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ABSTRACT: This article discusses some issues directly related to the management of priceless work of art included in wider collection, considering in particular the case of *Lady with an Ermine* by Leonardo da Vinci from the Princess Czartoryski Museum in Kraków, Poland. The author depicts the complex opportunities and challenges which appear both before the owners of the painting and other authorities responsible for its safety and state of conservation.

The Princes Czartoryski Museum

The Museum was founded in 1796 by Princess Izabela Czartoryska to preserve the Polish heritage for the future generations. Izabela bought trophies commemorating the victory against the Turks at the siege of Vienna in 1683, historical artifacts from the treasures of the Wawel Cathedral and the Royal Castle, objects donated by Polish Families, and books that were to become a particular highlight of her collection. In 1798, Izabela's son, Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, travelled to Italy and acquired two paintings: *Lady with an Ermine* by Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael's *Portrait of a Young Man*

. Several years later he was forced to leave Poland and moved to Paris. In 1843 he bought the Hotel Lambert which became the Living Museum of Poland and all the objects from the Czartoryski collection were displayed in Paris. The collection was then expanded by his son, Prince Władysław and Princess Isabella Działyńska who purchased the Polonaise carpet, Etruscan and Greek vases, Roman and Egyptian antiquities, arms and armours, and Limoges enamels. At the 1865 Exposition des Arts Decoratifs in Paris, Władysław created a Polish room to exhibit the famous carpet and part of his collection.

In 1871, after the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, Prince Władysław hid the artifacts and fled France. In 1874, the city of Krakow offered him the arsenal in the Old Wall as a museum. In 1878 the Princes Czartoryski Museum was opened. Prince Władysław kept on purchasing new valuable objects to the collection until his death in 1894. His work was then continued by his son, Prince Adam Ludwik, who greatly contributed to the expansion of the Czartoryski family estate and the collection. The Prince took care of two museums, as the second museum for family collection was opened in Gołuchów Castle. When in 1914 he was called up to the Austrian Army, his wife Princess Maria Ludwika took over the Museum and took most of the important artifacts to Dresden using her connections with the Royal Saxon Family. The collection was restored to the Museum in Kraków in 1920.



In 1937, after Prince Adam Ludwik's death, his son Prince Augustyn, took over as head of the family. In August 1939, facing the outbreak of war, the Museum was forced to prepare for saving its collection. Sixteen cases with the most precious objects were transported and hidden in Sieniawa, while the rest of the collection was carried down to the cellars of the Museum. Unfortunately the Germans found the cases hidden in the cellars and loot all the tradable objects. Although the Leonardo painting and other pictures were roughly handled, they were not damaged. *Lady with an Ermine* together with several other paintings and precious objects were moved to Wawel Royal Castle which by that time became the headquarters of German governor - general Hans Frank. On September 22nd 1939, Prince Augustyn removed the remaining treasures and took them to his cousin's property in Pewkinie, however soon afterwards the Gestapo soldiers found the hidden cases. On January 25th 1940, the final selection of the 85 most important items from the museum were sent to Dresden where it was decided that they were to become a part of the Hitler's own collection in Linz. From that

moment on the museum was closed to the public. When the Germans evacuated Krakow in January 1945, Hans Frank moved all the paintings from Wawel Royal Castle to Silesia and then to his own villa in Neuhaus. The Americans arrested him on May 4th

1945, and the Polish representative at the Allies Commission for the Retrieval of Works of Art claimed the stolen paintings on behalf of the Princes Czartoryski Museum. However, the Raphael's

Portrait of a Young Man

and 843 other precious artifacts were missing from the collection.

In the times of Iron Curtain in Poland, the Museum was reopened and run by the communist government. It survived largely thanks to the work of Prof. Marek Rostworowski who dedicated his life to the collection. In 1991, the High Court of the Nation returned the Museum to its rightful owner, Prince Adam Karol Czartoryski, together with the library located in nearby buildings.

Several important objects from the collection were found and recuperated for the Museum, among them the Polonaise carpet which was found at Christies auction house in London. It returned to the Museum in 1997 with the help of the Polish government. Other restituted items were: a 16th century Islamic textile important for its iconographical representation of angels which returned to the Museum in 2002, and a 15th century reliquary which returned to the Czartoryski Foundation in 2004.

Today the Museum is administered by the Czartoryski Foundation set up by Prince Adam Karol Czartoryski in 1991 in order to preserve the work of the founders of the family collection who developed and sustained a museum as a public institution belonging to the world heritage and serving the Polish nation. The Foundation works under the supervision of the Polish minister of culture and the Princes Czartoryski Museum has been a branch of the National Museum in Kraków since 1950. There are 7 up to 11 persons within the Board of the Foundation including: President of the Board (the Founder), members of the Board (5 members of the Czartoryski family appointed by the Founder; and 1 up to 5 members from culture and art history environment of Poland, including at least one of the following: Director of the National Museum in Kraków, Director of the Wawel Royal Castle, Rector of the Jagiellonian University, Director of the Jagiellonian Library, or President of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences). The members of the Board are appointed for a 3-year term of office.

The case of *Lady with an Ermine*

Leonardo da Vinci's late 15th century *Lady with an Ermine* is oil on wood panel, 54 cm/ 39 cm and most probably depicts Cecilia Gallerani, the favorite mistress of Prince Ludovico Sforza, Duke of Milan. It is the only Leonardo's painting in Poland and one of the most valuable paintings not only in the context of Polish collections, but also of the world heritage. Such masterpieces require exceptional protection and 'prevention' is the main priority. According to experts, given the technology of the picture, the fundamental principle is the unconditional restriction of movement and transfer to the absolute necessary. As Prof. Grażyna Korpala, the expert of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage in the field of painting restoration at Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków appealed: "It is necessary to keep it under constant microclimatic conditions, in one place, in a tight microclimatic frame of the new generation, made on the basis of the already proven solutions used for panel masterpieces in renowned museums. Only storing the picture in a fixed location will eliminate to the maximum such basic threats as unavoidable external pollution, changes in the microclimate, all kinds of shock, vibration, drastic changes in pressure, and reduce the risks resulting from independent factors". Transportation of such a painting as

Lady with an Ermine

using even the most sophisticated methods of environmental chambers or anti-shock frames, the protection of such a painting can be not sufficient. According to several experts, allowing the painting to travel creates another serious threat, adding to the risk of theft and any possible human errors. Meanwhile, in recent years

Lady with an Ermine

has been loaned to: Washington, 1991; Malmö, 1994; Kyoto, 2001; Nagoya, 2001; Yokohama, 2002; Milwaukee, 2002; Houston, 2003; San Francisco, 2003; Budapest, 2009; Warsaw, 2010; Madrid, 2011; Berlin, 2011; and will be on loan in London from November 2011, arousing concern of Polish and world art experts. Due to its frequent voyages the painting has been called by the Polish press the 'Travelling Lady'.

In October 2009 *Lady with an Ermine* was loaned to Budapest for 5 months in order to be a part of "From Botticelli to Titian" exhibition in Museum of Fine Arts. The loan was decided by the rightful owner of the painting, the Princes Czartoryski Foundation, however Polish and Hungarian diplomatic services were also engaged in the process. This loan was said to be a fine Polish gesture to the Hungarian nation for their help in 1939 when Hungary gave shelter to one thousand Polish refugees from lands occupied by the Germans. Returning the gesture, Hungarian side decided to give on loan to the Princes Czartoryski Museum painting by Francisco Goya

Episode from the Spanish War
to be

of Independence

exhibited in Princes Czartoryski Museum. The planned travel of the painting awoke concerns of conservators and the Direction of the National Museum in Kraków, who since 1950 takes care of the collection. The regional (voivodship) conservator of monuments was asked to review the case and for a deciding opinion. The decision was in favor of the loan, as all necessary safety

measures have been undertaken, however under the condition that

Lady with an Ermine

will not be loaned for the period of the next 10 years. According to the Czartoryski Foundation representatives, the precious painting was not to come back to the Museum in Kraków after having been exhibited in Hungary, giving the planned renovation of the Princes Czartoryski Museum (finally the painting was moved to the Royal Castle in Warsaw together with other precious objects from the collection). The Foundation has gained a Norwegian Found dotation for refurbishment of the palace in which the Museum is located. Modernization is planned to take 2 years at minimum and will put an end to the shape of the exposition known so far.

According to the Director of the National Museum in Kraków, Zofia Gołubiew, the gallery will be completely modernized and the exposition very much altered. Additionally, the representatives of the Czartoryski Foundation stated that the deciding opinion about the future of the painting is in the hands of Foundation and that the conservators' objections are not going to be taken under consideration, as the loans of

Lady with an Ermine

bring a considerable financial benefit and contribute to the restoration of the Museum.

In March 2011 artistic environment in Poland was involved in another dispute on the future of the painting. The question was whether to loan *Lady with an Ermine* to exhibitions in Madrid and Berlin. An official letter of request was sent to Bogdan Zdrojewski, the Polish minister of culture by the minister of culture in Germany, Bernd Neumann. Leonardo painting was to be the main attraction of the Berlin exhibition "Renaissance Faces. Masterpieces of Italian Portraiture". Not being able to reach consensus between the Czartoryski Foundation, the Direction of the National Museum in Kraków, and the regional conservator of monuments, V-ce minister of culture (and the general conservator of monuments), Piotr Żuchowski, proposed to appoint a commission of experts who would objectively assess the state of conservation of Leonardo's treasured work. Their opinion would answer the question whether the painting could travel or not and what kind of threats it might be exposed to during its transportation. Members of the commission were experts on wood panel painting, art historians and experts in museology. Representatives of the Foundation stated again that loan of the painting is followed by a great prestige and its financial aspect, and that with an additional financing resulting from the painting's loan, Kraków will gain a museum with a modern infrastructure and world level security system for the works of art. After a long heated debate the decision about the loan of the painting was positive. The general conservator underlined that the decision was directly influenced by the first in history of Czartoryski collection personal appeal of the Founder of the Czartoryski Foundation, Adam Karol Czartoryski, to the Ministry of Culture of Poland, who permitted the picture to be transported. Zofia Gołubiew stated that she will not contradict the opinion of the Minister and approved the two loans of the painting, together with another one to the National Gallery in London, on which the agreement has been reached already beforehand. Simultaneously, she demanded a statement from the Czartoryski Foundation that it takes full responsibility for the painting. Polish conservators still warn that in case if Leonardo's work was damaged, it would not be possible to restore it anymore. As a response to that, Adam Zamoyski, UK historian and chairman of the Czartoryski Foundation stated that the painting will be more closely guarded when in transit or on loan than when it is at its home museum which is

now being rebuilt.

The painting was safely brought to Berlin from Madrid's Royal Palace exhibition "Poland, Treasures and Artistic Exhibitions" in September 2011, largely thanks to assistance in the transportation arrangements from the Polish Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, and Polish Army. From Germany it will be transported to London in November where it will be one of the highlights of Leonardo's monographic exhibition, "Leonardo da Vinci: Painter at the Court of Milan" at the National Gallery. This exhibition will focus on Leonardo as a painter, at a stage of his career when he created some of his most stunning works. It will bring together the largest ever number of his surviving paintings and include international loans that have never before been seen in the UK. According to an agreement concluded earlier in 2011, upon its return from London in February 2012 *Lady with an Ermine* will remain in Kraków for at least 10 years. All sides of the conflict agreed to it. Despite the above mentioned decision and all necessary safety measures undertaken, Leonardo's painting from the Museum Czartoryski collection does not cease to be the subject of a heated discussion among Polish and European conservators. Upon its upcoming loan to the National Gallery in London there has been a new outburst of a discussion on safety of the painting initiated by the British "Observer", followed by ArtWatch and several other sources stating that allowing a loan of

Lady with an Ermine

to the exhibition in London is "pure madness". The exhibition will be held at the National Gallery for 3 months but it has already taken years to organize it. The National Gallery has announced that in order to prevent "the gallery rage", it will issue only 180 tickets for each half-hour slot (not 230 as its license allows). This will cost the Gallery thousands of Pounds a day in potential revenue but at the same time it will greatly improve the safety of the priceless Leonardo's works exhibited and reduce the risk of any potential damage resulting from overcrowding in exhibitions. Furthermore, longer opening hours and the decision to open the exhibition on January 1

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2012 will add 20% to normal capacity, according to the statement of the Gallery officials.

Conclusion

The case of *Lady with an Ermine* shows complexity of the problem related to the safety of priceless pieces of art, such as the rare Renaissance portraits by Leonardo. Concerns regarding their fragility given the technology of the pictures, as well as the poor state of their conservation are not only growing in Poland. Concern is being voiced that some other

Leonardo's paintings –
Louvre; the
Madonna Litta
, from the Hermitage in St

La Belle Ferronnière, from the

Petersburg; and
Saint Jerome

, from the Pinacoteca Vaticana in Rome – also face dangerous journeys. Perhaps such renowned and priceless pieces of art should not become subjects of a discussion whether they can be moved from their home galleries and they all should have a monograph on their current state of conservation, such as the one of

Gioconda

. Even moving works from room to room within a gallery can present dangers and expose a painting to certain threats, as shows the example of a Renaissance painting by Domenico Beccafumi which was dropped, splitting it in two, while being taken off a wall at the National Gallery in 2008. While being transferred from home gallery to another museum (often overseas) paintings are constantly at risk of damage resulting from transportation. Even after having been transported safely, the paintings remain under risk of further damage in the host gallery, also resulting from independent factors, such as this year's incident at the National Gallery in which two paintings by Nicholas Poussin were sprayed with red paint by a vandal. Of course, the paintings are insured (in case of

Lady with Ermine

the insurance rates for 300 million Euros) but one needs to keep in mind that in the event of a serious damage it might not be possible to restore the paintings at all.

Disagreement between the Czartoryski Foundation and the National Museum in Kraków regarding loans and dangerous journeys of *Lady with an Ermine* finally found an end in April 2011. A newly elected board of the Foundation is expected to contribute to a better cooperation between the members of Czartoryski family and the representatives of the National Museum. The main goals of the new board will be to guarantee the safety of the Leonardo painting in order to preserve it in the best possible condition for the next generations, and effective accomplishment of the Czartoryski Museum's renovation in order to expose the collection in a new modern arrangement. According to the agreement, upon its return from London in February 2012

Lady with an Ermine will remain in Kraków for at least ten years. It states in the text of memorandum that for the next ten years the Leonardo painting will not be a subject of any loan, unless all parties involved in the decision making process decide otherwise under special and justified circumstances. Additionally, a full monograph on the current state of conservation of the painting will be prepared.

Photography

Fig. 1. Polish curators show the special traveling arrangements for *Lady with an Ermine*.
Photo credit: AP Photo/Alik Keplicz

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