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Historism in the Painting of Silesian Baroque. The Case of Bernhard Krause.

In the former research of Silesian art the academics from Germany and Poland spoke with one voice that time after 1740, when the Prussian army took up Silesia, was a period of stagnation in art, period of limbo between Baroque and Classicism. However, the newest research on XVIII century painting in Silesia deny this thesis clearly. They show that despite the unfavourable political circumstances and a lot of extra taxes and war tributes the situation of Catholic church in Silesia in that time was gut enough, that it was still the main patron of art. Among a lot of artists were working for Catholic church Bernhard Krause occurred. Without a doubt he was the most outstanding painter of Silesian Rococo, the representative of last generation of Silesian artists, who were educated in the spirit of religious baroque painting in Counter-Reformation, Austrian-Bohemian origin. His artistic work, which in symbolic way closed the extensive history of baroque painting in Silesia, had an interesting dialogue with the past and because of that this is the best example of phenomenon historism in Silesian art.

Bernhard Krause was born in Ząbkowice Śląskie (in German Frankenstein) in 1743. There is no telling where he was taken his primary education of painting. In the 60. of XVIII century he acquired his artistic education in Dresden and Vienna. In the capital of Habsburg Empire Krause was taught for example by Martin van Meytens, who was the court portrait painter of Habsburg family. In this city he also made acquainted with the painting of Vienna masters of art – Paul Troger and Franz Anton Maulbertsch. After returning Silesia Krause found a painting workshop in his family town Ząbkowice Śląskie. It was thriving so dynamically, that to the end of his life in 1803 he wasn't complain about lack of artistic work. He had a lot of prominent Catholic patrons, for example the bishop of Wrocław (in German Breslau) Philipp Gotthard von Schaffgotsch and the Cisterciens from Henryków (in German Heinrichau), Kamieniec Ząbkowicki (in German Kamenz) and Krzeszów (in German Grüssau). First of all Krause painted religious pictures to the churches and monasteries, but nowadays there are also some kept portraits and frescos worked by him.

In my presentation I would like to concentrate on historism in the painting of Bernhard Krause. This phenomenon was characteristic of European painting of XVIII century and was

expressed by conscious dialogue between epochs of art. In this time a lot of artists had this dialogue with their antecedents, for example Franz Anton Maulbertsch in Vienna and Christian Wilhelm Ernst Dietrich in Dresden. Bernhard Krause, who was educated in these artistic centres, came into contact with this phenomenon. In his imposing library in Zabkowice Śląskie he collected circa 80 copies of paintings of European masters, for example Correggio, Guido Reni, Peter Paul Rubens, Rembrandt van Rijn, Anthonis van Dyck. But Krause was especially fascinated by artistic work of Michael Willmann (1630-1706), the most famous painter of Silesian baroque. In Krause's own works there were a lot of quotations from pictures, drawings and engravings by Michael Willmann. He often repeated complete compositions of masterpieces of Willmann that's why he was named "the second Willmann" or "little Willmann". However, in spite of imitation Willmann's compositions Krause kept his own original style, which was formed in range of Rococo of Dresden-Vienna provenance. This manner was so different from dark tonality and expression of Willmann's pictures. Krause's paintings are characterized by diversity and freshness light and pastel colour. He was so subtle put the separate coats of paint, which was characteristic for the range of academic Vienna painting. Krause imitated not only compositions of Willmann but the other artists from Silesia (Jeremias Joseph Knechtel, Johann Claessens), Bohemia (Peter Brandl) and Saxony (Franz Xaver Karl Palko).