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# A KNIGHT IN THE SERVICE OF ART. HANNA BENESZ IN MEMORIAM (1947–2019)

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I met Hanna Benesz in late 1999 or in 2000. It was a grey autumn afternoon. I had asked for some consultation on several Dutch and Flemish paintings which were wartime losses of the National Museum in Warsaw. Hanna Benesz carefully listened to my doubts, and taking out respective cards, she interpreted the notes put on them. Outside, night had fallen, and the study was lit with a desk lamp. In the darkness, only her chiaroscuro silhouette stood out, while in her partially darkened face framed with raven hair, expressive eyes mesmerized. This is the image my memory instantly recalled when utterly by accident several months after her death I found out she had passed away.

Highly-esteemed in Poland and abroad, Hanna Benesz was an art historian, museum curator, and specialist in Dutch and Flemish painting. Born in Olsztyn in 1947, she spent her adolescence in Jasło, where having passed her final school exam in 1965, she graduated from the Stanisław Leszczyński Secondary School. Known to her school mates as Hanna Twardowska, she is recalled in social media with much fondness. Actually, her husband Jan Benesz graduated from the same Secondary School, too.<sup>1</sup> Hanna's uncle was Fr Jan Twardowski, an illustrious poet, a subtle, yet penetrating world observer with a great sense of humour.<sup>2</sup> His niece can be attributed exactly the same qualities. She studied at the University of Warsaw at the Institutes: of Art History and of Applied Linguistics, acquiring knowledge of fine arts and their history, as well as of linguistics and English. That period in her life, however, was not turbulence-free, since during the students' protest in March 1968, she was detained and put in custody, first at the Mostowski Palace Warsaw Police Headquarters, and subsequently in the Rakowiecka Street Prison. She was also expelled from University. Released, she

passed entrance exams to study history of art, and owing to the kindness of her former professors, she was also allowed to take the exams she had missed at the English Studies.

Having graduated from University, in 1975, she began working for the National Museum in Warsaw at the European Painting Gallery, at the time curated by Prof. Jan Białostocki, an illustrious art historian of high standing. Her task consisted in completing the documentation of the paintings that belonged to the department.<sup>3</sup> This applied to the works which in their majority were kept in storerooms, since the works displayed in the Gallery were generally catalogued.<sup>4</sup> Thanks to this long-lasting and tedious work, Benesz became acquainted with hundreds of pieces not shown to the public on a daily basis, thus gaining overall knowledge of the Museum's resources. Acquiring information on the paintings, she focused on both their artistic and historical aspects, particularly thoroughly studying their provenance, and verifying their respective inventory entries. Owing to numerous post-WW II vicissitudes, many paintings in the National Museum in Warsaw had double, triple, or even confused inventory numbers. The reasons for such a situation were explained in the 2012 'Muzealnictwo' by Roman Olkowski.<sup>5</sup> Such a detailed verification of every object led to spectacular discoveries and attributions, this yielding future publications. Benesz interrupted her career on four occasions due to the birth of her respective children, following the break, however, she would always resume her work with enthusiasm, entirely committed to fulfilling her assigned tasks.

In 1991, Benesz was appointed curator of Dutch and Flemish painting in the Collection of Old European Art at the National Museum in Warsaw. It was documenting the



1. Hanna Benesz

collection, studying attributions, iconographic complexities, provenance issues and the objects' preservation state that remained her main priority. Upon becoming curator, her main task was to elaborate a full reasoned catalogue of the collection of Dutch and Flemish painting, for which she invited a colleague from the Department, Maria Kruk, an excellent specialist in the topic, to join her. Both scholars boasted passive knowledge of Dutch, which greatly facilitated the work.

Continuing the activities of her predecessors, for the permanent display she would select works of high artistic qualities as well as representative of respective schools, periods, and painting genres. Nonetheless, Benesz would not hesitate to display lower-quality pieces if they happened to be the only available examples of an interesting or rare iconography, or testimonies to the phenomena occurring in painting.

In Benesz's view, the ideal means of displaying works, particularly in temporary exhibitions, was to hang them substantially separated from each other, surrounded by vast empty spaces and lit with high-quality spotlights. However, if such comfort was not available and space shortage forced the curator to make drastic decisions with respect to the display mode and size, she would follow the tendency she discovered in herself to crowd exhibits, in order to present as much as possible from what was worth viewing. Thus, she did not find it disturbing to hang paintings in two rows or group them thematically, and although such a display mode would not be praised by 'purists' and 'museum aesthetes', it was positively appraised by the public who found such a presentation a good opportunity to view a rich selection

of landscapes, still lifes, portraits, as well as genre, biblical or mythological scenes, or religious paintings. The question of space was solved in the Flemish Baroque room by designing a system of screens creating meandering zones for different painting genres, thus allowing the display of a bigger number of objects.<sup>6</sup>

In 2008, Hanna Benesz was looking forward to the changes meant to occur following the Museum's renovation, this including a new arrangement of the Gallery of European Painting. She was awaiting the implementation of the design foreseeing more room for the permanent display arranged in compliance with modern standards, displaying only works of the highest quality in adequate space perfectly selected for each of them, with study rooms densely covered with works, also used for minor theme- or problem-focused displays.<sup>7</sup> The concept was implemented, though since then the interior arrangement has undergone subsequent metamorphoses.

The second important issue which Hanna Benesz dedicated herself to was the promotion of the collection. She fulfilled this task through publications, papers delivered at international conferences, seminars and congresses, as well as by mounting exhibitions, not merely in the Warsaw Museum, but also in other Polish cities, and countries worldwide. In 1992–1993, one of her exhibitions reached as far as distant Japan, where it was shown in five cities: Kumamoto, Toyohashi, Yokohama, Osaka, and Tokyo.<sup>8</sup> Benesz insisted on a wider public becoming acquainted with the collection of Dutch and Flemish painting gathered at the National Museum in Warsaw. Insightful penetrating descriptions she authored of digitized paintings by Flemish, Dutch, and Belgian masters were uploaded on the Museum's website and 'Digital National Museum in Warsaw'. Furthermore, she conducted popularizing actions in periodicals addressed not only to specialists in art history, but also a wider group of readers.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, she gave lectures held at the National Museum in Warsaw and meant to introduce Flemish and Dutch painting to the public, as well as talks delivered at various cultural institutions, such as the 'Anin' Community Centre.<sup>10</sup> It was for the same reasons that she uploaded information on exhibitions of North-European painters and their works which might contain aspects of religious experience on the website of the Anin Parish.<sup>11</sup> Claiming that she treated the paintings entrusted to her like a mother treats her children, she took care of them meticulously, wanting to boast about them before the world, not sparing them praise in public, even if slightly overestimated.<sup>12</sup>

It is thus not surprising that the majority of her articles were published in English, therefore promoting the collection among international readers, while obviously not eliminating the Polish ones. She released her papers in 'Bulletin du Musée National de Varsovie' (1991, 1998), the annual of the National Museum in Warsaw established at the instigation of Prof. Jan Białostoski in 1960, aiming at promoting the Museum's collection abroad through articles written only in foreign languages. Moreover, she published in 'Oud Holland' (1997, 2001/2002), a quarterly founded in 1883, currently the oldest of the surviving artistic and historical periodicals in the world, since 1972 supported by the Netherlands Institute for Art History (RKD).<sup>13</sup> Additionally, she was one of the authors of the 'Bulletin of Art History'

(1998), publishing papers dedicated to art, also in foreign languages. Additionally, her papers appeared in 'Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie' (2013), a journal published since 1938 with intervals in 1939–1956 and 1993–2011, and restored in 2012 as a bilingual Polish-English 'Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie. Nowa Seria /Journal of the National Museum in Warsaw. New Series'.

It was on two occasions that Hanna Benesz participated in international symposia held in 1999–2004 at the instigation of Prof. Zygmunt Ważbinski at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, their proceedings published in the 'Sztuka i Kultura' [Art and Culture] series (Vol. III, 2002 and Vol. V, 2004). She also attended congresses and study trips of CODART, an international network for curators of Dutch and Flemish art in museums worldwide,<sup>14</sup> which she was a founding member as of 1998, participating in its activities. The first congress she attended was CODART VIJF in Bruges in March 2002. Furthermore, she participated in study visits to Sweden, north-eastern provinces of the Netherlands, French Flanders, and to northern Italy.

Benesz significantly contributed to two events in Poland: the 2004 study visit to the museums of Gdansk, Warsaw, and Cracow boasting Dutch and Flemish art in their collections, organized several days following the 7<sup>th</sup> CODART Congress (CO DART ZEVEN),<sup>15</sup> and to the 20<sup>th</sup> CODART Congress (CODART TWINTIG) held in Warsaw in 2017. Both offered substantial potential for the promotion of the art of the Flemish, Dutch, and of Belgians in Polish collections.

Over that period, she cooperated closely with CODART Directors: the founder Gary Schwartz and his successor Gerdien Verschoor. Ms Verschoor and Hanna Benesz had known each other from the time when the first served as a cultural attaché at the Warsaw Embassy of the Netherlands. Gerdien Verschoor boasted a thorough knowledge of Poland and Polish culture, as well as a good command of Polish not merely due to her function at the Embassy, but because she had studied in Poland and defended her Phd here.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, Hanna Benesz benefitted from online publications to promote knowledge of the collection: publications on the websites of RKD STUDIES (Gerson Digital: Poland)<sup>17</sup> and of CODART (CODART eZine). She used that platform to release her studies and papers, information on events, symposia, congresses, conferences, study trips, new arrangements of the permanent display and presented exhibitions, as well as on the history of the Warsaw collection, or the ties between Gdansk and Dutch art. CODART eZine twice published interviews with her;<sup>18</sup> moreover, information on the Dutch Order she received was published there,<sup>19</sup> and so was Benesz's moving obituary.<sup>20</sup>

Hanna Benesz curated or co-authored some dozen exhibitions. She was of the opinion that a successful script can only be created with a thorough knowledge of the collection and a multitude of good ideas. However, she emphasized, that oratory and persuasion skills were in this respect of importance, too, since they allowed to make museum director believe in one's ideas and visions in order to receive the director's support to implement them.<sup>21</sup>

Her first exhibition mounted was the 1985 display of 17<sup>th</sup>-century Flemish painting in Legnica.<sup>22</sup> Her two exhibitions shown in Japan were successful, too: the first being



2. Hanna Benesz during the CODART VIJF study trip to Bruges, 2002

the afore-mentioned one held in 1992–1993<sup>23</sup> and the second in 1997–1998, curated by Iwona Danielewicz, the Exhibition's originator, focused on European academism.<sup>24</sup> Hanna Benesz was the curator of the latter when the display was physically mounted in place, in Japan. A major museum event organized at the National Museum in Warsaw was the presentation of Peter Paul Rubens's *Descent from the Cross* from the collection of the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg and of Passion iconography related to that presentation (2000).<sup>25</sup> The very opening of the exhibition was attended by an immensurable crowd of invited guests. Mounted to celebrate the second millennium of Christianity, next to the display of European Baroque painting which peregrinated to Japan, the Exhibition was the project that, in her own view, best reflected her concept of creating exhibitions. When implementing this project she could boast of another accomplishment, since mainly thanks to sponsors' generosity, the beautiful painting by Abraham Janssens *Lamentation of Christ* could be revealed to scholars and the public. A complex conservation process restored the painting, previously underestimated, in oblivion, and considered to be merely a copy, as a genuine work by the exquisite Flemish master.<sup>26</sup> Its beauty stunned the media and the public.<sup>27</sup>

Hanna Benesz also participated in exhibitions mounted by several organizers; they were as follows: 'Transalpinum. From Giorgione and Dürer to Titian and Rubens. Painting from the Collections of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, the National Museum in Warsaw and the National Museum in Gdansk' (18 Sept–10 Dec 2004, National Museum in Warsaw; 21 Dec 2004–20 Feb 2005, National

Museum in Gdansk);<sup>28</sup> 'Rubens, Van Dyck, Jordaens. Golden Age of Flemish Painting 1608–1678; Paintings from Museums in Vienna and Kassel and from Polish Collections' (6 Dec–30 Dec 2007, National Museum in Warsaw); 'Flemish Painting of the Age of Rubens, Van Dyck, Jordaens, 1608–1678' (15 Jan–26 March 2008, National Museum in Gdansk).<sup>29</sup>

When analysing the changes that had occurred during her career, she observed that currently mounted exhibitions tried to foresee public's expectations and meet them, and were more attractive than exhibitions from the past. This was all due to the employment of professional designers and a growing availability of new technologies. She, however, missed the old more academic view of art, those chronological displays of works arranged in compliance with respective artistic schools, exhibitions that used to be a valuable assistance to art history students. She was of the opinion that in the early years of her work for the Museum, thanks to the priorities formulated by Prof. Białostocki for museum curators, a better balance between research into collections, regarded as the basic duty of the collection curator, and mounting temporary exhibitions was achieved, although the latter were neither less frequent nor less important than presently, however prepared as a shared effort of the team. She could not help thinking that museum curators nowadays were less interested in documenting collections and the provenance of museum exhibits than in mounting temporary exhibitions with attractive scenography and exquisitely published catalogues. Additionally, they were obliged to handle the financing aspect of their projects. Benesz's greatest desire was to be able to transfer all the organizational and financing tasks onto another individual, for herself to be able to concentrate exclusively on the content of the exhibition as such.<sup>30</sup>

One of her unaccomplished projects, which she had in mind, though saw no prospects for acquiring financing with Polish resources, was mounting a monographic exhibition of the works of Bernaert de Rijckere (1535–1590), a little-known 16<sup>th</sup>-century Flemish painter born in Kortrijk, who died in Antwerp.<sup>31</sup> Six of his works are in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw. One being an allegorical group (family) portrait posed to resemble the scene of *The Finding of Moses* showing, as identified by Hanna Benesz, Diane de Poitiers Duchess de Valentinois, the mistress of King Henry II of France as the main protagonist, and the biblical scene symbolized at the time care she was taking of the child entrusted to her. The painting came from the collection of Cypryan Lachnicki (1824–1906), a painter, art connoisseur, and an honorary director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Warsaw<sup>32</sup> in 1876–1906, who had purchased the painting in France from a private collector. Bequeathed to the Museum in 1902, the painting reached it in 1908. Its detailed description can be found in the catalogue authored by Hanna Benesz and Maria Kluk and on the website of the National Museum in Warsaw.<sup>33</sup>

However, what served as the actual impulse to consider this project was the discovery of five allegorical paintings which could be attributed to the artist.<sup>34</sup> They arrived at the Museum in the course of the 1945 restitution campaign from the repository of the Ministry of Culture and Art located at the Paulinum Castle in Jelenia Góra. Showing female

busts, the paintings differed in head pose and ornaments: the first, shown in three quarters, of refined hairstyle and looking to the right, features a pearl earring and a pearl necklace; the second of raised eyes, looking leftward, boasts hair crowned with an ornament with pearls, shells, corals, and flowers; wearing a pearl necklace and a pearl earring, with a shawl covering the hair and shoulders, the third is looking straight ahead; the fourth, in a veil attached to her hair with a pearl pin and enshrouding the shoulders and framing the décolletage, is looking down and leftwards; shown in profile, the fifth surrounded by a veil, partially flowing down her back, and partly framing the décolletage, and fastened in the middle with a buckle, features hair adorned with pearls. The latter painting, seeming inferior to the other signed ones in its technical and artistic layer, is, in Hanna Benesz' opinion, a most likely later reconstruction executed by Abraham, Bernaert's son, who following his father's death completed some of his works. According to the Catalogue's authors, the set may be personifying Christian virtues.<sup>35</sup>

Unable to identify a Polish sponsor ready to generously support a little-known Dutch painter, Benesz's dream was to have such a monographic exhibition organized under CODART's patronage in one of the museums in the Netherlands. She was aware that this could be an event of a major academic impact. She also cherished hope that even if she personally was unable to mount this display, in the future a group of her successors would successfully face the challenge, for which she had prepared grounds with her long-standing work.

As mentioned above, beginning as of 1995, Hanna Benesz and Maria Kluk, also a curator at the Department of Foreign Painting, were working on a full collective catalogue which finally covered the whole collection of Netherlandish painting (1494–1600) as well as Dutch, Flemish and Belgian until 1983, described in 973 notes featuring excellent, often full-page-size coloured photographs. Each note contained all basic information on the painting, including a brief biography of the artist, covering thoroughly studied provenance, references to iconographic sources, bibliography and a brief comment in the event if this was required by issues related to the attribution or iconography. The Catalogue *Early Netherlandish, Dutch, Flemish and Belgian Paintings 1494–1983 in the Collections of the National Museum in Warsaw and the Palace at Nieborów. Complete Illustrated Summary Catalogue* was published in 2016 in two volumes, the first containing signed works and attributed to identified artists, while the second dealt with works by non-identified painters, and included a concordance and numerous indexes.<sup>36</sup> During a gala held at the Royal Castle in Warsaw on 16 May 2017, both authors were honoured with the Prize in the '2016 Sybilla' Competition for the Museum Event of the Year in the 'Publication' Category.<sup>37</sup>

That very same month, on 22 May 2017, Hanna Benesz received the Order of Orange-Nassau (Oranje-Nassau) of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade awarded by King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands. The ceremony of presenting Hanna Benesz with the Order was held at the Stanislavian Theatre in the Royal Łazienki in Warsaw on the second day of the 20<sup>th</sup> CODART Congress (*CODART TWINTIG*). The decoration and the knighting were performed by His Excellency Ron van Dartel, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

to Poland. In this way the government of the Netherlands showed their appreciation and awarded Hanna Benesz for her research into Netherlandish, Dutch, and Flemish painting, yielding, among others, the monumental catalogue of the collection of this painting in the National Museum in Warsaw, as well as her efforts to promote this collection worldwide, thus contributing to promoting Dutch cultural heritage abroad.<sup>38</sup>

It is in prizes and awards that her career was appreciated, and so was the experience exchange with colleagues from other museum centres, including the Netherlands, as well as the cooperation with CODART. From the very launch of her career Hanna Benesz played an important role in Polish museology and art history: she became member of the Warsaw Section of the Society of Art Historian already on 1 July 1975, from the beginning establishing contacts with colleagues from other regions of Poland. Her co-workers saw in her a rare example of a researcher who understands the complexity of a museum curator's job, paying equal attention to iconographic, provenance, as well as to technical research, but also showing that meticulous hard work on a daily basis can yield spectacular exhibitions or collection catalogues.

Hanna Benesz certainly was not commonplace. Boasting an unusual gift for learning languages, she was fluent in English and French. Furthermore, she had an excellent command of German, to the extent that Prof. Jan Białostocki who could speak it fluently assigned to her writing correspondence in German or the translation of a catalogue.<sup>39</sup> Having stayed on the Apennine Peninsula for three weeks, she had sufficient command of Italian to communicate in it. Her passive command of Netherlandish has already been mentioned. Hanna Benesz was extremely hard-working, meticulous, disciplined, and persistent. One could easily see that she loved her work.

Moreover, she boasted an excellent talent for assessing objects, in other words, she 'had a good eye', as they say in the jargon of art historians. Thanks to extensive knowledge and vast experience, her attributions and datings, opinions and expert's opinions displayed extreme accuracy. She was often requested to confirm identification and prepare an expert opinion in the cases of recovered 'wartime losses'. Those were the tasks assigned to her by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, as happened in the case of the Wrocław painting: the work by Jacob Jordaens *St Ivo, a Patron of Lawyers (St Ivo Giving Alms to the Poor)* put on sale by Sotheby's in London, or for the National Museum in Gdansk, as was the case of *Still Life with Birds* by Melchior Hondcoeter.<sup>40</sup> She also authored entries for auction catalogues.<sup>41</sup>

She published only when she deemed something really worthy of publication, and only when it had been thoroughly thought through, documented, and well argued, recalls Prof. Jacek Tylicki.<sup>42</sup> This was exactly the case of the *Temptation of St Anthony*, lost during WW II,<sup>43</sup> and recovered many years later,<sup>44</sup> before the war thought to have been a work by Lucas Cornelisz de Kock,<sup>45</sup> which in 1955 Jan Białostocki attributed to Jan Wellens de Cock.<sup>46</sup> In her paper, Hanna Benesz presented a meticulous provenance of the Warsaw painting, the iconological interpretation of the topic, and thoroughly researched attribution. Following



3. Hanna Benesz receiving the Netherlandish chivalric Order during the CODART TWINTIG Congress in Warsaw, 2017

(Photos: 1 – from the Benesz family collection; 2 – A. Janiszewska; 3 – from the collection Embassies of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Warsaw)

earlier researchers into the painter, she compared the painting with the print after his *Landscape with St Christopher* and the one featuring the inscription: *Pictum / J. Kock*. Since the artist was a strongly enigmatic personage, she supposed, like other scholars, that he could have been an agglomerate of several other painters. In 2011, Jan Piet Filedit Kok suggested to call the painter Master J. Kock.<sup>47</sup> Following this, on the grounds of the till-then findings and the formal analysis of the *Landscape with the Legend of St Christopher* at the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg, Benesz suggested to change the attribution of the painting previously considered a work of the Mandijn / Huys group to, similarly as in the case of the *Temptation of St Anthony*, have been executed by the Antwert Jan Wellens de Cock / Master J. Kock group.<sup>48</sup> Despite her vast knowledge and excellent identification skills, she would often ask for the second opinion on her work and correction of mistakes. *This, perhaps, explains, recalls Prof. Jacek Tylicki, why she never obtained any higher academic titles, which she fully deserved, but by which she set no store.*<sup>49</sup>

Before she retired, she had made efforts to share her knowledge, experience, and work ethos with junior colleagues. She often repeated that any beginning museum curator should first of all gain a thorough knowledge of the collection that has been entrusted to their care, and a deep feeling of responsibility for it. She inspired her successors with her openness to the world, international contacts, and cooperation with different museums. She made them acquainted with CODART, introducing them into its activity. Benesz infected others with her passion for art. Even when

retired, she joined in the Museum projects. She conducted research into a group of anonymous paintings discovered in the collection, finding new attributions for many, and explaining their iconography.

A group of her colleagues recalls her as an extremely approachable person, warm, friendly, patient, and good. *Not only have we lost a leading specialist in her domain, but also an extremely dear friend.*<sup>50</sup> Altruistic and full of empathy, she assisted people in need: she would raise funds to help the sick and poor, she would take children from poverty-stricken households on holiday, she supported her friends in their crises, letting them stay with her if needed; she also provided assistance to the persecuted during the martial law in Poland. Furthermore, she was on the committee raising funds for the organ for the Anin church, which she also supported with her writing.<sup>51</sup> Those who had the chance of meeting her observed a very special quality, which her friends characterized as follows: *She had that unique ethical integrity, that hard to define sense of what is good and decent, and what isn't. For many she*

*was a moral authority, manifesting appropriate attitudes and decisions. She had a deep belief in God, and was for us a rare example of a Christian in the profound meaning of the word.*<sup>52</sup>

I saw Hanna Benesz for the last time during the Sybilla Gala in 2017 when her and Maria Kluk's *opus magnum*, their many-years' Benedictine work, was being awarded. We spoke about art, plans, past and current issues. I mentioned a painting on which I was eager to learn her opinion. Hanna Benesz readily agreed to do so. However, the issue was not pressing, and I only wanted to find out what she thought about it out of curiosity. Meanwhile, later developments forced me to focus on other matters. When I learnt she had passed away, and I pictured in my mind the scene of our first encounter, I understood that although I might hear lots of views on that painting, I shall never hear that one. And at such moments one's mind begins to persistently repeat the well-known verses from her Uncle's poem: *Let's hasten to love people, for they depart this life so promptly.*

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**Abstract:** Hanna Benesz graduated from the Institutes: of Art History and of Applied Linguistics at the University of Warsaw. Her whole career launched in 1975 remained inseparably connected with the National Museum in Warsaw, where she worked at the Gallery of European Art curating the Flemish and Dutch collections. She followed all the promotion steps: from assistant to curator. Benesz strongly believed that museum curator's job was grounded in a perfect knowledge of the collection. Thanks to her research conducted into the paintings amassed in National Museum's storerooms, she successfully attributed a substantial number of works and identified provenance of many. She studied iconography applying research methods worked out by iconology. Moreover, she focused on the paintings' technical condition, this occasionally leading to spectacular 'restorations', e.g. the identification of a genuine work by Abraham Janssens (ca 1575–1632) the Lamentation of Christ in a forgotten work, previously considered to be a copy. Author and co-author of many exhibitions, she cooperated with museum curators around the world. Her exhibition on Baroque art

reached as far as Japan. Benesz's intention was not only to present the paintings from the National Museum's collections through a direct contact of visitors with the works, but also in publications, mainly in English and online. As soon as she became curator, together with Maria Kluk she focused on working out the reasoned catalogue *Early Netherlandish, Dutch, Flemish and Belgian Paintings 1494–1983 in the Collections of the National Museum in Warsaw and the Palace at Nieborów. Complete Illustrated Summary Catalogue*, published in 2016. A year later, the Catalogue was honoured with the main prize in the Sybilla Competition in the category for publications, while the King of the Netherlands awarded Hanna Benesz with the chivalric Order of Orange-Nassau (Oranje-Nassau) of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade; she was decorated with it by the Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands during the 20<sup>th</sup> CODART Congress held at the Warsaw Łazienki Palace.

Not only was Hanna Benesz an outstanding museum curator and scholar, but also a trusted friend and a warm empathetic person, sensitive to other people's misfortunes.

**Keywords:** Hanna Benesz, Jan Białostocki, Maria Kluk, museum curator, museology, provenance studies, Netherlandish painting, Dutch painting, Flemish painting, Belgian painting, Abraham Janssens, Bernaert Rijckere, CODART, Order of Oranje-Nassau.

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#### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Obituary on Facebook, <https://www.schoolandcollegelists.com/PL/Jas%C5%82o/1443945569223047/l-Liceum-Og%C3%B3lnokszta%C5%82c%C4%85ce-im.-Kr%C3%B3la-Stanis%C5%82awa-Leszczyc%C5%84skiego-w-Ja%C5%9Ble> [Accessed: 12 January 2021].
- <sup>2</sup> J. Tylicki, quoted after the in memoriam paper titled Hanna Benesz (1947-2019), <https://www.codart.nl/personal/hanna-benesz-1947-2019/> [Accessed: 12 January 2021].
- <sup>3</sup> *Curator's interview*, Hanna Benesz, interviewed by Ruud Priem, p. 4, <http://ezine.codart.nl/17/issue/46/artikel/hanna-benesz-interviewed-by-ruud-priem/?id=203#/page/4> [Accessed: 12 January 2021]. The interview had been published earlier in the CODART Courant (Winter edition 2008), <https://www.codart.nl/feature/interview/hanna-benesz-interviewed/> [Accessed: 12 January 2021].
- <sup>4</sup> M. Walicki, *Przewodnik po dziale malarstwa obcego* [Guide to the Foreign Painting Department], Warszawa 1936; J. Starzyński, M. Walicki, *Katalog Galerii Malarstwa Obcego* [Gallery of Foreign Painting], Warszawa 1938; *Malarstwo europejskie w zbiorach polskich (1300–1800)* [European Painting in Polish Collections (1300-1800)], M. Walicki, J. Białostocki (Comp.), Warszawa 1955 [Warsaw 1955] (2nd Edition Warszawa 1958); *Europäische Malerei in Polnischen Sammlungen, 1300–1800*, J. Białostocki und M. Walicki (bearb.), Warszawa 1957.

- <sup>5</sup> *Curator's interview...*, p. 4; Roman Olkowski wrote about the problems resulting from chaotic entries in inventories, see R. Olkowski, *O badaniu proveniencji muzealiów* [Researching into Museum Exhibits' Provenance], 'Muzealnictwo' 2012, No. 53, pp. 27-37.
- <sup>6</sup> See CODART Courant 10, June 2005 [Accessed: 12 January 2021].
- <sup>7</sup> CODART 2008; also Dorota Folga-Januszewska wrote about the planned renovation, though as can be read in her paper, the Galleries: of Ancient Art, Faras Gallery, of European Painting, or of Decorative Art were to remain in their so-far or slightly reduced form, see D. Folga-Januszewska, *Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie wobec planów rozbudowy Głównego Gmachu w latach 1999-2010* [The National Museum in Warsaw versus the Plans of the Extension of the Main Building in 1999-2010], in: *Przeszłość przyszłości... Księga Pamiątkowa ku czci Profesora Stanisława Lorenza w setną rocznicę urodzin* [The Past of the Future... Commemorative Book to Honour Prof. Stanislaw Lorenz on the Day of His Hundredth Birthday], Warszawa 1999, p. 439.
- <sup>8</sup> *European Baroque Painting*. The National Museum in Warsaw, exh. cat., Kumamoto-Toyohashi-Yokohama-Osaka-Tokyo 1992-1993.
- <sup>9</sup> H. Benesz, *Bruegel – artysta prowokujący pytania* [Bruegel: an Artist Provoking Questions], in: 'Plastyka i Wychowanie' 1997, No. 1, p. 14-24; eadem, *Wielka zagadka wielkiego obrazu* [A Great Mystery of a Great Painting], in: 'Spotkania z Zabytkami' 2008, Vol. 32, No. 6, pp. 7-11.
- <sup>10</sup> <http://oddzialanintpw.blogspot.com/2013/09/> [Accessed: 12 January 2021].
- <sup>11</sup> <http://aninparafia.pl/zamieszkanie-chrystusem-i-maria/> [Accessed: 12 January 2021].
- <sup>12</sup> *Hanna Benesz and Aleksandra Janiszewska, Former and Present Curator of Dutch and Flemish Paintings at the National Museum in Warsaw: an Interview*, <https://www.codart.nl/celebrating-gerdien/interview-hanna-benesz-and-aleksandra-janiszevska/> [Accessed: 12 January 2021].
- <sup>13</sup> Established in 1932 as the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), in 2014 it was renamed Nederlands Instituut voor Kunstgeschiedenis / Netherlands Institute for Art History.
- <sup>14</sup> CODART's Director at the time Gerdien Verschoor wrote on CODART in 'Muzealnictwo', see G. Verschoor, *CODART – sukces Międzynarodowej Sieci Muzeów* [CODART: Success of the International Museum Network], 'Muzealnictwo' 2009, No. 50, pp. 65-76.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68, Figs. 1-6.
- <sup>16</sup> <https://pisarzemia.nl/2015/10/03/gerdien-verschoor/> [Accessed: 12 January 2021], see the note on the author in: G. Verschoor, *ibid.*, p. 65.
- <sup>17</sup> Tomasz Zaucha wrote about the Gerson Digital Project, see T. Zaucha, „*Gerson Digital*” – *cyfrowa monografia historyczno-artystyczna* [‘Gerson Digital’: Historical-Artistic Digital Monograph], 'Muzealnictwo' 2014, No. 55, pp. 164-168.
- <sup>18</sup> *Curator's interview...*, <http://ezine.codart.nl/17/issue/46/artikel/hanna-benesz-interviewed-by-ruud-priem/?id=203#!page/1> [Accessed: 12 January 2021]; 'CODART Courant' 2008, No. 17, pp. 18-19, <http://ezine.codart.nl/17/issue/46/artikel/hanna-benesz-interviewed-by-ruud-priem/?id=203> [Accessed: 12 January 2021]; *Hanna Benesz and Aleksandra Janiszewska...*, [Accessed: 12 January 2021].
- <sup>19</sup> *Hanna Benesz Awarded Knighthood in the Order of Orange-Nassau*, <https://www.codart.nl/personal/hanna-benesz-awarded-knighthood-order-orange-nassau/> [Accessed: 12 January 2021].
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- <sup>22</sup> *European Baroque Painting...*, see Endnote 8.
- <sup>23</sup> *European Baroque Painting...*, see Endnote 8.
- <sup>24</sup> *European Academicism in the Nineteenth Century: Paintings and Drawings from the National Museum in Warsaw and Other Polish Collections*, I. Danielewicz... et al. (ed.), Warsaw 1997. The Exhibition was presented in three Japan's museums: Hokkaido Obihiro Museum of Art, Ashikaga Museum of Art, Yawatahama Public City Gallery.
- <sup>25</sup> *Arcydzieło Petera Paula Rubensa „Zdjęcie z krzyża” ze zbiorów Państwowego Ermitażu w Sankt Petersburgu. Z tradycji przedstawień pasyjnych w malarstwie i grafice północnoeuropejskiej XVI i XVII wieku* [Peter Paul Rubens's Masterpiece The Descent from the Cross from the Collection of the State Hermitage in St Petersburg. From the Tradition of Passion Presentations in North-European Painting and Prints of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries], exh. cat., Warszawa 2000.
- <sup>26</sup> *Hanna Benesz and Aleksandra Janiszewska...*, [Accessed: 12 January 2021].
- <sup>27</sup> J. Wyleżyńska, „Zdjęcie z Krzyża” *Petera Paula Rubensa ze zbiorów Ermitażu* [Peter Paul Rubens's Descent from the Cross from the Hermitage Collection], 'Niedziela' 18/2000, <https://m.niedziela.pl/artyku/64469/nd/zdjecia> [Accessed: 12 January 2021].
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- <sup>32</sup> The Museum of Fine Arts in Warsaw was established in 1862, and was financed by the Russian state administration. After Warsaw had been seized by the German troops in 1916, Polish society founded the National Museum in Warsaw as a public museum, financed by the Municipality, which incorporated into its collection among others also works from the Museum of Fine Arts, see. E. Manikowska, *W stronę muzeum narodowego. Kolekcje i budowa polskiej tożsamości kulturowej u progu niepodległości* [Towards a National Museum. Collections and Building of Polish Cultural Identity at the Threshold of Independence] in: *Miłośnictwo rzeczy. Studia z historii kolekcjonerstwa na ziemiach polskich w XIX wieku* [Love of Objects. Studies in the History of Collecting

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### Hanna Benesz's Selected Publication

*Arcydzieło Petera Paula Rubensa „Zdjęcie z Krzyża” ze zbiorów Państwowego Ermitażu w Sankt Petersburgu: z tradycji przedstawień pasyjnych w malarstwie i grafice północnoeuropejskiej XVI i XVII wieku ze zbiorów Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie* [Masterpiece The Descent from the Cross from the Collection of the State Hermitage in St Petersburg. From the Tradition of Passion Presentations in North-European Painting and Prints of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries], H. Benesz, J.A. Tomicka (comp. and academic edit.); J. Sikorska (cooperation); H. Waszkiel (ed.), Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie, Warszawa 2000.

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