

THIRD PART

Soviet Crimes – History accuses (prints 1991 - 1993)

“Little did I realize in 1990 when I was accepted into the Master’s program at the Latvian Academy of Art that I would be living and working in an ‘independent’ and ‘free’ Latvia!” Aleksandrs wrote in 1993, “Where I was completely free to create those images that burned in my soul for so many years, and imprisoned there for fear of reprisal of my family in Soviet occupied Latvia. Relieved of this heavy burden, I immediately set out creating images of Latvia during her occupation and the atrocities committed by the ‘red fascists’ over the last fifty years. I feel very strongly that the world, especially the Russian people, must be made aware of the extreme magnitude of the suffering and genocide the Latvian people have endured from these ‘red fascists’ who occupied this land during those dark and bloody years. My intention is to use my art as a weapon for social change in Latvia. Perhaps in some way, I wish to re-ignite that flame, the soul of Latvia that has been oppressed for so many years. It has been a constant struggle for me to maintain the compositional and imaginative form to carry these images because of my emotional and personal involvement in these prints.” Following graduation Aleksandrs went on to teach at the Art College in Rezekne. He died on his birthday on March 22, 1994 at the age of 41.



The lithograph named “Freedom’s guard, Tukums” (1991) shows the statue honoring the fallen at Tukums, with crosses of soldiers’ graves in the background. The statue had been pock-marked with bullet holes by the Communists. The inscription on the statue translates as “A blessed heritage of our nation is this land, and blessed is he who bravely dies for it.”

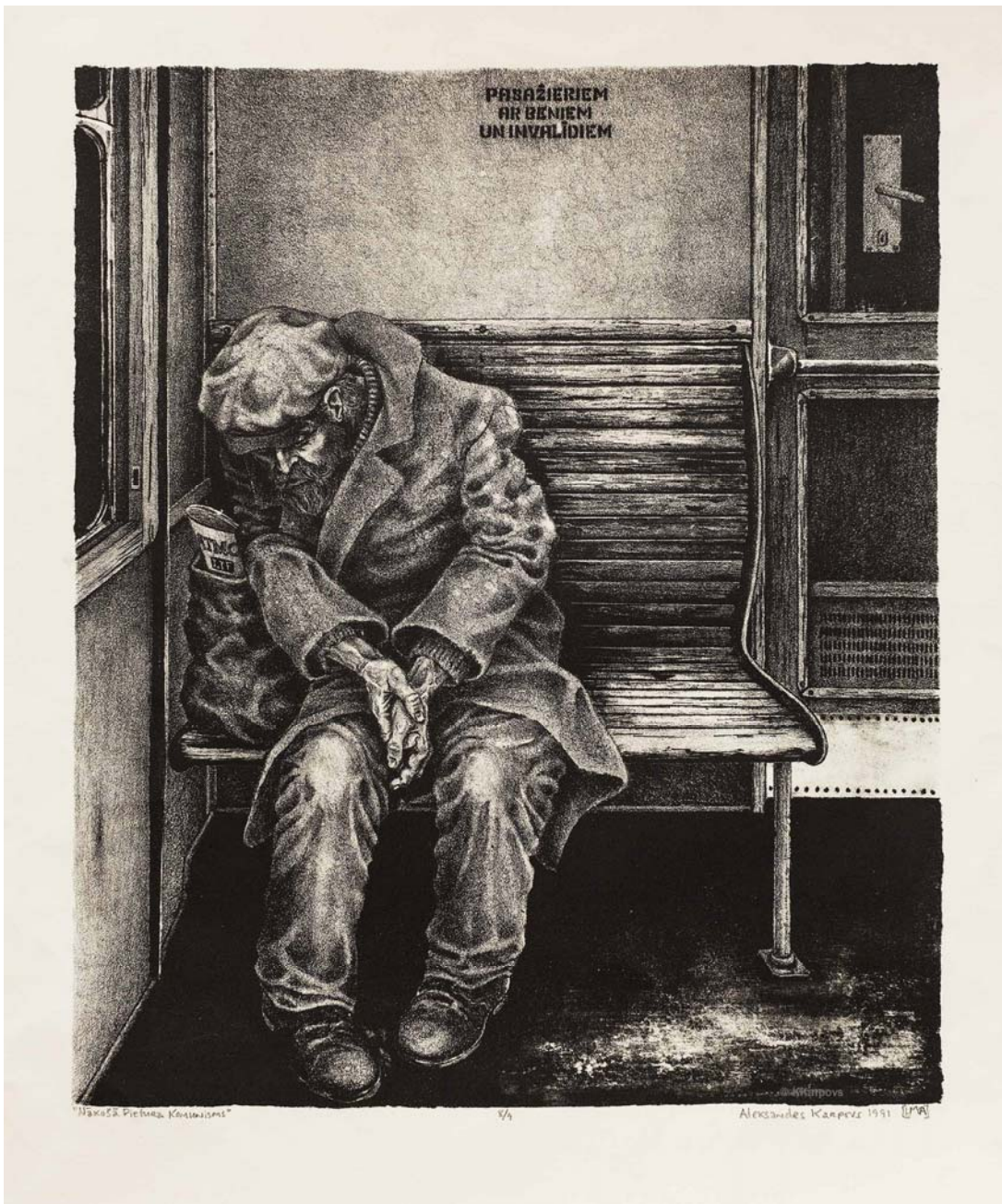


Among the greatest challenges for Aleksandrs was depicting the monument Latgales Mary that was being restored for unveiling in Rēzeknē Latvia on August 13, 1992. This event was very personal for Aleksandrs, as his mother Lucia's family was from Latgale, the easternmost of the four regions of historic Latvia. The statue is steeped in religious symbology as the Latgalians are devoutly Catholic, praying to the Virgin Mary. This was to be the third restoration of the monument to commemorate the liberation of Latgale from the Bolsheviks in January 1920 and Latvian unity, after having been destroyed twice by Stalins' Communists. Aleksandrs created two very different lithographs of the monument, the first in 1991 and the second in 1992. The first of these is "**Latgale's Mary Reborn**" (1991). The "1940 – 1991" depicted on the cross is the period of foreign occupation when the monument and people were being violated. In this image the statue emerges through the broken ice during a dark storm, and we see the inscription "United Latvia". At that time – 1991 – independence was still tenuous.



Aleksandrs reworked the image of the statue in his etching "**Latgale's Mary - Reborn II**" (1992). Here we see a new day with the storm having passed for now. The 1991 attempt by the Soviet OMAN (black berets) to suppress the independence of Latvia had failed. Latvia's newly won freedom survived. The image is no longer surrounded by darkness. Perhaps once again Latgale's people were also free from the darkness of Soviet communism. On this new day, Aleksandrs captures Latgales' Mary praying for a future with freedom from a red (and brown) fascist tyranny. The uplifting beauty of color and bright composition reveals a free Latvian nation, now fully reborn and supported by the faith of its values.

Next Stop Communism. (1991) Lithograph. 32x39



In 1991 Aleksandrs created this print of the figure of an old man in a train, sitting on the seat reserved for invalids, or passengers with children. The sarcastic title of the print is **“Next Stop Communism”**. Following the genocide of the well-to-do classes (intelligentsia and farmers by Stalin and Jews by Hitler), the bleakness of life resulting from communist rule corroded the human spirit. This old man symbolizes that dark Orwellian¹ future and death of spirit lived by those in Latvia from 1940 through 1991.

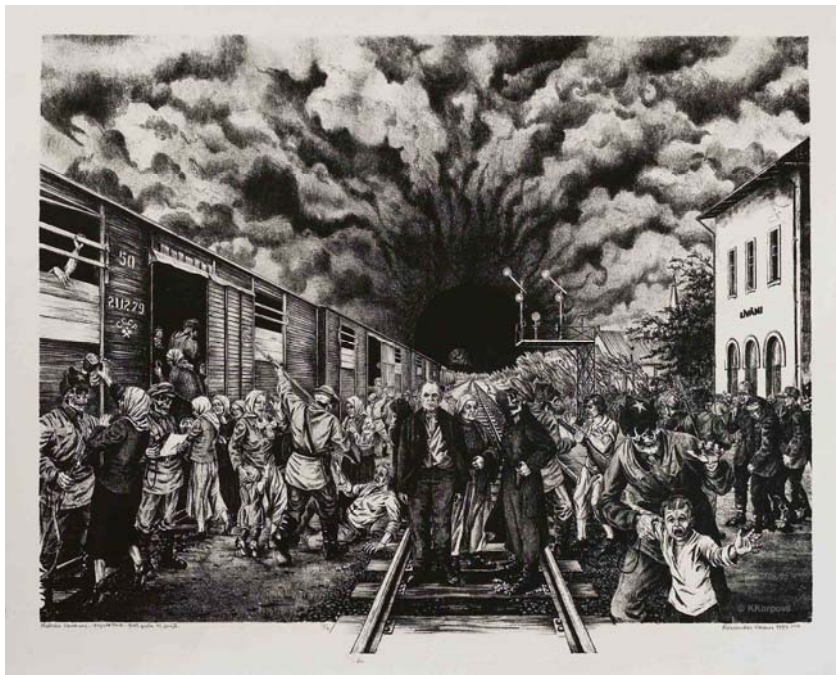
¹ The term “Orwellian” was coined after the English author George Orwell who wrote the novel “1984”



“Deportation, Riga 14 June, 1941” (1991) Lithograph 64x78.

Aleksandrs wrote, “In 1941 after the forced occupation of the Baltic States, the Soviet Union began the systematic repressions and deportations of the citizenry of these nations to Siberia’s labor camps... The three young women are portraits of my aunts and the man confronting the Soviet secret police (NKVD) is my uncle Janis Volonts, who was Latvia’s Minister of Welfare prior to his arrest . All of them were arrested and deported to Siberia, only two returned, their

crime being that they were Latvian. My uncle is pictured here trying in vain to explain to the NKVD thug that the woman next to him is not his daughter, but his niece, and not on their “list.” It was a useless argument as can be seen from the expression on the officer’s face, who has drawn his pistol to make things clear... I recall when I was drawing this image an American student approached me and asked me if I was Jewish, thinking this image was an example of an atrocity being committed by the Nazis. “No,” I told him, “these are ‘red’ fascists.”



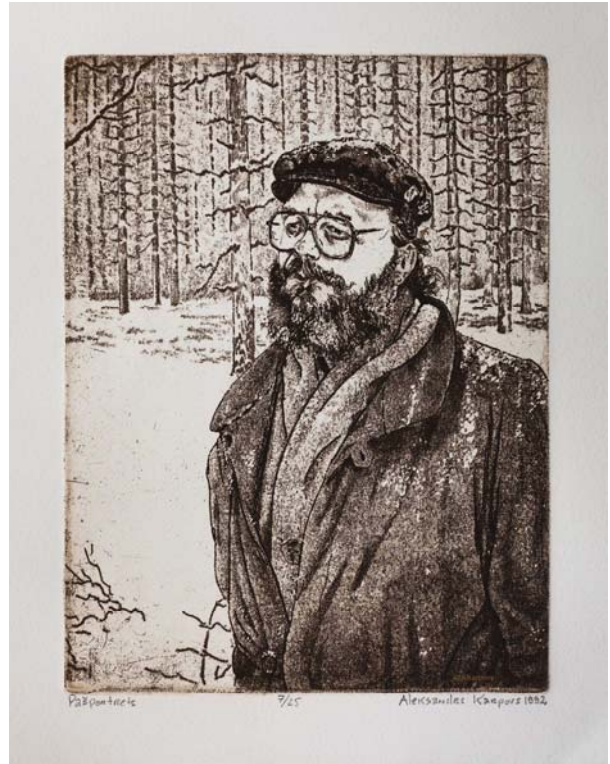
“The Black Hole, Deportation, Livani, 14th of June, 1941”. History accuses III (1993) 53x67.

“This lithograph combines surrealistic imagery and metaphor with realistic rendering to carry this image of genocide against the Latvian Nation by the Soviet Union,” wrote Aleksandrs. “It is also a very emotionally personal image ... In the center of the scene stand my grandparents who are in the process of being separated never to see each another again. My grandfather, Justins Volonts, is looking directly at the viewer with an expression of a man who has lost everything. My

grandmother, Stefanja Grizbouskis, clutches her rosary and looks on as this demon from hell confronts them. My mother is portrayed to their right, being pushed away by another NKVD demon with a rifle. There is a small boy (Aleksandrs’ self-portrait) being subdued as he implores the viewer for help.”



“Heraldic statue ‘Latgale’ at the Brethren cemetery” (1992) Litograph 14x18

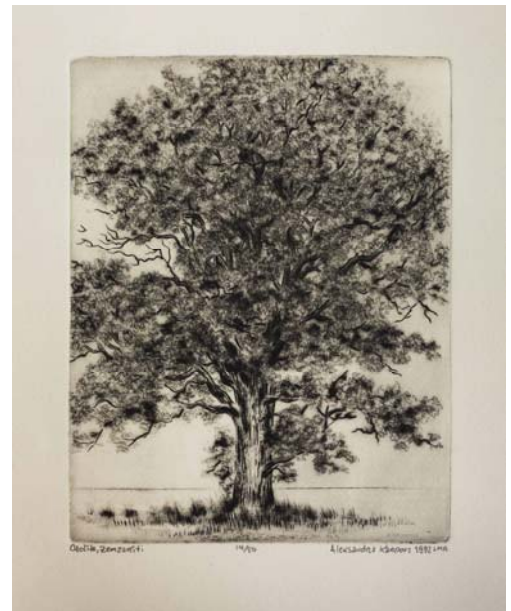


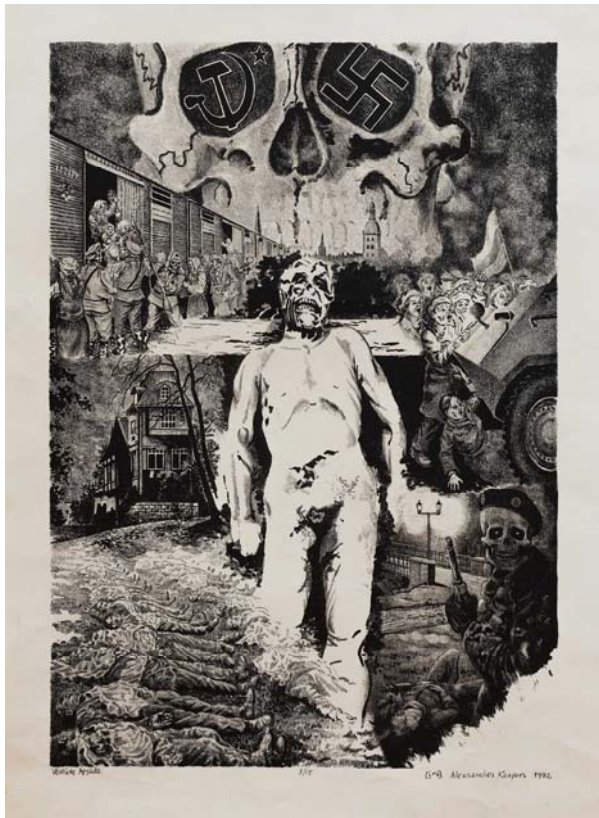
Self portrait (1992) Etching. 17x23

This 1992 lithographic **“Self-portrait”** depicts my brother alone in our mother’s forest in Anspoki, 3 km south-east of Preiļi Latvia, the 25 hectares of forest that was to be her dowry. Instead of presenting this handsome wedding dowry, her parents lost their lives to genocide .



Oak. 1992
Offset. 17x18
Several of Aleksandrs’ pieces include reference to the oak tree, which is a symbol of Latvian culture. In 1992 he created a multi-color lithographic study of **“The Oaktree”**. With prints that included seasonal changes in color.





“**History accuses’ (1992)**, Lithograph. 34x49 is a graphic visual account of the atrocities committed to the Baltic peoples by the former Soviet Union,” wrote Aleksandrs, “It is a collage of images of murder and mass executions that took place under the Soviet occupation. Beginning at the lower left and moving clockwise is a row of corpses, workers of a sugar refinery murdered on June 26, 1941 at Panevyzys, Lithuania. Above, is the “Home of Soviet Youth” in Kureassaare, Estonia, where at least sixty-one Estonians, from all walks of life were found tortured and then murdered by the NKVD. Above this is a scene of the mass deportation of Latvians to Siberia from Riga, in 1941. To the right is a scene of the senseless attack by the dreaded Soviet Black Berets (OMON) forces on Lithuanian citizenry as they demonstrated in support of their independence in Vilnius on January 13, 1990. Below, a member of the OMON stands menacingly over one of his victims in Riga, Latvia on January 20, 1990. The lower right corner seems to be ripped off, symbolizing that the horrors inflicted by the ‘Russian imperialism’ onto the peoples of the Baltic nations may not be over for good. In the

center is the mutilated body of the workman Peteris Dobe that was found in a mass grave in Latvia in 1941. Watching over these grotesque acts of ‘ethnic cleansing,’ Bolshevik style, is the death’s head of fascism. In one of the empty eye socket’s is the hammer and sickle, the symbol of ‘red fascism,’ while in the other the swastika, the symbol of ‘brown fascism,’ one and the same.””

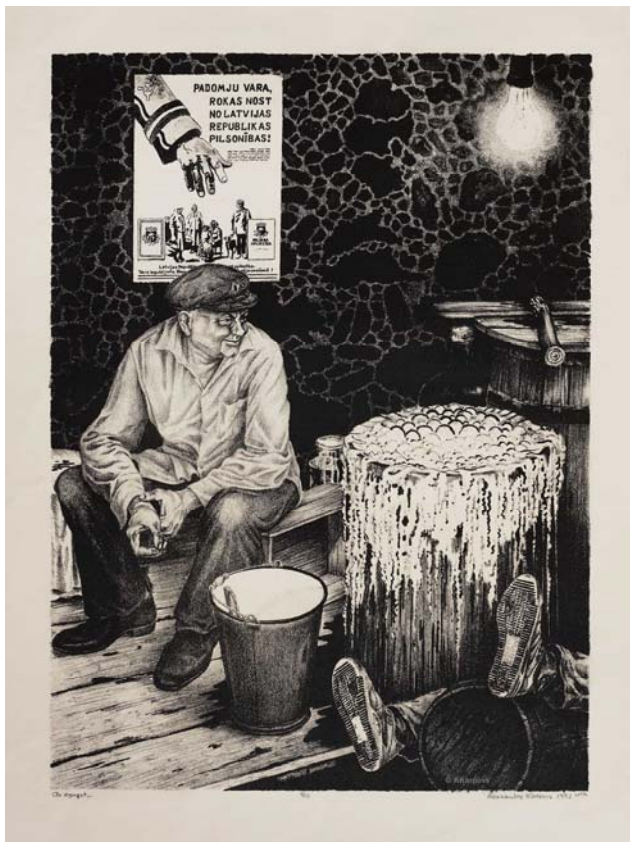


“The 30x40 etching ‘**Pēdējā Laiva, Košrags, Latvija’ (The Last Boat) (1992)** Offset. 30x40, tells of the fate of Latvia’s fishermen during Soviet occupation,” wrote my brother in his thesis. “The old sailor portrayed here told me how, in 1949, the Soviet NKVD destroyed and burned all the fishing boats along the western coast of Latvia. Then they deported and ‘relocated’ entire fishing villages under the orders of the dictator Joseph Stalin... This lone fisherman stands before the old wreck of his fishing boat, with the expression of a man who has lost his very livelihood, his reason for living. All that remains is the skeleton of his past. The M-1949 engraved on the wreck is

the date of one of the mass deportations of Latvians, on March 25, 1949. Torn and ragged, like the old wreck, this old man is waiting to die. In the distance we see the remains of the old fishing dock extending out into the majestic Baltic sea.”

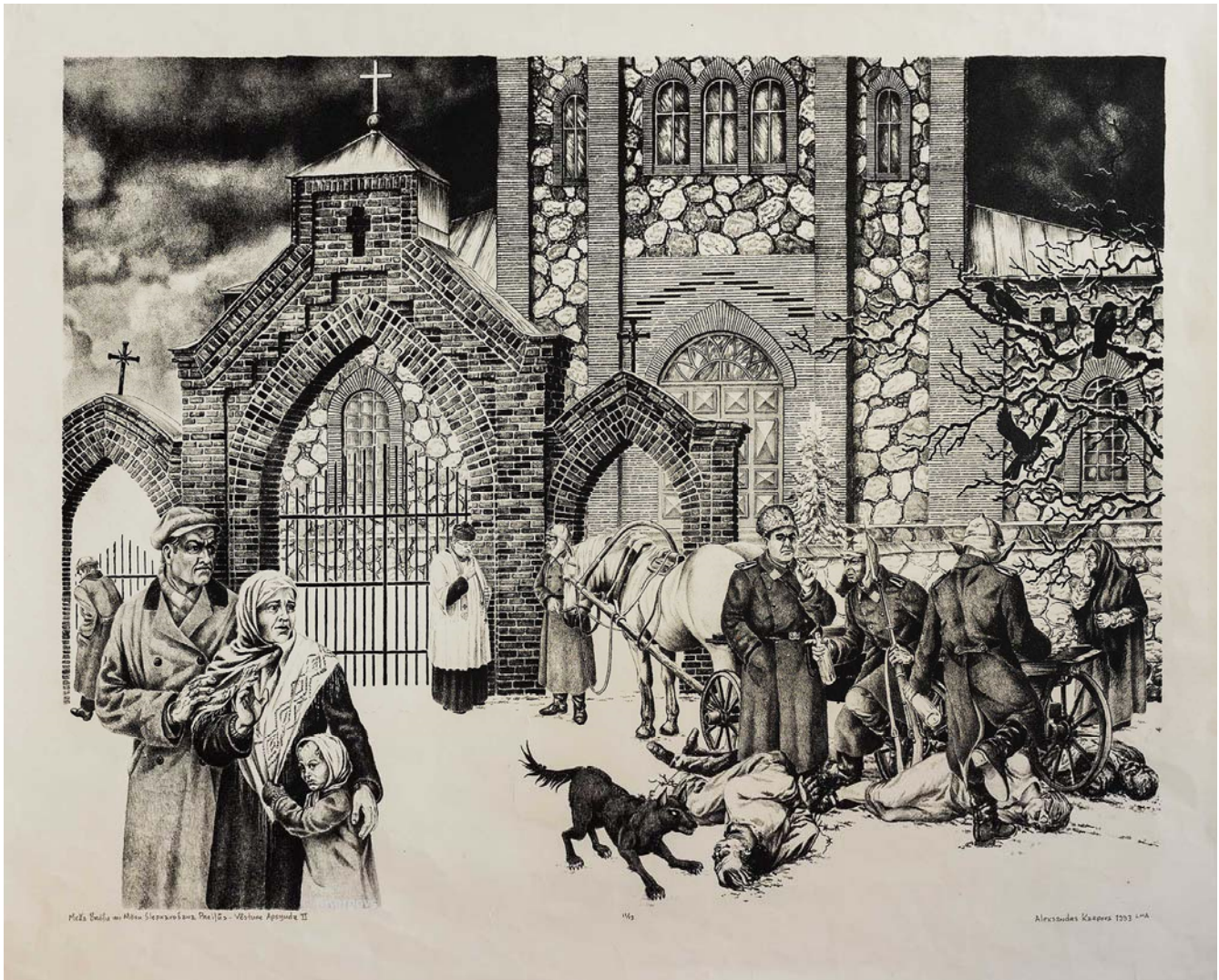


“At Least 999,999 too many!” (1992). Offset.23x31 “This is a satirical political attack on the continued occupation of Latvia by “former” Soviet armed forces and colonists,” wrote Aleksandrs in 1993. “The viewer is confronted with a detailed rendering of a cityscape of Old Riga, Latvia. In the foreground a Soviet military policeman is featured as a skeleton in uniform, confidently leaning against a wall smoking a cigarette with an AK-47 automatic weapon on his lap. What appears at first to the viewer to be cobblestones on the street, are in reality a mass of rats madly scampering around. Some of rats are storming a bread store. Others are copulating or fighting, and some are intoxicated. Crowning this scene is the king white rat sitting on the military policeman’s shoulder standing guard over this chaotic scene.” At the time when this etching was made, Soviet troops were still present in Latvia.



The lithograph **“Beer is Brewing” (1992) 39x52** shows the yearly event in the cellar in the workers’ house on our farm in Anspoki, Latvia. Brunislavs was my grandfather’s, Justin Volonts’, caretaker, and had survived Soviet occupation. Every year, he brewed beer. In this image he is sharing some with my brother and Aleksandrs (partial self-portrait with legs showing), with a bit of humor, shows that he is no beerdrinking match for Brunislavs. On the wall is the poster (left) “Soviet Power, hands off of Latvia Republic’s citizenship!” Aleksandrs wanted his art to remind Latvians of the importance of maintaining their national identity as Latvian citizens given the very real threat of Russian imperialism looming from the East. Since 1989 when legislation was passed replacing Russian with Latvian once more as the official language, the number of Latvian speakers has increased to 79 percent².

² The observant viewer may have also noticed that in this print the rocks in the wall between the lamp and the poster is an inverted map of the three Baltic nations.



"The Murder of Forest Brothers and Sisters", (1993) History Accuses II "This 54x68 lithograph is of an actual event that took place in the city of Preilji, located in the southern region of Latgale of Latvia," wrote my brother in his thesis. "During the summer of 1992 I researched the mass execution of Latvian freedom fighters by the NKVD during the early years of Soviet occupation, roughly 1941, and 1945 through 1949. A total of eighty-three freedom fighters, both men and women, were tortured and murdered and their bodies thrown in front of the Catholic Church in Preilji... Military thugs of the NKVD had driven up to the front of the church in a wagon and had tossed there the bodies of these tortured and mutilated freedom fighters. The NKVD then stood and waited, watching intently at the passersby to note any sign of recognition or reaction in their faces when they saw these victims. If anyone showed any sign of recognition they would immediately arrest the person."



The final plate completed during my brother's life was **"Our Riga!" (1993)**. This 44x65 etching was of Riga's old town. The piece is masterfully done showing details of the beautiful city. At first viewing it, one of Aleksandrs former professors from the Latvian Art Academy commented, that "finally you have done a piece that is not social realism." This made Aleksandrs chuckle, as his professor apparently had not looked too closely. In the foreground, an oak tree – the symbol of Latvian culture – is half dead on the side facing a Soviet military compound, where dead trees abound. When this print was made 40,000 Soviet troops were still in Latvia. Freedom was still tenuous .

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