

KAUR ALTTOA 70

One of Estonia's finest medieval architecture scholars and pedagogues, and students of art historian Villem Raam is turning 70! It's no surprise that this fact motivates one to reflect and inspires the person's colleagues to celebrate the jubilee by publishing a special issue in his honour. In which, we will also find an article by Kaur – as he is generally known to his Estonian history and art history colleagues. In the case of the *Baltic Journal of Art History*, this is no surprise; because Kaur was one of the founders of this periodical, which saw the light of day in 2009 and the 13th edition of which has now been published. Whereas, he is also its most prolific author! The focus of Kaur Alttoa's research has been the Middle Ages, an era that was as harsh and real, as it was poetically romantic. In the same way, Kaur knows how to be encouraging and charming, and if need be, critically forthright. Through his years at the university, he has surprised his listeners time and again by highlighting the richness, contradictions and beauty of the medieval world.

Kaur has earned a place in the art and architectural history of the Baltic Sea countries. His circle of colleagues includes art historians from Germany, Finland, Sweden, and further afield. When the time was ripe, he used the opportunity to make research trips to the Rhineland, Westphalia and Gotland, and after a long time, to be one of the first Estonian art historians who had the chance to see the points of departure and models for the medieval architecture in Livonia. Kaur's residence and fortress is his father's, Professor Villem Alttoa's, house in Tähtvere district in Tartu. There quite a few researchers have gotten their first introduction to medieval art, surrounded by their mentor's unfiltered cigarette smoke.

With the red brick walls of the Tartu Cathedral and St John's Church before his eyes, Kaur has travelled far and wide. Aspiring toward his dreams, leaving behind his marks, the reading of which will continue for years and decades to come. The first achievements of Alttoa's research were related to the Västseliina Castle, which was the subject of his diploma thesis, and in which he presented positions that provide a solid basis for today's researchers. This was followed by papers on a wide variety of subjects: the houses of worship in South- and North-Estonia, the churches in Saaremaa, the Riga Cathedral, the castles of the Teutonic Order in Viljandi, Rakvere, etc. Alttoa has also penned a monograph on one of the most interesting sacral buildings in the Baltic countries – Tartu's St John's Church – and its terracotta sculptures. His wife Eve Alttoa, who is a historian and conservator, helped him with the research for this project. Livonia's largest cathedral, which is located in Tartu, was the subject of his first, and also one of his latest studies, which he is currently working on. In the course of listing Kaur's research topics, one is struck by their wide scope and his dedication to his subject.

Alttoa's work has been recognised with a Mare Balticum medal, as well as the Ervin Püttsepp prize and the Villem Raam award. It is difficult to find an object or subject related to Estonia's early architectural history about which Kaur has no opinion. With his feet firmly planted on the ground, as an art historian who started his career at the Architectural Conservation Institute in Tallinn, his gaze has been directed throughout time on construction elements – on walls and boreholes, which give his research a characteristic depth and factual basis. Along with a pen and camera, Kaur's everyday tools are the requisite square and compass.

Kaur's closest colleagues are both – archaeologists and historians. Thus, it is no wonder that this issue of the *Baltic Journal of Art History* presents different viewpoints on archaeology, or more precisely architectural (building) archaeology. In this field of study as well, Kaur assumes the role of a kind of patriarch. The contributors to this issue include Anti Selart, Andres Tvauri, Alar Läänelaid, Aivar Kriiska, Juho Kirs, Lennart Maala, Ain Mäesalu, Heiki Valk as well as the topics in conservation history by Kurmo Konsa and art history by Reet Pius, Jaanika Anderson, and Kadri Asmer. In addition to his University of Tartu colleagues, Kaur's old friend Markus Hiekkanen from Finland and Hilkka Hiiop from the Estonian

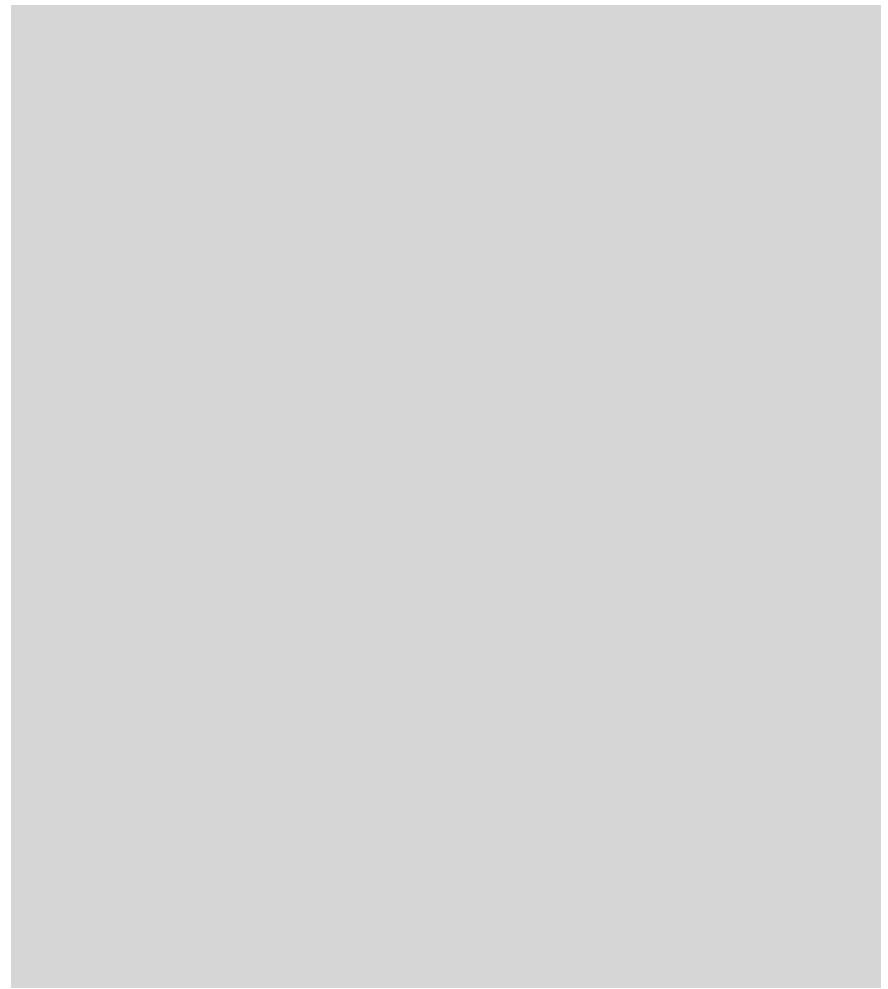


Fig. 1. Kaur Alttoa speaking in the White Hall of the University of Tartu Museum (15 September 2006). Photo: Andres Tennus, University of Tartu.

Academy of Arts have also made their contribution. The last article in this issue by Anu Raudsepp is dedicated to Eduard Wiiralt, Estonia's greatest artist, which in a way, makes a symbolic reference to one facet of the jubilarian's life's work, by expressing the other side of Kaur's personality, its alter ego, if you will, that has mostly remained in the shadows – his interest in Estonian art, the Pallas Art School in interwar Tartu, the Visarid artists' group around 1970, contemporary art theory and cultural policy, and more broadly, the heritage conservation related thereto. In addition to his work at the

University of Tartu, Kaur has also been a long-time faculty member of the Estonian Academy of Arts, where his lectures start from the beginning and end with the Impressionists and 20th century art.

Ot bizona do Barbizona (in English, from bisons to the Barbizon school) is how Kaur, slightly ironically, has used this Russian expression to describe his lecture course. But he is truly a man whom fate has granted many lives. A talented young man crowned with the halo of dissidence, whose home became the meeting place for freethinkers and patriots during complicated time, and who became the head of the Department of Art History at the university after the Singing Revolution in the late 1980s. Kaur Alttoa's subject is the past and memory. Even more – Kaur is memory. And when listening to him we recall the things of art (in Italian, *le cose dell'arte*) as well as times in general in the broader sense and how things have changed in time. Along with great ideas and metaphysics, our jubilarian is more interested in the "things themselves", which according to Aristotle are not the source of our world, but it is still sufficiently important to write about the distinction between "heavenly and earthly nature" – be it in the form of a living plant or a lifeless stone. In Alttoa's world, stones live their own special and somewhat mysterious lives, which may even sometimes be known only to Kaur.

In the name of his colleagues,

Anti Selart, Head of the Institute of History and Archaeology,
University of Tartu

Juhan Maiste, Head of the Department of Art History, University
of Tartu