

# **Challenging Patriarchy and Articulating Identity:** Women Architects in 1960s-1980s Soviet Lithuania Through the Lens of Nijolė Bučiūtė



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## Abstract

This research explores the professional lives of female architects in Soviet Lithuania between the 1960s and 1980s, with a particular focus on Nijolė Bučiūtė and her design of the National Opera and Ballet Theatre. The study commences by outlining the historical context of Lithuania that shaped its architectural industry, examining how changing ideological and political reforms influenced the profession. Although the Soviet Union's official rhetoric claimed gender equality, a deeply rooted patriarchal system limited women's professional journeys. In this context, Bučiūtė's appointment to design the National Opera and Ballet Theatre in Vilnius in 1960 was a groundbreaking achievement, as women architects were rarely entrusted with leading projects. Gender biases within the Lithuanian architectural community are then examined, revealing how they shaped the reception of Bučiūtė's work. While the architect developed a distinct and innovative architectural vision, her work was frequently met with opposition. By maintaining confidence in her identity, she challenged the dominant canon of Lithuanian modernism, yet her legacy remains underacknowledged to this day.

Bučiūtė's unique position within the architectural field in Lithuania offers a critical lens through which to investigate the broader gender dynamics of the Soviet Union's industry. Lithuanian architectural archives and historical narratives have predominantly focused on male practitioners, leaving women's contributions largely undocumented. By situating Bučiūtė's career within the intersecting forces of political ideology, institutional barriers, and societal expectations, this research narrates an untold part of history, exploring how women navigated the profession's male-dominated environment. Incorporating evidence from archival material, press coverage, and interviews with Bučiūtė's colleagues and family members, alongside a detailed analysis of the National Opera and Ballet Theatre design process, this study aims to reveal the gender inequalities in the field. Notably, gender disparities in recognition and historiography persist, despite women comprising 40% of currently practising architects in Lithuania. Ultimately, the need for a critical feminist re-evaluation of Lithuanian architectural history is highlighted, advocating for a more equitable acknowledgement of women architects' contributions to the discourse.

**Keywords:** female architects, Soviet Lithuania, Nijolė Bučiūtė, gendered dynamics in Soviet architecture, 1960s-1980s, Lithuanian national identity.



Fig. 2: The eastern facade of the National Opera and Ballet Theatre, Unknown photographer, circa 1970, Source: Lithuanian Central State Archives.

Fig. 1: (Front Cover) Architect Nijolė Bučiūtė in the nearly finished National Opera and Ballet Theatre. Unknown photographer, 1973. Source: N. Bučiūtė's family archive.



Fig. 3: N. Bučiūtė (in the middle) with fellow students during her study years at the Vilnius Art Institute (now Vilnius Art Academy), Unknown photographer, circa 1947-1953. Source: N. Bučiūtė's family archive.

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Introduction

“It was so unlikely – she was never a communist, and besides, she was a woman of such a young age.”<sup>1</sup> These words encapsulate the surprise that surrounded Lithuanian architect Elena Nijolė Bučiūtė’s commission to design the new National Opera and Ballet Theatre (subsequently referred to as the NOBT) in 1960. This appointment was unprecedented, as she was the first woman to win a competition for a unique object at the Lithuanian Urban Construction Design Institute in the history of Lithuania. Furthermore, this occurred during the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, a period marked by political control, Russification,<sup>2</sup> and restrictions on freedom. How, then, did a young woman who had yet to see any of her designs realised get appointed for such a significant cultural building, and how does that tell the story of female architects of the 1960s-1980s Soviet Lithuania?

Although the Soviet Union officially claimed gender equality, encouraging women to participate in the workforce, this often translated into double responsibilities: maintaining a full-time job while continuing to bear traditional family responsibilities.<sup>3</sup> While the overall number of women in architectural institutes increased after World War II, the field remained predominantly male-dominated.<sup>4</sup> Systematic challenges and prevailing prejudices against female architects made leadership roles difficult to attain, and those who did succeed in being commissioned are still unrecognised in present architectural studies.

While globally, feminist studies gained momentum in the second half of the 20th century, the prolonged Soviet occupation and intrinsic gender biases delayed Lithuanian scholarship covering female experiences of the 1960s-1980s. Scholars such as Jonas Minkevičius,

Vaidas Petrulis, Marija Drėmaitė and Jūratė Tutlytė have explored the broader context of architects during the Era of Stagnation<sup>5</sup> (1964-1985), however, most Lithuanian archives focus on male designers, leaving the professional lives of female architects underexplored.<sup>6</sup>

In the last ten years, the research on female practitioners increased, with Violeta Lakštauskienė examining the development of women’s architectural education and professional practice in Lithuania and comparing these processes to analogous developments in Europe and the US.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, M. Drėmaitė has situated Lithuanian female architects of the 20th century within a global context, analysing the reasons behind their underrepresentation.<sup>8</sup> N. Bučiūtė’s contributions, for instance, have been explored by Indrė Ruseckaitė and Lada Markejevaitė from the national identity perspective, however, their analyses remain limited in scope, focusing on individual aspects rather than addressing the broader systemic challenges faced by female architects.<sup>9</sup>

Expanding on the existing literature, this thesis will focus on the structural barriers and power dynamics of the male-dominated architectural industry of 1960s-1980s Soviet Lithuania, aiming to understand the reasons behind the shortage of recognised female practitioners. Drawing on L. Nochlin’s influential 1971 essay “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?”, this paper will ask: Why does Nijolė Bučiūtė remain nearly the sole recognised woman architect in the architectural

history of Soviet Lithuania, and how did she achieve this distinction?<sup>10</sup> To answer this, the research will first analyse the patriarchal power structures of the Soviet Union and their impact on the professional journeys of female architects. The study will then shift focus to the Lithuanian architectural community, investigating how entrenched gender biases shaped its historical narrative, largely dictated by male architects. By positioning Nijolė Bučiūtė’s career within these overlapping forces, this study aims to understand how she navigated imposed challenges.

Given the lack of sources on women in architecture at the time, this thesis incorporates interviews with Bučiūtė’s contemporaries and family members, archival material, and comparative analysis to uncover the situation for female practitioners in 1960s-1980s Lithuania. Ultimately, selecting Bučiūtė as a case study is not intended to diminish the contributions of other female practitioners. Rather, her unique position within Soviet Lithuanian architecture provides a critical lens through which to investigate broader gender disparities in the profession.

5 The term “Era of Stagnation” was introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev to express his critical perspective on the economic, political, and social policies of the USSR. This period began under Leonid Brezhnev (1964–1982) and extended through the leadership of Yuri Andropov (1982–1984) and Konstantin Chernenko (1984–1985).

6 Jonas Minkevičius, *Prieštarų goji Architektūra* (Kaunas: Naujasis Lankas, 2014); Marija Drėmaitė, Vaidas Petrulis, and Jūratė Tutlytė, *Architektūra Sovietinėje Lietuvoje* (Vilnius: Vilniaus dailės akademijos leidykla, 2012).

7 Violeta Lakštauskienė, “Women Architects: History of Professional Education and Practice / Moteris Architektė: Profesinio Išsilavinimo ir Veiklos Raida,” *Mokslas – Lietuvos ateitis* 7, no. 1 (2015).

8 Marija Drėmaitė, “Modernistės. Moterys XX a. architektūroje,” *Naujasis Židinys - Aidai* 32, no. 6 (2022).

9 Indrė Ruseckaitė and Lada Markejevaitė, “Asmeninis Elenos Nijolės Bučiūtės modernizmas,” *Architektūros Leidinių Fondas*, no. AF02 (2014).

10 Linda Nochlin, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* (1971; reis., Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2021).



1. The Soviet Woman in Architecture: Ideology, Opportunity, and the Limits of Equality

In her seminal 1971 essay of the same title, Linda Nochlin asks, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?”.<sup>11</sup> Her answer operates on two levels: first, the structural obstacles have historically limited women’s access to education and professional practice. Second, and more significantly, the definition of “greatness” has been deeply rooted in patriarchal paradigms, positioning men as artists and women as craftspeople. Even though the number of women entering the architectural field in the United States increased, entrenched biases persisted.<sup>12</sup> Scholar Ellen Perry Berkeley notes that female practitioners were held to a higher standard than their male counterparts.<sup>13</sup> While mediocrity was tolerated among men, women had to be exceptionally talented to gain recognition.

Although the Lithuanian architectural discourse developed in a different framework due to its distinct ideological and social context, similar gendered patterns emerged. To fully understand the challenges faced by female architects, it is essential to examine the historical conditions that shaped their careers.

The Soviet occupation of Lithuania, which commenced on the 14th of July 1940, imposed significant restrictions on creative, religious and political freedom, enforced Russification, and introduced stricter ideological and aesthetic regulations across the arts. Scholar Tomas Venclova has investigated Soviet occupation and stated that “politics and ideology have made great efforts to subordinate art to their own goals, to use the appeal of artistic subject matter and form in order to more easily and comprehensively manipulate people.”<sup>14</sup> In this way, the show of power is understood as one of the main premises of the relationship between the arts and the political system, which was established during the Soviet occupation. Like other art forms, architecture was deeply politicised, serving as a tool through which the Soviet Union sought to implement its ideological

agenda. The authorities tried to cultivate an image of a “Soviet person” through the built environment, claiming that architecture should reflect both the material prosperity of its inhabitants as well as the ideological and artistic values of society.<sup>15</sup> However, these declarations remained largely rhetorical, as in practice, neither the promised prosperity nor genuine aesthetic value was realised.

Just as the arts became a tool of the political agenda, the image of the Soviet woman was a construct created by the government and used to present an illusion of gender equality to the Western world. Although the 1936 Soviet Constitution proclaimed equal rights for women across political, social, economic, and cultural spheres, this declaration was driven by both ideological motives and practical needs.<sup>16</sup> Due to workforce shortages after World War II, women were encouraged to work in traditionally male industries, leading to an increase in women entering fields like engineering and architecture. During 1950-1970, the number of female graduates from architectural studies in Lithuania increased from 25 per cent to 50 per cent of all graduates.<sup>17</sup> Even though the number of women employed in different design institutes became greater, this did not mean a change in the male-dominated culture or the elimination of gender inequality. The creation of a “new type of woman” did not equate to freedom from domestic responsibilities. On the contrary, the Soviet Woman propaganda further burdened women, as they were expected to balance full-time employment with family care.<sup>18</sup>

Following the death of Joseph Stalin, the Soviet government under Nikita Khrushchev initiated a series of architectural reforms in 1954–1955, primarily aimed at modernising housing. Notably, these reforms opened new opportunities for female architects, providing a

platform for their professional emancipation.<sup>19</sup> Women increasingly took on projects associated with family life and domestic functions, such as schools, hospitals, kindergartens, and residential housing.<sup>20</sup> This shift enabled a few female practitioners, such as residential area designers Birutė Palukaitytė-Kasperavičienė (Fig. 4) and Aida Lėckienė, as well as landscape architect Teklė Šešelgienė, to make a mark in the architectural industry in Soviet Lithuania.

While the field was undergoing relative liberalisation, with a rejection of architectural excesses, it is important to note that this so-called modernisation was less an architectural transformation than a construction reform aimed at increasing efficiency.<sup>21</sup> This industrial and functionalist approach to architecture limited the creative potential of women practitioners working in the housing sector.<sup>22</sup> The hierarchy in architectural institutes prevailed, making it more challenging for female architects to secure appointments in male-dominated institutions, such as the Urban Construction Design Institute. At the time, this institute held a monopoly on designing “atypical” buildings in the Republic – projects that offered the most creative freedom. Even when women managed to enter these institutions, they were often relegated to background tasks, their contributions unrecognised.<sup>23</sup> This could be compared to Soviet Estonia, where, due to the state system of job placement, more promising male students were pre-selected in the more desirable design offices, creating an easier path for them to become star architects in the Soviet Union.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, true gender equality was not achieved in the architectural industry of the Soviet Union. A bureaucratised system and gender biases challenged women’s access to desirable positions with power dynamics maintaining a ‘glass ceiling’.<sup>25</sup>



Fig. 4: Architect Birutė Kasperavičienė at her drawing desk at the State Urban Construction Design Institute in Vilnius. Photographer: A. Barysas, 1968. Source: Lithuanian Central State Archives.

11 Nochlin, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?*.  
12 Ellen Perry Berkeley and Matilda McQuaid, *Architecture: A Place for Women* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989).  
13 Berkeley and McQuaid, *Architecture: A Place for Women*.  
14 Aleksandras Štromas, *Laisvės horizontai* (Baltos lankos, 2001).

15 Jonas Minkevičius, *Architektūra ir jos tolesnio vystymosi perspektyvos* (Vilnius: Valstybinė politinės ir mokslinės literatūros leidykla, 1961).  
16 Virginija Jurėnienė, “Creation of Soviet Woman in Soviet Lithuania and Soviet Union,” *Lyčių Studijos ir Tyrimai* (2006).  
17 Lakštauskienė, “Women Architects: History of Professional Education and Practice.”  
18 Pepchinski and Simon, *Women Architects in Socialist Europe 1945-1989*.

19 Drėmaitė, “Modernistės. Moterys XX a. architektūroje.”  
20 Drėmaitė, “Modernistės. Moterys XX a. architektūroje.”  
21 Marija Drėmaitė, “Šiaurės modernizmo įtaka „lietuviškajai architektūros mokyklai“ 1959-1969 m.,” *Menotyra* 18, no. 4 (2011).  
22 Drėmaitė, Petrulis, and Tutlytė, *Architektūra Sovietinėje Lietuvoje*.  
23 Drėmaitė, “Modernistės. Moterys XX a. architektūroje.”  
24 Ingrid Ruodi, “Four Women at the Top: The Self-Image and Media Representation of Female Leaders in Soviet and Post-Soviet Estonian Architecture,” *Cidades*, no. Au22 (2022).  
25 Pepchinski and Simon, *Women Architects in Socialist Europe 1945-1989*.

2. Architectural Hegemony: The Formation of the Lithuanian Modernist School and Its Gendered Boundaries

While the post-Stalin shift in the USSR’s political agenda restricted creative freedom in some architectural fields, greater artistic flexibility was granted to projects of institutional and cultural significance.<sup>26</sup> This newfound openness offered Lithuanian architects a chance to express their determination and intellectual strength, encouraging the use of architecture as a tool of resistance towards the occupying authority.<sup>27</sup> The first generation of post-war modernist architects, commonly called the “Lithuanian modernist school,”<sup>28</sup> began their careers in the 1950s. By securing commissions for major projects in the urban centres, they established themselves as influential and respected professionals.<sup>29</sup> Despite their ongoing resistance to Soviet influence, these architects eventually obtained cultural elite status, gaining social and economic privileges.

Having come of age during the interwar period in Kaunas,<sup>30</sup> this group of architects was affected by the city’s modernist tradition, which for them represented a nostalgic connection to Lithuania’s independence

and the related architectural freedom.<sup>31</sup> Just as the Bauhaus movement had influenced interwar architects, it similarly defined this new generation’s perception and professional identity. The Bauhaus ideal, which portrayed architects as cultural heroes and community saviours, reinforced their sense of significance and power.<sup>32</sup> This perception may have contributed to their insistence on a unified style, which they saw as a means of opposing Soviet occupation. According to I. Ruseckaitė and L. Markejevaitė, the promotion of the singular aesthetic was more important than individual expression or functional requirements of the building, with stylistic coherence and purity ultimately defining “good” architectural design in Soviet Lithuania.<sup>33</sup> This led to the formation of a modernist school in Lithuania, characterised by “unity of function and artistic form, moderation coming from folk architectural traditions, use of local materials, and ‘logical’ decor without excessive embellishment.”<sup>34</sup> However, this stylistic canon was mostly shaped by the male elite of the architectural industry, marginalising those who did not conform to its rigid framework, as will be later illustrated by Nijolė Bučiūtė and her design for the National Opera and Ballet Theatre.

26 Minkevičius, *Prieštaringoji Architektūra*.  
27 Minkevičius, *Prieštaringoji Architektūra*.  
28 Some of the figures of the “Lithuanian modernist school” were Vytautas Edmundas Čekanauskas (1930–2010), Vytautas Brėdikis (1930–2021), brothers Algimantas (1928–2018) and Vytautas (1928–2016) Nasvytis, and Algimantas Mačiulis (1930–2024).

29 Marija Drėmaitė, “Kultūrinė rezistencija ar maištaujantis oportunizmas? Tylusis modernizmas kaip Lietuvos architektų 1955–1990 m. laikotarpio atsiminimų strategija,” *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis*, no. 95 (2019). Before the 1950s, the architectural industry in Soviet Lithuania was monopolised by foreign architects, usually of Russian origin. Resistance to this dominance among young Lithuanian practitioners was demonstrated at the 2nd convention of the Union of Architects of the LSSR, where they proclaimed that the national character can be best expressed by the local architects. This event altered the status quo in essence, as the formation of architectural direction was transferred from Russian to Lithuanian architects. Through their dedication and professional competence, Lithuanian architects subsequently gained recognition and esteem throughout the Soviet Union.

30 Kaunas, the second-largest city in Lithuania, served as the country’s temporary capital during the interwar period (1920–1939). This era marked a significant chapter in Lithuania’s architectural history, distinguished by buildings of high artistic quality and unique regional characteristics that influenced future generations of architects. 44 examples of Kaunas’ interwar modernist architecture were added to the List of European Heritage Sites in 2015.

31 Vaidas Petrulis, “Nacionalinio Savitumo Strategijos Sovietmečio Lietuvos Architektūroje,” *Town Planning & Architecture* 29, no. 1 (2005); Drėmaitė, “Kultūrinė rezistencija ar maištaujantis oportunizmas? Tylusis modernizmas kaip Lietuvos architektų 1955–1990 m. laikotarpio atsiminimų strategija.”  
32 Eglė Navickienė, “Architektų modernistų profesinis savivaizdis sovietmečio Lietuvoje ir jo nūdienis vertinimas,” *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis*, no. 113 (2023).  
33 Ruseckaitė and Markejevaitė, “Asmeninis Elenos Nijolės Bučiūtės modernizmas.”  
34 Ruseckaitė and Markejevaitė, “Asmeninis Elenos Nijolės Bučiūtės modernizmas,” 96.



Fig. 5: Architects of the Urban Construction Design Institute discussing the Vilnius city centre development model. Pictured are chief architect Vytautas Edmundas Čekanauskas, along with Genovaitė Balėnienė, Gediminas Baravykas, Vytautas Parčiauskas, and Sigitas Katilius, Photographer: A. Sabaliauskas, 1982. Source: Lithuanian Central State Archives.



3. Defying Constraints: Nijolė Bučiūtė's Career, Gender Roles, and Professional Resilience

Gender-based discriminations in architecture were partly rooted in the notion that the profession required traditionally masculine traits, such as logical thinking and mathematical competence, which women were often presumed to lack.<sup>35</sup> In 1911, German architect Otto Bartning published an article, “Should Women Build?” where he argued that the tendency of female practitioners to conform too easily to client requests resulted in weak and overly feminine architecture.<sup>36</sup> Architects like Nijolė Bučiūtė later challenged such reductive assumptions by demonstrating the ability to navigate architectural projects and structural challenges with a deductive and rational approach.

Born in 1930 in Rokiškis, northeastern Lithuania, Bučiūtė exhibited exceptional talent from an early age. After graduating from the Vilnius Art Institute (now Vilnius Academy of Arts) in 1953, Bučiūtė began working at the Lithuanian Urban Construction Design Institute, where she eventually became a group leader. Her colleagues, A. Lukšas and E. Stasiulis, remember the architect as a communicative, rational, tolerant, and supportive figure.<sup>37</sup> According to her daughter, Bučiūtė was a problem solver and spatial thinker.<sup>38</sup> At the time, such traits were often associated only with masculinity and highly valued in a profession that required both artistic vision and technical expertise.<sup>39</sup> Bučiūtė’s brother, Algimantas Bučius, recalled how she faced challenges when dealing with determined male construction workers and high-ranking ministers from the *nomenklatura*.<sup>40</sup> Yet, as he noted, she “would defeat them with clear professional arguments.”<sup>41</sup>

While rationality was a valued trait for architects, emotional expression was discouraged in the field – “The worst trait for a female architect was to be hysterical,” recalls L. Markejevaitė, quoting her mother.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, Bučiūtė herself expressed approval that many women on her project team possessed what she described as “masculine traits.”<sup>43</sup> This conflict between societal expectations of feminine behaviour and the perception of architecture as a masculine profession has been examined by scholar Despina Stratigakos, who notes that many women had to dismiss some of their more traditionally female traits to define their roles within the architectural industry.<sup>44</sup> It is unclear whether Bučiūtė consciously adapted her behaviour, but as her brother, A. Bučius, recalls, she exhibited rationality and composure from an early age – qualities he attributes to their father.<sup>45</sup>

Importantly, gendered perceptions in architecture were not shaped by men alone. According to scholar Marija Drėmaitė, women themselves internalised these biases, often downplaying or justifying their gender in professional settings.<sup>46</sup> Gražina Janulytė-Bernotienė, who entered the field in 1971, observed this tendency firsthand.<sup>47</sup> Conversely, women were highly respected in the family of N. Bučiūtė, which may have prevented her from seeing her gender as a professional obstacle.<sup>48</sup> This inherent respect is evidenced in an article published in 1971, where she stated, “I feel like a woman first and foremost. Architecture is just a job I

enjoy doing.”<sup>49</sup> Notably, most of her project team for the NOBT consisted of women (Fig. 6), and she collaborated extensively with the female engineer Ida Doktorskytė, not only on the theatre but on numerous other projects as well.<sup>50</sup> Bučiūtė’s work environment thus reflected her commitment to promoting a professional culture where women’s contributions were integral and valued.



Fig. 6: Urban Construction Design Institute drawing room. First row from the left: engineer Aldona Rožinskienė, engineer Ida Doktorskytė, architect Eugenija Pilypaitienė; second row from the left: unknown technician, architect Ramutė Krištopavičienė, furthest row: engineer Stefanija Survilienė and architect Nijolė Bučiūtė. Unknown photographer, circa 1964. Source: N. Bučiūtė’s family archive.

35 Despina Stratigakos, *Where Are the Women Architects?* (Princeton University Press, 2016).

36 Otto Bartning, “Sollen Damen bauen?,” *Die Welt der Frau (Gartenlaube)* 40 (1911).

37 Aleksandras Lukšas, interview by the author, 2025; Edmundas Pranciškus Stasiulis, interview by the author, 2025.

38 Lada Markejevaitė, interview by the author, 2025.

39 Stratigakos, *Where Are the Women Architects?*

40 Nomenklatura was a select group of individuals in the Soviet Union who had key administrative roles across various sectors, including government, education, industry, etc. Their appointments required approval from the Communist Party, ensuring that political loyalty determined access to influential positions within the state bureaucracy. Algimantas Bučius, “Mano Sesuo Architektė Elena Nijolė Bučiūtė,” in *Kamajai* (Vilnius: Versmė, 2016).

41 Bučius, “Mano Sesuo Architektė Elena Nijolė Bučiūtė.”

42 Markejevaitė, interview.

43 Lada Markejevaitė, *It sustingusi muzika: Nacionalinio operos ir baleto teatro rūmai Vilniuje* (Vilnius: Artseria, 2021).

44 Despina Stratigakos, “Architects in Skirts: The Public Image of Women Architects in Wilhelmine Germany,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 55, no. 2 (2001).

45 Bučius, “Mano Sesuo Architektė Elena Nijolė Bučiūtė.”

46 Drėmaitė, “Modernistės. Moterys XX a. architektūroje.”

47 Gražina Janulytė-Bernotienė, “Moterys Architektės. Pokalbis su M. Drėmaite, G. Janulyte-Bernotiene ir G. Zykuviene,” moderated by Justinas Dūdėnas and Matas Šiupšinskas, *Homo cultus. Žmogus ir miestas*, December 30, 2024, 52 min., 46 sec., <https://www.lrt.lt/radioteka/irasas/2000382002/moterys-architektes-pokalbis-su-m-dremaite-g-janulyte-bernotiene-ir-g-zykuviene?season=%2Fmediateka%2Faudio%2Fhomo-cultus-zmogus-ir-miestas%2F2024>.

48 Markejevaitė, interview.

49 Nijolė Logminienė, “Architektės Dalia,” *Gimtas Kraštas*, August 26th 1971.

50 I. Doktorskytė cooperated with N. Bučiūtė by taking part in the tender for the Sports Hall in Vilnius; preparing projects for the Institute of Land Management in Vilnius (1967), the furniture shop-pavilion in Vilnius (1968); and the building for the Planning Committee (1973). She was involved in the NOBT design as a chief engineer from the tender in 1958 until 1972 (when she emigrated to Israel).



However, N. Bučiūtė not only had to navigate gender biases in the professional field but also deal with the challenges of motherhood. In an interview with Aleksandras Lukšas – a prominent architect in Soviet Lithuania and one of the landscape designers of the NOBT – he reflects on the professional atmosphere at the institute, stating that architects who wanted to be appointed for individual projects had to stay late at work.<sup>51</sup> Long working hours prevented many women from moving forward in their careers, as they had other responsibilities such as childcare and household chores. Bučiūtės sketch (Fig. 7 and 8) of an architectural detail on one side of the paper and a design of children's clothes on the other gives us a glimpse into her attempt to balance the two lives: personal and professional. Due to the scarcity of clothing available in stores, many women, including Bučiūtė, were sewing their own garments. For the architect, only nights were available for this task.<sup>52</sup> Even with all the family responsibilities, women had to dedicate themselves more than their male counterparts to succeed in the industry. “Nijolė works with the capacity of three men,” – her colleague stated, highlighting the hard-working personality of the architect.<sup>53</sup> During the design process of the NOBT, Bučiūtė was also involved as the chief architect of other major projects<sup>54</sup> in Vilnius, intensifying her work schedule. Thus, while raising three children, N. Bučiūtė emerges as an example of a woman who had to navigate a demanding professional environment that often failed to accommodate the dual burden of caregiving and career.

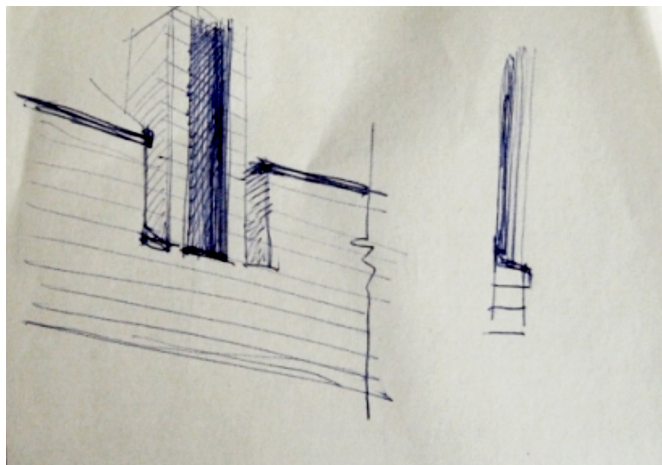
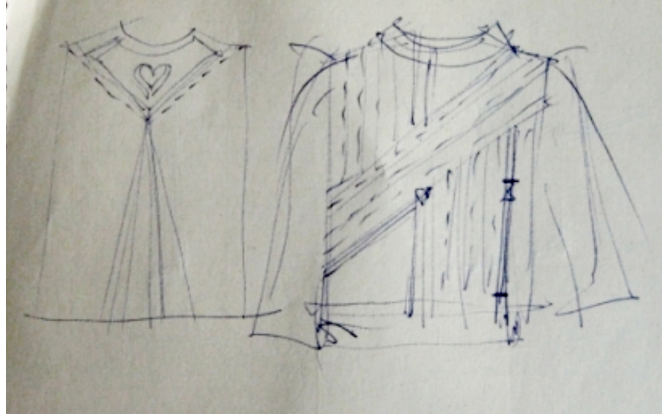


Fig. 7, 8: N. Bučiūtė's sketches: an architectural detail on one side and children's clothing on the other, Date unknown. Source: N. Bučiūtė's family archive.

<sup>51</sup> Lukšas, interview.

<sup>52</sup> Markejevaitė, interview.

<sup>53</sup> Edita Riaubienė, “Elena Nijolė Bučiūtė: architektūra – tai praktinė paskirtis ir meninė prigimtis,” *Archiforma* (1999): 47.

<sup>54</sup> Notably, they were a secondary school in Vilnius (1966-1967, built in 1971), the Land Survey Institute (1962-1964, built in 1967), and the building for the State Planning Committee (1967-69, built in 1973).

#### 4. Navigating Bureaucracy: Nijolė Bučiūtė's Breakthrough in Soviet Lithuania

In Soviet Lithuania, architects were reduced to mere bureaucratic employees, as government institutions assumed responsibility for all planning works.<sup>55</sup> While most jobs were simply designated to architects gathered in the state design institutes, some tenders were held for the most important public buildings. Female practitioner Gražina Janulytė-Bernotienė (b. 1951) remarks that sometimes, competitions were the only opportunity for women to win jobs.<sup>56</sup>

However, in occupied Lithuania, these tenders operated within a rigid bureaucratic framework, functioning more as administrative formalities than free competitions. Design institutes monopolised their respective areas of activity, and competitions were sporadic, with limited dissemination of information ensuring that only a select few were aware of them.<sup>57</sup>



Fig. 9: N. Bučiūtė with National Opera and Ballet Theatre model. Photographer: A. Šarkis, 1962. Source: Lithuanian Central State Archives.

<sup>55</sup> Vaidas Petrulis, “Politics, architecture and the premises behind their linking in soviet Lithuania,” *Darbai ir dienos*, no. 48 (2007).

<sup>56</sup> Janulytė-Bernotienė, “Moterys Architektės.”

<sup>57</sup> Darius Linartas, “Sovietinio Laikotarpio Architektūros Konkursų Raidos Apžvalga,” *Town Planning and Architecture* 33, no. 1 (2009).



5. Gendered Critiques of Nijolė Bučiūtė's Architectural Vision

Remarkably, in a competition held for the National Opera and Ballet Theatre in 1960, 28-year-old Nijolė Bučiūtė won first place. The first years at the architectural institute were challenging for Nijolė, as many of her first projects were not realised, even within the context of the NOBT competition. In 1958, the first stage of the competition was held for the design of the new theatre, and the proposal by Spelskis, assisted by N. Bučiūtė, was initially selected. While Spelskis offered Bučiūtė the opportunity to collaborate further on the design, she confidently rejected the proposition as it did not align with her emerging vision.<sup>58</sup> This brave decision prompted authorities to question her rationale and inquire whether she had an independent vision for the theatre. According to Lada Markejevaitė, the architect's daughter, Bučiūtė did not have a design in mind at the time, yet confidently claimed otherwise.<sup>59</sup> She was subsequently granted two months to develop a personal proposal, which ultimately was chosen as the winning entry in the competition. While it is difficult to determine definitively why the young architect's design was selected, the most plausible explanation is that her proposal was significantly more innovative and modern in comparison to Spelskis's design, which adhered more closely to Stalinist architecture.<sup>60</sup> Given that such major cultural projects served as a symbolic representation of the USSR's power and technological progress, Bučiūtė's modernist approach may have been recognised as a superior expression of Soviet modernity.

The NOBT, opened in 1974, became the first theatre in any Soviet capital to be designed in the modernist style from the outset.<sup>61</sup> The building's composition reflects a classic modernist architectural approach – a rectangular volume overhung by a perpendicularly descending slope. The sloping character of the terrain towards the river Neris allowed the building to maintain a continuous connection with its surroundings. Structurally, it consists

of a grounded, enclosed stage area and a hanging, transparent audience section. The auditorium of the theatre was designed to accommodate 1,150 people, rejecting the prevalent amphitheatre layout of the time in favour of a loge-balcony composition. This approach was more typical of old theatre designs, creating a vision of “boats hung between the huge, sculptured pylons.”<sup>62</sup>

Bučiūtė's bold approach to construction is most apparent in the defining space of the theatre – the red foyer. To achieve a column-free interior, the foyer's roof was supported by seventeen-meter-long cantilevered metal trusses, a daring engineering solution for its time. Nijolė Bučiūtė aimed to reflect the future direction of architecture, a style that had yet to fully develop and adapt in response to technological advancements.<sup>63</sup> However, her innovative vision challenged the established norms of the time, leading to mixed responses among her contemporaries and in the press.

The design of the National Opera and Ballet Theatre “geographically broadened the boundaries of inspiration and modernist rationality of the Lithuanian Architectural School.”<sup>64</sup> While the first stages in 1960 and 1962 reflect the common creative explorations of the 1960s Lithuanian architects with the building's functionalist character, the design of NOBT “broke the usual stereotypes of theatre buildings and paved way for a new generation of transparent, light, and modern theatre buildings.”<sup>65</sup> From the initial concept stages, N. Bučiūtė's foyer design (Fig. 10) became part of discussions during the hearings at the institute, where her male colleagues were given the chance to express their criticism. In one such meeting, architects argued that the foyer's height made it overly open and austere, claiming, “there is nowhere to nestle.”<sup>66</sup> However, Bučiūtė remained confident in her decision and did not yield, claiming that one of her inspirations behind such volume were childhood memories in the Rokiškis neo-gothic churchyard. The architect did not feel any discomfort going around the impressively tall red brick walls of the church; quite the opposite, she sensed a solemn, celebratory, and sacral atmosphere, which she then sought to reflect in the NOBT design.<sup>67</sup> Notably, some of the professionals who had initially criticised the foyer's height and openness later conceded that the foyer and its glass façade reinforced the image of a contemporary theatre.<sup>68</sup>



Fig. 10: The Red Foyer of the National Opera and Ballet Theatre. Photographer: M. Plepys, 2021. Source: Theatre Information Centre.

<sup>58</sup> Markejevaitė, *It sustingusi muzika: Nacionalinio operos ir baleto teatro rūmai Vilniuje*.

<sup>59</sup> Markejevaitė, interview.

<sup>60</sup> Stalinist Architecture was a style imposed during Joseph Stalin's leadership between 1933 and 1955 and associated with the Socialist realism school of art. In 1955, Nikita Krushchev denounced the “excesses” of the Stalinist style and closed the Soviet Academy of Architecture.

<sup>61</sup> Markejevaitė, *It sustingusi muzika: Nacionalinio operos ir baleto teatro rūmai Vilniuje*.

<sup>62</sup> Markejevaitė, *It sustingusi muzika: Nacionalinio operos ir baleto teatro rūmai Vilniuje*, 207.

<sup>63</sup> Markejevaitė, *It sustingusi muzika: Nacionalinio operos ir baleto teatro rūmai Vilniuje*.

<sup>64</sup> Ruseckaitė and Markejevaitė, “Asmeninis Elenos Nijolės Bučiūtės modernizmas.”

<sup>65</sup> Markejevaitė, *It sustingusi muzika: Nacionalinio operos ir baleto teatro rūmai Vilniuje*, 25.

<sup>66</sup> Markejevaitė, *It sustingusi muzika: Nacionalinio operos ir baleto teatro rūmai Vilniuje*, 224.

<sup>67</sup> Ruseckaitė and Markejevaitė, “Asmeninis Elenos Nijolės Bučiūtės modernizmas.”

<sup>68</sup> Markejevaitė, *It sustingusi muzika: Nacionalinio operos ir baleto teatro rūmai Vilniuje*.



In different newspaper articles published during the construction and after the building was finished, the National Opera and Ballet Theatre was referred to as a “building of an era,” elevating its significance to the Soviet Lithuanian architectural discourse.<sup>69</sup> Architect A. Nasvytis agreed on the project’s importance in one of the institute’s meetings, arguing that “The building is for a century, we will not be building another opera house,” however, adding that the current design is too subjective to reflect the common achievement of their generation.<sup>70</sup> This raises the question of whether it was truly a wish to see the theatre as a more objective reflection of their generation’s architectural accomplishments or, possibly, envy for the opportunity to design such a major project. The unrecognition of Bučiūtė’s unique architectural approach by her male contemporaries is evident in the letter she received in 1966 (Fig. 11):

*“According to your project, the building of the Opera and Ballet Theatre that is being built now would look more suitable for some kind of factory, say a sewing factory, but not for a theatre. We, a group of friends, after discussing this project of yours, became convinced that you (don’t be offended) have no idea about beauty and art as understood by most people. We suggest you shift to land design, planning agricultural buildings, such as pigsties. Art and beauty aren’t required for that.”*

The comparison of the theatre’s design to a sewing factory indicates the prevailing gender-based prejudices within the field, where women were only associated with designing buildings tied to traditionally feminine roles, such as domestic work or the textile industry. Furthermore, the letter highlights the marginalisation of those who deviated from the dominant architectural norms, portraying them as incapable of truly understanding art. L. Markejevaitė recalls that her mother faced significant challenges in developing the NOBT project for fourteen years in such a masculine environment, as her creative vision was not widely accepted within the architectural community.<sup>71</sup>

69 Danutė Baginskienė, “Architektė Nijolė Bučiūtė,” *Statyba ir Architektūra*, 1976.

70 Markejevaitė, *It sustingusi muzika: Nacionalinio operos ir baleto teatro rūmai Vilniuje*, 224.

71 Lada Markejevaitė, “Žvilgsnis į LNOBT architektūrą. Rūmų kūrimo istorija (1960-1974),” *Bravissimo*, 2014.

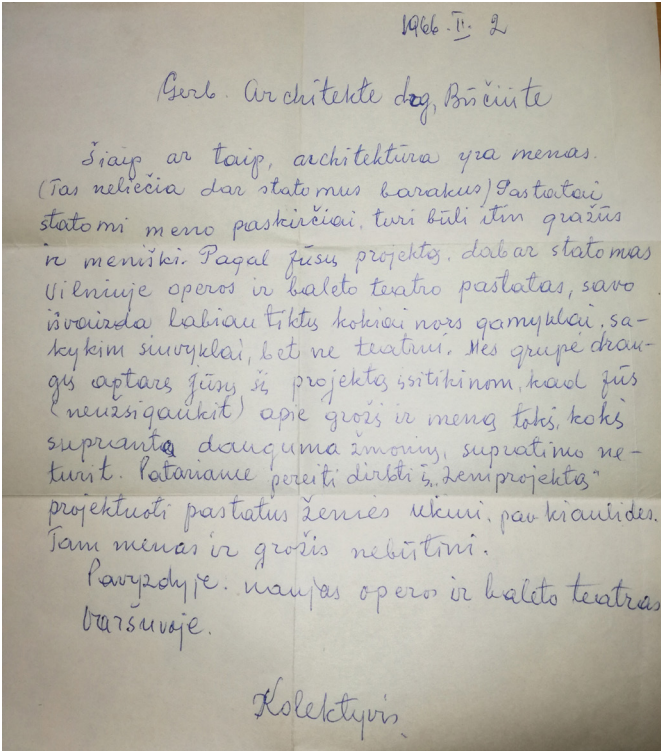


Fig. 11: A letter sent to N. Bučiūtė by her colleagues from the Urban Construction Design Institute, 1966. Source: N. Bučiūtė’s family archive.

Further evidence of professional envy toward Bučiūtė can be found in a 1965 newspaper article by architect Juozas Vaškevičius, which describes her work as “creativity, whose fruits male architects could be jealous of.”<sup>72</sup> This statement suggests a possible competition within the institute, where Bučiūtė’s success challenged the established hierarchy. Notably, this article appeared on March 8th. While internationally recognised as a celebration of women’s emancipation, in the USSR, it functioned less as a marker of genuine progress and more as a vehicle for state-driven, female-centred socialist propaganda.<sup>73</sup>

However, scrutiny of her femininity was not limited to male colleagues. Ironically, women also contributed to these narratives. A 1971 article by journalist Nijolė Logminienė exemplifies this internalised bias:

*“When she raises her eyes – brown and soft, there is so much free femininity, that one can doubt whether it is the famous Vilnius architect – Nijolė Bučiūtė, who does such a, it seems, male job, designing many major buildings for the capital of Soviet Lithuania.”*<sup>74</sup>

However, due to her professionalism, hard-working personality and great knowledge in the field, Bučiūtė gradually gained the respect of the construction team and the public.<sup>75</sup>

To better understand how Nijolė deviated from the stylistic canon at that time, it is essential to compare it to a similar architectural example from that period. The National Drama Theatre, reconstructed in 1981 by Algimantas and Vytautas Nasvytis, represents a more conventional approach to theatre architecture typical of that generation. The “Lithuanian Modernist School” emphasised human scale and ascetic design, which is evident in the theatre’s entrance at street level without a grand staircase (Fig. 12), while the foyer of the theatre is a

72 Juozas Vaškevičius, “Kūrybinis Braižas,” *Vakarinės Naujienos*, March 8th 1965.

73 Barbara LeSavoy and Garrett Jordan, “The Capitalist Hijacking of International Women’s Day: Russian and American Considerations,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 14, no. 3 (2013).

74 Logminienė, “Architektės Dalia.”

75 Bučius, “Mano Sesuo Architektė Elena Nijolė Bučiūtė.”

low-ceiling enclosed space (Fig. 13). However, this design also made the entrance less prominent, reinforcing a sense of exclusivity and implying that access was reserved for a privileged class.



Fig. 12: The entrance to the National Drama Theatre is set back from the street line and partially hidden. Unlike many theatres, it lacks a grand staircase. Photographer: M. Plepys, 2021. Source: Theatre Information Centre.



Fig. 13: The foyer space of the National Drama Theatre. In contrast to the NOBT foyer, this area features a significantly lower ceiling without any direct visual connection to the outside. Photographer: M. Plepys, 2021. Source: Theatre Information Centre.



According to Tomas Daugirdas, who explored the intersection of culture and national self-awareness during the Soviet occupation, society was conditioned to perceive culture as sacred and inaccessible to the “unenlightened.”<sup>76</sup>

However, in the case of the NOBT, Bučiūtė sought to depart from the traditional form of theatre design, where the interior was usually disconnected from the outside. Instead, she envisioned a much more inclusive and democratic design, which would show “that all lovers of music and theatrical art are welcome here.”<sup>77</sup> Her democratic approach and commitment to making culture accessible to everyone are apparent in the concept sketches of the foyer (Fig. 14 and 15). Strips of balconies hanging up in the tall space allowed the creation of a “continuous relationship between hall and stage, hall and foyer, the whole building and its surrounding environment, and people inside and outside of the theatre.”<sup>78</sup> The theatre’s layout further enhances accessibility, with multiple entry points from different sides and circulation paths that allow visitors to move freely throughout the space. Notably, the main entrance staircase creates a ceremonial transition, guiding ordinary people into a different, theatrical reality. In this way, Bučiūtė found her own agency within the rigid norms of the architectural field, creating a space that focused on intimacy, accessibility and collective belonging.

During the peak of the NOBT’s construction, Jurij Markeev (1929-2002), Bučiūtė’s creative and life partner, joined the project, contributing to various exterior and interior elements. With Markeev’s influence as well as Bučiūtė’s maturing and changing approach, the NOBT gained more characteristics of the later modernism, such as increased sculptural plasticity, a return to ornamentation, and a richer palette of colours and materials, making an even bigger deviation from the Lithuanian architectural canon.<sup>79</sup> The use of costly materials and ornamental elements was criticised by her contemporaries, who

argued that these choices mitigated the stylistic cohesion of the overall composition.<sup>80</sup> Conversely, Bučiūtė consciously refused to follow prevailing trends, which favoured ascetic and uniform aesthetics, remarking that “an unfashionable item cannot in any way possible go out of fashion.”<sup>81</sup> Instead, she sought to create a much richer and intricate symphony of details, enhancing the multi-layered and sophisticated character of the theatre. However, material shortages in the USSR hindered the creation of such refined designs. To overcome the limited availability of interior elements, Bučiūtė resorted to local craftsmanship, commissioning custom-made pieces that had no existing precedent.<sup>82</sup> This approach not only allowed her to escape the limitations of the scarce resources but also reinforced the theatre’s distinct identity.

<sup>76</sup> Tomas Daugirdas, “Dievybės-Kultūros Įnoriai,” *Naujas židinys - Aidai*, no. 1-2 (2002); Tomas Daugirdas, “Autentiška Masinė Kultūra,” *Naujas židinys - Aidai*, no. 4 (2002).

<sup>77</sup> Baginskienė, “Architektė Nijolė Bučiūtė,” 18.

<sup>78</sup> Baginskienė, “Architektė Nijolė Bučiūtė,” 18.

<sup>79</sup> Ruseckaitė and Markejevaitė, “Asmeninis Elenos Nijolės Bučiūtės modernizmas.”

<sup>80</sup> Algimantas Mačiulis, “Tikras ir Netikras Pinigas Interjeruose,” *Literatūra ir Menas*, December 3rd 1977.

<sup>81</sup> Bareikis and Bareikis, interview.

<sup>82</sup> Markejevaitė, *It sustingusi muzika: Nacionalinio operos ir baleto teatro rūmai Vilniuje*.

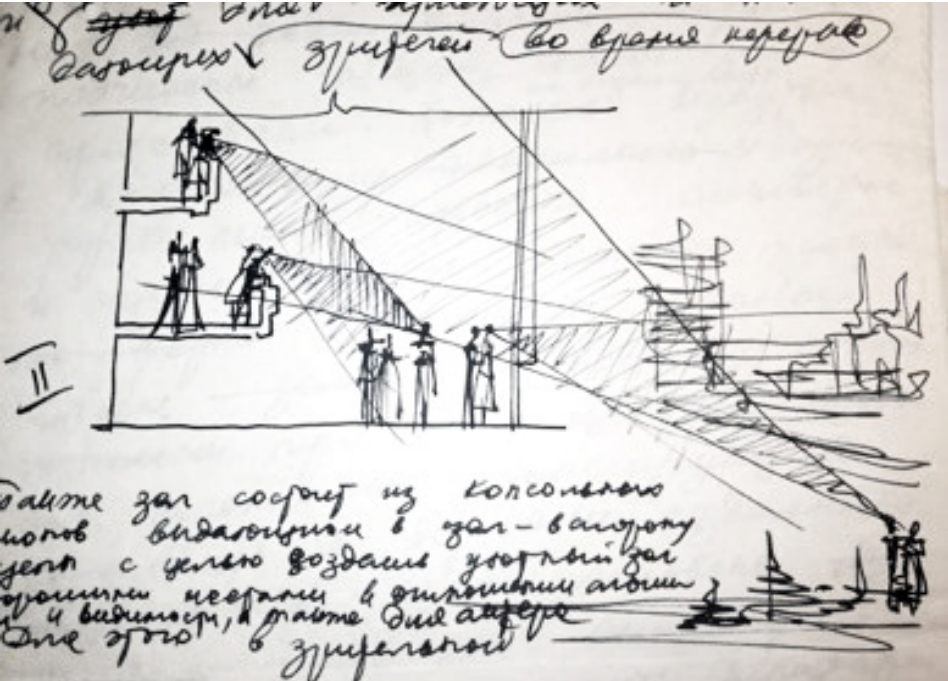


Fig. 14: Concept of the spatial structure of the foyer space by N. Bučiūtė, circa 1974. Source: N. Bučiūtė’s family archive.

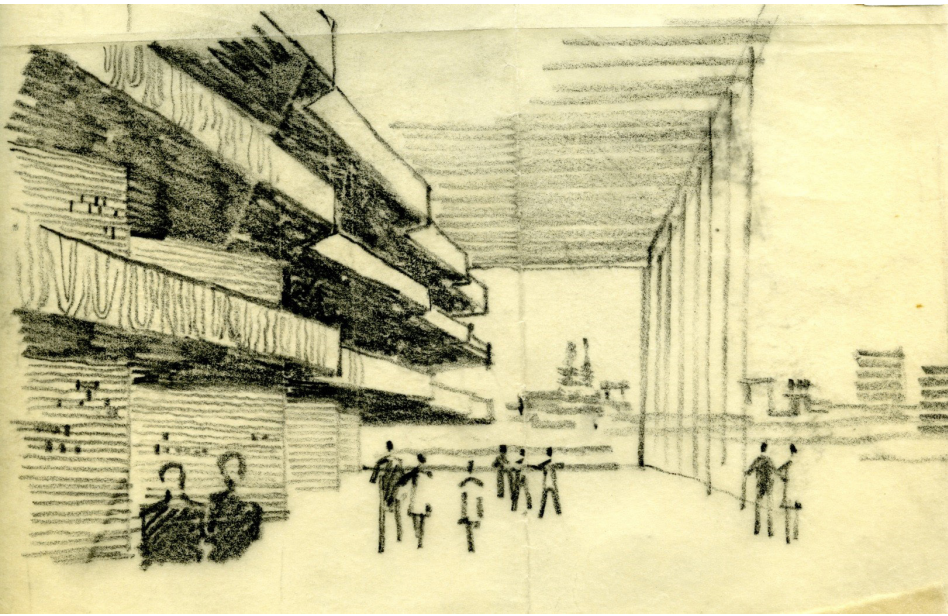


Fig. 15: Foyer perspective sketch by N. Bučiūtė, circa 1968. The transparent façade establishes a strong visual and spatial connection between the interior and exterior, creating a sense of interaction between those inside and outside the building. Source: N. Bučiūtė’s family archive.



6. Materiality as Resistance: National Identity in the NOBT’s Architectural Language

The national identity aspect of the NOBT design emerged as a significant point of critique within the Lithuanian architectural community. Upon J. Markeev’s involvement in the project, he and N. Bučiūtė began incorporating their personal nostalgic influences into the design, diverging from the prevailing national identity expressions of the time.<sup>83</sup> Architect A. Lukšas recalls that the Lithuanian community was “a bit displeased, that it is not Lithuanian per se,” partly blaming Markeev’s Russian origin<sup>84</sup> for that.<sup>85</sup> However, Bučiūtė’s exploration of identity was unrecognised in the building, despite her distinct approach to resisting Soviet influence. Within the theatre, her sense of national consciousness subtly emerges through the careful use of three key materials: red profiled bricks, brass accents, and warm yellow glass. While it was unconventional to use red bricks for theatre finishes (this material being too cheap for a building of such importance), Bučiūtė associated the character of the red brick masonry with ancient Lithuanian defensive structures and church buildings.<sup>86</sup> Both Bučiūtė and Markeev were born in clay-rich landscapes, this material becoming their tool of play.<sup>87</sup> Markeev’s development of five decorative profiled brick types, along with their varied application in the design of the auditorium walls (Fig. 16), resembles the facade relief of St. Anne’s Church in Vilnius – a landmark deeply symbolic to Lithuania’s architectural heritage<sup>88</sup> (Fig. 17). Furthermore, yellow glass was chosen for the chandeliers in the foyer space instead of the more familiar material, clear crystal.<sup>89</sup>

83 Ruseckaitė and Markejevaitė, “Asmeninis Elenos Nijolės Bučiūtės modernizmas.”

84 J. Markeev was born and raised in Vladimir Oblast, a federal subject of Russia located near Moscow. He belonged to the Merya people, a small indigenous group in Russia. Before coming to Lithuania, he was involved in Moscow’s underground intellectual circles.

85 Lukšas, interview.

86 Ruseckaitė and Markejevaitė, “Asmeninis Elenos Nijolės Bučiūtės modernizmas.”

87 Markejevaitė, interview.

88 St Anne’s Church is a Gothic Roman Catholic church built in the 15th century in Vilnius. Its influence on the NOBT design can be associated with the legacy of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, a period when the country was at its peak in territorial and political strength. The use of red bricks in later periods of Lithuanian architecture may symbolise a romanticised reflection of the nation’s glorious past.

89 Markejevaitė, *It sustingusi muzika: Nacionalinio operos ir baleto teatro rūmai Vilniuje*.

Bučiūtė sought to create a warm assembly of tones in the interior space, associating the yellow colour with amber, otherwise called “Lithuanian gold.”<sup>90</sup> The chandeliers, however, do not function as lights, rather they reflect the light coming from above, spreading the warm colour across the space (Fig. 18). Finally, Bučiūtė considered brass an exceptionally Lithuanian material, prompting the decision to use it for detail finishing in the interior space to create warm tone harmony.<sup>91</sup> Brass is used for column and entrance door finishings, plinths, decorative fire curtains and door handles (Fig. 19).

Overall, the chosen materials for the theatre: yellow-amber glass, brass, wood and red ceramic are more suggestive of old Lithuanian manors or even folk architecture rather than austere modernist style.<sup>92</sup> Hence, scholar L. Markejevaitė argues that the NOBT can “even be portrayed as a certain reincarnation of the very grandeur of The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, or perhaps it was meant to become a secret operation of an occupied and repressed nation’s resistance?”<sup>93</sup> This suggests that the theatre’s design carries deeper, historically encoded meanings, possibly reflecting the period of Lithuania’s political peak and reaffirming Lithuanian identity in the face of foreign control.

In the NOBT, the integration of diverse tones, patterns and materials fosters a warm, mystical, and celebratory ambience, resembling a theatrical composition that guides visitors through Bučiūtė’s personal nostalgia and exploration of national identity. While the NOBT did not conform to the dominant norms of national identity representation, it nevertheless encapsulated nationalistic values in a distinctive approach that was unrecognised by the male architectural elite of the time.

90 Amber is often called “Lithuanian gold” because of its historical, cultural, and economic significance to Lithuania. Since ancient times, people living along the Baltic coast have gathered amber and crafted it into jewelry and protective amulets. Its significance in trade dates back to prehistoric times, particularly through the Amber Road—an ancient trade route linking the Baltic Sea with the Mediterranean.

91 Ruseckaitė and Markejevaitė, “Asmeninis Elenos Nijolės Bučiūtės modernizmas.”

92 Markejevaitė, “Žvilgsnis į LNOBT architektūrą. Rūmų Kūrimo Istorija (1960-1974).”

93 Markejevaitė, *It sustingusi muzika: Nacionalinio operos ir baleto teatro rūmai Vilniuje*, 11.



Fig. 16: Fragment of the auditorium wall, Unknown photographer, Date unknown. Source: N. Bučiūtė’s family archive.

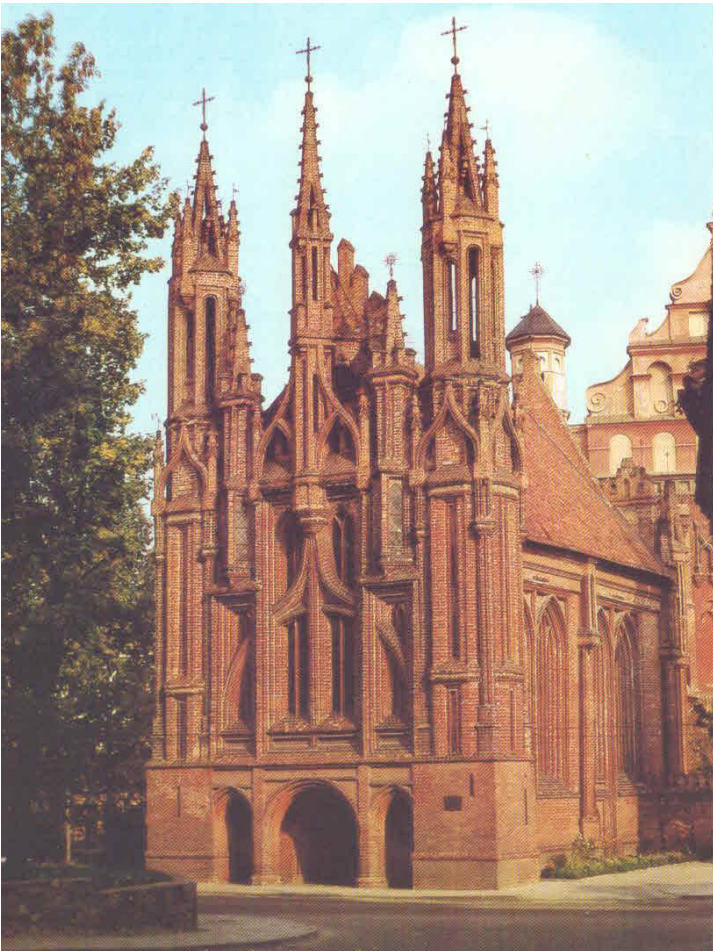


Fig. 17: St Anne’s Church in Vilnius, Unknown photographer, 1990. Source: Osta.ee.





Fig. 18: The yellow-glass chandeliers in the foyer space, Photographer: A. Slapikaitė, circa 2021. Source: Architektūros Fondas.



Fig. 19: Passageway of the NOBT with brass columns. The passageway was converted into an interior space in the 1997 reconstruction. Photographer: A. Vileikis, 1986. Source: Theatre Information Centre.



Fig. 20: J. Markeev and N. Bučiūtė discussing yellow wine glass design, Unknown photographer, 1975. Source: N. Bučiūtė's family archive.



## Conclusion: Continuing Struggle for Recognition

The National Opera and Ballet Theatre, which recently marked its fiftieth anniversary,<sup>94</sup> stands today as both the most significant work of Nijolė Bučiūtė and a testament to the gendered challenges faced by women in Soviet Lithuania's architectural profession. With many of the key figures of that era no longer present, archival letters, diary entries, and oral history were used as a method to recover counter-memories that challenge the dominant patriarchal narratives in architecture. This research set out to narrate this untold part of the story to understand why, despite the many women who contributed to architecture during the Soviet era, public recognition has largely been limited to a single female architect, N. Bučiūtė. The reasons for that lie in the history of the architectural profession, which was shaped by a male-dominated hierarchy that positioned men as the epitome of the field. Although the Soviet Union officially proclaimed gender equality, in practice, institutional and systemic biases constrained women's access to leadership positions and recognition. Bučiūtė emerges as a rare exception, but even her career was significantly shaped – and limited – by these conditions. Gendered criticism within the architectural community left a lasting impact on her, as reflected in her daughter's remark that “right until the end of her days, she was healing the wounds from creating the ugly duckling.”<sup>95</sup>

Despite the sophistication and originality of Bučiūtė's work on the NOBT and her innovative practice within the rigid confines of Soviet bureaucracy, her legacy remains underacknowledged. The 1983 mural “Architects” by Rimas Jonušas (Fig. 21) further illustrates this non-recognition. It captures thirteen prominent Lithuanian architects of the Soviet era, including only one woman, Birutė Kasperavičienė, placed in the background and partially obscured by her male counterparts. Interestingly, N. Bučiūtė, who designed „the building of an era“, is not included in the artwork.

Although Bučiūtė was awarded the title of LSSR Honoured Architect in 1974, she did not receive formal recognition in independent Lithuania<sup>96</sup> until 2000, when she was awarded the Order of the Knight of Architecture.<sup>97</sup> Even more telling is that the NOBT was only added to the Lithuanian Heritage Register in 2022, twelve years after her death. In contrast, the National Drama Theatre, designed by the male duo A. and V. Nasvytis, was listed as early as 1993, with both architects still alive. Such disparities are not isolated. Of the 47 recipients of the Order of the Knight of Architecture, only five have been women, underscoring the persistent under-recognition of female architects. Although gender representation is becoming more balanced, with women making up 40% of all practising architects in Lithuania, this increase does not signify that equality within the field has been achieved.<sup>98</sup>

The recent “Women in Architecture” exhibition at the Union of Architects<sup>99</sup> marks a step toward recognising women's contributions to the field. However, the title itself suggests that female architects are still regarded as outsiders rather than equal participants. This lingering bias highlights the necessity for continued historical revisionism in architectural studies. Future research must go beyond merely adding women's names to the canon and instead critically reassess the structural inequalities that shaped their careers. Addressing these injustices is not only about the reshaping of the historical record; it is a call to challenge the fundamental societal paradigms that continue to enable the persistence of gender inequalities today.



Fig. 21: “Architects”, a mural by Rimas Jonušas (1983), portrays the leading figures of Soviet Lithuanian architecture. From left to right: Kazimieras Rimantas Balėnas, Birutė Kasperavičienė, Kęstutis Pempė, Česlovas Mazūras, Gediminas Valiuškis, Vytautas Brėdikis, Gediminas Baravykas, Algimantas Nasvytis, Vytautas Nasvytis, Rimas Jonušas, Gytis Ramunis, and Vytautas Kazimieras Balčiūnas. The figure in the foreground is Vytautas Edmundas Čekanauskas. Source: Energy and Technology Museum.

<sup>96</sup> Lithuania declared the restoration of its independence on March 11, 1990.

<sup>97</sup> The Order of Knight of Architecture – Lithuanian Architects' Union Award. Awarded since 1998 to members of the Lithuanian Architects' Union (not younger than 70 years old) for significant contributions to Lithuanian architecture.

<sup>98</sup> Lakštauskienė, “Women Architects: History of Professional Education and Practice.”

<sup>99</sup> The “Women in Architecture” exhibition, held at the Union of Architects from November 2024 to January 2025, showcased the work of women architects from the Soviet occupation period to the present day. Nijolė Bučiūtė was among the architects featured in the exhibition.

<sup>94</sup> The NOBT celebrated its 50th anniversary in Autumn 2024.

<sup>95</sup> Markejevaitė, *It sustingusi muzika: Nacionalinio operos ir baleto teatro rūmai Vilniuje*, 11.

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