

The magic of light in the urban environment in Latvia

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Abstract

Baltic peoples, whose way of life was based on agriculture, widely worshipped natural objects and phenomena since ancient times. The Balts worshipped their gods in holy places – Sacred Groves. The longest day and shortest night of the year are at the Summer Solstice when rituals were associated with ensuring the fertility of fields and livestock, as well as with fire and water, which on this night have life-giving power. Fire is sacred. Fires should be lit at sunset and in the highest possible places. Beliefs say that fire brings blessings as far as its glow can be seen. The Winter Solstice is the shortest day and longest night, as well as a time of purification and awareness when we allow the spark of Higher Intelligence for harmony to come into us. At Christmas, fire is at the centre of ritual action and space. The pulsation of fire has its own rhythm, its own ups and downs, just as the Sun has its own

rhythm of cyclic pulsation and rotation. Fire itself is passionless. It is as much about creation and development as it is about re-creation. The fire is divine and God-given, and equated to life. Fire gives light, marks spatial and psychological landmarks, and stabilizes the human psyche in the infinite field of consciousness and darkness. Fire is an excellent object of meditation. The special importance of fire is reflected in the cultural traditions and annual celebrations that are so characteristic of the Balts and are still alive. A full-fledged human life and happiness are unthinkable without the skill and ability to manage the fire and energy hidden in the depths of matter.

Light can become magical in an urban environment. Why do people need it? In autumn, dusk begins earlier, and evenings become longer and cooler, so in the city, as well as in a home, people strive more for brightness and warmth at this time. High-quality greenery lighting helps people not only navigate safely in the dark but may also transform a landscape. Lighting design can create a particularly romantic atmosphere in parks, where by a stroll could turn into an unforgettable and fabulous adventure.

In cooperation with leading Latvian light and video artists, many event managers, artists groups, and creative personalities wanted to contribute to the celebration of

the 90th anniversary of Latvia. The festival of light *Staro Rīga* held in Latvia's capital city became highly popular and anticipated among citizens. During the festival, residents and guests can see unique light art objects, and theatrical performances, and go on walking routes along the canal bank and adjacent parks, gardens, and squares. Illuminated objects have become an integral part of the Rīga urban design concept. Ancient traditions inspire people with new ideas for urban transformation.

Introduction

Since ancient times, the Balts, who had a positive faith in their happiness and destiny, widely worshipped natural objects and phenomena. Their religion (Lithuanian: *Baltų religija*) was closely related to the way of life based on agriculture and animal husbandry. The fertility cult had special importance in the course of the life of a farmer. Deities look after a good harvest, rain and the fertility of livestock and women. Heaven symbolizes light and God, its highest, the most subtle manifestation of visible and felt vibrations. Baltic peoples worshipped cosmic phenomena such as the Sun, the Moon, Morning Star called *Auseklis* and Evening Star called *Rieteklis*. Thunder as the leading force of creative processes is able to create and restore the movement of the World (Universe) and the passage of time. Darkness is a symbol of raging forces while fire (Fig. 1) is a symbol of the centre of the Universe and the way to other worlds. Fire related to the holy fire dedicated to Thunder, hearth fire of every home and bonfires of Solstice rituals have real and symbolic relation to original forces of the Universe – God, Thunder, Fortune and Mother Earth [1]. A

full-fledged human life and happiness are unthinkable without the ability to manage fire and energy hidden in the depths of matter (Fig. 2). Various kinds of magic played an important role in the life of tribes living in the territory of Latvia. There was no unified religion, clergy or sanctuaries in the lands inhabited by the Balts. Tribes in each region had its own deities characterized by a certain behaviour and area of responsibility. All the solstice celebrations honoured the Sun (Latvian: *Saule*, Lithuanian: *Saulė*), the common Baltic solar deity in the Lithuanian and Latvian mythologies. The noun *Saulė* and *Saule* in the Lithuanian and Latvian languages is the name for the Sun and originates from the Proto-Baltic name *Sauliā* or *Saulē*. In Latvian mythology, the symbol of the Sun (also the Moon), harmony, completeness and defence related to eternal, tireless motion, recurrence, return, cycle and wholeness is a circle. In the language of symbolic signs, the World is marked by the circle which makes up the Sun's run [3]. People worshipped their gods in holy places – Sacred Groves. Annual holidays were blessed long ago in the place, where the Latvian nation was formed.



Fig. 1 God-given fire is divine and equated to life.

(<https://www.pikist.com/free-photo-snnngt/iv>)



Fig. 2 Fire can be placed in the natural

environment in a wide variety of ways.

(Photo by Māris Šljivka)

Solstice celebrations – the basis for new traditions

The Winter Solstice, according to Latvian traditions, is celebrated on 21 December, and similar to the Summer Solstice, a battle of light and darkness takes place. The day of the Winter Solstice is the longest, and the night is the shortest. Only this time when darkness prevails many traditions of the Winter Festival are connected with increasing light, thereby warding off forces of darkness (Fig. 3).

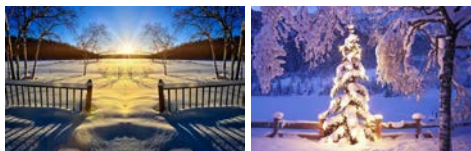


Fig. 3 The Winter Solstice is a time of purification and awareness; we allow the spark of Higher Intelligence for harmony to come into us. (Photo by Pixabay)

Fig. 4 The Winter Solstice is a festival of fertility, hope and light. The evergreen tree spruce is an eternal life symbol. (<https://kllproject.lv/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/davana-2.jpg>)

The annual Latvian celebration lasts for four days, usually from 20 to 23 December. Latvian ancestors beliefs say that the entire next year's harvest depended on the favour of the Sun and light at the Winter Solstice. It must be said that the celebration of the Winter Solstice was the richest – everything that was grown in the spring and summer and harvested in the fall was brought to the table. Latvian ancestors called annual celebrations times or days. The name 'Winter Festival' should mention the

analogy that the word 'holiday' is derived from the word *svēts* /holy/ with the original meaning – white, clean, shiny, bright (Fig. 4). Christmas is the only one that was called *svētki* /holiday, festivity/. The oldest meaning of the Latvian word *svētki* is light, illumination, so *svinēt* /to celebrate/ means to gain light – spiritual strength for the coming season. The Winter Holidays is the Winter Solstice, the celebration of the birth of God – the light, the brightness of Heaven. For Latvians, God as the Heavenly Father also represents the rule of law as the only and highest law of the World. During the holidays, people look for light, put themselves in order, forget about troubles that have happened and not think about the worries that will follow, perform rituals to receive light, and strength for everyday life, and attract fertility, blessing and wealth. Our ancestors had a mythical mindset, God in this case was not the God of Christendom. The double festive meaning of Heaven, the light of the sky and the highest spiritual concept do not create contradictions, but on the contrary – at the Winter Solstice, light wins over darkness and the Sun begins its ascent. Analogically and symbolically it can be represented as the birth of God. Today, Christmas is considered a quiet and peaceful holiday, but our ancestors celebrated the Winter Holidays joyfully, indulging in various fun and loud activities. In Latvian folk traditions, the Winter Solstice is a holiday to celebrate the efforts and hardships of the past year, to praise fertility and harvest, and to welcome the return of sunlight and warmth to nature. The days become longer and brighter after the Winter Holidays, therefore the Winter Holidays can be considered as the celebration of

the return of light, the final celebration of the autumn harvest and the completion of all great works.



Fig. 5 The fire in the centre of the Worship Ritual at the Winter Solstice in Valmiera. 2018.

(<https://www.valmieraszinas.lv/sagaidot-gada-garako-nakti-valmiera-atzimeti-ziemas-saulgriezi/ziemas-saulgriezi-2018-autors-valmieras-zinas-22/>)

During the Winter Holidays, fire is at the centre of ritual action and space (Fig. 5). Fire is an excellent object of meditation and a real and symbolic connection with the forces of origin of the World. The pulsation of fire has its own rhythm, its own ups and downs, just as the Sun has its own rhythm of cyclic pulsation and rotation. Fire gives light, marks spatial and psychological landmarks, and stabilizes the human psyche in the infinite field of consciousness and darkness. The fire itself is passionless. Fire is divine and God-given, and equated to life. Fire means both life and death, and is feared and worshipped. The special importance of fire is reflected in cultural traditions and celebrations of the Balts.

The Summer Solstice has always been a time to celebrate, and honour our connection to the inner firepower that keeps us alive, and a time to reflect on

our personal growth and the meaning of the light. This is the brightest time of the year when light is most available to us. The Summer Solstice is a day when you can spend it in nature and in inner prayer. Special gates are opened to the Divine. If a person prays during this night and day, then it really comes true. It's a moment filled with the potential for growth. In fact, the Pagan Summer Solstice Festival was named after the goddess of fertility, power, and order. As part of the World opens up again, we use the power of this Summer Solstice to embrace love, laughter, clarity and compassion. Everything in nature is waking up and we are moving to the strongest power of energy possible. If we live in harmony with nature, the time of the solstice allows us to flourish and blossom (Fig. 6). Every action and ritual either cleanses, restores, or protects and creates (Fig. 7). The Summer Solstice celebration takes place on the night of June 20–21 (astronomical summer solstice on June 21 at 1:51 pm). During this period of transition between day and darkness, the light lasts the longest and the night is the shortest. Mysterious feelings can be captured directly through ritual actions. Līgo is known on 23 June, a day before an Latvian festival Jāņi or Jāņi Day /John's Day/ on 24 June. Nowadays, citizens travel into the countryside to celebrate the solstice by observing ancient folk traditions relating to renewal and fertility.

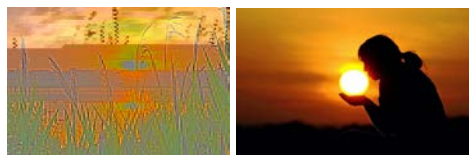


Fig. 6 The Sun in the Summer Solstice changes its position minimally for several

days. (<https://www.pikist.com/free-photo-vxckq/lv>)

Fig. 7 The Source of light and heat symbolizes the energy that has inestimable importance in the fate of one person and the whole of humanity. (<https://www.speletmagazine.lv/dzivesstils/5-idejas-saulgriezu-ritualiem-694>)

The Summer Solstice was a very important holiday for our ancestors, and fire with a deep and wide philosophical, mythological and religious basis was an integral part of the mystery. The preparation for the celebration adds mystery. The magical, special thing about this holiday is that nature blooms during this shortest night. In ancient times, any ritual aimed at promoting all kinds of fertility and warding off bad luck was given a magical meaning. It was a way that people tried to influence the usual order of things and explain the happenings around them in a way that they could understand. It was a way that people tried to influence the usual order of things and explain the happenings around them in a way that they could understand. Fire rituals were associated with special daring, courage and strength. According to Latvian traditions, several rituals are performed on this day to get rid of everything old and bad. The Summer Solstice associated with fire and water, which on this night have life-giving power. In the Summer Solstice celebrations when the primordial life force is felt very strongly, one of the most powerful rituals is the lighting of Jāņi Fire (Latvian: *Jāņuguns*) on the hilltop, where a flame connects the earth with the sky. The fire illuminated the fields and people and gave them a blessing. Around midnight, as the Sun goes down, the symbol of the Sun is fire attached atop the end of a card wrapped in a garland of

oak leaves and raised in the air. The burning of the *pūdele* (a container filled with tar) is a ritual that means protection from misfortunes (Fig. 8). As the longer is a card and the higher the fire burns, the larger the area is illuminated with the sacred flame. The fire is like a substitute for the Sun in this night of change. Our ancestors believed that fire was the best way to communicate with the gods who live in other worlds. Obtaining the new fire is one way of creating a new world. Celebrants form a circle around a fire (Fig. 9), and it should burn until dawn. Music has a strong ability to conjure up an appropriately festive mood. We live the traditions much more naturally and with greater strength when Līgo songs are played. In the folk song is a hidden code, and a person gains energy by singing. The solstice songs sung on this night are very mystical and magical and always draw you into an inner process and feel that is always very appealing. Especially during the solstice, you can find strength and inner peace through songs, as well as a sense of belonging.



*Fig. 8 The ritual for lighting a *pūdele* or a fire at the end of a pole. Celebrants form a circle around a bonfire of the Summer Solstice (<https://www.la.lv/januguns-uz-zemes-udens-un-debesis-ka-pareizi-sagatavot-ugunskuru-pudeli-plostu-un-saulesriteni>)*

Fig. 9 The bonfire was the symbol of the Sun at the Summer Solstice festival in Turaída. The special importance of fire is

reflected in the traditional and still-living fire cult traditions of the Balts. 2017. (<https://www.sigulda.lv/public/lat/jaunumi/17530/>)

Jāņi Fire symbolizes the centre of the Universe and means purposefulness and activity (Fig. 10). The ashes of the midsummer bonfire were scattered on fields, believing that they would bring fertility to the land. Jāņi Day called the day of fertility was a pagan holiday of farmers associated with the cult of the Sun and agriculture, therefore Jāņi rituals and traditions were symbolically connected with the glorification of their elements and were aimed at promoting all kinds of fertility and warding off bad luck. Fire is the passion that creates the World out of primordial chaos, and it is extremely important in difficult moments of our life when we have to make a choice and get rid of the old to start something new. Fire in all cultures is associated with a transition and a border beyond which a new life, a different order, thoughts and actions arise.

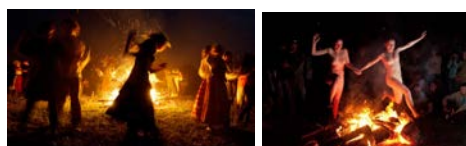


Fig. 10 Jāņi Fire is both a physical and a spiritual element, embodying warmth, light and purification. (Photo by RIA Novosti/Scanpix)

Fig. 11 In order to jump over the fire, you have to overcome a little fear, so the psychological meaning of this jump is related to daring, accepting a challenge, overcoming difficulties. (Photo by Shutterstock)

Our ancestors believed that a person running naked through the countryside absorbs as much as possible the precious midsummer dew (Fig. 11). This improves health, increases beauty and brings blessings because all the power of the magical Jāņi wort has gathered in the morning dew. In the darkness of the night, a wheel tied with straw and smeared with a burning substance was set on fire and rolled down the hill (Fig. 12), and it means fertilization and the blessing of the earth. It is important that the wheel is heavy enough and rolls to the bottom of the hill, even if it is with several rolling passes. This ritual means that the Sun is going down, or the daylight will become shorter every day.



Fig. 12 The rolling of the wheel of fire from the hill means fertilization and the blessing of the earth. (Photo by ©Depositphotos.com)

Fig. 13 Glowing fire clay sculptures in Jelgava. 2019 (Photo by Kristaps Hercs)

In the city of Jelgava, a special heat-resistant material chamotte suitable for outdoor climatic conditions is obtained by mixing the clay characteristic of the local area with finely crushed and fired clay particles, and since 2012, a large-format ceramic sculpture plein air has been held. Glowing fireclay sculptures became a long-standing tradition of the Summer Solstice celebration on the Isle of the Castle (Fig. 13). In 2013, the first symposium of large-format fireclay sculptures held under the leadership of

artistic director Aleksandrs Djačenko, and a new tradition started. Since 2014, the fireclay sculpture symposium in Jelgava gained international importance. Ten days artists their imagined figures of chamotte given by Jelgava company 'Latvijas keramika' created on specially built fireclay brick ovens. At the end of the symposium, sculptures were fired at 1100 degrees.

The dance performance 'Lec, saulīte' (Fig. 14) as part of 'Rīga – 2014 European Capital of Culture' was held on 21 and 22 June 2014. The best dance groups of Latvia – 2,500 members, as well as choirs, soloists and accompanying ensembles, took part in the concert performance that depicted the events based on Latvian traditions in dances and songs. In this performance, the emphasis was on fertility, energy, its giving and creation. People gather around bonfires to draw firepower and endurance throughout the shortest night, the most intense point in nature.



Fig. 14 A grand fire ritual performance 'Lec, saulīte' in the Summer Solstice. Choreographers Jānis Purviņš and Agris Daniļevičs, musical director Raimonds Tiguls, scenographer Reinis Suhanovs, dance expert Maruta Alpa. 2014 (Photo by Reinis Oliņš)

The Latvian people are proud of this holiday when nature is in full bloom and forests, fields and farms are sung. This time has an unusual energy, even a certain mysticism, the power of the energetic attraction between men and women. It is a magical time for performing various rituals. This performance designed as a fire ritual featured magically peaceful ritual songs and hot-blooded dances. The goal of the creative working group of the concert performance was to break stereotypes about Latvian laziness, and not be afraid to portray the power of Latvian sexuality. The project was organized by the 'Song Festival Society' in cooperation with the Latvian National Cultural Centre and the 'Rīga 2014' foundation. Artistic director Jānis Ārglis, director Elmārs Seņkovs, script author Rasa Bugavičute, libretto author Nora Ikstena, project manager Antra Purviņa.

Ancient traditions – a source of inspiration for new ideas of urban transformation

In Europe, in the early 1990s, fire sculptures began to develop as a separate type of sculpture and art installation. Since then, fire sculpture shows and competitions became popular. It is traditional to associate these events with the European Capital of Culture. The first European Fire Sculpture Championship was held in Stockholm, back in 1998 when it was the European Capital of Culture. The first World Fire Sculpture Championship was held in Tallinn in 2011 when it was awarded this title. The fire sculpture movement has gained popularity. Fire simultaneously symbolizes both

destructive and vital forces for survival. Fire sculptures are an environmentally friendly genre because, unlike fireworks, they allow to use one of the primary elements of nature in an artistic way without using chemicals and without negatively affecting birds and animals in the area.

In autumn, dusk begins earlier, and evenings become longer and cooler, so in the city, as well as in a home, people strive more for brightness and warmth at this time. Lighting design can create a particularly romantic atmosphere in parks, where by a stroll could turn into an unforgettable and fabulous adventure. High-quality greenery lighting helps people not only navigate safely in the dark but may also transform a landscape. Light can become magical in an urban environment. On Proclamation Day of the Republic of Latvia, on November 18, residents of Rīga and city guests had the opportunity to observe the fire sculpture for the first time in Rīga City Canal opposite Bastejkalns (originally known as Bastion Hill). The fire sculpture ensemble 'Song of Rīga' (Fig. 15) was created by professional sculptors Kārlis Īle, Agnese Rudzīte and students of the Art Academy of Latvia Maija Puncule, Agita Šteinberga, Jānis Noviks, Rihards Ābeltiņš, Lauris Vītoliņš, Edgars Kvjatkovskis and others was included in the International Festival of light *Staro Rīga*.



Fig. 15 The fire sculpture ensemble 'Song of Rīga' was in the middle of the Rīga City Canal. 2011. (Publicity photo)

WaterFire sculptures on pontoons in the middle of the Rīga City Canal consisted of three parts. The sound of the 'Song of Rīga' visually manifested as a movement of small fireballs, thus symbolizing the interaction between 'Song of Rīga' and society. The beginning of "Rīga's song" should be found in a folk song, but, like Rīga, it also had to be modern. Therefore, the sculpture was formed by connecting the past and the future and spreading further through the fire in the darkness. In the first part of the sculpture, the viewer could recognize Latvian symbols, and this part symbolized the national song. In the second part of the sculpture, pipes of different heights symbolized the organ and modern music. The central part of the sculpture combined modern and ancient songs, creating a unique 'Song of Rīga'. One sculpture symbolized the historical aspect, and its main idea was to depict Latvian characters in order to explain the nature and order of the events of the Universe. The other sculpture, using modern technology depicted a contemporary song. The WaterFire sculpture was like a visual version of digital music. The fire sculpture elements reflected the rhythm of the song in dynamic movements. The

culmination of the fire sculpture project 'Song of Rīga' was the third sculpture, which combined the historical and modern rhythm of the song.

Rīga was the European Capital of Culture in 2014, and Latvia, where fire sculptures were used in various events, became the next host country of the competition. The impressive World Fire Sculpture Championship 'Magic Fire Riga' took place on the beach of Ķīpsala Island near the Vanšu Bridge (Latvian: *Vanšu tilts*) and was part of diverse opening events of the year of the European Capital of Culture. The European fire sculpture movement and both championships were led by the Swedish artist Gunnar Karls Nilsson, so it was a great honour that he agreed to be the art curator and chairman of the jury for the championship in Rīga.



Fig. 16 The flaming sculpture at the World Fire Sculpture Championship in Riga. 2014. (<http://wolfy.lv/test/>)

During three days from 16 to 18 January, foreign sculptors created sculptures (Fig. 16) in public and made it possible to show this art form in a much wider and more concentrated manner. The teams had to make structures of wood and wheat straw, and the height and width

could not exceed six metres. All participants of the championship were provided with the same amount of materials and other conditions for origination sculptures, creating equal starting positions. On the evening of 18 January, majestic figures of light (Fig. 17, 18), up to six meters high, made a carnival procession along the entire embankment.



Fig. 17 The fire sculpture 'Abduction of Europe' by sculptors Rashid Sagadeev and Tatiana Sagadeeva. 2014. (Photo by Timurs Subhankulovs)

Fig. 18 Glowing the fire sculpture 'Abduction of Europe'. 2014. (Photo by Timurs Subhankulovs)

The tradition of the Night of Ancient Lights revived in the Finnish city of Turku in 1992 soon gained great response in other Baltic Sea countries – Estonia, Sweden, Germany, Poland. In Latvia, this evening has been celebrated in Roja and Pāvilosta for more than ten years. On 27 August 2016, a chain of bonfires, which united people with other coastal nations, during the event of the Night of Ancient Lights on the entire coast of Latvia, including Kolka, confirmed the readiness to take care of nature and the sea. On the seashore, people welcomed participants of the relay 'Heartbeat for the Sea' who with torches lit a bonfire and lit a large fire sculpture (Fig. 19). On 26 August 2017, the Night of the Ancient Lights took place simultaneously in all countries around the Baltic Sea and all

over Latvia, and before 20.30 on its shores, everyone was invited to light a bonfire and say goodbye to summer.

The fire sculpture festival *Uguns-Sa-Sala* at Lake Bikšere took place on the evening of 25 August 2018, and the artistic organizer was Kārlis Īle. If in previous years the sculptures were made of wood and straw, then the idea and solution of this festival were different. The viewer was taken to a magical garden made up of many moody objects, and soft music played from several places, which seemed to slow down time and made the visitors stop, allow themselves to be in the moment and forget about the rush. Two opposite elements ice and fire joined in a magical harmony. Visitors had a unique opportunity to touch cold ice and feel the heat of fire radiating through it. Although the event had a slow and relaxed atmosphere, however, a powerful culmination was the lighting of a large straw sculpture (Fig. 20).



Fig. 19 Aigars Kehers lit a large fire sculpture 'On the Way to Light' created by himself and his assistants in honour of the Night of the Ancient Lights. 2016. (Photo by Inese Dāvidsone)

Fig. 20 Different senses of space and time reigned in the fiery and mysterious place. 2018. (Photo by Municipality of Madona county)

On 24 August 2019, an event for the whole family 'Night of Fire' was held in Pāvilosta. Bonfires (Fig. 21) on the coast

of the Baltic Sea mark a commitment to care for the sea, which unites people, cities and countries, for the quality of its environment and the preservation of natural resources for future generations.

On 31 August 2019, on the evening of the last day of the last summer month, everyone had the opportunity to gather at Roja Beach to participate in the event of the Night of the Ancient Fire. Beautiful songs sounded and an impressive fire sculpture *Ugunsgars* /the spirit of fire/ (Fig. 22, 23) created by Uldis Balga, Agris Dzilna and Luīze Linde provided a visual treat.



Fig. 21 The 'Fire Night' was an event organized for the whole family in Pāvilosta. 2019. (Photo by Mārtiņš Kalniņš)



Fig. 22 Getting ready for the Night of the Ancient Fire at Roja Beach. 2019. (<http://www.talsuvestis.lv/galerijas/nggallerij/galerijas/Sen%C4%81s-uguns-nakts-Roj%C4%81>)

Fig. 23 The sculpture was created in a cosmopolitan way, allowing each viewer to perceive it according to their own imagination. 2019.

(<http://www.talsuvestis.lv/galerijas/nggallerij/galerijas/Sen%C4%81s-uguns-nakts-Roj%C4%81>)



Fig. 24 Farewell to summer in the light of bonfires on the beach of Pāvilosta. 2021. (Photo by Dainis Ģelzis)

On the evening of the last Saturday of August 2021, as the Sun was setting, bonfires lit up on the shore of the Baltic Sea. Calling to protect the sea that unites us, the Night of the Ancient Fire was held for the twenty-third time on Pāvilosta Beach, and an impressive fire sculpture (Fig. 24) was created.

Our ancestors lit bonfires on the shores of the Baltic Sea to send a message to their neighbours and seafarers, and in the early 1990s, this tradition was revived. Every year, on the last Saturday of the month of August, a large concert in the Saulkrasti district is held throughout the day. On 27 August 2022, everyone interested was invited to participate in the folklore festival *Pa Saulei* /By the Sun/ (Fig. 25, 26). Bonfires lit (Fig. 27) on the Night of the Ancient Lights are a tribute to the Baltic Sea and its importance in the history and development of the countries of the region. In recent years, it has also been a reminder of the need to protect the Baltic Sea from pollution and extinction.



Fig. 25 The Night of the Ancient Lights for the twelfth time took place in Saulkrasti. 2022.

(<https://www.visitsaulkrasti.lv/galerija/senas-uguns-nakts/>)

Fig. 26 The folklore festival is traditionally combined with a historical tradition in the Baltic Sea region – the lighting of bonfires along the coast of the Baltic Sea and its Gulf in Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Sweden, Russia, Germany and also in Latvia. 2022.

(<https://www.visitsaulkrasti.lv/galerija/senas-uguns-nakts/>)



Fig. 27 The bonfires lit on the Night of the Ancient Lights serve as a symbol of the unity of countries of the Baltic Sea region.

(<https://www.visitsaulkrasti.lv/galerija/senas-uguns-nakts/>)

Magic of lights in Latvian parks

In Jelgava, the artistic level of the symposium was determined by the participation of the world-class ceramist Pēteris Martinsons, and talented, well-

known ceramicists Aleksandrs Djačenko, Mārīte Djačenko and Ilze Emse-Grīnberga also participated. The artistic concept of symposiums differed every year, and since 2014, more than twenty fireclay sculptures were placed on Pasta /Post/ Island, where a special walking park was created (Fig. 28).

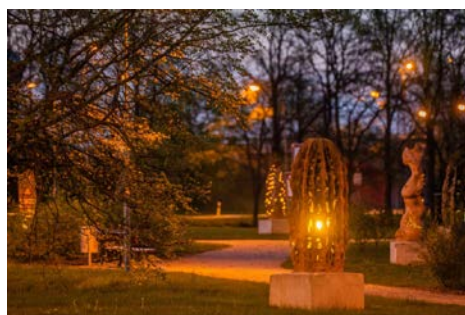


Fig. 28 The sculpture named *Windpole* by artist Ilze Emse-Grīnberga can be seen at night in the Fireclay Sculpture Park on Pasta Island in Jelgava (Photo by Ivars Veiliņš)



Fig. 29 The fireclay sculpture 'Towards the Sun' by the artist Katrīna Vīnerte is also expressive during the day. 2018. (Photo by Ausma Melluma)

The 2014 symposium's theme was 'Cinema', and ceramicists made sculptures *Zvaigžņu puteklī* /Stardust/ (Aleksandrs and Mārīte Djačenko) and *Lomu maiņa* /Role Change/ (Katrīna Vīnerte). The theme 'City for Growth' of

the 2015 symposium inspired artists to make sculptures *Atbalss* /Echo/ (Aleksandrs and Mārīte Djačenko), *Vēja stabule* /Windpole/ (Ilze Emse-Grīnberga) (Fig. 33) and *Mazā Prinča ceļš* /The Path of the Little Prince/ (Katrīna Vīnerte). In 2016, the park's landscape was enriched by sculptures *Ugunszeme* /Land of Fire/ (Kristīne Djačenko), *Naktsvijole* /Night Violet/ (Ilze Emse-Grīnberga) and *Pretī saulei* /Towards the Sun/ (Katrīna Vīnerte) (Fig. 29) made according to the theme 'Solstice'. The 2018 symposium's theme was 'Day of the Balts', and artists created sculptures *Attīstība* /Development/ (Aleksandrs and Mārīte Djačenko), *Saulesmeita* /Daughter of the Sun/ (Sanita Ābelīte), *Mūsu jūra* /Our Sea/ (Irena Šliuželiene), *Mantojums* /Heritage/ (Vilius Šliuželis). In accordance with the symposium's theme 'Ancient World' in 2019, sculptures *Dzintara ceļš* /Amber Road/ (Jānis Leimanis), *Variācija par Trojas zirgu* /Variation on the Trojan horse/ (Katrīna Vīnerte), *Acanthus* (Irena Šliuželiene) and *Ideja* /Idea/ (Vilius Šliuželis) were made. During the 2020 symposium, according to the theme 'Fire of the Balts', artists created fireclay sculptures *Nakts karaliene* /Queen of the Night/ (Vitalija Kurtinaitienė), *Paradīze* /Paradise/ (Alar Raudoja), *Riti* /Roll/ (Elīna Titāne), *Ugunskrūms* /Firebush/ (Aleksandrs and Mārīte Djačenko). At the 10th International Large Format Ceramic Fire Sculpture Symposium from 10 to 21 June 2022, anyone interested could watch fireclay sculptures being made on Pasta Island. The artist was like a coder of meanings, and the viewer was like a translator. Five artists from Georgia, Lithuania and Latvia created four large-format sculptures on the theme 'Signs

and Meanings' and presented their messages in images and pictures. Nato Eristavi from Georgia created a sculpture *Totēms* /Totem/, Vilius Šliuželis and Irena Šliuželiene from Lithuania depicted Madonna in the artwork. Latvians Jānis Leimanis created *Uguns burtniecība* /Letter of Fire/, and the sculpture created by Ilze Emse-Grīnberga was named *Trusī, bēdz* /Bunny, run away/. On June 21, once the sculptures took on the shapes created by artists, large format fireclay sculptures were fired at a temperature of 1200 degrees, creating a unique glow show that started at 8 pm and lasted until 11.45 pm. Four fireclay sculptures created by artists from three countries, glowing fiery at 12.00 pm, closed the international symposium of large-format ceramic fire sculptures on Pasta Island, and new artworks supplemented the urban environment of Jelgava.

Vienkoči Park is a walking and recreation park, where trails with thematic sightseeing and learning objects have been created. Models of historic manors and other buildings, wooden sculptures, ethnographic buildings and interesting sights are located in the park. The recreation and picnic areas created in the area of a park are perfect for leisurely relaxation with the family and a larger company of friends. A wooden playground is available for children. On 10 May 2013, Vienkoči Park received the Latvian Heritage Award. The 'Latvian Heritage' cultural sign is awarded to those rural tourism entrepreneurs who preserve and celebrate Latvian cultural and domestic heritage, showing it to visitors and passing it on to future generations. The Night of Lights was held in Vienkoči Park (Fig. 30). The

purpose of an evening of light and moods was to make one short autumn day brighter, to give you the opportunity to recharge yourself with candlelight and warmth for the dark period of winter.

In Vienkoči Park, the annual Night of Lights was held in 2017 (Fig. 31). At the Fire Night event, everyone could recharge themselves with warmth and light candles for the dark period of winter, so that it would be more easily welcome spring.



Fig. 30 Events of the Night of Lights in Vienkoči Park. 2013. (http://laiki.lv/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/UgunsNakts2013_11-4328.jpg)

Fig. 31 The mood and light event in Vienkoči Park gathered a large number of interested people in one place. 2017. (<https://vienkoci.lv/lv/jaunumi/121-uguns-nakts-vienko%C4%8Du-park%C4%81-2017>)

On 6 October 2018, the entire Light Forest of Vienkoči Park was decorated with candles. The single-tree light fixtures located in the forest cluster were illuminated by candles, resulting in unique outdoor lighting. This tradition began fourteen years ago when craftsmen created the first single-tree light fixtures in the plain air. They were lit in autumn when friends and craftsmen gathered together. Little by little, all this was supplemented by various activities, and a stable tradition was formed. Ten years ago, Vienkoči Park was opened for

wider inspection, and this Night of Lights became public.



Fig. 32 The annual Night of Lights in Vienkoči Park of Līgatne. 2018. (Photo by Rihards Vidzickis)

In the Forest of Light, which is the highlight of the annual Night of Lights, warm light and silence reigned after 6 pm regardless of the number of visitors. Ancient dances began with the lighting of lights. Later, there was a traditional procession of torches along the paths of the park, forming a seemingly endless snake of fire (*Fig. 32*). A show of fire jugglers was at the end of the torchlight procession. Vienkoči Park hosted the annual Night of Ancient Lights also on 1 October 2022. The main goal remained the same from year to year – to make one short autumn day longer and to charge oneself with candlelight for the dark period of winter. Candles were lit in the Light Forest of Vienkoči Park, and various activities and the lighting of a barrel-shaped fire sculpture took place at the same time. In the traditional torch procession along the winding paths of Vienkoči Park, a fire snake was formed. The torchlight procession ended with a show of fire jugglers, involving the association Soul of Flames, Afroplus, flautist Ieva Rūtentāle and fire sculptures made by Kārlis Īle. On the evening of the Night of Lights, the most resilient and magic-loving visitors took part in the fire

ritual together with the folklore group 'Delve'. Here by the Līgatne River, everyone can find inspiration for cultivating a green lifestyle.

The festival of light *Staro Rīga* had grown over many years and gained international recognition among light artists, locals and tourists. One of the most colourful events *Staro Rīga 2017* took place from 17 to 20 November and marked a path of light to the centenary of the State of Latvia. In the Botanical Garden of the University of Latvia, people could see materialised images from earlier times in the 'Moonlight Greenhouse' light and video installation. Claude Debussy's 'Moonlight' led one to Carl Gustav Jung's theories of the subconscious in Ieva Balode's video work 'Dreaming Vol II', which linked symbolically with the environment. The environmental object of curved wire treated with luminescent paint in 'Arrivals' was subtitled 'They were here'. This installation made the departed visible as they came to life as ghosts in ultraviolet light. Artist Alexander Reichstein, who was born in 1957 in Moscow and has lived and worked in Helsinki since 1990, is convinced that people never disappear without a trace: we can still hear their words, footsteps, and even their breath. People who have been in the sun for a long time roam the garden, meet each other and enjoy nature. In Vērmāne Garden, the environmental art three-dimensional installation 'Symbiosis' showed the interaction of three dimensions of time, namely the past, present, and future. Serge Schoemaker Architects from the Netherlands created the architectonic light installation 'Allée of Light' (*Fig. 33*) to make people aware that we live in a world wherein there will always be two

sides: one warm and the other cold, one good and one evil, and one full of light and love and the other dark. These two sides create an eternal flow that influences our lives. One's only choice is to observe this flow or even experience the transition from darkness into light and to invite and bring others with us to witness it. We create all that we see around us ourselves and everything is possible. The light forever changes; sometimes it seems that it will disappear immediately, but it inevitably returns even brighter and larger. With the bright and all-encompassing light of the 'Allée of Light', we want to congratulate Latvia on its birthday and believe that darkness will disappear once and there will be light and love on the way to Latvia and our stars. Even when one is seeming in a strait or narrow tunnel, there can still be light and it is in our power to see it and follow it.



Fig. 33 The architectonic light installation 'Allée of Light' in Vērmāne Garden. 2017. (<https://staroriga.lv/ru/4-gaismas-aleja/>)

In Kronvald's Park, which forms part of the City Canal greenery [2], a light installation titled 'Bwindi Light Masks' by Richi Ferrero, consisting of 40 light masks from the African interior and traditional music from the Tuva tribe from Italia featured an interesting light story. A total of 40 identical masks from the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, at

the innermost heart of Africa, were arranged like small monoliths, thereby resembling ancient terracotta finds at an archaeological site. The rite came alive when artificial light altered the hues of the masks, creating a still dance supported by the bi-vocal sounds of the Tuva people of Central Asia. This dance painted a picture with shadows. Various companies, institutions, and private entrepreneurs took part in the festival participants' well-known programme 'Rīga Carnival' to illuminate the urban environment.

One of the most colourful events of Proclamation Day of the Republic of Latvia was the 12th *Staro Rīga 2019*, which featured a wide variety of light art objects and took place from 15 to 18 November. Its artistic concept entailed the four dimensions of the art of light—time, space, man and light—interpreted by artists from Latvia, Estonia, Denmark, Germany, France, and Great Britain according to their own creative intentions. The most pronounced artistic tendencies included laser projections and interactivity, which had more in common with generative art. Buildings, squares, bridges, and monuments were turned into unique pieces of light art. Kronvald's Park featured the sculptural light performance 'Lead Lights', which was composed of an impulsive interplay between people and light objects. Participants interacted with the installation to play with moving open-work projections and the surrounding environment, transforming the park space into a unified light game installation. The extraordinary road 'You, in me – I, in you' at Kronvald's Park to Ķergalvis Pergola was created by the students at the Latvian College of Culture

at the Latvian Academy of Culture. Images of the 15-minute mixed-media symphony 'Sea Routes' by international artist group Tura Ya Moya (specialised in creating interdisciplinary analogue installations) were projected from sea containers that had travelled 3000 kilometres past Greenland and Scandinavia. An impressive multimedia performance with a water screen, 'Déjà Vu', created by Juris Matuzellis (Pepe), DJ Monsta, and other local artists on the City Canal next to Bastejkalns, aroused great public interest. A variety of technological aspects, audiovisual show elements, animation, holograms, water effects, motion and video graphics, fountain choreography, musical accompaniment, lights, and lasers were used in this visual game on a surface of the canal. There was a beautiful visual interplay with the canal water, which was raised to a height of 18 metres and 30 metres wide.

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