

The inspiration for the main theme of volume XXXII of *Wilanów Studies* was the two-hundred and twentieth anniversary of the Wilanów institution's existence as a museum. It is considered to have been established with the first entry in the Guest Book started by Aleksandra Potocka née Lubomirska and her husband Stanisław Kostka Potocki; this entry, placed there by Zofia Zamoyska, is dated 5 August 1805.

More than two centuries of the Wilanów Museum's existence, first as a private enterprise and then as a state institution, brings with it an enormous baggage of history and experiences, both of the owners enlarging their art and library collections, and of the curators supporting them.

In 2005 we celebrated the two-hundredth anniversary of the Wilanów Museum with the exhibition 'Grand Tour. Narodziny Kolekcji Stanisława Kostki Potockiego / Grand Tour. The Birth of a Collection of Stanisław Kostka Potocki', presented in the Orangery at Wilanów, prepared by its curator Anna Kwiatkowska and the Museum staff. The exhibition showcased – often for the first time in history – the period when the concept for the museum was formed and the creation of the Wilanów collection began. It was a process consciously articulated and carried out by the Potocki family, mainly with educational purposes in mind. The year 2019, in turn, saw the conclusion of a comprehensive renovation of the first-floor rooms in the south wing and a part of the north wing of the palace; its aim was to install new exhibitions in these spaces. This happened in 2022 with the opening of the permanent exhibition 'Art Collecting in the Potocki Family', curated by Joanna Paprocka-Gajek supported by the Museum staff, and by Dorota Folga-Januszewska. What both projects had in common was a search, based on sources and archival accounts, for ways in which the art collection amassed by the Potocki family had been displayed in the past, and an attempt to follow the guiding idea of the exhibition as it had been at the time. In the process of preparing a permanent exhibition in the renovated spaces of the palace – which, unfortunately, had been converted during the 1955–1960 renovation into modernist painting galleries – we sought to restore the character of the décor in the spirit of the nineteenth century. All decisions were based on iconographic evidence, results of the accompanying surveys, as well as architectural studies and all the surviving documentation.

The Wilanów Museum is not the only place in Poland where significant changes to existing exhibitions have been carried out in the last decade. While developing this volume, we asked curators from other museums located in former palatial and manorial residences to share

INTRODUCTION

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*Museum of King Jan III's Palace
at Wilanów*

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their experiences of the process of establishing the themes for new exhibitions, defining these themes, and coming up with methodologies of working with source material.

In 2015, we saw the completion of two important renovations, coupled with restructuring projects, in the residences housing former art collections: the aristocratic Raczyński estate at Rogalin and a gentry manor and park complex at Waplewo Wielkie. The scale of issues connected with their conservation was commensurate to their size and the degree of preservation of the authentic historic structure, as well as the planned functions which they are obliged to carry out as museum institutions with specific purposes. The authors of the articles, curators Ewa Leszczyńska and Dobromiła Rzyska-Laube, movingly describe the process of recreating and restoring these places to their former glory. The scale of the conservation and reconstruction work undertaken at Rogalin is incomparable to the extent of the work undertaken at Waplewo Wielkie, especially as over the years the latter, a gentry manor, served a completely different purpose and only 20% of its scattered collections have survived to this day. However, in creating the Museum of the Polish Gentry Tradition, a great deal of effort was made to refer to the *genius loci* of the place, as the Reader will find described in the article *The role of the Counts Sierakowski art collection in arranging the permanent exhibition and developing the genius loci of the Polish Gentry Museum at Waplewo Wielkie, a branch of the National Museum in Gdańsk*. Ewa Leszczyńska, in turn, in her article *Assumptions, archival foundations and conservation premises for the restoration of the Raczyński residence at Rogalin, a branch of the National Museum in Poznań, to its historical shape*, portrays the progress of years-long disputes and deliberations undertaken, as well as the challenges faced in order to restore the environmental, architectural and collection-related qualities of the complex and to both restore in the most faithful form the seat of distinguished Poles and show the deeply patriotic reasons for the creation of the collection in the nineteenth century.

The year 2022 saw the happy ending of two important exhibition projects, which both received awards in the Sybilla 2022 – Museum Event of the Year competition. The above-mentioned permanent exhibition ‘Art Collecting in the Potocki Family’ was opened at the Wilanów Museum. Based on an analysis of surviving source and iconographic materials, historical decoration has been restored in the south wing, including the second part of the Potocki Library created in the second half of the nineteenth century. The area is furnished with original library furniture, which underwent restoration, and contains the remains of the palace’s book collection and a historic collection of paintings and craftworks. The aim and the main narrative thread of the second part of the exhibition was to restore the memory of the First Exhibition of Antiquities,

which took place at the Potocki Palace and had a significant impact on the academic community involved in the study of the history of Polish and European art, despite the restrictions imposed by the partitioning powers. The focus, within the new exhibition, on the First Exhibition of Antiquities of 1856, which promoted the ethics and principles of collecting and smuggled into view thinly veiled patriotic thought, has brought to light important sources documenting the event.

In June 2022, in turn, veritable crowds turned up at the Wawel Royal Castle in Cracow to see the display, which had been being announced for years, entitled 'The New Crown Treasury'. The exhibition, which occupies twelve rooms of the castle's north wing, alludes to a collection of the most valuable national mementos and regalia once existing in this royal residence, which was looted by the Prussians. The authors of the article *The New Crown Treasury at Wawel Castle. The glory of the Commonwealth in twelve scenes*, Dariusz Nowacki and Danuta Szewczyk-Prokurat, outline two important issues concerning the creation of this exhibition: first, the analysis of extant pieces and the ways in which they had been acquired for the collection, including an acquisition policy stretching over several years, and secondly, a discussion on how to present valuable artefacts using the most advanced display solutions available in Poland.

In the following year, 2023, the eyes of many history aficionados and art lovers once again turned towards Cracow. The Princes Czartoryski Museum opened the final, after the Palace and the Arsenal, of the planned sections of the museum complex, the so-called Monastery. The space was opened to the public while preserving as many historical references as possible, their selection supported by an analysis of archive materials and iconography depicting the pre-war exhibition. According to Mateusz Chramiec and Elżbieta Musialik, authors of the text *The Princes Czartoryski Monastery – a 'sanctuary' of nineteenth-century museology*, this has become a unique exhibition-and-research project focusing on the historical collection, with all the respect and consideration due to the research achievements of many generations of curators.

Two further texts deal with research into now defunct exhibitions, as well as dispersed collections. The first is devoted to the history of an apartment containing the collection of Far Eastern art established by Stanisław Kostka Potocki in Wilanów. Anna Konopko, who has been researching this unusual space for years, presents new findings and facts in her text *The Chinese Apartment of Stanisław Kostka Potocki: a proposal for the chronology of establishing the rooms and possible changes in wall decoration before 1832*, drawing upon previously unknown sources. Tomasz de Rosset, in turn, attempts to trace the fortunes of forty paintings belonging to the Count Konstanty Branicki, which were catalogued by the custodian of the library in Sucha Beskidzka after

being brought back from Paris in 1882. The later fortunes of this collection were turbulent, with some paintings ending up in Polish public collections, others dispersed and wending their way into private collections worldwide, and still others being lost or destroyed. The text *Habent sua fata picturae. Count Konstanty Branicki's cabinet of paintings in Paris* is an exemplary analysis of the fortunes of now-dispersed collections.

The next article concerns a rare and extremely interesting object from the Far Eastern collection amassed by the Potocki family; one that has survived to this day through a fortunate turn of events. In writing *As lovely as peonies and orchids. The Chinese headband with kingfisher feathers in the Wilanów collection*, Joanna Wasilewska recounts to our Readers the origins, functions, workmanship and unusual materials used to create the ornaments readily used by Chinese beauties. Interestingly, ornaments of this kind are seen in the paintings that once adorned the Chinese Rooms of the Potocki family; this helps to expand our knowledge of the wide use of these unusual materials.

The volume ends with three communications. The first is related to the volume's main theme, namely the history of museums and the development of exhibitions based on archival documentation, and pertains to an unique venture indicated by its title: *Maintenance and conservation works in the castle baths at the Łańcut Castle Museum*. Alicja Mogielska-Dziekońska reports on the course of works, completed in 2020, aimed at the restoration of the therapeutic and leisure complex founded by Alfred III Potocki in Łańcut. As a result of these works, the rooms, which had been deteriorating since the Second World War, have been incorporated into the castle tour as a unique attraction.

The second communication, entitled *From Wilanów to America (?)*. *On the painting Sophonisba by Eglon van der Neer*, is by Agnieszka Woźniak-Bartyzel, who intends to outline therein the latest research and hypotheses concerning the piece, which most likely used to be a part of the collection owned by Princess Izabela Lubomirska née Czartoryska, held in Wilanów and later in Łańcut. The current location of the work is not known. The last time a painting *Sophonisba* by Eglon van der Neer was mentioned was in 1973, by Alan Jacobs Gallery in London.

The last of the communication is an important text by Piotr Czerkwiński *Testing the composition of metals in Egyptian artefacts held at the Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów*. The study in question, carried out in 2020 by Dr Alina Tomaszewska-Szewczyk of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń using X-ray spectroscopy with an XRF analyser, has not been published, which is unfortunate, since it could provide valuable comparative material for researchers of Egyptian art.

Closing the volume is the new issue of The Chronicle prepared by Marta Gołąbek and Karolina Alkemade, where the most important information on the activity of the Wilanów Museum is brought together. Its content

reflects a picture of the efforts and diversity of activities undertaken by the team of museum professionals.

I am sincerely hoping that texts collected in this volume will be of interest to our Readers and serve to expand their knowledge of the important and interesting research and exhibition ventures undertaken in Poland in the past decade.

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