

Dutch and Flemish Art Collections in the Sinebrychoff Art Museum

Minerva Keltanen, chief curator, Sinebrychoff Art Museum, Helsinki

Sinebrychoff Art Museum belongs to the Finnish National Gallery aside the Kiasma, which is a museum for contemporary art, and Ateneum, which is specialized on Finnish national art. Sinebrychoff Art Museum has a quite unique place in the Finnish Museum field. It is the only museum in Finland specialized in old European masters. Its collections include some of the most valuable and internationally important Old Masters in the country dating from the 13th century till the 1850's. In numbers the museum has some more than 1000 paintings, around 4000 graphics, 400 miniatures, furniture and objects, silverware and porcelain. The museum gets annually some small fund from the State for new acquisitions. Sinebrychoff Art Museum is partly an art museum with temporary exhibitions, but it also includes a home museum with a permanent display.

The entire museum building has belonged to the Sinebrychoff family, which founded the brewery in Helsinki in 1819. The core of the museum's Dutch and Flemish art collection is the collection of Paul and Fanny Sinebrychoff. Paul Sinebrychoff the Younger was the last male member of the renowned Sinebrychoff family. He and his wife Fanny – who was a famous actress in the Swedish Theatre before marriage – were deeply impressed during their travels to other European countries by the beautiful castles and manors with royal art collections, and they started to cherish an idea of creating something similar in Finland. Paul and Fanny Sinebrychoff started to collect art in the 1880's, especially Swedish 17th- and 18th-century portrait paintings and miniatures. Some of those artists, such as David Beck and Toussaint Gelton, were already Dutch by origin. In 1901 they began to collect Dutch 17th-century art. The collection contains some 30 paintings by Dutch and Flemish artists.

Paul Sinebrychoff acquired his paintings from international auctions and art dealers, but also from the other private collectors. His personal correspondence with several art dealers and personal advisors is an invaluable archive for researchers. He was most interested in portraits, and he even acquired still lifes, landscapes and genre paintings as well. The biggest threat seemed to be that he would acquire a "real hag of a woman" for his collection, like he was frightened beforehand when he bought the portrait of Anna van Schoonhoven by Johannes Cornelisz. Verspronck in 1908. The portrait became one of his favorites and was hung in the study above his armchair. Paul Sinebrychoff acquired many Dutch beauties, like the unknown lady by Cornelis van der Voort, which he bought from art dealer Frederik Müller & Cie in Amsterdam. The portrait of the 22 year old beauty by Nicolaes Eliasz. Pickenoy. is a charming piece of this artist. Also the portrait of Maria Odilia Buys by Jan Anthonisz. van Ravesteyn is an excellent example of that artist's work.

When Paul Sinebrychoff bought the double portrait of two sisters in 1907 from the art dealer Jacob Hecht of Hamburg, it was attributed to Cornelis de Vos and it was known as *The Artist's Daughters*. But it seems quite unrealistic that the artist's daughters would have worn such an aristocratic lace collar. The girls are without a doubt the daughters of an important aristocratic family, which could be identified some day. The work has been attributed also to Frans Pourbus the Younger, but still the final word has not been reached.

The *Portrait of a young woman* by unknown artist is quite interesting. The art dealer

Goudstikker bought the painting from the collection Madame La Comtesse Mniszek in an auction in Paris, held in Hotel Drouot in 1910, and then he sold it to Paul Sinebrychoff. The work was attributed to the Haarlem artist Johannes Cornelisz. Verspronck, but the attribution was refused in 1950 by Sturla Gudlaugsson in the RKD. She proposed instead the artist Dirck Dirckz. van Santvoort. Nevertheless, in the summer of 2005 Rudi Ekkart questioned the attribution and suggested another artist working in Utrecht in that time. According to the research of her dress, the painting could be dated between 1624-1631. When taking the x-rays, another dress was found under her black costume, which was originally much more decorated. The pigment analysis revealed that the dress had been red in color. Why was the costume over painted in black soon after it was made? Was it because the girl married? Or did she become a widow? In either case, lace was not used in a widow's dress. The model is also turned slightly to the right, which could indicate a pair portrait of her husband. But usually, the husband was on the left and the wife on the right side. Maybe she has had her sister or brother as a pair portrait? In the Instituut Collectie Nederland there is a portrait of a young girl, which is almost a mirror reflection to our painting. Also her dress is over painted black.

Paul Sinebrychoff was also very content with the *Portrait of a young woman*, which was believed to present the sister of Rembrandt. It was mentioned as an early painting by Rembrandt from the period of Leyden in the publications of great Rembrandt experts Hofstede de Groot (1916) and Bredius (1935) at the beginning of the 20th century. Kurt Bauch attributed the painting to the student of Rembrandt, Isaac de Jouderville, in 1960, and later research by Werner Sumowski confirmed the attribution (1983). The painting was restored last year and it arouse doubt that the portrait does not present a woman, but in fact a man instead.

At the request of his wife Fanny, Paul Sinebrychoff bought the still-life painting by the Haarlem artist Willem Claesz. Heda for their collection from the Amsterdam art dealer Fredrik Müller in 1908. Fanny had seen a beautiful Heda painting in the collections of the Countess Hallwyl in Stockholm, and she wanted a similar painting in their collection. A slightly different version is in the collection of the Muzeum Narodowe in Warsaw.

The beer king of Helsinki - as he was called - Paul Sinebrychoff died in 1917, and his wife Fanny died in 1921. They donated their art collection to the Finnish State. Later in 1975 the Finnish State bought the entire Sinebrychoff family building and the transferred other donated collections of foreign art to the building to form a special museum of Old Masters.

The museum has received *The reading monk* by Rembrandt from the art collection of chamberlain and extravagant millionaire Hjalmar Linder. The painting is signed and dated 1661. The formal style, material and technical analysis made by researchers and conservators prove that the painting has been made in the 17th century in the studio of Rembrandt. The provenance of the painting is known from the 1750's on, when it belonged to the collections of Comte de Vence in Paris. After this the painting was bought by the Earl Wemyss, and it was more than 100 years in the Gosford House in Scotland. *The reading monk* was put for sale in 1919 for the London Thomas Agnew & Sons –art gallery, where chamberlain Hjalmar Linder bought the painting and donated it to the Finnish Art Society the year after.

The reading monk has taken part in many exhibitions worldwide since 1835. In 1956 it was

displayed at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and in the Museum Boijmans in Rotterdam, and the painting was cleaned and restored then. The Rembrandt -researcher Gerson wrote that its surface has suffered a bit, but you can still trace its original refinement. In the years 1997-1998 *The reading monk* took part in the great Rembrandt-exhibition in Australia. In the exhibition catalogue “Rembrandt – A Genius and His Impact” the researchers Albert Blankert and Marleen Blokhuis wrote that the painting, which is known to be in the remarkable collections since 1750, is of too high a level to give reasons for doubts. Also *The reading monk* was kept authentic in an exhibition of Kyoto in 2002, and in the exhibition in Washington in 2005 about *Rembrandt's Late Religious Portraits*.

German art historian Christian Tümpel published in 1986 a book “Rembrandt – Mythos und Methode”, where he placed a question mark aside *The reading monk* – he was first to doubt the painting's attribution. Next was Ernst van de Wetering, from the Rembrandt Research Project, who wrote in 2006 in the exhibition catalogue of the Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen “Rembrandt? The Master and his Workshop” his doubts about *The reading monk*. He keeps it as a painting by anonymous pupil of Rembrandt's studio, a satellite painting of another work painted in 1660, *Titus in a monk dress*, in the Rijksmuseum. Peter C. Sutton, the executive director of the Bruce Museum, has confirmed that he and Arthur Wheelock have been fully aware of the thoughts of Christian Tümpel and Ernst van de Wetering about *The reading monk*, but even though they still consider this painting made by Rembrandt himself.

From the same Hjalmar Linder collection comes also our Gerard ter Borch painting *Woman drinking wine and holding a letter*. The painting was cleaned and restored last year. A young woman in a white satin dress appears in many of Gerard ter Borch's paintings of the 1660s and 1670s, and she has been identified as the artist's step-sister Gesina, also a practicing artist in the ter Borch family. *Woman drinking wine* has the same provenance as *Wine-drinking lady with a sleeping soldier* also by ter Borch, nowadays in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Montpellier. The both paintings were in the collection of Chevalier de Damery, a Parisian art collector in the 18th century. These works were engraved in the 18th century and the reproductions were given the inscriptions “La Santé portée” and “La Santé rendue” respectively. These titles seem to be quite surprising, but they were in keeping with the moralizing spirit of the 18th century. These two paintings were together in different remarkable art collections till 1855, when the Russian Count Kushelev-Bezborodko died, and the ter Borch paintings went their separate ways. Our painting was inherited by his eldest son Grigory. It was around this time that the painting was transferred from panel to canvas. The painting was sold in the auction of Hotel Drouot in Paris in 1869. After that we have no information on its provenance, or who owned the painting until 1923, when the Russian businessman Vladimir Tokarev offered the painting to the Finnish Society of Fine Arts. The painting was purchased with the posthumous donation from chamberlain Linder.

Next autumn 2009 the Sinebrychoff Art Museum will also organize an exhibition *Alehouses and entertainment for masses* in cooperation with the Kadrioru Art Museum in Tallinn, Estonia. The exhibition concentrates on the genre paintings of the Dutch Golden Age. Aside our own collection and the Kadrioru's collection, there will also be displayed some Dutch paintings from the Finnish National Museum, Helsinki; Ostrobothnian Museum, Vaasa; and Gösta Serlachius Art Museum of Fine Arts, Mänttä, which also have interesting works by Dutch and Flemish painters.

