

"PAON" – THE FIRST ARTISTIC CAFÉ OF THE YOUNG POLAND

Summary

"Paon" was the famous first artistic café of the Young Poland movement. It was founded in 1896, when Ferdynand Turlinowski opened his "Kawiarnia Teatralna" [Theatre Café] in Cracow at 38, Szpitalna Street. The café soon attracted the city's artistic and cultural élite. In the largest room, the proprietor hung a huge canvas (226 × 600 cm), on which he encouraged his clients to leave pieces of work. His regulars – painters, writers, journalists and actors – covered it with paintings and drawings (e.g. Stanisław Wyspiański, Józef Mehoffer and Włodzimierz Tetmajer), and often satirical or humorous aphorisms and poems (e.g. Stanisław Wyspiański, Lucjan Rydel and Stanisław Przybyszewski) about other members of their circle. This canvas, which is now held in the collections of the National Museum in Cracow, is a unique kind of "guest book" of the period.

Before long, the artists, wishing to have a place of their own, apart from the general public, formed a kind of private club in a separate room. This room came to be known, on Przybyszewski's initiative, as "Pod nonszalanckim Paonem" [The Nonchalant Peacock], from a poem by Maurice Maeterlinck, and ultimately, for short, as "Paon". The walls of the room soon filled up with works by the artists who met there, mostly portraits and caricatures. Wyspiański's drawings and pastels were particularly well-represented, among them the great (*Neptune with nymphs*, a peacock above the door like a coat of arms, and scores of portraits of Paon's eminent clients (including Dagna Juel-Przybyszewska, Stanisław Przybyszewski, Jacek Malczewski, Włodzimierz Tetmajer and Lucjan Rydel). The information we have about the interior is taken from literature and the few published photographs.

In 1901 Turlinowski went bankrupt. The café closed down, the furnishings and fittings were auctioned off, and the artists' works were scattered and for the most part lost. In 1912 a new building was built on the site of the original café. All that is left of Ferdynand Turlinowski's "Kawiarnia Teatralna", popularly known from the emblem in the artists' den as "Paon" [The Peacock], is the legend of Cracow's first bohemian artistic café. After its demise its regulars relocated to Jan Apolinary Michalik's "Kawiarnia Lwowska" [Lvovian Café], popularly known as "Jama Michalika" [Michalik's Lair], on the nearby Floriańska Street.