

a traditional ornament used in weaving, a coat of arms of Riga and motifs of ornaments of a bronze head-dress.

Each banknote has its own story to tell, but all these stories are connected by the fragments of the *Lielvārde* belt depicted on banknotes, and they form so-called vertical dominant. It is supplemented by denomination figures of banknotes and coins which are incorporated in the belt fragments.

Symbols of lats and santims coins are characterised by elegant simplicity. Artist Gunārs Lūsis chose elements symbolising the Latvian way of life to be depicted on santims coins minted in 1992 (165). The symbols of small stylised ethnic suns and the five semi-circled lines connecting them on the reverse of the coins above the denomination figures depict the morning and evening and the working day connecting them. Higher denomination coins bear the symbols of the basic elements of the existence of the Latvian nation: a pine tree seedling representing the woods (50-santims), a salmon representing the waters (1-lats) and a cow representing the land (2-lats).

The design of the lats and the symbols it included were as simple as that, but at the same time they were complicated. The Latvian money of the interwar period described us as a nation, but the restored lats explained why we were just like that. During an interview, Imants Zodiāks, when answering a question concerning the positive reception by the public of the design of lats banknotes and coins said: "This means that we have crossed the national border, and that we have constructed general abstractions. They are folksy, but at the same time commonly understandable and acceptable." To be more precise, the design of lats banknotes and coins is timeless – it is borderless in terms of time and space, and most of the public understands it. No wonder people say that "the new money was as beautiful as the independent Latvia".



165
Design for 10 santims 1992 coin. By Gunārs Lūsis. Cat. 209

4.3. More than just a coin

The Coin Design Commission of the Bank of Latvia that became operational on 22 November 1993 played a major role in the creation of banknotes and coins. The Commission consists of representatives of the Bank of Latvia, outstanding Latvian experts of art and culture, as well as artists and scientists. The Coin Design Commission provides advice to the Bank of Latvia on issues related to the production of circulation and collector coins by proposing themes for coins and their programmes, comes up with proposals for types of coin development, selects artists for designing coins, assesses the work carried out by artists and samples of minted coins.

The Commission discusses the artists who could be offered to make proposals for the creation of a specific coin within a restricted tender. Three artists are invited to participate in the development of circulation coins, while five or six artists whom the Commission regards as the best suited for mastering the particular theme are offered to take part in the development of collector coins.

Out of the proposals or sketches received, the Commission selects the most appropriate one. The lats collector coins were created by artists Gunārs Lūsis, Laimonis Šēnbergs, Heinrihs Vorkals, Arnis Priedītis, Kristaps Gelzis, Franceska Kirke, Gunārs Krūlis, Ilze Lībiete, etc., as well as by the deceased artists Gunārs Čilīts and Ilmārs Blumbergs. To extend the range of artists involved in coin design art, a new artist was also invited to participate in the restricted tender. Ligita Franckeviča and Jānis Strupulis excelled in making plaster models of collector coins.

An international tender was organised to select a mint, taking account of specific features of each mint. The Bank of Latvia was very demanding towards mints, thus somewhat reminding minting of Latvian circulation coins during the interwar period, i.e. the selected mint first minted a sample of the respective coin and sent it for assessment and approval to the Bank of Latvia. It should be added that mints had to remake the sent samples in some cases. The Bank of Latvia sent a plaster model to mints which was used by the selected mint to prepare for minting the respective coin.

From the outset, the collector coins issued by the Bank of Latvia took the form of an encyclopaedia minted in silver and gold and reflecting Latvia's culture and history. Due to the fact that the themes for coins were carefully selected, the collector coins issued by the Bank of Latvia differed considerably from those issued by other national central banks, since they mainly focused on classical themes. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the set of coins issued by the Bank of Latvia has been included in the Latvian Cultural Canon, as according to Ramona Umblija, a former member of the Coin Design Commission of the Bank of Latvia, "Each Latvian banknote and coin is a work of art". The collector coins issued for the first time in the history of Latvia in 1993 were dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the Republic of Latvia. The coin series consisted of a 2-lats white metal coin, a 10-lats silver coin and a 100-lats gold coin.

Latvian collector coins still receive high international recognition. Many of them have earned prestigious awards, thus reaffirming the careful attention paid by the Bank of Latvia to design of collector coins. For example, the 1-lats collector coin "Millenium Button" issued in 1999 and having the appearance of a button was the winner in the nomination "The Most Innovative Coin of the Year" at the contest "Coin of the Year" organised by Krause Publications, the US numismatic publishing house, and its magazine *World Coin News* in 2003 (166). The coin was designed by Gunārs Čilīts (b. 1927), the plaster model was made by Jānis Strupulis, and it was minted at The Royal Mint, the UK.

The 1-lats collector coin the "Coin of Time" issued by the Bank of Latvia (minted in 2004) received a prize of the best coin of 2004 awarded by the Worldwide Bimetallic Collectors Club (167). The central part of the coin struck in hazy bluish metal niobium is enclosed by an outer silverring. The obverse of the coin bears the heraldic five-petal rose and the initials H. R., paying homage to the discoverer of niobium Heinrich Rose, whereas the reverse features an astronomical clock. The coin was designed by Laimonis Šēnbergs (b. 1947), the plaster model was made by Jānis Strupulis, and it was minted by Münze Österreich, Austria.

Although the 1-lats collector coin dedicated to the 150th anniversary of Riga Technical University has not received any international awards, it nevertheless should be regarded as one of the most interesting and unusual collector coins issued by the Bank of Latvia. It is not traditionally coin in shape but consists of two detachable triangles that form a square, and it is a small yet practically employable 100 – a ruler and protractor. The coin was designed by Kristaps Gelzis and minted by Suomen Rahapaja Oy, Finland.



166
Latvia, 1 lats, 1999, Millenium Button.
By Gunārs Čilīts and Jānis Strupulis. Cat. 217



167
Latvia, 1 lats, 2004, Coin of Time, I.
By Laimonis Šēnbergs and Jānis Strupulis. Cat. 220

Overall, the Bank of Latvia has issued 98 lats collector coins and circulation coins of special design since 1995, and several dozens of Latvian artists have participated in designing them. The traditions of money design art have not disappeared following Latvia's joining the Eurozone. The Bank of Latvia continues to issue both collector and special circulation coins. The Bank of Latvia has issued 46 euro collector coins and 15 euro circulation coins so far. Latvian euro coins, like before, continue to win excellence awards at international contests of coin design art. Moreover, euro coins increasingly stand out not only because of their symbols and design elements but also because of their shape.

4.4. From idea to award-winning

On 3 August 1922 the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia approved the law "Regulation on Money". Pursuant to this law, Latvia's monetary system was based on gold, and the monetary unit was the lats whose value was 0.2093226 grams of fine gold. The law also provided for minting gold 10-lats and 20-lats coins. The supplement "Regulation on Gold Money" to the law "Regulation on Money" of 14 September 1922 actually established the direction in which the design of the above mentioned coins should go. Namely, it was envisaged to depict "(...) a head of a Latvian maiden, an oak branch (...) and the face value on the obverse of Latvian gold coins, and the coat of arms of Latvia, the minting year and the word Latvia on their reverse. Meanwhile, the edge of the coin would feature the first words of the Latvian national anthem: *Dievs, svētī Latviju!* (God, bless Latvia!). However, as a result of the monetary reform implementing the transition from the Latvian rouble to the lats, the Ministry of Finance no longer saw a need for gold coins and decided to mint only 1-, 2-, and 5-lats silver coins.

Although gold coins were not minted in the Republic of Latvia during the interwar period, documents suggest that several preparatory steps were made. Latvian sculptor Teodors Zalkāns (1876–1972) also participated in the tender on the development of the design of the 10-lats gold coin (168). Although the state had already decided on the visual appearance of the gold coins, the sculptor came up with his own vision. His intention was to feature a portrait of a Latvian mother in profile on the obverse of the coin as a symbol of the nation's moral strength during the period of tragic suffering. According to the author, the symbols associated with prosperity, fertility and fruitfulness (a loaf of bread, an apple, a vessel containing a curdled milk beverage and a

jug of milk) depicted on the reverse of the coin would testify to the core values of the state and society.

Since the idea of minting gold coins was abandoned, the sculptor's project, which had already taken shape in a plaster model, found its place on the shelves of the Ministry of Finance next to other non-implemented coin (or banknote) projects. After Second World War, when Latvia was remained occupied by the USSR, the plaster model of the gold coin was stored in the former Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Latvia until 20 May 1949 when the Ministry handed it over to the Central State History Museum of the Latvian SSR (the present day National History Museum of Latvia) as "a wooden board with an enlarged plaster sample of metal money which during a stock-taking was found to be of no use for the Ministry". During the period of political censorship, the plaster model of the gold 20-lats coin was held in the special collection of the museum's Numismatic department, and only a limited number of persons were aware of its existence.

In the run-up to the 90th anniversary of the Republic of Latvia, the Bank of Latvia decided to issue the 20-lats gold coin once nurtured by Teodors Zalkāns. Sculptor Ligita Franckeviča (b. 1947) adapted his outstanding work to the modern technical capabilities for minting the gold 20-lats collector coin of the Republic of Latvia at the Austrian mint Münze Österreich. It was given a concise and appropriate name – the *Latvijas monēta* (Coin of Latvia), because it "(...) shines with the promise of a good fortune and happiness in the future, since the path running from the past and tradition leads to attainment of distant goals" (169).

The simple thematic concept of the coin which was at the same time so very relevant to the Latvian way of life won recognition not only in Latvia. In 2009, the gold collector coin "Coin of Latvia" won the second prize in the nomination the "Gold Coin of the Year" at the contest "Coin Constellation" (*Монетное созвездие*) organised by Watermark Publishing House, the Russian numismatic publishing house. Meanwhile, in 2010, the "Coin of Latvia" received the "Best Gold Coin" and "Coin of the Year 2010" awards (the coins issued in 2008 were assessed). The "Coin of Latvia", due to its aesthetic and general attractiveness, as well as its international recognition, is still popular among collectors.



168
Models for 20-lats gold coin 1992. Obverse and reverse.
By Teodors Zalkāns. Cat. 226



169
Latvia, 20 lats, 2008, Latvijas monēta (Coin of Latvia).
By Ligita Franckeviča after a model by Teodors Zalkāns. Cat. 234

5. Where there any alternatives?

Many wanted to take part in the design competition for the renewed national currency. The submitted designs varied from direct references to the national currency of the interwar period to contemporary art. Each had a specific idea with whom the designer wanted to describe and associate his renewed country.

The renewed national currency existed and was in circulation longer than the historical one. That, perhaps, is why the renewed national currency has been more lasting in the memory of modern society than the historic national currency. Maybe because of this, the alternative designs of the renewed national currency now seem strange, quirky and even alien to us.

LITHUANIA

5.1. Proposed (but unused) designs for national currency

14 artists took part in the 1989–1990 money projects competition: sculptors, medalists, graphic artists, and painters. They had to come up with concepts that combined colours and denominations, composition. The works illustrate a glimpse of interwar money – they feature historical personalities, rich national symbolism, historical and architectural monuments (176).



176
Design of the 50-lit banknote, 1990. By Alvydas Mandeika.
65 × 122 (90 × 141) mm, 61 × 122 (91 × 141) mm
LNM, NO 232, NO 281



177
Design of the 2-lit banknote, 1990. By Ljudovitas Porius.
Pencil, watercolour: 148, 129 × 238 (162 × 300) mm
LNM, NO 442



178
Design of the 10-lit banknote, 1994. By Gitana Matonytė (Jaskelienė).
Computer graphics, 211 × 296 mm
PRIVATE PROPERTY (LITHUANIA)

The litas projects drawn up by a group of artists after the competition and intended for printing in France remained unrealised (177). After adjustments to the compositions, denominations, and themes some of them were used for the 1991 banknotes.

Gitana Matonytė's (Vaskelienė's) diploma thesis, "Republic of Lithuania's banknote projects", defended at the Department of Design of the Academy of Arts, became the answer to modern design (178).

The history of commemorative coins, of which 110 have been issued, is full of unrealised litas projects (179).



179
Design of the 50 litas coin, 2008. Fluxus. By Ljudas Paruškas.
Computer graphics, ø 386 mm (4-2 AV), ø 179 mm (4-2 Rev, and ø 21 LPM)

LATVIA

5.1. Proposed (but unused) designs for national currency

The work on the re-establishment of the lats formally began in June 1984, when during the meeting of the Metal Arts Section at the Artists' Union Juris Gaginis, Chairman of the Metal Arts Section, invited artists to think about new coins – develop designs and plan for minting. However, the actual process of the re-establishment of the lats began in February 1990, when the initiative was taken over by the Latvian Culture Foundation that announced a competition on the thematic concept of the lats.

More than 20 projects were submitted for the competition, with professional artists and amateurs from Latvia and abroad taking part. Most contestants did not stand out as particularly original regarding the design of lats banknotes and coins. Yet, it is understandable, as during the time when Latvian society had regained its confidence that was lost during the Second World War and suppressed in later years the design of banknotes and coins was largely dominated by imitations of the lats' designs from the interwar period and the symbols included in those designs. At the same time, differences were apparent, namely, some symbols were carried over, but some were new and relevant for the society of the time. The designs of banknotes and coins included the well-respected politicians of Latvia (Jānis Čaksta and Kārlis Ulmanis), outstanding cultural personalities (Rainis, Aspazija, Krišjānis Barons, Kōļģis Valdemārs, Oskars Kalpaks, etc.), as well as parts of monuments of public interest, namely, the Freedom Monument, elements from the ensemble of the Brethren Cemetery, etc.



180
Plaster models of the 1-santim coin submitted to the Latvian Culture Foundation's competition for the thematic concept of the lats in 1989. Obverse of the 1-santim coin and reverse of the 1-santim coin. By Ēdgars Grīnfelds. Plaster, ø 258 mm and 150 mm
LNM, CVM 283045, CVM 283050



181
Sketch of the 20-santim coin submitted to the Latvian Culture Foundation's competition for the thematic concept of the lats in 1989. Obverse and reverse. Author unknown. Ink, ø 210 mm (475 × 377 mm)
LNM, CVM 223892

Project motifs also expressed similar messages, e.g. "For free Latvia", "let's work for Latvia", "Ad Ram", "LR – 91 – AP", "Culture", "Agriculture", "If you are afraid of wolves, don't go to the woods!" (181). Authors of some designs have not been established to this day

1990–2015

182
Sketches of the banknotes submitted to the Latvian Culture Foundation's competition for the thematic concept of the lats in 1989:



1. Sketch of the 1-lat banknote reverse. Motto: Bruno.
Author unknown. Computer graphics, 380 × 609 mm
LNM, CVM 223028



2. Sketch of the 25-lat banknote obverse. Motto: "If you are afraid of wolves, don't go to the woods!". By Elīza Vilnina.
Watercolour, application: 204 × 440 mm
LNM, CVM 223007



3. Sketch of the 10-lat banknote obverse. Motto: Ķilģis.
By Vilnis Didrihšons. Computer graphics, 201 × 440 mm
LNM, CVM 223048



4. Sketch of the 2-lat banknote obverse.
By Sergejs Kovalčikovs. Pencil, 238 × 440 mm
LNM, CVM 223064

