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THE COMMISSION FOR THE COLLECTION AND PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL MONUMENTS AND ANTIQUITIES AND ARISTOCRATIC ART COLLECTIONS IN EASTERN CROATIA*

Abstract

The work of Komisija za sakupljanje i očuvanje kulturnih spomenika i starina (The Commission for the Collection and Preservation of Cultural Monuments and Antiquities; KOMZA) was important for salvaging aristocratic art collections in eastern Croatia after World War II. The salvaged artworks were listed and stored in the local collection centre in Osijek, and after the confiscation were mostly granted to the Museum of Slavonia. This paper describes the basic principles of the Commission's work and how a large part of former aristocratic collections entered museum collections. The importance of the Commission's archives is particularly emphasized, especially in the light of research of the provenance of artworks that were deliberately kept secret during the communist regime. Without researching this material, it would not be possible to establish the origin, authorship, content or historical and artistic value of many artworks in our museums.

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INTRODUCTION

Even during World War II, decisions were made within the anti-fascist movement in Yugoslavia with far-reaching consequences for the attitude of the future state authorities towards artistic heritage. Antifašističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Jugoslavije (Anti-Fascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia; AVNOJ) decided on November 21, 1944, that the property of "state enemies, absentees and property alienated by the occupying authorities"¹ would become state property. This process was managed by members of Komunistička partija Jugoslavije (the Communist Party of Yugoslavia), who, in accordance with communist ideology, conducted a radical programme of violent and undemocratic confiscation of private property. The owners of the most valuable art collections before World War II were representatives

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1 "Odluka o prijelazu u državno vlasništvo neprijateljske imovine, o državnoj upravi nad imovinom neprisutnih osoba i o sekvstru nad imovinom koju su okupatorske vlasti prisilno otuđile" [Decision on the transfer of enemy property to state ownership, on state administration over the property of absent persons and on the sequestration of property forcibly alienated by occupying authorities], *Službeni list DFJ*, no. 2, 6 February 1945, 13–14. All translations are by the authors.

of the social elite (nobility, wealthy citizens, members of the church hierarchy, etc.) who were considered opponents of the regime, i.e. *state enemies*, in post-war Yugoslavia. During the war and in the post-war period, many of these collections were destroyed, looted or abandoned. This was especially true for collections owned by the Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust, and for those of wealthy bourgeois and aristocratic families, most of whom emigrated.

The authorities were aware that the post-war situation with artworks had to be resolved quickly, and Komisija za sakupljanje i očuvanje kulturnih spomenika i starina (the Commission for the Collection and Preservation of Cultural Monuments and Antiquities; KOMZA)² played a key role in preserving private collections in Croatia. The Commission was established on June 28, 1945, by Ministarstvo prosvjete Federalne Države Hrvatske (the Ministry of Education of the Federal State of Croatia; renamed Narodna Republika Hrvatska / the People's Republic of Croatia / after November 29, 1945). The establishment and operation of the Commission were based on the legal framework of the new Yugoslav state, and followed the attitude of the communist authorities towards private property. The property taken and catalogued by the members of the Commission belonged mainly to wealthier civil families, industrialists, officials of the former Nezavisna Država Hrvatska (Independent State of Croatia), nobility, missing Jewish families and those considered to be enemies of the regime. After the Commission brought its activities to an end in 1950, the competent authorities allocated the material mainly to museum institutions and declared it state property. In this paper, the focus is on the circumstances of the establishment, work and results of the Commission's activities in eastern Croatia regarding the collecting of artworks from former aristocratic collections.

The research of the Commission's work in this paper is primarily based on archival material kept in several institutions. For the Commission's work on the level of the Republic of Croatia, the most important files were kept in the archives of today's Ministarstvo kulture i medija Republike Hrvatske (the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia).³ For the Commission's work in eastern Croatia, the archival material kept in Muzej Slavonije (the Museum of Slavonia) in Osijek is also important. The results of research on legal and organizational framework of the Commission's work at the national level were first published in 2019 in a paper by Iva Pasini Tržec.⁴ The activity of the Commission has recently been the subject of research conducted

2 The name varies slightly in historical sources. The term Commission is used in the rest of the paper.

3 Files of the Commission for the Collection and Preservation of Cultural Monuments and Antiquities (KOMZA) from No. 1/45 to No. 84/50, Central Archives, Collection of Old Materials, Directorate for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia, Zagreb (hereafter cited as KOMZA).

4 Iva Pasini Tržec, "Osnutak, organizacijski ustroj i djelovanje Komisije za sakupljanje i očuvanje kulturnih spomenika i starina" [Establishment, Organizational Structure and Work of the Commission for the Collection and Preservation of Cultural Monuments and Antiquities], *Peristil: zbornik radova za povijest umjetnosti*, no. 62 (2019): 123–138.

by several art historians in the context of discovering the provenance of works of art in the holdings of Croatian museums.⁵ Questions of provenance are within the focus of interest of the international community, especially in the light of research into the fate of Jewish heritage during the Holocaust. The experiences of foreign experts in research of this type are gradually being implemented in Croatia as well. As an example, we highlight the participation of Croatian experts in the project *Transfer of Cultural Objects in the Alpe Adria Region in the 20th Century* (TransCultAA).⁶

The Commission's work in eastern Croatia has been researched and published (since 2013) in papers by Jasminka Najcer Sabljak and Silvija Lučevnjak in the context of salvaging the art collections of noble families after World War II.⁷ On February 17, 2015, the Scientific and Specialist Conference *Dr. Danica Pinterović – rad i djelovanje* (Dr. Danica Pinterović – Work and Activities) at the Museum of Slavonia provided a better understanding of the Commission's impact. Most of the topics at the conference dealt with the Commission's work, and J. Najcer Sabljak especially elaborated the attitude of Danica Pinterović towards artworks from the collections of the Slavonian nobility.⁸

FOUNDING OF THE COMMISSION AND THE BEGINNING OF ITS WORK IN EASTERN CROATIA

After the Commission's founding, Professor Vladimir Tkalčić (1883–1971), a Croatian museologist and cultural worker with a lot of experience in the field of cultural heritage protection, was appointed its head.⁹ During the war, he headed Muzej za umjetnost i obrt (the Museum of Arts and Crafts) in Zagreb and led large operations to save materials from Orthodox churches in Croatia. Based on a large amount of the saved material, Muzej Srba u Hrvatskoj (the

5 Bartol Fabijanić, "Slike u Strossmayerovoj galeriji starih majstora iz nekoliko međuratnih plemićkih zbirki kontinentalne Hrvatske" [Paintings in the Strossmayer Gallery of Old Masters from Several Noble Art Collections of the Interwar Period of Continental Croatia], *Peristil: zbornik radova za povijest umjetnosti*, no. 64 (2021): 115–128; Iva Pasini Tržec, "O sudbini pet privatnih zbirki zagrebačkih židovskih obitelji za vrijeme i nakon sloma Nezavisne Države Hrvatske" [Five Private Jewish Art Collections and Their Fate during the Independent State of Croatia and after Its Collapse], *Peristil: zbornik radova za povijest umjetnosti*, no. 64 (2021): 97–113; Ljerka Dulibić and Iva Pasini Tržec, "Musealisation Process of Dispossessed Artworks in Croatia during and after the Second World War," in *Transfer of Cultural Objects in the Alpe Adria Region in the 20th Century*, eds. Christian Fuhrmeister and Barbara Murovec (Wien & Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2022), 405–423; Iva Pasini Tržec, "So-Called Private Collections of Public Interest in Zagreb and Their Destiny During Socialism," in *Transfer of Cultural Objects*, eds. Fuhrmeister and Murovec, 425–441.

6 This research project is the first attempt to investigate the transfer of cultural assets in the Alpes-Adria area in the 20th century. In an unprecedented transnational and collaborative way, it engaged a multinational team of scholars to analyse "Uses of the Past", in particular historical and current conflicts of ownership, patrimony, and cultural heritage. See TransCultAA, accessed December 11, 2022, <http://www.transcultaa.eu>.

7 The most important works of these authors on this topic are cited in this text. A complete insight into their work can be obtained by searching the website of the Croatian Scientific Bibliography CROSBI, accessed May 18, 2022, <https://bib.irb.hr/index.html>.

8 Jasminka Najcer Sabljak, "Danica Pinterović i muzealizacija zbirki slavonskog plemstva" [Danica Pinterović and the Musealization of the Collections of the Slavonian Nobility], *Osječki zbornik*, no. 34 (2018): 99–106.

9 "Tkalčić, Vladimir," *Hrvatska enciklopedija Online* [Croatian Encyclopaedia Online], accessed May 30, 2022, <http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=61533>.



Fig. 1. Danica Pinterović (on the left) with her colleagues, photograph, Archaeological Museum, Osijek.

Museum of Serbs in Croatia, Zagreb) was founded in 1946.¹⁰ Organizing the salvage of this heritage prepared Tkalčić and his associates for the extremely important work that they performed within the Commission after the end of the war. On November 23, 1945, the Ministry of Education ordered him to organize the operation of Zemaljski sabirni centar (the National Collection Centre) in the Museum of Arts and Crafts, where the Commission planned to house the collected material from various locations. The local collection centre for eastern Croatia was organized at Državni muzej u Osijeku (the National Museum in Osijek), which was renamed the Museum of Slavonia in 1947.¹¹ The first appointed member of the Commission in Osijek became the museum's curator, Danica Pinterović (1897–1985), an eminent archaeologist and historian (**fig. 1**).¹² The then director of the museum in Osijek, the historian Josip Bösendorfer (1876–1957) was also responsible for the Commission's work. He headed the institution until his retirement in 1949.¹³ Pinterović and Bösendorfer were aware that in their field of work they had several extremely valuable collections owned by the nobility that required special attention. These were the collections of the Odescalchi family in Ilok, the Eltz family

10 Ljiljana Vukašinović, "Gdje je nestala muzealizacija srpske kulture. Povodom sedamdesete godišnjice jedne zaboravljene kulturne institucije Srba u Hrvatskoj" [Where Did the Musealization of Serbian Culture Disappear? On the Occasion of the Seventieth Anniversary of a Forgotten Cultural Institution of the Serbs in Croatia], *Prosvjeta: novine za kulturu*, September 2016, accessed May 10, 2022, <http://casopis.skd-prosvjeta.hr/gdje-je-nestala-muzealizacija-srpske-kulture/>.

11 Vesna Burić, "Stotinu godina muzeja u Osijeku" [One Hundred Years of the Museum in Osijek], *Osječki zbornik*, no. 17 (1979): 5–15.

12 "Pinterović, Danica", Hrvatska enciklopedija Online [Croatian Encyclopaedia Online], accessed May 10, 2022, <http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=48302>.

13 Ante Grubišić, "Zasluge dr. Josipa Bösendorfera u spašavanju kulturne baštine tijekom i neposredno nakon Drugoga svjetskog rata" [Josip Bösendorfer's Contribution to Saving Cultural Heritage During and Immediately after WWII], in *Zbornik radova s Desničinih susreta 2012.*, eds. Drago Roksanđić and Ivana Cvijović Javorina (Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet, 2013), 487–508; "Bösendorfer, Josip," Hrvatska enciklopedija Online [Croatian Encyclopaedia Online], accessed May 19, 2022, <http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=8912>.

Fig. 2. Small Manor in Našice, photograph, Našice Local History Museum.



in Vukovar, the Khuen-Belasi family in Nuštar, the Norman-Ehrenfels family in Valpovo and the Pejačević family in Našice. The collections contained exceptional works of fine art and were the pinnacle of private collections in the area.¹⁴ After the end of the war, most members of the nobility emigrated from Croatia, leaving behind their property that was looted, i.e. intentionally or unintentionally destroyed.

Initially, the Commission's work in eastern Croatia was limited to the work of Danica Pinterović, who faced a number of obstacles, from unreliable and unsafe means of transport between Osijek and nearby places to the unfavourable situation in the Osijek museum, which lacked space, staff and finances. In such circumstances, on October 31, 1945, she managed to visit the Valpovo Manor for the first time, which housed the Children's Home at the time. After inspection, she stored those items that she found artistically, culturally and historically valuable in a second-floor room of the manor and catalogued them.¹⁵ She first came to Našice on November 20, 1945.¹⁶ She determined that the collection of the Pejačević family, which before the war was held in the so-called Great Manor from the early 19th century and the Small Manor from the early 20th century, was dislocated around the city (**fig. 2**). The material was devastated and looted at the end of the war. The Small Manor, which housed a boarding school at the time, was chosen as a temporary storage place, while the Great Manor was inaccessible since the army was stationed there. In January 1946,

14 Jasminka Najcer Sabljak and Silvija Lučevnjak, "State Authorities and the Heritage of Noble Families of Eastern Croatia," in *Art and Politics in the Modern Period*, eds. Dragan Damjanović, Lovorka Magaš Bilandžić, Željka Miklošević and Jeremy F. Walton (Zagreb: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, 2019), 221–229.

15 Izvještaj D. Pinterović o putu u Valpovo [Report by D. Pinterović on her Visit to Valpovo] (December 31, 1945), Documentary Collection, Museum of Slavonia, Osijek.

16 Izvještaj D. Pinterović upraviteljstvu Državnog muzeja u Osijeku [Report by D. Pinterović to the Management of the Museum of Slavonia] (November 23, 1945), Documentary Collection, Museum of Slavonia, Osijek.

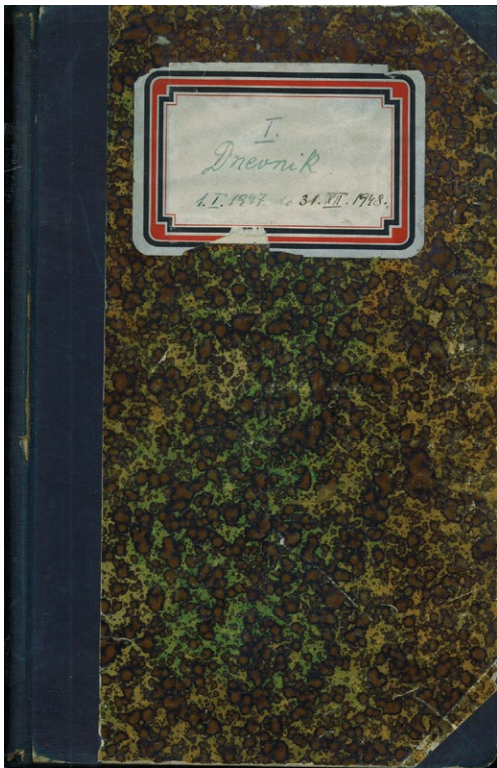


Fig. 3. Danica Pinterović's Work Register, Museum of Slavonia, Osijek.

Pinterović returned to Našice and found the previously-collected items in a disarray since the rooms were accessible via a window, and concluded that some items had probably been stolen.¹⁷

At the start of 1946, the Commission's leaders in Zagreb found the situation in eastern Croatia extremely unfavourable, since none of the items from the aristocratic art collections had been transferred to the local collection centre in Osijek. In order to intensify activities, they organized the visit of the Commission's representatives from Zagreb from April 4 to April 13, 1946.¹⁸ The Secretary of the Commission, Ivana Vrbanić, arrived from Zagreb and visited several places in eastern Croatia (Donji Miholjac, Našice, Nuštar, Požega, Vinkovci, Vukovar, Trenkovo). Her visit to Osijek and the National Museum was especially significant. She found a very complicated situation in that institution because its director Josip Bösendorfer had just obtained permission from the city authorities to move the museum to Tvrđa, the historical core of Osijek. The museum moved into the former City Hall building on the main square, and two rooms were earmarked as the Commission's local collection centre. Ivana Vrbanić stated that the material examined in the field had not yet been transported to Osijek and that the museum in Osijek had been in an unenviable position due

to a lack of employees, major problems with moving museum materials, and inventory backlogs.¹⁹ However, her visit brought positive changes, and from April 1946 onwards, Pinterović began sending regular monthly reports on her work to the Commission in Zagreb, which testify to accelerating activities to save cultural heritage. Her rich correspondence and her work diaries, kept in the Museum of Slavonia – especially those kept until 1950 – are important for creating a complete picture of the Commission's activities (**fig. 3**).²⁰

THE MUSEUM IN OSIJEK AS THE COMMISSION'S COLLECTION CENTRE (1946–1948)

After the relocation of the Osijek Museum to Tvrđa, the minimum conditions for transporting the items to Osijek were met. Intensive collection of materials from the abandoned manors and their transport to the Commission's local collection centre in Osijek took place from the end of 1946 until 1948. Although most of the Commission's efforts were focused on salvaging material from aristocratic collections, some significant collections owned by wealthier

¹⁷ Renata Bošnjaković, Silvija Lučevnjak, "Danica Pinterović i Našice" [Danica Pinterović and Našice], *Osječki zbornik*, no. 34 (2018): 115–123.

¹⁸ KOMZA 214/46, 216/46, 277/46, 307/46.

¹⁹ KOMZA 135/46.

²⁰ *Dnevnik rada Danice Pinterović I.* (1. siječnja 1947. – 31. prosinca 1948.) [Danica Pinterović's Work Register I] (January 1, 1947 – December 31, 1948); *Dnevnik rada Danice Pinterović II.* (1. siječnja 1949. – 13. lipnja 1948.) [Danica Pinterović's Work Register II] (January 1, 1949 – June 13, 1948), Documentary Collection, Museum of Slavonia, Osijek.

citizens of Osijek were also catalogued.²¹ In September 1946, a group of experts consisting of Prof. Tihomil Stahuljak (assistant at the Conservation Institute in Zagreb), Prof. Zdenko Vojnović (librarian at the Museum of Arts and Crafts) and Predrag Grdenić (secretary of the Museum of Arts and Crafts) arrived from Zagreb to Osijek. On September 26, 1946, they found two unlocked rooms in Našice (in the Small Manor) with items catalogued by Pinterović, and on the same day they inspected items in the Valpovo Manor, which has also been stored and catalogued by Pinterović. They made a new list of items in the Valpovo Manor since they did not consider the existing inventory sufficiently precise.²² On September 30, 1946, they made an important review of items in Vukovar, which will be discussed more in the next chapter. Following their visit, the Commission's work in this area intensified. Pinterović was occasionally helped by other Osijek museum employees. The field inspection of collections and their transport to Osijek began at the end of 1946. Unfortunately, Osijek museologists arrived too late in some places since materials had already been destroyed during the war or in the immediate post-war period, especially the collections of the Odescalchi family in Ilok and Khuen-Belasi in Nuštar.²³ In 1947, the Commission managed to ensure the transport of only six items from Ilok to Osijek.²⁴

The heritage of the Khuen-Belasi family met a similar fate, as their manor in Nuštar (**fig. 4**) served as a military hospital at the end of the war, and later housed war invalids. Prior to the final military operations, the family evacuated most of their collection to Zagreb and abroad. Some of the archives and artworks are today housed in the University Library in Zagreb. Although Ivana Vrbanić collected some items during her visit in April 1946 and stored them in the manor, that same year in July, Prof. Marko Samardžija from Vinkovci informed the Commission that these items had disappeared. On August 12, 1946, at the persistent request of the Commission, the Slavonski Brod authorities informed them that the Khuen-Belasi family archives had burned and that some paintings had been destroyed as they depicted “an aristocratic way of life.”²⁵ The paintings were destroyed by the current inhabitants of the Nuštar Manor, mostly war invalids.²⁶

21 These are, for example, collections of families Brlić, Govorković, Hengl, Krešić, Pfeiffer, Povišil, Reisner, Šeper, Šmucer.

22 KOMZA 354/46, 355/46, 407/46.

23 Dopis upućen upravitelju Narodne imovine od D. Pinterović (5. lipnja 1946.) [A Letter sent by D. Pinterović to the manager of the National Property (June 5, 1946)], Documentary Collection, Museum of Slavonia, Osijek.

24 File K-11/47 and File K-16/47, Archive, MS; Jasminka Najcer Sabljak, “Tragom kolekcije kneza Livija Odescalchija – od Rima do Iloka i Zagreba” [Tracing the Collection of Duke Livi Odescalchi – from Rome to Ilok and Zagreb], *Serinia Slavonica*, no. 15 (2015): 57–87; Jasminka Najcer Sabljak, *Likovna baština kneževa Odescalchi – od Lombardije i Rima do Iloka* [The Artistic Heritage of the Dukes Odescalchi – from Lombardy and Rome to Ilok] (Osijek: Muzej likovnih umjetnosti; Zagreb: Društvo povjesničara umjetnosti Hrvatske; Ilok: Muzej grada Iloka, 2015).

25 KOMZA 214/46.

26 KOMZA 277/46, 307/46.



Fig. 4. Drawing room, Khuen-Belassi Palace in Nuštar, photograph, Khuen Collection, Salzburg.

In December 1946, Pinterović inspected subsequently-found items in the Forestry Administration building in Našice, and the evacuation of that material to Osijek finally began. In total, about a hundred artworks (paintings and prints) were transported from Našice to the local collection centre in Osijek. In addition to artworks, about 70 pieces of antique furniture (cabinets, dressers, armchairs, mirrors), about 90 pieces of porcelain and glassware, and about 100 other items (e.g. photo albums, textiles, fans, samovars, etc.) were transported. Thanks to the Commission's work, especially to the work conducted by Pinterović, a part of the cultural heritage of the Našice branch of

the Pejačević family has been successfully preserved.²⁷

Danica Pinterović often pointed out in her reports that the members of the Commission lacked funds and time, and the lack of museum staff was especially acute. Once again, she had to hurry the Commission to provide sufficient funding for transport, and she encouraged the Commission's headquarters in Zagreb to ensure the transport of the collected material to Osijek, which did not happen.²⁸ Soon, the premises intended for the local collection centre in Osijek became insufficient, so additional space had to be rented to house the items.²⁹

In a letter from early 1948, the Zagreb Commission warned the local collection centres that during that year the final cataloguing of the collected materials and inventory should be sent to the Ministry of Education in Zagreb, so that the items could be finally allocated.³⁰ On June 22, 1948, an extremely important meeting, attended by the President of the Commission from Zagreb, Vladimir Tkalčić, was held in Osijek. It was followed by the Commission's work

27 Renata Bošnjaković, Silvija Lučevnjak, "Danica Pinterović i Našice" [Danica Pinterović and Našice], *Osiječki zbornik*, no. 34 (2018): 115–123.

28 KOMZA 230/46.

29 KOMZA 365/46.

30 KOMZA 15/48.

from June 11 to 22, 1948, during which Tkalčić and the director of the Osijek museum Bösendorfer worked with curators Pinterović and Josip Leović. They reviewed all of the items and concluded that most of them should become the property of the Museum of Slavonia, while a small portion of the items (only 16 items on the list) should be transferred to Zagreb.³¹ In his report, Tkalčić stated that the items collected had been stored in three larger and four smaller rooms in the Osijek museum, and included a total of 1,100 artworks (paintings, prints, sculptures), about 170 “various items of furniture” and more than 500 “ceramic, glass and other small items.”³² Not included in the list were some items that, according to the Commission, were of no greater value, and could be used as office decorations or for other such purposes. In addition, about 8,500 books were collected.³³ On July 31, 1948, the Museum of Slavonia sent a request that all listed items be submitted to their institution.³⁴

Until the change of the socio-political situation with the establishment of the independent Republic of Croatia in 1990, the topic of the confiscated estates and property was politically undesirable, so the provenance of such items was not researched, and in the published material (e.g. exhibition catalogues) was not mentioned. The exhibition *Umjetnost slavonskog plemstva – vrhunska djela europske baštine* [Art of Slavonian Nobility – Masterpieces of European Heritage] shown at the Klovićevi dvori Gallery in Zagreb (April – July 2021) completed the research on the artistic heritage of noble families in eastern Croatia, based mostly on the Commission’s documentation as a starting point for the identification of these works, their attribution and dating, i.e. professional valorisation.³⁵

THE COMMISSION AND SALVAGING HERITAGE OF THE ELTZ FAMILY FROM VUKOVAR

As an example of the Commission’s efforts to save artworks that had been owned by noble families from eastern Croatia, we present the case of the fate of works of art from the Vukovar collection, created in the Vukovar manor by the Eltz family. It is assumed that prior to the war, the Vukovar collection numbered about 500 artworks: at least 165 paintings (mostly oil paintings), some sculptures, reliefs and a large number of prints. The oldest and most valuable artworks in this collection were owned by Hugo Franz Karl Eltz (1701–1779), a priest and collector, and owner of one of the largest European art collections, with 1,231 items. He collected mostly works of major masters

31 KOMZA 358/48.

32 Ibid.

33 KOMZA 388/48.

34 KOMZA 430/48.

35 Jasminka Najcer Sabljak, Silvija Lučevnjak, “Umjetničke zbirke slavonskih plemićkih obitelji / The Art Collections of Slavonian Noble Families,” in *Umjetnost slavonskog plemstva – vrhunska djela europske baštine / The Art of the Slavonian Nobility Masterpieces of European Heritage*, eds. Jasminka Najcer Sabljak, Silvija Lučevnjak and Valentina Galović (Zagreb: Galerija Klovićevi dvori, 2021), 8–120.

Fig. 5. Count Ladislav Pejačević, *Vukovar Mansion Salon*, 1846, watercolour painting, Eltz Collection, Vienna.



of Flemish, German and Dutch Baroque art from the 17th and 18th centuries, and some works of northern Italian Baroque provenance. Compared to other aristocratic collections from today's eastern Croatia, the Vukovar collection occupies a prominent place due to the quantity and quality of the artworks, as well as the wide range of themes and techniques it contains, ranging from old masters from European Baroque centres, Biedermeier and academic realism, to the works of Croatian artists from the early 20th century (fig. 5).

When the war reached eastern Croatia in 1944, the exodus of families of German origin to Austria and Germany began. The Eltz family also found themselves in these circumstances, trying to evacuate part of the property from the Vukovar estate to their German estates. They managed to transfer some of the items to Germany, but during the transport of part of their collection by rail, the train allegedly ran into a mine and many boxes with items from Vukovar ended up at the Zagreb Fair (today the Nikola Tesla Technical Museum on Savska avenue).³⁶ Some of these items were looted during and after the war, and then transferred to Arheološki muzej u Zagrebu (the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb) where the material was catalogued on October 25, 1945.³⁷ It is extremely important that the members of the Commission identified all of these items with the same mark. They placed their marks on the back side of paintings' frames, and the Commission's seal was affixed next to them. These markings later allowed unambiguous determination of the provenance of the items.

36 KOMZA 227/45.

37 Ibid.

The Commission sent the compiled list to the Ministry of Education and asked for an opinion on their placement, i.e. their allocation to new owners.³⁸ In the meantime, the items were transported to the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb, where they were re-examined on November 23, 1945, and the first list was corrected and amended, as recorded in the minutes.³⁹ As early as the following year, the state declared the Eltz family *enemies of the state* and nationalized their property, including their artworks.⁴⁰ The Commission was therefore able to grant their works of art to various institutions and organizations. Some of the items were given to the Museum of Arts and Crafts, and the artworks were transferred to other organizations and institutions in Zagreb, often for furnishing offices or state residences, such as Josip Broz Tito's official residence on the Brijuni Islands, where a number of representative Old Testament scenes ended. Nineteen family portraits from the Vukovar collection were granted to Galerija slika Jugoslavenske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti u Zagrebu (the Gallery of Paintings of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb), but experts from this museum soon realized that the material was more appropriate to exhibit in Slavonia, in the area to which it belonged. In 1948, the Academy gifted the portraits to the present-day Museum of Slavonia in Osijek, as evidenced by the minutes of the consignment of these artworks between the two institutions.⁴¹

Some of the artworks that the Eltz family did not evacuate from Vukovar were found by the Commission's team, led by Prof. Tihomil Stahuljak, when he arrived in Vukovar on September 30, 1946. They listed the found artworks and stored them in one room of the manor that housed a boarding school at the time, and sealed it until the arrival of the Commission's members from Osijek. They also left a record of the reviewed items,⁴² which consisted of 38 paintings, two sculptures and at least 36 prints. Danica Pinterović came to Vukovar a year later. She opened the room, inspected the items and announced her imminent return in order to transport the items to Osijek.⁴³ Shortly afterwards, on October 30, 1947, the Commission of Savezno Ministarstvo Poljoprivrede i Šumarstva (the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry) came from Belgrade to Vukovar and took 19 paintings and some artworks for the decoration of the Belje Manor in Baranja (a state residence).⁴⁴ It was not until the end of 1947 that Pinterović organized the transfer of the remaining artworks to Osijek.⁴⁵ Thus, due to the slowness of the Commission's work as well as to numerous other reasons,

38 Ibid.

39 KOMZA 449/45.

40 KOMZA 487/47.

41 Minutes of 21 July 1948, file 557/48, Documentary Collection, Museum of Slavonia, Osijek.

42 KOMZA 356/46.

43 Ibid.

44 Minutes of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia dated 30 October 1947, Documentary Collection, Museum of Slavonia, Osijek.

45 Minutes of 28 December 1947, Documentary Collection, Museum of Slavonia, Osijek.

some of the artworks from the Vukovar collection were confiscated contrary to the existing legal regulations. In their recent research, J. Najcer Sabljak and S. Lučevnjak identified some of this material in the Republic of Serbia, primarily thanks to the Commission's documentation.⁴⁶ As a result of the Croatian War of Independence, the new permanent exhibition of the Vukovar City Museum now exhibits over 2,000 items from the museum's holdings and 100 items, mostly family portraits and landscapes from the former Eltz family collection, are now in the holdings of other museums in Zagreb and Osijek.⁴⁷ Among them are artworks preserved by the Commission, whose provenance was researched in the doctoral dissertation by J. Najcer Sabljak.⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

The Commission's activities took place in extremely difficult conditions, in particular due to the lack of professional staff, means of transport and adequate storage space for the collected material. The biggest problems that the Commission faced in retrieving the materials were, in addition to the poor physical condition of the items and the absence of security measures, a lack of understanding for the Commission's field activities (especially by local authorities) and a lack of original documentation on the salvaged items. An additional aggravating circumstance was the lack of coordination between cultural heritage protection services at the federal (state), republic, and local levels, due to which part of the material was beyond the reach of the Commission's staff, as is shown in the case of the Vukovar collection.

Thanks to the work of the Commission's members, a significant number of items of artistic, cultural and historical value that represent the heritage of noble families from eastern Croatia were gathered, catalogued and successfully preserved in the holdings of the Museum of Slavonia. Although the work was carried out in unfavourable circumstances, thanks to the efforts of Pinterović and her associates, part of that heritage was saved from looting or destruction and later preserved in the holdings of the Museum of Slavonia. According to the archives of the Commission, it is possible to reconstruct a part of the inventory of the manors, that is, the art collections owned by noble families before World War II. Systematic and accurate recording of the data on salvaged artworks and items by the Commission was the starting point for later research of this material, various exhibitions and monographs. This research is increasingly relevant in the context of establishing the provenance of the material in

46 Jasminka Najcer Sabljak and Silvija Lučevnjak, "Pitanje transfera i provenijencije umjetnina na primjeru zbirki obitelji Eltz i Odescalchi" [The Question of the Transfer and Provenance of Artworks on the Example of the Collections of the Eltz and Odescalchi Families], *Zbornik Matice srpske za likovne umjetnosti*, no. 47 (2019): 121–132.

47 "Muzej u obnovljenom dvorcu" [Museum in a Renovated Manor], Gradski muzej Vukovar, accessed December 11, 2022, <http://www.muzej-vukovar.hr/O%20muzeju/Muzej%20u%20obnovljenom%20dvorcu>.

48 Jasminka Najcer Sabljak, "Umjetničke zbirke vlastelinskih obitelji u Slavoniji i Srijemu" [Art Collections of Aristocratic Families in Slavonia and Srijem], (PhD diss., Filozofski fakultet, Zagreb, 2012).

museum institutions, which is a complex topic at the global level, and touches upon various aspects of artistic, cultural and political history, especially in relation to events during World War II, when Croatian and European cultural heritage suffered significant damage.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ *Provenance Research Today: Principles, Practice, Problems*, ed. Arthur Tompkins (London: Lund Humphries in association with IFAR, 2020).

