

The police enquires suspicious paintings in Alšova galerie

May 26, 2011, Václav Koblenc



Alšova galerie, the interior, illustrative photo, author: Deník/Václav Panzer

České Budějovice – Her painting *Spaniard* was auctioned last year in auction house Christie's for £6,4 millions and became the most expensive painting made by a woman ever. The Alšova galerie hasn't exhibited any authoress with such a reputation as Natalia Goncharova yet. But serious doubts appeared – the majority of 150 paintings of this Russian avant-garde artist might be forgeries. The police already enquires the case. „I forwarded the suggestion concerning the exhibition

to the criminal police for the following investigations. They will verify it first,“

said the the spokeswoman of the south-bohemian police Lenka Holická. The accusation was reported on the server Artalk.cz. They wrote that the exhibition might be covered by a group of fraudsters. They cite from the Russian website ArtInvestment.ru which informed that approximately 10 years ago some forgeries of Russian avant-garde from the beginning of 20th century appeared on the market. The expert's opinion of the paintings were made by three people: Anthony Parton, Denise Bazetoux and Jean Chauvelin. And these people also confirmed the authenticity of Goncharova's works in Alšova galerie. „Parton and Bazetoux were hired by an international group of fraudsters from Switzerland and France,“ said to the russian server Peter Aven, the ex-minister of economical relationships of Russia, banker, collector and billionaire. Jean Chauvelin is, according to Artalk.cz, the main figure of the case which was reported in an american journal ARTnews. There was an exhibition of an Ukrainian paintress Alexandra Exter in Château Museum in Tours which was seized by the police – it emerged that 180 of 192 exposed paintings were fake. „And the owner of 130 of them was an art dealer from Paris Jean Chauvelin which deals with the russian avat-garde since the fifties,“ mentions Artalk.cz.

The curators believes in expertises

The exhibition of Goncharova in Alšova galerie was prepared by the curator Vlastimil Tetiva. He believes in expertises written by this mentioned trio. „I'm not an absolute expert on Goncharova but I believe in the authenticity of the paintings. They were published in several prestigious catalogues raisonné,“ reacted the curator. He considers the suspicions as a form of a competitive contest. But he admits that he was informed by Parton about the disputations. „Unfortunately, the money comes first. The group from Russia uses anything to discredit. Goncharova lived in France and these collections appeared there,“ argues Tetiva. The works are in a perfect condition at first sight even though some of them are nearly 100 years old. This is surprising especially about the drawings on the paper. According to the russian server, the fakes come from collections of NKVD generals with fictive names and addresses in Kazakhstan. An analysis would have to confirm the authenticity. Anyway, the case induces many questions. The administration of Alšova galerie hides where the artworks come

from. They only said that the collection was mediated by a Czech collector working in Paris. The paintings and drawings come from private collections without a precise indication of the origin which is, according to experts, suspicious. „I have never seen anything like this in a national gallery, especially when it concerns such a remarkable author as Goncharova,“ confirms the art historian Radek Wohlmuth who raised the doubts already before the vernisage of the exhibition. The art of the Russian avant-garde is known as a field where a large amount of forgeries circulate. Tetiva claimed that the exhibition might highlight the artworks to find some buyers. But Goncharova is an author of a world caliber which breaks the records at the auctions in London or New York. The experts addressed by the Journal agree that it would be absurd if a collector from abroad would try to introduce his works at the Czech market which is, compared with the rest, completely marginal. Another issue which is strange is the insurance value – hundreds of millions CZK – and the fact that the exhibition fits exactly the regional gallery. What more - it will be held only there. Experts are surprised by the huge amount of energy and money which is required to prepare this exhibition. Private collectors don't even usually have such a broad range. „Everything is a strange coincidence. It gives us an image of a typical procedure of how artworks are laundered, the same as money,“ commented Wohlmuth.

Zimola: It is serious

The couple Bazetoux – Parton was, according to Artalk.cz, castigated also by the Tretiakov gallery which owns the biggest collection of Goncharova's paintings. It is because they wrote two publications where 60 to 70 % of paintings are fake. Petr Berkovský, temporarily accredited director of Alšova galerie, is convinced that exhibited paintings are not forgeries. „I admit that it surprises me a little bit. Negotiations took a whole year and Mr. Tetiva has all the materials,“ said Berkovský. The region of South Bohemia, which organizes the gallery, doesn't want to make conclusions. „The informations are so serious that we will undertake, regarding the credit of the gallery, necessary steps,“ said the hetman Jiří Zimola.

Source: http://www.denik.cz/z_domova/padelky20110526.html