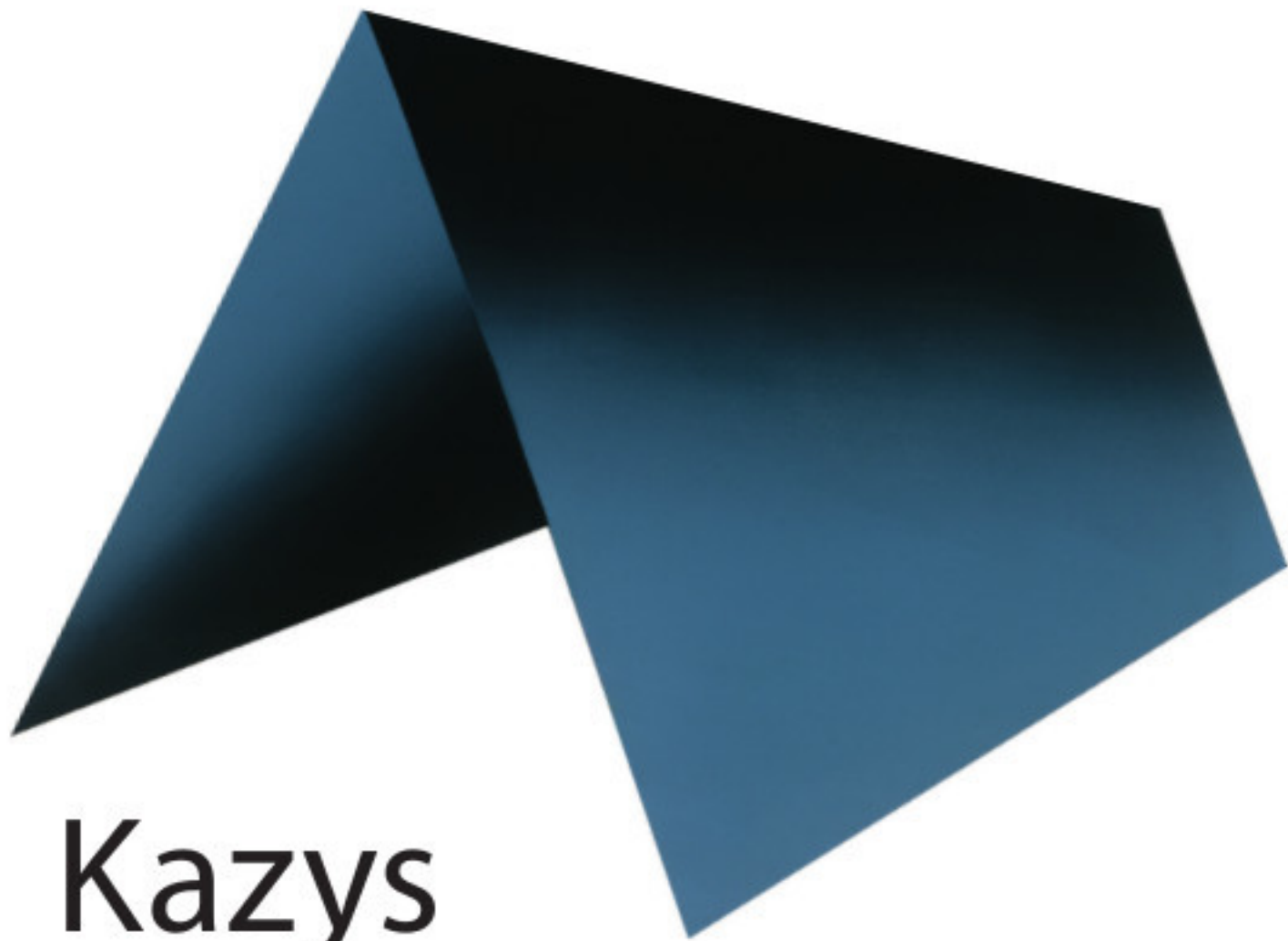


NATIONAL MUSEUM OF LITHUANIA



Kazys
Varnelis House-Museum

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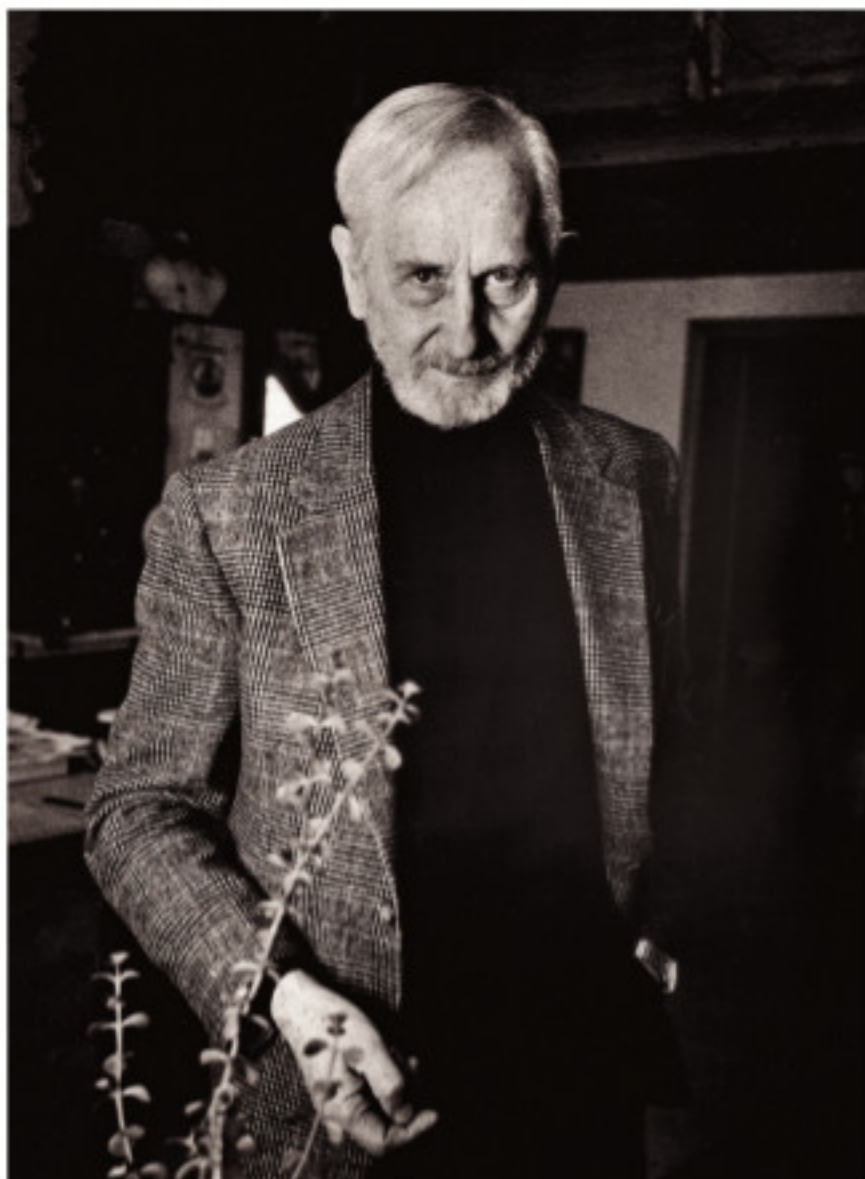
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Kazys Varnelis House-Museum

A SHORT GUIDE TO THE MUSEUM





Kazys Varnelis, 1996. Photo by Valerija Dichavičienė

About the museum's founder

BEGINNING

Kazys Varnelis was born on 25 February 1917 in the village of Alsėdžiai, a small town in the northwest region of Lithuania called Žemaitija (Samogitia in English). Varnelis's father, Kazimieras Varnelis (1871–1945), was also famous in his own right as a folk artist, wood sculptor, and painter, and his mother Teofilė Domarkaitė (1877–1969), was a weaver and seamstress. The house in which the artist-to-be grew up was quite unusual: painted from floor to ceiling, it reflected great respect for art, the written word, and historical memory. This childhood environment awakened his imagination and Varnelis set his mind to becoming an artist. In 1936, Varnelis started his studies at the Kaunas Institute of Applied and Decorative Art. At first, he studied painting under Justinas Vienožinskis, and later, together with Vytautas Kasiulis, studied under Stasys Ušinskas, who became a great authority to him. The works he created as a student—such as the historical scene “The Battle of Rūdava” and the modernistic “Port of Kaunas”—are stylistically similar to Ušinskas's work, with pure forms and clear geometrical structures. While a student, Varnelis also participated in ethnographic expeditions to his homeland where he helped gather and document examples of folk art for Paulius Galaunė, then director of the Vytautas the Great Museum of Culture in Kaunas. Galaunė made a huge influence on Varnelis's personal evolution, teaching him the subtleties of museological work and encouraging him to explore his Lithuanian roots.

In 1941, having finished his studies, Varnelis started to work as a teacher at Saulė High School in Kaunas. Three months later, he was appointed the head of the Ecclesiastical Art Museum in Kaunas. Two years of work in this museum were valuable: they helped him develop strategic thinking and insight and establish contacts in the field. Varnelis managed to retrieve art treasures that had been taken to Vilnius under Russian and Polish rule, restored the museum's exhibitions, and became a professional museologist himself.

But the ongoing war and the difficulties of life under occupation made Varnelis worry about his future in Lithuania. At Ušinskas's urging, Varnelis sought out graduate studies abroad and, in 1943 left to enroll in the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts (*Akademie der Bildenden Künste*), where he studied mural painting under professor Herbert Dimmel until 1945. It was an important stage of his life that helped him reveal his creative talent and also fanned the flames of his passion for books. Varnelis had amassed a small but valuable library while still living in Kaunas. Vienna astounded him with what it had to offer: even in wartime there were bookshops where one could acquire both antique books and prints and the newest art publications at prices even a poor art student could afford.

FIRST YEARS IN EXILE

On 16 February 1945, Varnelis received a diploma from the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts. He had visited his parents one in Alsėdžiai one last time in 1944, but with Soviet and Nazi guns thundering across the countryside he boarded the last train out, watching as the train tracks were being pulled up behind it. He would not return to Lithuania for forty years. Instead he joined tens of thousands of other displaced Lithuanian refugees in Germany. Among them were intellectuals and artists who published newspapers, organized exhibitions, sports events, and established schools even within the difficult conditions of life in a refugee camp. Varnelis followed suit: in 1947, he organized and participated in the exhibition of Lithuanian art in Nürtingen, and in 1948, together with his colleagues he founded the Union of World Lithuanian Artists and Architects. At the same time, Varnelis began his practice as a mural painter, decorating a chapel in Buchberg and making plans for painting a dome of the church at Burglengelfeld. Crucially, he also made the acquaintance of the physician, musician and collector of abstract art, Ottomar Domnick (1907–1989). Having had the chance to see Domnick's extraordinary collection (now the *Sammlung Domnick* in Nürtingen), he became convinced that abstraction was the right track to follow. Varnelis would later say "These works were like music to me."



Kazys Varnelis in his home in Chicago. 1970s.

Photo by Jonas Davydenas

CHICAGO

In 1949, Varnelis moved to the USA and settled in Chicago. He found work in a church art studio, but a year later became an independent artist and opened his own studio. His main customer was the Lithuanian community that had brought its own perception of worship from the other side of the Atlantic. Implementing these ideas in churches in Chicago, Cleveland, and notably the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception in Putnam, was a challenge to the artist who had already begun to turn toward modernism. Still, this was a time in which the interests of Catholicism and modern art temporarily aligned: the French review *L'Art Sacré* promoted bringing living art into the Church and modern architects like Le Corbusier and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe were making stark, minimal chapels. Varnelis would compromise, collaging national motifs with modern forms, making stark spaces filled with remarkable sacrality.

The artist created his first abstractions back in 1951. In the early 1960s, Varnelis closed his studio to pursue his dream of being an artist. Gradually, the impact of his innate precision, self-discipline, growing cultural experience, as well as the experience of dwelling in the rapidly modernizing environment of Chicago, plus exposure to key shows in New York, shaped his work. Varnelis's mature paintings draw upon myriad of sources: American regionalism, constructivism, minimalism, post painterly abstraction and optical art. Instead of disjunction or eclecticism, however, the artist shaped them into a unique and transcendent vision of an ideal world of geometry and rhythm: in the words of art historian Laima Laučkaitė, these works are "a perfect object for meditation with the eyes."

Varnelis finally began to achieve his dream of being an artist when he took part in the prestigious 1967 running of the Chicago and Vicinity Artists Show at the Art Institute of Chicago and his "Composition X3" won accolades. That year Varnelis began teaching art at the City College of Chicago, thus validating his career choice. Varnelis exhibited in the show again in 1969, 1971, and 1974 and in 1970 participated in a joint exhibition with painter Richard Koppe and sculptor Lilian H. Florsheim at the Museum of Contemporary Art



Interior of Kazys Varnelis's home in Chicago, 1970s.

Photo by Jonas Dovydenas

Chicago. He would also appear in an exhibition of Lithuanian artists at Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington in 1974 as well as in solo exhibitions at the Milwaukee Art Center (today, Milwaukee Art Museum) the University of Iowa Museum of Art in 1975. In 1969 and 1974, Varnelis received the Vielehr Award from the Art Institute of Chicago, in 1975 was awarded a grant of the National Endowment for the Arts. In 1973, he became full professor. During the 1970s, the artist's works would be acquired by the Guggenheim Museum, New York, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, the Detroit Art Museum, the Akron Art Institute, the University of Iowa Museum of Art, and a small number of private collectors.

In that period, Varnelis's basic bibliophilic aim—Lithuanian studies—became crystallized. His cartographic collection grew considerably, and his library increased by more than 5,000 publications. His house at 441 West. St. James Place, adjacent to Lincoln Park, resembled both a museum and a modern art gallery, with paintings and sculptural compositions created by the artist displayed next to old books, maps and art albums. In 1975, the editor of the art section of *The Milwaukee Journal*, James Auer, wrote:

Bluish light beams down from narrow windows upon constructivist sculpture and enormous rectangular canvases in the two-story living room. Walls rising from painstakingly restored woodwork hold paintings that have been exhibited at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Contemporary Art and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. In many ways, Varnelis's 85-year-old home provides a better showcase for the paintings than any public gallery because it permits each canvas to be given the isolation and emphasis it deserves.

On the top floor of the house, reached by stairways lined with recent works, is "the real kitchen—the studio where he produces pictures whose images blend, in a welter of presumed influences, the woodcarving of his native Lithuania, the illusionistic painting of Benton and Wood and the distinctive, neo-Bauhaus constructivism of Chicago area architecture.

STOCKBRIDGE



Villa Virginia—Kazys Varnelis's home in Stockbridge, 1970s.

Photo by Jonas Davydėnas

In the late 1970s, the artist started to look for a new place of residence that could accommodate his growing collection and library, but most of all his large artworks. In Varnelis's words, "while living in Chicago for many years, I accumulated so much that the place became cramped." There were other reasons as well—he admitted that he never liked Chicago, "its terrible winds and sudden changes of weather," and had been nurturing the hope of moving closer to nature for a long time. A possibility came up in 1978, when his attention was caught by an announcement about a villa named "Laurel Mere" for sale in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. He wrote to its owner:

After a number of successful shows in American museums, I have been looking for a new environment for my works which are mostly quite big in size. We believe that Laurel Mere would be an appropriate and safe home for my collection. Therefore we are going to do everything to restore this property to its original beauty (which of course will take a number of years) in even the smallest possible detail. We would be working to save the original atmosphere which we believe would go very well with my paintings and sculptures. The entire house would be arranged as a private museum and it may someday be given to the public. I am explaining all this to you thinking that you might be interested in knowing our purpose in buying Laurel Mere. I want to emphasize that we are not real estate dealers, developers or business people looking at this property as something to make some kind of business. In opposite, we are people, who believe in the American heritage and who are interested in preserving beautiful things.

The addressee, the sole heir of the last owners, George Otis and Marie Rich Rockwood, Princess Diane Eristavi-Tchitcherine, had long since left Stockbridge and was living in Venice, Italy. Still, many of her parents's belongings, notably the antique furniture, remained in the villa and influenced his direction. Where he had set out to find a space that would accommodate his paintings, the antiques and the environment would lead him toward greater emphasis on antiquarianism. In early June 1978, the Varnelis family became the owners of both the buildings and the inventory that they contained: "Chinese bric-a-brac,"

a dragon-shaped stand, nineteenth-century American furniture, painted tables, antique chests of drawers and chairs, seventeenth-century chandeliers and medieval chests all became part of his collection.

Laurel Mere, which had originally been known as Villa Virginia (a name Varnelis restored) was indeed extraordinary. Built in 1917, the same year as Varnelis was born, on the initiative of the then-owner of the estate, William H. Clark, and designed by architects Philip Hiss and



Detail of the library in Kazys Varnelis's home in Stockbridge, 1970s.

Hobart Weekes, the building had a striking exterior and interior. Stucco mouldings, a white marble staircase, teak flooring on the ground level and oak parquet on the upper, residential floor, an ornate caisson ceiling brought from Italy, fireplaces—everything exuded the grand air of the bygone era of the gilded age. Still, the villa had stood uninhabited for many years and the new owners were forced put much effort into restoring it. Huge investments were needed and hard to manage on a retiree's pension. Heating and plumbing systems were broken, the floor was damaged, the magnificent ceiling was discoloured and peeling, window shutters were decayed, and the roof had holes. In his retirement, however, Varnelis had the time to work on the house while his years in the church interior studio gave him first-hand knowledge of construction and he slowly restored the house.

It took us several years of hard work to reconstruct the building and settle, but we managed to increase the space for the library, collections, and my canvases which are, as you know, most often quite large. Besides, the greatest success is the remaining furniture, which was quite abundant, although terribly neglected. It gradually turned out that there were some very valuable pieces from the Renaissance period, and a considerable number from the 18th and 19th century, many of them brought from Italy and, thus, original.

The late 1970s were also the heyday of postmodern art. Varnelis had mixed feelings towards postmodernism, but he thought about it often. Villa Virginia was his unique response to postmodernism, changing the context his work would be displayed in rather than compromising the modern geometries of his painting. In his library there are numerous publications and newspaper clippings documenting his interest in combining the antique and the modern in a living space, particularly inside of Italian villas and English country houses. Eventually, as Varnelis restored the villa, it became a gallery whose host eagerly shared the stories of the objects that decorated the rooms with guests made up from not only from the Lithuanian-American community, but also from specialists working in American museums and galleries.

Museum



Kazys Varnelis's House-Museum in City Hall Square in Vilnius

Photo by Kęstutis Staškus

However, in a country filled with art museums, the future of his collection was in doubt. Money to establish a museum was non-existent and the Lithuanian-American community hardly had wealthy donors who could bankroll such a personal vision. Still, at this time, Glasnost made contacts with Lithuania much easier than they had been in the past. Varnelis visited his homeland for the first time in 1984 and the daring idea of returning began to take shape in the artist's mind:

In 1988, as the political climate warmed, following my exhibition in Vilnius, connections with my homeland were established. One of the first to come was [art historian] Irena Kostkevičiūtė who, having visited our estate and being astonished by the size of my collection, said that it must be transferred to Vilnius where the entire installation must be recreated. Of course, this suggestion was exactly what I needed. After all, it was my secret dream.

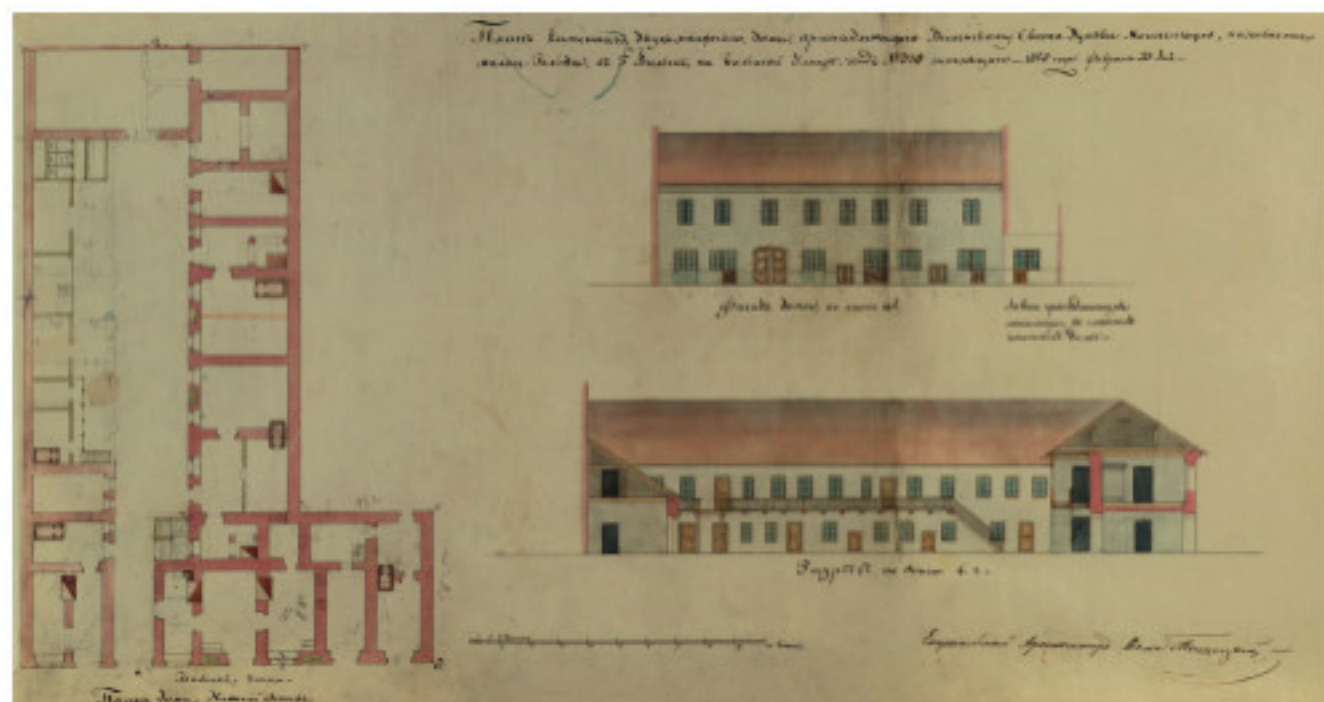
It was not until the country regained independence that the idea became reality. Varnelis's correspondence and visits to Lithuania in search of a proper venue took almost seven years. His large and outstanding collection needed a special space. Several historical buildings were considered: the smaller Radziwiłł Palace, buildings on M. K. Čiurlionio and Antakalnio streets, the premises of Arka Gallery, even houses in Kaunas and country manors close by Kaunas and Vilnius. After years of back and forth negotiations, he wound up in the very heart of Vilnius, in the former building of the Small Guild and the Massalski House. In the autumn of 1998, five cargo containers were shipped to Vilnius across the Atlantic, and in January 1999, Varnelis and his wife moved into the restored quarters at 26 Didžioji Street. In 2003, the Kazys Varnelis House-Museum became a branch of the National Museum of Lithuania.

THE HISTORY OF THE MUSEUM BUILDINGS



Didžioji street (east side) at the City Hall. House of the Small Guild. 1880–1882.

Photo by Józef Czechowicz



Reconstruction plan of the Minor Guild. 1858

Lithuanian State Historical Archives

The museum is shaped not only by its exhibitions but also by its history. The space itself is a veritable museum of architecture: small vaulted rooms with crooked walls, countless niches and numerous steps bear witness to the special history of this place that goes back to the fourteenth century.

The museum occupies two historical estates: the Small Guild, and the Massalski, or Merchant, House. In time, house numbers changed: before the nineteenth century, it was no. 43 and no. 44 Didžioji Gatvė, in the Soviet period—68 and 66 M. Gorkio Gatvė, today—26 and 24 Didžioji Gatvė.

In early sources, the surroundings of the City Hall were called *Imbary* in Polish, referring to rows of shops and warehouses situated there. For centuries, this was one of the city's most important locations, a hub of marketplaces, inns, and residences for local and travel-

ling merchants and magnates. In the second half of the sixteenth century, a panoramic view of the city of Vilnius from Georg Braun's atlas reveals that housing was dense in this territory, and brick houses prevailed. On the site of the present museum, Braun depicted brick houses. Although historians have some questions about the reliability of this source, excavations and early documents leave no doubts that the museum's buildings are some of the oldest in the city.

The history of the Small Guild goes back to the time when the city adopted the Magdeburg Law, giving it autonomous rule over municipal affairs and the construction of the City Hall or Rotušė across the square. Excavations date the building of the Small Guild to the early fifteenth or even late fourteenth century. As the name suggests, the place was used for trade purposes. The building was already called the Guild House (*Dom Gieldy*) in the second half of the sixteenth century, when it was owned by the famous Mamonich family of printers and traders, who rented out several rooms to merchants. In the late sixteenth century, the brothers Andrew and Harasim Maksimovich bought the building from the Mamonich family and sold it "for the benefit of the city's jurysdyka", i.e. to ten merchants of Vilnius "of Lithuanian and Russian origin irrespective of their faith" for 3,000 golden coins in 1608.

For a long time, the Small Guild did not have a single owner: the house belonged to several proprietors, mostly merchants. In the early seventeenth century, a part of the building was owned by Andrzej Rackiewicz, who later mortgaged it to Basilian monks. At a similar time, another owner of the house was Jan Azarycz, who later sold his part to a noble, tradesman and councillor Zachary Szykik-Zaleski. The latter apparently was not very good in managing his property. Having run into debts, in 1644 he mortgaged his part to a relative, Vilnius tradesman Andrzej Migura. Szykik-Zaleski was not in a hurry to pay back his debts, and after Migura's death the ownership passed to his heirs, children and grandchildren, by the right of pledge.

While the Basilians managed Migura's house, Vilnius was ravaged by Muscovites. The events of the mid-seventeenth century caused great damage to the city. It took time for life to return to its normal course. The brick building of the Small Guild was in critical condition,

considerably destroyed and burned, and the funds for repairs could not be obtained. For fear of letting the building collapse, in 1663 the owners decided to rent it to the city's residents Paweł and Teodor Sielawa for fifteen years on condition that they repair the house and thus be exempt from rent payment for five years.

In the late seventeenth century, the Small Guild had a sole owner. Seeing that they would not be able to redeem the property from mortgage, Szycik-Zaleski's heirs transferred the part still held by the Miguras along with the entire debt and a bonus of 2,500 golden coins to the Basilian monks who already owned three quarters of the building. They kept the property until the 1830s, when the new authorities transferred it to the Eastern Orthodox Monastery of the Holy Spirit. However, the monks never lived there—the rooms were rented (in the late seventeenth century, there were at least six tenants), and used by shops, warehouses and inns.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, there were around six to eight hundred inns in Vilnius. A particularly great number of them were concentrated in the City Hall Square, one of the busiest and major trade hubs in the city. An inn (German *Schenke*, Polish *Szynk*) did not need much space—one or two rooms and several tables with benches were enough. Inns were often established in larger basements, which could be accessed through the front door. Having dropped in, guests could order beer (warm beer for breakfast), vodka, kippered fish or other snacks, and discuss their affairs. The basement of the Small Guild still contains a wall with a little window through which orders were served.

The Small Guild always was a very busy location—according to the sources, a passageway ran through the building. Not all the rooms were used for trade and storage—early seventeenth century documents show that the rooms on the upper floor were residential, and were probably located in the part of the house that was closer to the street. As we learn from the press of that time, before a major reconstruction in the middle of the nineteenth century, the house always had tenants. In 1820, the newspaper *Kurjer Litewski* wrote that a Mr. Winicki lived at this address. After the death of one permanent tenant of the building, Wiktorya Dershoff, her jewellery—pearls, silver—was put on sale in 1827. In the middle of



Kazys and Gabrielė Varnelis' dining room

the nineteenth century, an upper floor meant for permanent tenants was added in the wing of the courtyard of the Small Guild. The rooms were equipped with stoves, which were lacking on the ground floor.

From then until the Second World War, the history of the Small Guild is veiled in mystery—nothing is known about its owners or transformations. The building greatly suffered during the war. In the Soviet times, after minor repairs, it was converted into flats and housed a textile shop. When Lithuania became independent, the building would be extensively restored prior to becoming part of the Kazys Varnelis House-Museum.

The history of the adjacent Massalski, or Merchant House is similarly convoluted. Research on its brick masonry allows us to date the buildings to the sixteenth or seventeenth

century. The earliest written source in which the estate was mentioned is a census of Vilnius houses of 1636, which indicates that at that time the house was owned by the widow Massalska. In the late seventeenth century, the heiress married Zygmunt Trzeciak, and the house came into his family's possession as part of her dowry. Unfortunately, they could not avoid debts either. In 1696, a part of the house was mortgaged to Piotr Czechowicz, and in 1743, the entire building became property of the Dawidowicz family. In the eighteenth century, the place was ravaged by fires—apparently, it happened twice, and the house changed hands again. The new owners, the wealthy Vilnius merchant family, the Domański, already had other property in the vicinity: they owned the house of the Great Guild, and alongside, rented several shops with basements in the Small Guild. Although the condition of the building was very poor, the Domański kept this property for a long time—up until 1856. The larger part of the premises were leased: the ground floor, like in the Small Guild, contained several shops, the Green Pharmacy operated near the street, and the upper and attic floors were broken into flats to accommodate travelling merchants from abroad. On 4 October 1820, the newspaper *Kurier Litewski* published the following announcement:

The undersigned has the honour of announcing to the honourable public that presently he owns a flat in Domański's house, 44 Imbary St., at the Green Pharmacy, and informs those who would like to acquire glasses or other optical equipment that they are kindly invited to come for a visit, as a careful vision test is necessary for precise prescription of glasses.

Karol Fleischman, oculist

Later, the Massalski House was owned by Dominik Grilewski, and in the early twentieth century passed to the Vilnius City Executive Board.

The history of the Small Guild and the Massalski House is quite similar: both buildings changed hands many times, were ravaged by invaders and fires, accommodated tradesmen and tenants, but the Massalski House was more residential, while the Small Guild was basically used for trade purposes. It is testified by the common structure of the buildings and architectural details.

The museum's exhibition

Room 1

The first room in the itinerary is devoted to early maps. Varnelis's cartographic collection consisting of more than 300 items is one of the largest private collections of this kind in Lithuania. Its chronology ranges from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. The maps illustrate the history of Lithuania and the development of Lithuanian cartography.

One of the most remarkable expositions here is the *Tabula moderna Polonie, Ungarie, Boemie, Germanie, Russie, Lithuanie*, compiled by the monk, philosopher and geographer Marcus Beneventanus (1465–after 1525) and published in Rome in 1507. The only original copy of this map in Lithuania, this is the first map of the country with Lithuania's name in title. The major cities of that time—Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda (Memel), Trakai, Medininkai—and the Nemunas and Neris (Vilija) rivers are also clearly marked on the map. Like many other of his maps, it was acquired by Varnelis from the famous Chicago specialist in early cartography, Kenneth Nebenzahl.

Another exhibit is an early printing of the first map published in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, compiled with the efforts and funding of Mikołaj Krzysztof "the Orphan" Radziwiłł (1549–1616). Some scholars argue that a first edition of this map was printed in 1603, but this copy was never found, and the its existence isn't certain. Thus 1613 is usually indicated as its printing date, although unfortunately, the single known 1613 map is held in the Uppsala University Library in Sweden. The map in Varnelis's collection is a copy that appeared in Willem Jonszoon Blaeu's (1571–1638) atlas in Amsterdam in 1631. For almost two hundred years, the most precise image of the lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in Europe, this map included exactly marked geographical objects, detailed administrative divisions and was accompanied with abundant historical data written in Latin, demonstrating the excellent



Beginning of the exhibition

teamwork of the cartographers led by Radziwiłł. Whatever the specifics of its dating, the significance of Radziwiłł's map is undisputable: it both served practical purposes (e.g., state administration) and represented Lithuania as a modern nation state.

Next to this extraordinary exhibit, we will find another, classical image: the aforementioned sixteenth-century bird's eye view of the city of Vilnius from Georg Braun's atlas. It is the earliest known plan of the city and first appeared in the atlas *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* (*Cities of the World*) compiled by Georg Braun (1541–1622) and Franz Hogenberg (1535–1590). The six-volume publication contains more than 500 topographical plans and panoramic views of the major cities of the world. Vilnius is included in volume three titled *Urbium Praecipuarum Totius Mundi* (*Major Cities of the World*), published in Cologne in 1581. Here we will find the Lower and the Upper Castle, the Gates of Dawn, the ensemble of the Bernardine convent, the Church of Saint Johns and the old City Hall. At the bottom of the plan, burghers dressed in period clothes are represented. The other side of the plan bears a vivid description of the city of Vilnius and its residents, which, unfortunately, will does not reflect well on its citizens:

People of Vilnius, especially ones living in the suburban huts, are illiterate, of slavish nature who have never studied any free arts or sciences and have no aptitude for them, inactive, lazy and indolent, enjoying no freedom, real slaves considered property of the nobles. [...] They have no wine, yet they like a drink. They drink mead and beer; they have a great liking for warm wine, onions and garlic. Their houses are always full of smoke (as they do not have chimneys) and therefore they go blind; no other place has so many blind as this city. Their houses do not have any embellishments or expensive utensils. [...] The way of life of the nobles is little better or superior, they only wear more luxurious clothes, adorned and embroidered in gold and silver to display their nobility. [...] They get drunk on mead, warm wine or strong quarelling, scuffling, hurting each other and fighting fiercely.

Still, we should take this picture of Vilnius residents with a grain of salt. An attentive viewer will see that the network of streets and the location of many objects do not



Mikołaj Krzysztof "the Orphan" Radziwiłł's map of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. 1635–1650

correspond to reality. It is thought that the authors of the plan never visited Vilnius and relied on the accounts of other travellers, while introducing their own biases and prejudices into the work. Thus, the social portrait of residents of Vilnius is likely also have been considerably embellished by imagination.

Braun's plan of the capital of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania went through seven reprints, and each time new information was added. The museum holds the first edition of the plan, the only copy found in Lithuanian museums.

Another exhibit worthy of attention is a panoramic view of the city of Grodno from the same atlas. Created after a prototype of 1568, it commemorated a concrete historic event—the arrival of the envoy of Grand Duke of Moscow Ivan the Terrible, Fyodor Kolychev, to the Sejm of Grodno on 24 July 1567.

Other exhibits are equally interesting: a map of Europe by Hendrik Hondius the Younger (1597–1651), dedicated to King of France Louis XIII, a map of Livonia published by Johann Blaeu in 1662–1665, and copies significant for the history of Lithuania Minor—a map of Prussia with the newly founded city of Gumbinnen, published by Johann Homann in 1735, and the Hohenzollern family tree compiled in the seventeenth century.

Room 2

Right behind the corner is a small room with portraits of Lithuanian and Polish rulers on one side, flanked by portraits of representatives of prominent families on the other. Collecting this kind of portrait gallery was one of Varnelis's main aims as an antiquarian. The majority of portraits of the highest rulers—Stanisław Leszczyński, Augustus III, Władysław Vasa—were acquired at Antiquariat V. A. Heck in Vienna, and the portraits of Kazimierz Leon Sapieha, Mikołaj Krzysztof “the Orphan” Radziwiłł, Michał Fryderyk Czartoryski and other magnates found their way to the collection from galleries and private individuals.

One of the most impressive exhibits is a portrait of Mikołaj Krzysztof “the Orphan” Radziwiłł from the famous publication *Armamentarium Heroicum* (*Arms of the Heroes*) by Jakob Schrenck von Notzing (1539–1612). The nobleman in magnificent armour framed by a decorative Renaissance ornament easily wins the viewer's attention in this room.

Schrenck von Notzing's publication, which includes portraits of not only “the Orphan” Radziwiłł, but also his close relatives, “the Black” Radziwiłł and “the Red” Radziwiłł, appeared in 1601 in Latin, and in 1603 in German. A catalogue of the collection containing 125 sets of



Mikołaj Krzysztof
"the Orphan" Radziwiłł
(1549–1616).

Engraved by Dominicus
Custos after Giovanni Battista
Fontana. From Jakob Schrenck
von Notzing's publication
Armamentarium Heroicum
(*Armour of Heroes*), 1603.

“heroes” in their armour and was commissioned by the younger brother of Emperor Maximilian II, Archduke of Further Austria, Ferdinand II of the House of Habsburg (1529–1595). He began to accumulate this extraordinary collection circa 1577. To be included in the collection, armour had to meet two conditions: the high mastery of the armourer, and the exceptional personality of its owner. To implement this ambitious idea, an entire “army” of envoys was sent out to the most prominent courts of that time with offers to contribute armour to the archduke’s collection. Circa 1580, the envoys arrived in Vilnius, and a year later, the first museum in Europe—Ambras Castle (Austria), built by Ferdinand II Habsburg to house his collection—already boasted three sets of armour of the Radziwiłł family. Each exhibit in the castle had its own place and an “information stand”—a drawing representing the owner of the armour and a description. However, some mistakes occurred—Mikołaj “the Black” Radziwiłł’s armour was mistakenly attributed to his son Mikołaj Krzysztof “the Orphan” Radziwiłł, and the son’s armour was misattributed to his father. In the *Armamentarium Heroicum* published on the basis of this collection in 1603, the mistake was not corrected. The armour worn by Mikołaj “the Orphan” Radziwiłł was made by Kunz (Konrad) Lochner (1510–1567) from Nuremberg in the middle of the sixteenth century. This famous armourer meticulously executed Radziwiłł’s order: in its structure, intricate ornaments and unusually rich colours, the armour resembles a textile rather than metal work. It is said that even Lochner’s the ceremonial armour of Sigismund Augustus does not equal it in beauty and execution technique.

The masterpiece of armour that belonged to Sigismund Augustus (1520–1572) is held in the Stockholm Royal Arsenal (*Livrustkammaren*), and the armour of “the Black” Radziwiłł, mistakenly attributed to his son—in the Art History Museum in Vienna (*Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien*).





Room 3



Room of battle scenes

The room of battle scenes is filled with battles of the armies of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Sweden from the second half of the seventeenth to the early eighteenth century: Filipów, Sandomierz, Brześć Litewski (now Брэст in Belarus) and Saločiai.

The larger part of the copper engravings comes from the publication *De rebus a Carolo Gustavo Sveciae Rege gestis commentariorum libri septem elegantissimis tabulis aeneis exornati cum triplici indice* (*Seven Books about the Rule of Karl Gustav in Sweden*, 1696) by the lawyer, political philosopher and historian, baron Samuel von Puffendorf (1632–1694). He prepared this work extolling King of Sweden Karl X Gustav on commission from the Swedish royal court. The book's designer Erik Jönsson Dahlbergh (1625–1703) matched the author in his artistic talents. Dahlbergh produced the artistic design of the book and made detailed drawings of the Siege of Sandomierz of 1656 and the Battle of Brześć Litewski of 1657. Dahlbergh was also an authoritative historian, engineer, cartographer, and officer, who was conferred the title of nobleman for his merits.

The spectacular portrait of "The Lion of Khotyn," Jan Sobieski, contrasts the Swedish defeats with an impressive victory of Lithuanians in which the Grand Hetman Sobieski is depicted during the Battle of Khotyn against the Tatars in 1673. Beside military scenes, other compositions are exhibited as well: a panoramic view of Königsberg (after Friedrich Bernhard Werner), the crowning of King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki (1669–1673), a bronze statuette of Joan of Arc from the second half of the nineteenth century, and a woman's marble bust on a neo-Renaissance chest of drawers.

As an artist not just an antiquarian, Varnelis created unseen and unexpected combinations such as this room. The museum's unconventional exhibition structure is often disconcerting—at first sight things seem put together haphazardly. Even though he was well schooled in museological canons, Varnelis did not regard strict thematic compositions as a necessity. Transferring the masterful play of rhythm and space from his canvases to the ancient vaults of the structure, he created a suggestive installation, in which even the doorposts perform a role, acting as picture frames.