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Juozapas Kamarauskas’ architectural narrative

The grand birds-eye view panoramas, conveying the Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Classicism and 19th-century changes to the urban and architectural texture are a special visual narrative of the history of architecture. Architect-engineer Juozas Kamarauskas’ (1874–1946) sharp eye communicates the beauty of the geological relief that determined the formation of the city and street network structure, the pulsating vitality of paving and buildings and the eloquent architectural details. Carefully following the city’s changing face, he saw a priceless treasure – architecture as man’s perfect creative journey through time. In his watercolours, he revealed the smallest of the unnoticed, unseen architectural details, while rising above the city rooftops, he gave the viewer a unique look at the not so everyday structures otherwise hidden from view. The sense of such a light elevation combined with artistic documentation and imagination is conveyed in the architect’s images not only of Vilnius, but of Kaunas, Trakai, Saint Petersburg, Narva and other locations.

Juozas Kamarauskas, the creator of architectural landscapes – an exceptional figure from Lithuanian art and architectural history from the late 19th and

first half of the 20th centuries – undeservedly found himself cast to the fringes as a romantic or urban poet. However, deeper research of the legacy of this architect-engineer and artist have revealed his detailed architectural inventory work. He devoted himself to perfecting his technical drawing skills from the very beginning. Not just passively documenting separate buildings or their groups, or the urban landscape, he intensely analysed spatial structures, creating visual architectural reconstructions.

Kamarauskas’ character formed within the environment of research and actualisation of culture and historical heritage that prevailed amongst the intelligentsia of the 19th century. Towards the end of the century, alongside the rapidly growing popularity of photography, many artists documented urban images, architectural and artistic monuments, spurred on not only out of artistic drive, but for scientific purposes as well. Placed among other creators from his time, such as Ivan Trutnev (1827–1912), Mieczysław Barwicki (second half of the 19th–first half of the 20th centuries), Juozapas Balzukevičius (1866–1915), Liucija Balzukevičiūtė (1887–1976) and Mstislav Dobuzhinsky (1875–1957), etc., Kamarauskas’ work stood out for its consistent and complex record and reconstruction of cities, architectural ensembles and monuments. While still a student of Ivan Trutnev (1892) at the Vilnius Drawing School, later at the Central Baron A. Stieglitz

School for Technical Drawing in Saint Petersburg, and the Imperial Academy of Art (1893–1897), he consciously formulated a “research program” for the history of construction in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania¹. It was based on documentation of architectural heritage, creating photo-realistic images of buildings and analysing them, preparing illustrations of reconstructed buildings and urban cityscapes in perspective. In his monograph *Dingęs Vilnius* (Lost Vilnius), the art researcher Vidas Drėma wrote: “Kamarauskas drew images of Vilnius not as a romantic artist, or expressing emotions or moods, but as a scientist-conservationist, an architect historian, a restorer analyst”². This comment by the art researcher may be expanded with the architect’s own explanation of the principles behind the creation and research of his architectural images, given during the 6th Early Vilnius Research Papers Presentation-Conference (1941):

[...] commencing his presentation, he noted that only [a tenth] of all his inventorisation-construction works are shown here, including:

- 1) 2 plans – plastic coloured plans of Vilnius and accompanying sketches, one of them marking trees that are already obsolete (due to winter freeze).
- 2) 27 coloured images of Vilnius and 11 accompanying sketches.

¹ Curriculum Vitae, Lithuanian Art Museum archive, B-9, Juozapas Kamarauskas (1874–1946), engineer, architect, B. I-14, I. 53/a; Portrait of engineer-architect Juozapas Kamarauskas, Lithuanian Art Museum archive, B-9, ap. A1, nr. 3 (I-3).

² Drėma V., *Dingęs Vilnius* (Lost Vilnius), Vilnius: Vaga, 1991, p. 48.



- 3) 26 coloured images of Gediminas' Hill and 4 reconstructions of the hill.
- 4) 46 coloured various architectural monuments around Vilnius and their details, together with 14 accompanying sketches.
- 5) 26 coloured reconstructions of Early Vilnius.
- 6) 44 coloured landscapes from around Vilnius and Trakai and 27 associated sketches.
- 7) a) 16 coloured images of Trakai city and the N[ew] Trakai Castle and one reconstruction.
b) 1 coloured image of O[ld] Trakai.
- 8) 2 Kaunas Castle reconstructions.
- 9) 2 coloured images of Sapiežiškiai Church, not far from Kaunas.
- 10) 8 coloured images of Saint Petersburg, Narva and Podole.

Explaining his works from point 1, the speaker said that he walked around all the construction sites of Vilnius and drew them from all four sides, taking note of each building's number and its date of construction. In this way he inventoried around 7,000 houses from 1895 to date, and it is due to this work that an accurate plastic plan of Vilnius city could be made. This plan also marked all the city's parks, forests, hills, foothills and individual trees.

The works from point 2 are images of various houses, Catholic and Orthodox churches. He systematically, year after year, month by month, even day by day, marked all the changes taking place across Vilnius. He tried to distinguish the oldest and newest construction developments in Vilnius by colour.

Point 3 shows the inventoried architectonic components of Gediminas' Hill. The speaker has many plans of construction around and on Gediminas' Hill.

Point 4 features numerous illustrations of the architectonic details of construction in Vilnius, indicating all the precise measurements.

Like points 3 and 4, point 5 continues the research of older architecture and with the assistance of historical data, the speaker has reconstructed all of early Vilnius with its defensive walls, gates and towers.

Point 6 gives an inventory of images of Vilnius' surrounds, with all the changes that have taken place over the last several years.

Point 7 shows the general view over N[ew] Trakai, as well as a reconstruction of all the castles.

Points 8 and 9 give a reconstruction of the Kaunas castles, based on the historical data the speaker could access at the time.

At point 10 the speaker says he has shown only a small portion of all his works: images of Saint Petersburg, Narva and Podole³.

This protocol, kept in the Lithuanian Art Museum's archive, shows that Kamarauskas' works should first of all be considered not in terms of their artistry, but valued based on criteria of the documentation and objectivity of the depicted architectural objects. His drawings are both an architectural draft, where what is most important is to convey as precise proportions and relativity of the given objects as possible, and architectural element details, giving an artistically romantic rendition of their environment. This objective of creating an inventory demanded a mathematically accurate method of depiction. Rūta Statulevičiūtė-Kaučikienė has called his urban cityscapes a "photograph for a document"⁴.

The architect's erudition is revealed once the complexity of his works has been analysed, his attention to documenting each object from buildings to single trees in the city, plus the volume of historical and iconographic sources he referred to. Kamarauskas only settled down in Vilnius from 1922, but before then he had been regularly returning to Lithuania for a little over two decades. The architect consistently collected historic, iconographic, cartographic and archaeological material from museums and libraries in Saint Petersburg, Vilnius and other cities⁵. However, his architectural inventory has yet to be duly assessed in terms of the history of architecture or heritage protection. Analysing

the panoramic plans of Vilnius created in the 1920s, we can reconstruct the neighbourhoods and their density that existed prior to World War II, the height of buildings, and study the city's green spaces. Selection of a birds-eye view appears to have been adopted from 16th-17th-century city plans and urban landscapes created by topographers and graphic artists. The plans of Vilnius city from the Fishermans' suburb (*Vilnius city plan*, 1929, cat. 2) or from Taurakalnis (*Vilniaus city plan*, 1923, cat. 1) appear to continue the narrative about the changing city, from one of the oldest iconographic and cartographic sources on Vilnius given in the 1581 edition of Braun and Hogenberg's *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* atlas, to the larger early 20th-century city, having preserved its medieval spirit. Kamarauskas, like Władysław Zahorski (1858-1927), Juljusz Kłos (1881-1933), Marian Morelowski (1884-1963), and later – Zygmunt Mieczysław Czaykowski (1887-1950), worked with iconographic and cartographic sources, redrawing and analysing them, comparing the existing situation in the city and discovering new architectural and archaeological data that had been forgotten over time. In 1939-1940, Waclaw Gizbert Studnicki found a plan of Vilnius city at the Berlin State Library's Maps Department from the collection of General Major Johann Georg Maximilian von Fürstenhoff (1686-1753), dating to around 1740. He must have brought a photographic copy⁶ of this plan to Vilnius, whereupon it became a new source to many researchers analysing early urban and architectural structures. This cartographic document was also analysed and studied in Kamarauskas' work. He redrew the Vilnius castles and approaches, marking the Upper Castle's defensive wall plan, discovered in the 1930s (*Vilnius city plan*, 1941, cat. 399). Different skills form when one works with early documents. It is no accident that the architect deepened his knowledge of the city's general urban structure, but also in the building up of each neighbourhood and city block, the volume of separate buildings and their proportional relativity, the architectural forms of separate buildings, roof constructions and firewalls. He recorded data typical of 19th-century building inventorying: openings, the number of chimneys, and the most characteristic

³ Protocol from the 6th Early Vilnius Research Papers Presentation-Conference, Lithuanian Art Museum archive, B-9, b. I-16, l. 43-44.

⁴ Statulevičiūtė-Kaučikienė R., „Meniškoji dokumento prigimtis: Juozapo Kamarausko kūryba“, *Logos*, 2005, nr. 42, balandis-birželis, p. 178.

⁵ Juozapas Kamarauskas' journal, Lithuanian Art Museum archive, B-9, ap. 1, nr. 1, p. 43 (reverse).

⁶ Lithuanian National Museum, AFP-4261.



elements of buildings. Analysing the mentioned city plans of Vilnius, we should note that the architect had a good understanding of the topographic relief of the Vilnius Old Town, suburbs and surrounds.

He devoted a great deal of attention to separate sacred buildings as well. In the plastic images of the churches of St Anne and the Bernardine monastery, St Raphael, St Stephen, St Nicholas, St Michael, Ss. Peter and Paul, St Casimir, the Franciscan monastery, St Catherine, the Missionaries' as well as other Catholic and Orthodox churches, the eye is drawn to the expressive modelling of architectural forms, and the perspective and space captured in the illustrations. His strict lines aspire to an architectural measurements draft, yet the artistic, often imagined treatment of the immediate surrounds give the work a gentler edge. Residential and public buildings were depicted by a freer, more sketched hand. The architect looked at a building like a historical source. Incidentally, Kamarauskas' legacy is not complete, only separate works, sketches and notes are today kept in different archives, making the formation of a general overview somewhat difficult. Only a detailed analysis of his works can let us state that he devoted more than one illustration or watercolour to each object, often producing numerous sketches along the way.

Kamarauskas' documentation of images created by man and nature and landscape perspective are equally important to architectural and urban history. His Vilnius city panoramas, mostly produced in the 1930s, convey the city spirit (e.g., *Panorama of Vilnius* 1933, cat. 180; 1935, cat. 183). Although the light, pastel colours characteristic of Kamarauskas' work create a romantic image of the city alluding to the grandeur of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, looking closer we see the beautiful, musical and pulsating city panorama preserved in the first half of the 20th century. Churches

and their towers rising above red tiled roofs of houses resound amid the general architectural composition of the city. Few such panoramas infused with green spaces remain today, while the innovations of new architecture jutting up in-between often result in disharmony.

The dominant of the Vilnius Upper Castle rising up above the city was probably the most consistently documented architectural object throughout all of the years of Kamarauskas' work. The Lithuanian Art Museum has around 80 works with images of the castle to date. Drawn when he was seventeen years old, his image of the Upper Castle from the aspect of the Old Arsenal (*Castle Hill in Vilnius*, 1891, cat. 23) is one of his most painterly works, where he conveyed the proportions of the castle palace from the Neris River side, highlighting the wall structure. Realistic depiction, close to the art of photography, was a feature Kamarauskas excelled in from the very beginning of his career to his final works. Comparing his watercolours (e.g., *Ruins of the Upper Castle's palace*, 1894, cat. 29) to photographs, a heritage-protection-like sensitivity to details is revealed: any deformations to walls are recorded, the position of bricks and stones is carefully captured.

Kamarauskas researched the surviving remains of the palace walls, also analysing iconographic sources. His canvas created in 1893–1894 (cat. 41) reconstructs the image of the palace that was captured by I. Skibinski (?) in 1831⁷. The palace ruins seen then were reconstructed in a redder tone, marking walls that no longer existed, and using a black contour in his attempts to recreate the openings. Kamarauskas' work from the last decade of the 19th century is characterised by illustrative reconstructed drawings of the Vilnius castles, based mostly on the late 18th-century iconographic watercolours of Franciszek Smugliewicz (1745–1807) and artistic fantasy. The visions of the Vilnius castles based on interpretations of early sources are among the most interesting pieces of work. The reconstructed architectural landscape, intertwined with images of the past social life, transports the viewer back in time, serving an educational function. Preservation of scale and proportions leaves no doubt as to the authenticity of

the recreated image. The image's space meanwhile allows gaining an understanding of the vanished object's grandeur and significance in Vilnius city's urban structure. Recreating the old architectural forms, he tried to avoid repeating one architectural model. He often searched for and checked the shape of openings, décor elements and construction devices in his reconstructions of buildings (*Upper and Lower Castles in Vilnius*, no year given, cat. 43; *Cathedral Square in Vilnius*, 1894, cat.75), and created several or dozens of variants for his images. In fact, even though the Staffage, or inconsequential elements, impart vitality into the monumental, sometimes rather static architectural landscapes, often they overwhelm the architect's scientific intentions too.

Only by taking a closer look can we appreciate the uniqueness of Kamarauskas' work. He continued the retrospective panorama traditions typical to the old masters. In terms of iconographic images, the monochromatic panorama of Vilnius from the Hill of Three Crosses (*Vilnius*, 1910, cat. 45) is multi-layered – it is a vision of Vilnius' Upper Castle where we sense the architect-artist's matured approach to the architectural landscape. He gradually came to reject Staffage and delved instead into an analysis of architecture and the building's history. The romantic sky filled with cumulus clouds and birds became a distinguishing feature of his illustrations and sketches, but it did not interfere with his analysis of the state of the palace ruins in many of his works dedicated to the Upper Castle created in the 1930s, nor did it stop him from reconstructing the heritage protection work from this period, or from assessing the reconstructions recorded in his works.

Kamarauskas' contemporaries, architects and architecture restorers, did not particularly like him. Perhaps that is why, in the 1930s, when investigation of the Upper Castle commenced, the architect-engineer was restricted from accessing Castle Hill⁸. Doubts were also expressed regarding Kamarauskas' erudition and the scientific basis for his documentary reconstructed architectural heritage images⁹. However, he did produce very informative and documented images of the archaeological

⁷ Original unknown. Jan Bułhak's original photograph is today kept at the Warsaw National Library: *Papiery Mariana Morełowskiego z lat 1894–1963: materiały do pracy M. M. i Irena Kołoszyńskiej „Model Wilna”, t. 127*, Warsaw National Library, Rps Ossol. 14942/III.

⁸ „Vilniaus senovės restauratorius (Juozapas Kamarauskas)“, *7 meno dienos*, 1932, nr. 68, p. 4.

⁹ This kind of doubt is expressed in a postscript to Jonas Basanavičius' article about Kamarauskas. Basanavičius J., „Apie vieną Vilniaus mylėtoją“, *Vilniaus aidas*, 1925, balandžio 16, p. 2–3.



investigation work and excavation of the old palace walls conducted on Castle Hill (e.g., *Vilnius. Gediminas' Tower and ruins of the castle*, 1938, cat. 35). Based on the architect's legacy of visual documents, we can say that he played a part in documenting the architectural data discovered during research of the Upper Castle in the 1930s, analysing it and preparing reconstructed sketches and illustrations.

Unable to observe the investigation work being conducted at the Upper Castle until 1937, Kamarauskas limited himself to architectural landscape studies of Castle Hill from the Hill of Three Crosses¹⁰. However, the intensified heritage protection work on the tower and palace gave the engineer an impulse to create reconstructed, not just documented, images of architectural objects. Drawings and sketches differ in terms of their careful analysis of the wall structure. Kamarauskas managed to record the architectural discoveries on the palace exterior, adding his reconstructions of architectural elements and building composition, based both on the architectural codes of the palace ruins, the surviving elements, and historic (written, iconographic) source data. The engineer devoted quite a lot of attention to the analysis and reconstruction of borders around openings¹¹. He researched the palace's western wall, the opening structures and searched for window opening shapes from the second floor that looked over the castle courtyard (*Fragment of the ruins of the Upper Castle in Vilnius*, 1937, cat. 32). In another reconstruction, *Vilnius. Ruins of Gediminas' Castle*¹², and probably guided by Skibinski's(?) image of the palace, Kamarauskas drew five semi-circle shaped arched windows with a profiled brick border. The architect offered a hypothesis as to the existence of a third floor,

that based on his reconstruction would have had a vaulted ceiling, while smaller semi-circular windows would have been found in the castle courtyard side, repeating the compositional axis from the second floor. Kamarauskas added small semi-circular openings on the external wall from the Vilnia River, taking into account the defensive function of this wall. Summarising images of the Upper Castle, their importance in the historiography of architectural heritage research must be considered. One of the most important aspects of his artistic drawings-sketches was providing a basis for his reconstructions from existing details and knowledge gained from analysing iconographic (and cartographic and written) sources.

Vilnius was among the most dominant themes in Kamarauskas' work. In the protocol from 1941, most of all he presented images of this city and its architecture. However, in terms of iconography, the most valuable works are those showing streets destroyed after World War II, created in 1944–1945. They reveal the merits of the architect's long inventory work¹³.

The plans of Trakai and Kaunas, much like aero-photographs, also demonstrate Kamarauskas' particularly rich artistic imagination. At the end of the 19th–first half of the 20th century, rising up above the city was still practically out of reach. He created perspective-focused cityscapes, based on isometric perspective used by his predecessors, where the viewer is introduced to the entire network of city streets and buildings, roads, neighbourhoods and squares. In these plans, the architect conveyed a given location's topographic character. R. Statulevičiūtė-Kaučikienė has called such reconstructed cityscapes "imaginary cartography",

where reconstructed buildings take on other forms¹⁴.

Kamarauskas' work is an inexhaustible source of documented architecture. Although the architect-engineer's artistic character formed a unique, sometimes imagined side to his works based on an architectural vision, nevertheless, his drawings are accurate iconographic, inventory-like documents. He was influenced by the cultural, political and social environment that surrounded him, and the intensified attention to researching cities, architecture and monuments evident in the late 19th–first half of the 20th century. The character of his architectural drawing was based on technical drawing studies conducted whilst in Saint Petersburg. His work reveals his sensitive approach to cultural monuments, his desire to protect relics from the past, making them monumental in his images. The light-coloured, eloquent yet secretive watercolours of Vilnius, Kaunas, Trakai and other cities by Kamarauskas are an invaluable Lithuanian cultural heritage treasure.

¹⁰ Examples from the Lithuanian Art Museum: cat. 56, cat. 58, cat. 59, cat. 61, cat. 66.

¹¹ The author analyses the border profiles of a palace wall seen from the Lower Castle's arsenal on the reverse of a watercolour (*Vilnius Castle ruins*, cat. 34).

¹² This artistic sketch shows data about a foundation arch excavated in 1938 (in fact, the first time part of it was excavated was in 1933), very precise locations for the western wall and openings also excavated at this time, and their proportions. Thus, the presumption is made that the author gives an incorrect date for this image. It is guessed that the work

was actually created in around 1938, not 1894 like he has written (*Vilnius. Ruins of Gediminas' Castle*, cat. 27, 1894).

¹³ Pilypaitis A., „Inž. archit. Juozo Kamarausko kai kurių Vilniaus senamiesčio gatvių išklotinės“, *Valstybės LTSR architektūros paminklų apsaugos inspekcijos metraštis*, Vilnius, 1958, t. 1, p. 17–30; Kultūros paveldo centro archyvas, f. 36: Juozas Kamarauskas. Inžinierius, architektas (1874–1946), ap. 1: Vilniaus senamiesčio gatvių išklotinės (1914–1945).

¹⁴ For more, see: Statulevičiūtė-Kaučikienė R., „Imaginaciniai architektūros atvaizdai XIX a. II p.–XX a. I p. Lietuvos dailėje“, *Meno istorija ir kritika, Menas ir tapatumas*, Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto leidykla, 2008, nr. 4, p. 23.



