainius Strazdas’ own words concerning the importance of rediscovering what I shall call “heritage technologies.” Strazdas states that rediscovering these technologies is important so…

…that people could repeat, and near that one word, the principle, to perfect that thing you can repeat. If you can’t repeat then what will you add? You will do different and won’t know how or what. When you repeat you at once bring near you civilization, you work in the historical context. (Interview by the author, 2015)

In all that the Guild does it invokes history, particularly the medieval and renaissance history upon which the activity and identity of the group (not unlike the identity of the nation) is largely based. As a general rule the group strives for historical accuracy, often strictly using materials, processes, and precise measurements in attempts to create authentic copies. Strazdas’ comments on perfection and addition, however, suggest that he is interested in more than just facsimile reproduction, as elaborated upon in the following statements:

Its more easy to understand some principles of culture if you have some idea about technology and surroundings of this time… old culture is not abstract, but very concrete… when you know technology you accept these old time masters like your friends, like your collaborators, like your neighbors, they are not some anonymical mass… I think, today we have too much anonymical space… when we buy some finished things we use only small degree of our possibilities… when you know properties you can succeed creatively… you can use more nuances in your manipulation…
you can play the black keys, not just the white. (Interview by the author, 2015)

The stove-tiles that the Potter’s Guild produced for the Grand Dukes’ Palace are, for all intents and purposes, “authentic copies.” In this case, in addition to rigorous calculations of dimensions for accurate reproduction (complicated by the shrinkage and warping of clay), the group took the extra step of commissioning spectral analyses of glaze samples bored from original Renaissance tiles. These analyses allowed for the creation of identical glaze formulas. However, in the reconstruction of stove-tiles with original glaze formulas, the Guild made exceptions such as the avoidance of lead, the modern and more refined processing of the raw materials, and the use of electric kilns. The results of this endeavor were contemporary stove-tiles that resembled their original analogs in all but the latter’s relatively pristine condition, finesse, and consistency. Whether this represents the kind of perfection and addition mentioned above by Strazdas is unclear but speaks to larger, relevant issues.

The Guild’s “authentic” stove-tiles are now incorporated into the replica tile-stove in the Palace’s “Renaissance Clerk’s Room.” Gintautas Rackevičius oversaw the project, designing the tile-stove himself using European analogs and local archaeological finds. With this information Rackevičius designed the stove as it “could have been,” meaning according to preexisting design concepts and principles rather than factual, documentary evidence of what an actual tile-stove in the Palace looked like. Thus, while the formulas for composing both the stove-tiles and tile-stove had historical foundations, they were, in reality, an entirely
new (and generically European) product. Rackevičius reflects on this production in the following way:

We know all elements of the old glazes but in modern times you can choose what would you like to breathe: plumbum [lead], poisonous materials, or you would like to use modern glazes? You know at first sight it’s very hard to recognize is it used old materials made in old technologies or it is new? The main importance is the conception of reconstruction of Royal Palace because a lot of architecture elements from sandstone are made mechanically so they are with straight lines without any curved lines. And in such quite modern interior, or quasi-historical interior, you would like to reconstruct furnace of 16th century and is it necessary to imitate that its 16th century? No, I do not like that way of thinking and such way of working. You are making new Renaissance (Neo-Renaissance) but you are not making Renaissance, it is impossible to repeat the original. (Interview by the author, 2015)

Rackevičius’ comments on the recreated stove-tiles and tile-stove shed light on the enigmatic question he posed at the beginning of his interview: “What was mankind’s worst invention?” to which he rhetorically replied, “The clock” (Interview by the author, 2015). Whether the tile-stove or the Palace at large is an accurate or “authentic” reconstruction is not entirely to the point of the matter, for authenticity is, in part, a temporal phenomenon. As cited by Walter Benjamin and Nestor Garcia Canclini, objects often acquire the designation of authenticity, which is awarded in the present, simply because they are old and have accrued a history (Canclini 1995:139).

In the case of the Palace, archaeology has shown that it existed in several substantially different forms throughout history and even in several different
materials: wood, stone, and brick. Thus one can place the Palace in a “discourse concurrent with the idea of the nation, it arises also out of contexts in which the ‘nation’ becomes an active arbiter between the past and a ‘people’… (it) combines the prioritisation of ‘origins’ with the ‘pathos of incessant change’” (Smith 2006:28). Consequently, to (re)produce yet another iteration of the Palace is, in a broad view, to operate fully within a typical process of cultural formation that blends continuity with the necessity of change. Doing this negates the otherwise problematic fact that the present Palace is, conceptually, neither an accurate reproduction nor a fully contemporary iteration. The same argument can be made for the Guild’s stove-tiles and the Guild itself: because “there is no unchanging ‘essence’ or ‘character to particular cultures; indeed, that cultures are not individuated entities existing as natural objects with neat temporal and spatial boundaries” (Handler 1994:29), so there is no objective authenticity in these phenomena of cultural production.

The principle of reinvention seen guiding the reconstruction of the Palace, the design of Rackevičius’ tile-stoves, and the Guild’s production of stove-tiles is conceptually layered. First, in folklore theory, Barre Toelken’s twin laws of folklore position the opposing forces of dynamism and conservatism within a dialectic that moves traditions adaptively through time (1996:39). According to cultural memory theorists and contemporary neuroscience, the process of remembering, through which memories are fundamentally changed as they are re-inscribed within the contexts that they are recalled, is also structured in these dialectical terms. Quite literally, “[t]he brain reconstructs memories, so neither
individual nor collective memories correspond to the actual past” (Markowitsch 2010:281). It is for this reason that Hans Markowitsch, in his study of cultural memory and the neurosciences, states that it is “[p]referable to use the expression ‘collective remembering’ instead of collective memory. ‘Remembering’ indicates the process character: Old memories are recalled in the context of the present and are then re-encoded in the context and mood of the present” (2010:279). Scholars describe heritage in a similar fashion: not as a thing of the past but a “cultural process that engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present” (Smith 2006:44). The living traditions and living memories that are required for the construction of culture and national identity are equivalent in this frame, and this is particularly relevant as the Palace was explicitly constructed to embody and facilitate memory. I would argue as well that Dainus Strazdas, by invoking the history of the Guild, followed suit.

Cyclically returning to and departing from familiar historical points in a constant state of flux is part of the process of historical change and cultural evolution. However, “[t]hat identities and memories change over time tends to be obscured by the fact that we too often refer to both as if they had the status of material objects” (Gillis 1994:3). But even here contemporary cultural theorists have modified their perspective. UNESCO, for example, acknowledges the principles of continuity and change in regards to both intangible and tangible heritage. A statement on the UNESCO website reads:

…all artifacts are in a constant state of chemical transformation, so that what is considered to be preserved is actually changing – it is never as it
once was. Similarly changing is the value each generation may place on
the past and on the artifacts that link it to the past. (UNESCO Office in
Cairo)

The same sentiment concerning intangible cultural heritage was by offered by
Milda Valančiauskienė:

Preservation doesn’t mean a conservation… if we keep sutartinės
[polyphonic songs] only in an old way and also in this social context which
was one-hundred years ago, when women were singing these kinds of
songs only in rural areas, we lose it, we already did lose it, and now the
social contexts are different. We can still keep it but in some other social
context, so it’s not a question of conservation but of preservation,
especially if that’s your cultural heritage. We understand very well that it
changes, it’s a living tradition, it’s changing everyday, but how much it
should change is also a very open question. (Interview by the author, 2015)

Change is both natural and essential to the survival of culture. To
artificially restrict this process produces results like those witnessed in Santa Fe:
stagnation, or what Smith calls “fossilization” (2006:55), and disenfranchisement.
Taking this process to the opposite extreme produces results like those
witnessed in Dresden: a loss and rewriting of history that is ethically or politically
suspect. Median points may, indeed, better satisfy the arbiters of cultural politics,
but in the processes of historical recreation, recontextualization, and revision,
political implications are never far off. This remains true as this study moves from
the past to the present of Lithuanian folk pottery and traverses its four main
ePOCHS: the Folk Pottery Renaissance (1861-1918), the interwar era (1918-
1940), the Soviet era (1940-1990), and the present-day, post-Soviet era (1990-present). Each of these periods fits snugly into the architecture of memory, cultural politics, and nationalism. Within this architecture, issues raised in the preceding examination of the Palace and Guild, such as authenticity, revisionist history, the ownership and construction of heritage, and consumption, are prevalent. Indeed, as I will show, that these issues persist in Lithuanian folk pottery across distinct eras is one of the tradition's essential and binding features.
THE PAST IS OPEN TO THE FUTURE PART II:
THE FOLK POTTERY RENAISSANCE AND A NEW LOOK AT THE OLD

*Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.*

- TS Eliot
In my book, when dating the start of Lithuania’s Folk Pottery Renaissance to 1861 and placing the emergence of the tradition within the period of National Reawakening, I introduced Henry Glassie’s nationalistic definition of folk art. According to Glassie, the nationalistic definition of folk art is the “authentic conjunction of individual creativity and collective order. It is the result of a people shaping their destiny through the reformulation of their heritage, often in the face of a colonial threat” (1989:26). Here it is worthwhile, with the aid of the theoretical tools acquired through my study of folklore, to describe the problems and paradoxes of this definition. By undertaking this deconstruction of Glassie’s statement, I will reveal how its simplistic assumptions about heritage and cultural ownership helped to limit my own understanding of Lithuanian folk pottery. Additionally, this examination will show, as with the Palace and the Guild, how simplified assumptions about culture and history led to dissonance between the image of Lithuanian folk pottery that I created and its “authentic foundations.”

To begin, the setting of a precise date for the Folk Pottery Renaissance is impossible. Consequently, one should not confuse 1861, the start of the Folk
Pottery Renaissance (an expansion of production), with the beginning of folk pottery production. In fact, the earliest known examples of folk-style pottery are dated 1844 (Figure 9), 1845, and 1862. These items are pitchers with oxide and sgraffito decorations on a background of pristine white engobe in a heavy faience style. These pitchers don traditional Lithuanian dowry chest ornaments, the year of creation/celebration, and in one case the year and the day. These ornaments and the dates that accompany them suggest, with high probability, that these are wedding pitchers. In turn, the likelihood that they are wedding pitchers increases the odds that the pots in question were made on commission. Therefore, the pots are not necessarily indicative of a wider trend of production by a constituency of ethnically Lithuanian potters. However, such examples are capable of representing a dialog, or at least a limited exchange, between urban and rural or elite and folk cultures. Rural folk culture, historically segregated from urban elite culture by pronounced ethnic and socioeconomic divides, was more likely engaged in the production of subsistence pottery prior to 1861.

If not precise and rigidly accurate, the date that I have proposed here for the Folk Pottery Renaissance, 1861, is symbolic: it indicates a well-theorized temporal point for the transition to accelerated and expanded commercial production. I believe this transition is inseparable from a conflux of dramatic socioeconomic, political, and cultural events in Lithuanian history. The first event in this conflux is the abolition of serfdom in 1861, followed by a series of land reforms, peasant migrations, and then even more dramatic reforms under the auspices of independence. Lithuania achieved independence in 1918 and it lasted until 1940.

The socioeconomic evolution of Lithuania that began in 1861 effectively broke down the barriers between the ethnically Lithuanian majority of rural peasants and the phenomena of urban culture and industry. The result was a fundamentally altered and exponentially larger base of both native consumers and producers. This is important because, as briefly outlined in the introduction, it was in the urban and aristocratic centers of the then Grand Duchy of Lithuania that ceramics evolved aesthetically and technologically before being inherited or adapted by Lithuanian folk potters.

In urban and aristocratic centers, it was most likely foreign craftsmen that established the aesthetic and technological trends that affluent and, quite probably, non-Lithuanian consumers nurtured through sustained demand. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, what appears to have happened is a transmutation of these imported and then established aesthetic and technological conventions into a local and national vocabulary.
Though not without deviations, I would argue that the national vocabulary of Lithuanian folk pottery consisted of a loose, swift, and sparing folk style combining native ornaments with a standardized set of market-based forms and local aesthetic tendencies (Figure 8). (Ornamentation was also largely market-based in its appeal to local sensibilities and its role in forming taxonomic hierarchies for both products and competing producers). Though in many ways an amalgam of regionally and internationally distributed archetypical forms and ornaments, it is the particular combination, the particular “hybrid” of these forms and ornaments, further offset by aesthetic tendencies, that is specific, codified and culturally distinct. A great deal of elaboration on all of these points is included in my book (Stellaccio 2011:11-138).

The preceding theories, which I developed concerning the origin of Lithuanian folk pottery, define it as a largely socioeconomic, or one might even say commercial, phenomenon. However, I do not believe that the socioeconomic circumstances conducive to the Folk Pottery Renaissance are cause to limit it to this definition or divorce it from the frame of nationalistic politics. Indeed, the rise of the Lithuanian nation itself, which occurred simultaneously, is owed in great part to these two forces: nationalism and socioeconomics. These two forces are also closely intertwined in the production of material culture and, specifically, pottery in Lithuania during the late 19th and 20th centuries. It is at this chronological juncture of nationalism and socioeconomics that I inserted Glassie’s nationalistic definition of folk art. The first part of this definition that should be examined now is the term “heritage.”
Part of the reason for setting the symbolic start date of the Folk Pottery Renaissance to 1861 is that, aside from a few dated examples, there is no evidence of any substantial production of folk pottery in either rural or urban environments before this time. In linking this renaissance with socioeconomic circumstances we find crucial parallels between Lithuania and North Germany, from where, ironically, many of Lithuania’s medieval craftsmen likely came. Among Northern Germany’s rural peasantry, the popularity of utilitarian earthenware pottery eclipsed wooden vessels only in the 18th century. This transition came on the heels of an agricultural boom in which the expanding agricultural economy demanded an increase in vessels and dishes such as colanders and jars for separating milk. The situation was likely similar in Lithuania, its agricultural and economic boom delayed until the abolition of serfdom in 1861. Most probably, wooden vessels were more common before this time.

Emerging fairly quickly and firmly established and traditionalized in the span of a few decades, one can interrogate the Lithuanian folk pottery tradition as what Eric Hobsbawm describes as an invented tradition; the kind produced en-masse in Europe precisely within the period lasting from 1870 to 1914 (1983:263). (This period includes most of the period of renaissance for Lithuanian folk pottery and includes nearly all of the National Reawakening). Hobsbawm defines two types of invented tradition: those “actually invented,
constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period and establishing themselves with great rapidity” (1983:1). We might refer to these types as the:

[t]wo main forms of the creation of tradition in the nineteenth century, both of which reflect the profound and rapid social transformation of the period. Quite new, or old but dramatically transformed, social groups, environments, and social contexts called for [these] new devices to ensure or express social cohesion and identity and to structure social relations. (Hobsbawm 1983:263)

Indeed, the suggestion here is that all invented traditions have an inherent agenda: “to inculcate certain values and norms or behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm 1983:1). However, this is not necessarily a historically accurate past. Rather, “[t]hese ‘invented traditions’ are particularly significant for the legitimation of the emergent social and political order, and their success depends, to a large measure, on their ability to reconstruct an acceptable view of the past” (Zerubavel 1994:106, my emphasis).

In the essays assembled for The Invention of Tradition there are two common themes governing the phenomenon: economic gain and dis/empowerment (whether creating a positivist nationalist discourse or using tradition to manipulate a balance of power, often between colonizers and colonized). These themes are, no doubt, conceptually intertwined in many cases as they are in the case of Lithuanian folk pottery. Indeed, potters may have sought to capitalize upon as much as serve nationalist sentiments as part of a
concerted, politically-driven national effort “to elevate and extol that which was native and authentically Lithuanian” (Stukas 1966:57). Or, perhaps, in the absence of extolable traditions, people simply created them. Bearing this in mind, it is impossible to separate the socioeconomic orientation of the folk pottery tradition’s rapid emergence from its participation in the dialog of national emergence. In turn, I am reasonably confident in placing Lithuanian folk pottery within the category of invented traditions.\(^\text{10}\)

What is interesting about placing Lithuanian folk pottery in the milieu of invented traditions is that all the cases presented in *The Invention of Tradition* are conceptually and/or ethically suspect, either for their agendas, their alterations of history, or both. Certainly, the (re)invented traditions of the Palace and Potter’s Guild, by inserting Lithuanian identity into a revisionary statement about the past, fall in-line with the characterizations of invented traditions presented here. To some extent, Lithuanian folk pottery did this as well, in part by serving as newly created cultural infrastructure. This infrastructure operated upon explicit references to the past that implied, and arguably over-exaggerated, cultural continuity in a nationalist context.

If heritage is regarded as “authentic” or original and as having a historical precedent, then it may be seen as conflicting with the label of invented tradition, which infers a rapid emergence without a natural lineage, and this concerns 19th and early 20th century Lithuanian folk pottery directly. Furthermore, by amalgamating influences, the creation of the folk pottery tradition was revisionist in a manner similar to that of the reconstructed Palace and Potter’s Guild: it
created a nationalist orientation out of cosmopolitan confluence by assimilating international trends and endowing them, or even masking them, with local particularities. This acknowledgment begins to destabilize the meaning of the word heritage as it is used in Glassie’s definition and grants entry into an exploration of the phrase “their heritage.”
In UNESCO’s effort to formulate binding protocols for the protection of intangible world heritage, it ran into a particular conceptual problem: How to define heritage in accessible, universal terms that still manage to preserve the integrity of sovereign nations and the multi-cultural communities and minority groups that they house (Smith 2006:29-41). This problem underscores the duality of heritage itself as something both collective and highly personalized. On the one hand, “[t]he heritage of myriad culture hearths enriches not only those realms’ genetic descendants and political heirs; it enhances lives wherever those discoveries and creations are disseminated and emulated” (Lowenthal 1994:44). “Heritage thus reflects ever more widely shared values” and this is the logic of world heritage, “but it is at the same time invincibly unique. To forge identity and buttress self-esteem, each people vaunts or invents a distinctive legacy” (Lowenthal 1994: 46). Consequently, heritage commonly pits the collective narratives of larger bodies (the world, the nation, etc.) against the personal narratives of smaller ones (a culture, a group, a community, etc.). This is especially true in political/administrative formulations that attempt, often unsuccessfully, to balance these sometimes-competing claims to heritage. The difficulty in reconciling these narratives lies in the fact that collective narratives are “both powerful and unstable. By establishing or confirming a shared vision… a collective narrative shapes normative, hegemonic, or over-determined worldviews. Personal narratives can confirm, subvert, appropriate, or otherwise
disrupt or assert the power of collective narratives and vice versa” (Shuman 2005: 54).

Initially, non-Western countries and already-disenfranchised indigenous groups with different conceptions of heritage or fears that their heritage could be “justifiably” appropriated (or further appropriated) within a totalizing, dominant Western heritage discourse (Smith 2006:35-41) voiced the strongest objections to the language and policies that UNESCO first formulated. But a polarity between Western and non-Western should not obscure the polarity between collective and personal narratives that leaves any nation at the crossroads of heritage discourse in a predicament. The nation, on one hand, requires a strategy for self-definition. On the other hand, as Richard Handler argues, “in nationalist ideology internal diversity is always encompassed by national homogeneity” (Handler 1994:29). Now, “just as the nation-states of the nineteenth century built national cultures out of their folklore, so both new states and subaltern groups within them must make cultural capital out of their own” (Noyes 2006:29). This leaves the nation problematically positioned between the particularistic and cosmopolitan (Gillis 1994:5), with the stability of its discourses destabilized from both sides.

It is worthwhile to insert here some mention of the discipline of folklore’s own historical struggle with such narratives. Roger Abrahams, for example, insists “folk culture stands in contrast at every level with the construction of official culture, even in those situations in which reigning political ideologies are said to derive from das volk” (1993:6). Folklore did emerge in the context of
Romantic national ideologies. In the context of our present understanding of
cultural politics, however, Abrahams insists “nationalism and pluralism come into
conflict, often with disastrous results, in places where there are indigenous
populations who are not in the ascendancy” (1993:8). This is an endemic issue in
the Post-modern study of folklore that takes various forms, although its
advocates are consistently concerned with finding a “corrective to the alternative
concept of universal fixed categories” (Shuman 1993:72).

What I wish to suggest here is that revisionary historical interventions in
heritage discourse tend towards totalizing narratives and universal fixed
categories. I would argue that this is true, even common, in small, perceptibly
weak, and marginalized countries like Lithuania. After all, such interventions are
often responses to perceived threats that loom large for small nations that have a
history of sustained cultural threats. As one example, interpretations of
Lithuanian folk pottery reveal some dimensions of such narratives and
categories.

As already stated, the aesthetic and technological foundations of
Lithuanian folk pottery laid in the Middle Ages are most likely to have been
preformed outside of Lithuania and imported at some point in time. Indeed, in the
development of craft in particular, Germans, Poles, and Jews made significant
contributions. As evidence of this, in a selective visual comparison, examples of
North German and Lithuanian folk pottery from the 18th to 20th centuries are
virtually indistinguishable. Such similarities are very much in keeping with
historical trends. As German historian Viet Valentin writes of the late Middle Ages:

...German colonization of the east was less and less a deliberate conquest, more and more an economic expansion. The Germans took the stage as the technicians, craftsmen, teachers, and organizers of the east. The Letts and the Lithuanians, Hungarians, all the south and east Slavic tribes came to value them as pioneers and leaders in all these fields.

(1951:122)

Moving forward in time, in the 17th and 18th centuries it was mostly the nobility who sponsored and managed the production of *faience*, and many of them, if not the majority of them, identified as ethnically or culturally Polish. Furthermore, many of the aristocrats who founded manufactories are known to have hired German masters.

In the 19th century, Jews predominantly populated many Lithuanian cities as 50 percent or more of urban citizenry. As Lithuanian historian Zigmantas Kiaupa writes, “[a]t the end of the [19th] century, with the increase in Lithuanian traders, artisans and industrialists, people began to see Jews as competitors and applied this attitude both to individuals and the whole Jewish community” (2002:93). With this emergence, a result of Lithuanian peasants migrating to urban centers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there was no doubt a crucial exchange of knowledge. At the age of thirty, for example, Simonas Paulikas took a wife of just sixteen years, who, reportedly, could not stand the lingering smell of the leather shop in which he worked. To appease her, Paulikas took employment in a Jewish-owned pottery workshop where he learned the
trade of pottery making. Paulikas then taught the pottery trade to his son-in-law, Leonas Voveris. Leonas in turn taught his son, Romualdas Voveris. Romualdas, along with his brothers, represented the end of one of the last and highly touted Lithuanian folk potter dynasties, this one based in the well-known pottery town of Viekšniai (Interview by the author, 2007). As Lithuanians began to supplant foreigners in trade, crafts, and urban industry, Jewish (and German) artisans would progressively close their establishments between the World Wars. In 1923 about seven Jewish shops existed for every Lithuanian shop and by 1936 the proportions were relatively equal, the result of a nationalist economic movement colored with racism and xenophobia (Davoliūtė 2014:23).

There are, of course, numerous tributaries in the development of Lithuanian folk pottery, some likely too obscure and too far removed to be known, let alone credited. The Jewish question is, however, especially poignant due to the particularly large presence of this population in trade and craft in Lithuania prior to WWII, the lingering controversy over local complicity in Lithuania’s Jewish holocaust, and the still-prevalent anti-Semitism to which I can attest. To be clear, it is not the case that Lithuanian folk pottery need cite its sources or be singled out above any other nation or national tradition for amalgamating influences. However, the erasure of the Jewish presence from revisionist Lithuanian heritage narratives, in this case and likely in others, risks being politically and historically unsound. The danger here is twofold: First, a danger arises in “the potential that in the name of ‘folksy’ nostalgia racist and chauvinist agendas [would emerge]” (Bendix 1997:192) and be left unresolved and unaddressed. Second, in
contemporary discourse, a danger arises in the potential violation of a community’s legal claims to cultural property (Noyes 2006: 31).

The lingering controversy and proportion of Lithuanian dissatisfaction with the conceptual inconsistencies in the narrative of the Grand Dukes’ Palace, as one example, is only nominally indicative of the instability that can emerge along with conceptual and political problems in the process of revising and creating heritage narratives. This is to say nothing of how these revisions affect Lithuania’s minorities. For example, one wonders about the feeling of Poles who might take offense at the historical fact of Polish rule over Lithuania being subsumed in the Palace as a national symbol for a country where they are now legally barred from the Polish spelling of their own surnames, among other things. Lithuanian folk pottery is also a national symbol, and it too is riddled with competing claims silenced by collective amnesia, historical revisions, and a dominant heritage narrative.

Part of the motivation for writing my book was a somewhat backwards interest in deconstructing such totalizing narratives, though at the time I lacked this vocabulary. While the local tendency seemed to be one of amnesic omission or indiscriminant inclusion, I believed that identifying and stripping away the tradition’s accumulated layers and outside influences would reveal Lithuanian folk pottery in its most authentic form. This began when I chose, as one of the departure points for my scholarship, one of the only and most widely published textual resources for Lithuanian folk pottery: a catalog compiled by museologist...
Paulius Galaunė. This catalog was published in 1953 (the year Josef Stalin died) as part of a series of Lithuanian folk art reference books.

Although it is an invaluable resource, Galaunė’s catalog seemed either indiscriminant or erroneous in its selection of objects. Even while stretching my own definition of Lithuanian folk pottery to encompass individual variation, commissions, one-offs, and regional tendency within the frame of a reasonably coherent national tradition, there were stylistic deviations in the catalog that were difficult if not impossible to reconcile. The nature of these deviations became clearer as my research progressed and I categorized them in two different ways.

In the first category are temporal deviations: these are objects, the stylistic anomalies of which are emblematic of the aesthetic changes that occurred late in the development of Lithuanian folk pottery between 1861 and 1953, the date of the catalog’s publication. In the second category are geo-cultural deviations: these are objects, the stylistic anomalies of which can be associated with analogs and observable tendencies present in either those neighboring countries with whom Lithuania maintained economic and cultural commerce or the minority groups that existed within Lithuania. It is this group of geo-cultural deviations that are most concerning for their glaring incongruities.

To offer just a couple of examples, first are bowl-in-bowl oil lamp forms (Figure 10), five of which are included in the aforementioned catalog. These examples are all dated to 1860 and all come from the western, coastal region of Lithuania known as Lithuania Minor. Lithuania Minor was long inhabited by Germans and Germanic Prussians. (Indeed, while Hitler’s claim to this region in
WWII was psychotic, it was not by any means historically inaccurate).

Furthermore, these examples are found in a collection of ceramics that is predominantly salt-glazed (a distinct feature common in Germany but otherwise absent in Lithuania). Furthermore, while there are no other occurrences of this form in Lithuania, they are common in Germany and throughout Scandinavia. Other explicitly German forms are found in the catalog and in collections, as are numerous pots more (or entirely) Latvian in style. (Although other cultures’ pottery, most likely Polish and Belarussian, may also be present, no scholar has identified them).


One of the problems with faulty scholarship is that its assertions are often repeated. This is particularly dangerous when works of scholarship are seminal, and the Galaunė catalog, the first and still most widely distributed publication on Lithuanian folk pottery, was certainly this. Consequently, the catalog no doubt exerted great influence in shaping a particular and predominating conception of heritage even among some of the ceramic community’s most discriminating
potters and scholars. At the studio of the Vilnius Potter’s Guild, for example, conspicuously placed on a centrally located shelf, are three “authentic copies” of Lithuanian folk pots (Figure 11). One of these pots demonstrates a strong affinity with the more ornate Latvian style, if the original pot is not of Latvian origin.

This is not, however, the first time the Guild, typically quite rigorous in their scholarship, reproduced selections from the Galaunė catalog that are atypical of the Lithuanian tradition in a more purist view. Rather, this mode seems characteristic of the Guild. Common on their shelves, for example, are medieval pottery replicas from the Grand Dukes’ Palace that are stylistically discordant when compared to the folk tradition. German archaeologist Dr. Hans-Georg Stephan described some of the wares reproduced by the Guild as likely a Polish-Baltic variant (personal communication).

I discussed the problem of geo-cultural deviations with Valentinas Jazerskas during our interview. Jazerskas, who is the president of the Kaunas National Artist’s Union, begins his response by commenting that “[Galaunė] was a museologist but not an ethnologist who could choose carefully what was
specific and not specific, and he did not deepen ethnographic regional differences with careful documentation” (Interview by the author, 2015). But Jazerskas then dedicates the remaining majority of his response to a discussion of how Lithuanian potters absorbed and transmuted influences. In particular he cites the borrowing of the *faience* aesthetic from aristocratic manors:

In dowry chest painting the villager looked at manor culture and took a piece of that and put it into his work, the same with pottery... he saw a white porcelain pitcher [at a lady’s manor] and so he dips the whole [pot] in Glinka [white clay] so that it would be white, he lived differently from manor or city but he lived adjacent. (Interview by the author, 2015)

And at yet another point in the interview, when asked about the tradition's late emergence, Jazerskas elaborates:

[The pottery tradition] didn’t go anywhere, like I said, from Neolithic time, and Prussian, now Kaliningrad region, there were pottery throwers who first made pots used like urns, but because clay doesn’t live long, that tradition wasn’t interrupted we just don’t have examples... if the pyramids lasted 2000 years a Lithuanian wood palace lasts 100 years... the pottery tradition was not interrupted, that’s fact... it was alive, we have that heritage what we have... we can retrace what we can retrace. (Interview by the author, 2015)

In Jazerskas’ replies, there are incongruities to and digressions from the narrative that is supported by the physical evidence and accepted historical discourse. First, in his response to the idea of a foreign presence in the Lithuanian folk pottery tradition, Jazerskas subsumes the appropriations and inaccuracies found in the popular discourse on Lithuanian folk pottery by framing
it in a generic process of cultural evolution. This generalizing, in turn, creates an inclusive picture of heritage. This inclusive image appropriates foreign objects that cannot be shown to have had any impact on the local tradition. For example, neither the bowl-in-bowl forms nor any element of their design were ever incorporated into the Lithuanian tradition: they are and have always been anomalies. Furthermore, Jazerskas’ answer oversimplifies the historical asymmetry of and exchange between folk and elite culture. His response to the notion of Lithuanian folk pottery emerging only in the 19th century is similar; it creates a generic and comfortable image of continuity and stability for the evolution of Lithuanian folk pottery that endows it with an almost seamless longevity. Such answers are not uncommon, however, as the Guild often responds similarly to such questions.

There is yet another dimension of this discussion that is articulated in examples from the Galaunė catalog, these being those works made by the late 19th and early 20th century potter Napoleonas Taseckis (Figures 12-15). (Taseckis is probably a Lithuanianized form of the Polish surname “Tyszkiewicz”). Likely of Polish origin, works by Taseckis in the Galaunė catalog are anomalous for their high-faience style, unusual ornamental vocabulary, stylistic deviation from the national tradition, and even for bearing the artist’s signature. In researching for my book I discovered a series of undocumented works by Taseckis that were, in no discernible way, folk, these being pitchers and flowerpots in a purely elite faience style. Without evidence of a larger production, what these factors strongly suggest is that Taseckis was a city-based, perhaps
Polish, high-end pottery producer who selectively hybridized or appropriated the Lithuanian folk style.


What is interesting about Taseckis’ works is their appearance and use in the construction of Lithuanian identity. To understand this, however, one must first understand the role folk art played generally in the formulation of a modern Lithuanian identity. As Jolita Mulevičiūte writes of the early to mid-20th century
folk art phenomenon in her book *Modernizmo Link* (Towards Modernism): “[f]olk art amassed and reconciled seemingly incompatible artistic aims - a need for national traditions and a wish for artistic renewal, the maintaining of communal ideals and a desire for individual self-expression” (2001:185). Violeta Davoliūtė, writing about the same period, echoes this sentiment in her own book, *Memory and Modernity in the Wake of War*, stating that:

For the cultural mainstream and in public works, the tension between nativism and cosmopolitanism was generally resolved in the attempt to recast traditional Lithuanian culture in a way that would reinforce Lithuania’s image as a modern nation with… a distinct pedigree. Folk culture became the ‘business card’ of the nation in terms of its representation abroad…. The exhibition of folk art at various international exhibitions was another important aspect of Lithuanian cultural self-representation. Neo-traditionalist styles dominated among painters, and the new buildings typically had modernist exterior facades while interiors were given over to representations of traditional culture. (2014:26)

It is known from photographic documentation that in the interwar period of which Davoliūtė speaks, many considered Taseckis’ pots, which could certainly be described as neo-traditional (and thus remarkably avant-garde for their time), exemplary of the Lithuanian folk tradition. People of this opinion included Taseckis’ pots in heritage displays made for public consumption. Yet, in this context it is also discernible that Taseckis' works earned distinction because of their own hybridity and exceptional quality, not because they captured some essential and indisputable “folk-ness.” Arguably, a simple, unglazed cooking pot might have better conveyed this essence. However, Taseckis’ work, like the
ostentatiously ornamented (and probably) Latvian pot recreated and displayed at the Potter’s Guild, is in its own right exceptional: folk but not folk, traditional but modern, local but more than local. In being so, the inclusion of such works in emblematic representations of the folk pottery tradition, or of Lithuanian folk culture more broadly, endow it with an easily understood measurement of aesthetic and technological achievement. In addition to being ripe for appropriation and promotion, this measurement of achievement reinforces the appeal and perceived superiority of aristocratic and cosmopolitan taste as high marks in production. Despite these paradoxes, which contemporary folk potters in Lithuania acknowledge, the legend of Taseckis the “folk potter” persists to this day. Taseckis’ pots appeared as recently as 1989 in a survey Folk Art in the Soviet Union, where they are selectively presented as exemplary works of Lithuanian folk art.

While Lithuania’s Soviet period will be discussed in more depth in the next section of this study, the inclusion of Lithuania (actually the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic at that time) in a survey of folk art of the Soviet Union underscores the problems with embedding any group or nation’s heritage in universalizing collective narratives that can be appropriated or even owned and commodified. Admittedly, Lithuania’s incorporation into the Soviet Union is a historical fact but it was not voluntary. Consequently, there is a great deal of both explicit and nuanced contention with any image of Lithuania’s integration into the USSR as willful. The lending of Lithuania’s cultural achievements to Soviet propaganda that implicitly or explicitly claims it as its own collectively shared
property are problematic for the same reasons. The problem here is a matter of appropriation, ownership, and entitlement, the claims to which are “a significant source of the instability of collective, larger than life narrative” (Shuman 2005:55).

The USSR’s appropriation of national cultures and Lithuania’s commensurate resistance to assimilation excellently illustrates Francois Laplantine’s assertion that “disillusionment with the promises of abstract universalism have led to particularist tensions” (quoted in Garcia 1995:xxxi). Interestingly, Garcia himself asserts that “[w]e can choose to live in a state of war or in a state of hybridization” (1995:xxxi). Obviously, in the example of Soviet occupation and cultural appropriation, the passive acceptance of hybridity seems an unreasonable imposition upon national will and well-being. Yet, national heritage discourse is itself often a totalizing narrative “based,” as Rudy Koshar suggests, “on the decentering and suppression of other, ‘non national’ identities, whether those of region, class, neighborhood, or gender” (1994:229). Thus, the particularist discourse of Lithuanian folk pottery, embedded within the nationalist one, in turn forcibly embedded within an even larger heterogeneous union is, to paraphrase Winston Churchill, something of a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. If “heritage distills the past into icons of identity” (Lowenthal 1994:42) then the same is true for the invocation of Taseckis’ pottery as the “representative authentic” in the foundational discourse of hybridized modern Lithuanian identity. For Taseckis’ work is already a highly self-conscious and exaggerated form of hybridity that lends ever-greater instability to the construction of a collective national narrative.
REFORMULATION OF THEIR HERITAGE

What is revealed in the preceding discussion are the political problems and conceptual conundrums with assumptions about whose heritage we are speaking about when referring to “their heritage” in the context of nationalistic discourse. These problems are a heavy assault upon the nationalistic definition of folk art offered by Glassie, which I in turn employed in my earlier research. The phrase “reformulating their heritage” affirms these problems. Reformulation, after all, is not a natural process but is by definition a strategic manipulation that implies explicit goals and agendas that may have political, cultural, or even moral repercussions. In his definition, it would appear that Glassie assumes the objectives of reformulation within the nationalist discourse to be positive. But the narrative surrounding Lithuanian folk pottery, as much as it is part of the nationalist discourse, is problematic for its assimilations and omissions at the expense of minority populations whether past or present.

Indeed, the creation of the narrative for Lithuanian folk pottery, the Potter’s Guild, and the Grand Dukes’ Palace is, like the creation of cultural memory, a process of remembering and forgetting that is “selective, subjective, and inscriptive” (Cressy 1994:71). “When an identity is defined through [such] a process of abstraction of traits (language, traditions, certain stereotyped behaviors), there is often a tendency to remove those practices from the history of mixing in which they were formed” (Garcia 1995:xxvii). Glassie’s definition is
thus generic to a point where it is oppressively ahistorical in its assumption of a homogenous “their” and offensively cavalier in legitimizing “their” claim to the ownership of heritage. Glassie’s definition lacks the multivocality needed to stabilize the national narrative and I, in turn, am guilty of inadequately deconstructing it in my book.
POTTERY, NATIONALISM, AND FOLKLORE

In continuing to re-explore the developmental principles of the “national” pottery tradition in Lithuania as outlined in my book and to place this examination within the context of my study of folklore, there is one additional topic to be discussed: the historical foundations of folklore. Moreover, how these foundations are bound together with authenticity, nationalism, and highly relevant to Lithuania in particular is essential to this study.

As any student of folklore will learn, one of the most important names in the history of the discipline is Johann Gottfried von Herder. As stated by Regina Bendix in her interrogative book on authenticity:

[Herder’s] efforts to collect and publish the folksongs of peoples, the cultural relativism he sought to formulate, and the exuberant and emotional vocabulary he chose to advance this cause inspired literary and scholarly Romanticism. On the eve of an industrializing modernity, Herder’s work solidified the modern invention of the ‘folk’ category. (1997:35)

For Herder the folk were rural peasants, whose culture represented the “soul of the people.” The search for this authentic soul “proved extremely powerful, and an entire social and literary movement absorbed and imitated the seemingly authentic aesthetic of the folk” (Bendix 1997:35). The rural/urban dichotomy at work here can hardly be overstated, as Bendix relays:

The call for authenticity implied a critical stance against urban manners, artifice in language, behavior, and art, and against aristocratic excesses; it
promised the restoration of a pure, unaffected state of being. Following the logic of their own philosophy, Rousseau, Herder, and their contemporaries assigned such purity and authenticity to the rural and pastoral way of life. (1996:16)

Lithuania was well known to Herder and the other German Romantics, particularly Goethe. Both of these scholars took an interest in the language, poetry, and culture of the Lithuanians. That Herder was born in Mohrungen (now Morag), located in present-day Poland but formerly a part of the once-Baltic territory of Prussia, is indicative of the close proximity and, most probably, the high degree of familiarity he would have had with the culture of the rural Lithuanian peasant. Furthermore, it is said that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe famously proclaimed that “to hear how our ancestors spoke, listen to the Lithuanians” (Lane 2002:xxii). This statement suggests that scholars of the day perceived the then-isolated Lithuanian peasant to be unique and reveals how close the rural population of Lithuania was to the emerging concepts of das volk: the foundational premise for the invention of the ethno-lingual nation and the emergence of nationalism. Indeed, the German Romantics and their contributions to cultural and political theory are deeply interwoven in the history of the Lithuanian nation, which the Lithuanian intelligentsia built squarely upon the foundation of the rural Lithuanian peasant.

Admittedly, when I began my research in Lithuania, I was taken in by the supposed urban/rural dichotomy upon which both Lithuanian nationalism and folklore itself were founded. First, the persistence of this dichotomy throughout the history of Lithuania and Lithuanian ceramics seems to demand a theory that
accounted for Lithuania’s pronounced socioeconomic, political, cultural and ethnic divisions. Second, my aspiring and sympathetic appeal to the pre-existing popular narratives of the Lithuanian people was also at play. In due course I was given to the same romantic inclinations as folklore’s founding fathers. Predisposing me to such inclinations was a view of modernity and tradition as opposing forces (Becker 1998:19), a symptom of the crippling nostalgia articulated by Dean MacCannell in *The Tourist*:

> The progress of modernity (‘modernization’) depends on its very sense of instability and inauthenticity. For moderns, reality and authenticity are thought to be elsewhere: in other historical periods and other cultures, in purer, simpler life-styles. (1976:3)

In my own research I did acknowledge the exchange between rural, urban, and aristocratic culture, but my characterization may have been imbalanced. For example, it is probable that urban production was more the rule than the exception. If this was the case then perhaps the transition from subsistence to production pottery (if it was a transition and not a more abrupt rupture) was synonymous with the relocation of the tradition to urban centers rather than with rural producers adopting urban and aristocratic tendencies. In turn, this may have limited the role of rural culture to that of a market. This would certainly be in line with the phenomenon of Lithuanian “pottery towns,” the prolifically stocked urban markets of the early to mid-20th century, the urban origins of the Voveris dynasty, and other aspects of the pottery tradition’s history. In such a situation, the degree to which there was a real exchange between urban and rural centers in the creation of the folk pottery tradition could only be

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determined by the degree to which rural consumers set demands for functional and aesthetic norms.

If urban-based potters were consciously appealing to rural consumers, one could better articulate Lithuanian folk pottery as part of a “culture industry.” According to [Theodor] Adorno, the phrase ‘culture industry’ allows us to distinguish ‘a culture that arises spontaneously from the masses’ from cultural products that are, in some sense, ‘tailored for consumption by masses.’ He warns that the term ‘industry’ ‘is not to be taken too literally,’ that he uses it to emphasize the ‘standardization of the thing itself... [and] the rationalization of distribution techniques....’ Hence the phrase ‘culture industry’ points to, and emphasizes, the ways that cultural products are tailored to meet the consumptive desires of a broad public, and suggest that such a process might be fruitfully thought of as an industry because the product is standardized in its widest material and symbolic sense. (Wood 2008:108)

This definition, in turn, would reinforce the characterization of Lithuanian folk pottery as an invented tradition within the frame of nationalist politics. These questions are, however, theoretical and unanswerable. I pose them in order to posit that in considering the relationship between the rural “folk” and urban elite culture in the construction of the Lithuanian folk pottery tradition and its surrounding narrative, one can divorce it from the Romantic and nostalgic language of 19th century folklore. As I have pointed out, I was unlikely to have made this division in my original study.

Separated from this language, the Lithuanian folk pottery tradition can be better understood as something not only invented, but as something
quintessentially modern and hybridized. This is another way that the Lithuanian folk pottery tradition is similar to the contemporary iterations of the Grand Dukes’ Palace and the Vilnius Potter’s Guild. All three of these phenomenon were constructed in a similar fashion for a similar purpose: filtering through history using a process of inclusion and omission in order to create icons of national heritage, to claim space, and to claim history. Admittedly, I served to legitimate these nationalist claims when I decided to “nostalgize the homogenous’ and decried ‘bastard traditions,’ thus continually upholding the fallacy that cultural purity rather than hybridity are the norm” (Bendix 1996:9).

Reframing Lithuanian folk pottery production in the way proposed in this chapter, that is as a hybrid, polyvocal invention, may not be just more historically accurate and more politically correct. Rather, this reframing may better place the Folk Pottery Renaissance within the continuum of late 19th and 20th century Lithuanian history that it is, especially in its sudden proliferation, a part of. First, this reframing aligns Lithuanian folk pottery better with the general principles of modern/folk hybridity in the nationalist art and literature of Lithuania during the early and mid-20th century. (This includes the emergence of professional, applied-art ceramics, which drew heavily upon the folk tradition). In this vein, this reframing secondly creates a smoother transition between the Folk Pottery Renaissance and its manifestations in the commercial period of the interwar era, the Soviet-era, and as contemporary folk pottery in the post-Soviet era. This is significant because in my previous work the commercial, interwar period served as the outermost border of the “authentic” folk pottery tradition while the Soviet
and post-Soviet eras were all but ignored. The purpose of the next two chapters is to address these omissions and, by demonstrating that the creation of folk pottery has operated on similar principles in different historical epochs, to bind them together in a fluid history instead of separating them according to arbitrary or incomplete assumptions. Additionally, the following chapters will demonstrate that memory politics, authenticity, and the ownership and construction of heritage all continue to persist in Lithuanian folk pottery and, more broadly, to inhabit the landscape of Lithuanian culture.
THE PAST IS OPEN TO THE FUTURE PART III:
WEAVING TOGETHER POTTERY AND TEXTILES IN THE INTERWAR AND
SOVIET ERAS

*Without elimination, both a new world
And the old made explicit, understood
In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
The resolution of its partial horror.*
Yet the enchainment of past and future,
-TS Eliot
THE INTERWAR ERA

As stated in this study’s introduction, the term “authenticity” is highly problematic within the field of folklore and other scholarly disciplines. The meaning of this term is objectively uncertain and distorts and misleads both popular and scholarly perception by implying evaluative judgments based on false dichotomies: authentic/inauthentic, original/fake, good/bad, etc. Regina Bendix, the foremost scholar on this subject insists “the quest for authenticity is a peculiar longing, at once modern and antimodern. It is oriented toward the recovery of an essence whose loss has been realized only through modernity, and whose recovery is feasible only through methods and sentiments created in modernity” (1997:8); it is “fundamentally an emotional and moral quest” (1997:8). For Bendix, authenticity is a construct both subjective and fleeting. When asked what he considered authentic, traditional Lithuanian textile specialist Vytautas Tumėnas gave the following answer:

It’s a time period. Of course the biggest question is this intermediate period between the end of authentic and the developing of harmonized sashes. When tradition is going to die you must think how to make it like a souvenir or how to make it like part of decorative craft for the interiors of modern society. If you have folk songs and you take this to the opera house for a choir you must change it, we call it harmonization. Harmonization starts in the first half of the 20th century. (Interview by the author, 2015)
In Lithuania, harmonization is generally understood as the adaptation of traditional aesthetics, as found in folk art forms such as pottery, folk songs, woodwork, etc., through various modes of refinement, stylization, modernization, simplification, for wide, popular, and modern audiences. The term is used generally but more often in specific reference to two periods, the interwar and Soviet period. Harmonized works briefly displaced some of the earlier forms they adapted and were regarded as “authentic” or original at certain points in time, but contemporary scholars generally recognize harmonized works as derivative. Harmonization is an important element to understand in the evolution of folk pottery and textiles.

As with textiles, the first half of the 20th century was a period of distinct changes for Lithuanian folk pottery. In regard to form, it appears that by this time the number and variety of what I call “non-essential” forms was increasing. Non-essential forms are additions, often decorative novelties, and luxuries: sugar bowls, salt dishes, candy dishes, chargers (shallow bowl forms), aristocratic tureens (lidded bowl forms), small pitchers, bedpans, flowerpots, flower vases, and the like. As previously stated, the Lithuanian folk pottery tradition originates in the making of subsistence pottery, and this evolved into the production of essential forms: milk pots, storage jars, cookware, pitchers, bowls, etc. The addition of non-essential forms is thus indicative of what I term “an expansion of the table” and “filling of the interior” that are consistent with a transition from a stagnant feudal subsistence economy to a quickly evolving, capitalist surplus economy. Leading up to WWII, there is also a stylistic change in folk pottery
forms that is characterized by greater experimentation, elaboration, and the appearance of modernist tendencies. In addition to forms, the ornamentation of folk pottery also changed in this period.

As pointed out in Chapter 2, I characterize the typical folk style of ornamentation as loose, swift, and sparing. Decorators of folk pottery in the early 19th and 20th centuries also borrowed heavily from Lithuanian Easter eggs (Figures 16-17), the form of folk art most similar to pottery in form and in the process of ornamentation. This style, I would suggest, was the result of not only the relatively modest and organic tendencies that typify Lithuanian folk art, but also of cost and cadence. In terms of cost, relevant factors include the expense of certain equipment and materials, the unavailability of others, and the taxonomic value of particular forms within the marketplace. By taxonomic values I mean that certain forms like the pitcher, which maintained a central position in social ritual and domestic interiors, received a great deal of attention from decorators and were generally more expensive. Alternatively, other forms, like the utilitarian cookware confined to everyday use in the kitchen, was almost never decorated.

What determines cadence, which relates to cost, is the constraint of time available for pottery production. Time constraints resulted in a tempo that only occasionally slowed down for the sake of self-conscious artistic indulgence, precision, geometry, low-relief ornamentation, and other features uncommon to Lithuanian folk pottery. The demands of production even denied the potter to decorate his own wares, and his wife, his children, or, if a large enough
workshop, his assistants, often did this work. Combined with the nature of the tools and materials employed, these factors produced an aesthetic result that I would argue is one of Lithuanian folk pottery’s quintessential defining features. In geo-cultural terms, the codified Lithuanian aesthetic of this period as described here is identifiable virtually without error even where Lithuania’s pottery tradition overlaps with those of other nations.

16. Traditional Lithuanian Easter eggs. Early to mid-20th century. Photo by the author
17. Traditional pots. Early to mid-20th century. Photo by the author

In the early to mid-20th century, however, identifiable aesthetic tendencies began to change. There are, for example, new colors introduced to the potter’s palette, new motifs, and new compositional tendencies. Most conspicuous, however, is an increase in the borrowing of pottery ornamentation from other media. Specifically, this growing, inter-media interchangeability, a form of intertextuality for material culture and a process of bricolage, refers to the appearance on folk pottery of ornamental motifs usually consigned to wood (Figure 18) and textiles. The rigid complexities of these materials were so incongruous with the organic forms, technological vocabulary, and speed of
Lithuanian folk pottery that hitherto they were rarely or never incorporated into the folk potter’s lexis.


Furthermore, even when ornaments appear unchanged in form there are observable aesthetic changes as the style of ornamentation in general becomes gradually more rigid, compact, and decorative in the second and third quarters of the 20th century. There is also a shift in the taxonomic value of certain forms, with heavier investment in non-essential forms (perhaps commissioned) such as flowerpots and elaborate flower vases (Figure 19).

What I believe these changes in Lithuanian folk pottery represent is the beginning of a tectonic shift. This was a sea change, not in the production of folk pottery, which had probably already been re-centered in urban settings, but in its marketing for an increasingly urban, cosmopolitan, modern, and affluent populace that had greater access to commercial and imported goods. To this end, folk pottery would have to transition from a functional craft tradition to a viable commercial product. This shift would amount to a dramatic recontextualization of the folk pottery tradition and demand a reformulation of the tradition’s conventional structure. In this transition, decorative tendencies could logically supersede the demands of traditional function and thus also form. These tendencies, and a greater propensity to invest in one-off, individual objects rather than more traditional serial production, might affect and alter aesthetic conventions as well as rearrange the tradition’s preexisting taxonomic architecture.

The changes seen in the folk pottery tradition were also apparent in the development of textiles. According to Teresė Jurkuvienė, head of the Folk Art Department at the Folk Culture Center in Vilnius and a specialist on national costume, Lithuania’s textile tradition was declining in the early 20th century. Particularly, by this time the making and wearing of national costumes was virtually extinct (Interview with Teresė Jurkuvienė, 2015). As a result, by 1930, the city-based Marginiai Cooperative Society established a cottage industry of weavers.15 Organizers at Marginiai concerned themselves with the promotion and distribution of “folk” art and, with an emphasis on souvenirs and items for
decorative interiors, encouraged the process of harmonization. Antanas Tamošaitis (1906-2005), an academically trained artist, helmed this movement:

From 1931 to 1940 [Tamošaitis] was in charge of the folk art and domestic industry section of the Lithuanian Ministry of Agriculture. During the summers he organized expeditions into the countryside to collect folk art and to study the techniques of village weavers. He made an extensive study of the regional differences in Lithuanian dress and was instrumental in popularizing the idea of the Lithuanian national costume. (Lithaz.org, my emphasis)

Here, the phrase “the idea of the Lithuanian national costume” is incredibly important. This phrase suggests the perception of a divorce of a representational image from the tradition’s authentic foundations, much like what occurred with the Grand Dukes’ Palace as described in Chapter 1 and the historical narrative of folk pottery in Chapter 2. In this case, this process of separation was wrought by the conscious initiation of the harmonization process. As relayed by Vytautas Tumėnas:

Tamošaitis… was thinking how to make the way for income for textile weavers in the village so he created customers, he created their understanding that it is good to buy traditional things, he created the modernized textile viewers and explained for them how to make their textiles and produce artifacts which are suitable for city people, so this period is a mixed period and according to the style you can understand [that] this is traditional style at beginning of 20th century and [then] this is not traditional because it will have wider borders, wilder colors or more soft colors (too much soft according to tradition), or maybe simplified ornamentation. And it's very clear this is not tradition. (Interview by the author, 2015)
Teresė Jurkuvienė adds some interesting insights to this discussion. For example, Jurkuvienė relays that, due to a lack of proper ethnographic research at a time when the tradition was already disappearing, even the “authentic” national costumes that are now shown in museums are merely ad hoc assemblages. These assemblages, like Rackevičius’ tile-stoves in the Grand Dukes’ Palace, indicate only how the costumes could have been. Tamošaitis’ reinvention of the textile tradition (and national costume specifically) could therefore not help but be a similar and, in its modernist ideology, even more exaggerated process. For Jurkuvienė, this is not only a process of bricolage and harmonization, but also a process of nationalizing the folk tradition: creating cultural heritage iconography in a mass-consumable form by synthesizing, in a modern capitalist idiom, the expressions of small, rural, folk communities (Interview by the author, 2015). I would argue that the building of a nation upon Herderian notions of the folk required a similar process of packaging and distributing folk expression and that this was not an isolated example.

Although it seems that there is less scholarship available on the mechanics of change for the Lithuanian folk pottery tradition, there are a number of parallels with this evolution of textiles. For example, by the early 20th century, some held the view that the folk pottery tradition was declining: primitive, fit for only low and provincial levels of society, unfit for modern needs (due specifically to the high lead content of its glaze), and, consequently, suffering from competition with imported pottery (Šatavičiūtė 2004:285-86). In other words, folk potters were, by adhering to an increasingly obsolete tradition, failing to provide
nationalist infrastructure for a changing society. It is also known that the Marginiai cooperative acted as a conduit for the marketing and distribution of folk pottery (at least ceramic whistles and toys) and at some point between 1930 and 1940 installed a ceramics facility. Similarly, a central figure in the development of ceramics, also working under the auspices of the Lithuanian Ministry of Agriculture, emerged. This figure was Liudvikas Strolis (1905-1966). As with Tamošaitis, The Lithuanian Ministry of Agriculture tasked Strolis, or he assumed the task of, reinventing the folk tradition within a changing socioeconomic context.

Like many young artists in independent, interwar Lithuania, Strolis received his art education in Paris, where the nationalist sentiment embodied in native folk art traditions mixed with contemporary cosmopolitan trends in European art. For his particular brand of modern/folk hybridity, Strolis incorporated Art Deco and Art Nouveau, and he articulated his approach to adapting tradition in the following way:

We have to study our national heritage creatively. We cannot constantly roam, we will never find the final answer to our most pressing questions in our folk creation. We have to study national legacy deeply and choose something: maybe mood, maybe coloring nuances, maybe laws of logic, sense of proportion or maybe something else that is valuable in past creations. (quoted in Šatavičiūtė 2004:285-86)

Exported back to Lithuania, the modern/folk hybrid mode allowed for the maintenance of national identity as the newly independent country also pushed for ascension to cosmopolitan Europe and the still-larger global community. The
Ministry of Agriculture supported this agenda and, consequently, also Strolis’ education. In exchange for the Ministry’s support and sponsorship, Strolis agreed to teach courses for folk potters in Lithuania, a form of civic outreach and public development. Strolis taught folk potters for the first time in 1932 and the courses ran from that year until 1937. Šatavičiūtė characterizes the classes in the following way:

The students were taught to make ceramic articles as well as to draw and ornament. The potters experimented in local clay, tried more perfect tools, learnt to prepare a more complex ceramic mass, produce various types of *faience*, throw articles, shape in gypsum forms [plaster molds] as well as install more perfect kilns and to work more rationally in the workshop. The teachers were introducing the glazing of pots with the glazes not yet employed by our potters as well decoration with more versatile Lithuanian patterns. (Šatavičiūtė 2004:288)

Notably, these classes and the nature of their sponsorship reveal just how conscious the production of nationalist heritage in Lithuania was during this time. In many cases, socioeconomic circumstances also forced this self-consciousness into tradition as an intentional interruption or alteration of the folk potter’s natural rhythm of production.

In essence, Strolis’ task was bringing professional, high-art education to folk potters. Ostensibly, this was done to help raise the quality of their production to a level engineered specifically to meet the needs of increasingly discriminating urban dwellers (Šatavičiūtė 2004:282). The implication made by the available scholarship is that this form of modernization was essential for the tradition’s
survival and required a severe and highly intentional alteration (harmonization) of folk aesthetics. The result of this effort, dispensing almost completely with traditional forms and dramatically reformulating ornamentation, can be seen in the work made by students at the aforementioned ceramics courses (Figure 20).

In 1934, Strolis began teaching ceramics at the Kaunas Art School, which was the nation’s only art institution of higher learning during the years of interwar independence. From this perch, Strolis trained the first generation of professional, academically educated Lithuanian ceramic artists and indoctrinated them with much the same philosophy invoked at his courses for folk potters. This movement created a place for elements of the folk tradition in Lithuanian ceramics for the next thirty years. Likewise, in its initial phase, academically trained, applied artists created works that were often indistinguishable from the ones made by the folk potters that Strolis began training at nearly the same time.
With reference to Rackevičius’ distinction between Renaissance and Neo-Renaissance discussed in Chapter 1, I term both the professional and folk variations of modern/folk hybrid pottery “Nouveau-folk.” Nouveau-folk references both the specific influence of Art Nouveau and the process of reinvention in general.

Just as Mark Jarzombek asserts that in 2006 there were multiple Dresdens existing simultaneously (the result of overlapping, interpenetrating, and accrued layers of material, meaning, design, and history), so multiple versions of stylistically-folk pottery existed in Lithuania during the second quarter of the 20th century. These forms of folk pottery evolved gradually from 19th century subsistence pottery and their simultaneity owes much to Strolis’ instrumental role in the speedy harmonization of Lithuanian folk pottery at both the folk and academic levels. The typology of folk pottery following Strolis includes: 1) a still-present subsistence oriented production (milk jars, cooking pots, etc.); 2) an expanded production folk pottery made by established artisans and workshops; 3) an increasingly commercial version of folk production that utilized inter-media aesthetic exchanges and incorporated the souvenir, one-off, and commission; 4) a highly commercial, modern/folk hybrid pottery characterized by aesthetic interchangeability and made by folk potters influenced by the applied arts; and 5) an inter-media modern/folk hybrid pottery made by professional, academically trained artists that I will term applied-art folk. In my own work, I viewed the third category as transitional and as representing the outermost boundary of authentic folk pottery. I adopted this view early on in my study and have found it echoed by
“[s]ome scholars [who] have noted [that] commercialization fundamentally changes the meaning of crafts (and presumably also their usefulness as symbols of national identity) even when they are not transformed” (Chibnik 2003:9).

Although one can view these five types of folk pottery holistically as constituting the rich, interdependent strata of folk pottery creation, there are numerous ways to categorize and differentiate them. For example, one could group types based on shared or contrasting stylistic features, the methods of production, or, to employ a typical folk art trope, the level of education attained by the artisans who created them (Brunvand 1998:548-49; Glassie 1989:92-113; Vlach 1992:13-23). I feel, however, that it will be more revealing to examine this continuum of folk pottery and the issue of commercialization in terms of context and function. Two important parallels in the development of both ceramics and textiles in Lithuania during the first half of the 20th will aid this investigation.

The first important parallel between the two media is the occurrence of a dramatic recontextualization and synchronized reshaping of the craft that is inexorably tied to a market transition from rural to urban environments and consumers. In this transition there is also a supplanting of original utilitarian or ritual function. Indeed, while one can assume by the nature of the aesthetic changes that ceramics took on an increasingly decorative role in the residential interior, textile production at Marginiai focused on a similar arena by producing “curtains, small napkins fashionable at the time for the urban population, ties for men… items used in modern life, only decorated with traditional ornaments” (Teresë Jurkuvienë, personal communication). One can also frame this process
of recontextualization as decontextualization or, to adapt a term used by Dean MacCannell, “museumification” (1976:8), which is a process that can operate independent of institutions and physical spaces.

Speaking of decontextualization in his book *Hybrid Cultures*, Nestor Garcia Canclini admits that by removing an object’s context (in a museum setting), “[O]n the pretext of exalting… art… it is robbed of one of the keys to its value: the everyday or ceremonial function for which the original users made it” (1995:119). Deirdre Evans-Pritchard, in her study of the legal suit brought by Santa Fe’s Native American jewelers against non-Native jewelers making similar products and infiltrating their market, also points to the importance of context. In this case Pritchard illustrates how the subjective determination of authenticity between virtually indistinguishable artifacts (Native-made and non-Native made) depends partly on context (the ethno-cultural context in which something is made or sold) (1987:290). Milda Valančiauskienė, speaking of the cross crafting tradition in Lithuania, which UNESCO includes on its list of intangible cultural heritage, also emphasizes the importance of context and function in defining tradition:

Many aspects of traditional life they are changing because society is changing but many traditions have their living aspect, or they change. For example, cross crafting. Our society is almost all Catholics, but practically I don’t know how many people are really going to church, etc. So with cross crafting it’s the same thing, a part of practitioners they use this tradition only for aesthetics. But also we have a big part of the society for [whom] it is much deeper… It’s not only like a sculpture that you just put
and that’s all… it’s still a big part of their lives, not only their spiritual life but also their social life. (Interview by the author, 2015)

What can be gathered from the above statements is that shifts in context and function can be interpreted as dramatic shifts in meaning. Such shifts represent substantial breaks from the past in which the traditions originate and are, perhaps, greater cause for interrogating terms such as “authenticity” and “tradition” than are superficial alterations of form. Consider, for instance, if the Grand Dukes’ Palace remained, as originally intended, the seat of Lithuania’s administrative power. This might place the Palace more directly within an uninterrupted historical process (a tradition!) of cyclical rebuilding. Additionally, this placement would render arguments concerning the authenticity of the Palace’s form far less consequential. As it currently stands, however, the Palace is not an authentic reconstruction in form or function. Instead the Palace is a symbolic image that operates as an icon of heritage by virtue of its references to past structures and its canonization by, or perhaps imposition on, public opinion. Here one might also consider what would happen if the Potter’s Guild began designing their own stove-tiles for functioning tile-stoves. In one view, the creation of original, functional tiles would be a reanimation and continuation of tradition rather than its museumification. In this case, museumification would be the static preservation of rediscovered heritage technologies and aesthetics through the production of museum artifacts, scientific reconstructions, and lifeless copies.
This same inquiry applies to the professional-inspired work of folk potters and the folk-inspired work of applied artists. Was this work, when one removes it from the question of form and reframes it as a question of context and function, exclusively a means of preserving and marketing heritage? Arguably, the divorce of this work from its original context and function results in mere symbolic images, like the Palace. By operating referentially, these symbols emphasize the fact that they are conceptually, physically, and temporally detached from tradition for the sake of its artificial preservation. Interestingly, similar issues are encountered in Jane Becker’s study of Appalachian craft, Selling Tradition. Becker states:

Consumers were purchasing more than a newly conceived good, however; in no small part, they were also purchasing an icon of an imagined past, provided by a group of contemporary citizens who had assumed the task of preserving a carefully selected version of the nation’s heritage in the present. At the same time, all the structures and ideals of a culture dedicated to industrialism, consumption, and rationality, were reshaping the production, delivery and meaning of the folk handicrafts. (1998: 13)

Becker’s statement illustrates the dynamics of Lithuanian folk pottery’s harmonization and commercialization. These two processes were calibrated to socioeconomic and cultural changes in independent, interwar Lithuania, preserving the image of the rural village while undoing it as the locus for the production of culture. These consciously enacted changes raise the question of displacement: whether removing a tradition’s original meaning by intentionally
altering its context and function changes said tradition into little more than a nostalgic invocation of an effectively extinct tradition. Artificially preserved, tradition finds its new meaning in heritage productions that are somehow distinct from what the natural result of a tradition’s organic evolution would have been, even if that result would be the tradition’s death.

Displacement is “the process by which a way of life becomes heritage” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:7). In this process, a potentially more contrived, more artificial, and more fixed manifestation of a tradition is able to supplant another, typically earlier, version as heritage. Using terms introduced by Erving Goffman, Dean MacCannell describes this rupture in the fabric of tradition in terms of front and backspace. The back region is one in which what occurs emanates organically from a way of life, while the front region is that in which a way of life is staged for consumption (1976:98-100). There are connotations of temporality in this divide as well, between future and past and between modern and pre-, non-, or anti-modern. The implications here are potentially severe. As Dean MacCannell indicates in his book, The Tourist, “the best indication of the final victory of modernity over other sociocultural arrangements is not the disappearance of the non-modern world, but its artificial preservation and reconstruction in modern society” (1976:8).

These discussions of temporality do, in some way, correspond to the claim made by Vytautas Tumėnas at the opening of this chapter that authenticity is a period of time. Still, for Tumėnas, the end of this period is not to be confused with the death of tradition and its displacement by fixed forms of heritage. After all,
“[T]radition is a mental construct, not a force existing in its own right or a set of norms for behavior somehow mysteriously enforced by a crafts community” (Jones 1989:58). Traditions live as long as they are carried on in some form, but the “aesthetics of tradition,” as Tumėnas refers to them, emanate from a reasonably distinct temporal point at which authenticity correlates to an original context (Interview by the author, 2015). The danger present here is in betting historical accuracy against the creation of what Amy Shuman refers to in her study of stone carvers as an “emblematic story.” “Emblematic stories are allusions to an idealized period that the stories dehistoricize and resituate in a particular relation between the present and the lost ideal. The ideal becomes an origin to which all changes in the present can be traced, and only those changes that illustrate the relation between the present and that ideal count” (2005:62). It should also be pointed out that emblematic stories are like images idealized and thus divorced from the particularities of their foundations. In the sense that Tumėnas’ “aesthetics of tradition” represent a model, authentic original, and an image, so are they an emblematic story.

The second important parallel in the evolution of folk pottery and textile is that some constituencies saw them as necessary forms of nationalist, cultural infrastructure for the newly independent nation. This is just as it was prior to independence with the invention of the Lithuanian folk pottery tradition: spontaneous and ideological in both its nationalist orientation and revisionist historical narrative. This similarity allows one to employ the nation as a whole, the nationalist function of folk pottery, and folk pottery’s revised heritage
discourse as overarching contexts. Within these contexts there is virtually no perceptible shift in meaning across the five stages of folk pottery evolution described earlier or over the time-periods in which they evolved. Instead, even in its most exaggerated and contemporary forms, those being professional-inspired folk and folk-inspired professional, there is only a change in the location of producers and consumers and a relatively gradual aesthetic shift. Framed this way, it is easier to accept the premise that “traditions—invented or not—are key elements in the historical evolution of the nation-state and its symbols and histories; they reflect a people’s relationship to their past. [And] if we redefine tradition as a symbolic construction, it can embrace both continuity and discontinuity” (Becker 1998:39). This is fitting, for at no time in the history of Lithuanian folk pottery would notions of continuity and discontinuity be more imperative than in the proceeding era of Soviet occupation, which is the topic of the following section.
Perhaps the most significant development in folk pottery during the interwar period was the nationalizing of the folk tradition: its transformation from a craft consumed, if not produced, by the rural peasantry to a commodified and iconic form of national heritage that merely referenced them. As I argued in Chapter 2, the nationalist function of the folk pottery tradition and the narrative surrounding it was a major impetus for the “invention” of both. Consequently, it might be said that the process of nationalization began with this invention. Regardless, the nationalization of folk pottery took time, evolved with the tradition’s recontextualization in urban centers, and achieved greater breadth and finality through cooperative-based commercialization and incorporation into the applied-art genre. The two trends involved here, commercialization and “artification,” would also continue into the Soviet era, during which they would be severely complicated by the hard-to-decipher ambiguities of Soviet ideology and cultural policy.

As described earlier in this chapter, the five types of Lithuanian folk pottery that I have identified were: subsistence, expanded-production, commercial, commercial-cosmopolitan, and applied-art folk. Due to the nature of the interaction between these types I will divide them into two sections, the second section segregating the discussion of applied-art folk from the other four categories, which will be the topic of the following section.
In his 1973 publication, *Lietuvos puodzai ir puodai* (Lithuanian Pots and Potters), ethnologist Juozas Kudirka cites the mid-20th century as the end point for the creation of subsistence pottery (1969:78). The physical evidence supports this assertion, which seems even more plausible in light of the impacts of collectivization and accelerated modernization in Soviet Lithuania. Consequently, it is fairly safe to assume that along with the early to mid-20th century disappearance of the smoke-firing and leaven-firing traditions, so too did the manufacture of subsistence pottery come to a close. In its absence, expanded-production folk pottery became, for a time, the living root of the tradition.

Prior to the Soviet period, expanded-production folk pottery meant a broad but still standardized set of forms (pitchers, storage jars, milk pots, flowerpots, etc.) made by established individual artisans and in small-scale workshops. These forms were typically accompanied by a recognizable style of ornamentation. This type of production continued in some form during the Soviet era but by the end of it came to a close, I would argue, for two reasons. First, I believe that Lithuanian folk pottery became anachronistic within and incompatible with the popular market, a process known to be already underway in the interwar period. Indicative of these phenomena are instances, not universal but not infrequent, in which folk pottery reveals a failed struggle to adapt: a perceptible decline in aesthetic quality, despite some technological improvements, and the
appearance of ornamentation that, lacking any kind of symbolic content, becomes purely decorative (Figures 21-24).


Second, and likely more important, the socioeconomic reorganization of Lithuania under the Soviets would change production fundamentally. For example, intense regulation would place limits on the output of individual producers and private workshops, both seen as antithetical to communist ideology. In a 2007 interview, for example, a famous Lithuanian potter, the late Bronius Radeckas, from an equally famous pottery town, Kuršėnai, attested to regulatory, bureaucratic obstacles. For a time, such obstacles virtually halted Radeckas’ production (Interview by the author, 2007). Likewise, Vydmantas Vertelis, another Kuršėnai potter, Radeckas’ nephew, and the last of yet another dynasty of Lithuanian folk potters, relays how his father would hide pots from Soviet inspectors who regulated and placed heavy taxes on private production (Interview by the author, 2015).
As yet another indicator of these conditions, there is a question of whether private production was even allowed, a matter still debated among Lithuanians. Clearly, some private production did occur, as Vertelis’ father maintained a private atelier in the earlier years of occupation and Radeckas maintained one in its later years. Yet regardless of how absolute these prohibitions on private production were or were not, they most certainly existed in some form. Likewise, they likely had a significant impact on the traditional architecture of the folk pottery “industry.” With both production and distribution strained under the weight of communism’s dramatic socioeconomic reformulation, it seems reasonable that folk pottery, in its more traditional, already-declining manifestation, might not survive in a nation that was also continuing to modernize.

Taking a look at the work of Radeckas (Figures 25-28), one sees what appears to be an adaptive metamorphosis. As a starting point, Radeckas’ oeuvre includes works in the modernized-folk style of the mid- to late 20th century: Nouveau-inspired alterations of traditional forms, the elaboration of generic forms (like the cup or tureen) that are not necessarily typical of Lithuanian folk pottery, increasing decorative tendencies supplanting traditional content in ornamentation, and heavy investments in unusual features such as low-relief ornamentation. This modernized-folk aesthetic then gives way to versatile and dramatic shifts towards a style appealing to institutional (as opposed to popular) taste in Lithuania and in Russia (Moscow specifically). As it is described here, the evolution of Radeckas’ work can be considered emblematic of the changes in small-scale, expanded-production pottery during the Soviet occupation.
In Kuršėnai, the Soviet-era history of folk pottery centers not only on the small number of potters, like Radeckas, who retained, or were granted, their own workshops, but also on a cooperative studio founded by local potters. This studio was opened in 1964, when no alternative workspaces were available. Although opened by special appeal in this case, it was not unusual for potters to be moved into collective, factory-oriented settings in the Soviet era.

In these sorts of collective environments, which were more easily regulated than a plethora of private ateliers and more in keeping with Soviet ideology, the nature of the production that emerged was increasingly industrial. In
fact, this Kuršėnai studio was eventually wedded to a larger, intercity-network of factories for which an appointed arts council screened production (Interview with Silvestra Šufinskienė, 2015). Potter Silvestra Šufinskienė describes the evolution of the factory as follows:

Those old potters, they didn’t have where to work… they wanted to work with clay, they were sick for clay! They wrote a project to the Ministry, to the [Communist] Party to give them a place to work. They gave them a place connected to the factory and the potters took their wheels there and started to work. There was no standard for four or five years. After, of course, the factory started to dictate the standard, then they would sit and make the same pot over and over. In one day a potter made fifty pots, it was required to make a certain amount. You needed to make examples, get them approved, and then produce them. From the 70s, they started to build another guild, a bigger one, and all the style disappeared, it wasn’t folk anymore, it was mixed: folk with something, something contemporary, they weren’t looking at the traditions anymore, it was most important to sell. (Interview by the author, 2015)

Heavily stylized, increasingly generic, and geared towards commercial mass production, I can think of no other way to label the type of pottery that was ultimately produced by the Guild than “factory-national” (Figure 29). This type of pottery appears to have been the dominant form of serial production pottery during occupation. So dominant was this type, that it largely displaced the expanded-production, commercial, and commercial-cosmopolitan varieties of Lithuanian folk pottery. As a testament to its dominance, more than one of the contemporary, revivalist potters in the present, post-Soviet era has remarked that customers seeking “authentic” or traditional pottery were in fact looking for
factory-national (Interview with Vygantas Vasaitis, 2015; Interview with Valentinus Jazerskas, 2015).

29. An example of factory-national pottery. Late 20th century. Photo by the author.

Notably, a similar phenomenon of displacement occurred in textiles (Jurkvičienė 2007:43). Indeed, the harmonized forms of national costume that were used exclusively in commemorative, ideologically-oriented public performances blurred the standard of tradition for the Soviet generation, which had little exposure to its other manifestations. One might refer to the harmonized pottery and national costumes that superseded the earlier versions of these art forms in the public consciousness with the terms “representative” or “staged” authenticity. These terms were also applied to the Grand Dukes' Palace and Potter’s Guild earlier in this study.

In my own thinking, if Soviet-era national costumes or pottery are not considered traditional, or at best are forms of “staged authenticity,” it is not only because they underwent dramatic changes in form. Instead, Lithuanian art of the Soviet era is non-traditional because an ideology that fundamentally altered it
was forced upon it.\textsuperscript{20} Certainly, this was part of my own justification for excluding most pottery made during the Soviet era from my book.

Of course, there are arguments against exclusion, namely that these manifestations of tradition do represent a temporal cultural reality: a reasonably uniform cultural response to then-current circumstances. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett says about heritage productions, regardless of questions concerning their authenticity, they are their own unique form of cultural interface and cultural index (1998: 157). In the same vein, I would argue that Dean MacCannell’s touristic “front spaces” (1976: 98-100) are forms of “real culture” in the sense that their construction was a relatively uniform cultural response to existing circumstances, i.e., shifting economies in an increasingly globalized world. This idea of culture as a response will be elaborated upon in the conclusion of this study.

Additionally, the emergence of Lithuanian folk pottery within the frame of 19th and 20th century nationalism was, arguably, also ideologically oriented. Thus I cannot claim that the presence of ideology itself compromises notions of “real culture,” tradition, or authenticity. Still, Soviet ideology was imposed, foreign, and contested, which is quite different in its implications. As a byproduct of coercion and constraint, the cultural forms coerced by a foreign and intentionally destructive ideology can, quite justifiably, be considered a facade of cultural identity.

Despite this claim, locating Soviet ideology in Soviet-era folk and production-folk pottery is quite difficult. Even Šufinskienė, one of my main
informants, explicitly denies the role of Soviet ideology in her Guild’s pottery production. However, as I believe that Soviet ideology was often too subtle, ambiguous, and complex to be discussed categorically, I think its role in the ceramic arts is worth exploring.

The ambiguity of Soviet cultural policy lies in its equivocal use of nationalist expression. On the one hand, nationalist sentiment was antithetical to Soviet assimilationist policies and could be employed or at least cited as a legitimate form of cultural resistance or cultural preservation. Upon this tenet, Šufinskienė rejects ideological implications for the pottery produced at the Kuršėnai collective because it remained national in form. On the other hand, in the Soviet Union, dubbed the “Affirmative Action Empire” by scholars, “a strategy aimed at disarming nationalism by granting what were called the ‘forms’ of nationhood” (Martin 2001:3) emerged. This strategy was in accord with Joseph Stalin’s belief that the necessity of cultural expression was finite. If allowed to run its course, Stalin thought, nationalism would naturally expire in obsolescence and “create the base for the organization of international socialist culture” (Martin 2001:5). This was more than a belief, however; it was an official cultural policy in the Soviet Union. Dr. Lolita Jablonskienė of the Lithuanian National Gallery characterizes this policy at length:

…one could call it a kind of rethinking of the interaction of national and international: national on one side understood as both the folklore tradition, in a very expanded sense, and also the tradition of national modernism from the prewar period, and the international… modernist trends… [T]he Soviet period was much more complicated than was described earlier. The earlier discourse would have stated that the
national tradition, both the folklore tradition and modernist tradition, secured the individual identity of Lithuania separate from the rest of the Soviet Union, which indeed looked a bit different, if you look at ceramics or fine arts... The recent research and archives, and [looking] more deeply into the cultural politics of the Soviet Union show that a certain element of allowed nationalism or, lets say, officially accepted nationalism, was part of the Soviet cultural policy and it was even encouraged, especially in the periphery, meaning the Baltic countries, the caucuses of the Soviet Union, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the Soviet Middle East. I’m not ready to speculate why that happened because usually art critics and cultural theorists consider that the cling to... the folk tradition kind of coincided with the dogma of socialist realism in the sense that it was international or proletariat in its content and national in shape. But otherwise there’s also speculations in slightly different direction that keeping countries, if you wish, ‘marinated’ in their folk national traditions was safer than allowing them to direct their glance towards what is happening outside in the world. So those nationalisms seem to have been safer than the global attitude. (Interview by the author, 2015)

Here, Jablonskienė’s analysis suggests that the agenda of Soviet cultural policy destabilizes the nationalist-resistance narrative that typically frames the occupation era. However, Jablonskienė’s perspective is not that of a maker and is perhaps more objective and cerebral. Lithuanian sculptor Mindaugas Navakas, who worked as both an artist and educator during the occupation, articulated his somewhat contrary perspective on this same issue, essentially arguing for the precedence of the Lithuanian agenda:

…in Soviet theory was one weak point about the culture. Culture had to be socialist in content but national in form, that was official doctrine. But if it becomes national in shape, lets say ornament... what is then with
nationalism? Because the Soviet official doctrine was cosmopolitan… [and] nationalism was of course a contradiction to cosmopolitanism, to the world’s proletariat revolution. And this puzzle they never solved, especially when we are speaking about visual art. If you start just drawing some ornaments that are based from somewhere of course, they are not from the future! They are from yesterday, of course, and what was yesterday? This is what they never solved, this dilemma just stayed completely and there was always a gap, sometimes bigger, sometimes smaller, and that was essential. (Interview by the author, 2015)

What I would propose, in response to the two previous, somewhat conflicting statements, is that the ambiguity of Soviet cultural policy was the central battleground for art and cultural expression during occupation. On the one hand, dissenters could exploit this aspect of official policy as a channel for the expression of nationalist political sentiment and cultural identity. On the other hand, ideologues hoped to subversively appropriate these very same expressions. Ultimately, the only way of determining the nature of expression, harkening back to Evans-Pritchard’s study of the Native American jewelers in Santa Fe, was to understand the context of its creation, particularly the intent of its maker and its social interpretation. With this often lacking in absolutes or lost to history completely, one starts to understand the difficulty of looking at and analyzing Lithuania’s Soviet-era art in retrospect.

One of the major complicating factors in analyzing Soviet-era nationalist expression is the element of harmonization. If, indeed, “the ambiguity [of Soviet cultural policy] was intentional, since Bolshevik plans for the social transformation of the country did not allow for any fundamentally distinctive religious, legal,
ideological, or customary features” (Martin 2001:12-3), then harmonization would be a way of achieving it. Harmonization softened the particularities of cultural expression, reduced geo-cultural specificity through a process of distillation, and helped create Stalin’s *natsional’naia kul’tura*. “The translation that best captures the meaning of Stalin’s *natsional’naia kul’tura* is not ‘national culture’ but… ‘symbolic ethnicity’” (Martin 2001:12-3). Harmonization helped to create this abstracted cultural identity, and modernization, already resulting in its own generic tendencies, aided it. Modernization, in turn, was, in the Soviet Union, infused with ideological content.

In classic Marxist theory, “national consciousness was an unavoidable historic phase [like capitalism] that all peoples must pass through on the way to internationalism” (Martin 2001:5). This was known as the Modernization Premise, which insists that as nations modernize and evolve they inevitably do so towards communism as well as cultural cosmopolitanism. Industrialization was an inseparable part of modernization in the USSR and thus, inevitably, had an ideological basis in keeping with the Modernization Premise. Indeed, even the Soviet regime’s infamous agricultural collectivization can be seen as a modernization movement that would, by advancing the rural peasant technologically and undoing the material aspects of individual identity, undo the preexisting social structure of class hierarchy. It is possible to conceptualize aspects of the collectivization movement as a form of harmonization and to thus better understand some of its working principles and its implications for art.
Take for example Lithuania’s song and dance festivals: an interwar, invented Lithuanian tradition then appropriated by the Soviet regime and, finally, reclaimed by Lithuania after independence. The song and dance festivals are now a major tourist attraction and on UNESCO’s representative list of intangible cultural heritage. The Lithuanian Folk Culture Center describes the festivals in the following way:

[Prewar] concert programs included patriotic and folk songs. However, most of these reached the audience further harmonized following European standards and the examples of German choirs. It was thought that the traditional sound of folk songs no longer suited the needs and tastes of a well-educated public. In the Soviet period, they were held every five years… Among harmonized Lithuanian folk songs appeared other ‘Soviet’ peoples’ folk songs and ideological works by Lithuanian and other composers. Dances completely lost their traditional character as did costumes, which had already begun to be stylized before World War II.

“Scenographic national costumes” (as they are officially referred to), simplified and produced in high volume to help choreograph mass spectacle and public display, represent one act of harmonization embedded in yet another: the song and dance festivals. Scenographic costumes also represent collectivization because they established generic group identities. As a case-in point, Teresė Jurkuvienė indicates that national costume only existed in the Soviet period as the collective property of organizations and institutions. Harmonization of the national costume at this scale was unlikely to be achieved by individual, traditional weavers. Rather, this required modernization and industrialization, which achieved an ideological goal by helping to erase individual expression at
the level of production. As harmonization and modernization helped erode both individual and cultural identity, so these interdependent phenomena created ambiguous cultural spaces that were ripe for the insertion of ideology (Jurkuvienė 2007: 46).

What the example of national costume demonstrates is the intertwined nature of collectivization, modernization, industrialization, harmonization, production, heritage, identity, and ideology. The production of pottery I have labeled factory-national, the kind eventually produced in Kuršėnai, is similar. This form of pottery production was in line with the general ideological thrust of modernization under the Soviets, and as a widespread commodity it was, like the song and dance festivals, a mass-spectacle. Accordingly, increased regulation and greater divisions in the labor of production produced not identities for individual potters, their families, or small workshops, but for increasingly large manufactories. Thus industrialization subversively embedded Soviet modernization propaganda in harmonized national forms. Interestingly, the concept of “Soviet in content and national in form” has explicit connections to the development of folklore studies in the USSR.

The study of folklore prospered in the first years following the Revolution, when Soviet ideologues and censors who might have stunted its growth largely ignored it. For example, Vladimir Propp wrote his famous, *Morphology of the Folktale*, during this time and published it in 1928. It was, however, about this time (the late 1920s) that “[t]he brief period of considerable freedom in Russian folkloristics came to an end… when the Stalin era was inaugurated, with the five-
year plans, industrialization, and collectivization” (Oinas 1973:46). At this time there emerged “influential people” who felt that “traditional folklore promoted capitalist and bourgeois values which were detrimental to the socialist ideals” (Goff 2004:2).

Maxim Gorky, founder of the socialist-realism literary method that became an edict of the visual arts, “rescued” folklore in 1934. In that year, Gorky gave an influential speech in which he stressed “the close connection of folklore to the concrete life and working conditions of the people, for which reason its study should not be concerned with the abstract mythic-religious ideas, but must deal with concrete historical reality, work processes, and real interhuman relations” (Oinas 1973:46). What ensued were ideological works of folklore: “[t]hese works imitated traditional folklore, making use of its motifs and poetical devices, but employing contemporary life as their subject. Their protagonists were, according to the narrators themselves, no longer the ancient epic heroes, but the ‘new Soviet hero-innovators and defenders of the socialist fatherland’” (Oinas 1973:46). Soviet in content but national in form, this type of folklore was labeled “pseudo-folklore” (Oinas 1973:56).

The earliest use of the term “pseudo-folk” that I have found appears in James Agee’s 1944 article for Partisan Review entitled Pseudofolklore. In this text, Agee makes effort to distance elite art productions (film, theater, music, etc.) “from those cultural forms he considered authentic” (Becker 1998:39). There are also fitting parallels to Soviet pseudo-folk in what Henry Glassie described as the “non-folkloristic.” Glassie states: “it followed that the inauthentic, the non-
folkloristic, was that which lacked tolerance for individual expressiveness, breeding alienation, or that which blocked continuity, begetting oppression” (2003:182).

In one view, the term “pseudo-folk” indicates the presence of coercion and the insertion of ideology into appropriated forms of folk expression. This has a particular relevance to harmonized forms of expression in which “the line between true folklore and folk stylization,” (Frank 1991:3) and between form and content, is intentionally blurred. In such cases nationalism is merely a façade, and I believe this ambiguity is present in factory-national pottery and in the folk-inspired applied art of the Soviet era. Also, the scholarship of Felix Oinas (Folklore and Politics in the Soviet Union) and others has given the term pseudo-folk a strong Soviet connotation. Thus there is a strong case for attaching the term “pseudo-folk” to the types of Soviet-era pottery discussed here.

Regardless, I will avoid the term pseudo-folk from here on because its accuracy is undermined by the impossibility, or at least high subjectivity, of determining whether Soviet-era folk expression effectively served Soviet cultural policy or disguised crucial expressions of national sentiment. This question of intent and interpretation will ultimately be of paramount importance. For if Soviet-era pottery remained operative in the nationalist frame, even clandestinely, then there is a stronger argument for its placement within the continuum of nationalist oriented pottery made prior to occupation.
As mentioned earlier, Liudvikas Strolis began teaching in the ceramics department at the Kaunas Art School in 1934. Strolis was not the first instructor to teach there, but he was the most influential, and historians and artists alike regard him as the patriarch of Lithuanian ceramics. In particular, Strolis’ philosophy regarding the folk fusion of modernist trends directly or indirectly shaped applied and fine art ceramics in Lithuania until the 1970s. In the 1970s, Strolis’ influence and the importance of modern/folk hybridity waned as arguments for the fine art status of ceramics began in Lithuania along with Post-modern artistic trends.

Between the time of occupation, 1940, and 1970, the range of what was considered applied art, and thus categorically differentiated from folk, was diverse. There was, first of all, a breed of ceramic art that was exclusively tied to Socialist Realism (Figure 30). Notably, Socialist Realism, the depiction of everyday Soviet citizens, scenery, and activities that reinforced the values of Soviet ideology, had an assigned content rather than explicit, outward signs of ideology. This made Socialist Realism outwardly ambiguous. Additionally, such works are also national in form to the extent that they generically symbolize the rural, agrarian culture upon which nationalist ideas of the folk were based. When viewed in context, however, a distinctly Soviet content is discernible.
The second type of applied-art ceramics, which I title applied-art folk, was one extending the Socialist Realism doctrine to works having particularist nationalist components. Typically, these nationalist components consisted of traditional imagery (traditional houses can be seen on the vase in figure 31), folklore themes (a scene from the famous Lithuanian folk tale Spruce, Queen of the Grass Snakes is seen in figure 32), and, seemingly quite popular, statuette dancers in national costume (Figure 33). Interestingly, the dancers depicted in clay form are always wearing harmonized costumes, some in garb and poses borrowed directly from the stylized dances of the Soviet-era song and dance festivals (Interview with Teresė Jurkuvienė, 2015).
31. Vase in the folk/Soviet Realism style, Mid- to late 20th century, Courtesy of the Lithuanian Art Museum. Photo by the author.


The two types of ceramics described above, Socialist Realism and applied-art folk, can be placed in the normative tier of the tripartite diagram of folk, normative, and elite culture (Brunvand 1998:10). Bleeding into the elite tier is a third type, those works typifying the Strolis school: one-off functional pieces incorporating heavily stylized and refined folk forms and ornaments. Such works were made in both the interwar and early Soviet period. Indeed, in some cases the only way to differentiate in which period they were made might be the addition of an explicitly Soviet symbol, as seen in the work made by Liudvikas
Strolis below (Figure 34). However, such distinguishing symbols were not necessarily common.

Like the previous two types of applied ceramic art, many of these works were also made in the Marginai cooperative. Marginiai had been renamed the “Art Cooperative” in the Soviet era and it housed both folk and applied artists, the former often working in service of the latter. Strolis, for example, who infamously could not throw on the potter’s wheel, relied on the help of non-academically trained, master “folk” artists for the creation of many of his works.


Although they diverge from Socialist Realism in their lack of realistic figurative imagery, it is plausible that, for ideological purposes, works of the Strolis school, figure 35 is an example, fit reasonably well within the frame of
Socialist Realism. After all, functional forms make direct reference to the activities and values of everyday life. Also, while folk ornaments are predominantly abstract, they also reference a rural and agrarian lifestyle in a fairly direct way. Ultimately, works from the Strolis school were conservative enough, and ambiguous enough in their inability to clearly contrast resistance and appropriation, to fall comfortably within the purview of Soviet ideology.

Danutė Skromanienė, curator of modern ceramics at the Lithuanian Art Museum, views the Strolis school of artists favorably as staunch nationalists clandestinely expressing dissenting political views (Interview by the author, 2015). From another perspective, Strolis’ own artistic conservatism (viewed unfavorably by some who studied under him), and his frequent, ideology-infused works might suggest a passive or resigned complicity. Either way, by the 1970s, Strolis’ health was failing after years of alcoholism and a debilitating aneurism in the 1960s and his influence was evaporating. Furthermore, Soviet society had undergone a “thaw” under Khrushchev (1894-1971), and Post-modern internationalist trends (Minimalism, Abstraction, Abstract Expressionism, etc.) had begun to take hold in ceramic art. Eventually, Strolis and the nationalist/modern hybridity he encouraged in art became obsolete.

The fact that folk/modern hybridity in applied ceramic art began to disappear at a point when alternative ideas finally began filtering into Lithuanian society reinforces the notion, inferred by Jablonskienė, that Soviet authorities used nationalist expression as a pacifying surrogate for the international trends they deemed less safe. This shift may also reveal the success of Soviet cultural
policy in undermining the stability, or at least effectiveness, of the nationalist
discourse in the visual arts, regardless of artistic intent. Let us not forget,
however, that Lithuania at present is independent. Indeed, Lithuania was the first
nation to declare independence from the USSR, which indicates a strong
nationalist undercurrent. In this vein it seems that Navakas was correct: it was
not the nationalist discourse but Soviet discourse that was unstable, and
ambiguity ultimately favored Lithuania. But as yet another counterpoint, today’s
“folk” potters have looked to the folk pottery of pre-Soviet Lithuania as a source
of inspiration for their creation. To use Vytautas Tumėnas words, today’s folk
potters look to the pre-Soviet era for the “aesthetics of tradition.”

The contemporary folk potter’s omission of Soviet-era ceramic art places
the locus of national identity in an opposing era and reinforces the idea that
coerced culture is not native culture. This idea, in turn, emphasizes that although
the politics of tradition, image, authenticity, and memory continued throughout
the 20th century, it was a higher-stakes game in Soviet Lithuania. With this fact
and contemporary Lithuanian folk potters tacitly acknowledged, the purpose of
the following, final section is to briefly explore their work.
THE PAST IS OPEN TO THE FUTURE PART IV:
CONTEMPORARY LITHUANIAN FOLK POTTERY

In my beginning is my end. In succession
Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,
Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place
-TS Eliot
Cultural policy in the Soviet periphery ambiguously straddled ideology and nationalist discourse. Viewing the border areas as more susceptible to outside influence, the Soviet administration extended token privileges to bring them to heel. As Valentinias Jazerskas claims, the Soviet administration granted Lithuania such an exception in permitting the creation and maintenance of a folk artist’s union (Tautodailininku sajunga), which opened in 1966. Semantically a combination of tautas (nation), dailininkas (artist), and sajunga (union), Tautodailininku sajunga translates literally as “The National Artist’s Union” and not as “folk artist’s union.” In translation, I failed to make this distinction between “national” and “folk” for some time, recognizing the discrepancy only upon returning to Lithuania for fieldwork after my graduate courses in folklore.

Although it seems like a glaring error at first, the semantics in this case are not so easy to untangle. First, the word “folk” exists in Lithuania only as a term borrowed from English. Folklore, in Lithuanian, is folkloras. What seems a more appropriate translation of folk in Lithuanian is the word liaudis. Indeed, Paulius Galaunė’s catalog series on Lithuanian folk art, which includes the catalog of folk pottery discussed in Chapter 2, is titled Lietuviu liaudies menas: keramika or Lithuanian Folk Art: Ceramics. But here too there are discrepancies. In Soviet times, for example, it appears that people often understood the word liaudis as people (liaudies menas as the people’s art) and nothing short of an ideological buzzword.

During my 2015 fieldwork, when I put out a call on Facebook for native Lithuanian speakers to indicate their sense of this word, liaudis, interpretations
consistently leaned towards its Soviet-era ideological use. Linguist Loreta Vaicekauskienė, on the other hand, offers the following, more nuanced interpretation:

Everything is dependent on context. Even in Soviet time there were several meanings for ‘liaudis’: there was the ideologized meaning of ‘Soviet people,’ and traditional, customary meaning of ‘simple people.’ There were even slang meanings in Soviet time - completely without ideology - for ‘a group of youths.’ Soviet time ‘people’s language,’ [liaudies kalba] is what we called ‘village Lithuanian.’ In the past and present there is left an absolutely neutral conjunction ‘people's culture, creation, and art.’ For me it looks like these words have no Soviet ‘smell’ at all, you can use them without fear. (Personal communication)

The ideological interpretations of the word liaudis in the Soviet context are consistent with Teresė Jurkuvienė’s claim that Soviet cultural policy-makers instituted an official conceptual shift, breaking down any perceived barrier between rural “folk” culture and national culture. The objective of this shift was to re-conceptualize all Soviet people as one cohesive class: the proletariat. Indeed, there could be no distinction between classes or cultures that segregated or marginalized the proletarian ideology upon which the Soviets built the Revolution. Furthermore, Soviet propaganda, such as the ideology-infused forms of nationalist expression described earlier, could be used more effectively if it was not limited to particular groups such as “the folk” or even to rural culture at large.

Arguably, if the Soviet-era merging of “folk” and “national” seems dangerous or unethical it is because it was one step towards an engineered cosmopolitanism and part of a colonial, ideology-conscious process of forcibly
erasing identity. Yet the process of nationalizing folk culture, taken to an extreme in the Soviet era, was already underway in the pre-occupation era. The only difference between the two eras is that in independent Lithuania, people sought to nationalize folk pottery in order to salvage the tradition, which some people saw as dying but still relevant to national identity. We can trace the process of nationalization back even further to the “invention” of folk pottery in the late 19th century context of the National Reawakening.

Such links do allow, despite the analysis I made in my book (Stellaccio 2011:111-32), to almost seamlessly link together all the various manifestations of national expression in clay over the 19th and 20th centuries. (Although I would argue that subsistence-pottery production is an exception because it had no perceptible political implication). The question at hand is whether contemporary folk pottery can be placed within this framework as well. To help get to an answer I shall briefly investigate the work of three artists representing three progressively younger generations in three progressively larger cities: Silvestra Šufinskienė, born immediately prior to occupation in 1938 and working in the historic pottery town of Kuršėnai; Česlovas Gudžius, born in 1966 and working in Lithuania’s second-largest city, Kaunas; and Vygantas Vasaitis, who was born in 1972, educated in the post-Soviet era, and works in Vilnius, Lithuania’s capital.
Virgilija Silvestra Šufinskienė, introduced in Chapter 3, began her career as a ceramic artist during the Soviet era with an education in the city of Kaunas, where she studied at a vocational school. What she considers her real education, however, took place at the Guild established in Kuršėnai.

I studied in Kaunas, but the real university was with the old potters. From those masters I learned the secrets, the framework of pottery making, and throwing I learned there, from the real masters. Those things I learned from professional art were forgotten. (Interview by the author, 2015)

Interestingly, Šufinskienė’s comments regarding professional art suggest a dichotomy familiar to students and scholars of folk art in which binaries such as educated/uneducated, professional/non-professional, and artist/craftsperson or artist/folk artist are debated as defining features (Brunvand, 1998:548-49; Glassie 1989:92-113; Vlach 1992:13-23). Coupled with the statement above, Šufinskienė’s own comments on the art/craft dichotomy are of note:

…craftsmen work just to sell, I’m not a craftsman, I am an artist. People don’t need to buy my work, I work for myself. I get an idea and do it and I do not care where it ends up. If somebody wants to buy art then sometimes they buy, but that I make especially for sale? No. For sale I make [things like] these cups. (Interview by the author, 2015)

The comments that Šufinskienė has made here reveal pertinent dimensions of how this contemporary potter-artist perceives herself. Šufinskienė clearly aligns herself with the “old potters,” in part by virtue of her apprenticeship
with them, and this is an integral part of her artistic, cultural, and individual identity. But the “old potters” were production potters who produced a high volume of wares for sale, and were thus craftsmen and not artists by her definition. A self-proclaimed “artist,” Šufinskienė makes her “serious” works primarily for exhibition and repeatedly refers to them using the term *dailuota*, which might be understood as *embellished* but is better translated as *artified*. Use of this term seems to be a tacit acknowledgement of the self-conscious and studied investment in objects that folk-potters could rarely afford to make but which defines her work. Šufinskienė does attempt to reconnect her work to tradition by proposing that the old potters made specially decorated pots as gifts and commissions alongside their production, and this is true. I do not believe that this is true, however, to an extent that traditional production would mirror Šufinskienė’s output or its character. Thus, in conceptualizing her work, one can see that Šufinskienė is isolating and elaborating one particular strand of the folk pottery tradition. This is not unlike what she does visually.

The central, reoccurring theme of Šufinskienė’s pottery ornamentation is the life-tree or “world-tree” flanked by birds (Figure 36). This is a theme common in Lithuanian folk art but also widespread in international folk art. In this case, as I argued in my book, the aesthetics of ornamentation in combination with the peculiarities and sensibilities of form make the pot culturally identifiable.

Stylistically, however, with the color schemes, angularities, symmetry, and densely ornate compositions, there is a substantial divergence from the codified Lithuanian folk pottery aesthetic in Šufinskienė’s work.

Upon entering Šufinskienė’s home with my guide in Kuršėnai and fellow ceramic artist, Vidmantas Anglickas, there is a humorous and good-natured exchange when our host presents her work:

Šufinskienė: And now folk, now folk, present-day folk!
Anglickas: These are not our ornaments.
Šufinskienė: Then whose are they?
Anglickas: Really, these are our ornaments?
Šufinskienė: These are pure folk, they are artified in my own way, not according to a book or to an old master.

Admittedly, Anglickas’ doubts concerning the Lithuanian-ness of Šufinskienė’s ornaments are not entirely unwarranted. Indeed, if one removed these works from her Kuršėnai home then I would probably not recognize them as Lithuanian. Indeed, I might not even recognize them as European but as Central or South American. Notably, my own mentor, Genovaitė Jacėnaitė, whose input was essential to my book, also made this observation about Šufinskienė’s work.
When she describes her ornaments herself, Šufinskienė states that for inspiration she is looking to Galaunė’s catalog, to folk ornaments on pots and furniture, and to the birds and plants in Lithuania. She also looks at birds and plants from around the world that she finds in books, acknowledging the ubiquity of these motifs, which is of particular interest to her (Interview by the author, 2015). By choosing to work almost exclusively with a singular motif in multiple iterations Šufinskienė is, in the style and content of her ornamentation, isolating and elaborating.

Šufinskienė’s use of form is similar. She states, for example, that she looks at traditional forms and that she wants her forms to be those of the old Lithuanian masters (unlike her ornaments) (Interview by the author, 2015). Primarily, Šufinskienė produces a limited quantity and diversity of forms, mostly pitchers and some jugs and vases for exhibition. Concentrating on the development of this limited palette, Šufinskienė is again isolating and elaborating elements of tradition. Although in her elaboration of singular forms she is given to some experimentation, the influence of the old masters seems to be present. Indeed, even Šufinskienė’s alterations of form fit reasonably well within the traditional taxonomy. Ironically, however, the artist herself acknowledges that “forms can hardly differentiate what is Lithuanian or not. The forms are for function, so they can be the same elsewhere” (Interview by the author, 2015).

Ultimately, in respect to their Lithuanian-ness, I cannot help but acknowledge the self-negating contradictions in Šufinskienė’s work at the level of both ornamentation and form. But I also acknowledge that Šufinskienė’s
communion with tradition is both heartfelt and informed. Indeed, Šufinskienė does much to cultivate and preserve the history of the tradition and her understanding of its character is reasonably in line with my own, although hers is slightly less purist (something I measure with a recognition and response test that I built from the Galaunė catalog and images from my own archive\textsuperscript{25}). More importantly, Šufinskienė considers herself to be working towards the tradition’s future as much as from its past: adapting it for modern times and creative satisfaction.

Unlike Vytautas Tumėnas, Šufinskienė does not locate authenticity within a time period but within originality (Interview by the author, 2015). To some extent, because she is an artist invested in singular objects that she is indifferent to selling, her ideas of originality and authenticity are widely separated from the constraints of commodification and mass production.
ČESLOVAS GUDŽIUS

As a fourth-year high school student, Česlovas Gudžius went to a pottery workshop where he studied with a potter who, still making his own lead glazes and firing a traditional kiln, likely qualifies as one of Šufinskienė’s “old masters.” This potter’s surname was Bodendorf, which indicates Jewish heritage. Gudžius then found employment during the Soviet era in the central ceramics factory in Lithuania, which was called JIESA. JIESA was the very factory to which authorities wedded Šufinskienė’s Kuršėnai guild. At the factory, Gudžius made standard production, including the dinnerware sets that were popular at that time. After the collapse of the USSR and the subsequent failure of the JIESA factory, Gudžius went into business for himself, running a studio at his home in the city of Kaunas.

I first saw Česlovas Gudžius’ pottery in the gift shop at the Grand Dukes’ Palace in Vilnius. What I saw there were three of Gudžius’ folk-style pitchers near a display of Palace pottery reconstructions made by the Vilnius Potter’s Guild. In essence, the combination of these two types of ceramics, one originating in the Lithuanian-rural-peasant tradition and the other in the European-urban-aristocratic tradition, is a contradiction. Gudžius tacitly acknowledges this, stating that “if you look at Palace ceramics, what they find there is not the pure ceramics tradition, you can feel the influence of pots imported from many different places” (Interview by the author, 2015).
At the Palace this contradiction is ignored, I would argue, precisely because doing so allows the gift shop to articulate and to sell, both literally and figuratively, the overarching, remodeled narrative of national unity and uniform ethno-political identity that the Palace at large relies upon for its status as heritage. As a museum, however, the parameters of the Palace exhibits are narrow and there one will not find anything rooted in the folk tradition on display. Indeed, the gift shop is inherently more flexible in terms of display and brings state and folk history together in an explicit way that the Palace cannot without losing its integrity. Ultimately, the gift shop demonstrates how the commodification of culture and the creation of culture through constructed narratives can work symbiotically. The gift shop appropriates Gudžius’ pottery as a functioning part of the Palace’s revised role in the modern nationalist narrative.

In Gudžius’ Kaunas-based studio, the narrative is his own, a mix of contemporary folk-pottery, historical exemplars, and souvenirs. The souvenirs, a financial necessity, consist of small bells, candlesticks, ceramic eggs, and similar products. The contemporary folk pots, like Šufinskienė’s, are one-off pieces that elaborate traditional forms and are heavily invested with painstakingly incised and painted ornaments in a reasonably consistent and identifiable personal style. In contradistinction, however, I would suggest that Gudžius’ ornamental style is more recognizably Baltic, if not Lithuanian, than Šufinskienė’s. For while the latter’s ornamental style and themes are based on imagery she acknowledges are universal, and rendered in an unfamiliar style, the former’s style has a recognizable correspondence with Baltic aesthetic tendencies and with
Lithuanian metal and woodwork in particular. Already working within narrower aesthetic parameters, Gudžius’ synthesis of these influences, his compact line work, and his signature medallion compositions are distinctive. In some ways, Gudžius’ traditional ornamental style thus leans more to the individual than the universal, a quality that stands out even in the Palace gift shop. The potter does not, however, explicitly associate the originality of his art with authenticity as Šufinskienė does. Instead, Gudžius states that “[t]hose authors who try to make copies, maybe that’s more authentic… and this thing [points to an old and broken pot] is authentic, and after one-hundred years, my work will be authentic too” (Interview by the author, 2015).

In addition to being original, Gudžius’ aesthetic style appears to be very strategic. For example, in taking my recognition test, Gudžius reveals a highly informed sense of traditional aesthetics by analyzing even subtle elements of form and ornament in regards to their presumed Lithuanian-ness. He understands the roots of the tradition, it seems, but is not bound by it. Gudžius is loyal to form, but he mixes and matches ornaments and technical features freely, the interchangeability of his work reminiscent of folk pottery in the interwar period. For example, Gudžius extracts ornaments from furniture and metal work that he simply feels “are more beautiful on pottery” (Interview by the author, 2015). Gudžius’ process of translating elements of tradition, not narrowly from folk pottery but broadly from Lithuanian folk art, is evident in the pairing of images below (Figures 37-38): one image from Galaunė’s catalog and one showing a pitcher made by Gudžius. Gudžius explains his process of translation and his
aesthetic with something of an affront to tradition that simultaneously
demonstrates his knowledge of and his conscious departure from it. He states:

We create contemporary folk art, we repeat these times, what we do, we
aim for the essence, and so our ornaments are more beautiful. We do not
give a small child to make it messy because to fire the work and the other
materials, those are expensive… Now we do our time, a bit with
modernism, a bit something ours… we can take elements, but I also do
what is dear to my heart. (Interview by the author, 2015)

37. Pitcher on table with painted ornaments, Late 19\textsuperscript{th} to mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century. Courtesy of the MK Čiurlionis National Museum of Art. Originally published in Lietuviu liaudies menas: keramika.

Officially, Vygantas Vasaitis is a member of the Vilnius-based Craftsmen’s Guild. Vasaitis works independently, however, having received a subsidized workshop of his own under the auspices of the same municipal rejuvenation initiative that awarded the Vilnius Potter’s Guild their studio. Vasaitis’ activities and those of his respective organization mirror those of the Potter’s Guild in many ways, such as their interest in reviving heritage technologies. Along with the Potter’s Guild, Vasaitis was involved in the rediscovery of the leaven-firing tradition and he includes samples of this work, as well as smoke-fired pottery and other historical forms, at his studio and among his wares at craft festivals. These are often the same craft festivals that the Potter’s Guild attends. At these events, Vasaitis also dresses up in medieval garb and gives demonstrations of historic throwing and firing techniques. Even Vasaitis' studio, with its rustic wooden shelves and heavy-set medieval pottery wheel, can be likened to the studio maintained by the Potter’s Guild. The major difference between the two groups, but more particularly between Vasaitis and Dainius Strazdas, the head of the Potter’s Guild, is in how they use tradition.

As relayed in Chapter 1, Strazdas speaks emphatically about the importance of heritage technologies and traditions for modern-day makers. Accordingly, there is no doubt that as an educator Strazdas has provided valuable tools to students and artists throughout Lithuania by preserving and promoting knowledge of historic craft. But even a cursory tour of the Vilnius
Potter’s Guild’s studio reveals the dominant and monumental importance of the copy and academic study. Vasaitis’ studio, on the other hand, is less a site of re-creation, preservation, and dissemination and more a site of active interpretation. Vasaitis describes his working philosophy using the following example:

I made these dishes which are absolutely not copies and not traditional, but I made them with traditionally milled glaze [milled with a grindstone]. The grindstone is a comfortable thing for me, it is the key to the other side, you can use again the good things that are forgotten and take them into your life, it is useful, it is not gone, it is just not left in our culture but is just in museums. The way we make our work is an aesthetic thing, it leaves traces of itself, like with the potter’s wheel. With the grindstone you get various sized particles and the glaze is not totally sterile like what you buy from a store, there’s an aesthetic, and for me it is beautiful. You can make an original thing with old technology. (Interview by the author, 2015)

Arguably, Vasaitis’ creative use of a heritage technology in this case reflects his artistic spirit. It is noteworthy that of the three individuals described here, Šufinskienė, Gudžius, and Vasaitis, only Vasaitis has a formal education in fine arts. It is also notable that Vasaitis’ interest in heritage technologies extends well beyond Lithuania’s geographic borders. Indeed, Vasaitis has introduced heritage technologies into his practice that originate in Russia, Georgia, Germany, Poland, and elsewhere. Additionally, Vasaitis’ borrowings include not only technologies but also aesthetic templates. For instance, numerous experiments with Middle Eastern zoomorphic pottery motifs (Figures 39-40), English slip-trailing decoration, Japanese Raku-fired tea bowls and the like can all be found in his studio.
Although an eclectic and cosmopolitan fine artist in one view, much of Vasaitis’ creative activities are rooted in Lithuania’s folk tradition. In some cases, for example, his experiments with foreign aesthetics are adapted to, or hybridized with, elements of the Lithuanian tradition, as seen below.

In terms of his training, Vasaitis has, outside of his formal education, learned a great deal from folk potters. This includes Lithuanian folk potter Romualdas Voveris, who I introduced in Chapter 2. Vasaitis’ relationship with Voveris then led him to his own experiments with local clays, traditional kilns and firing techniques, forms, and decoration. Vasaitis also conducts his own research into the Lithuanian folk pottery tradition and made many valuable contributions to my own study. Likewise, Vasaitis collects folk pottery avidly and, on rare occasion, does make copies. All of these activities come together in Vasaitis’ knowledge of his nation’s tradition and they inform his work.

Perhaps one of Vasaitis’ most interesting bodies of folk-inspired pottery is his “kids-ware.” These are pots, some of them traditional in form, decorated with child-like drawings of various domestic and imaginary scenes (Figure 43).
Vasaitis’ kids-ware began when his young children at home began drawing on his pots. When the works began to sell rapidly and his children grew up and stopped decorating, Vasaitis made the drawings himself.

As stated in Chapter 3, Lithuanian folk potters who were not working in large workshops and were consumed with the labor of production often delegated the work of decoration to their wives and even their children. This delegation must be considered a factor in the unique aesthetic makeup of Lithuanian folk pottery. Specifically, the decoration of pottery by children is easily associated with the highly organic and sometimes whimsical character of ornamentation, particularly the homespun renderings of landscape and figures that make intermittent appearances on folk pots (Figures 41-42). While making up a minority share of Lithuanian folk pottery ornamentation, this type of illustration is a vital part of the tradition’s aesthetic DNA, and it is something kept alive in Vasaitis’ kids-ware.

Interestingly, such aesthetic characteristics were, at least in part, disavowed by Česlovas Gudžius when he implied that they are antithetical to his pursuit of refined artistry. Accordingly, Gudžius’ pottery is, in my opinion, far more pedantic than anything typical in the Lithuanian folk pottery tradition of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.27 In this vein, the “crudeness” of Vasaitis’ kids-ware is more in line with the nature and character of Lithuanian folk pottery than Gudžius’ pedantry.


Šufinskienė, Gudžius and Vasaitis, the three potters briefly profiled here, demonstrate both similarities and differences. On the one hand, traditional masters have mentored all three artists and all three root some dimension of their production in tradition. Additionally, all three are reasonably well informed about the Lithuanian folk pottery tradition and locate its most archetypical forms and ornaments in the pre-Soviet eras. Considering that these potters represent three successive generations, I would suggest that these similarities already represent a significant, binding continuity. In other words, among a small community of artisans, ways of knowing the past constitute a tradition.

That their engagement with tradition is similar is partly evidenced by the fact that all three possess state-issued certificates of authenticity for a certain number of the wares that they produce. The Ministry of Agriculture awards these certificates as part of a Lithuanian national heritage program begun in 2007. This program offers three progressively awarded certifications for products, the artisans who make them, and then master artisans sanctioned to train apprentices.

The certificates issued for artisanal products are awarded based on their meeting a set of standards for authenticity, which a diverse review committee of more than twenty scholars, museum representatives, and officials review and assess. For example, one standard for authenticity is that there must be an in-country historic precedent of more than one-hundred years (as of 2016, this skips...
over the entirety of the interwar and Soviet eras) for a traditional product. Any younger than this and there will be “too little tradition” (Interview with Pranas Magys, 2015). Although the committee acknowledges that “what is happening today will one day be traditional” (Interview with Pranas Magys, 2015), it will not certify a product without this historic precedent.

Another standard for authenticity is applied to process. For instance, a traditional product made with contemporary technology can only receive a B-level certification while those made with “traditional” technologies receive an A-level certification. However, standards for A-level certification are flexible. Even if an artisan uses traditional technologies only at certain stages of production that artisan can, with the considered approval of the committee, still qualify. Conversely, if historic technologies are used but the form is completely without precedent and not traditional, the product is unlikely to be certified. (Still, there may be exceptions and these are more likely if the artisan is, by virtue of education and/or family relations, part of a lineage of craftsmen and thus assumed to have a sufficient knowledge of the tradition). This does not mean that there is a preference for certified artisans to create copies and the committee does not encourage them. Rather, the committee prefers that artisans “put their own interpretation but not change it entirely” (Interview with Pranas Magys, 2015). In other words, the committee prefers to support living traditions, but also traditions that live within boundaries.

For an artisan to be certified he or she must show that they have worked with a particular craft form for ten years, or five if they received a formal
education in that craft. If an artisan’s products are certified, the artisan can be certified within three years. When a product or artisan is certified they will be able to attach labels to their works that endow them with “Autenticissimo.”30 The labels are written in Lithuanian, English, and Russian as seen in figure 44 below.

Traditional product is a custom made article produced by a craftsman, food product, folk instrument or any other product of ethnic material heritage made from traditional raw materials by hand or through the application of old or equivalent new technologies preserving qualitative attributes and compositions of the product [sic].

![Authenticity certificate](image)

44. Authenticity certificate

Of course, the authenticity certification program has built-in economic incentives, such as priority locations at fairs and reimbursement for overhead costs. Though many question the viability of these benefits (all three of the artists featured here express heavy skepticism of the program’s benefits), it is generally held that the Ministry built them into their program to attract artisans to their mission. In exchange for these benefits, artisans agree to work in the Ministry’s boundaries: they conform to the Ministry’s standards for authenticity and do not
dramatically vary their products; submit to a certain degree of quality control by individuals and teams charged with surveying market sites and making studio visits; and they agree to present an 80 percent majority of certified products when selling their work at public venues. If an artist is found to be in violation of the program’s codes, they will be issued warnings and can, ultimately, be decertified.

Interestingly, the Ministry of Agriculture that initiated this program in 2007 and issues these certificates of authenticity is the same organization sponsoring Antanas Tamošaitis and Liudvikas Strolis in the last century. This shows that the Ministry of Agriculture’s mission has not changed dramatically in nearly one-hundred years and that there is a great deal of continuity in the approach to and management of culture in 20th century Lithuania. Indeed, the mission is still the preservation of Lithuanian national identity, as indicated by the following excerpt from a mission statement appearing on the heritage program’s website:

Speedy development processes of science and technologies, globalization of the world raises challenges to country and nation. That forces to look for the ways how to keep Lithuanian national individuality. Nowadays in modernizing world national heritage gives to nation originality and exclusivity… In the year 2007 Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania adopted law of national heritage products which ensures governmental protection of national heritage products, enables to preserve and propagate accumulated experience in national crafts in the same time giving to it contemporary significance, gives governmental help and gives favorable conditions to traditional craftsmen to create, realize and popularize products of national heritage. (Lithuanian National Heritage)
Ironically, if one were to define authentic traditions by the Ministry of Agriculture’s own requirement that it have a one-hundred-year precedent in Lithuania, the Ministry’s mission to safeguard Lithuanian heritage would just barely qualify as such a tradition! In a larger context, however, the Ministry of Agriculture’s warning against globalization is part of a pattern of cultural responses to perceived threats to Lithuanian national identity. In the chronology of Lithuanian folk pottery, this pattern began with occupation (under the Czar) and proceeded to modernization (in the interwar era), again occupation (under the Soviets), and again modernization at its present, global scale.

In each of these periods, the nation responded through the creation and utilization of heritage. In some cases these responses relied on the staging and production of heritage at a scale like that of the Grand Dukes’ Palace. Embedded in the Palace was the staging and production of heritage at the scale of the Vilnius Potter’s Guild, itself incorporating reproductions of Lithuanian folk pottery into its identity. In turn, folk pottery originated, at least in part, as a heritage production that, like the Palace and Guild, found its national form in the confluence of international trends and influences. Conversely, these assertions of national identity, which originated in assimilationist movements from cosmopolitanism towards nationalism, were used to control the drift from nationalism towards cosmopolitanism (a seeming paradox). For example, in the interwar era, artists sought to preserve the national tradition by adapting it and modernizing it with the incorporation of international trends such as Art Nouveau. In the Soviet era, at least during the first twenty years of it, in which Strolis’
influence dominated, ceramics became conservative. During this period, artists held relatively tightly to the use of national ornaments in what many likely considered a struggle for survival. In this alternation, perhaps there is a distinction in the presence of more conservative or liberal trends in periods when people considered either the present or the future to be the biggest threat. Yet regardless of its nature, the degree of shift, or its tense, a strategic positioning and repositioning between cultural conservatism and liberalism as a social response to external circumstances is a tradition in Lithuanian pottery, whether folk or folk-inspired. By virtue of the fact that they have subscribed to the Ministry’s heritage program and that it now contextualizes their work, the three artisans introduced here are formally participating in this tradition of socio-political consciousness.

Within the parameters set by their relationship to tradition and by the Ministry for authenticity, Šufinskienė, Gudžius and Vasaitis have all taken substantial creative liberties in their work. Ironically, the fact that each potter takes these liberties is also a commonality between them. After all, they participate in the same market, where mass-produced, imported pottery forces a greater investment in singular works and ever-greater articulations of uniqueness from individual producers. Here, economic factors and the notions of individual artistic identity that have evolved over time in Lithuania, intermix. The intertwining of these two phenomena make it advantageous and increasingly possible for potters to stretch the individuality of their traditional wares to the maximum allowed by policy, politics, tradition, and the market. This balancing of individual
expression within a broader, defining context is also a tradition, not only in Lithuanian folk pottery of differing historical periods but in applied and even fine art ceramics as well. In applied art, for instance, individual authorship became important as ceramic artists shifted from serial production to singular art works and the notion of artistic identity took hold. This was not, however, a period of unchecked self-expression. Rather, in the era of applied art (1918-1960), nationalist sentiment, economic limitations, a very gradual acclimation to European culture, and a small oligarchy of state-sponsored educators, among other factors, produced creative constraints. Likewise, in the crowded, competitive urban markets where folk pottery was sold in the early 20th century, producers asserted their individuality by advertising the distinguishing aesthetic and technical merits of their wares. Yet here too there were constraints, such as the requirements of utilitarian function, technical limitations, and, again, the fashion for nationalist sentiment.

What can be seen in the relationships between artisans and the broader contexts in which they work is a consistent pattern in the production of ceramic art in Lithuania over the last 150 years. Identifying this pattern, one can view contemporary Lithuanian folk pottery as the culmination and legitimate successor of the Folk Pottery Renaissance. One may also view contemporary folk pottery as the confluence of this Renaissance and the development of applied, fine art, and even industrial ceramics, as all three have come to bear on today’s potters. It is important, however, to acknowledge that the continuity of tradition in this case is not to be measured solely by enduring aesthetic features or even utilitarian
function but by something far more foundational. Indeed, the essence of the Lithuanian ceramic tradition lies in the consistent pattern of how artists of common heritage respond to the external economic and socio-political circumstances that to some degree structure the creation of culture. Within an array of responses, it is the assertion and preservation of identity, which as I have shown is bound to the role and creation of memory, that should be singled out. Ceramic artists in Lithuania have pursued the maintenance of identity, both individual and national, the two inexorably linked, while aesthetics, function, and even the contexts in which they exist have changed, often dramatically so, since 1861.
CONCLUSION: POTS AND KHALATS

If historical ruptures and cultural reinvention characterize the history of Lithuanian folk pottery, as I argue in this paper, then it is worthwhile to revisit another idea proposed by Henry Glassie and incorporated into my previous study. Also encountered in *The Spirit of Folk Art*, this operative idea is that it is the simultaneity of tradition and variability that defines folklore (1989:31). When applying this definition to folk art, I interpret it as variable individual expressions within a stable cultural context. As Glassie puts it, this is the “willing submission of individuals to their own cultures” (1989:31).

In this equation, a stable cultural context provides relatively fixed parameters that preserve the contours of identity. Conversely, individuality is the variable. As such, the degree to which individual variations diverge from their moorings in context is often the degree to which they are judged to be traditional or non-traditional, or, as some might say, authentic or inauthentic. There are, of course, no objectively decided or agreed upon markers between the binary polarities of traditional and non-traditional. Rather, the divides are subjectively determined and quite often by outsiders. Still, in my early work, the concept of tradition and variation as described by Glassie appeared to be a useful tool for understanding and evaluating Lithuanian folk art. Consequently, the tradition-and-variation premise served as a core component of the definition of folk art I employed in my book on Lithuanian folk pottery:

If I have learned anything from the esoteric philosophies on archaeology that Ian Hodder laid down in his book *Reading the Past*, it is that free
agency must always be considered a factor in cultural DNA. Room must be made for the individual artist working within, interpreting, and sometimes stretching the limits of the national tradition. Space must also be made for the anomaly, for the radical, for the experiment, and for the special commission. To deny them would take the “art” out of “folk art” and shatter the definition upon which this text is operating. (Stellaccio 2011:132)

To a great extent, the tradition-and-variation premise has also been relevant to the present study. Here, a central example of the kind of fixed points to which I referred above is what Vytautas Tumėnas termed the “aesthetics of tradition.” Effectively a stylistic template, the “aesthetics of tradition” is, in this case, a codified collective image of Lithuanian folk pottery constituted by forms, functions, and ornaments that are rooted in late 19th and early 20th century production. The aesthetics of tradition is a visual representation of an essential Lithuanian-ness, the kind I was in search of at the outset of my study of Lithuanian folk pottery in 2004. According to this definition, if a given pot is deemed too far removed from the aesthetics of tradition then I would consider it to be removed from Lithuanian culture to some extent as well. “Out of context,” such works can be viewed as not, or perhaps as only partially, representative of a nation as defined by its culture and traditions.

At the same time, this argument also works in a reverse fashion. For example, the dismissal of Soviet-era folk pottery from my book was based on the idea that because the cultural context changed dramatically, and in this case forcibly, that the “folk pottery” made during this era could not be, or had little
chance of being, accurately representative of the nation. Furthermore, the aesthetic decline that I perceived in this period seemed to reaffirm that nationally representative pottery could not be created in a corrupted context that no longer provided cultural stability and continuity. “Aesthetic decline” was in large part measured in comparison to the stable, archetypical image of Lithuanian folk pottery that is embedded in the “aesthetics of tradition.” This should reveal how very powerful the idea of codified aesthetic features has been for my work, and how it was bound to the idea of stable contexts.

While the era of Soviet occupation might indeed represent an unstable cultural context, in truth the whole of Lithuania’s 19th to 21st century history has not provided its artisans with any great quantity of consistency, as I demonstrate in this study. Rather, dramatic shifts in economic and socio-political structure over the last century-and-a-half, which seem to be the norm in Lithuania, have created, at relatively close intervals, numerous discrete environments for the creation of ceramic art. At this juncture, one might consider that the tradition and variability premise can also be reversed and interpreted as stable expressions within variable contexts. However, individual expressions have not proved to be inherently stable in this case either. Furthermore, the relationship between stable expressions and variable contexts relies on the same subjectively placed markers between traditional and non-traditional as does the relationship between variable expressions and stable contexts. Most importantly, it is not the question of which element is stable that is problematic as much as it is the notion of
stability itself and the idea that there is a fixed point, perhaps in some binary relationship, to which cultural expression is moored.

Of course, similar relationships appeared earlier in this thesis, particularly with mention in Chapter 1 of Barre Toelken’s twin laws of folklore. These laws position the opposing forces of dynamism and conservatism within a dialectic that moves traditions adaptively through time (1996:39). Although these twin laws are reminiscent of the tradition and variability premise, Glassie’s definition is far more troublesome, in large part due to its phrasing. Glassie’s framing of the conservative element of culture as “the willing submission of individuals” suggests not the performative creation of culture but servitude to an immovable monolith, which this thesis has shown Lithuanian culture not to be. In the same vein, I find Glassie’s phrasing out of place within the context of Lithuania’s occupation for its omission of the active management of culture as a form of political resistance.

In this study, one thing that I have uncovered about Lithuanian folk pottery and its various manifestations is that in their creation, culture has been employed in different ways depending on context. Context determined if the socially-based, adaptive response (the creation of art) was more conservative or more progressive depending on what the needs of society at the moment of creation were judged to be (sometimes by individuals and sometimes by organizations and institutions). Even the emergence of applied art in Lithuania, ostensibly a rupture in the continuity of folk traditions, seems to have been a progressive, culture-oriented social response that tempered the preservation of cultural
identity with the need for modernization at a specific historical moment. Overall, the creation of culture in Lithuania appears, when viewed in its context and continuity, to have been, to a significant degree, consciously managed towards social, economic, and, perhaps most importantly, political ends. This would seem to suggest that human agency has a far more important and complex role in the creation of culture than a mere act of submission to some guiding principle located within culture.

To create a proper role for human agency and the variability of context within a reevaluation of Lithuanian folk pottery, I feel I must do away with Glassie’s tradition and variability premise. To do away with binaries altogether, even Toelken’s, is also tempting, but I think that conceptualizing the forces of conservatism and dynamism does help illustrate the alternating patterns of action and reaction that help drive culture’s evolution. However, I also feel that in establishing the relationship between the development of culture and its broader contexts as I have done in this study, that this pattern of conservatism and dynamism, action and reaction, must be fit into a broader network of interactions. Towards this end, the present study has forced me to reevaluate my own operative model of culture.

In his 1973 essay, *The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man*, Clifford Geertz argues that there was not a “critical point” in the evolution of human beings when they became capable of developing and retaining culture. Instead, Geertz argues, man evolved as a biological and intellectual being in tandem with culture (1973:46-9). This means, essentially, that the incremental
creation of culture, such as tools and language, created greater capacities and necessities for change within environments that humans were shaping through their culture (Geertz 1973:46-9). Between humans and culture, there is no first in this reciprocal process of creation. Likewise, there is, according to Geertz, no human nature outside of culture (1973:49).

Most interesting for me is the idea, expressed in Geertz’s reciprocal model and also stated explicitly by him, that culture is created through adaptive response, just as the human being is (1973:46). Interestingly, something of this idea is captured in the following statements made by Mindaugas Navakas regarding the management of culture in the Soviet Union:

… look at this, let’s say the USSR is a huge country, yes? For instance, let’s take the middle-Asia: Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, etc. That was a completely different culture, this culture was based on Muslim religion, the clothes and everything, the habits were completely different. They were dressing all the time through this Soviet period in their national dress with this stupid tikka and this khalat and this just completely, ninety percent of the population, what to do with them, say “hey guys, quit this khalat and put on these suits?” Wow, in the heat of thirty-five degrees [Celsius]! When it’s 35 it’s usual, but in the 40s, are you crazy? They needed this cotton, they were only cotton growers there, with their national costumes that are fitted to temperature, to the heat, and they were picking the cotton. (Interview by the author, 2015)

What Navakas illustrates here, in his typically brusque fashion, are two important points. First, in accord with Geertz, Navakas implicitly suggests that culture is an adaptive response. In this case, the khalat is an adaptive response...
to the physical environment. Interestingly, while other factors such as aesthetic sensibilities also gave rise to the *khalat*, I believe that these, to some extent, can also be seen as formulated responses. Indeed, the idea of codified cultural aesthetics and geo-cultural specificity, which I believe have a great deal of legitimacy, must, by their nature, account for the particularities of unique environments. Certainly, Lithuanian folk pottery is not dissimilar. Lithuanian folk pottery was a response to environment in two central ways: 1) What food could be grown in the area determined what sorts of vessels were needed to convey it to human beings. 2) What materials the environment provided to make the pots also shaped the tradition. Then, again, other factors such as aesthetic sensibilities shaped the pottery tradition as well and I make the case for their relationship to place in my book. Admittedly, in my discussion of the relationship between aesthetic sensibilities and place, I focused primarily on the relationship between aesthetics and landscape. But environment, as I have shown in this study, is far more comprehensive. This brings us to Navakas’ second implied assertion, that culture is a product of context.

In his article, aptly titled *Context*, Dan Ben-Amos offers an all-encompassing, *Alighieri*an definition of cultural context as “the broadest contextual circle, which embraces all possible contexts” (1993:216). Ben-Amos’ statement is suggestive of the web-based model of culture provided by Geertz (1973:5), in which culture comprises all of the elements, contexts, and interactions between them that shape human beings. In this model, political and economic contexts (as well as so many other factors) are woven into the web of
cultural context, just as I have shown them to be in the case of Lithuanian folk pottery.

In a definition complementary to that offered by Ben-Amos, Mary Hufford describes context as “a historically contingent framework that we generate, shape, contest, and critique through our cultural productions” (2003:168). This definition is suggestive of Geertz’s reciprocal model for the simultaneous creation of culture and human beings. Both definitions (Ben-Amos’ and Hufford’s) work symbiotically and apply here as people both respond to and, through their responses, also shape their environment and culture in a relationship that is interdependent and dynamic.

At the end of this study, blending these two models, the web-based model and the reciprocal model, into a ecological model of culture, has become a necessity for conceptualizing, understanding, and accommodating the phenomenon of Lithuanian folk pottery. This is Lithuanian folk pottery in its reevaluated form as a structured adaptive response, influenced by many factors, all of which can be considered elements of culture and context and which evidence change. This is also Lithuanian folk pottery in its many guises, rather than as a singular expression of an essential Lithuanian-ness that is confined to temporal and aesthetic borders and that seems to collapse with change.

In this ecological model of culture that I am endorsing, by extending cultural context to increasingly greater extents that include physical, economic, political, and social environments in an interconnected web, it becomes conceptually easier to accommodate any culture’s inherent pluralism. If, for
example, Jews and Germans constitute part of the cultural context that shaped Lithuanian folk pottery, then it behooves one to retreat from notions of pure culture that limit the understanding of any given cultural phenomenon. In this model, it becomes more obvious that to seek purity for a tradition that emerged from such an environment is to artificially isolate it and to obscure the “precise, complex, concrete images” that “[w]e need now more than ever… if we are to occupy this planet as a species” (Van Maanen 2011:126). Additionally, the ecological model of culture I am endorsing helps conceptualize and accommodate the changing nature of culture and cultural expression.

As I have shown in the case of Lithuanian folk pottery, both contexts and material culture changed dramatically over the course of the last 150 years. Both of these dimensions of culture changed because they are interconnected, as I would argue is the case for all elements in the reciprocal and web-based, ecological model of culture. If any element in the web-based model changes then we must assume that all have the capacity for change, although they may do so at different times and different speeds. In the case of the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, the political context changed abruptly but the reorganization of the state was not instantaneous. Consequently, it took time and a series of gradual steps for political authority to work its way to an impact upon material culture. Or take for example the unequal spread of collectivization, hampered by poor soils in certain regions of Lithuania, which left a number of local traditions intact for longer periods of time than in other regions that changed more rapidly. Rates of change range from the more rapid, observable changes that appear to be
dramatic ruptures and the more gradual changes that, perhaps being barely perceivable, appear to be continuities.

Incorporating a network of changing or even volatile economic, social, political environments into our understanding of cultural context helps pinpoint those factors of cultural production that are less susceptible to accelerated change and are suggestive of stability. As argued at the conclusion of Chapter 4, the essence of the Lithuanian ceramic tradition lies in the motivation towards and consistent pattern of how artists of common heritage respond to external, economic and socio-political circumstances. These patterns, as Geertz would likely agree, to some degree structure the creation of culture. Whatever lies at the root of these patterns of response, they clearly change less rapidly than the external, physical forms that the responses take. In this there is a separation of aesthetics, which can change more quickly (even from one pot to another) from more intrinsic, or “foundational,” aspects of culture, such as the meaning of a set of symbols.

As mentioned earlier, I long took aesthetic codification as the very substance of national identity. This was far easier when I reduced Lithuanian folk pottery to a manicured representation of “authenticity” that was, in turn, confined to rather limited temporal borders. But aesthetic dogma does not hold up so well when the definition of folk pottery is expanded to include its tributaries of influences and its evolution over time. As a case-in point, with the increased diversity in pottery production in Lithuania today, it becomes harder to bind folk pottery and folk potters together stylistically. Indeed, grouped together, the three
potters introduced in the previous chapter do not easily coalesce into a uniform *image* of tradition. But here I must return to a theme introduced earlier and repeated intermittently throughout this paper and to now, at least for the purposes of this investigation, more explicitly advocate for the separation of an image of tradition from its foundations.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the designers of the Grand Dukes’ Palace did everything in their power to recreate the façade of the “authentic” 18th century palace. At the same time, the Palace’s conceptual, not to mention technical, cultural, political, and economic, underpinnings were questionable. Conversely, what binds folk potters of the 19th to 21st centuries and mid-20th century applied artists together is less the external image and more the essential forms of these same underpinnings.34

In the search for authentic Lithuanian folk pottery that I undertook in my book, it is now clear that I was, in many respects and to some extent to my own disadvantage, primarily concerned with image. Indeed, I have consistently located authenticity within the codified aesthetic vocabulary of Lithuanian folk pottery and gone to lengths, both in my book and even in this thesis, to analyze, justify, or dismiss deviations from it. In the interwar era, the major deviations from “the authentic” were the interchangeability of aesthetic borrowings from different media and the visual evolution of forms and ornaments occurring as folk and applied art mixed. In examining the Soviet era I contended with the ambiguous ideological war raging underneath of national iconography and the seeming aesthetic decline of expanded-production folk pottery. In contemporary folk
pottery it is the over-assertion of the creative spirit and ever-greater deviations from traditional aesthetics that I felt must be explained in relation to what was “authentic.” But what one can learn from potters in each of these eras, as they struggled to adapt and to preserve their identities in an ever-evolving and shifting world, is that it was not the outward image that bound them together. Rather, the necessity and the nature of their responses to shared socio-cultural and economic circumstances (similar limitations, opportunities, demands, markets, etc.) is what linked communities of artisans and their respective epochs together to create a variegated “national art.”

It is perhaps possible and helpful to conceptualize these underpinnings as the “backspaces” of culture and the exterior images as the “frontspaces.” As argued earlier, both of these spaces inform us about culture and so it is impossible to distinguish one as authentic and the other as inauthentic, real or fake. Instead, it is only possible to think of temporality, the fleeting moments in which a context may appear stable, of precedents, which cannot be taken for granted as uncorrupted expressions, and of consistency, those features, often deep-seated, which are more steadfast underneath of surfaces that shift and morph more rapidly.

In retrospect, it was vastly difficult for me to deconstruct the often misleading relationship between the image and its foundations in culture, in part because of my formal training as an artist and my predominating fixation with outward manifestations. Indeed, I was trained to analyze the image and to extrapolate from it in interpreting the dynamics and phenomena linked to its
creation and appearance. (I was also trained to express my biases in provocative ways rather than to subdue them!). One of my realizations in writing the current thesis is that folklore, for the most part, proceeds in an entirely different direction, not backwards from the image, but forwards from the starting points of fieldwork and theoretical frameworks. It is possible to utilize both, as I have unwittingly done in this study, and the possibility of reaching a common ground from two opposite directions is exciting and promising territory. But there must be balance, for art is an artifice and never a surrogate for its maker, while as a folklorist it is the makers that I have elected to study and represent.

In studying makers, there are two important advantages of working forward from fieldwork instead of backward from the image. First, fieldwork is immersive, both forcing and requiring a computation of the contexts (the ecology) in which an object is made. As I have demonstrated in this study, through my analysis of economic, social, and political circumstances and their role in cultural context, context is of the utmost importance for understanding the relationships between place, makers, and objects. Second, fieldwork is in part a process of collecting the voices of one’s subjects. This is important for two reasons. First, without voice, any judgment made by a foreign researcher will inevitably rely too heavily on a set of ethnocentric biases. How could I, for example, make an accurate judgment about what constitutes an aesthetic decline that indicates the condition of a Lithuanian tradition without prioritizing aesthetic judgments formed in an American context and relying on American sensibilities? This is why, in this study, I did such things as to design an image-based test for interviewees that
allowed me to better assess the subject’s aesthetic preferences and judgments. Indeed, this allowed me to incorporate both the relationship to the image that my interviewees and I share as artists and their own voices. This, perhaps, is indicative of the kind of hybrid approach that I have begun here and may continue to utilize as a hybrid folklorist who is not merely doing research but also building a community of artists. Second, without voice, the Lithuanian story cannot be told because the objects about which I speak are dead history, given life by folklore and fieldwork. This is folklore’s advantage and its power, something I have only realized in bringing my study of Lithuanian folk pottery into the present day, that folklore is history, it is the past, with a voice in the present.
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INTERVIEWS


The literal translation of the Lithuanian text “Praetis Atvirta Ateičiai” would be “The Past is Open to the People of the Future.”

It is interesting here to reflect on the outward image of the Palace as a publicly available image and its privatized inner structure as analogous to the concept of engrams and exograms as forms of internal (individual) and external (social) memory (Welzer 2010: 289).

Leaven-firing is regarded as a medieval firing technique. Pots are removed from the kiln at maximum temperature (approximately 940° C) and dipped into a soupy mixture of water and spoiled organic matter (flour, yeast, vegetable matter, etc). This leaven material burns on the surface of the hot pot helping to seal its pores and creating unique burn patterns on the pot’s surface that are semi-permanent.

Cultural studies researcher Eglė Rindzevičiūtė first mentions the attempt to remarry the image, or the cultural symbol, and its “authentic” foundations in her discussion of the reconstructed Grand Dukes’ Palace, which takes this task on in both literal and figurative terms.

Sgraffito is the process of scratching through one layer of clay (slip or engobe) to reveal another layer of color beneath.

Engobe is typically a slightly vitreous, decorative clay slip (clay watered down to the consistency of paint) that is used on top of the structural clay body to hide its color.

Faience typically refers to European imitation porcelain, meaning polychromatic glazes on backgrounds of white clay or white glaze.

The term “subsistence pottery” indicates two things. First, subsistence pottery making implies the manufacture of pottery to satisfy immediate needs as opposed to the creation of a marketable surplus. Second, subsistence pottery making is a type of manufacture generally characterized by its lack of equipment and material intensiveness. Largely done by women producing cookware as a domestic chore, this kind of pottery production continued in Lithuania until the 20th century in those areas where the relevant economic circumstances persisted and the practice endured. An example of subsistence pottery is shown below in image #45.
9 The process of formulating a national vocabulary was revisionist: it gave the aesthetics that emerged out of a conflation of cosmopolitan influences a nationalist orientation by assimilating them and endowing them with particularities. This process, quite conspicuous in Lithuanian folk pottery is similar to the one turning the Grand Dukes’ Palace and the Potter’s Guild, which were also amalgams of multicultural influences, into icons of national heritage.

10 However, it is debatable which of the two kinds of invented traditions described by Hosbawm most accurately characterizes Lithuanian folk pottery.

11 Here I use “revisionary interventions” as a euphemism for invented tradition because they both seek to create and/or stabilize fictional or semi-fictional accounts of the past.

12 Signed, likely in abbreviated form, as Tasźcki, the signing of pots was a practice of no other known potter from his time.

13 Production potters, specifically those who worked on the potter’s wheel, were traditionally male in Lithuania. Only in the mid-20th century do female throwers appear.

14 Intertextuality, a term coined by Julia Kristeva, refers to the notion that all literary production takes place in the presence of other texts and that conventional ideas of authorship must account for this interaction. I find this term convenient for describing the interrelations, specifically the traceable exchanges of respective decorative traits, between such forms of Lithuanian folk art as Easter eggs, pottery, textiles, and wood.

15 Cooperatives were a cornerstone of Lithuanian economic reconstruction. Providing employment, in many cases to people put out of work by the modernization of agriculture, was a major objective in establishing textile production and offering weaving courses at Marginiai.
16 Vilnius possessed an art school within Vilnius University but it was occupied by Poland from 1919 until 1939.

17 It is interesting to note that the emergence of professional, academically trained ceramic artists would lead to a lasting hierarchy in which folk artists were subjugated, despite the similarity of their works and their exchange of influence at this time.

18 It is worth noting, however, that it was not the knowledge of subsistence pottery making that disappeared but the practice, a demonstration of which Kudirka documented in the 1960s. Still, subsistence pottery production did, in effect, vanish.

19 These forms of Lithuanian folk pottery displaced by factory-national would continue but, it appears, to no large degree.

20 Admittedly, ideology is almost always present, whether it be communist, capitalist, modernist, etc. And it is debatable how much any of these ideologies are voluntarily assumed within any given system. It is difficult, however, to not distinguish between ideologies that gradually permeate a given system as it evolves and those ideologies accompanied by dramatic and accelerated ruptures and/or intimidation.

21 “Applied art” generally refers to the application of design and decoration to useful objects to make them aesthetically pleasing. The term also infers a distinction from traditional craft (so that it includes such genres as industrial and graphic design). Applied art also infers a distinction from fine art, which typically de-emphasizes or avoids utilitarian function and foregrounds a work’s intellectual, conceptual, or expressive features as its primary meaning. Applied art in Lithuania was a product made in studios with academic or factory affiliations by academically trained artists who claimed authorship for unique works and signature styles. Although there is arguably a blurry theoretical separation between folk, applied, and fine art, these criteria for applied art seem to do justice to popular perception of these categories in Lithuania.

22 Pranas Brazdžius was teaching there from the department’s establishment in the late 1920s until Strolis took over.

23 As an example of its ambiguity, Soviet socialist realism is not entirely distinct from the works of social realism that the Works Progress Administration sponsored in Depression-era America, and this again emphasizes that context is a determining factor of meaning.

24 This type of education seems increasingly common during the Soviet era.
As part of my research on contemporary folk pottery, I assembled a series of images that, in my opinion, represented what I considered to be the temporal, stylistic, and cultural range of Lithuanian folk pottery. These images were shown to interviewees as I sought their opinions about the age, origin, and style of any given pot. This test, for which there is no precedent known to me, helped me to assess how similar the interviewee’s perception and sense of Lithuanian folk pottery was to my own and where I might gain insight, find agreement, and also disagreement.

The surname Bodendorf was adapted to Lithuanian as Bodendorfas.

Of course, while most Lithuanian folk pottery of the late 19th and early 20th centuries is loose in its style, this was not absolute. As already pointed out, the work of Napoleonas Taseckis’ was exceptionally pedantic. Interestingly, Gudžius freely pointed to Taseckis’ work as not in total accord with the aesthetics of tradition.

All three artists are also similar in that out of economic necessity they diversified their production to include non-certified products, namely souvenirs and various forms of contemporary tableware.

The head of the National Artist’s Union is a member of the Ministry of Agriculture’s review committee for authenticity.

I have borrowed the word “autenticissimo” from an article by Christi na Veiders titled “Italy’s Year of ‘Autenticissimo’.” This article details how producers of “authentic” Italian foods used labels of authenticity to support their businesses and protect Italian heritage. The program is part of an EU-wide initiative developed under the auspices of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) to protect heritage and commerce from imitation products (Veiders 2015; Serra 2007).

This percentage is quantitative, meaning that it is determined by the number of pieces regardless of their size. Vygantas Vasaitis, for example, will include a numerical majority of certified works in his public displays that are quite small in size, allowing him to include non-certified works that are more substantial in size and price. For Vasaitis, this helps to solve the problem of diversifying inventory (Interview, 2015).

Tikka most likely refers to a type of jewelry or banding worn on the head.

A khalat is a loose, long-sleeved robe typically worn in parts of Central Asia and the Middle East.
Vygantas Vasaitis' kidsware is an excellent example of fundamental similarities, for it continues an important facet of 19th and 20th folk pottery creation but its outward appearance is substantially different.