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“On someone who loved Vilnius”

Juozapas Kamarauskas' work holds an exclusive place in Lithuanian art history. He is the only artist to have left so many vedute genre works formed in Lithuania in the late 18th century, a majority of which are dedicated to Vilnius. Many 19th–early 20th-century artists memorialised Vilnius, but Kamarauskas is the only one in Lithuanian art to have consistently furthered this genre. His engineering background and great inclination to draw formed a unique creative style – he used realistic means to depict both non-existent architectural monuments and complexes, and those he still had the chance to witness.

There are entries on Kamarauskas in Lithuanian encyclopedias¹, dictionaries², and in works on early 20th-century Lithuanian art history³. The eminent Lithuanian culture promoter Jonas Basanavičius wrote about Kamarauskas in 1925⁴. The memories of Kamarauskas' contemporaries are equally valuable – *Vilniaus aidas* journalist (later – editor at the Lithuanian Art Museum) Rapolas Mackonis⁵ and senior architect in post-war Vilnius Vladislovas Mikučianis⁶. Contemporary art researchers have also studied the architect and artist's creative legacy⁷.

The biography of Kamarauskas presented in this article consists of several accounts from his life, journal fragments, documents, reports, personal documents, letters and manuscripts kept at the Lithuanian Art Museum, Vilnius County and Lithuanian Central State archives⁸. A register of works the artist compiled himself has also provided a great deal of information.

Juozapas Kamarauskas was born on April 29, 1874 (April 16 according to the Julian calendar), as he later wrote, “at the Skauradai folwark in Troškūnai powiat, Ukmergė district, Kaunas governorate”; his parents were farmers Mykolas Kamarauskas and Ieva Uršulė Sadauskaitė-Kamarauskienė. He had seven siblings of which five survived, Boleslovas, Juozapas, Felicija, Teofilė and Anelė, the others dying in early childhood. The future architect and artist's passion for drawing is evident in a picture dated to 1884 in his register of works where he drew the Skauradai folwark when he was ten years old.

Kamarauskas attended the Raguva school, later he studied with Fr. Jonas Rusteikis in Troškūnai, and in Vilnius with Adam Liaskowski and Andriuszkiewicz⁹.

He never fails to mention that he attended the Vilnius Drawing School, led by Ivan Trutnev¹¹.

Arriving in Vilnius to pursue his education, the eighteen-year-old discovered a growing city, alive with the ideas of a national revival which encouraged him to take an interest in early Lithuania's cultural heritage. We know about his later studies from a study report certificate issued by the Vilnius Gymnasium's teachers on January 20 – 21, 1893, kept at the Lithuanian Art Museum's archive, and a graduation certificate after completing four levels at the Prince N. A. Bezborodka Gymnasium of the Institute of History and Philology in Nizhyn¹² dated April 29, 1893. In his journal from these times, he wrote that he submitted an application to the Academy of Art in Saint Petersburg on September 29, 1893. He left for Saint Petersburg in 1893 and attended the Central Baron A. Stieglitz School for Technical Drawing. Our knowledge of his engineering studies comes from Kamarauskas' own accounts of his life. In one¹³ it is written that in 1897–1899 he attended the Building and Art Studio where his teacher was engineer M. M. Prozorov, another reveals that he completed

¹ *Mažoji lietuviškoji tarybinė enciklopedija, Vilnius: Mintis, 1968, t. 2, p. 36–37; Lietuviškoji tarybinė enciklopedija, Vilnius: Mokslo, 1979, t. 5, p. 227; Tarybų Lietuvos enciklopedija, Vilnius: Vyriausioji enciklopedijų redakcija, 1986, t. 2, p. 195; Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija, Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidybos institutas, 2006, t. 9, p. 250.*

² *Słownik artystów polskich i obcych w Polsce działających: Malarstwo. Rzźbiarstwo. Graficy, Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdansk, Łódź: Wydawnictwo polskiej akademii nauk, 1979, t. 3, p. 324–325; Lietuvos dailininkų žodynas. 1918–1944, Vilnius: Lietuvos kultūros tyrimų institutas, 2013, t. 3, p. 192–193.*

³ *XX a. Lietuvių dailės istorija. 1900–1940, Vilnius: Vaga, t. 1, 1982, p. 282–283.*

⁴ Basanavičius J., „Apie vieną Vilniaus mylėtoją“, *Vilniaus aidas*, 1925, balandžio 16, p. 2–3.

⁵ Mackonis R., *Senoji vilniečių karta. Portretų eskizai*, Vilnius: Lietuvos rašytojų sąjunga, 1999, p. 118–119.

⁶ Mikučianis V., *Norėjau dirbti Lietuvoje*, Vilnius: Lietuvos dailės akademijos leidykla, 2001, 48, 49.

⁷ Statulevičiūtė R., „Meniškoji dokumento prigimtis: Juozapo Kamarausko kūryba“, *Logos*, 2005, t. 42, p. 184–193; Statulevičiūtė-Kaučikienė R., „Imaginaciniai architektūros atvaizdai XIX a. II p.–XX a. I p. Lietuvos dailėje“, *Meno istorija ir kritika*, Kaunas: Vytauto didžiojo universiteto leidykla, 2008, nr. 4, p. 20–34. Povilaitytė E., „Vilniaus Aukštutinės pilies rūmų ikonografija: nuo

dokumento fiksavimo iki vizijų“, *Lietuvos pilys*, 2009, nr. 5, p. 83–103.

⁸ Lithuanian Art Museum archive, F. B-9, ap. 1, b. 1–34; Vilnius County archives, F. 61, ap. 4, b. 634; Lithuanian Central State archives, F. 1367, ap. 3,

b. 1217 ir F. R-643, ap. 1, b. 1634.

⁹ Lithuanian Art Museum archive, F. B-9, ap. 1, b. 6, l. 7.

¹⁰ Lithuanian Art Museum archive, F. B-9, ap. 1, b. 3, l. 1.

¹¹ According to J. Širkaitė, Kamarauskas could have attended this school after 1886: Širkaitė J., „Vilniaus piešimo mokykla ir jos mokiniai“, *Kultūros istorijos tyrinėjimai*, Vilnius: Kultūros ir meno instituto leidykla „Gervėlė“, 1997, p. 166–239.

¹² Nizhyn is a city in northern Ukraine, in Chernihiv District, 150 km from Kiev.

¹³ Lithuanian Art Museum archive, F. B-9, ap. 1, b. 3, l. 1.



architectural studies at the “Petrapil Academy”¹⁴. Mikučianis’ memoirs state that according to the architect, he was educated in Saint Petersburg where he graduated from the Civil Engineering Institute Faculty of Architecture and received an architect’s diploma¹⁵.

From 1893 he worked as a junior construction assistant, a technician, later a construction site manager, architect and city architect. His life accounts show that in 1897–1899 he worked on the Užnemunė railroad between Hrodno and Alytus, and in 1899–1905 he worked on the Moscow–Vindava and Petersburg–Vitsyebesk railroads. Kamarauskas had the opportunity to work with famous Italian engineer, one of the builders of the Suez Canal in Egypt, Gaetan Fontana. In 1906–1910 Kamarauskas participated in rebuilding the Michailovskoi railway station, and in 1910–1914 he was appointed senior construction engineer of Saint Petersburg. Following service in the military technical unit, in 1914–1917 he worked in the First Railroad Battalion, and in 1917–1922 he was engineer-architect of the city and governorate of Saint Petersburg, and extraordinary chief of construction. He was arrested on September 5, 1918 and imprisoned until May 1, 1919, when he was proven innocent and released. He served in Saint Petersburg until the autumn of 1922. As life became increasingly complicated, and he grew tired of the terror following the revolution, he decided to return to Vilnius.

Kamarauskas’ parents and sisters already lived in Vilnius from the late 19th century. His sister Felicija had permission to open a book-store in Vilnius from January 22, 1899 where she could sell prayer books, pictures, crosses, rosaries and other cult paraphernalia. She had received warnings on numerous occasions that she could sell publications but not those written in Latin script, otherwise she would be prosecuted and her business would be closed down¹⁶. It appears that the store was closed, as whilst he still

lived in Saint Petersburg, Kamarauskas wrote letters to his sisters, offering material assistance and encouragement to reopen the store.

When he arrived in Vilnius, the artist lived on Skapo Street, and from 1927 at 9-3 St Casimir’s Lane¹⁷, later, in 1943 he moved to a small apartment near the St Nicholas Orthodox Church at 28-15 Didžioji Street. Searching for work, he often appealed to the Polish government, but he was rejected each time. Kamarauskas’ attempts at being employed on the Polish Railroad Board were fruitless, as was his attempt at finding service with the Vilnius magistrate. This lack of permanent employment forced him to take on various occasional commissions – preparing construction designs, restoring paintings in churches and provincial manors, creating money and stamp designs, copying religious paintings, drawing everyday genre pictures and postcards bearing city heraldry, portraits of the dukes of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, *ex libris*es and posters.

When Lithuania reclaimed Vilnius in 1939, Kamarauskas managed to secure a position in the city municipality’s Department of Construction as an engineer, architect and conservator. When the municipality was reorganised into an Executive Committee in 1940, he worked as an engineer-architect in the urban sector of the Department of Construction and Architecture. When the Vilnius Art Museum became the Vilnius State Art Museum, Kamarauskas was involved in researching early cultural monuments, preparing inventories of Vilnius’ architectural monuments, and reports about the research being conducted. On March 24, 1941 at the 6th Early Vilnius Research Papers Presentation-Conference, Kamarauskas read a paper about the inventorying and reconstruction of architectural monuments in Vilnius and Kaunas. Among the architectural images and reconstructions he had

created, mention was made of two plans of Vilnius, images of Vilnius, images and reconstructions of Gediminas’ Hill, images of the Vilnius surrounds and Trakai, reconstructions of Kaunas, images of the Sapiežiškiai Church (not far from Kaunas), as well as images of Saint Petersburg, Narva and Podole. Mikalojus Vorobjovas, Mieczysław Limanowski, Marian Morelowski, Adolfas Valeška, Euzebiusz Łopaciński and Vytautas Žemkalnis listened to his presentation, giving a favourable assessment of the works they saw, and taking into account the architect’s merits, they decided to ask the People’s Commissariat for Education of the LSSR¹⁸ to allocate him a pension, or give him an appropriate post. Žemkalnis also suggested releasing an album of Kamarauskas’ most valuable works and to hold an exhibition, which was eventually organised in 1941 at the Vilnius City Executive Committee. As the war was ending in 1944, Kamarauskas, as the engineer-conservator with the Communal Department’s Technical Section in the Vilnius City Executive Committee, was ordered to produce plans and drawings of the exteriors of historical buildings. On September 15, 1944 he was appointed inspector for architectural monument protection with the Architectural Board of the LSSR. On April 12, 1945, the Board of Science of the Vilnius State Art Institute allocated Kamarauskas with a pension in acknowledgement of the historic and artistic value of the architect’s work.

Unfortunately, Kamarauskas never lived long enough to receive his pension, Having lived through two world wars, changes in government, imprisonment¹⁹ and the passing of loved ones, he died on October 9, 1946, aged 72. He is buried at the Antakalnis Cemetery.

Visions of early Vilnius in Kamarauskas’ compositions were not of much significance to

¹⁴ Lithuanian Art Museum archive, F. B-9, ap. 1, b.14, l. 53.

¹⁵ Mikučianis V., *Norėjau dirbti Lietuvoje*, Vilnius: Lietuvos dailės akademijos leidykla, 2001, p. 10.

¹⁶ Lithuanian Art Museum archive, F. B-9, ap. 1, b. 6, l. 15.

¹⁷ He depicted his apartment at 9-3 St Casimir’s Lane in a composition dated October 4, 1942 (cat. 327).

¹⁸ At this time, when a majority of architects had fled Vilnius, Vladislovas Mikučianis was appointed the senior architect for Vilnius city. A like-

minded colleague of Kamarauskas, Zygmunt Mieczysław Czaykowski (1887–1950), who was born in Warsaw and had graduated from a specialised architecture school in Paris, worked as the scientific secretary on the board of Vilnius architects at this time as well. Settling in Vilnius from 1938, Czaykowski fell in love with the city, its history and architecture. He dedicated a larger part of his research to the underground history of Vilnius art. He was simply obsessed by the idea that the real ancient, medieval Vilnius was hidden under more recent

reconstructions, waiting to be rediscovered. Czaykowski created a great deal of historic reconstructions in 1941, once World War II was already underway. In September 15–October 5, 1940, he and Kamarauskas participated in an exhibition of Vilnius artists.

¹⁹ Kamarauskas was imprisoned for using Lithuanian script; another term of imprisonment was in 1918 in Petrograd, and during the period of Polish rule in Vilnius, he was arrested for being suspected of spying.



Vilnius society at the time. His scientific architecture erudition were not taken seriously either. In 1923, to mark the city's 600th anniversary, Kamarauskas created a plan of Vilnius city that was noticed by the Polish press, despite not being received favourably. Jonas Basanavičius was the first to speak openly about the importance of Kamarauskas' work in terms of the cultural history of Lithuania, and especially Vilnius: "As a patrician of Vilnius, he earnestly collected all types of historical and archaeological relics, such as descriptions of Vilnius, city plans, drawings, and studied everything he could find about Lithuania's capital in private collections, libraries and museums, as much here in Vilnius as in Saint Petersburg, and other locations"²⁰. Kamarauskas became a member of the Lithuanian Scientific Society in 1928. However, his work only received due respect and interest after the war – the long-serving staff member of the Lithuanian Art Museum and cultural historian (thanks to whose efforts a majority of Kamarauskas' work found its way to the museum), Vladas Drėma, called the artist the most ardent and loyal lover of monuments of our capital's past²¹.

Basanavičius wrote that by 1925 Kamarauskas had created around 4,000 sketches of Vilnius city and Trakai Castle²². Kamarauskas mentions in his *Curriculum vitae* (written in 1945) that there are around 5,000 "completed compositions and sketches". The register of works entered in his journal, which is kept at the Lithuanian Art Museum's archive, contains 1,147 works painted and drawn in 1884–1943. The works themselves are spread around the world, some being left in Saint Petersburg, some having been confiscated by the Polish government, others were "borrowed" by various individuals and never returned, while some are in private collections. One of the most important works of Kamarauskas are the sketches and drawings of the Vilnius Old Town's streets destroyed during World War II that were made in 1944–1945 and are now kept in the archive of the Cultural Heritage Protection Department

of the Republic of Lithuania. Watercolour and oil painted works can be found in the National Museum of Lithuania, the M. K. Čiurlionis National Museum of Art, the Trakai History and the Jewish museums. His posters are found at the Vytautas the Great War Museum. The Lithuanian Art Museum's collections contain the largest assembly of his works – 550 pieces on cardboard, canvas, paper, cotton watercolour, oil, ink and pencil compositions and sketches. Towns in Lithuania, Ukraine, Belarus and Russia predominate among the collection's painted works, featuring their architecture, landscapes. Among the illustrations, sketched figural compositions dominate (usually townswomen, children, beggars), while much fewer sketches of architectural details have survived. In 1960 around 70 watercolours and drawings accidentally discovered at a house in the Old Town found their way to the museum's restoration workshops, thanks to the art researcher and head of the Visual Art Department, Vladas Drėma. In 1980, the Monument Protection Inspectorate's Scientific Methodical Board archive transferred over 200 works by Kamarauskas to the Lithuanian Art Museum. Around 100 works were acquired from private individuals.

More than half of the collection kept at the museum is dedicated to Vilnius. The artist himself has written that ever since 1892, he devoted all his spare time to his beloved Vilnius, immortalising it in his drawings. Systematically, year to year, every month, every day, he would take note of and record all the changes taking place in the general Vilnius urban landscape. Kamarauskas' Vilnius surprises and captivates; while very familiar, it is depicted from a totally unexpected angle, lending itself to be discovered anew. This impression is intensified by the rich and comprehensive descriptions in several languages, entered in calligraphic writing sometimes on the front, but usually on the reverse of the image.

His register has a record of several plans of Vilnius, but only five have survived. Those created in 1923 and 1929 are especially interesting, as here Vilnius is depicted to photographic precision: a detailed streets network, hundreds of carefully reconstructed houses lining the streets rooftops topped with chimneys, and the old street names. Some plans feature frames

decorated with early pagan gods, inscriptions, coats of arms and cartouches, reminiscent of 17th–19th century illustrations. All of this is conveyed based on the surviving remains of buildings, on iconography, on archival material – sometimes, his imagination. According to the author himself, "each plan contains around 2,000 buildings that can be categorised into new, old and historic. Around 2,000 kilometres had to be walked to form one plan. In this way, it took two years to create one plan"²³. Contemporaries recall that he would draw an architectural object on location, and upon returning home it would be transferred to the plan to the appropriate scale. From the register we see that Kamarauskas had also created relief plans-reconstructions of early Vilnius from different centuries, but the one that survived was *Vilnius (16th–17th century)* (cat. 44).

A large part of Kamarauskas' creative legacy is devoted to images of the Upper Castle. He liked to depict this castle from different aspects, sometimes focusing on separate objects (the castle, the western tower with the optical telegraph superstructure and the roof covering), sometimes the whole castle complex amid the background of a panorama over Vilnius. Kamarauskas had set himself the objective to record the same object each year or at least every several years. Numerous images drawn on location remain which serve as a record of the changes and reconstructions that had taken place. Much fewer reconstructions of the Lower Castle exist, indicating his obvious preference for the Upper Castle.

A separate part of his work consists of panoramas over Vilnius giving a bird's-eye view. These panoramas, breathing space, created at different times of the year were mostly drawn on location, and are noted for their light, poetic mood. Kamarauskas' Vilnius is surrounded by forest-covered hills, their valleys filled with churches, palaces and castles.

There are also watercolours that depict the oldest, no longer standing city structures – defensive walls and gates that surrounded the city. They include images of the Gates of Dawn (Medininkai), Trakai, Spas (Saviour), Subačius, Tatar and Vilnius (Vilija) gates, created in 1892–1898. Studying iconographic material, the artist depicted the walls including

²⁰ Basanavičius J., *op. cit.*

²¹ Drėma V., *Dingęs Vilnius: Vaga*, 1991, p. 48–49.

²² Basanavičius J., *op. cit.*

²³ Lithuanian Art Museum archive, F. B-9, ap. 1, b. 14, l. 53.



the most critical defensive segments – towers, embrasures and machicolation.

Kamarauskas also drew the Vilnius seen by his contemporaries. In his watercolours, he memorialised various churches in Vilnius – the Missionaries, St Michael's, St Nicholas, Ss. Peter and Paul, the Franciscan, St Anne's and Bernardine monastery churches, the church of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Trinapolis church. Houses of prayer of other confessions reflected the multi-cultured city: the Cathedral of the Theotokos, the Old Believer and the Znamenskaya (Žvėrynas) orthodox churches, the Evangelical Lutheran church, the Tatar mosque and the Karaim kenesa. The subtle, at times joyous, at times nostalgic landscapes surrounding Vilnius (Verkiai, Trinapolis, Žvėrynas, Markučiai) take an important place in Kamarauskas' work. Near the river are broad meadows, dotted with white houses, nearby cows are grazing, and townspeople relaxing and bathing in the river. His compositions also record cosy corners of the city – courtyards featuring a distinctive architectural detail, a willow completely filling the courtyard space.

A more modest but no less valuable part of Kamarauskas' creative legacy is his collection dedicated to other Lithuanian cities. It includes plans of larger cities – Kaunas, Trakai, Šiauliai and surrounds, smaller towns – Anykščiai, Troškūnai, Vidiškės, Zapyškis and others, and architectural monuments such as churches, buildings. Kamarauskas tried to reconstruct the castles of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as well, capturing images of the castles at Trakai, Kaunas, Vytėnai, Gelgaudiškis, Veliuona, Raudonė, Lida, Mir, etc. In his depictions, he tried to convey the various brick bond methods, borders around openings such as doorways, windows, the cracks in the ruins, and the natural surrounds. The collection also contains several images of Saint Petersburg, its surrounds and other cities in Russia.

Kamarauskas' first solo exhibition took place in 1941 for the Vilnius City Executive Committee. Several of his works were exhibited at a show by Vilnius artists in 1940, but the broader public could

only appreciate his work in 1982. It was then that on May 12, an exhibition was opened at the Central Halls of the Lithuanian Art Museum titled *Early Vilnius in the Illustrations of J. Kamarauskas (1874–1946)*. A publication was also released for this occasion. An exhibition of restorers works held in 1983 also included some of Kamarauskas' drawings. His works were displayed at the permanent exposition of early 20th-century Lithuanian art at the Lithuanian Art Museum (at the present-day Town Hall). His first major retrospective show was organised in December 1994–February 1995, at the Lithuanian Art Museum's National Gallery. Then, 91 works were exhibited and a catalogue was released. Two decades later, on June 30–September 27, 2015²⁴ an exhibition was held at the Lithuanian Art Museum's Vilnius Picture Gallery, *Visions of Old Vilnius. An Exhibition of Watercolours by Juozapas Kamarauskas*, where aside from his works a rich collection of archival material was also presented. And in the beginning of November, 2015, a studio-exposition dedicated to Kamarauskas was opened at the Vilnius Picture Gallery.

²⁴ Some time earlier, between January 23–June 3, 2015, another exhibition was held at M. K. Čiurlionis House in Vilnius, called *Visions of Vilnius from the Early 20th Century*, where works by M. Dobuzhinsky and Kamarauskas from the Lithuanian Art Museum's collections were displayed.



