

Focus on Latvia



Helēna Demakova

Helēna Demakova was born in 1959. Since the autumn of 2004 she is the Minister for Culture in Latvia. Demakova has a degree from the Institute for foreign languages at the University of Latvia, and has been a lecturer in cultural history, also at the University of Latvia. She has an EU diploma in Cultural Management and has worked as a curator for art exhibits both at home and internationally. Demakova is one of the founders of the Latvian People's Party and is a former MP and adviser to the Prime Minister. She is the vice chair for the Museum of the Occupation in Riga.



Ieva Lešinska

Editor, journalist, poet and translator, born in 1958. Since 1993 Lešinska has been on the editorial team at the magazine *Rīgas Laiks*. Her interviews with Latvian politicians and her articles about intellectual and artistic currents and trends in Europe and the US are especially well known. She is a prominent translator of Latvian poetry into English and of English language poetry into Latvian, including T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, as well as poems by Seamus Heaney, Ezra Pound and others.

Thursday 10.00
Saturday 11.00



Inese Zandere

Poet, children's author and journalist, born in 1958. Zandere has a degree in philosophy from the University of Latvia. She has worked at the Avots publishing house, at the children's magazine *Pionieris* and for *Diena*, the largest daily paper in Latvia. Today, she is chief editor for the magazine *Rīgas Laiks*. Her debut as a poet came with her collection *Grāmātiņa* [The Little Book] in 1983. Several of her poems have been set to music. Zandere has won many awards, including the Annual Literature Award for Poetry in 2002, the Annual Award in Children's Literature in 2002, and the Annual Prize for Culture, awarded by the newspaper *Diena*, in 2003.

Thursday 10.00



Vaira Viķe-Freiberga

Born in 1937, the first woman president of Latvia 1999–2007. Viķe-Freiberga was born in Latvia, but at the end of the Second World War her family came to Germany, Morocco and Canada as refugees. In 1965 she received her doctorate in psychology and was a professor in the subject at the University of Montreal until 1998 when she returned to her homeland to become first director of the Latvian Institute and then president. During her years of exile she was active in the society of Latvians in exile and an authority on Latvian folklore. Vaira Viķe-Freiberga speaks English, French, German, Spanish and Arabic as well as Latvian, and her education and language ability have been great assets on the international stage.

Thursday 14.00
& 15.00
Friday 12.00



Leons Briedis

Born 1949. Poet and translator from the Romance languages. In 1970 he was expelled from the university in Riga, accused of 'nationalism'. Briedis' poetry is devout, sure of form and somewhat self-ironic – and can at times be close to an incantation or a prayer. He debuted as a poet in 1974 and has published 17 poetry collections and written pop song lyrics. Since 1992, he has run the publishing house *Minerva*, and publishes the philosophical journal *Kentaurs*.

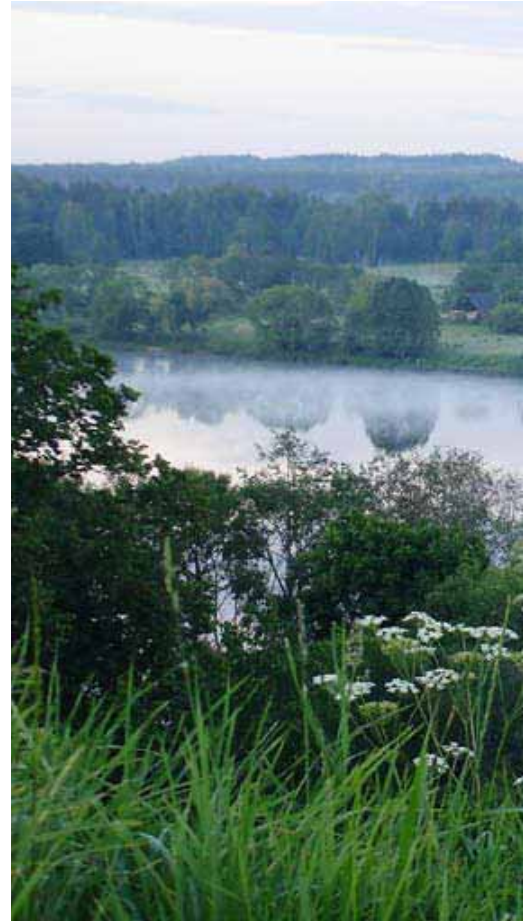
Saturday 14.00



Nora Ikstena

Writer, born in 1969. Ikstena has been an editor at the magazine *Karogs* and collaborated with *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*. In addition, she has been chair at the National Board of Culture, and chair of the board at the Latvian Literature Centre. Her debut novel, *Dzīves svinēšana* [Celebrating of Life] was published in 1998, and since then she has followed it up with two further novels. Ikstena has also published several short story collections and biographies. In 2001 she was awarded the Latvian Annual Prize for Literature. Her works have been translated into many languages, including English, German, Russian and French.

Friday 11.00
& 16.00
Saturday 15.30



Early morning by the Daugava, near Skriveri.



Juris Kronbergs

Poet and translator, born in 1946. Kronbergs was born and lives in Sweden. For his poetry and translations he has received several prizes. The collection *Wolf One-Eye* was chosen as the best collection of poetry in Latvia in 1997. It has already been published in translation in several countries, including England. This year sees its publication in Lithuania, Denmark, the Czech Republic and France. Kronbergs writes and translates in both Latvian and Swedish. In addition, he has been the cultural attaché at the Latvian Embassy in Stockholm. Kronbergs has received several literary awards for his writing and his work in the Baltic region, such as the Latvian Order of the Three Stars and the Swedish Order of the Polar Star. He is an honorary member of the Latvian Academy of Sciences.

Thursday 13.00
Friday 13.00
& 15.30
Saturday 10.00
Sunday 15.00

Authors, poets, video poets, polyglots, a minister of culture and an ex-president, translators, politicians, publishers, graphic designers, authors of children's literature, journalists ... This year Göteborg Book Fair will be visited by a large and diverse Latvian delegation. Read all about the 24 Latvian participants in this year's programme.



PHOTO: INNA LAZDINA



Pauls Bankovskis

Author and journalist, born in 1973. Bankovskis has worked as a journalist on *Diena*, the largest daily paper in Latvia, and is currently a freelance contributor to several magazines and newspapers. Bankovskis' debut as an author came in 1993 and since then he has published nine novels and three collections of short stories – often engaged with the myths and legends of Latvian history. Another recurring theme is the reality of life during the Soviet era. He published his first book for children, written together with his daughter, last year. Bankovskis has been translated into Finnish, English, Russian and Lithuanian and has received two major literary prizes: the novel prize from *Karog* magazine (1996) and the R. Gerkens prize (2002).

Thursday 10.00
Saturday 13.00



Artur Punte

Poet and translator, born in 1977 in Riga, and studied at the Maxim Gorky Literature Institute in Moscow. Punte works in advertising, has exhibited video-poetic works and was one of the organisers of the video festival *Word in Motion*. He translates Latvian poetry to Russian, and writes poetry in Russian and Latvian. Punte is a part of the *Orbita* group, and is their web editor.

Saturday 16.00



Ira Tefpers

Swedish-Latvian art expert, born in Riga. Her family fled to Sweden at the end of the Second World War. Tefpers has both undergraduate and graduate degrees from Göteborg University, and has for many years taught at the Department of Art History and Visual Studies. She has also written about contemporary art for several Swedish newspapers and magazines. With Latvian independence in 1991, Tefpers became more interested in Latvian art, a subject on which she has since lectured and written.

Saturday 17.00



Pēteris Bankovskis

Literary critic, born in 1952. Bankovskis has been an editor for Latvian television as well as at several magazines and newspapers. He was previously employed at the office of the president and works today at the Latvian Culture Foundation. As a freelance journalist Bankovskis writes about art and cultural issues across many topics. His articles and essays have been published in many art catalogues and anthologies.



Kārlis Vērdiņš

Poet and translator, born in 1979. Vērdiņš has studied cultural theory at the Latvian Academy of Culture. So far he has published two collections of poetry: *Ledlauži* [The Icebreakers] (2001) and *Biezpiens ar krējumu* [Cottage cheese with cream] (2004). Vērdiņš works as an editor for the Latvian Encyclopedia. Among other things he has translated T. S. Eliot into Latvian.

Thursday 10.00
Friday 16.00



Pēteris Cedriņš

Writer and translator born in Chicago in 1964. Cedriņš has lived in Latvia since 1991, and he teaches both American literature and translation at the University of Latvia and Daugavpils University. Parts of his prose work *The Penetratum* have been published in English magazines. He has also been a speechwriter for the former President of Latvia, Vaira Viķe-Freiberga.

Friday 14.30
Saturday 15.30



Sandra Kalniete

Art historian, author and politician, she was born in 1952 in Siberia, where her family lived after their deportation. In 1957 the family was able to return to Latvia, and in the 1980s Kalniete got involved in the Latvian freedom movement. She has served as ambassador in France and Spain, and was the Latvian Foreign Minister 2002–04. Kalniete has written two books. The latest, *With Dance Shoes in Siberian Snows*, is about her family's time in Siberia and was translated into Swedish in 2005.

Friday 14.00
Saturday 12.00
& 15.00



Liāna Langa

Poet, born in 1960. Langa studied philology at the University of Latvia, and has worked as a restorer at Krim and a teacher in Riga. In the beginning of the 21st century Langa lived in the US and studied philosophy and 20th century literature. Her poems offer a confrontation and compromise with earlier Latvian post-war poetry. Langa was awarded the Latvian National Literary Award in 2001.

Friday 16.00



Jānis Krēsliņš

Jānis Krēsliņš was born in 1955 in New York. His parents came to the US as refugees after the Second World War. Krēsliņš came to Sweden on a Fulbright scholarship in 1982, and took his doctorate at Stockholm University in 1989. He is Senior Academic Librarian at the National Library of Sweden in Stockholm, with responsibility for the older collections.

Friday 09.30,
11.00 & 12.00



Sergej Timofeyev

Poet, born in 1970. Timofeyev studied Russian literature at the University of Latvia, and works as a freelance translator, copywriter and journalist. He is active in Orbita, a group of writers, artists and musicians. Timofeyev who writes in Russian has published three collections of poetry, so far.

Saturday 10.30
& 16.00



Ausma Cimdina

Literary expert and critic born in 1950. Professor and deacon at the Faculty of Philology at the University of Latvia. Director for the research institute Feministica Lettica. She is above all interested in the history and theory behind the modern critic, literary sociology and feminist epistemology. Cimdina has been editor for several publications and has written three books including a biography of Vaira Viķe-Freiberga.

Thursday 14.30
Friday 11.00



Knuts Skujenieks

Poet and translator, born in 1936. Skujenieks completed his studies at the Maxim Gorky Literature Institute in Moscow in 1961, and the very next year was sentenced to seven years in a labour camp for anti Soviet agitation. During his years in the Gulag, he wrote around a thousand poems, which were first published after the fall of the Soviet Union. When Skujenieks returned to Latvia in 1969, he was acknowledged as one of the foremost Latvian poets and translators. However, his first collection of poetry, *Lirika un balsis* [Lyrics and Voices], was only allowed to be published in 1978. Skujenieks has been the chair of PEN in Latvia, and has been awarded many prestigious prizes, such as the Baltic Assembly Prize and the Tomas Tranströmer prize. Two of his poetry collections have been translated into Swedish: *Ett frö i snön* [Seed in the Snow] (1990) and *Bitter hand, bitter mun* [Bitter hand, bitter mouth] (2003).

Friday 13.00
Sunday 15.00



Juris Petraškevičs

Graphic artist, born in 1953, who has won many prizes for his book designs and illustrations. He has had several sole exhibitions of his work in Latvia, Norway, Belgium and France. Petraškevičs is a senior lecturer in graphic design at the Latvian Art Academy in Riga. He has also created animated films and designed several coins.

Thursday 10.00



Juris Rozītis

Playwright and author. Born in London in 1951, grew up in Australia and moved to Stockholm at the beginning of the 1980s. Chair of the Latvian Central Council in Sweden. Rozītis, Ph.D. in Baltic languages from Stockholm University, has worked as an actor and director in Latvian theatre productions in exile. His novel *A Son of a Birch* was prizewinning in Latvia in 1995.

Friday 14.00



Aivars Stranga

Professor in history, born in 1954. Deacon for the Faculty of History and Philosophy at the University of Latvia. Stranga's speciality is Latvian history 1918–2000, the history of the Jews in the Baltics from the 1400s until the present time, and Russian and Soviet foreign policy from 1917 until today. He is the chair of the Latvian History Commission and the vice chair for the Centre for Jewish Studies. Stranga has written several papers on Latvian-Russian relations and Latvian defense politics 1991–2000.

Friday 14.00
Saturday 15.30



Uldis Bērziņš

Poet and translator, born in 1944. Bērziņš is the most significant translator in Latvia today. He translates from Turkish, Persian and German, as well as several Scandinavian, Slavic and Semitic languages. Bērziņš is a member of the Latvian Bible Society and is currently translating the Koran into Latvian. He debuted as a poet in 1963, but was forced into many years of silence by the authorities. He has received several awards for his poetry as well as his translations.

Saturday 11.00
& 14.00



Sergej Moreino

Poet and translator born in 1964 in Moscow, who has lived in Riga since 1989. Moreino translates German, Polish and Latvian poetry to Russian and works with the multimedia art group Orbita. His poetry is remarkable for the way the formal constructions, such as verse length, rhythm and phonetics, are subordinate to the overall rhythm. His collection of poems in two languages, published in 2006 includes both his own poetry as well as his interpretations of the Latvian poets Uldis Bērziņš and Janis Rokpelnis' poetry.

Saturday 16.00



Latvian seminars at Göteborg Book Fair 2008

Thursday

- 10.00–10.45 *The horse who sings at night*
- 12.30–12.50 *Den sagolika sannsagan* (org: Baltic Books)
- 13.00–13.20 *Tidig poetisk modernism – Aleksandrs Čaks*
- 14.00–14.45 *The singing president*
Location: Museum of World Culture
- 14.30–14.50 *Cherished forbidden reading*
- 15.00–15.45 *Borderline-cases* (In co-operation with Romanian Cultural Institute Stockholm)
Location: Museum of World Culture
- 15.00–15.20 *Lettland i oligarkernas grepp* (org: grannland.com)

Friday

- 09.30–09.50 *Den lettiska folksjälen* (org: Baltic Books)
- 11.00–11.45 *Latvian literature in Sweden*
- 12.00–12.45 *Rethinking identities and cultures* (In co-operation with Romanian Cultural Institute Stockholm)
- 13.00–13.45 *Den lettiska poesins grand old man*
- 14.00–14.20 *The Latvian novel in exile*
- 14.30–14.50 *How far is it from the centre to the periphery?*
- 15.30–15.50 *Lettisk poesieteran*
- 16.00–16.45 *Trends in Latvian poetry and prose today*

Saturday

- 10.00–10.45 *Vizma, helt enkelt*
- 10.30–10.50 *Russians in Latvia* (org: grannland.com)
- 11.00–11.45 *Literature and the secret police – the aesthetics of opposition* (In co-operation with Romanian Cultural Institute Stockholm)
- 11.30–11.50 *Övergivna platser i Sverige och Lettland* (org: Sida Östersjöenheten)
- 12.00–12.20 *With Dance Shoes in Siberian Snows*
- 13.00–13.45 *Writing about the past today* (In co-operation with Romanian Cultural Institute Stockholm)
- 14.00–14.20 *Riga – city of polyglots*
- 15.00–15.20 *Changes and Returning*
- 15.30–15.50 *The land of Latgale, its character and meaning*
- 16.00–16.45 *New Russian literature in Latvia*
- 17.00–17.20 *Jugendarkitektur i Riga*

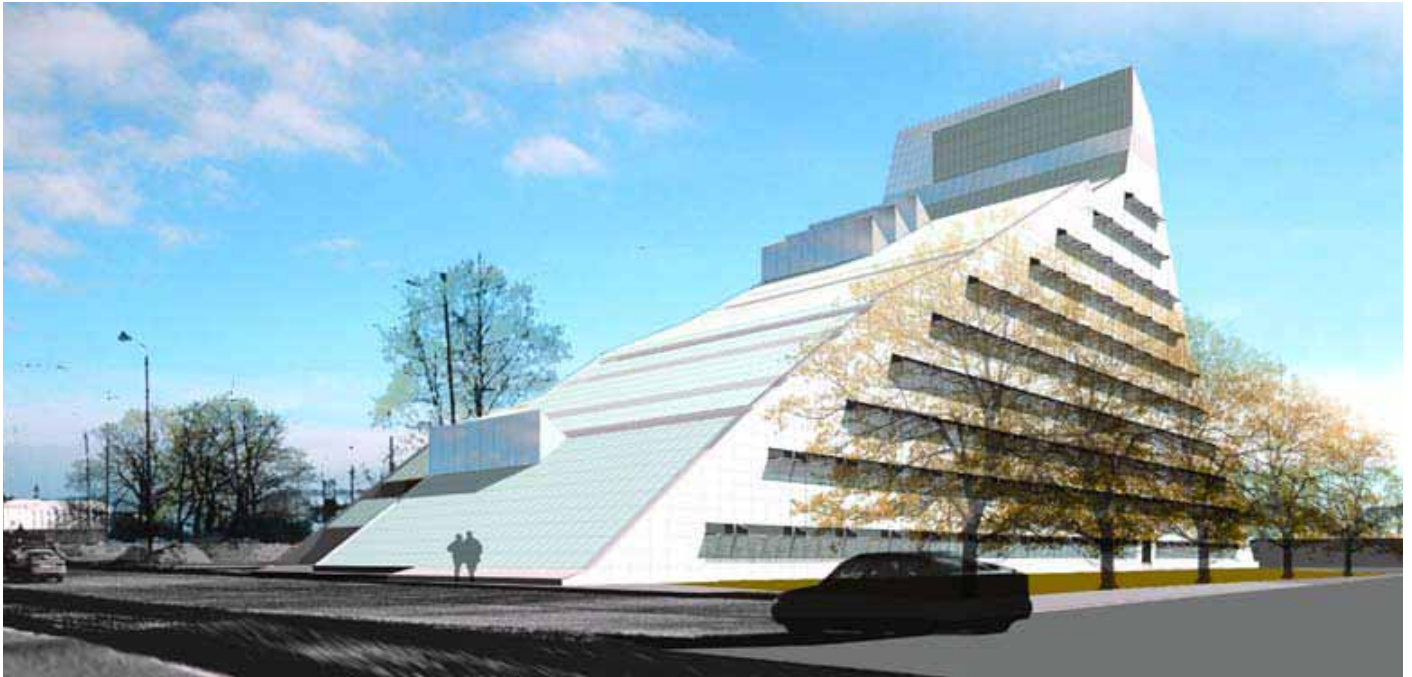
Sunday

- 15.00–16.00 *En kavalkad av lettiska poeter*

Seminars in italics are held in Swedish

LATVIA 90

90 years ago Latvia gained independence for the first time. Therefore, the Latvian organizers have united under the name 'Latvia 90'.
The organizers of the Latvian seminars are:
Writers' and Translators' House in Ventspils
Embassy of Latvia in Sweden
Latvian Ministry of Culture
Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Riga City Council
Latvian Literature Centre



Model of the new national library in Riga which will be ready in 2012.

On Latvian–Swedish literary contacts

The first cultural contact between Latvians and Swedes recorded in literature, talks about stealing brides – from both sides – and is relived in Latvian folklore.

*White, so white is this bird
Cleaning itself on the dock
Comes a Swedish hawk
Feathers flying in the air*

*

*Everyone stops their talking
When they hear my Swedish songs
All my songs are Swedish songs
I will sing them home myself*

Up until the Second World War, Latvian literature was entirely unknown in Sweden. Only one book, the short story collection *I dödens skugga* [In the Shadow of Death] by Rūdolfs Blaumanis, was published in the 1930s – and that in translation from German! That is why we can only imagine how our Swedish colleagues and public in the 1920s would have reacted to, for example, the Latvian modernist Aleksandrs Čaks Riga poems about drainpipes, ice cream, prostitutes and cockroaches. These poems Swedish readers could first become acquainted with in 2004 when his book *Sirds uz trotuāra* [My Heart on the Pavement] was published in Sweden. And how would Jānis Rainis' play *Jāzeps un viņa brāļi* [Joseph and His Brothers] have been received had it been produced in Swedish in the 1920s instead of 2001 (at the Orion Theatre, Stockholm). In other words, what if these works had been 'letters' which arrived soon after they were posted, instead of 'letters which were forgotten, and arrived fifty years late', as the poet Per Helge wrote about Čaks' Swedish volume.

Only one Latvian author visited Sweden in the years between the wars. Jānis Rainis, the national bard of Latvia, visited Sweden and Norway in 1928 to promote his candidacy for the Nobel Prize. His poetry was performed at Dramaten one evening by the actress Inga Tidblad and others.

After the war, the Iron Curtain divided Sweden and Latvia. Two Swedish authors visited Riga during this time. The first was Artur Lundkvist, who visited briefly enroute to Moscow in 1958, to receive the Order of Lenin. He commented later 'I was in Riga, and met Russians.' The other, now legendary visit, was Tomas Tranströmer's in 1970. He was better prepared and could therefore, after having successfully shaken off his minders, call on the poet Vizma Belševica, who later invited others, such as Knuts Skujenieks, to meet him.

There were also sporadic visits from Latvian authors to Sweden. Perhaps most memorable was the poet Imants Ziedonis' reading, together with Swedish colleagues Johannes Edfeldt, Östen Sjöstrand and Bertil Pettersson, at the Museum of Modern Art in Stockholm in January 1981.

From the end of the 1800s until 1988, 125 Swedish authors were translated to Latvian, and about 20 Latvian authors to Swedish. After independence in 1991, about 110 Swedish literary works have been translated to Latvian, and about 16 Latvian works to Swedish (of which six have been by Vizma Belševica).

During the last years of the Soviet empire, contacts started to be more comprehensive and regular. In 1987 Fripress publishers arranged a reading for 'their' poets at Kulturhuset in Stockholm. Among these were Vizma Belševica, on her first visit to the West.

Together with Benkt-Erik Hedin of the Swedish Writers' Union, I helped to arrange the first major visit of Swedish writers to Latvia. The group included Katarina Frostenson, Kay Glans, Björn Håkanson and Birgitta Trotzig. We travelled what was at that time the normal way – Stockholm to Helsinki to Tallinn and finally Riga. There was a real feeling of travelling to a faraway land!

Latvian literature started to be published in Sweden in 1978, thanks to the author Lennart Frick who founded the publishing house Fripress after he realised how much exciting literature was being written in the so-called border countries, such as Latvia. Books by Imants Ziedonis, Vizma Belševica and Knuts Skujenieks were enthusiastically reviewed in Sweden.

In the 1990s, Ariel publishers took over Fripress' role, and has published a selection of Latvian poets, including Uldis Bērziņš, Amanda Aizpuriete and Edvīns Raups. On the other hand, prose has been nearly invisible in Swedish translation, with the exception of Belševica's autobiographical trilogy – the Bille books, Sandra Kalnietes' *With Dance Shoes in Siberian Snows* and Agata Nesaules' *A Woman in Amber* (written in English). The latter two books were internationally acclaimed.

The ice is broken, the work continues.

Juris Kronbergs, poet and translator