

THE COLLECTION OF FELIKS JASIEŃSKI'S DONATION – THE FIRST TWO VOLUMES

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On 11 March 1920 Feliks "Manggha" Jasieński signed an act of a donation upon whose basis the National Museum in Cracow (MNK) obtained an enormous collection totalling ca. 15 000 objects: Polish paintings and sculptures from the Modernism era, Polish and European graphic works from the turn of the nineteenth century, arts and crafts (assorted utensils, furniture, ceramics, carpets and *kontusz* belts), and examples of folk and Far Eastern art, predominantly woodcuts and other Japanese artworks. This extraordinary collection can be, without any exaggeration, described as a masterpiece comparable with such outstanding undertakings as Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill, John Soane's residence in 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields in London, the Puławy residence of Isabella Czartoryska born Fleming, or de Goncourt brothers' Maison de l'artiste in the Parisian district of Auteuil. A pity that this fact was went unnoticed by the Cracow councilmen during the collector's lifetime and by museum experts in subsequent years. For all practical purposes, the collection was never permitted to make its voice heard, and from the very onset it was divided between particular sets of museum resources of art and crafts according to a domineering vision of a museum and its obligations, and specifically comprehended learned aesthetics. True, during the 1930s the collection was displayed in the Szofajski town house as an integral exhibition but only partially, since it had been deprived of certain works supposedly fundamental for other displays, such as Podkowiński's *Frenzy*, whose absence in a gallery of Polish painting would have been unimaginable (also today it decorates one of the showrooms at the Cloth Hall, although for some time it was accompanied by a tablet explaining its origin). Later, temporary exhibitions were also unable to grant Jasieński a suitable place in collective memory, thus leaving room for deforming clichés, numerous misunderstandings, and stereotypes. This is the reason why

we should appreciate the initiative of MNK, which in recent years published a donation collection to mark its hundredth anniversary (1920–2020). Plans foresaw ten volumes composed of a separate presentation and an interpretation of the collection as a logical work together with a description of its individual parts (painting, drawing, sculpture, graphic art, and the crafts – Polish, European, and Oriental). This colossal venture was undertaken so as to *highlight and perpetuate in universal awareness the dimension and variety of the donated collection* – to cite Zofia Gołubiew, the then director of the Museum. The published two volumes symbolise the scale of the whole project.

Volume one contains a holistic presentation of the complete collection by Agnieszka Kluczevska-Wójcik, editor of the entire *corpus*, and is the outcome of lengthy studies on Jasieński and his collections, conducted in Poland and France (*Feliks "Manggha" Jasieński i jego kolekcja w Muzeum Narodowym w Krakowie*, 2014). This undertaking called for a thorough analysis of preserved sources since Jasieński was one of the more vivid and most controversial figures in *fin de siècle* Warsaw and Cracow during the Young Poland period as well as an *enfant terrible* of Polish Modernism.

As a lover of Japanese art, which in his opinion was to enliven our culture, Jasieński was the target of attacks and criticism, often unjust. He also became a protagonist of Young Poland legends still recounted today

– on the one hand, a *cliché* likeness of an arrogant megalomaniac and a voracious collector, who would stop at nothing for the sake of obtaining a chosen object (the black legend) and, on the other hand, a portrayal of a patron and a friend of artists, as well as a promoter of Polish art and craft (the white legend). The author declared that she merely wished to recall and *supplement his intellectual portrait*, but

actually she has to a great extent created it because one has to be a highly specialised scout to discover something in existing historiography.

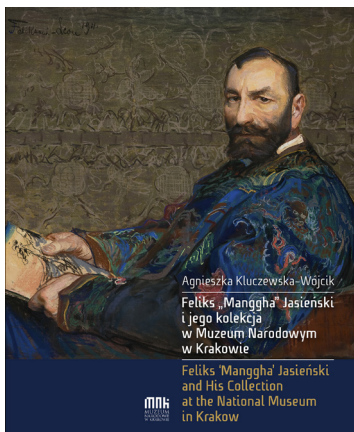
The collector was born in 1861 in Grzegorzewicz (Mazovia). The first part of his biography is preceded by elements of the genealogy of the father's side of the family but mainly that of the mother, *de domo* Wołowska, a descendant of nobilitated Frankist Jews. This was a family of great patriots, insurgents, and subsequently émigrés, whose property and relations in the world of culture played an essential part in Jasiński life. He spent his childhood on his mother's landed estate in Osuchów, amidst palace furniture, souvenirs, and paintings (his later collection contained a set of miniature portraits originating from Osuchów). Later, Jasiński left for Warsaw to continue his home education at the IV Boys' Gymnasium, from which he graduated in 1881, but without passing the final exams (due to an eye condition). Consequently, he was unable to embark upon formal academic courses, and as an un-enrolled student attended lectures first in Dorpat (Tartu) and then, after a brief interval, while undergoing medical treatment in Berlin and Paris. Jasiński studied economy, law, philosophy, history, the history of art, and music. While in Paris, he made his first acquaintance with genuine world art at the Louvre, the local galleries, and the annual Salons, and predominantly with Japanese art (at the time of his arrival Paris was the site of an exhibition organised by Louis Gonse at the Georges Petit Gallery). Completing his education Jasiński went on a trip to Italy and upon his return he married Teresa Łabędzka (their son, Henryk, was born in 1888, and several years later, after his parents divorced, left with his mother to live abroad). Residing together with his family in Warsaw he was collaborated with several periodicals as an art critic, considered a musical career, and composed (but according to the later reminiscences of his son, Jasiński simply did nothing), maintained contacts with the art milieu, i.a. Pankiewicz and Podkowiński, whose works he purchased for his future collections, commissioned portraits, and invited artists to stay with his family in the countryside. He engaged in the revival movement of artistic life in the capital, mainly in the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts (Zachęta) by joining sessions on "new art" and describing himself as a "worker" in this field. After the death of Podkowiński, Jasiński, together with Leon Wyczółkowski, whom he later befriended, organised a monographic exhibition of the artist's works. Finally, the wide gamut of his activity must be supplemented by the

affair produced by the purchase of *Frenzy*, which up to this day remains a *sui generis* hallmark of Polish art at world exhibitions. The painting was the cause of two notorious scandals – first in 1894, when the canvas, on show at the Zachęta, was slashed by its author, and upon a second occasion in 1901, when Zachęta proposed to purchase the restored painting. Manggha put an end to the ensuing disputes by buying the controversial painting, and then moved for always to Cracow.

Kluczevska-Wójcik dedicated the successive parts of her book to Jasiński's long voyage, which from the spring of 1897 to the winter of 1900 led *from Warsaw to London via Jerusalem*. The tour was associated with the chief literary work by Manggha the collector: *Les promenades à travers le monde, l'art et les idées* (Paris and Warszawa 1901), a *sui generis* account of the great expedition and a description of its successive stages, but also a collection of interesting reflections on art, music, and literature (unfortunately, the whole book was never translated into Polish). The voyage started in Constantinople, and then went on to Jaffa and Jerusalem, followed by Egypt, from which the traveller returned to Europe, where he began touring Italy, France, and Germany; in the meantime he also spent some time in London. Everywhere, his experiences included successive artistic discoveries, concerts, spectacles, reading, visits paid to artists' ateliers, and exhibitions (i.a. the 1900 Exposition Universelle and the much criticised exhibition of Polish art at Galerie Georges Petit in Paris).

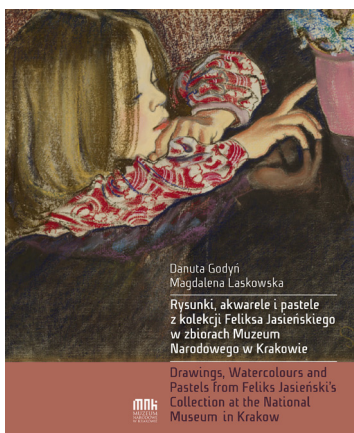
Next, the author presented Jasiński's work for the "Chimera" periodical issued in Warsaw. Upon his return to Warsaw Jasiński, a friend of Zenon Przesmycki (Miriam), published in the periodical in question feuilletons about art and music as well as reviews from exhibitions; he was also an art advisor dealing with the graphic layout and the organisation of exhibitions held at the editor's office. The latter idea, exceptional in Polish conditions, was quite frequent in Paris: such exhibitions were systematically held in

the seat of the avant-garde periodical "Revue Blanche", published by the Natanson brothers (sons of a Warsaw banker). The programme of two week long exhibitions prepared by the collector for "Chimera" for the year 1901 was only partially realized due to his departure. The event was preceded by a loud scandal produced by Gerson's obituary in the press with Manggha undermining the painter's universally acknowledged talent. As a consequence the outraged representatives of the Warsaw milieu brutally attacked his collection of Japanese woodcuts displayed at the Zachęta (with Jasiński responding just as violently). Presumably, Kluczevska-Wójcik wished to avoid delving any deeper into this outright vulgar row.



Agnieszka Kluczevska-Wójcik
Feliks „Manggha” Jasiński
i jego kolekcja
w Muzeum Narodowym
w Krakowie

Feliks „Manggha” Jasiński
and His Collection
at the National Museum
in Krakow



Danuta Godyń
Magdalena Laskowska

Rysunki, akwarele i pastele
z kolekcji Feliksa Jasińskiego
w zbiorach Muzeum
Narodowego w Krakowie

Drawings, Watercolours and
Pastels from Feliks Jasiński's
Collection at the National
Museum in Krakow

In the autumn of 1901 Jasiński settled down in Cracow, where his home was turned into a museum, an exhibition showroom, and a lecture hall. Here, he became a professional columnist, a journalist, and a critic writing for periodicals published in Galicia. From the very onset Jasiński became an active participant of local social and artistic life, loaned objects for assorted exhibitions or organised displays on his own (a total of about 40 held in Warsaw, Cracow, Kiev, and Lwów). Frequently portrayed, he supported artists, and was deeply involved in their problems and disputes (such as the famous duel between Mehoffer and Wyczółkowski). His public appearances, polemics, attacks directed against “confederate patriotism”, and provocations whose battle call was “new art”, were intended to be an “animating stick” put into the wheel of ossified intellectual and aesthetic habits. From the very beginning Jasiński also thought of opening a museum based on his collections for the purpose of moulding the taste of his countrymen. Initially, he planned to donate artworks to the Warsaw Zachęta, but after he left the capital and only when he truly settled down in Cracow did he declare a donation for the National Museum (1903). From that time on he regarded his collections as a museum department of sorts, which Boy-Żeleński depicted in the poem *One More Branch of the National Museum* (1907), performed at the Green Balloon cabaret. The vision of the addition, accepted by Director Feliks Kopera, produced enormous distrust on the part of the Town Council. In turn, this lack of understanding induced Jasiński to return to his earlier idea and, with the collector Juliusz Herman as an intermediary, he embarked upon successful talks with the Museum of Fine Arts in Warsaw (today: the National Museum). The agreement could not be realised due to the outbreak of World War I, which the collector spent in Ukraine; later, in the already different conditions of an independent Polish state, the collection remained in Cracow. In 1920 it was officially presented to the National Museum, and in 1934 part of it was installed at the Szofajski town house, an event the collector did not live to see (he died in 1929).

In extremely interesting fragments of her book Kluczeńska-Wójcik considered the prime areas of the artistic passion of the titular collector. Probably greatest attention was always drawn by his fascination with Japanese art. In the above-mentioned collection of essays “Manggha” Jasiński described the growth of his interests, tours of European galleries, museums, print rooms, libraries, auction houses, and artists’ studios, contacts with collectors and experts, as well as studies and a constant improvement of knowledge on the subject. The author analysed Jasiński’s assessment of Japanese art and competence in this field. The basic part of the collection of woodcuts and other objects was created in the antique shops of Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin, Leipzig, and Vienna, and together with greatest European merchants, particularly Siegfried Bing. With this aim in mind the collector also attempted to establish direct contacts with Japan through the intermediary of the Lwów painter Stanisław Dębicki. Furthermore, he made efforts aimed at the widest possible popularisation of Japanese art in Poland, convinced that this was the path towards a revival of national art (*Przewodnik po dziale japońskim oddziału Muzeum Narodowego*, 1906). The second favourite domain was graphic art. Jasiński constantly expanded

his graphic art collections (by maintaining contact with such marchands as Amboise Vollard), as well as knowledge on the topic (based on publications, illustrated books, and periodicals); he also attempted to broaden relations with Polish and foreign artists (e.g. Max Klinger). He became deeply engaged in supporting graphic art at home, took part in preparing publications and organising competitions, prizes, scholarships, and the activity of associations (the Society of Graphic Artists). The third realm of his endeavours as a collector was the *oeuvre* of contemporary Polish artists. Jasiński initiated the collection of their works at the end of the 1880s, when, after graduation and his European voyages, he settled down in Warsaw. A great impact on the contents of the collections was exerted by discussions on the preferred character of Polish art, echoes of infamous artistic scandals at the Zachęta (the case of the sculptor Antoni Kurzawa and then of Podkowiński). Initially, the collection was composed of the works of Jasiński’s peers: Józef Pankiewicz, Władysław Podkowiński, and Leon Wyczółkowski, and subsequently of Cracow artists, members of the “Art” association, Academy professors – Jan Stanisławski, Jacek Malczewski, Julian Fałat and Stanisław Wyspiański, Józef Mehoffer, Stanisław Dębicki, Wojciech Weiss, and many others. Jasiński was personally acquainted with all of them and in some cases was even their close friend. The book highly assesses those choices as apt reflections of the main tendencies and transformations in Polish art of the period. The author also drew attention to the exceptional sculpture gallery, which, as a rule, does not often become the object of art collections (Antoni Kurzawa, Konstanty Laszczka, Kazimierz Ostrowski), as well as the symptomatic exclusion of artists whom Jasiński described as “art poachers” and “soap producers”, such as Henryk Siemiradzki, Aleksander Kostas, Alfred Wierusz-Kowalski, and Kazimierz Pochwański.

The publication by Agnieszka Kluczeńska-Wójcik is a valuable and extremely interesting presentation of one of the most important accomplishments in the history of Polish culture, which should be classified as an artwork if only due to its meta-artistic character. Feliks Jasiński devoted his entire activity to artists and Polish art. His collections and publications, predominantly *Sztuka Polska* (both a collection of illustrated monographs published in facsimiles and an album from 1903–1905), served this purpose; the same is true of passionate publicistic and other undertakings (prizes, foundations, a scholarship fund). Jasiński was firmly convinced about the unity of art – an almost contemporary vision of an absence of distinction between so-called high and low art; hence his interest in the decorative arts and efforts to grant them a status equal to that of painting. Jasiński was also a lover of the art of the Muslim Orient – a predilection expressed in his collection of carpets, fabrics, and ceramics. Alongside the “professional” crafts, such as the above-presented ones, he also appreciated folk art of the Podhale, Hutsul, and Kaszuby regions (fabrics, wooden artefacts, jewellery, decorations). Jasiński cultivated a special friendship with Wyczółkowski, whom he supposedly exploited by selling his paintings at a profit, but whose *oeuvre* he actually promoted and took care of the rather incompetent artist by organising journeys, paying bills and rent, and settling assorted problems (e.g. he brought over from Paris two graphic presses for Wyczółkowski). Truly, it would be difficult

to imagine Cracow from the Young Poland era without the Wyczół and Manggha team.

The second, even more imposing volume is the first part of a monumental collection encompassing drawings, water colours, and pastels by Polish artists; it is discussed and preceded by a theoretical-historical introduction by Danuta Godyń and Magdalena Laskowska (*Rysunki, akwarele i pastele z kolekcji Feliksa Jasieńskiego w zbiorach Muzeum Narodowego w Krakowie*, 2016). The presented part of the collection totalled 795 works by 86 more or less known, or totally unknown artists (i.a. students at the Maria Niedzielska School of Fine Arts for Ladies, where Jasieński lectured on the history of art). The collector displayed a special attitude towards drawings, of which he was very fond and which he willingly collected: *Personally, I prefer the sketch to the completed work. I regard the artist's personality to be the most valuable in a work of art. In a sketch this personality erupts violently; inspiration and talent outright gush and the artist works obsessed by the idea of creation and realises his dreams as rapidly as possible* (p. 21). The author also drew attention to the eighteenth-century tradition of this attitude, rather universal at the time of Jasieński, namely, the perception of a sketch not solely as a record of the artist's initial conception and a project of a work, but, first and foremost, as evidence of his talent. This part of the collection (more than in other cases) is the effect of direct contacts with artists, collectors, and critics. Jasieński was clearly fond of accentuating his special bond with the world of art, very often demonstrated by the dedications addressed to him as well as his letters to Feliks Kopera.

In an analysis of this part of the collection the foundation of the author's narration is composed of artists and sets of their works. In each case, upon the basis of preserved sources, the publication describes transactions, loans of artworks for exhibitions, deposits at MNK, sales, and exchanges. A special rank was held by Leon Wyczółkowski and his 325 works. Jasieński esteemed the sketches executed by his friend probably even higher than completed canvases since the former suited perfectly his sensitivity and aesthetics. *Wyczółkowski is the co-creator of my collections* – he was in the habit of saying owing to the fact he either received the majority of the works as gifts or bought

them at low prices (which, in turn, enabled exchange and other purchases). Just as important for the collector was the *oeuvre* of Józef Pankiewicz, whom he met already in Warsaw (*There are no sketches by Pankiewicz, only his canvases*), Władysław Podkowiński, Józef Mehoffer, whose 30 canvases included portraits of Jasieński, historical, Biblical and mythological scenes, landscapes and a cartoon for a polychrome (the Wawel cathedral treasury) and stained glass windows (Freiburg cathedral), Stanisław Wyspiański, Stanisław Dębicki – a Lwów-based lover of Japanese woodcuts, and a number of other painters from Lwów (Juliusz Makarewicz, Aleksander Augustynowicz, Jan Kotowski), together with Olga Boznańska, Jacek Malczewski, Kazimierz Sichulski, Wojciech Weiss, Jan Stanisławski, Józef Chełmoński, Ferdynand Ruszczyk, Karol Tichy, and Tymon Niesiołowski.

A highly valuable element of the publication is a catalogue of works containing superior illustrations, which allow the reader to outright see the collections (although this is not an everyday practice in such cases). The catalogue is supplemented by appendices containing reproductions of inventory cards from the Jasieński collections: *Spis Rzeźb i Obrazów* (made on 11 January 1906), as well as lists of works deposited by the collector at the National Museum in Cracow and those withdrawn from the deposit, together with various other documents, including a *sui generis* morality certificate (*Wybór dokumentów archiwalnych świadczących o finansowej uczciwości Feliksa Jasieńskiego oraz jego zaangażowaniu w działalność mece-nasowską*); the volume ends with a bibliography and a list of archival material.

It must be added that both books feature a lucid narration and are elegantly written; if something needs to be criticised it is fragments producing a certain dissatisfaction, such as the question of the numerous deposits at the Cracow National Museum prior to the donation. Mentioned upon a number of occasions, they are not discussed in greater detail in the two volumes, although appendices of the catalogue of drawings contain pertinent documents.

The publication project of the National Museum in Cracow is, nonetheless, extremely valuable; hopefully, it will be successfully completed for the round anniversary of Jasieński's donation.

Abstract: These are the first two volumes out of the ten planned by the National Museum in Cracow, which together will constitute the publication of the body of work donated to the museum by Feliks "Manggha" Jasieński. One volume presents the collector's creative biography and the history of his various collections. There are also attempts to interpret the nature of the content of his collections, mainly woodcuts and other Japanese objects, as well as modern Polish art, paintings, engravings (together with a set of European engravings) and decorative arts. The second volume is the first part of a monumental catalogue of the collection which

covers drawings, watercolours and pastels by Polish artists. The subsequent eight volumes are envisaged to cover particular parts of this extensive collection (of Polish, European and Eastern paintings, drawings, sculpture, engravings and decorative arts). This enormous undertaking marks the 100th anniversary of Jasieński's donation (1920–2020), and, as Zofia Gutubiew put it, is intended to *visualise and fix the extent and variety of the collection in the public's awareness*. The publishing project by the National Museum in Cracow is extremely valuable, and it should be hoped that it will succeed as intended.

Keywords: collecting, collections, painting, modern art, Polish art, Japanese art, Japanese woodcut, European engraving, Cracow, Zachęta Society of Fine Arts in Warsaw, National Museum in Cracow

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