

Use temporary exhibitions to make changes to your permanent display

Olena Zhivkova, head of the Western European Art Department, Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko National Museum of Arts, Kiev

The Khanenko National Museum of Arts houses the most celebrated international fine arts collection in Ukraine. The private collection of Bohdan Khanenko (1849-1917) and his wife Varvara (1852-1922) are the core of the current exhibition. In the late nineteenth century, the museum was decorated, inside and out, in an eclectic style which are been fully preserved. This often creates problems for large-scale exhibitions and changes to the permanent display. Last year, however, one hundred Old Master paintings from nine Ukrainian museums were presented in the exhibition *The Comeback of St. Luke*, which opened at the Pushkin Museum in Moscow and then moved to the Khanenko Museum in Kiev, where the show was called *European Dimension*. Usually our museum attracts 4,000-7,000 visitors a month, but that exhibition demonstrated the popularity of large-scale projects by drawing almost 13,000 visitors in only two weeks.

Twenty-eight paintings in *European dimension* were previously part of our permanent display. Twelve of them were by Dutch and Flemish artists. Thanks to the CODART congresses and study trips I had attended long before this exhibition, I was able to clarify the attributions of several Dutch and Flemish works by important masters in the depot, which have been restored in the last four years. It was easier to persuade our conservators to clean and restore these masterpieces and to persuade the museum to spend money on their framing than it would have been with paintings by lesser artists. These reattributed and restored works – by such artists as Vrancke van der Stockt, Jan Brueghel the Elder, Willem Ormea, Roelant Roghman, Cornelis Gerritsz Decker and Gasper Peeter Verbruggen II – are now part of our permanent display, which had not been changed since 1998.

This project also shed light on one of our paintings: *Man Holding a Glove* by Nicolaes Eliasz. There has been a protracted dispute between our museum and the Kroshytsky Art Museum in Sevastopol, which holds another version of this picture. At *European dimension*, the two portraits were placed side by side, and not only did the truth emerge, but the display attracted many visitors. By the end of that exhibition, newly hung works had become such an attraction that we decided not to put them back into storage. They are supplemented by several other recently restored paintings, replacing doubtful works and copies. So what is our priority, to pursue research or attract visitors? To be truly successful, we must do both.

About Olena Zhivkova

Olena Zhivkova became head of the Western European Art Department of the Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko National Museum of Arts, Kiev, in 1999. Since 2008 she has also been a lecturer at the National University of Kiev (Mohila Academy), where she teaches the course “Expertise and attribution in European painting.” Her most recent publication is the 2012 exhibition catalogue *European Dimension. Works of the Old European Masters from the State Collections in Ukraine, The Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko National Museum of Arts*.

Olena Zhivkova has been a member of CODART since 2003.