

INTRODUCTION

Revisiting the Studies on Art History by Jurgis Baltrušaitis

ODETA ŽUKAUSKIENĖ

Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas
odeta.zukauskiene@lkti.lt

The distinguished Lithuanian art historian and cultural scholar Jurgis Baltrušaitis (1903–1988), having spent most of his life in France, worked on a great variety of research topics. His interests ranged from the morphology of Romanesque sculpture to anamorphoses, from Southern Caucasus art to various peregrinations of art motifs from East to West, from fantastic images in medieval culture to aberrations and depravations of vision, and much more.

Today, Baltrušaitis's name is primarily associated with the studies of the fantastic in the Middle Ages, anamorphoses, and aberrations. His books have attracted the attention of scholars and artists from various fields. However, it must be admitted that despite his popularity, Baltrušaitis occupies a modest place in the annals of art history. It may be because for many years he was an independent art historian, unaffiliated with any institution. He was regarded in France mainly as an original representative of the Henri Focillon's school. In Lithuania his books, written in French, were not officially available during the Soviet occupation, and are not yet sufficiently appreciated. Moreover, his eminence here is overshadowed by the

creative legacy of his father, the symbolist poet Jurgis Baltrušaitis (1873–1944).

This volume comprises the proceedings of the international conference “Jurgis Baltrušaitis 120: The Fluidity of Art History and Imagination,” which was organized by the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute and held in Vilnius in 2023.¹ The event was designed to mark the 120th anniversary of the birth of the junior Baltrušaitis in order to reflect on the uniqueness of his scientific legacy, central research areas, methods, and multifaceted cultural contexts. The conference was also accompanied by another significant commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the birth of the senior Baltrušaitis, encouraging parallels between the two prominent cultural figures.

The conference focused on fluidity. Baltrušaitis (Jr.) did not use the concept in his works; therefore, he studied the fluid borders of medieval art, the endless movements, continuities, and fluxes of art forms in the cultural imaginary, and the plastic “flux” of anamorphic images, which requires both the

¹ *Jurgis Baltrušaitis 120: The Fluidity of Art History and Imagination*: conference abstract book, ed. by O. Žukauskiene. Vilnius: Lithuanian Culture Research Institute, 2023.



1. The Baltrušaitis family in Rimini around 1905.
Family archives



2. Jurgis Baltrušaitis Sr. and Gordon Craig in
Alasio, 1911. Family archives

viewer to set themselves in motion, displace their point of view, and to look for new perspectives of vision. Baltrušaitis explored the movement of images and motifs in different periods, tracing the destiny of artistic creations in different civilizations, their survival and metamorphosis. His works reveal that art forms are fluid – they ignore the boundaries of artistic styles, flowing across cultural boundaries, between center and periphery, and their meaning is formed in the dynamic interaction of order and disorder, rationality and irrationality, reality and imagination. It is worth recognizing that Baltrušaitis's insights into art history closely interacted with the artistic and cultural phenomena of his time, which also moved art history itself and encouraged it to go beyond defined boundaries.

Cross-Cultural Path of Life and Cross-Cultural Approach

Several stages can be distinguished in Baltrušaitis's life. His intellectual biography reflects the painful historical events of the 20th century and connects different cultural contexts (the years spent in the Russian Empire, Lithuania, and France have had a profound impact on his worldview) that fostered a unique experience of art. He was born in Moscow in the family of Lithuanian poet and diplomat Jurgis Baltrušaitis. His mother Maria Olovianichnikoff was from a well-known Russian family of industrial entrepreneurs and art patrons (fig. 1). His father's friends were representatives of Russia's Silver Age culture (1890–1917) and outstanding artists, writers, philosophers,

and musicians who created the milieu that developed his sensibility in art. His father had befriended and collaborated with prominent theater reformers, including Vsevolod Meyerhold and Edward Gordon Craig, who paid great attention not only to new acting and staging methods, actor training methodologies and body movement scenarios, but also to scenography and theater decorations (fig. 2).² In one interview, contemplating the beginnings of his intellectual path, Baltrušaitis admitted: “Perhaps I was influenced by Edward Gordon Craig, who was a friend of my father. When I was a child, he would show me his models built with hinged screens, and I was fascinated by them.”³

After graduating from the German School in Moscow in 1923, Baltrušaitis initially chose to study in Heidelberg, but in 1924 he arrived in Paris. It was no coincidence that the French Ambassador to Lithuania Alix Everard, in her opening speech at the conference, reminded us that Baltrušaitis came to Paris as if “by mistake,” driven by the desire to study scenography and the history of medieval theater, but a fateful meeting with Henri Focillon, a leading figure in art history and aesthetics in

France of his time, directed Baltrušaitis toward medieval art studies; thus, Baltrušaitis began his career as a medievalist after writing his first essay on “ornamental gesture.”

In 1924, having started leading the Institut d’Art et d’Archéologie at Sorbonne, Focillon, as a representative of Aesthetic Formalism and an art history professor at Collège de France, gathered students to study the art of the West in the Middle Ages and directed their attention to a concrete region (Mozarabic Spain, Ottonian Germany, Celtic Ireland, Caucasus etc.). He was attempting to investigate the origins of Western civilization and to define the “preliminary experiences” that were integrated into the peculiar structures of Western art (fig. 3).

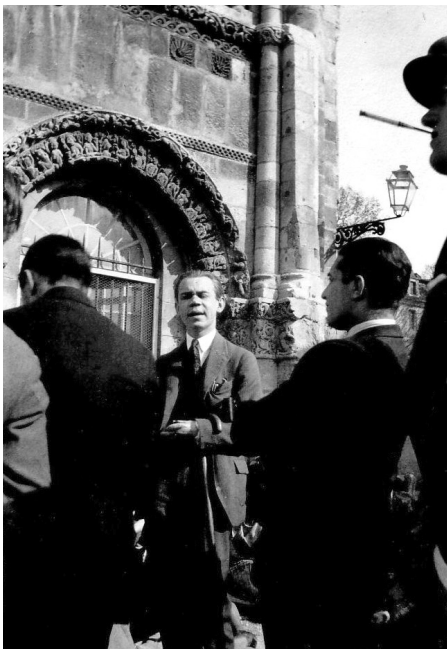
Focillon’s works on aesthetics outlined a theoretical direction. His widely read book *Vie des forms* (1934) focused attention on the morphological nature and anthropological foundation of art. Despite the obvious connections with the traditional concepts of the development of art styles, his theory showed that “forms are alive” and various time rhythms pulsate in the “life of forms.” And in this book he already referred to Baltrušaitis’s brilliant studies on the stylistic ornamentation in Romanesque sculpture, stating that “ornament is a speculation on the great power of the abstract and on the infinite resources of the imaginary.”⁴

In another fundamental book *Art d’Occident: Le Moyen Age roman et gothique* (1938), summarizing historical research, Focillon rejected a linear concept of historical development and introduced a complex

2 In the late 1930s, Soviet agents arrested and killed many talented creators of modern culture who dared to oppose the introduction of social realism, including the experimental theater artist and director Meyerhold. The young Baltrušaitis learned about those events directly from his father, for whom these were the most difficult years of his diplomatic service. These events were painful and were not an easy topic for discussion or recollection.

3 *Une poétique de l’aberration*. Entretien avec Jurgis Baltrušaitis. Interview by Jean Louis Gaillemain, *CLEFS*, No. 2, Février-Mars, 1978, p. 40. My translation into English.

4 Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art*. Translated by George Kubler. New York: Zone books, 1989, p. 68.



3. Jurgis Baltrušaitis Jr. on expeditions with a group of Focillon students. Family archives

concept of time as a layering of geological strata. He argued that history is made up of driving forces, traditions, influences, and experiences, thus underlining the universality of medieval culture: “The historical substance from which its art was created was an amalgam of great richness, combining within itself the debris of classical antiquity, the vestiges of barbarian cultures, and the contributions of the East.”⁵ In other words, a universality determined by the process of fusions and influences.

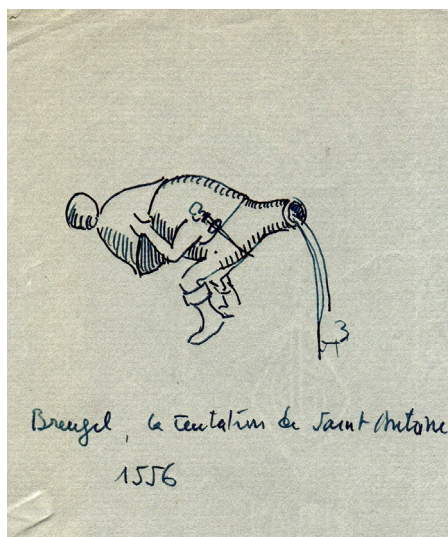
Focillon encouraged Baltrušaitis and other pupils from various countries (including Fraçoise Henry, Geneviève Marsh-Micheli, Charles Sterling, Louis Grodecki,

and others) to study, through formal and comparative aspects, the complex processes of how art forms interact in the Romanesque and Gothic periods. He not only summarized the works of young scholars, but also experienced their impact. Baltrušaitis was one of those whose research, developed in parallel, contributed to the development of the master’s ideas. His early works were devoted to the morphology of Romanesque sculpture; later, by exploring the survivals and revivals of fantastic motifs in the late Gothic, Baltrušaitis gradually established a more structural approach and created a distinctly original system for interpreting art, where not only his drawings, made by hand, but also a wealth of carefully selected visual materials informed his unique art history narratives (fig. 4).

⁵ Henri Focillon, *The Art of the West in the Middle Ages*. Ed. by J. Bony, transl. D. King. London: Phaidon, 1963, p. 6.

Johan Jakob Tikkanen (Helsinki), Adolf Goldschmidt (Berlin), Heinrich Wölfflin (Munich), Osvald Sirén (Stockholm), Ewert H. G. Wrangel (Lund), and, later, Josef Strzygowsky (Vienna).⁷ The one appointed to the position was the Swede Helge Kjellin, who focused his research on the Northern Baltic region. In Latvia, the (Baltic) German tradition had been around for longer.⁸ Due to historical circumstances, Polish and Russian historiography had a greater influence in Lithuania, but the interwar period provided an opportunity to develop closer ties with France, and Baltrušaitis became a bridge person.

Having spent several years in Kaunas, Baltrušaitis curated Lithuania's presentation at the exhibition of Baltic Folk Art in Paris in 1935. On this occasion, a catalogue of the exhibition was published, prefaced by Focillon.⁹ While presenting the exhibits, Baltrušaitis reviewed Lithuania's history, revising its links with Eastern and Western countries. In the study of folk art, he highlighted the frontier-like character of Lithuania as a Western civilization, and as a



5. Jurgis Baltrušaitis's drawing for the studies of *The Fantastic Middle Ages*. Detail of *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (1556) after Pieter Bruegel The Elder.

medievalist emphasized the echoes, the remains of Western medieval art in the work of local artisans. However, Baltrušaitis did not study Lithuanian art to remain on the sidelines of the development of national art history. Therefore, his research conducted in France has not received much reception in Lithuania, which strived to consolidate its cultural identity during the interwar period. Later, during the Soviet occupation, his books were locked up in special funds and were accessible only to a narrow circle of readers. As a result, Baltrušaitis remained quite an enigmatic art historian.

Baltrušaitis moved from Kaunas to Paris in 1939, before the Soviets annexed Lithuania, and had remained in France ever since without seeing Lithuania's independence restored in 1990 – an aspiration to which he had contributed through his diplomatic activities. As a cultural attaché

7 This is revealed through archival research by Eero Kangor. For more, see: Odetta Žukauskienė, *Landmarks of Art History*: conference review. International Conference dedicated to the 200th anniversary of the delivery of the first art-historical lecture at Vilnius University, Kaunas, 2010. *Kunst-texte*, No. 1, 2011, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.48633/ksttx.2011.1.87997>

8 Krista Kodres, "Two Art Histories: The (Baltic) German and Estonian Versions of the History of Estonian Art," in *History of Art History in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe*. Vol. 23. Ed. by Jerzy Malinowski. Torun: Tako, 2012, p. 67.

9 *Guide de l'exposition d'Art populaire baltique: Estonie, Lettonie, Lituanie*. Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro, 1935.



6. Jurgis Baltrušaitis in conversation with André Chastel, villa Virginie (rue du XIV^e arrondissement).

and advisor to the Lithuanian government in exile, he participated in the Lithuanian political struggle for independence, but in his scholarly works he always remained independent of all political and intellectual movements.

Baltrušaitis published his masterwork *Le Moyen âge fantastique* in 1955. André Chastel, trained under Focillon, in *Le Monde* wrote on that occasion: “The Fantastic Middle Ages can be characterized as the first collection of large scale analysis, in which the fabulous and monstrous funds of medieval imagination and the reveries of all times had been revived.”¹⁰ His innovative work on the fantastic was an attempt to reveal the margins of the Gothic, where the Romanesque world of bizarre creatures persisted and paved the way for a new influx of exotic forms (fig. 6).

It should also be noted that in the 1940s, Baltrušaitis established contacts with representatives of the Aby Warburg Institute. In his works, *survival* became an important methodological tool connected not only to Focillon’s works (which ignored Warburg’s ideas¹¹) but also to members of The Courtauld Institute of Art. In his investigations of the survivals of fantastic creatures in *Le Moyen Age Fantastique*, Baltrušaitis referred to the scholars of antiquity survivals, among whom were Fritz Saxl, Erwin Panofsky, and Jean Seznec. Baltrušaitis used another concept characteristic of Warburg’s tradition, *anachronism*, understood in terms of non-linear time and heterogeneous temporality. It highlighted the recursive nature of imagery and helped Baltrušaitis further explore the afterlife of fantastic forms in the beautifully illustrated book *Réveil et Prodiges* (1960).

10 André Chastel, “Orient–Occident au Moyen Age,” *Le Monde*, 18 Novembre 1955, p. 8. My translation into English.

11 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant le temps. Histoire de l’art et anachronisme des images*. Paris: Minuit, 2000, p. 81.

In his series dedicated to “depraved perspectives,” Baltrušaitis turned his scholarship to a study of anamorphoses and aberrations. Interested in the surrealist movement, he began to explore anamorphosis, which he described as “a projection of forms outside their visible limits, a distortion of an image in such a way that it can be viewed in its correct form from a particular point. The method is established as a technical curiosity, but it contains the poetics of abstraction, the powerful mechanism of optical illusion, and the philosophy of artificial reality.”¹² The book *Anamorphoses* received wide acclaim and incited a vast exposition organized by the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.¹³ This transdisciplinary study of anamorphic images still inspires both research and artistic work.

His triptych (*Anamorphoses*, *Aberrations*, *La Quête d’Isis*) formed a coherent body of work considering visual phenomena that superimpose visions onto reality, thus entering the field of anthropology of the imagination. According to Baltrušaitis, aberrations are positive delusions of vision leading a viewer down poetic paths. His books about the legend of form, and myth were crowned by *Le Mirror*. Summing up his research, the author said:

I do think that the mirror transfigures the things, but it is more than the trans-

figuration of reality and it extends into the transfiguration of thought and spirit. I was interested especially in these creative transfigurations. Everything I did since the *Anamorphoses* was the history of aberrations, curiosities, mistakes and illusions that had generally been disregarded by leaving aside the ignored texts that I had largely used. However, these texts added a completely new light to the evolution and formation of thoughts in Western civilization.¹⁴

As an art historian who disregards disciplinary boundaries, Baltrušaitis often presented unexpected comparisons and affiliations between images. In visually eloquent books, he (re)arranged images in sequences demonstrating their connections and long-term transformations. Perhaps it could be said that he created these montages of images like an unfulfilled scenographer or cinematographer.¹⁵ His archival collection of notes draws parallels with a “cabinet of curiosities.” This, too, determined the uniqueness of his research, attracting both appreciation and criticism. At the beginning of the 21st century, when his works received greater reception, the renowned art historian Roland Recht assessed their significance as follows: “The

12 Jurgis Baltrušaitis, *Anamorphoses ou Thaumaturgus opticus*, Paris: Flammarion, 1996, p. 7. My translation into English.

13 *Anamorfosen: spel met perspectief*, Rijksmuseum, 1975–76. Later the same exposition was held in the Museum of Decorative Art in Paris (1976) and similar exhibitions were organized in various museums and galleries in the United States and Canada (1976–1980).

14 Jurgis Baltrušaitis, Christian Descamps, Jean-Paul Simon, “Conversations sur le miroir,” *Ça cinéma*, No. 17, 1979, p. 49.

15 The cinematic mode can be discerned in Baltrušaitis’s visual thinking. Philippe-Alain Michaud, in his book *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion* (trans. Sophie Hawkes. New York: Zone Books, 2004), argued that cinema has become for art historians a pertinent way to understand the temporality of images, their movements, their survivals, and the capacity for animation.

popularity of his books today is due not to their method or to their vision of art history, but to the objects they bring together. It is a reiteration of the cabinet of curiosities, the creation of an 'imagery museum.'¹⁶ In this way, he seemed to recognize the uniqueness of the scholarship and, at the same time, its peculiar incompatibility with the framework of 20th century art history.

Not Only an Art Historian?

In an interview with the creators of the film *Les Métamorphoses de Baltrušaitis* (1989),¹⁷ the filming of which took place a few weeks before Baltrušaitis passed away, the art scholar summarized his path, which began with a study of medieval monsters and ended with poetic fusions of scientific and artistic imagination. Working on the fringes of academic institutions, one might say on the margins, the explorer of imagination developed a fundamental method of study, integrated into a coherent system. He admitted that at the beginning he was guided by intuition, that disorder is no less important than order, and that apparent disorder is based on a certain order. He immersed himself in art history by studying Romanesque art, exploring the dynamic interaction of order and disorder. He explained it as follows:

Here I gradually discovered that the whole visible disorder, the moving mass, the restless spirit of Romanesque capitals obeys a perfect order. In architecture, the "law of frames" operates, from which dependent characters adapt to circles, quadrangles, etc. There is also the "law of ornament," which generates curved lines flowing out of each other, and which bases the mathematics of the geometric structure of the depicted plots. And in that world where animals and monsters are imprisoned, monsters appear in exactly this way. Gradually, everything develops, changes, until at the end of the Middle Ages then certain Romanesque principles were revived again. And then, when Gothic begins to decline and decay, the old principles return again, which lead to renewal, bringing it back.¹⁸

On the other hand, Baltrušaitis's studies of medieval art were distinguished by their focus on fantastical imagery, monsters, and exotic creatures. However, he emphasized that he was not so much interested in individual types of monsters, but in "the mechanism of how they are formed," a kind of *visionary machinery*, in which fantastic images unfold, constantly changing meaning. He explained in the same documentary: "I've always studied the rules of deformation and the deformations of the rules. I studied not the monsters, but the ways in which they were created, how they were made."¹⁹ In his later works he analyzed *the mechanism of a legend*. Therefore, his attention was focused on abstract structures in which fantastic images and fabulous illusions take shape.

16 Roland Recht, "Jurgis Baltrušaitis. Anamorphoses". Interview by Jeanette Zwingenberger, *Art Press* 13, 2009, p. 37.

17 *Les Métamorphoses de Baltrušaitis*. Documentary directed by Sandra Joxe. Written by Sandra Joxe, Jean-Claude Carrière. France, 1989, 42 min. Produced by Lezards Associes, co-produced by Musée du Louvre. Collection Entretiens du Louvre.

18 My translations of the interview excerpts from the film here and further in the text.

19 *Ibid.*

Baltrušaitis was convinced that he had succeeded in creating both a unique research method and a distinctive theory that united all his empirical research. As he put it:

When I studied different things – Isis, aberrations, anamorphoses – every time I thought that I was studying something else, I was doing it completely independently, looking only at the path that the collected material led me to. And now, at the end, at the end of my life, I suddenly noticed that it all leads to the same principles, and despite the different ways of expression, the essence remains the same. This is a kind of flexible system that shapes myths and forms, underpinning all their dynamics.

Finally, he admitted that there is something precise and mathematical, poetic and metaphysical in the legends that surrounded art forms, formal myths, and scientific discoveries. He illustrated this with Euclid's optics, the geometry of vision, and the mathematical theory of mirrors that led to scientific breakthroughs. However, a mirror, the invention of which is accompanied by completely abstract theorems, not only reflects the surface of reality, but also distorts it, creating phantasmagorias and illusions that sweep through cultural history. Baltrušaitis was interested in precisely that other, less studied but no less important, demonic side of the mirror. Here is one witty excerpt from the filmed interview:

Sandra Foxe: Is the mirror filming us here, i.e. the camera lens, also somehow devilish, in your opinion?

Jurgis Baltrušaitis: It inevitably distorts.

S. F. What?

J. B. That which films us is what creates our image. Yes, of course it is a demon, because it deforms the image. Of course it deforms us, does whatever it wants with us.²⁰

Baltrušaitis's research transcended the boundaries of art history, seemingly anticipating the emergence of transdisciplinary studies of visual culture. And he himself admitted that his works did not fit into the strict framework of discipline. When asked how he would describe himself in terms of profession, he replied: "I am not just an art historian, I am more or maybe less than that."²¹ And indeed, Baltrušaitis's works encompass the cultural and intellectual planes of history as well as the sphere of imagination, transcending the limits of art history.

Revision of Central Ideas and Dialogues

The papers published in these conference proceedings are in French and English. The first part of the volume aims to rethink Baltrušaitis's legacy by emphasizing his contributions to art history, art-historical narratives, and methodology. The art historian and art critic Jean-François Chevrier, who had been in contact with Baltrušaitis since 1981 and in 1989 published a book dedicated to him,²² acknowledges that the entire body of Baltrušaitis's works is distinguished by attention to the life of forms – the playful and enigmatic transformation of art forms,

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Jean-François Chevrier, *Portrait de Jurgis Baltrušaitis & Art sumérien, art roman par Jurgis Baltrušaitis*, Paris: Flammarion, 1989.

their mysterious internal laws and “intellectual mechanisms.” He points out that Baltrušaitis’s research into ornamental stylistics and its constructive dynamics has little-discussed links with avant-garde art and cubo-futurism (an important phase in Russia’s post-revolution avant-garde). This cohesion provides the key to a deeper understanding of his methodology and a particular focus on figurative systems and geometric distortions.

Maddalena Mazzocut-Mis, a professor of aesthetics and author of two monographs dedicated to the works of Focillon and Baltrušaitis,²³ discusses Focillon’s influence on Baltrušaitis’s morphology and his research into the endless metamorphoses of forms accompanied by survivals and awakenings. She notes that Baltrušaitis transcends the boundaries of his master’s theory, nullifying the presence of the subject, and showing that the artist is immersed in the life of forms, becoming the instrument through which the formal patterns manifest themselves. On the other hand, his choices are greatly influenced not only by the constants of forms, but also by myths and fables from which the formal structures emerge.

The next paper discusses Baltrušaitis’s contribution to the historiography of medieval art in the South Caucasus. Medieval art historian and former cultural adviser at the Embassy of France in Vilnius, Patrick Donabedian admits that Baltrušaitis occupies an important place in the study of both

Armenia’s and Georgia’s cultural heritage. This was determined by the precision of his research, namely the careful observation of architectural monuments and meticulous photographic documentation. Baltrušaitis’s expeditions in the 1920s, which he was able to undertake thanks to his father’s diplomatic connections, allowed for on-site research and were distinguished by neutrality and a pursuit of objectivity. It is also important that in his photographs, Baltrušaitis was able to capture some architectural heritage monuments that have now disappeared. Thus, he not only encouraged deeper research into the art of the Southern Caucasus, but also became an active advocate for preserving the heritage of this region.

Continuing the theme, Mariam Manukyan, an employee of the National Museum-Institute of Architecture after Alexander Tamanyan in Yerevan, reconstructs Baltrušaitis’s connections with the prominent Armenian architect and architectural scholar Toros Toramanyan (1864–1934). Based on archival data, she discusses in detail the correspondence that reveals the aims of Baltrušaitis’s scientific collaboration and how the scholars shared visual materials, valuable both for morphological analysis and the identification of cultural influences.

Byzantologist and head of the Gabriel Millet Center at the *Ecole pratique des hautes études*, Ioanna Rapti discusses in her paper the contributions of Gabriel Millet and Jurgis Baltrušaitis to the history of medieval Armenia and Georgia, offering comparative insights. The two scholars were among the first in the West to study medieval art in the sensitive ter-

23 Maddalena Mazzocut-Mis, *Forma come destino. Henri Focillon e il pensiero morfologico nell'estetica francese della prima metà del Novecento*, Firenze: Alinea, 1998; *Deformazioni fantastiche. Introduzione all'estetica di Jurgis Baltrušaitis*, Milano: Mimesis, 1999.

ritories of the South Caucasus at the dawn of Byzantine studies, supplementing the historiography of medieval art in Europe and attempting to open up a perspective for the study of the “global” Middle Ages.

The paper by art historian Annamaria Ducci²⁴ examines Baltrušaitis’s visual research method. His drawings were extremely important for the morphological analysis of Romanesque sculpture. Pointing out parallels with other art historians, Ducci shows that Baltrušaitis emphasized morphological structures, distortions of figures, transformations of images, and their movement through time in his drawings. She agrees with Chevrier’s point of view that Baltrušaitis’s sketches can also be compared to the stage designs of Meyerhold’s performances, the modern dance sketches by Natalia Goncharova, or Wassily Kandinsky’s drawings that convey dance movements. These juxtapositions pave the way toward a deeper understanding of the uniqueness of Baltrušaitis’s research method.

Raphaël Bories, curator of the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations (the Mucem) in Marseille, discloses the significance of Baltrušaitis’s curatorial activity. He shows how the medievalist and secretary general of the exhibition *Art populaire baltique* at the Trocadero Museum in 1935 linked Lithuanian folk sculptures to Breton Calvaries. Drawing on Focillon’s definition of the “West,” which had some political significance as well, Baltrušaitis highlighted certain historical

anachronisms and used anachronisms to reveal the complex time structures that hide connections between art forms.

The paper dedicated to Baltrušaitis’s study of anamorphoses unveils his pioneering studies in the history of perspective, which have historical and theoretical significance. Baltrušaitis became acquainted with anamorphoses from the catalogue of a Surrealist exhibition in New York.²⁵ His interest in the works by Tristan Tzara and the prompted him to research geometrical and optical structures, where ghostly and playful forms emerge and rationality gives birth to irrationality. However, as Dalia Aleksandravičiūtė attests in her paper, Baltrušaitis’s research was characterized by an in-depth study of the development of anamorphosis and deepened our understanding of 17th century intellectual life, as he carefully studied the works of Marin Mersenne, Jean-François Nicéron, Gaspar Schott, and Athanasius Kircher.

A comparative approach is crucial for discovering connections between the ideas of father and son. From the point of view of literary scholar Viktorija Daujotytė, both Baltrušaitis Junior and Senior were exceptional in their own right. Reflecting on the works of Baltrušaitis Jr. in the context of Lithuanian culture, she recalled a quote by Algirdas Julius Greimas, who said that “if the art historian Baltrušaitis is known to the East of Berlin as the son of the poet Baltrušaitis, then to the West of Berlin the poet Baltrušaitis is known as the father of

24 Annamaria Ducci published her monograph *Henri Focillon en son temps. La liberté des formes* (Strasbourg, Presses universitaires de Strasbourg) in 2021.

25 *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*. Essays by Georges Hugnet, ed. Alfred H. Barr. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1947.

the art historian Baltrušaitis.”²⁶ In her search for a comparison between the two, she aptly notes that the senior Baltrušaitis’s poetic symbolism relied on illusory structures of consciousness, which were an important aspect of his son’s scholarly endeavors. The art historian was interested in the “restlessness” of forms, disorders, and deviations that are not strictly separated from order. His works sharply expressed the relationship between the real and the false, the ordinary and the distorted, the rational and the dreamlike, forms and their deformations. One can detect early traces of thinking about aberrations of the imagination in his father’s letters to Giovanni Papini,²⁷ and Daujotytė assumes that the scholar’s interest in monsters and chimeras may also stem from the poet’s initial exposure to gloomy Lithuanian legends.

The final papers of the proceedings discuss intellectual dialogues and parallels. Antanas Andrijauskas reveals fundamental turning points in comparative studies of the first half of the 20th century, comparing the approaches of Strzygowski, Warburg, and Baltrušaitis. In relation to these scholars, he highlights the uniqueness and novelty of Baltrušaitis’s methodology, which helped trace the endless transformations of art forms at the crossroads of different cultures and distant civilizational worlds. Other authors expand the intellectual map of Baltrušaitis’s theory. Žilvinė Gaižutytė-Filipavičienė points out the kinship the art

historian’s ideas share with those of André Malraux; Aistė Žvinelytė discusses the echoes of Baltrušaitis’s thought in philosophy; and Jeanette Zwingenberger draws a certain parallel between some of Baltrušaitis’s interests and the works of Etienne Delécluze.

In commemoration of Baltrušaitis’s 60th birthday, Greimas noted that “a secret conversation between man and his subconscious” is revealed in Baltrušaitis’s books. “As an art historian, Jurgis Baltrušaitis speaks of ages long past, of the delusions present in the minds of man from the Middle Ages and Classical times, including the backslidings of his gaze, and of European art, which fed on the monsters of the Far East, the inordinate flora and fauna of Antiquity. And yet his concerns are relevant: these are the anxieties of our era, this is the desire of our generation to understand itself.”²⁸ Another 60 years later, the significance of Baltrušaitis’s works has been revisited, revealing their historical value and possibilities for further interpretations. Thus, we hope that the present volume will encourage further reception not only in art history, but also other scholarly fields and the arts that particularly resonate with Baltrušaitis’s work.

26 Algirdas Julius Greimas. *Iš toli ir iš arti. Literatūra. Kultūra. Grožis*. Vilnius: Vaga, 1991, p. 229. My translation from Lithuanian.

27 Jurgis Baltrušaitis. *Laiškai. „Rašau tik tai, kas yra mano gili vidinė būtinybė“*. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2015, p. 322.

28 Algirdas Julius Greimas, “Jurgis Baltrušaitis mini savo 60 metų sukaktį,” *Dirva*, No. 74, June 28, 1963, p. 3.