

The collection of Dutch and Flemish paintings of the Kadriorg Art Museum

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In reference to the exhibition in the Sinebrychoff Art Museum in Helsinki, which will also include a large selection of Dutch and Flemish paintings from the collection of Kadriorg Art Museum, in Tallinn, on the opposite shore of the Gulf of Finland, I was asked to give you a general introduction of our collection. This lecture aims to give a short overview of the history of the collection as well as its current state of survey.

Although the Kadriorg Art Museum is relatively young – it celebrates its tenth anniversary in 2010 – its collection dates back to 1919, the year marking the foundation of the Art Museum of Estonia. Kadriorg Palace houses a collection of Western European and Russian art that had been randomly stored in the depots of the Art Museum of Estonia before the new museum opened. The museum currently stores and partially displays about 1,000 paintings, 3,500 prints, 250 sculptures (in addition to 2,500 small-scale sculptural works), and 1,500 decorative works (historical furniture, glass, and porcelain, etc.), ranging from the 16th to the 20th centuries. It is the largest and most important collection of Western European and Russian art in Estonia.

Dutch and Flemish paintings were part of the collection from the start. For example, the pair of paintings from the studio of Pieter Brueghel the Younger bears old inventory numbers *M 1* and *M 2* (thus painting 1, 2), meaning that they were the first paintings encountered in the collection of the Art Museum of Estonia. The holdings of Dutch and Flemish art were not assembled along any specific line, but rather consist of a variety of works that entered the museum from different sources. These include the so-called, “state art purchase,” i.e. works of art bought in St. Petersburg in 1920 by state service appointed art agents (including works by Philips Wouwerman, Gerard ter Borch, Jacob de Wet I).

It is no doubt too much to call these art purchasers “art agents” as one can read from the abstract. Let me explain the case in more detail. We know only that this collection (that consisted of 88 paintings, among what some ten paintings representing the Netherlandish art (which some of them I encountered earlier) was given over to the State Treasury in 1921 by Albert Org a head of the immigration commissions in Petrograd. The collection was most likely purchased in St. Petersburg (1920)¹ in aim to sell the works of art again to make a profitable art deal. The noble idea behind this aventure was to use the money raised from selling the collection to support the removing costs of the Estonians (ethnic Estonians) repatriated from Bolshevik Russia. The deal

¹ The commissions for granting Estonian citizenship for fellow countrymen (ethnic Estonians) living in Russia were called into being after the Treaty of Tartu, signed in February 1920 in which Estonia was recognized independent from Imperial Russia and Estonia in turn was the first country to recognize the legality of Bolshevik Russia. And the campaign of repatriation was ended by 1922.

went off for the evaluation document (compiled by Robert Auer in Finland) showed the prizes lower than were expected.² Finally, by 1926 the Ministry of Education managed to buy the whole collection and deposited it to the museum. Only with two exceptions to which I turn back later, we do not possess any information about the previous owners of the paintings.

Returning back to introduce the development of the collection:

A number of the works in the collection came to the museum from institutions or societies that were closed down by the Soviet regime in the 1940s and 50s (Adriaen van Ostade and Abraham van der Hoef, Circle of Hieronymus Bosch); and from the collections of local Baltic-Germans who left Estonia in the period of 1918–1940 (*Woman with boys* by Norbert van Bloemen, *Boy with a goose* and *Girl with a rooster* by Jacob Gerritsz. Cuyp, *Journey into Noah's Ark* by Lambert de Hondt). Furthermore, the collection was enriched by more recent private donations and acquisitions, including works by Clara Peeters, Hans van Essen, Bartholomeus van der Helst, which were purchased by the museum in 1970-1980-s, and the large canvas probably from the workshop of Maerten de Vos – collected by the organization for heritage protection in 1956 from Vigala church in West-Estonia (where it stood rolled up in the sacristy). The church in Vigala stood since early 17th century under the patronage of von Uexküll family, it is likely that the painting came to the church from their estate nearby. In 1991 Johannes Mikkel donated to the Art Museum of Estonia his collection, that also included some ten paintings of the Netherlandish school.

When we began studying the museum's Dutch and Flemish paintings in 2002 (soon after the museum was opened), there were about 100 predominantly 17th-century Dutch School works. Several years later, while the focus of the collection has remained the same, conscientious research has noticeably reduced this number. Several of the paintings turned out to be German School, and even some Italian works were found. And of course in many cases, the definition "17th century" referred to the period emulated and not when the painting was actually made. The extensive study of the collection has also brought to light new and fascinating finds, for example paintings by Leonaert Bramer, Jacob Jordaens, Cornelis Mahu, Frans Francken II, Frans Ykens and Lambert Jacobsz.

The collection I started to work with consisted in tens of works that bore an attribution such as "unknown artist after Aelbert Cuyp, or Adriaen van Ostade, etc." Now, after some years of survey and active consulting with specialists, in most cases the names of who painted the works (only with few exceptions) have been discovered. In cases where we have not succeeded in finding the hand who painted the actual piece, we now know the name of the one who painted

² Auer also documented the condition of the paintings, from what we see that a number of them were in rather feeble state. For example the painting by Jacob de Wet the Elder showed here.

the prototype. Besides the study in the archives and consulting with specialists, in many cases the correcting of the attributions has developed in the process of conservation work.

Now I'd like to go more in depth over the attribution history of one individual piece – the same composition *Christ at Emmaus* by Lambert Jacobsz. (ca. 1598 – 1636). The painting is part of the Johannes Mikkel collection that was bequeathed to the museum in 1991. Johannes Mikkel bought it during the first republic period (1918–1940) from the antique-shop of Mr. G. Kangro in Tartu who in turn had acquired it from Suislepa Manor (near Viljandi) that belonged before its nationalization in 1920 to von Krüdener family.

Johannes Mikkel himself was convinced the painting was by the hand of the 17th century Spanish master Diego Velázquez. When the painting reached the museum it was related to the school of Utrecht Caravaggisti. No doubt, the compositions showing few almost life-size figures in half length at the table against a solid background can best be compared with their works. Last year I e-mailed the image of the painting to the RKD, where both Fred Meijer and Jan Kosten took a look at it and considered it to be a composition by Lambert Jacobsz.; though they were inclined to consider it to be a copy.

Lambert Jacobsz. was a history painter (mainly, if not exclusively of biblical scenes), art dealer but above all a Mennonite preacher in Leeuwarden. Jacobsz. studied with Pre-Rembrandtists in Amsterdam but settled in Leeuwarden after his marriage in 1620 where he died in plague in 1634. His most outstanding pupil was Jacob Adriaenz. Backer (1608–1651), who worked in his studio in Leeuwarden from 1626 – 1632 before leaving to Amsterdam to study with Rembrandt. (Later today we have all opportunity to visit the exhibition dedicated to this distinguished painter).

Until the autumn of 2008 the painting was covered with a very thick and yellowed varnish layer that disguised the painting underneath (you can still see a little piece of that varnish on the beard of the apostle on the left side). Many experts suggested it to be a 19th-century work, the judgment had probably a lot to thank to the general brownish tonality of the painting (visible). The image displayed here shows the state where the varnish is removed but with its entirely over painted background (the original background of the painting is grayish).

About provenances

The reconstruction of provenances of the works in the collection has not been as successful as the attributions of the paintings. Due to the insufficient documentation and the lack of archive data (the museum lost part of its archive in the fire of 1944), the collection does not stand out as a dignified example. In fact, on most occasions we know only the previous owner. The gap between the “date of birth” of a painting and the first written record of it reaches in most cases to centuries.

Also, as a dominating part of the paintings in the collection were newly relined or parqueted in the 19th century, very valuable information on reconstructing the provenances (like old collection numbers, marks, inscriptions, attributions) that the paintings might have had on the backside, has been lost.

We are fortunate if we can trace the provenance into the 19th century: such is the case with a still-life by Hans van Essen (purchased to the collection in 1979) that belonged until the early 20th century to the Rezvoi family of the Marienhof estate near St. Petersburg. The painting was a gift to general Dmitri Petrovitš Rezvoi (1762–1823) by his comrades who took part in taking Hamburg over from French troops in 1814. “Hamburg 1814” in Cyrillic was also written on the leather label the painting once had on the backside.³ The painting probably reached Estonia during the First Republic period (1918–1940) when many Russians emigrated to Estonia or used Estonia as a gate to flee from Bolshevik Russia to the West.

This was surely the fate of the Bramer’s *Arrest of Christ* (bought for the museum by the Cultural Committee in 1988 from Pille Veste), painting that belonged in the early 20th century to Sergei I. Šidlovski (1861–1922), a Russian White Guard Officer but also a high statesman in Imperial Russia who fled from his homeland in 1920 and lived in Estonia until his death in 1922. But also this provenance had to be discovered. The painting overlaps in size and iconography (and also material – slate) with the Bramer in Shidlovsky’s possession that Wichmann encounters in his catalogue from 1918.⁴ This assumption is confirmed by the illustrated plate in one of the RKD dossiers.

Most of the 19th century provenances concern the paintings belonged to local Baltic-German noble families: (case of Von Liphart or Von Ungern-Sternberg) some of these works took part also in the exhibitions held in late 19th – early 20th century (Bartholomeus van der Helst).

Two paintings from the workshop of Pieter Brueghel (VM 1-2) – that were handed over to the society for heritage protection in 1920 by Eduard von Baggo (in Nõva/ Neue manor) belonged to Baronnes Josephine Baggeuwfudt (mother of Eduard), born von Ungern-Sternberg. Her grandfather Baron Eduard von Ungern-Sternberg married a widow of Sir Thomas Wynn in England in 1810; so it is likely (when considering also the characteristics of art taste of the period in England) that the paintings were brought along then.

As last examples I bring you 2 exceptional cases whose provenance can be dated back into 18th century. With the art acquisition in 1920 in St. Petersburg (described above) came two paintings: *Letter to a Sleeping Soldier* (from the Studio of ter Borch, attributed to Caspar Netscher

³ That we know from the article by Baron Vrangal published in (*Starõe Godõ*) 1913 where the painting is also reproduced.

⁴ Appendix I. Wichmann Summary Catalogue of the Paintings, with Supplement. – *Leonart Bramer 1596–1674. Ingenious Painter and Draughtsman in Rome and Deft*, Waanders, 1994, p. 290.

in Gudlaugsson catalogue⁵) and *Landscape with Horses* by Philips Wouwerman that bear the old collection numbers of the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. The paintings are encountered under the same numbers in Labensky's catalogue (compiled in 1797) and were deposited to Strelna Palace (white collection numbers lower right) sometime in the 19th century. Again, most likely the paintings appeared to the market (if we can name it so) after the revolution during which the palace was plundered. Dr. Everhard Korthals-Altes, who has surveyed thoroughly the history of collecting 17th-century Dutch art in the 18th century, has managed to detect the previous owner – François Tronchin (1704 – 1798) a renowned collector in Geneva, who sold in 1770 his whole collection to Catherine the Great.

Conclusion

Though the collection catalogue is about to be finished, the work on the provenances of the paintings needs still lot of attention.

Call for information

Some works in the collection even warrant more extensive survey: for example, the Boschian *Expulsion of the moneylenders from the Temple* will be studied together with three other versions in Copenhagen, Glasgow, Madrid in close collaboration with an international team of art historians and conservators. I would be most thankful if any of you know the present location of the painting. The information about the painting being in a private collection in Madrid dates to the 1970s, but whether it is still in the country, we do not know.

⁵ Gudlaugsson, S. J., Katalog der Gemälde Gerard ter Borchs sowie bio-graphisches Material, Bd I-II, Nijhof, Den Haag, 1959–1960.