

Ivan Ferenčak

Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts

From Berlin to Zagreb: Paintings from the donation of Ante Topić Mimara to the Strossmayer Gallery of Old Masters

The Strossmayer Gallery in Zagreb, opened for public in 1884, is the most valuable and one of the largest collection of Old Master paintings in Croatia. Despite the intentions of its founder and first donor, Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer (1815 – 1905), to collect and present to Croatian public diverse European painting schools, until the donation of Ante Topić Mimara (1898 – 1987), Gallery mostly exhibited Italian religious paintings. Mimara's donation (intended in 1948 but realised only in 1967), the second largest after the one made by Bishop Strossmayer, greatly enriched sections of Dutch, French and English paintings as well as the themes of profane paintings (portraits, landscapes, genre scenes etc.) in the Gallery's holdings.

Due to the fact that the donation has never been systematically looked into, the aim of my doctoral thesis is to analyze eighty-four donated art works (from a hundred and forty intended), research the circumstances of the donation, and investigate the art works provenance in order to enlighten the context in which Mimara's collection was formed at the art market of the time. Having in mind donators' repeatedly repeated statement not to ask him about where artefacts came from, provenance of the collection is in main focus of my work, especially because of the public opinion that his collection is mostly composed of Old Masters forgeries or stolen art works.

Through this PhD project which will be carried out within the framework of HERA project 15.080 TransCultAA, every piece will be analyzed in detail according to traditional art historical methods (formal, iconographic, comparative, stylistic analysis) with particular attention to its alterations (traces of conservations, overpaints, format modifications etc.) and emphasis on the implementation of the contemporary provenance research as methodological approach. In this sense, diverse labels and mark(ing)s on the back of the paintings will be fully studied and identified as means to detect where the painting came from, and, possibly, to discover its earlier provenance. Also, as a way to discover the provenance of the art works in

question, number of auction catalogues from the first half of the 20th century will be examined.

Until now, through close examination of the paintings in Strossmayer Gallery holdings, labels of several antique/art dealers from Berlin popped-out and it is expected that the further examinations will yield the names of even more individuals. The questions I would like to address at this opportunity concerns the context of the Berlin art market in relation to the formation of Mimara's collection and Mimara himself: who were protagonists with whom Mimara was in contact, what was his role on the Berlin art market and to what extent was he involved. By building up connections between individuals with whom Mimara was in contact, my main objective in this stage of research is to determine the possible pattern of his collecting activities as well as the time span in which single pieces of art found its way to his possession. Getting familiar with this art market creates a groundwork for next steps of this study – namely, looking into the art dealers from whom Mimara acquired art pieces for his collection might shed some new light on earlier provenance of the studied pieces, as well as on their reception and attributions at that time. In this way, unfolding the Berlin-phase of the collecting of art works is only one (but huge) step in interpreting process and circumstances of the formation of the Mimaras' collection on the European interwar, WWII and post-WWII art market.