

Baiba Vanaga

Dr. art., art historian,

Head of Art Research Department, Rundāle Palace Museum

E-mail: baiba.vanaga@rundale.net

DOI: 10.35539/LTNC.2023.0049.06

German Women Active in the Study and Promotion of Art History in Latvia from the 1880s until 1915

Vācu sievietes ieguldījums mākslas vēstures pētniecībā un popularizēšanā Latvijā laikā no 19. gadsimta 80. gadiem līdz 1915. gadam

Keywords:

history of art history
in Latvia,
Rosalie Schoenflies,
Bertha Noelting,
Elly von Loudon,
Susa Walter

Atslēgvārdi:

mākslas zinātnes
vēsture Latvijā,
Rozālija Šēnflīsa,
Berta Neltinga,
Ellija fon Loudona,
Zuza Valtere

Summary

During the last decades of the 19th century and in the early 20th century, there was a quite large and diverse body of critical and historical texts about art published in newspapers and magazines in Latvia; these were written by various authors, among them some women as well. This article collects together for the first time information about the very first women of German origin whose public activities in Latvia were in the field of art history. It provides a brief overview of the life stories and professional activities of four women from local German society: teachers Rosalie Schoenflies (1844–1916) and Bertha Noelling (1848–1921) who gave public lectures on art and wrote texts dedicated to art; the painter Elly von Loudon (1852–1926) who focused on researching and copying Italian Renaissance frescoes, and published several articles on Italian art; and the artist and art teacher Susa Walter (1874–1945) who at the beginning of the 20th century was one of the most prolific art critics in the local German-language press.

Kopsavilkums

19. gadsimta pēdējās desmitgadēs un 20. gadsimta sākumā Latvijā izdotajos laikrakstos un žurnālos tika publicēts diezgan liels un daudzveidīgs mākslas kritiku un vēsturiskajai mākslai veltītu tekstu apjoms; tos radījuši dažādi autori, starp kuriem arī atsevišķas sievietes. Šajā rakstā pirmo reizi vienkopus apkopota informācija par pašām pirmajām Latvijas vācu sievietēm, kas darbojās mākslas vēstures pētniecības un popularizēšanas laukā. Tas iepazīstina ar četrām Latvijas vācu sieviešu dzīves stāstiem un profesionālajām aktivitātēm: skolotājām Rozāliju Šēnflīsu (1844–1916) un Bertu Neltingu (1848–1921), kas lasīja publicētas mākslas vēstures lekcijas un rakstīja par mākslu, gleznotāju Elliju fon Loudonu (1852–1926), kas nodarbojās ar itāļu renesanses fresku izpēti un kopēšanu un publicēja vairākus rakstus par itāļu mākslu, un mākslinieci un mākslas skolotāju Zuzu Valteri (1874–1945), kas bija viena no ražīgākajām mākslas kritiķēm 20. gadsimta sākuma vietējā vācu presē.

Introduction: The beginnings of art history in Latvia and its research

In the 19th century, when art history was still a new academic discipline, its findings also entered the Baltic space. The works of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768), the founder of scientific archeology and the father of the history of art, had reached the Baltic very quickly, but almost nothing was written about art here for a longer time. According to the local press, as early as the 1810s Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Fleischer (1777–1831), an actor, journalist and teacher from Prussia, offered a series of lectures on various arts and poetry to residents of Riga. (Grosmane 2019: 59) In 1857, the first series of lectures on art history in Latvia was offered in Jelgava by the painter, art teacher and cultural researcher Julius Döring (1818–1898), and in his audiences there were far more women than men. (Ābele 2019: 56–57) Towards the end of the 19th century, lectures on art history given by various authors were also offered by the *Rigascher Kunstverein* (Riga Art Society), which was founded in 1870 and whose activities significantly energised the artistic life of Riga.

The active establishment of learned societies demonstrated a striving for the discovery of new knowledge with regard to the local heritage. In 1816, the *Kurländische Gesellschaft für Literatur und Kunst* (Courland Society for Literature and Art) was founded in Jelgava, and two years later it established its own museum – the *Kurländisches Provinzialmuseum* (Courland Provincial Museum). From the viewpoint of cultural history, especially significant were the collections of the society's yearly meeting reports, better known by their later title *Sitzungsberichte der Kurländischen Gesellschaft für Literatur und Kunst* (published from 1819 to 1937 with slightly different variations of the title). In 1865, Julius Döring was elected secretary and librarian of the society; he was actively involved in research and regularly published articles about important architectural monuments and the most outstanding artists of the past in the society's publications. Of great importance for art history are the materials he collected for the dictionary of Baltic artists, *Ostbaltisches Künstler-Lexicon*, which remained unpublished, but was later used by Wilhelm Neumann to prepare his biographical reference books. (Döring; Neumann 1902; Neumann 1908) Less important in the development of local art history, though very active in its research of general history, was the *Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Altertumskunde der Ostseeprovinzen Russlands* (Society for the History and Antiquity in the Baltic Provinces of Russia), which was founded in 1834 in Riga and published several volumes of the series on the history of Livonia

(Vidzeme and part of modern-day Estonia), Estonia and Courland (Kurzeme), *Mittheilungen aus dem Gebiete der Geschichte Liv-, Est- und Kurlands* (1834–1939), as well as collections of its meeting reports, *Sitzungsberichte der Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Altertumskunde der Ostseeprovinzen Russlands* (1873–1936).

In the 1880s, research into the art history in the Baltics became significantly more intensive. Articles on art and architectural monuments were published with increasing frequency by the archaeologist Carl von Löwis of Menar (1855–1930), the historians Anton Buchholtz (1848–1901) and Joseph Girgensohn (1849–1933), the architects Wilhelm Bockslaff (1858–1945) and Wilhelm Neumann (1849–1919), and others. Neumann, who had studied architecture at the St Petersburg Academy of Arts, became the most important researcher of Baltic art of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the first art historian in Latvia with a university degree. His book on the history of the fine and applied arts in Livonia, Estonia and Courland from the late 12th century to the end of the 18th century, *Grundriss einer Geschichte der bildenden Künste und des Kunstgewerbes in Liv-, Est- und Kurland vom Ende des 12. bis zum Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Reval: Kluge, 1887), was the first publication on the history of Baltic art and earned him a doctorate in philosophy and fine arts from the University of Leipzig. In his numerous articles and books on art and architecture Neumann “consistently and purposefully transformed art history from ‘the illustration of past events’ into an independent branch of science in the local context”. (Ābele 2014: 47)

During the 19th century, the German orientation of contacts was traditional both in seeking opportunities for better art education and in the development of an artist’s career, and was certainly echoed also in the texts on art. During the last decades of the 19th century and in the early 20th century, there was a quite large and diverse body of critical and historical texts about art published in newspapers, magazines and yearbooks of learned societies; these were written by various authors, among them some women as well. During the 19th century, texts pertaining to the field of art criticism and art history which had been written and published in the territory of Latvia were mainly in German. In the last decades of the 19th century, texts on art also appeared in publications in Latvian, and the terminology of art in the Latvian language began to develop.

In the 1880s, the first two women whose public activities were in the field of art history entered the art scene of Latvia. German teachers Rosalie Schoenflies (1844–1916) and Bertha Noelting (1848–1921) gave public lectures on art and wrote texts dedicated to art, and it is interesting that they both were born outside the Baltic and educated in Germany, but had lived in Latvia for some time and actively participated in various public activities.

At the turn of the 20th century, women in Latvia increasingly turned to professional involvement in art, and became active on the art scene, and the first women of Baltic descent also turned to the history of art. In the last decade of the 19th century, the Baltic German painter Elly von Loudon (1852–1926) focused on researching and copying Italian Renaissance frescoes, and later published several articles on Italian art in the local German press.

Around 1900, the first women appeared who were working in literature, art and culture journals and/or actively focusing on art criticism, and regularly publishing reviews of exhibitions in local newspapers. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Baltic German artist and art teacher Susa Walter (1874–1945) was one of the most prolific art critics. At that time there were also two women of Latvian origin who promoted art and art history in the local press: Hermīne Zālīte (1858–1932), who selected illustrations for the monthly *Mājas Viesa Mēnešraksts* and introduced readers to significant works of art, and Matilde Jureviča-Priedīte (1872–1957), who published reviews of several art exhibitions, but they will not be analysed in this article.

In the Latvian tradition of art history, female art historians have never been singled out and researched, nevertheless studies on art history writing and publications on art in the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century have been published on several occasions, both in the local press and in more scholarly articles by researchers. The earliest studies are associated with the name of the notorious Baltic German art historian Niels von Holst (1907–1993), who participated in Nazi art looting during World War II in the Baltic and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. According to von Holst, between 1800 and 1939 approximately 2000 studies of varying length were published on Baltic art and architecture. (Holst 1942: 8) He counted that in the period outside the time frame of this article, between 1919 and 1939, a total of 280 studies of Baltic art history were published, and among the authors 203 were German (of these, 151 were Baltic Germans), 39 were Estonian, 16 were Swedish, 15 were Latvian and 6 were Danish. (Holst 1942: 9) When interpreting these numbers, it should be taken into account that in the 1930s and 1940s everything Niels von Holst wrote was political and emphasized German dominance in Baltic history, but presumably these numbers reflect quite precisely the productivity of Baltic Germans, even though they may be erroneous in relation to the publications of Latvian and Estonian authors. Moreover, in this publication he mentions only the research and articles that were devoted to Baltic art history, regardless of writings on European art history, and publications on local exhibitions and art news in the local press.

In recent decades, articles on the writing of art history in Latvia and other topical issues of art history in the 19th century and early 20th century have been published by Latvian art historians Elita Grosmane and Kristiāna Ābele, to whom thanks is due

for her profound interest in the identities of the art critics who were published in the Baltic German press and her findings as regards the biographies and activities of two of the women featured in this article. (Grosmane 2001; Grosmane 2019; Ābele 2012a; Ābele 2012b; Ābele 2014; Ābele 2019) During the period covered by this article, art life in all the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire was partially unified, so in recent decades important publications on art history issues have also been produced by Estonian researchers such as Krista Kodres and Kristina Jõekalda. (Kodres 2012; Jõekalda 2015) On her own, Latvian art scholar Stella Pelše has studied art criticism and other art theory issues published in the Latvian language in the first four decades of the 20th century (Pelše 2007; Pelše 2010), but these, although relevant in terms of time, go beyond the scope of this article because the focus here is on the work in the field of art history that has been done by women of German origin.

The goal of this article is to collect in one place information about the very first German women who worked in the research and promotion of art and art history in the territory of modern-day Latvia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This is being done for the first time in Latvian art history, as the contribution and professional activity of local German women in Latvian cultural history, and in history in general, has scarcely been researched.

The article provides a brief overview of the life stories and professional activities of four women from the local German community: Rosalie Schoenflies, Bertha Noelting, Elly von Loudon and Susa Walter. More extensive studies of their life stories or professional activities have not been published about any of these women; there is absolutely no information about some of them in the publications dedicated to the evolution of art history in Latvia. Thus the main sources for compiling this study were publications in the press – both the articles advertising various events, and the texts on art written by the women themselves. Additional information was provided by other researchers' publications on related topics, as well as archival documents. When collecting information about the women mentioned in the article, the biographical method was used, but the texts created by the women themselves were not analysed according to their content or formal qualities.

Rosalie Schoenflies

The first woman in Latvia to be mentioned as being publicly active in the field of art history was Rosalie Schoenflies (née Hirschfeld), who in the 1880s published articles on fine art and pedagogy in the local press, and offered lectures on art history. Schoenflies, a teacher, journalist and women's rights activist, was born in the Pomeranian town of Pyritz (now Pyrzyce in Poland). She

turned to pedagogy early and participated in the founding of the *Verein deutscher Lehrerinnen und Erzieherinnen* (German Women Teachers' and Tutors' Association) in Berlin in 1869. (Jucker 1916: 14)

In 1875, she arrived in Riga accompanying her husband Martin Schoenflies (1840/1841–1879), a mathematician and engineer who became professor of technology and mechanical engineering at the Riga *Politechnikum*, and remained in Riga also after her husband's death in 1879. On arriving in Riga, Rosalie became involved in various public activities. She helped to establish a craft school for girls, the *Mädchen-Gewerbe-Schule des Jungfrauenvereins*, which began work in 1878, being the first institution of this kind in the Russian Empire and serving as a model for the establishment of other similar schools. (Schoenflies et al. 1897: 227, 229) In 1878, the local press reported that Rosalie Schoenflies was one of the teachers in the continuing education courses in pedagogy organized by Lina Stahl (1835–1905), the owner of a private secondary school for girls in Riga. (Anonymous 1878: 5) Schoenflies also became involved in the work of the Riga Art Society, and in 1884 was elected chairman of the society's library commission. (Anonymous 1884: 5)

For ten years Rosalie Schoenflies worked at the newspaper *Rigasche Zeitung*, which was the most significant voice of German-language newspapers in Latvia in circulating art news and art-related opinions. In her articles, she analysed the activities of the Riga Art Society, popularised and examined illustrated publications from the library of the Riga Art Society and those on offer at book stores, reflected on the significance of photographic reproductions of artworks in cultural education, and informed about discoveries in art history, current events and significant figures in the art world of Germany. (Schoenflies 1885a: 1; Schoenflies 1885b: 1; Schoenflies 1887c: 1–2; Ābele 2019: 61–62)

In the first half of the 1880s, Schoenflies delivered several series of art history lectures for women at the *Jung-Stillingsche Zeichenschule* (Jung-Stilling drawing school). The school was founded in 1873 by local artist Elise von Jung-Stilling (1829–1904), and initially was intended for women only, but from 1895 onwards it also accepted male students. (Jung-Stilling 1895: 3) It was the first art school in the southern Baltic region to be established by a woman and it laid the foundations for art education in Latvia. (Howard 2006: 112)

In 1883, the *Rigasche Zeitung* reported on a second course of lectures being offered by Rosalie Schoenflies at the Jung-Stilling drawing school. The lectures were intended for both students of the school and other women interested in art history, and were scheduled to run from September to May. The programme included lectures on the art of antiquity, mainly works of ancient Greek art, to which the examples of ancient Egyptian and Asian art, as well as the art of ancient Rome, were added for

better understanding and comparison. Introducing the programme, the newspaper *Rigasche Zeitung* wrote: “The treatment of a subject, as we know, is determined by the wish to reveal the cultural-historical basis and spiritual specificity of the people from which art grows, also to emphasise aesthetic viewpoints, not just in order to give knowledge of art objects and art-historical facts, but also to promote deeper understanding and development of taste.”¹ (Anonymous 1883: 9) In 1885/1886, Schoenflies also offered a lecture course on Renaissance art, both of Italy and from the North of the Alps. (Anonymous 1885b: 5)

Around 1887, Rosalie Schoenflies left Riga, but her articles from Rome were still being published in the *Rigasche Zeitung*, describing not only her visit to the studio of the Estonian sculptor August Weizenberg (1837–1921), but also the treasures of art in Kassel seen on her way to Rome. (Schoenflies 1887a: 1–2; Schoenflies 1887b: 1) Later she continued to work as a journalist and women’s rights activist in Germany. For example, in 1896 she was one of the organizers of the *Internationaler Kongress für Frauenwerke und Frauenbestrebungen* (International Congress of Women’s Works and Aspirations) in Berlin and the head of a commission that compiled a collection of speeches, reports and discussions from the congress. (Schoenflies et al. 1897) Topics included the state of the feminist movement around the world, schooling for girls and women, women in industry, philanthropy, the legal status of women, women writers and peace activists, dress reform, and moral issues. Rosalie Schoenflies herself was represented in the collection of articles with her lecture on the craft school for girls in Riga. (Schoenflies et al. 1897: 227–229)

Bertha Noelting

In the late 1890s and early 1900s, public art history lectures in Riga were also offered by another woman from Germany, teacher and writer Bertha Noelting (also Nölting). She was born in Allermöhe near Hamburg, and worked as a teacher in Pinneberg, Hamburg, Braunschweig, Helmstedt, Karlsruhe and Gießen. Between 1876 and 1915, Bertha Noelting lived in Riga, where she worked as a teacher and also wrote poetry, publishing her poems under the pseudonym ‘E. Heldt’. (Hagested 2011) In 1878, her collection of poems *Ewige Liebe: Novelle*

1 In the original German: “Für die Behandlung des Stoffes ist, unseres Wissens, das Bestreben maßgebend, den culturgeschichtlichen Boden und die geistige Eigenart des Volkes, aus der die Kunst erwachsen, mit zur Anschauung zu bringen, auch ästhetische Gesichtspunkte hervortreten zu lassen, so daß nicht nur die Kenntniß der Kunstgegenstände und der kunstgeschichtlichen Thatfachen, sondern auch die Erschließung eines tieferen Verständnisses und die Bildung des Geschmacks erstrebt wird.” English translation quoted after: Äbele 2019: 61

in Versen (Riga: Verlag von J. Deubner) was published; in 1884, the collection *Verwehte Spuren: Drei epische Dichtungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Grobel) followed; and in 1889 – the collection *Zurück in's Leben: Novelle in Versen und andere Dichtungen* (Riga: N. Kymmell). At the turn of the 20th century, Noelting's poems were also published in other collections such as *Baltische Dichtungen* (Riga: Verlag von L. Hoerschelmann, 1896) and *Riga und Umgegend in Wort und Bild* (Riga: Deubner, [ca. 1900]).

Press publications show that in the early 1880s, Bertha Noelting offered courses in the art of reading for ladies, advertising herself as a student of the Austrian reciter, actor and speech teacher Alexander Starkosh (1840–1909); she also presented lectures on important works of classical literature. (Anonymous 1881: 7) For some time she gave lectures on art history to the students of the previously mentioned craft school for girls. (Cera 1903: 1) But in 1897–1904, advertisements for public lectures on art history were also published in the local newspapers. In the rooms of the Riga Art Society and the venues of other public organisations, Noelting offered a series of lectures on both the art of the previous centuries and important 19th century artists and art movements. For example, in early 1897 she gave a lecture on the typological development of the representation of Christ in art; in the first half of 1899, throughout the lecture series she spoke about German painters of the second half of the 19th century such as Moritz von Schwind (1804–1871), Anselm Feuerbach (1829–1880) and Arnold Böcklin (1827–1901); in the autumn of the same year, she gave lectures on the Pre-Raphaelites, the group of English painters founded in mid-19th century who sought a return to the values of 15th century Italian art; in 1900, she lectured about the pioneers of the mid-19th century French Naturalist movement in landscape painting, the Barbizon School, and the French Impressionists; in the spring of 1901, she introduced the ancient Greek sculptors Phidias (c. 480–430 BC) and Praxiteles (working 370–330 BC) and their time; but in March 1904, she offered a lecture on contemporary sculpture, in the advertisement for this lecture mentioning artists such as the German Max Klinger (1857–1920), the Frenchman Albert Bartholomé (1848–1928) and the Belgian Constantin Meunier (1831–1905). These varied lecture topics show that she had extensive knowledge and was interested in painters and sculptors of the most important art movements and schools of the 19th century, as well as sacred iconography and the sculpture of antiquity.

Bertha Noelting not only gave public lectures, but also published articles on art history, the most important of which is a brochure on frescoes by the Italian Renaissance painter Andrea del Sarto (1486–1530), *Andrea del Sarto's Fresken im Chioströ dello Scalzo zu Florenz*, published in Riga in 1902. The reason for this publication was an exhibition of copies of frescoes painted by the Baltic German artist Elly von Loudon. In her article, published in a 24-page brochure, Noelting presented Andrea del Sarto's

biography, detailed the painting qualities and stories of all the frescoes, and described Elly von Loudon's work on making copies. (Noelting 1902)

Elly von Loudon

Baroness Helene (Elly) von Loudon (fig. 1) was born in Zelgauska (Selgowsky) Manor, and studied art with the painter Julius Döring in Jelgava and at the St Petersburg Academy of Arts in the 1880s. She then travelled to Europe to visit art cities such as Brussels, Amsterdam and Paris, improved her painting skills in the private studios of several French artists and anatomical knowledge at lectures at the Sorbonne University in Paris, and returned to St Petersburg, where she worked briefly as a portrait painter. (Neumann 1902: 144) Around 1890, Elly von Loudon settled in Florence and specialized in the works of Andrea del Sarto.

Monika Hunnius (1858–1934) from Riga, at the time a singing teacher but later a writer, visited Elly von Loudon in early 1896 during a trip to Italy. In her autobiographical novel *Mein Weg zur Kunst* (Heilbronn: E. Salzer, 1925), she writes that the painter in Florence lived together with another Baltic woman – sculptor Olga Philippow von der Launitz (1854–1943), who inspired the writer's travel companion Doris von

Fig. 1. Portrait of Elly von Loudon.
Photo by Miss Angiolini in Florence, ca. 1902.
Private collection



Krüdener (date of birth and death not known) to study sculpture. Visitors from Riga visited the salon of both Baltic women artists, and Elly von Loudon would take them on excursions to old, forgotten churches, showing the art treasures there. In one such chapel, in the *Chiostro dello Scalzo*, von Loudon copied damaged frescoes by Andrea del Sarto. The cycle of frescoes consisted of 16 paintings; the murals comprised twelve scenes from the life of St John the Baptist and four figures representing Christian virtues.

In late 1902 and early 1903, the Riga Art Society organised an exhibition of Elly von Loudon's artworks in Riga. It featured copies of the cycle of frescoes, which were in their original size (2.5–3 metres high), and she had worked for them for 11 years. (Noelting 1902: 21–24) With the help of the Riga Art Society, the exhibition later travelled to Austria to be displayed at the *Genossenschaft der bildenden Künstler Wiens* (Vienna Artists' Society). (Acta des Rigaschen Kunstvereins 1902–1903: 220) A few months later, an album of photo reproductions was released in Riga. (Anonymous 1903) (fig. 2)

As Berta Noelting wrote in her brochure, by the time when Elly von Loudon decided to copy Andrea del Sarto's frescoes, they had already suffered greatly, so the

Fig. 2. A copy by Elly von Loudon after a fresco by Andrea del Sarto, ca. 1890–1903.
From: *Johannes der Täufer nach den Fresken Andrea del Sarto's gemalt von E. v. Loudon*.
Riga: Hebensperger & Co, [1903]. The University of Latvia Library



artist initially spent three years researching del Sarto's drawings and engravings in various European private and public collections. (Noelting 1902: 22) In her copies of frescoes, she not only depicted the parts of the paintings that had survived, but she also reconstructed the missing details, based on the works of the Renaissance artist that she had researched. Von Loudon described her work on painting the copies in several letters sent to the organizers of the exhibition, the Riga Art Society, and partly published in the local press. (Mengden 1902: 1; Mengden 1903: 5) Presenting her work, she wrote: "As much as it lay in my poor powers, which relate to a del Sarto like one to an indeterminable number, I have naturally not only tried to portray the style and character of the great Andrea, but have also proceeded technically following his traces."² (Loudon 1902: 26 rev.–27)

At the end of the letter, describing her motivation to paint copies of the frescoes rather than to restore them in real life, Elly von Loudon also presented her views with regard to art restoration, which were quite progressive at the time: "Finally, the art-historical motivation for my attempt to restore all the missing and more or less destroyed parts of the magnificent frescoes in the Scalzo: when a *capolavoro* is on the verge of destruction, I am deeply convinced that it is sacrilegious to attempt to restore it with any kind of repair. The slightest and most discreet retouching of a masterpiece deprives it of its artistic and art-historical value. However, it is a different matter to make an absolutely accurate copy which, on the basis of conscientiously collected material, supplements the destroyed parts of the original in the copy. Only in this way can a masterpiece be preserved for posterity without being damaged. Certainly, as always, one must do justice to the intention and try to be lenient towards the deed and the ability."³ (Loudon 1902: 30 rev.)

2 In German: "So viel es in meinen armen Kräften lag, die zu einem del Sarto sich verhalten, wie 1 zu einer unnennbaren Zahl, habe ich natürlich nicht allein Stil, Charakter des großen Andrea getreu wiederzugeben versucht, sondern bin auch technisch genau aus seinen Spuren vorgegangen." (*English translation by Jennifer Stinglwagner*).

3 In German: "Zum Schluß noch die kunsthistorische Motivirung meines Versuches, die herrlichen Fresken im Scalzo in allen fehlenden und mehr oder weniger zerstörten Partien wiederherzustellen: Wenn ein *capolavoro* der Zerstörung entgegengeht, so ist es nach meiner tiefsten Ueberzeugung eine Frevelthat, mit irgend welcher Reparatur die Zerstörung ausflücken zu wollen. Die leiseste und discreteste Retouche an einem Meisterwerk benimmt demselben seinen künstlerischen und kunsthistorischen Werth. Ein ander Ding aber ist eine absolut getreue Copie, die auf Grand gewissenhaft gesammelten Materials die Zerstörten Theile des Originals in der Copie ergänzt. Nur auf diesem Wege wird ein Meisterwerk, ohne geschädigt zu werden, der Nachwelt erhalten. Hier, wie immer freilich, muß man dem Willen Gerechtigkeit gönnen, und der That, dem Können nachsichtig entgegenzugehen versuchen." (*English translation by Jennifer Stinglwagner*).

Fig. 3. Article by Elly von Loudon
in journal *Illustrierte Beilage*
der *Rigaschen Rundschau*, 1910, No. 3

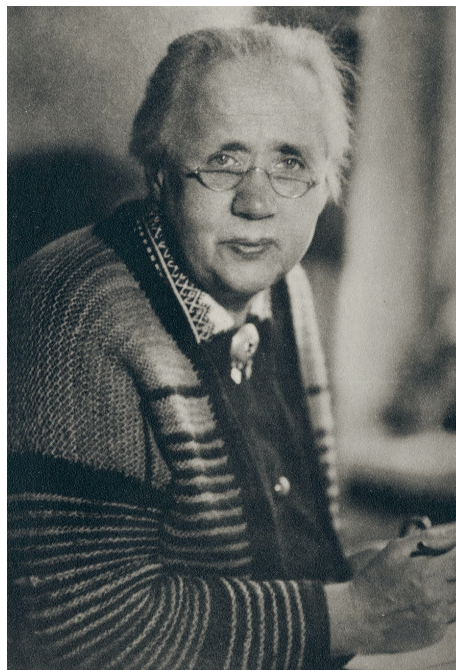


Elly von Loudon's interests included not only Andrea del Sarto's legacy and Renaissance fresco painting, but also other monuments of Italian art (fig. 3). Between 1904 and 1911, she published several articles in the magazine *Illustrierte Beilage der Rigaschen Rundschau* (1900–1914) about the frescoes of Andrea del Castagno (1421–1457), tombstones from the 15th–17th centuries, and some works by Renaissance and Baroque artists etc. (Loudon 1903: 33–34; Loudon 1904a: 34–35; Loudon 1904b: 43–46; Loudon 1905: 12; Loudon 1910: 17–19; Loudon 1911: 30–32)

Susa Walter

At the beginning of the 20th century, one of the most prolific commentators on art was Sophia Helene (Susa) Walter (fig. 4), an art teacher, painter and applied artist. She was born in Tartu in Estonia, in the family of Piers Walter (1836–1879), a doctor of medicine. Her brother Roland Walter (1872–1919) initially studied medicine, but later turned to art, studied in Berlin, and became involved in the Baltic art scene at the beginning of the 20th century. Susa Walter entered the Riga art scene at the very beginning of the 20th century, after first studies in her native Tartu, further education at the *Königliche Kunstschule zu Berlin* (Royal School of

Fig. 4. Portrait of Susa Walter.
Photo by unknown author, 1920s–1930s.
Herder-Institut, Bildarchiv, HI 135496



Arts in Berlin) and then with several Berlin artists, including influential landscape painter Walter Leistikow (1865–1908).

Shortly after moving to Riga, Susa Walter opened her own art studio, where her students included many actively working women artists. She also gave lectures on various issues of art history and contemporary art, both in her studio and sharing them also more widely. For example, in the summer of 1907, she gave lectures on 19th century art to more than 200 participants, teachers from the Baltic, Russia and Germany, as part of a holiday course in Tallinn (*Revaler Ferienkurse*). (Anonymous 1907: 1) The courses were organized by the *Estländischer Deutscher Schulverein* (German School Association in Estonia) and lasted for four weeks. The photograph of the organizers and lecturers of the course (fig. 5), commented in detail by Margot Mecketh (1889–1956), a teacher and participant of the course, also shows the graphic artist and painter Charlotte Hoeppener (1863–1934), who introduced the methodology of teaching of drawing and modelling, also Mary von Haken (c. 1852–1934), a teacher and author of articles in the newspaper *Düna-Zeitung*, the magazine *Rigasche Hausfrauen-Zeitung*, and others. The teacher Mecketh, already mentioned, also remembered Susa Walter's art studio and her lectures on art history, writing that the studio soon after its opening became "the magnet for all young people interested

Fig. 5. Organizers and lecturers of the Tallinn holiday course (*Revaler Ferienkurse*). Photo by unknown author, 1907.
1st row from the left: Susa Walter from Tartu, Bertha Fleischhut, Ella Fritz from Riga, Mary von Haken from Riga, Charlotte Hoepfener from Tallinn; 2nd row from the left: two unknown persons, Mr. Lawrinowicz from Jelgava (?), Sophie Dehio from Tartu, Olga Kalning from Kasan, Alexander Eggers from Tallinn, Karl Girgensohn from Tartu.
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in arts. [...] And it was here where ceramics were made, where people played 'Piff-paff-poltri' in the shadow play, but it was also here that large circles gathered in the afternoons to listen to Susa Walter's art history lectures, which seemed quite new to many people. [...] For 15 years I myself listened to art history in Susa's studio once a week in afternoon classes."⁴ (Mecketh 1951: 84 rev.–85) Walter also worked as a teacher of applied arts at the Elise von Jung–Stilling drawing school and its successor, the Riga City Art School; she left the school shortly after Vilhelms Purvītis (1872–1945) took over duties as the school principal in 1909.

Until World War I, Susa Walter's exhibition reviews appeared regularly in the local German-language newspapers *Düna-Zeitung* and *Rigasche Zeitung*. According to art historian Kristiāna Ābele, "Susa Walter, perhaps even more often than Wilhelm Sawitzky [(1879–1947), an author of reviews of cultural events in newspaper *Rigasche Rundschau*], went to exhibitions in apartments, newly established art salons and

4 In German: "Dieses Atelier wurde bald der Magnet aller jungen Menschen, die sich für Kunst interessierten. [...] Hier entstanden auch keramische Dinge, hier spielte man "Piff-paff-poltri" im Schattentheater, hier aber fanden sich nachmittags auch große Kreise zusammen, die der Kunstgeschichtsvorträgen von Susa Walter – die vielen ganz neuartig erschienen – folgten. [...] 15 Jahre lang habe ich selbst in Susas Atelier einmal in der Woche in einer Nachmittagsstunde Kunstgeschichte gehört." (*English translation by Jennifer Stinglwagner*).

similar 'informal places' out of collegial interest." (Åbele 2012a: 112) Her writings are characterized by keen observation and at the same time a reserved style of analysis. In reviews of exhibitions, she offered harsh, seemingly cool and subjective judgments that were independent of those of the artistic authorities of the day, therefore, as Åbele has pointed out, her reviews were more suitable not for cultivating public taste, but for professional use. (Åbele 2012a: 112) In Walter's writings, the emphasis was often on coloristic values, which were also important in her own painting.

Susa Walter was actively involved on the local art scene. She participated in most exhibitions of the *Baltischer Künstlerbund* (Baltic Artists' Union, founded in 1910), and also participated in the almost all fine arts and crafts exhibitions of local German artists that took place in Latvia in the first two decades of the 20th century. In 1910, Walter was elected chairwoman of the *Künstlerinnen-Klub* (Women Artists' Club), and held this position until the outbreak of World War I. The club was founded in 1907, and the official register states that its purpose was "artistic and social activities". (Richter 1908: 251) Unfortunately, no further information can be found about the activities of the Women Artists' Club or its members, only the officials are known from historical Riga address books.

As Margot Mecketh wrote, Susa Walter moved to Berlin in 1920, where "Susa not only continued to create her beautiful embroideries and artistic flowers as she had learned to do in Paris, but immersed herself in seriously scientific works from the Prussian State Library for a decade to write her life's work *Die konstanten Elemente in der Kunst* (The Constant Elements in Art)."5 (Mecketh 1951: 85 rev.) The title of the work suggests that it was a theoretical essay, but unfortunately its contents is unknown, as the unpublished manuscript of the work perished during World War II. (Lenz 1970: 850)

Conclusion

This article was an attempt to examine and collect together for the first time the life stories and works of the first four women of German origin whose public activities in Latvia were in the field of art history, and to mark their place in the research of Latvian art history. The biographies of all four women: Rosalie Schoenflies, Bertha Noelting, Elly von Loudon and Susa Walter are different, but

5 In German: "[...] bis sie beide 1920 nach Berlin übersiedelt, wo Susa nicht nur weiter ihre schönen Stickereien und künstlerische Blumen schuf, wie sie das in Paris erlernt hatte, sondern sich im schwer wissenschaftliche Werke der Preußischen Staatsbibliothek ein Jahrzehntlang versenkte und ihr Lebenswerk schrieb "Die konstanten Elemente in der Kunst"". (English translation by Jennifer Stinglwagner).

there are also some common features among them. All four have in common an interest in art history and were members of local German society.

The first two, Rosalie Schoenflies and Bertha Noelting, came from Germany in the 1870s to live and work in Latvia temporarily; nothing is known about their origins and level of education, but it can be assumed that they may have been educated in pedagogy. It is supposed that they knew each other because both were active participants in Riga's cultural life and were connected with the *Mädchen-Gewerbe-Schule des Jungfrauenvereins* – Schoenflies as one of the founders of the school, and Noelting as a teacher. The latter most certainly had connections also with the painter Elly von Loudon, especially at the time when an exhibition of von Loudon's copies of frescoes was being prepared in Riga and Noelting wrote a brochure about the Renaissance frescoes she had copied. The correspondence of Elly von Loudon and Bertha Noelting with the Riga Art Society regarding the organization of exhibitions in Riga and in Vienna, and the accompanying brochure and album of reproductions have been preserved in the Latvian State Historical Archives, and it clearly shows a link between the two. (Acta des Rigaschen Kunstvereins 1902–1903)

Unlike the first two women educators working in art history – the women who entered the field around 1900, Susa Walter and Elly von Loudon were educated as artists. They certainly knew about each other, but probably did not know each other personally or had met in person, because at the time Susa Walter moved to Riga, von Loudon was already living and working in Florence, although she did maintain ties with her homeland.

Three of the four women written about in this article were not married, thus they did not have to worry about the wellbeing of a family and they could devote more time to professional activities. The exception was Rosalie Schoenflies, who was married to a university professor; she had started an active public life already during her marriage, but probably after becoming a widow she had to focus more on the jobs where she could earn money – presenting series of art history lectures at the Jung-Stilling drawing school and writing for the newspaper *Rigasche Zeitung*.

Teaching and giving public lectures on art history are occupations shared by all women discussed in this article, except for Elly von Loudon. This can be explained by the fact that she was of noble descent and probably from a wealthy family, while the other women had to earn their own living. Employment in art education, and occasionally also work as exhibition reviewers in periodicals, where Susa Walter was actively involved, was an important source of income for those women who did not come from wealthy circles or had lost their breadwinners, the work allowing them to be financially secure.

All women discussed in this article showed a keen interest in art history from

the previous centuries – the sculpture of antiquity, Italian Renaissance sculpture and fresco painting, etc. However, Bertha Noelter and Susa Walter also gave lectures and wrote on recent, 19th-century art. In terms of occupation, Elly von Loudon stands out for her research of historical works of art: frescoes and drawings by Andrea del Sarto, visiting a number of European museums and private collections for the purpose of seeking out del Sarto's works, and then for many years copying frescos and reconstructing the lost sections of the damaged frescoes in her copies of the frescos.

Susa Walter, on the other hand, is the only woman discussed in this article who in her work also focused on local Baltic art, at that time researched only by men such as Wilhelm Neumann and a few others. Walter not only described and analysed art exhibitions of her time in press articles, but also turned to art theory, writing a book on the constant elements in art; its manuscript has not survived.

In the late 19th century and during the first two decades of the 20th century, among the women involved in introducing art history and reviewing current exhibitions, members of the local Baltic German community dominated, but in the interwar period, an increasing number of women of Latvian origin turned to art criticism and art history. Hermīne Zālīte (née Balode) must be named as the first Latvian woman who, in the late 19th century, actively started to promote knowledge of significant works of art. In the monthly *Mājas Viesa Mēnešraksts* (1895–1905) edited by her husband, doctor of philosophy Pēteris Zālīte (1864–1939), she was responsible for the visual design, selected artworks for illustrations and commented on them, wrote exhibition reviews and notes about travels abroad. Her dream was to study painting in Italy, but instead she mastered the autotype and zincography in Germany, as these were needed for a modern magazine. (Aspazija 1932: 4; Briedis 2003: 642) At the beginning of the 20th century, Matilde Jureviča-Priedīte turned to art criticism. She was a teacher with some education in music and painting, and in 1902–1904, she submitted several "lengthy, detailed and accurate articles on major exhibitions" for the local Latvian daily press, using the pseudonym 'Matilda'. (Buša 2011: 39)

It is interesting that over the following period, the writing of local art history in the Latvian language also developed, and this was mainly done by men. Women continued to work with the history of European art, for example, Lauma Juliana Sloka (1891–1960), who during World War I completed art history studies at Moscow University with the archaeologist and researcher of ancient art, Professor Wladimir (Woldemar) Malmberg (1860–1921) and in the early 1920s wrote the first book in Latvian on the history of prehistoric and ancient art (Sloka 1922), or Olga Rudovska (1893–1963), who worked in the Cabinet of Art of the University of Latvia and focused on the sculpture of antiquity in her research (Rudovska 1937; Rudovska 1939). During this period, several Latvian women also worked in art criticism, for instance

Maija Cielēna-Eliase (1889–1988) who also wrote the first book in Latvian dedicated to medieval art and contributed to the academic edition of art history of the world (Cielēna-Eliase 1924; Purvītis 1934); or women who published articles dedicated to art and aesthetics, such as Milda Palēviča (1889–1972), who was the first doctor of philosophy and a pioneer of aesthetics as an academic discipline in Latvia. Thus it can be seen that in the interwar period Latvian women art historians followed even more intensively the path that their predecessors, women of German origin working in the field of art history, had begun in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

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This article is funded as part of the fundamental research project of the Latvian Council of Science *Female Agency in Latvian Culture and Society (1870–1940)* (No. lzp-2020/1-0215).