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**Acquisition Activity of the Slovak National Gallery during Stalinism as an Image
of Social Identity**

Failure to Look for any Proof as an Art Historical Approach

The current scientific approach to research in the traditional sense consists of asking questions and subsequently looking for arguments which can answer them. It is most often expected to do so by finding direct tangible proofs that would clearly offer a very hard-to-negate conviction of the real truth. In some cases, however, such evidence cannot be found. For example, the work *Mathematician*, which was purchased by the Slovak National Gallery in 1950 can bring us closer to this issue. When examining the question of the reason for its purchase, there is no possibility to answer this question via exact and primordial proofs. There are no archive materials, no letters, no record about the specific reason for purchase.

In such a case, the observer has only two options. Firstly, he can throw away the information acquired so far and try to find other objects where could be possible to present exact proof. Or secondly, he may continue to look for indirect proofs by using the secondary sources and other knowledge. Both views are present in the environment of art-historical practice. While the first one is mostly used in research on 20th century art, the second of the cases is rather applied in the field of medieval art and culture, where direct evidence often no longer exists.

The research dealing with the acquisition strategies of the Slovak National Gallery in the first years of its existence is one of those examples that must find itself at the opposite side of this art historical difference. Not in case of *Mathematician*, but also in many cases, direct archival materials are missing. The reasons are not only the communist approach to controversial materials, but also the unsystematic archiving of gallery's activity in the first years of existence. For this reason, therefore, it is necessary to proceed in a different way. In the form of finding indirect proofs as in the case of medieval research. In the case of the already mentioned work *Mathematician*, a question about reason of purchase can be explained by the hypothesis which based on the identification of the mathematician with the working class and thence could refer to a possible reason for the purchase as the fulfillment of the expectations of the then communist regime. And even a

realistic depiction can refer to this impression. The disadvantage of such an assumption is naturally that the link between the object of research and the proof is much weaker and therefore less convincing than in the case of tangible proof. Such theories are then much easier to challenge. In the case of Mathematician, for example, with counter hypotheses that would refer to the struggle of communism against the old order (the artwork is dated to year 1680) or to the equally possible connection of a mathematician to the bourgeois class. And many other hypotheses could be mentioned, too. After such observation, it seems that each hypothesis can always be challenged through various other points of view and the acceptable truth cannot be found.

What option does the researcher have after that? The only option is to accept the fact that the real truth cannot be revealed, that there is no chance to do so, either by tangible evidence or by argument-based hypotheses. However, this skeptical view does not necessarily mean defeat. On the contrary, such a view can free one from claiming a single truth and accepting the possibility of many truths. What in practice means publishing all possible hypotheses that the researcher had the opportunity to uncover, put them in opposition and thus create a complicated picture of possible truth. Because such a result can be as valuable as evidence-based truth. At least it can come close to the real truth more than silence.