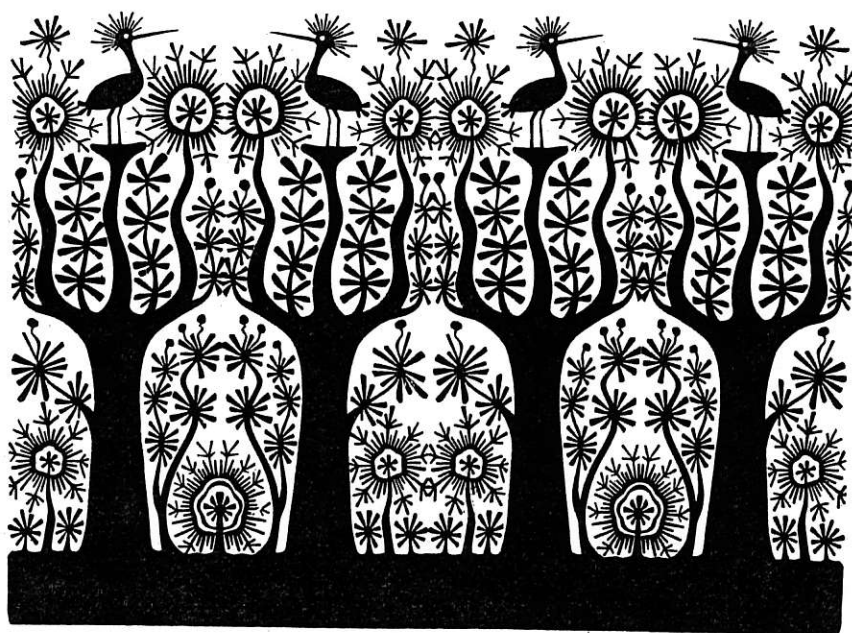


ART

# A Cutout World

PAPER CUTTING APPEALS TO PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD



"Storks" by Julija Daniliauskienė

#### JOLANTA PAŠKEVIČIENĖ

They appear on window panes before Christmas. Some are very simple, as if they were made by a child; some are intricate winter compositions.

They are in every gallery of folk art in Vilnius' Old Town, in the form of postcards or large openwork pictures cut out from a sheet of paper. They are snowflakes made of paper.

Lithuania does not have 2,000-year-old paper cutting traditions such as China's or Japan's. Neither does it have painters of the calibre of Picasso or Matisse, who are known to have made some.

But looking at the work of some of their creators, with their intricate hair-thin details, there is no doubt that Lithuanians can be very thorough and inventive people too.

The first paper cuts appeared in the country in the 16th century: some very simple ones

were discovered under noblemen's seals.

From the 19th century, many household articles were decorated with them, such as oil lamps, kitchen shelves, sideboards, and portraits of saints. They also served as curtains for windows. Birds, apples and ears of corn, as symbols of fertility, were fixed to chairs for the newlyweds at their wedding parties.

Many people, and not just grandmothers and children, enjoy the art. Paper cuts are used to illustrate books. They can be made into postcards and bookplates, and also landscapes, still lifes and whole pictures.

The art of paper cutting is as popular with the young as with the old, with women and men, with town and country people, of various ages and from different walks of life. Exhibitions of them are proof that in the last few decades the art has been enjoying a revival.

#### Mother of paper cuts

Even after looking through piles of work by Julija Daniliauskienė, you will hardly believe that these decorative black and white, large-format sheets are not woodcuts or linocuts. It is hard to believe that a pair of scissors cut out these hair-thin lines, twisting them into elaborate patterns. It seems that this entire plane, shimmering with birds, trees, vegetation and ornamental patterns, cannot have been cut from one single sheet.

Daniliauskienė, does not think she really deserves the title "the mother of paper cuts".

"I didn't invent them. They have been known and made all over the world at all times. It's true that I was lucky, or else it was by fate, that I happened to revive paper cuts, which were dying out with old country women. Again, it's probably not thanks to me, but to my husband."

However, until the early 1980s



Until the early 1980s, Daniliauskienė was the only person to exhibit work. Thanks to her achievements, many people later took up the art



Large paper cuts by Daniliauskienė are made from a whole sheet of paper; only the snowflakes and spheres have been glued on



she has been the only one known to make paper cuts and to exhibit them at arts and crafts events.

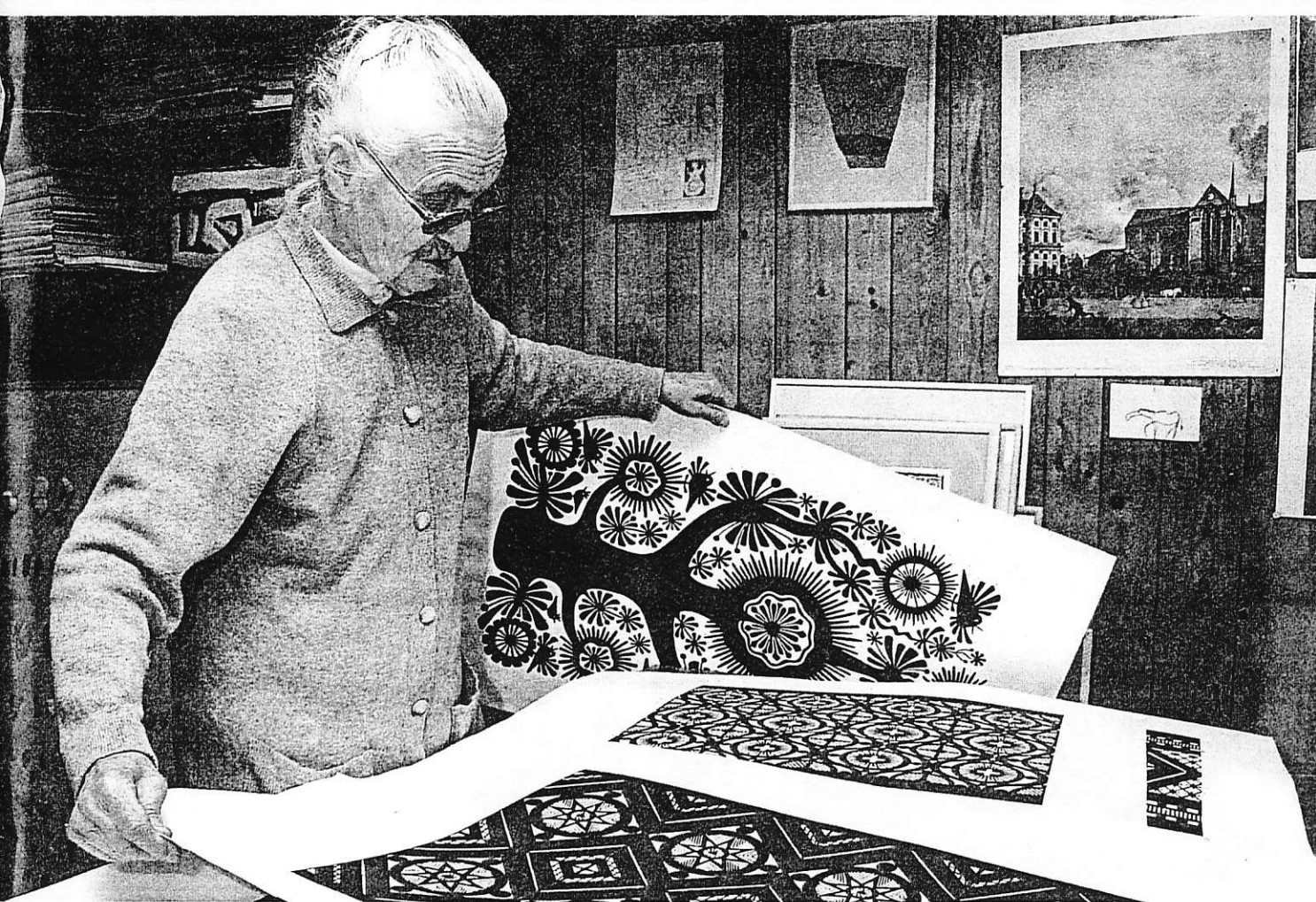
"Life is fair, it takes away with one hand, but it gives back with the other," she says.

Her life has definitely been no bed of roses. The happy childhood on a big farm, with music lessons, drawing and poetry, disappeared overnight when the Soviets exiled the entire family to Siberia.

After 15 years, she returned to Lithuania, married to a deportee who later became a historian-ethnographer, and with three small daughters. The family settled in the Panevėžys district, where her husband found a teaching job in a school.

"My husband realised how important it was to record folk art. We scoured the villages looking for decorated doors, windows and painted dowry chests. I recorded all those decorations by copying them."

She remembers that it was not



easy to find the time for this, with three little girls at home. But her husband insisted on her doing it before it was too late, because the folk heritage was diminishing with every day.

"I'm especially fond of flower patterns. I can feel the different touch of each artisan, but they all had the same free symmetry and recurrent motifs. I was fascinated by their simplicity, clarity and rhythm."

Between 1956 and 1965, wandering across villages with her husband, she reaped a double harvest. Scores of her sketches of folk decorations have been kept in the catalogues of the Lithuanian National Museum for almost half a century now. The decorative patterns proved to be a source of inspiration for her paper cuts.

She started paper cutting using patterns she had copied many times, very naturally, while teaching art and crafts to her daughters.

"When I took my first collection to Kaunas, to the M.K. Čiurlionis Museum, they were surprised to see work they had never seen before. Later on, I understood that country women used a different method. Their patterns were cut out without sketches, and look like geometric openwork.

"I did it a different way. I would draw a floral motif first, cut it out, and glue it on to paper. Later, I decided to try the technique of my favourite paper curtains that used to decorate country homes."

She had to seek out the secrets of the technique from old women. Thin paper is folded into several layers, and the shapes are cut out, starting from the edge. This way, filigree openwork in stars, diagonals and other geometric shapes emerges.

Her busiest period started in 1965, when her family moved to Vilnius. She started working for the state-run Dailė enterprise,

**It is essential for me that a paper cut is steeped in folk art."**

and made postcards (mostly for New Year) until she retired. These are small compositions glued on to a white sheet of paper.

"I liked black paper most. But to sell my work, I had to use coloured paper. Sometimes I would even glue on additional coloured details," she recalls.

She says that she was amazed that nobody else at the time was attempting paper cutting, as she finds it so pleasurable. It is probably a question of time when some things become fashionable.

With the trend, exhibitions appeared. For Daniliauskienė, this was an encouragement to create larger works and to look for new forms of expression.

"It is essential for me that a paper cut is steeped in folk art. I searched for new motifs. I was fascinated with traditional weaving patterns, and the decorative woodwork of the doors of country barns. I also liked flowering pine trees.





Flowers, leaves and animals feature in paper cuts by Merkienė

**Europos Parkas**

Visit Europos Parkas, the leading open-air contemporary art museum, a 20 min. drive from the centre of Vilnius. Enjoying the treasured landscape of the park, you will discover the admirable world of art.

Let's meet at the centre of Europe!

E-mail: [hq@europosparkas.lt](mailto:hq@europosparkas.lt) | [www.europosparkas.lt](http://www.europosparkas.lt) | Tel/fax: (370 5) 2377077, 2377070

OPEN-AIR MUSEUM OF THE CENTRE OF EUROPE



Cut from a folded sheet of paper, this work, called "Threat", is 67 centimetres high

"But it took a lot of time and effort before I was able to translate these into my paper cuts. It was not until I had learned stylisation and developed my imagination."

She has not practised her favourite occupation for a while now. She lives with her two daughters, Viktorija, a well-known graphic artist, and Darija, who is a chemist but also makes mobiles from straw. Julija will turn 80 next spring.

"The worst thing is my eyesight. For a while I worked with thick velvety paper to imitate painted chests. It was different to using small bits of paper. But I am no longer able to do even that, as my eyesight is so poor. If it wasn't, I would still be cutting, because I have plenty of ideas."

#### Improviser

"If in the old days women used to pick up a sheet of paper and

scissors and simply cut out patterned curtains for themselves, how can I do it differently?" asks Regina Merkienė. "Traditional paper cutting has always appeared without sketches."

As a professor of ethnology, she has been doing it for 25 years now, but has never even tried to use a sketch.

"When I take a new sheet of paper, I don't know what I'm going to do, or what will come of it. But I feel the mood, whether it's going to be happy or sad, melancholic or frightening. Then everything just happens."

She takes a sheet of paper that has been folded in half, and her scissors wind their way across it, producing different shapes, and eventually reemerge on the other side as if from a maze, and the cut-out image separates from the "negative". Often she uses both sides, a negative and a positive, like a reflection of an image in water or in a parallel world.

"When I see work by other people at exhibitions, I can always tell which pieces have been cut without a preparatory drawing, as they have a special shimmering effect."

Several decades ago, when colour paper suitable for cutting was difficult to come by, Merkienė used to cut tiny postcards from sweet wrappers. A valuable discovery was the black packaging for photographic paper.

She has estimated that a small picture takes her 20 minutes to cut. A larger work takes four hours. She has to unfold the entire image and straighten out all the details of the plants, leaves and shoots, gluing it on a white sheet of paper, which all takes time. Only then can you see the final result.

"I'm a real nuisance to my family when I prepare for exhibitions. Sometimes I have to glue a composition spread out on the floor. Other times I leave it on a table, pressed down under something so that it does not blow away. So I potter about with my

**When beginning a new work, Merkienė cuts whatever comes into her head**



VYTAUTAS ŠIRVINSKAS

work from one place to another, until it's finally glued on to a sheet of paper properly."

Despite her active professional life, she always enjoys cutting paper whenever she has a minute to spare, and she can do it easily while watching television in a comfortable armchair, or on a train, or whiling away the hours in a hotel room after a conference.

She recalls the time when her husband found himself in hospi-

**I feel the mood, whether it's going to be happy or sad, melancholic or frightening. Then everything just happens."**

tal after a heart attack. Everybody was talking about possible worse consequences, and it felt as if it was the end of the world. This depressing mood can still be felt in a work that she made an attempt to steady herself, entitled "Whirlpool".

#### **Nonstandard format**

On leaving the Ministry of Justice, Klaudas Navickas, a department head, always goes the same way. After a 20-minute walk, he



descends several steps leading down to a basement, takes off his jacket and tie, puts an AC/DC or Yellow River LP on the turntable, and becomes a different person.

Framed filigree paper cuts on the wall, certificates, tiny scissors on the windowsill and the table, a paper cut in progress: all these speak of his pastime.

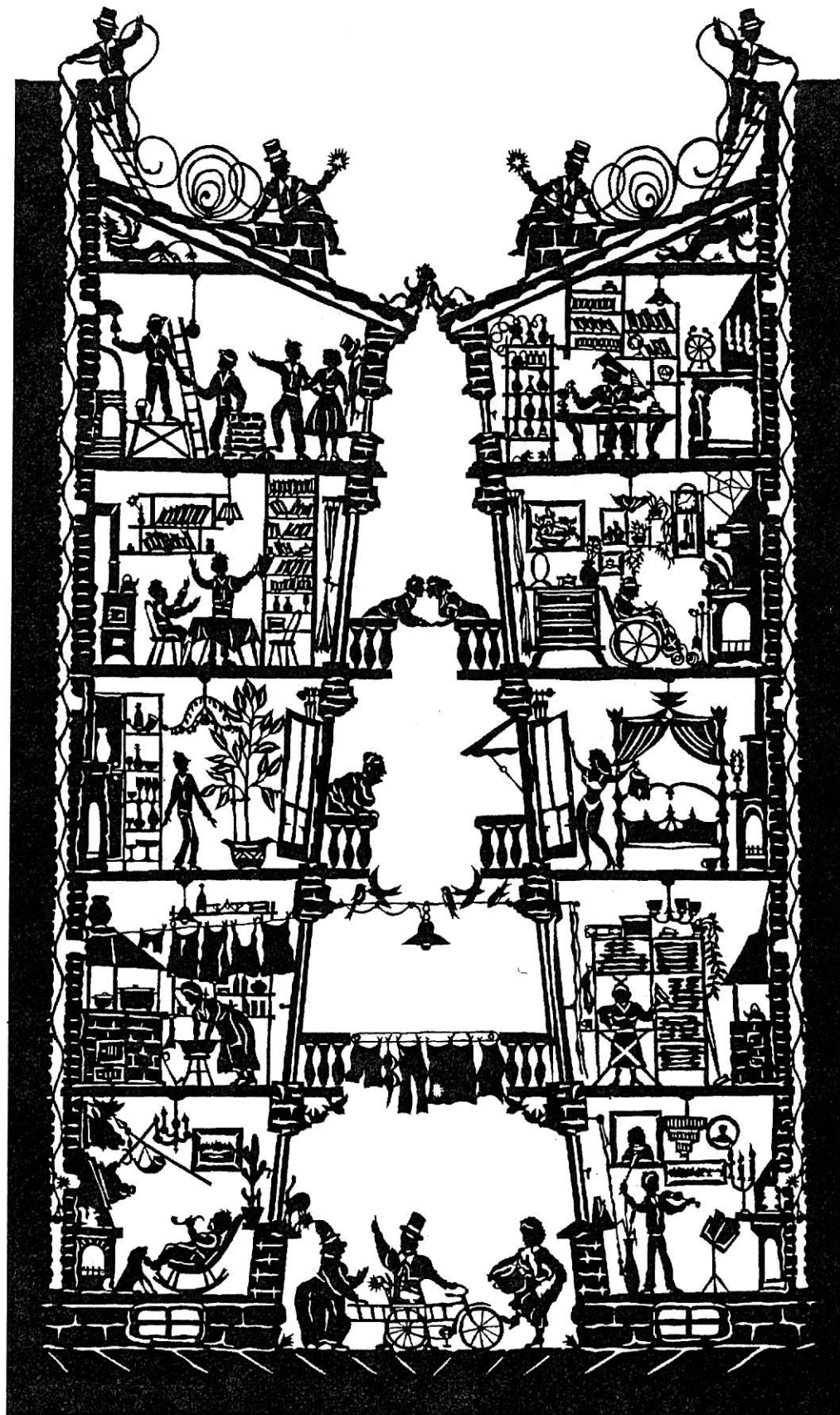
"In my studio, I'm the man I really want to be."

His warm smile backs up his words.

"Paper cutting has always been a pleasure for me, not work. But I wouldn't be able to make both ends meet if I did only what I enjoy doing most."

His job not only enables him to practise the skill, but also supports his gallery. On Fridays, open door day, it always attracts children, skilled teachers, and mothers with babies.

He has been creating paper cuts in his own individual style and technique for 15 years. First



This paper cut took Navickas over a month to make: an hour or so each day after work is all the time he can spare



SAVICKAS ART GALLERY

An exhibition of work  
by Augustinas Savickas  
and Raimondas  
Savickas

Art exhibitions.

Paintings and prints in color.

Savickas School of Art  
(for adults)

Vilnius g. 14, LT-01119 Vilnius  
Tel/fax (370 5) 2615078  
savickogalerija@centras.lt  
www.savickas.xxi.lt

Darius ir Girėno g. 13, Palanga  
Taikos g. 17, Nida

"Folk tales, songs and folklore supply me with funny subjects for my work," Navickas says



VILTAUTAS ŠIRVINKAS

he draws an image on white paper, and usually does not actually use scissors, but puts the paper on a firm support and works with tiny burins, as if it were a linocut. He always produces one copy only. Some of the works in his gallery he could never reproduce, nor sell.

"I worked on this piece for half a year. I would never repeat it," he says, as he points to a work with nature motifs on a brown background.

His larger works (he would never refer to any of his pieces as a "postcard") take several months, because he only makes them in his spare time.

In one year, his gallery gets five or six new pieces. Most of his themes and motifs are derived from folk stories and songs. But there are also some reflecting different pastimes: fishing, hunting or the cinema, with Hitchcock's birds, for instance.

His gallery has a new "Japa-

nese wall" that shows entirely different work, the inspiration for which came from a trip to Japan. He showed his art at Expo 2005, and with great success.

Now he says he has difficulty when he returns to Lithuania. In his paper cuts, alongside the branches of an oak tree, there are flowering Japanese cherry trees, dragons, and Mount Fujiyama.

"I'm being accused of not keeping to tradition. My themes are not in keeping with folk culture, my technique is different, and I use the wrong materials. But I've been a nonconformist all my life."

In his childhood he invented some different forms of artistic expression. Later, living in a hostel with his wife and two daughters did not prevent him from chiselling metal or moulding gypsum in the kitchen. Therefore, the day he found some small scissors on the street and

**In my studio, I'm the man I really want to be."**

starting cutting, a skill that is quiet and clean, became a red-letter day for his wife. Now, the entire family is employed in his gallery.

"Each of us has their personal interests, and nobody complains. My parents, both retired, are involved. My father is the director of the gallery, and my two daughters work shifts. My mother is a craftswoman, and exhibits alongside me."

Navickas sounds happy with this. The traditional mittens hand-knitted by his mother are displayed neatly in the gallery, and are already known in Germany, Scandinavia, and elsewhere in Europe.

"I believe that having a skill to engage in makes us all happy, and we don't know what a boring life is.

"When I work at the ministry, I don't think about my hobby. Here, I don't think about work. So I'm happily divided between two different lives."