

Džemma SKULME

Džemma Lija Skulme
1925

Painter, public figure



The Skulmes family is a distinguished family of Latvian artists. The most notable members of the family are Oto Skulme and Marta Skulme, their daughter Džemma Skulme and grandson Juris Dimiters, Oto Skulme's brother Uga Skulme and his son Jurģis Skulme.

Uga Skulme (1895—1963) was a notable painter, graphic designer, art scientist and critic; an active proponent of the Modernist school.

Oto Skulme (1889—1967) was an eminent painter, stage-designer, graphic designer and Rector of the Art Academy of Latvia.

Džemma Skulme is one of the most widely recognised Latvian artists in the world. She has worked in oil, acrylic and watercolour techniques; she has developed and refined the *alla prima* painting method. Her main themes are the archer, the caryatid and the Latvian woman.

Her works are displayed in the Latvian National Museum of Art, the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, the Zimmerly Art Museum in the USA and in the private collections of the Danish Royal family, former President of Russia B. Yeltsin. She was one of the most influential personalities of Soviet cultural life, who helped promote the Third National Awakening movement in Latvia.

In 1987 she was elected to the USSR Supreme Soviet, where she was the only member ever to vote "against" the majority.

The story of the artist Džemma Skulme is the story of an artistic family and several generations of artists, each a significant identity, an outstanding master and person of influence in their time and place. In the very centre of this family stands its most distinctive figure, artist Džemma Skulme.

Džemma Skulme was born in Riga on 20 September 1925. She graduated from Riga State Gymnasium No. 1, the Monumental Painting Department of the Art Academy of Latvia with her diploma work "*Dziesmu svētki*" [Song Festival]. She continued with postgraduate studies at the I. Repin Institute of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in Leningrad, receiving a postgraduate degree in art science in 1956 for her painting "*Mūsu svētki*" [Our Celebration].

Džemma Skulme's father, Oto Skulme, was Rector of the Art Academy of Latvia and Head of its Monumental Painting Workshop. He is remembered by Latvians as the stage-designer of the Latvian National Theatre and the Latvian National Opera, but mainly as the principal artist at the *Dailē* [Fine Art] Theatre, working closely with E. Smilģis. Džemma Skulme's mother, Marta Skulme, was the first Latvian woman to receive a formal academic education in sculpture. Oto, Marta, and Džemma's uncle Uga Skulme were members of a Riga-based group of artists who determined the development of art in Latvia in the 1930s. Professor Uga Skulme from the Art Academy of Latvia was an art critic during the 1920s and 1930s, and for many years worked on the journal *Daugava* [The Daugava] and as a research associate on the "Latvian Conversational Dictionary". He was broken by the Soviets and forced to give up his artistic conceptions. Uga's son Jurģis Skulme, a painter of the Realist Expressionist school, enjoyed an even more complex relationship with the ruling power of the day. Dž. Skulme's husband, Ojārs Ābols, was a significant theoretician and well-known artist. Džemma Skulme's son, Juris Dimiters, was originally a stage-designer, and later became a surrealist painter and socio-political poster artist.

During the 1950s Džemma Skulme gained popularity as a book illustrator, utilising techniques, such as ink washes, *sanguine* (red chalk) and watercolour (*aquarelle*). During the 1960s Skulme turned increasingly to painting; her lyrical view of the world became more dramatic, her works more expressive, wider brush strokes appeared, as did the palette knife, multiple forms of facture and powerful colour accents. Since the 1970s she has developed the caryatid theme, revealing woman's ethical and spiritual force.

Džemma Skulme regularly participates in exhibitions in Latvia, Sweden, Italy, the USA and Germany. She has held personal exhibitions in galleries in Austria, Germany, Canada and the USA.

Džemma Skulme was one of the most influential figures in Soviet cultural life, and during the Soviet era she was elected to the USSR Supreme Soviet. The artist attracted worldwide attention during the "Perestroika years" when, in 1987, she was the only member of the USSR Supreme Soviet who dared to speak and vote against the majority vote. During the vote to exclude the reform supporter Boris Yeltsin from the Soviet Presidium, Dž. Skulme was the only one of over 1500 members to abstain from voting. This was the first time in the history of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR that anyone had dared to depart from the traditional "unanimous vote". A year later, Skulme alone dared to openly agitate against a draft law, instigated by the USSR Central Committee Politburo, which would have given specific powers to the USSR internal military forces.

In 1992 Džemma Skulme was elected Honorary Member of the Latvian Academy of Sciences. She has been awarded Honorary Doctorate by the Art Academy of Latvia. She is People's Artist of the Latvian SSR, winner of the USSR State Prize, Honorary Citizen of the City of St Petersburg, Commander of the Latvian Order of the Three Stars, holder of a lifetime grant from the Culture Capital Foundation of Latvia.



Marta Skulme-Liepina in the 1920s. Džemma Skulme's mother Marta Skulme (1890—1962) was the first professional Latvian woman sculptor



Oto Skulme (1889—1967), the stage-designer and painter, the author of the stage-design for more than 250 theatre performances in the National Theatre, the National Opera and *Dailē* Theatre; he has painted portraits, still-lives, landscapes, works of historical and daily life genres



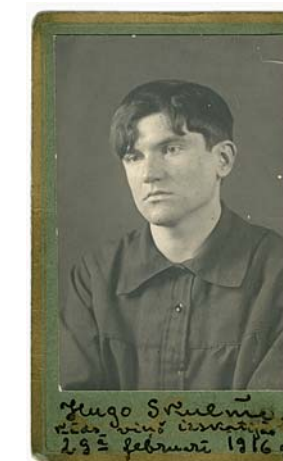
Džemma Skulme in Paris, 1956. Džemma Skulme regularly participates in exhibitions in Latvia, France, Sweden, Italy, the USA and Germany. She has held personal exhibitions in galleries in Austria, Germany, Canada and the USA

Džemma Skulme. "*Makedonijas motīvi*" [A Macedonian Motif]. 1974. Cardboard, oil, gouache, property of the Latvian National Museum of Art



Džemma Skulme. "*Kara kariatīdes*" [War Caryatids]. 1976. Canvas, oil, property of the Latvian National Museum of Art

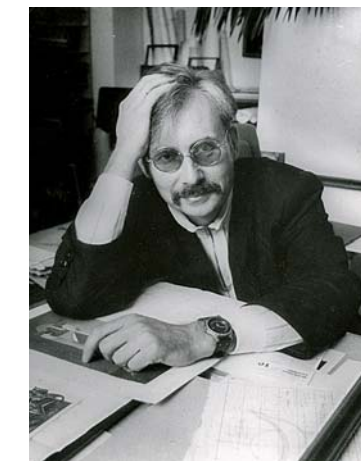
Uga Skulme (1895—1963), the painter, graphic artist, critic, pedagogue, the member of the artists' group of Riga, an active promoter of Modernism ideas. He has painted still-lives, portraits, landscapes, figural compositions.



Džemma Skulme among the Latvian deputies (parliamentarians) of the USSR Supreme Soviet. Sitting in the first row: Jānis Peters, Viktors Avotiņš, Juris Bojārs, the second row: Džemma Skulme, Andrejs Čirulis, Nikolai Samokhin, Andrejs Eizāns; the third row: Ivars Kezbers



Jurģis Skulme (b. 1928), artist. Imprisoned in 1978; spent three years in prison for criticising the Soviet system. A well-known writer, publicist and creator of television broadcasts. He has written about many Latvian artists, including Teodors Zalkalns, Janis Rozentāls and Vilhelms Purvītis



Juris Dimiters (b. 1947), stage-designer, poster artist, painter, sometimes called the genius of political poster irony. Winner of numerous awards in international poster exhibitions

For many years Džemma Skulme was Member of the Board of the Latvian Artists' Union and President of the Board. One of the most successful projects undertaken by the Latvian Artists' Union under her leadership during the 1970s and 1980s was the organisation of the Art Days during April, when art works were on display to thousands of people and art entered every Latvian household and heart. *Art Day* events in Riga's Dome Square and elsewhere were attended by thousands of people

