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ANNA TÜSKÉS

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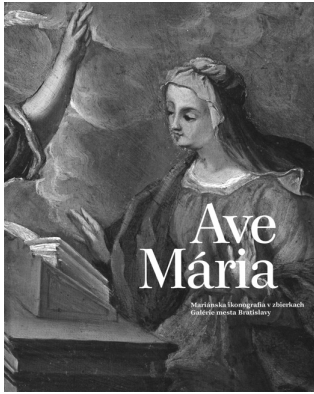
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BOOK REVIEWS AND REPORTS

Ave Mária – Marian Iconography in the Collection of Bratislava City Gallery

Jana LUKOVÁ – Martina VYSKUPOVÁ, Ave Mária - Mariánská ikonografia v zbierkach Galérie mesta Bratislavy (Bratislava, Galéria mesta Bratislavy, 3. 9. 2013–3. 11. 2013), Bratislava 2013.



This exhibition at Bratislava City Gallery is a major event, made even more important by the quality of its catalogue. This exhibition is the second specialising in hagiographic themes to be mounted at Bratislava City Gallery. The first, entitled ‘Martyrs’ Legends’ in 2012, was organised by the same curators. The objects, totalling approximately two hundred, were chosen from the collection of Bratislava City Gallery by the curator of Old Master Paintings and Sculptures Collection, Jana Luková, and the curator of Old Master Drawings and Prints Collection, Martina Vyskupová.

The installation of the exhibition is divided into two sections. The first part provides an overview of the iconography of the Virgin Mary from the 16th to the 19th centuries. This group of approximately one hundred pieces concentrates on bringing the visitor into the closest possible contact with the scenes of Mary’s life, from the offer of Joachim to her coronation. The second part, also containing one hundred works, presents paintings, engravings and sculptures of saints (Saint Stephan I of Hungary, Saint Ladislaus I of Hungary, Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Aloysius Gonzaga), ecclesiastics (the Jesuit priests Alexandre de Gusmão and Francesco Pepe) and lay people (the family of Jacob Meyer) venerating Mary, and some representations of pilgrimage sights in Europe (Sasvár/Šaštín,

Nagyszombat/Trnava, Máriatölgyes/Dubnica nad Váhom, Máriavölgy/Marianka, Mariazell, Ettal, Altötting, Mátraverebély-Szentkút, Máriapócs, Klatovy, Landshut, Pistoia) and one in Mexico (Madonna de la Soledad). The scale of the exhibition is appropriate, giving a balanced survey that leads from the woodcuts of Dürer to eighteenth-century -century Central European paintings and sculptures and to nineteenth-century steel engravings. The second section treats different genres of different qualities in a fascinating manner: ex voto paintings, altar pieces, devotional pictures, prayer cards and works of nuns among others. The visitor can only marvel at how the engravings and paintings interact in terms of their iconography. Comparisons of different iconographic subjects (Holy Family, Mettercia, Saint Lucas painting the Madonna, Immaculata, Mater Dolorosa, Madonna of the Rosary, Mary as a Good Shepherd, Mariahilf, Pieta, Maria lactans and Maria dell'Umiltà) show how rich the cult of Mary was in the 18th century.

There are some real surprises. Among the more remarkable paintings and sculptures representing Mary's childhood, the painting by Andreas Zallinger depicting Saint Anne teaching the Virgin to read (1801) is outstanding; the Virgin's visit to Elizabeth is represented by a sketch for an altar painting from the workshop of Franz Anton Maulbertsch from c. 1760. Visitors can also see a painting entitled 'The Descent of the Holy Spirit' (1833) by Ferdinand Lütgendorff, originally intended for the Church of the Holy Spirit in Dévényújfalu/Devínska Nová Ves. As for the exhibits with lesser-known iconographic subjects, I would like to point out the painting of the vision of St Francis of Assisi at the chapel in Porziuncola (c. 1770), originally in the Church of the Poor Clares in Bratislava.

Among the oldest works from the collection of old master drawings and prints is an interesting composition of the Holy Family with Saints engraved by Agostino Carracci after Antonio Allegri da Correggio in 1586. The works with the most impressive subjects include a print depicting the Holy Family by Jan Sadeler I after Peter Candid's painting in the last third of the 16th century. The viewers' attention is also attracted by the Holy Family with St Anna in Joseph's workshop, a composition by François Ragot after Francesco Vanni. The works by Johann Jacob Haid and Bernhard Vogel from the 18th century depicting the Virgin Mary and St Joseph after paintings of Ján Kupecký are also extraordinary. The most significant 19th century works include the mezzotint entitled 'The Rest of the Blessed Virgin' showing the sleeping Madonna with St John the Baptist by Vincenz Georg Kininger, based on a work by Pompeo Battoni.

The origin of the works also provides an opportunity to learn more about the history of the collection of Bratislava City Gallery as well. Many pieces came from

Bratislava City Museum in 1959-1961, and were acquired from various places, such as firms, or by way of donations from many people. Other items were purchased by City Gallery from private owners, antique dealers or ecclesiastical institutions, from the 1960's to the 1980's.

The catalogue is available only in Slovakian. It is very well illustrated, rich in original research, lucidly and stimulatingly presented. There are short but first-rate discussions of each item, with valuable supporting material, which includes the results of restoration. However, some new or less new research results are missing from the bibliography of some catalogue entries. For the devotional picture of Saint Elizabeth and the pilgrimage sight of Mátraverebély-Szentkút by Sebastian Zeller, it is worth consulting a volume with historical studies of prints by György Rózsa for additional information (*Grafikatörténeti tanulmányok*, Budapest 1998, p. 32, 52, cat. Nr. 19, 106, image 144, 119). For the copper engraving 'Saint Stephen offering the Hungarian Crown to the Virgin Mary' by Jacob Gottlieb Thelott, it is interesting to make a comparison with another copy of this engraving kept in the album 'Imagines Sacrae Beatae Mariae Virginis et Sanctorum Hungariae' of Ferenc Széchenyi in the National Széchenyi Library Budapest. It was first published by Zoltán Szilárdfy in his book on Baroque devotional pictures in Hungary (*Barokk szentképek Magyarországon*, Budapest 1984, nr. 31.) and recently by Éva Knapp in her monograph on the iconography of Saint Stephan in the graphics before 1850 ('Gyönyörű volt szál alakja' *Szent István király ikonográfiája a sokszorosított grafikában*, Budapest – Borda 2001, p. 181, cat. 99). The Budapest copy of the engraving – in contrast to the one in Bratislava City Gallery – bears an inscription in the left lower part: "S. Stephanus primus Rex Hungariae. Negotium Acad. Caes. Francisc. Excudit Aug. Vind. Com Gratia et Priv. S. Caes. Majest". Many of the devotional pictures have already been published in the book by Zoltán Szilárdfy, Gábor Tüskés and Éva Knapp (*Barokk kori kisgrafikai ábrázolások magyarországi búcsújáróhelyekről*, Budapest, 1987). Szabolcs Serfőző has recently published his doctoral thesis (*A sasvári pálos kegyhely története: A zarándoktemplom kialakítása és kegyszobrának kultusza a 18. században*, Budapest 2012) on the pilgrimage site of Sasvár/Šaštín and its representations.

Other representations of important pilgrimage destinations and iconographic types in Central Europe have also been analysed by researchers in the last few years. One may also contest the indication of the artists, such as the "Central European Painter" for many canvases. It would be interesting to try to specify the artist based on the characteristics of the style.

Bratislava City Gallery has a very rich collection of Marian iconography, and certain items are not included in the present exhibition, either because they form part of the permanent exhibition or due to lack of space. Visitors to the Gallery are welcomed by the statue of Madonna Immaculata, originally part of the Plague Column erected between the Capuchin and the Trinitarian Monastery, Bratislava in 1713. The marvellous series of rooms on the first and second floors of the Rococo Mirbach Palace includes a gilt wood statue of Mary Immaculate from the first third of the 18th century, the resurrected Christ appearing to his mother by a Viennese painter c. 1750, and an Annunciation, by Franz Anton Palko around 1758. This ensemble of painting, engravings and sculptures is a perfect demonstration of the Marian cult and iconography in eighteenth-century Central Europe.

ANNA TÜSKÉS