

Salvo Dolls. A Case Study in Soviet Estonian Vernacular Souvenir Production

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——— This article researches the production of dolls in Estonian traditional costumes, made in the Salvo factory during the entire Soviet period. Their most common material was wood, although some examples included textile details. These dolls, although not unique in the Socialist Bloc, were popular both with local consumers and tourists. They promoted the idea of the Soviet Union as a society that accepted local cultures and references to pre-Soviet traditions but also acted as a method for maintaining national identity, as well as a nostalgic decoration that allowed an accessible alternative to modernism.

Keywords: Estonia, souvenirs, Soviet Union, modernism, traditionalism.

This research focuses on a specific type of souvenir that was popular throughout the late socialist period in Estonia: small wooden dolls in traditional costumes, manufactured by the Salvo factory. The appearance of different dolls varied greatly, but they were produced from the 1960s throughout the entire Soviet period. The most common examples were made of wood and painted. More intricate examples had clothes made of textile and embroidered carefully. The dolls were meant not only to be cheap and light souvenirs for tourists from outside Estonia, but also to be used as home decoration for local consumers. This research argues that while the dolls were popular with consumers both as gift objects and home decorations, they acquired an interesting position in Soviet Estonian culture. They promoted the idea of the Soviet Union as a society that accepted local cultures and references to pre-Soviet traditions, but also acted as a method for rebellion against the modern style and for maintaining national identity.

This research aims to study the significance of ethnic souvenirs in the Soviet Union during the late socialist period by analysing the political context and reasoning behind the manufacture and the reasons for their popularity amongst the general public, in order to determine how these two agendas fit together. Salvo dolls were chosen as a case study, as they were omnipresent throughout the Soviet era, and the prevalence of ethnic dolls throughout the Socialist Bloc allows this research to draw parallels to other countries and contexts. There are enough catalogues and other material preserved for the study of the dolls and they are relatively well-known in the post-Soviet era as well.

The nature of Salvo dolls was not novel or unique either in the world or in the Socialist Bloc. The collections of Southern California Library hold a photograph of the American civil rights activist Charlotta Bass demonstrating the souvenirs brought from a trip to Czechoslovakia, Moscow and Georgia in August and September 1950 to a group of guests.¹ On the table, next to a pile of textiles, an observant spectator sees approximately ten wooden dolls in national costumes. Sadly, the black-and-white photograph does not allow us to identify the provenance of these dolls and we can only be certain that they do not hail from Estonia or the Salvo factory, but

1 Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research.

the photograph illustrates, firstly, the existence of dolls in national costumes around the Eastern Bloc already in the Stalinist period and, secondly, their popularity amongst foreign visitors. On Charlotta Bass's table they clearly hold a place of honour. The fact that sets Salvo dolls apart from other similar examples, however, is their ubiquity. They held an important position both in local material culture and amongst souvenirs oriented to foreign visitors from the 1960s until, as an object of nostalgia, contemporary times.

Salvo, the producer of these dolls, was in fact a plastics factory. Its origin differs from other larger factories: instead of being based on nationalised pre-Soviet workshops or factories, Salvo was founded in 1948 as a cooperative artel of handicapped people with only 15 workers. Initially, the range of products was limited to bread and household chemistry such as soap.² However, the next year baking bread was cancelled, as the Soviet government made stocking up agricultural products illegal.³ During the following years, several smaller enterprises were connected to Salvo; in 1959, Salvo became an official factory. By 1961, the factory already employed 492 workers.⁴ In the same year, the production of plastics started. After that, plastics and wood became the main materials used at the factory. Salvo's main products were tableware, small household objects and toys, and it was also the first factory in the Soviet Union to produce motorcycle helmets.⁵



1.
Erna Ojasoo (on the right) and Lilian Anter painting souvenir dolls. 04 10 1973, photo by E. Tarkpea. Estonian National Archives

Erna Ojasoo ir Lilian Anter dažo suvenyrines lēles, 1973 10 04

2 Promotional materials for the Salvo factory. Tallinn: Valgus, 1983.

3 Aigi Viira, "Mäng, Mäng, Mäng – Oli Väikese Inimese Töö Ka Nõukaaajal", in: *Õhtuleht*, 5/10/2006.

4 Promotional materials for the Salvo factory. Tallinn: Valgus, 1981.

5 *Ibid.*

The period that this research focuses on, the late socialist era, follows a ‘new cultural revolution’ of the Thaw, as phrased by Victor Buchli.⁶ As fitting to the mid-century modernism, the questions of good and bad taste were prevalent. The petit-bourgeois was again publicly condemned.⁷ The *Biedermeier* style and *bric-à-brac* had disappeared again from the new modern interior; but, curiously, ethnic symbolism had remained and, with the transition from the Thaw to late socialism, become even more popular. As stated by Djurdja Bartlett, ethnic motifs were first used in Stalinism as “an ideological barrier against Western trends”, but then acquired a “new symbolic role” in late socialism.⁸ Thus, Salvo dolls present a fascinating case study to observe in the context of ethnic symbolism, as well as of a certain resistance against modern style.

One of the main purposes of the dolls was to be a cheap and light souvenir for tourists from outside Estonia.⁹ Here, one must emphasize another characteristic of the period in question, late socialism: the gradual opening of the Soviet Union to foreign tourists. In 1965, the seaway between Helsinki and Tallinn reopened. According to Toivo U. Raun, the number of tourists from outside the Socialist Bloc increased tenfold in the following decade: in 1965, there were 9,400, but in 1977, there were already 94,100 tourists in a year.¹⁰ Importantly, besides “foreign” tourists from capitalist countries, intra-Soviet tourism had been an important subject already since the Stalinist era. Anne E. Gorsuch also traces the beginning of Soviet mass tourism to the 1960s.¹¹ Thus the increase in souvenir production starting from the late 1960s was connected to the wider political situation.

Nevertheless, tourism was not the only purpose of the dolls – they were also sold to local consumers. An advertisement published on the back cover of the popular local journal *Nõukogude Naine* [*Soviet Woman*] in

6 Victor Buchli, “Khrushchev, Modernism, and the Fight against the ‘Petit-Bourgeois’ Consciousness in the Soviet Home”, in: *Journal of Design History*, 1997, vol. 10, no. 2, p. 163.

7 *Ibid.*, p.166.

8 Djurdja Bartlett, *Fashioneast: The Spectre That Haunted Socialism*, London: MIT Press, 2010, p. 230.

9 I. Glik, “‘Salvo’ Suveniir 20-Aastane!”, in: *Kohalik tööstus: informatsiooniseeria*, Tallinn, 1984, no. 2, p. 25.

10 Toivo U. Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians: Updated Second Edition*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2002, p. 189.

11 Gorsuch, Anne E., “‘There’s No Place like Home’: Soviet Tourism in Late Stalinism”, in: *Slavic Review*, 2003, vol. 62, no. 4, *Tourism and Travel in Russia and the Soviet Union*, p. 761.

1969 declares: “A wooden doll in ethnic costume from the Salvo factory is a present to a friend and a souvenir to yourself.”¹² Therefore, the dolls acted not only as souvenirs of a trip or presents sent abroad, but also as objects of interior decoration.

The 1960s, which is when the production of dolls became more widespread,¹³ were also a period where ethnographic research gained more popularity in the Soviet Union. As explained by Karol Rawski, the directions in which Soviet ethnography moved were determined by conscious political decisions. In the case of the Baltic republics, it was necessary to stress economic oppression in relation to Western and Northern Europe.¹⁴ Thus the peasant identity had to be highlighted as an opposition to the “oppressors”, which explains the focus on the vernacular rural identity and its elements. However, any interpretation of the Soviet context should not be limited to a simple theory of hegemony. The motivations of different people working within the system varied greatly and were very often not guided by ideological considerations.

As written by David G. Anderson and Dmitry V. Arzyutov, the discipline of ethnography in the Soviet Union, more than in other cultural contexts, directed expert knowledge to “evocative artefacts”.¹⁵ While different authors, for example Francine Hirsch,¹⁶ have stressed the importance of museums in transmitting knowledge (and propaganda), especially in late socialism ethnic souvenirs played a similar role. In 1966, the Association of Estonian Craftsmen, Uku, was established, which employed craftspeople who produced national souvenirs after designs made by professional artists. As written in the official brochure,

¹² *Nõukogude Naine*, 1969/6.

¹³ This research did not manage to identify the precise year when the first dolls went into production.

¹⁴ Karol Rawski, “A Soviet Think Tank: The Involvement of the Institute of Ethnography in Soviet Policy”, in: *Region: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia*, 2017, vol. 6 (1), p. 113.

¹⁵ David G. Anderson, Dmitry V. Arzyutov, “The Construction of Soviet Ethnography and ‘The Peoples of Siberia’”, in: *History and Anthropology*, 2016, vol. 27 (2), p. 184.

¹⁶ Francine Hirsch, “Getting to Know ‘The Peoples of the USSR’: Ethnographic Exhibits as Soviet Virtual Tourism”, in: *Slavic Review*, 2003, vol. 62, no. 4, *Tourism and Travel in Russia and the Soviet Union*.

The aim of the association is to revive and to develop the traditions of our folk art that have been formed during centuries and handed down from generation to generation. The Association has drawn together craftsmen from all those Estonian towns and villages where skilful hands and the love for our cultural heritage are to be found.¹⁷

Similarly, Salvo dolls carry an ethnographical element to them. The clothes of the dolls are often authentic or nearly authentic representations of actual traditional costumes.

Several different types of dolls could be identified, based on their shape, material and purpose. The majority of the dolls were designed by Helmi Käsukond, born on 28 January 1925, who originally trained as a glass artist. Käsukond was also active in collecting ethnographic heritage, as she collected craft objects from the regions of Saaremaa and Muhumaa and tracked down local craftspeople for the founding of Uku.¹⁸ Thus her background explains the orientation to details and the ethnographic nature of the dolls.

The most iconic type, of which there are also the most examples preserved, is a simple wooden stand-alone figurine. Dolls varied in size and shape, as well as costumes. The majority of dolls were female, but there was also a number of dolls in male ethnic costumes. The painted costumes were quite intricate, including paintings of embroidery and traditional jewellery, and usually being fairly accurate representations of a specific traditional costumes of a specific Estonian area. In some cases, the wooden figurine has evolved into a wall-doll, in which case only one side was finished and painted. To display a wall-doll, one would need to hit a nail into the wall; the doll's backside had a small hole for hanging the doll up.

The wooden dolls also present a fascinating study in the resourcefulness and organisation of production in the Soviet Union. As they were normally coated with a heavy layer of paint, the quality of the wood underneath was not important and therefore it was a good chance for using leftover scraps from other objects. Most of the wood used was actually discarded from spade handles, brought from another factory called Vasar.¹⁹ Thus

17 Promotional materials for the Uku factory. Tallinn, 1968.

18 Piret Leskova, "Uku ja Mulgi Ukuvakk pidäsiive sünnipäevi", in: *Üütsainus Mulgimaa*, Spring 2017, p. 7.

19 I. Glik, "Salvo' Suveniir 20-Aastane!", in: *Kohalik tööstus: informatsiooniseeria*, Tallinn, 1984, no. 2, p. 25.

these dolls can be seen as an example of survival in a system of scarcity of materials under the Soviet regime. The variations in shapes, sizes and materials facilitated the planning of doll production.



2.
Wooden souvenirs
*Couple from Mulgi
Parish*. March 1965,
photographed by
O. Koska. Estonian
National Archives

Mediniai suvenyrai *Pora
iš Mulgi parapijos*,
1965 m. kovas

Other dolls were made of wood, but with costumes made of textiles and often decorated with embroidery and lace. In some cases dolls had artificial hair. Curiously, some of these dolls were even designed so that they would be usable as tea cosies or, as locally referred to, coffee pot warmers. The shape of the skirt was altered so that one could fit a teapot or a coffee pot underneath it, while the upper body was shortened. This product was commended in the all-Soviet journal *Novyje Tovary* [*New Products*] in 1969.²⁰



3.
Aive Partseoja, employee
of Salvo, demonstrates
dolls in textile costumes.
04 10 1973, photo by
E. Tarkpea. Estonian
National Archives

Aive Partseoja,
„Salvo“ darbuotoja,
demonstruoja leles
tekstiliniiais drabužiais,
1973 10 04

²⁰ *Novyje Tovary*, 1969/5.

Finally, as Salvo was also a plastics factory, toys were one of its main products. In addition to wooden dolls, Salvo manufactured plastic dolls dressed in textile costumes. They had movable limbs and artificial hair. The plastic doll can be seen as a different manifestation of the same performative vernacularism, but aimed at a different audience. Compared to the figurines, the plastic doll is not a collectible or an interior object, but a doll intended for children as a toy. Importantly, its face is not that of a grown-up, but of a child.

However, while vernacular dolls form the main body of Salvo's doll production, there are also examples of dolls demonstrating other local identities. The alternative "identities" are wooden figurines in the same style as the iconic standalone doll. From 1976 dates a photograph of wooden hockey players with "СССР" written on their shirts and "Salvo" on their helmets, thus referring to Salvo's importance as a producer of hockey gear for the all-Soviet team.²¹ Two years later, in 1978, a famous Estonian choir conductor Gustav Ernesaks was given a miniature wooden men's choir, manufactured in Salvo, for his 70th birthday.²² Additionally, certain dolls appear merely to show contemporaneous people in their everyday outfits. A good example is a photograph of a set of three dolls, depicting children holding the flags of the Soviet Union.²³ Unlike ethnic dolls, they do not include any references to Estonia, thus being identifiable either as Estonians, as Soviet citizens, or as happy tourists, depending on the context and viewpoint.

Additionally, in Salvo's case, the existence of non-ethnic dolls, produced in the same factory, sets these dolls apart from a large part of socialist "ethnographical" souvenirs. Where an isolated study of the traditional Salvo dolls might create an illusion that the dolls were a representation of an Estonian past, manufacturing them alongside other "identities" transforms them into an illusion of an existing reality. Certain appropriations of vernacular elements have been identified by researchers as strategies for alienating traditional culture from the modern past. As Francine Hirsch claims on the subject of ethnographic displays in the interwar Soviet Union, "Visitors might marvel at the panorama of peoples with whom they shared Soviet citizenship, but they often left with the impression that the wax figures in animal hides

21 EFA.204.0.104366

22 EFA.204.0.112641

23 Archives of the Estonian Museum of Design and Applied Art.

were strange ‘others’ from distant land.”²⁴ In the case of Salvo dolls, regardless of the original intentions of the Soviet Union as a colonial power, the dolls became manifestations of *living* identities, rather than monumentalized or Sovietized, thus undermining their original ideologized *raison d’être*.



4.
Õie Vesker, employee of Salvo, demonstrates the range of souvenirs in Salvo. August 1974, photographed by V. Rudko. Estonian National Archives

Õie Vesker, „Salvo“ darbuotoja, demonstuoja suvenyrų asortimentą, 1974 m. rugpjūtis

Salvo ethnic dolls were an example of the popularity of national costumes in Soviet propaganda for referencing pre-Soviet traditions and culture. Katrin Kivimaa has studied the manifestations of national identity in the visual arts. She notes in her study of feminine identity that folk costume played the same symbolic role in national identity during the national movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries.²⁵ She states further: “Thus, folk costumes had already become a conventional and formal sign of ethnos, which the Socialist Realist model adopted.”²⁶ Therefore, in addition to inventing new imagery, the Soviet empire also sought to rewrite the meaning of some already established symbols. The same idea is reinforced in a quote by Anne E. Gorsuch: “It [tourism] aimed to create a correct understanding of the ‘socialist homeland’ by investing historical sites and ‘exotic’ spaces with Soviet significance.”²⁷ Here, traditional culture, including costumes, can be seen as one of these elements that had to be invested with “Soviet

24 Francine Hirsch, *op. cit.*, p. 689.

25 Katrin Kivimaa, *Rahvuslik ja modernne naiselikkus Eesti kunstis 1850–2000*, Tallinn: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2009, p. 137.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 135.

27 Anne E. Gorsuch, “‘There’s No Place like Home’: Soviet Tourism in Late Stalinism”, in: *Slavic Review*, 2003, vol. 62, no. 4, *Tourism and Travel in Russia and the Soviet Union*, p. 761.

significance”. Souvenir as an integral component of tourism played a key role in this act of appropriation.

As ethnic dolls have often been low-cost objects, frequently a product of handicraft, their existence is difficult to trace in history. Different authors trace their emergence in one or other material already centuries back. Svetlana Boym refers to a proposition by “comrade” Cherniakova, printed in *Komsomolskaia Pravda* in 1928: “I broke the bric- -brac – all these peasant-guys and dolls. I carried them to the trash. [...] The room is so good and so full of light now! Having done this I appeal to all women homemakers to follow my example.”²⁸ This quote illustrates two facts. Firstly, dolls in peasant costumes were so commonplace in a 1920s Communist home that Cherniakova felt the need to single them out in her speech against *petit-bourgeois* interiors. Secondly, the early communist ideology saw dolls and the “domesticated” national ideology they represented as another manifestation of *petit-bourgeois* taste. The ethnographic references were to be used for education in public setting, but not yet for commodification – an interesting stylistic difference between the first avantgarde modernism of the 1920s and the later Khrushchev modernism.

Both the Soviet Union and its socialist satellite states used dolls in traditional costumes as a common theme in souvenirs, directed both to outside visitors and audiences, and to home consumers. Vladimir Kulic describes that the Yugoslavian pavilion for EXPO '58 was filled with 45 dolls in intricate costumes from all around Yugoslavia.²⁹ Greg Castillo studied Soviet Orientalism in comparison to the Western colonialist traditions and practices. In his words, “Under an imperative to remake ‘backward’ societies in the image of socialism, cultural authorities monumentalized the forms of vernacular design to symbolize the regional identity of peoples, at the same time they were eliminating the social and political structures that underpinned vernacular traditions.”³⁰ In spite of the transformation that took place in the production sphere, the symbols within vernacular design persisted and acquired new meanings.

²⁸ *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, 4 November 1928. Cited in: Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*, Cambridge [Mass.]: Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 36.

²⁹ Vladimir Kulic, “An Avant-Garde Architecture for an Avant-Garde Socialism: Yugoslavia at EXPO '58”, in: *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2012, vol. 47, no. 1, p. 161.

³⁰ Greg Castillo, “Soviet Orientalism: Socialist Realism and Built Tradition”, in: *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, 1997, vol. 8, no. 2, p. 33.

Here, it should be added to Castillo's argument that while the social and political structures of vernacular traditions were destroyed, in many cases some of their elements were preserved and monumentalized, connected to the forms that they created. A number of surviving photographs demonstrate that not only dolls as the final product, but also the process of production were ideologized. For example, this approach is presented by a collection of photographs taken by Endel Tarkpea in 1973. Even though the production of dolls was submitted to a Fordist logic, the photographs taken by Tarkpea focus on demonstrating different stages of production as an artistic activity. The majority of workers in the souvenir department were young women who become the heroines of Tarkpea's pictures. Instead of dolls, the photographer focuses on the women producing them, thus creating an interesting juxtaposition of various local identities, both in the past and in the present.

The focus on the work process could also be seen as a manifestation of the Marxist emphasis on the working class and on the importance of *production* itself. After all, production and factory setting were popular subjects in the Soviet media and literature. Similarly to Tarkpea's aestheticized images, there are also numerous photos depicting the work process in the plastics department, published in the contemporaneous media.³¹ However, the aesthetic nature of the images and the emphasis on individual workers presented as artists rather than the factory as a collective turn the focus of these images to authenticity, creating a symbolic connection to the history of vernacular crafts.



5.
Kirsti Kaljumäe,
employee of Salvo,
painting dolls intended
as wall decorations.
04 10 1973, photo by
E. Tarkpea. Estonian
National Archives

Kirsti Kaljumäe,
„Salvo“ darbuotoja, dažo
lėles, skirtas sienoms
dekoruoti, 1973 10 04

31 Archives of the Estonian Museum of Applied Arts and Design.

Here, parallels could be drawn to the studies of ethnic dolls in capitalist countries, thus a very different ideological backdrop. John Chaimov studied Hummel figurines and their role in shaping a German identity in the United States. Similarly, Salvo dolls, as well as their other Soviet counterparts, were intended for creating an image of an Estonian, both for home audiences and for foreigners. As Chaimov states, Hummel figurines were a way of selling a “likeable” Germany after the war.³² This article argues that the initial aim of the Soviet power for promoting ethnic dolls was similar, creating a likeable Soviet Union through representations of individual states. For achieving that aim, in Chaimov’s words, Hummel figurines relied on nostalgia: “Miniatures memorialize a bygone era of handicraft that has been usurped by a moment of estrangement in an era of industrialized production.”³³

Chaimov’s research could also be transferred to the Soviet Estonian context to explain the popularity of Salvo dolls. The connections to nostalgic feelings and resistance to modernism are also evidenced by an article published as early as 1969, where the renowned Estonian art historian Leo Gens wrote: “Dissociation in a material environment has become a discerning feature of contemporary culture. Man really needs romance, needs a so-called carnival situation, it is not a coincidence that we have so many replica windmills, almost genuine country taverns with pseudo-national food and pseudo-national interiors. [...] If the attic is empty, these needs are satisfied by wooden candlesticks by ‘Uku’, baskets, small tankards or national dolls by ‘Salvo’”.³⁴ This quote reflects a conflict between the principles of modernism and vernacular traditions. As the contemporaneous Soviet interiors and objects were usually deliberately simple and lacked decoration, people tended towards the opposite. Folk objects or their contemporaneous mass-produced counterparts were familiar, easily recognisable and sentimental.

Returning to Kulic, he notes on the subject of Yugoslavian dolls: “It was as if, under pressure, socialist Yugoslavia’s repressed Other had no choice but to resurface, even if in such an ephemeral form as a collection of dolls.”³⁵ Here, the argument by Kulic should not be understood solely from

³² John Chaimov, “Hummel Figurines: Molding a Collectible Germany”, in: *Journal of Material Culture*, March 2001, vol. 6 (1), p. 58.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³⁴ Leo Gens, “Inimene, Ese, Keskkond”, in: *Rahva Hääl*, 12/10/1969.

³⁵ Vladimir Kulic, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

the viewpoint of socialism, but rather within the wider context of modernism. The dolls described in the exhibition display presented an alternative to the modern style. In its ubiquity modernism occasionally acquired a repressive nature, regardless of the political regime. Kulic further remarks that the element of popularity in this case was not linked to nationalist tendencies – the Yugoslavian dolls were highly popular amongst international visitors as well.³⁶ The same argument can also be found in regard to the dolls made by Salvo. The dolls were not only a resistance against the Soviet system, but against the international modernism as well. Even if their original intention had been the marginalisation and “souvenirisation” of local cultures, the importance they acquired later was radically different.

Therefore, evidence suggests that for the Soviet Union the encouragement of ethnic souvenirs was a matter of “monumentalising” national cultures and using them as vehicles for propaganda. Salvo dolls were especially suitable for this purpose: an ethnic doll was already a ubiquitous symbol and allowed many variations for different objectives. However, for local consumers dolls soon came to signify the regional culture without the added propagandistic elements. In regard to the visual arts, Mai Levin claimed already in 1994 that national form was not just an “emergency exit” for artists, but helped to generally maintain national identity.³⁷ Katrin Kivimaa agreed that this particular aspect of Socialist Realism helped to uphold continuity in national culture.³⁸ Here, this research proposes that material culture could be interpreted similarly. It provided material outside of traditional Soviet symbolism without engaging in direct and overt rebellion not only for industrial artists, but also for consumers.

Although Soviet postmodernism cannot be directly compared to its Western counterpart, a manifestation of late capitalism, certain elements are still similar. Until the end of the late socialist period, the attitudes towards earlier ethnic souvenirs still remained ambiguous. In 1982, Malle Antson and Tiina Toomet stated: “We want to emphasise that folk art actually hides many more possibilities for manufacturing products according to contemporary needs. We simply have to detach ourselves from the habitual

³⁶ Vladimir Kulic, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

³⁷ Mai Levin, “Sotsialistliku Realismi Uurimisprobleeme”, in: *Kunstiteaduslikke uurimusi*, 1994, vol. 7, p. 204.

³⁸ Katrin Kivimaa, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

attitude to folk art as something necessarily colourful, ornamented and... useless.”³⁹

While Salvo dolls were perhaps not appreciated mainly for their artistic quality, they have become cult objects in contemporary times, thus proving that contrary to the quote by Antson and Toomet, the earlier folk-inspired artefacts should not be dismissed as useless. Referring to the previous paragraph, Salvo dolls acquired an important role in society as accessible and ubiquitous objects that, regardless of their original intention, could act as carriers of national traditions.

Conclusion

While using national symbols in design was tolerated and occasionally propagated by the Soviet regime, this practice was also popular amongst consumers. However, the reasons between the two groups were different. While the Soviet Union adopted vernacular symbols mainly for propagandistic reasons, amongst consumers they were loved as a vehicle for maintaining a version of national identity. By stepping away from the “good-bad” juxtaposition in mid-century industrial design, Salvo dolls can also be seen as resistance to the modern style. Thus they present an interesting case study of design objects outside the traditional paradigms of modernism. While for the Soviet Union as a colonial power the dolls represented a regional identity *compatible* with the socialist ideals, this research argues that for the local population they often signified a regional identity *outside* the Soviet Union, thus acquiring an important role in maintaining aspects of national traditions in daily material culture.

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³⁹ Tiina Toomet and Malle Antson, “Rahvakunst Toona Ja Täna”, in: *Sirp ja Vasar*, 30/04/1982, p. 5.

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Santrauka

„Salvo“ lėlės. Sovietinės Estijos tautinių suvenyrų gamybos atvejo studija

Triin Jerlei

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Estija, suvenyrai, Sovietų Sąjunga, modernizmas, tradicionalizmas.

Straipsnio tyrimo objektas – lėlės su tradiciniais estų tautiniais kostiumais, kurias per visą sovietinį laikotarpį gamino „Salvo“ fabrikas. Dažniausiai jos būdavo gaminamos iš medžio ir nudažomos. Įmantresni modeliai būdavo aprenjami rūpestingai išsiuvinėtais tekstilės drabužiais. Šios lėlės buvo sumanytos kaip pigus ir smagus suvenyras, skirtas į Estiją atvykstantiems turistams, tačiau tuo pat metu jos tapo populiarios ir tarp vietinių vartotojų. Viena iš jų populiarumo priežasčių, lyginant su kitais mediniais suvenyrais, buvo tai, kad prasta medžio kokybė reikalavo storo dažų sluoksnio. Iš tikrųjų dauguma medienos atkeliavo iš „Vasar“ fabriko kaip medinių kastuvų rankenų atliekos.

Lėlės su tautiniais kostiumais buvo būdingos ne tik Estijai; panašių pavyzdžių galima rasti visoje Sovietų Sąjungoje ir Centrinės Europos socialistinėse šalyse. Sovietų eros pradžioje Estijoje tautiniai kostiumai jau buvo tapę įprastu ir formaliu *etno* ženklų, kurį socialistinis realizmas adaptavo ir atkartavo įvairiose disciplinose. Pasak tyrimo autorės, nors lėlės buvo populiarios tarp vartotojų ir kaip dovanos, ir kaip namų dekoracijos objektai, jos vaidino įdomų vaidmenį Sovietų Estijos kultūroje. Šios lėlės skleidė idėją apie Sovietų Sąjungą kaip visuomenę, atvirą vietinėms kultūroms ir nuorodoms į ikisovietines tradicijas, tačiau tuo pat metu tarnavo kaip tautinės tapatybės išsaugojimo būdas, prieinamas daugumai vietinių vartotojų, taip pat kaip nostalgiškas puošybos elementas, pasiūlęs demokratišką alternatyvą modernizmui. Taigi šios lėlės tampa įdomia dizaino objektų, esančių už tradicinių „gero dizaino“ paradigmu, atvejo studija.

Triin Jerlei —

Salvo Dolls. A Case Study in Soviet Estonian Vernacular Souvenir Production