

INTRODUCTION

We present to the Readers' attention the second volume from the New Series of the *Selected Papers from the National Museum in Cracow*. The introduction to Volume I contained a short historical outline of this continuous publication with the indication of changes it had undergone over the years.

The present volume comprises some important articles that concern both museum items and objects connected with the Museum. The papers have been arranged according to the time of origin of artistic works which they describe. Thus, the publication opens with an article by Beata Biedrońska-Słota devoted to an outstanding Turkish product dating from the end of the 16th century: a tent seized by the Polish army during the battle with the Turkish and Tartar troops near Żurawno in 1676. Handed over to the Museum and kept here with great care for over 120 years, it is a good illustration of the Polish Sarmatian taste.

Wojciech Bochnak has carried out a searching analysis of the order book of Le Page, a famous Parisian gunsmith, active at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. The author has proved that the gunsmith produced firearms of top-class also for several Polish customers. A dozen or so pieces of arms from his manufactory can be found in the collections of the National Museum in Cracow.

The volume includes also a fundamental work by Adam Broż, a friend of our Museum's, though not its employee. Yet, the subject of his study refers to the history of our institution. The work is a comprehensive description of the sculptural decoration of the Cloth Hall (Sukiennice) from the times of its restoration in the years 1875–1879. This decoration was aimed at boosting the importance of the Cloth Hall as a symbol of the glory of the City and its townsmen. Adam Broż, on the basis of a detailed source query, has confirmed – beyond any doubt – that the author of the conception and pattern-designs for the sculptural decoration was Jan Matejko. The year 1879, when the reconstruction of the Cloth Hall ended, simultaneously marks the date of the institution of the National Museum in Cracow, which found its seat nowhere else but in the rooms of the 1st floor of the newly restored Sukiennice; our Gallery of the 19th Century Polish Art has existed there until now. The importance of Broż's paper has acquired additional value at the very moment when the City Authorities launch consecutive restoration works on the building.

Two papers refer to the end of the 19th century. Joanna Kowalska describes rather peculiar objets d'art: mantelpiece fans made of feathers, of an exotic origin. The Museum boasts an excellent collection of fans, displayed recently with great success at the exhibition "Fans of the Occident and Orient", presented also in a successive volume of the catalogues of the Museum collections, published in 2001.

The second article discusses a rather untypical exhibit preserved in the Museum, namely *Paon – Sketches by the Young Poland Artists*. It is a unique testimony of the café-artistic atmosphere of Cracow at the close of the 19th century and at the same time a chronicle – created currently – by the well-known Cracovian bohemians. Barbara Malkiewicz has reconstructed a colourful history of the *Paon*, discovered in the early 1980s by the author of the present text in the Museum recesses and handed over to conservators, who have uncovered the beauty and documentary value of the canvas. In the year 2004 the Museum prepares two exhibitions, at which the painting discussed will play a substantial role: one devoted to cafés, including the famous "Jama Michalikowa" and its cabaret *The Green Balloon*, and the second, entitled "Fin de siècle in Cracow". During both of them the Visitors will be able to see the *Paon* in a proper context.

A novelty which we introduce beginning with the present volume of the *Selected Papers* are short reports on the research conducted in the Museum. The cycle has been initiated by our ladies conservators – Anna Grochowska-Angelus and Małgorzata Chmielewska. The first of the communiqués concerns the conservation of one of the most precious pieces of Italian Renaissance painting in the Polish collections – *Adoration of the Child* by Lorenzo Lotto. This excellent work, purchased by the National Museum in Cracow in 1971, in the years 1996-1997 underwent a thorough renovation process, which returned it its former splendour. Also foreign art connoisseurs had the opportunity to appreciate our efforts during the monographic exhibition devoted to Lorenzo Lotto's oeuvre, presented in Washington, D.C., Bergamo and Paris.

The second communiqué refers to the renovation and research works conducted on some paintings which remain in joint ownership of the National Museum in Cracow and the Princes Czartoryski Foundation. Those activities, among others, fixed the attribution of works, confirmed their dating and, most importantly, restored their original lustre.

I can only express my hope that other Colleagues, encouraged by the example of our Ladies Conservators, will submit further communiqués informing us about interesting findings and attributions.

Finally, I want to add two observations which may suggest themselves to the Readers. Firstly, part of the texts reminds us of our old and tight connections with other European countries, the fact which gains in importance in 2004, the year of our accession to the structures of the European Union. Secondly, it is an old truth, which finds a still new corroborative evidence, that Cracow at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries was a city rich in important, yet not fully recognized artistic events. As our Museum has always devoted a considerable attention to them, it can now boast the supreme collection of artistic creations from that period.

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