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Zbirateljstvo in umetnostni trg v Ljubljani med obema vojnama na primeru razprodaje Strahlove zbirke

IZVLEČEK

Strahlova zbirka je bila zasebna zbirka slik in umetnoobrtnih predmetov, ki jo je začel v šestdesetih letih 19. stoletja v svojem gradu v Stari Loki pri Škofji Loki na Gorenjskem intenzivno ustvarjati Edvard vitez Strahl (1817–1884) s pomočjo sina Karla viteza Strahla (1850–1929) in njunih pomočnikov. Leta 1930, kmalu po smrti Karla Strahla, je bila na drobno razprodana, vendar je bilo o javni razprodaji slik in premičnin iz njegove zapuščine doslej zelo malo znanega. Prispevek na podlagi sodnih spisov o dražbi Strahlove zapuščine, ki jih hrani enota Zgodovinskega arhiva Ljubljana v Škofji Loki in ki so neprecenljiv vir podatkov o kupcih posameznih slik, pohištva in drugih predmetov, prinaša delni vpogled v strukturo ljubljanskih intelektualnih in podjetniških elit, iz vrst katerih so izšli najpomembnejši zbiralci oziroma imetniki umetnin in starin v času med svetovnima vojnama.

KLJUČNE BESEDE

Strahlova zbirka, razprodaje, zbirateljstvo, Ljubljana, Anton Ustar, Fran Virant, Ivan Zorman

ABSTRACT

LJUBLJANA'S COLLECTION AND ART MARKET IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE AUCTION OF STRAHL'S COLLECTION

Strahl's collection was a private collection of paintings, artworks and artisan objects, which Knight Edvard Strahl (1817–1884) started to create in the 1860s together with his son Knight Karl Strahl (1850–1929) and their assistants in his castle in Stara Loka near Škofja Loka in Upper Carniola. Although the collection was sold off item by item in 1930, soon after Karl's death, not much has been hitherto known about the public sale of paintings and movable property of his estate. Drawing on the judicial proceedings files concerning the auction of Strahl's estate, which are kept in the Škofja Loka unit of the Historical Archives Ljubljana and provide an invaluable source of information on the buyers of individual paintings, pieces of furniture and other objects, the article sheds some light on the composition of Ljubljana's intellectual and entrepreneurial elites, from the ranks of which came the most notable collectors or owners of artworks and antiques in the interwar period.

KEY WORDS

Strahl's collection, auctioning, collecting, Ljubljana, Anton Ustar, Fran Virant, Ivan Zorman

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S U M M A R Y

Ljubljana's collection and art market in the interwar period as exemplified by the auction of Strahl's collection

In the spring of 1930, an auction took place in Stara Loka near Škofja Loka in Upper Carniola to sell the possessions of Knight Karl Strahl, who had died at the end of 1929. Although not a man of wealth, Strahl left behind one of the biggest and most important collections of paintings as well as other objects of cultural and historical value that was created in the nineteenth-century Carniola. Based on Strahl's bequest, purchase option, and discount on starting prices, a large part of the collection was selected and bought by three Slovenian institutions (the National Gallery of Slovenia, the National Museum of Slovenia, and the Ethnographic Museum) before the public auction had even started. Held in May and June 1930, the public sale attracted a sizeable crowd of buyers from many parts of the then Drava Banovina, as well as a few antique dealers from around of what was then the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The contribution focuses on the buyers from Ljubljana, the capital of the Drava Banovina at the time.

Apart from the auction minutes contained in Strahl's probate file, which is now kept in the Škofja Loka unit of the Historical Archives Ljubljana, insight into the events that took place before and during the auction is also provided by documents preserved in the personal file of the notary Števo Sink,

who was the executor of Strahl's estate. The letters that the notary received from many potential buyers from the Drava Banovina, as well as Zagreb, Belgrade, and Vienna reveal a major interest in Strahl's estate, especially paintings, art objects, and furniture.

Most of the many visitors who decided to make several purchases over the course of the auction, which lasted for over one month, came from Ljubljana. Therefore, thanks to fifty buyers who bought the largest number of paintings as well as several pieces of furniture, kitchenware, and decorative items, many paintings and objects can be traced to the capital. Although the visitors from Ljubljana purchased different numbers of objects of different values, taken together, they undoubtedly mostly bought paintings. Whereas the majority of the buyers were highly educated, there were also a handful of antique collectors or traders, and one or two housewives who bought a few pieces of furniture or decorative objects to embellish their homes. The only two hitherto known antique collectors and traders were Amalija Jurečič and Count Emil Auersperg, with the documents revealing their purchasing preferences. Ambitious purchases were also made by private citizens, for instance, the dentist Dr Ivan Oblak, and especially the pharmacy owner Anton Ustar from Ljubljana, who bought a few decorative objects, an authentic Persian rug, and a painting of a Dutch company at the table, identified as the painting *Gostje v sobi* (Guests in the Room). In 2011, the painting was still in private possession in Ljubljana. Soon after the end of the auction, the painter Matej Sternen resold to Anton Ustar two other valuable paintings from Strahl's collection for altogether 5,000 dinars. Even though it is tempting to assume that the pair of paintings *Skupina jezdecev pred točilnico* (A Group of Horse Riders in Front of an Inn) and *Postanek jezdecev* (Horse Riders Taking a Break), which Ustar bought from Sternen, are identical to the pair of paintings *Pred krčmo* (In Front of an Inn) and *Jezdci v pokrajini* (Horse Riders in Landscape) from the collection kept in the Regional Museum in Maribor, there are no sufficient data to confirm this assumption. After the Second World War, Ustar's property was confiscated and nationalized, except for a few paintings which he kept hidden and which after his death were inherited by his second wife Julka Ustar, née Jama. At the auction in Stara Loka, the pharmacy owner bought paintings of relatively high quality and made equally selective purchases of books and graphic sheets.

Nevertheless, what roused most interest of the buyers from Ljubljana were precisely paintings, which is understandable, given that Strahl's gallery was famous far and wide. More than twenty visitors from Ljubljana bought nothing but paintings; some admittedly no more than one or two copperplate engravings and others a substantial number of paintings of relatively good value. Apart from the director

of the National Gallery Ivan Zorman, the dermatologist Dr Fran Virant was one of the most fervent art lovers who took part in Strahl's auction. He bought a painting of Maria Magdalena from Crngrob, portraits of Empress Maria Theresa and Emperor Joseph II, the painting of *Kljunčki v gnezdu* (Birdlings in the Nest), signed by Johann Georg Hamilton, and a painting depicting a company at the table, identified as the painting *Družinski prizor* (Family Scene), which passed via unknown channels into the possession of the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia and in 1986 into the hands of the National Gallery.

The greatest number of paintings were purchased by the well-known industrialist Ivan Rozman, the (co)owner of the factory Ilirija, who beside twenty-four paintings also took home two decorative figurines, one relief and one framed photograph, and the charismatic director of the National Gallery, Ivan Zorman, who was also an art trader. Zorman bought thirty paintings, more than twenty frames, and a host of other objects. Whether he was buying the paintings for his personal collection or the National Gallery was probably not even clear to him at the time. Some were soon resold and others were registered into the gallery inventory book, for example, the replica of the painter Jean Jouvenet's self-portrait, painting *Skupina beračev* (A Band of Beggars) from the collection of Dr Dantsek-Dayka in Bratislava, *Krajina z drevesi* (Landscape with Trees) by Gustav

Canton, Jr., *Speče dekle* (Sleeping Girl) by Cecilia von Strahl, and a figurine of Virgin Mary. After his death in 1969, remaining artworks were inherited by his heirs, including his nephew Marjan Pogačnik, who sold the paintings soon after and distributed the revenue. Following a different path, one of Pogačnik's indirect heirs, Prof. Miha Šengelaja, came into the possession of two paintings from Strahl's auctioned collection that had likewise been bought by Zorman. At the end of the 1930s, the Professor's father, a Russian emigrant Aleksander Šengelaja, who married Zorman's niece, bought from Zorman a pair of paintings depicting horse riders in battle.

The article at hand presents only a small step towards exploring the offer and conditions that prevailed on Ljubljana's art market during the interwar period. After 1918, Ljubljana was no longer merely the capital of the Carniolan territory but of all Slovenes. The distinctive nature of collecting and commissioning artworks enabled entrance and integration into the upper social strata, with the departure of a major part of (foreign) nobility gradually creating space for the new, middle-class elite. The flourishing of the art market under the new social and political circumstances, which may be described as "the golden age" of Slovenian collecting, was, of course, also related to numerous auctions of real estate and especially castle inventories, with the one held in Stara Loka ranking among the most interesting ones due to an extremely large number of paintings.