

Folk sacral reverse glass paintings (*Hinterglasmalerei*) from the Painting Collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb

PREVENTIVE, DIGITAL AND INTERPRETATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE MATERIAL – PRESENTATION OF PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

- The paper is based on direct experience acquired in the professional processing of folk sacral reverse glass paintings in the Painting Collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb. The author presents an interdisciplinary survey of preventive material protection, documentation tasks and digital material processing by using the M++ computer program. These provide the opportunity for the interpretation of sacral paintings from the basic ethnological (cultural-anthropological) view within the scope of folk piety, i.e., belief in patron saints. In terms of potential presentation the paper highlights the need to place the museum exhibit in a definite context (that is, provide the story behind the object), emphasised by recent theory as an important task of state-of-the-art museum curators.

Key words: Ethnographic Museum (Zagreb)
glass paintings, sacral art, museum collections, museum material
digitalisation

1. INTRODUCTION

Since I was entrusted, during my traineeship in the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, with the review and work on the Painting Collection, with particular emphasis on the processing of folk sacral reverse glass paintings (also known

under the German name *Hinterglasmalerei*), in agreement with my mentor, Senior Curator Zvezdana Antoš, Ph.D., I decided to base my paper on the direct experience acquired between September 2012 and early July 2013, when my formal training was completed.

An additional reason for the selection of the theme was personal familiarity with the reverse glass painting technique: I had a *naive* painter in the family and I enjoyed an almost daily insight into creativity of this kind since my childhood. In addition to practical skills, I acquired the theoretical foundations in the field during my education, where I produced a number of paintings of this kind. This time I was able to consider this art with the eyes of an ethnologist and curator. An initially complicating circumstance, the locally and internationally under-researched (in art as well as in ethnology/cultural anthropology) reverse glass sacral paintings, turned out to be an additional motive for study and consideration, especially if we take into account the value of these objects as evidence of a time and documents of folk piety at the interface between native creativity and the cultural influence of Central European countries. As parts of a museum collection they are today a rarity.¹

Considering the many-faceted aspects of the theme as well as the trends in museological theory and practice, I have endeavoured to approach the subject matter from all the angles which I observed during my study of the Collection. Accordingly, I have reviewed the reverse glass paintings not only in terms of ethnology and museum documentation, but also bearing in mind the history of art and, to a smaller extent, restoration and conservation considerations. In the process I have emphasised the museographic approach in structuring and analysing concrete activities within museum practices.

In presenting my own and, concurrently, my first experience in dealing with a museum collection, I have presented the entire course of events in the processing of the objects under consideration – its representative parts as well as the problems I tried to solve – and the consequent proposals for future upgrading of the digitisation process focused on facilitating the curator's work in line with the challenges posed by modern time and the concept of the new,

1 Along with the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb the Croatian Museum of Naive Art also has a comprehensive collection of folk sacral reverse glass paintings. The Sacral Art Collection of the Ethnographic Department of the Varaždin City Museum has 46 reverse glass paintings. Single paintings or smaller series are found in other museums or in private collections.

*third-wave museum.*²

In terms of literature, my paper is based on several (partly) thematically linked published studies, primarily the article by Mirko Kus-Nikolajev entitled “Migration routes of folk reverse glass paintings” published in *Narodna Starina* (1934). A recent article by Ljerka Albus³, “Folk sacral art in the holdings of the Ethnographic Museum of the Varaždin City Museum”, in which the author presents the results of her research of folk art in the Sacral Collection of the Museum and partly directly addresses folk sacral reverse glass painting,⁴ but it is predominantly a descriptive overview and, therefore, used primarily in the comparison of the collections of the two museums and the confirmation of my own observations. I found Vladimir Crnković’s “Anthology of the Croatian Museum of Modern Art – a Guide Through the Museum Collection (*Naive Art, Art Brut and Outsider Art*), from whom I took over the syntagma *folk reverse glass painting*, a very useful source of information on the special characteristics and history of the technique of painting on glass. In practical terms I used Hrvoje Stančić’s “Digitisation” and the “M + + Operating Manual” of the Museum Documentation Centre. In addition to that, I sporadically ran across a number of important information, mainly in specific chapters or facts/comments within different publications approaching the theme under consideration from the angles of different sciences (ethnology, museology, informatology, history of art). Electronic media (Internet) were used as fact sources. The latter also turned out to be extremely useful as sources of information on collections of folk sacral reverse glass paintings in the parent countries of this painting technique.

2. FOLK SACRAL REVERSE GLASS PAINTINGS (SACRED PICTURES)

There are few references and, generally, information, on *sacred pictures*. Usually they are only mentioned as an illustration of the *reverse glass painting technique*. Although initially complicating, this fact gave me an additional motive and challenge to tackle a theme that has not been studied extensively so far, especially not the way I am presenting in this paper.

2 The term refers to the reformed museum as opposed to the traditional idea of the mission and operation of museum institutions. (cf. Šola 1997: 50-52).

3 2013.

4 The term used is “reverse glass paintings”.

Basically, the technique reverse glass painting implies the application of paint on a piece of glass which is then turned, and the picture is observed through the glass. Along with the English term, *reverse glass painting*, the French term *verre églomisé*⁵ is also used, and so is the German word *Hinterglasmalerei*, also customarily used in Croatia owing to historical circumstances and commercial trade routes.

The technique is present in art since medieval times⁵, when it was widely used precisely in sacral painting. Byzantine icons are the best example. Later on reverse glass painting spread to Italy, more specifically to Venice, and significantly influenced Venetian Renaissance art. After the mid-18th century it became the favourite technique of the Church and nobility throughout Central Europe. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries it became a popular folk art in Austria, Bavaria, Moravia, Bohemia and Slovakia (provinces of Sandl, Buchers, Schwertberg, Gratzen, Karlstift and Waldviertel). More specifically, it was instrumental in the development of national (folklore) art and that is why these regions, along with Rumania (known for the Transylvanian icons), northern Spain and central and southern Italy, are considered as origins of the reverse glass painting technique.

A detailed survey on the migration routes of reverse glass painting and, especially, folk reverse glass paintings, and the arrival of the technique in Croatia, was published by the well-known Croatian ethnologist Mirko Kus-Nikolajev.

Reverse glass painting took particular hold in Podravina. In that region, according to Marija Gušić, “they were not only imported; on the contrary, in this region the technique took such root that it provided the foundation for the splendid development of this kind of modern Croatian painting” (Gušić 1955: 23). Thus preserved, it continued to live as undoubtedly one of the *most singular and most significant features* of Croatian naive art (cf. Crnković 2012: 167).

The reason why folk sacral reverse glass paintings are worthy of attention is also to be found in the fact that these more or less preserved examples are also the last representatives of this aspect of folk art in general. In a text dedicated to handwork in Podravina, Josip Turković says:

“These pictures are no longer found in the hamlets or vineyard cottages. They can only be found in museums and private collections. In 1924 some inhab-

5 Models can even be sought deeper in history, eg., the Roman Empire (cf. Kus-Nikolajev 1934: 77).

itants of Botovo, Drnje and Torčec⁶ donated 18 old reverse glass paintings to the Ethnographic Museum. Other paintings, unfortunately, were broken when new homes were built or when people resettled, and ended up on garbage heaps, while some were snapped up by art dealers”.

The famous Kajkavian poet Fran Galović recalled the end of once so important ornamental items on the walls of old houses with the following verses:
Two beds, and cupboards by the wall,
A big table and leather covered chairs,
Saints on glass, good guardians,
Acquired long ago with the cottage.⁷

On the one hand, whether in the works of unknown masters or created in unknown master’s workshops, sacral art confirms the authentic folk skill and creativity; on the other, it also demonstrates its strong ties with Central European cultural influences. Created by the people for the people, folk sacral reverse glass paintings bear witness to the wealth of folk culture, religious spiritual life and cultural value of folk art which “survived modernity” (cf. Albus 2013: 556). Today, perhaps, we can no longer offer them the authentic setting of a warm home, but they certainly deserve adequate museum treatment and accommodation, and new life in the hearts and minds of the generations that have inherited them.

3. FOLK SACRAL REVERSE GLASS PAINTINGS IN THE PAINTING COLLECTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM IN ZAGREB

The Painting Collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb maintains extensive holdings of objects – pictures, illustrations and prints, selected and acquired in line with the criteria governing the presentation of folk life. Among the varied techniques and many authors – from anonymous artists through amateurs to renowned national and international names – the group of reverse glass paintings, regularly with sacral motifs, deserves particular attention. The people call them *sacred pictures*, and in Croatia they are also known in public under the original German name, *Hinterglasmalerei*, for the painting technique which flourished in Central Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries and which soon thereafter reached Croatia via commercial routes.

6 This information matches the data about the localities on the sacral reverse glass paintings in the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb.

7 Fran Galović, “Vineyard cottage”, in Turković 1978: 112.

The complex process of typical reverse glass painting includes the outlining of the basic figures and motifs on the back of the glass by means of patterns and paint strokes of varying width. The surfaces outlined in this way are then painted, in most cases with vivid colours. The motifs are distinguished by simple art expression the salient feature of which is flatness, i.e., lack of three-dimensionality. Along with clear figure outlines, in terms of colour polychromy prevails (from vermillion through blue, green, terracotta, yellow and brown to gold and black). As a rule the composition of the picture includes combinations of floral motifs (e.g., small floral wreaths, buds, posies etc.), or decorations in the form of hanging textile folds, or clouds painted in grey and bluish tones (cf. Albus 2013: 543). Saint figures and Biblical scenes painted in this way are then held in simply moulded wooden frames; on some of them, inscriptions with names of saints or of events are painted underneath the theme; this is also the case with the paintings in the holdings of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb.⁸ The favourite sacred themes are painted on glass in oil and tempera, and watercolours, or combinations thereof. In a smaller number of cases a combination of colour and gilding is used, with ground and gilt details, a black background or a black mirror on the other side.

According to data available before my review (and later confirmed), the Ethnographic Museum has 131 reverse glass paintings, painted in the late 19th century. The artists and the exact places where they were painted are still unknown owing to the lack of information on inventory cards – until recently the basic documentation for object identification.⁹ The localities of these paintings are mainly concentrated in mainland Croatia, especially in its north-western parts – Hrvatsko Zagorje and Podravina – and Eastern Slavonia, that is, along the west-east commercial routes between the 19th and

8 Almost identical paintings (from the same period and area, and probably by the same artist), can be found in the Sacral Collection of the Varaždin City Museum. Because of this I have used to a considerable extent the descriptions of L. Albus (2013: 543).

9 L. Albus also discusses in her article the problems related to the oldest museum documentation of the Varaždin City Museum: “The former expert-museological processing of the objects and their inventorisation differs considerably from the later museum documentation methods. In most objects important data on provenance, year and way of acquisition and possible artist were not recorded; instead, inventorisation was reduced to basic records and inadequate object descriptions. This is why some conclusions will be more difficult, although these are obviously objects manifesting features of local character and West European influences” (2013: 542). In the case of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb the data are more extensive, but as a rule those related to the production of the paintings are still missing.

the mid-20th centuries. However, a more careful consideration of the matter clearly shows that their provenance cannot safely be related to the mentioned areas. Because of this, in their digital identification variant they have been included in the class of Central European (folk) art. Most of them were acquired (mainly in the first half of the 20th century) from private persons (some donations, mainly purchases). In this regard the name of Vilim Filipašić, museum advisor and director of the state railway in Zagreb (“Acquired and donated through the good offices of Vilim Filipašić”) in the mid-nineteen-twenties, deserves particular attention. A smaller part of the objects still bears the mark ZGZ (*Zbirka grada Zagreb*; Collection of the City of Zagreb), and another part the inscription *102/46 No. 30 Cuvaj Komza*, suggesting, assumably, the year of acquisition (1946) and the former owner.¹⁰

Following insight into the Collection and work on the reverse glass painting, all the paintings – specifically 131 – gained a new form within the M + + computer program. Some of the registered objects posed major problems and required repeated, careful documentation processing and/or re-inventory because of the collision of inventory numbers over time; in some cases the object did not match the inventory card, or had none. I was able to deal with some of these cases with the assistance of my mentor and Collection manager Zvezdana Antoš, and Museum documentalist Jasna Mokus. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the best willingness and full dedication of all the parties involved, some cases still remained unexplained at the time when this paper was completed. New efforts by the expert staff are anticipated, especially with regard to the acquisition data (cf. the series of paintings marked *102/46 No. 30 Cuvaj Kozma*). In consideration of the past work and object dating, re-inventory has turned out to be the most adequate solution. This was actually done covering a considerable part of the material, albeit of varying technique, in the Painting Collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb.

A special problem was posed by the restoration of more than a half of the reverse glass paintings. Although these are mainly objects of outstanding value in terms of their dating (late 19th century), more than one half of them were classified as B category material requiring restoration&conservation steps because of severe damage (in the past damaged paintings were also purchased in order to secure documentation on certain saints). The review of the condition of the Painting Collection and the consideration of its possible protection

10 More detailed information on this acquisition have not been found in the examined museum documentation.

were carried out by Zvezdana Antoš in cooperation with the painter Kristina Matković, who is also a restoration and conservation expert, about a year before I became familiar with the Collection. The reverse glass paintings (125 objects) were cleaned between 18 April and 13 May 2011. Within the scope of work on her graduate thesis Kristina Matković was also entrusted with the restoration of a painting showing St. Barbara, inventory No. EMZ 4508 (Fig. 1/p. 342). She documented every object (photo-documentation and documentation of the condition of each object), dusted and prepared the store-room (felt shelf coating, placing of acid-free cardboard between pictures, and arrangement of pictures on the shelves). Specific conservation and restoration operations were listed for every object to be restored (68 paintings of category A, 57 damaged paintings). The main damage of the paintings included the following: old glue residues (adhesive tape and liquid glue), cracks and damage of the painted layer. In line with the foregoing, restoration and conservation operations planned for the near future include cleaning, residual glue removal, glueing and retouching.

4. PHASES AND COURSE OF WORK – PROBLEMS, SUGGESTIONS AND SOLUTIONS

At the start of my involvement with the Painting Collection, part of the material was already digitised and photo-documented. This also partly refers to the reverse glass paintings (57 paintings of category A were photographed before preventive protection). Because of this, one of the initial steps was the checking and completion of the already recorded data, re-naming and transfer of the photographs into *Mmedia*, i.e., the final linking of textual data with the existing photographs in the M + + program.¹¹

Although my first encounter with the concrete digitisation of museum material implied a somewhat simpler, abbreviated form – in terms of the input of objects from the Painting Collection into M + + according to the already existing inventory cards and photographs, here I am presenting the whole process in all the phases which I was soon able – after gaining familiarity with

11 After the described *levelling* of the established condition, I could start processing the remaining reverse glass paintings *ab ovo*, i.e., phase by phase, which is certainly a longer, more complex and more demanding job because personal coverage of all the steps provides a clear picture of the condition; moreover, data add up forming a more or less regular structure and resulting, as far as the curator is concerned, in a feeling of achievement and satisfaction.

the functioning principles and patterns of the program – to handle personally under the supervision and cooperation with Zvezdana Antoš, Jasna Mokoš and Kristina Matković.

I have chosen such an approach in order to present the course of work in a structural and integrated way, assuming that no particular emphasis needs to be placed on the fact that, in real conditions, a curator's work on a collection is almost daily interrupted by many undeferrable tasks. Because of this the process is longer, but also more demanding since it requires continuous adaptation, i.e., leaving and re-entering the matter and its wealth of exact data that do not tolerate lack of concentration or half-hearted dedication.

An additional and related complicating circumstance regarded the synchronisation of work in the storeroom with digital material processing (as a rule, the physical processing of the object proceeded faster than input in M+ +) and occasional work in Zvezdana Antoš's Home Inventory Collection. I found a solution of the problem in careful recording of all data and performed activities for every collection. That was a kind of a working diary which helped me to re-enter, with no major difficulties, the previously started phases and steps, explained below in greater detail.

4.1. CLEANING AND PREVENTIVE PROTECTION

The Painting Collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb is situated in a storeroom at the mezzanine of the building, obtained by the reconstruction of the former gallery overlooking the northern exhibition hall at the ground floor. The paintings share the facility with primary material of documentation nature because of the shortage of adequate space. This is a problem regularly plaguing museums located in old buildings such as the Secession building of the Museum at 14 Mažuranić Square in Zagreb, which is also a protected cultural property.

In line with optimum storage conditions, the paintings waiting for processing necessarily had to be prepared first for photographing, ensuring maximum safety in the given circumstances. Cleaning and preventive protection were carried out by restorer Kristina Matković. The work included the following: cleaning of the glass surfaces, protection of the damaged material from further destruction, reorganisation of object arrangement, and additional shelf equipment with adequate felt supports and painting separation with acid-free cardboard.

4.2. CATEGORISATION AND RESTORATION

The condition of the objects was an obvious problem clearly established during cleaning and preventive protection; more than one half suffered considerable damage (cracks, damage of the paint layer, glue residues etc.).

A unique example of restoration of a very damaged painting refers to painting No. EMZ 4508, representing St. Barbara, from the late 19th century; the artist is unknown, but it was assumably painted by a painter from the well-known workshop in Sandl, Upper Austria.¹² The restorer Kristina Matković successfully restored the picture in 2008 as her graduation thesis, using state-of-the-art methods, techniques and professional rules. The restoration was carried out as a pilot project under the mentorship of Prof. Šefka Horvat-Kurbegović, Ph.D., from the Fine Arts Academy of the University of Zagreb; the work was focused on establishing whether reverse glass paintings could be saved at all. Although restoration is pointless in exhibition terms (restoration work is always visible on glass), the results are extremely important regarding the form of documentation, further research of the object, and its significance and broader context.

4.3. PHOTO-DOCUMENTATION

In the second phase, every object was photographed (Fig. 2/p. 342, Fig. 3 and 4/p. 343),¹³ first the reverse in order to record the inventory marks and possible inscriptions, and then the obverse; with B category material all the visible damage was also recorded.

Before photographing, the objects were measured and, parallelly with the described steps, written records were kept on all relevant data (inventory number or another mark, theme, dimensions, technique, possible inscription etc.). In this way appropriate notes were obtained for pictorial records, required for subsequent material input into M + +.

12 Assumed on the basis of comparison with paintings in the Regional Museum at Ptuj, Slovenia, which also confirmed the attribution (St. Barbara), which also ci, which

13 Depending on the size of the object, photographing was carried out in the free facilities of the Museum with good sources of natural lighting or in the storeroom. A digital *Olympus VR-310* was used.

4.4. OBJECT IDENTIFICATION ACCORDING TO INVENTORY CARDS/RE-INVENTORY

As work on the collection continued, the photographed objects had to be associated with inventory cards stored in the museum documentation.

Objects up to No. 19.000 were described on old cards (handwritten, often with a drawing of the object on the back); entries on cards for subsequent objects were typewritten with spaces for object description and, thereby, for more information on the object (Fig. 5 and 6/p. 344).

As already mentioned, the process of object identification would proceed smoothly if the inventory mark was written on the back of the object or found in the form of an inventory card, but that was not always the case. The mismatched inventory marks and cards, wrong object recording in another collection and even the absence of inventory cards are not surprising considering the age of the objects or the date of acquisition (mainly the first decades of the 20th century). Although every case was dealt with by a team effort, the inventory of debatable objects turned out to be the best possible solution, and it was accordingly implemented by the museum documentarist.

4.5. OBJECT INPUT IN M + +

After locating the inventory card matching the photographed object in terms of number title and description, I proceeded with material input in M + +.

As the basic theoretical preparation I used the instructions on the webpage on the Museum Documentation Centre (*Operating Manual for the M + + Program* – Version 5-00 – MDC) and Hrvoje Stančić's book *Digitisation*, but also the precious practical experience of my colleagues. Together with my mentor, they briefed me on the terminology implemented in the Museum. Although they have been using the program for a number of years, they still regularly run into dilemmas, and solve them in cooperation with their colleagues, experts for the collections which they manage.

I have followed the same good example in running across uncertain issues and consulted not only fellow ethnologists but also colleagues from allied disciplines (art historians, restorers, archaeologists, sculptors, painters, linguists and, considering the sacral nature of the Collection, theologians). Thus, as a frequent attendant detail on portraits of saints or Biblical scenes there often appear, on the sacred pictures, inscriptions with names or titles of the scenes

- most often in German, but in one of its mediaeval variants and in Gothic script (my colleagues, archaeologists and Germanists, helped me to decode the exact text). A greatly useful book turned out to be the *Lexicon of Western Christianity Iconography, Liturgy and Symbolism*), especially in cases when inventory cards carried vague terms like “saint” or “woman saint”, or names of two potential saints presented in a similar way.

In addition to these and similar substantial dilemmas, problems of technical nature also cropped up every now and then.¹⁴

Another potentially confusing, at least for a beginner, is a slow response to input changes, i.e., changes of object names, localities, dates and techniques, i.e., all data appearing in the shaded identification field, and delays in the M + + - *Mmedia* link, sometimes requiring the manual association of photographs and digital cards (more about that below).

The *thesaurus* is a question of its own. Envisioned as a hierarchically structured “terminological dictionary offering a list of accepted or agreed concepts used to form traditional data search aids or, today, in controlling input in a data base” (Križaj 2009: 312), it implies the standardisation of terminology which – in the specific case – is either missing or inadequate. For the sake of illustration, if the locality of the object on the inventory card is *Krk*, the list of proposed terms includes *Krk/Krk*, *island/Krk*, *town*. The program user has to choose which one to use; on, in the best of cases, this is a matter of a group of colleagues that regularly use the program and are interested in its future upgrading. To my knowledge, a general set of terminological regulations still does not exist, and suggestions and authors’ instructions have not yet taken root to the anticipated extent. Therefore, until the practical implementation of standardised terminology the *thesaurus* function will unfortunately remain unexploited.

As a beginner, I also often wondered whether to use offered terms or create new ones. Thus, the variants offered for the material and technique heading include *paint*, *oil/glass/wood*, which fully matched the records on inventory cards; however, I was suggested to neglect them and simply generate names

14 E.g., no possibility to enter the program (regularly at the level of the whole Museum, i.e., of server nature), sudden program shutdown (and that can really be irritating if it occurs before the refreshing of just entered data because it results in the loss of both time and energy), or, insisting on the started input in a specific field even if you want to give it up (most often I dealt with that by entering a neutral sign, or by exiting and then re-entering the program).

oil on glass or *tempera on glass*. This turned out to be a more rewarding option because the listing did not burden the basic identification field.

On the other hand, in agreement with the mentor the ornamentation section mainly remained unfilled considering the nature of the objects in the Museum. The possibility of separating the picture from the frame (identification parts *a* and *b*) was rejected for the time being, again in agreement with the mentor – Collection manager – and again considering the past practice of documenting objects with inventory cards.

Minor disagreements also occurred with regard to the section for object condition. Regarding the Painting Collection, the most frequent concepts (among the many offered) were *excellent*, *well-preserved*, *damaged* and *worm-eaten*. These concepts, selected in consultation with the restorer and mentor, provide a satisfactory general information.

Therefore, the mentioned differences of opinion ought to be understood as a need for drafting clear and comprehensive rules on the treatment of different kinds of collections by active involvement of curators-managers in their development and implementation – at least at the level of one specific museum. But that definitely does not imply the end; bearing in mind the dynamic focus of modern museums and their collections, the digitisation processes are live and need to be continuously re-examined and adapted to requirements and demands both of professional users and the museum audience. And there is no better way than practical experience, even in the best-conceived theory.

4.6. TRANSFER OF PHOTOGRAPHS INTO MMEDIA AND LINKING WITH TEXTUAL DATA

After the input of textual object data in M++ , every record had to be associated with the identification photograph, the photograph of the reverse and, if required, a specific number of detail photographs. Since the collection of reverse glass paintings includes quite a few damaged objects (B category material), photographs showing details refer first of all to damage like cracks, damage in the paint layer and wormholes, but also, unfortunately, “provisional” conservation with adhesive tape and similar improvisations.

Before transfer into *Mmedia* the previously renamed photographs (object inventory mark instead of the automatic camera record) occasionally had to be edited by cutting unnecessary background parts of the frame (*Crop* function) or turning the photograph vertically/horizontally, as required (*Rotate*

Clock/Counterwise function); I used the *Microsoft Office – Picture Manager* program. There was no need for more complex treatment by more sophisticated programs since the ground as well as lighting while photographs were taken met the requirements for obtaining earmarking identification photographs.

Only the fully edited and named photographs were transferred to the *Painting Collection* file within *Mmedia*, from which they were automatically associated the digital inventory card with a previous program intervention – picture association instruction. In this regard due mention has to be made of the need for exceptional concentration in the naming of photographs because even a smallest error, e.g., an inadequate hyphen, can result in failed recognition and, consequently, failed or partial performance of the planned action, followed by further system blocks because of which photographs must be manually associated with the cards. Personally, I have also found it more desirable to associate photographs object by object because if there are many photographs *Mmedia* slows down and even 24 hours is required to transfer into *M++* (according to my own experience and the experience of my fellow curators). At the same time, owing to the extent and poorly surveyability of the matter, this increases the possibility of error, i.e., failed implementation of the desired action.

If the procedure is successful, object photographs will be associated with identification cards and this, conditionally speaking, completes the digitisation of the object. Of course, there is still the possibility and the need for subsequent changes and additions depending on future research and knowledge, and, generally, the life of the object in the future (exhibitions, borrowings, restorations, etc.).

5. RESULTS AND FUTURE PLANS

The described phases of the digitisation of folk sacral reverse glass paintings in the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb have resulted, by the date of completion of this paper, in physical care (in terms of cleaning, preventive protection, reorganisation of object storage and improved storage conditions in the storeroom), review of the previously digitised material, and digitisation of material not documented so far in digital form.

As a whole, 131 objects have been processed, i.e., all the folk sacral reverse glass paintings. All the digital inventory cards have been written, so that pa-

per copies of the document are also available, with data which significantly outclass the former physical cards and notes on objects (Fig. 7/p. 345).

A computer approach to the museum material opens up numerous avenues for future research of the subject matter and for upgrading the existing data through easier comparison with similar collections in Croatian and foreign museums. The value of this potential increases with every additional digitised object and new efforts focused on the continuous upgrading of the program not only with regard to computer processing trends but primarily by paying attention to the needs and experiences of their primary users (and partly co-creators), curators, and adapting to the modern development of museum activity. Along the line of the focus of *third wave museums* on man rather than on (exclusively) museum objects, at this point I would like to draw attention to the possible upgrading of the current program version with new sections envisaged for possible stories *behind* the object (personal meanings, anecdotes, events etc.). According to Zvezdana Antoš, “a special value of the data base are data which do not describe the object already recorded on a photograph, as practiced by most European museums but, rather, stories and interesting details about the use of the object or the way in which it reached the Museum” (2010: 116). In this sense the development of the activities of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb follows the positive practices of other Museums in Europe and worldwide whose data bases can associate information (regarding tangible and intangible heritage) without any separation of primary and secondary documentation (cf. Antoš 2010: 116).

Bearing in mind the current planning of the new museum display and the adaptation of museum facilities, it would be worthwhile to consider the establishment of a special, open painting storeroom which would use in many ways the potential of the already mentioned *new museum* – from gratifying the visitors with the open character of the institution and transparency of material (and the consequent special experience of the visit to the museum) to the very practical solution of the problem, i.e., shortage of space for the storage and conservation of objects from museum collections.

6. POTENTIALS IN EXHIBITION TERMS (INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION AND OBJECT MUSEALISATION)

The collection of folk sacral reverse glass paintings of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb is the largest collection of this kind in Croatia. However,

for quite a long time museum practices have ceased being limited to mere qualitative and quantitative significance. This is why no particular emphasis is required when we speak about the importance, I dare say even task, of seeking links and contacts with institutions and individuals, owners of similar collections and/or objects, both in Croatia and abroad.

In terms of scientific (and popular) cooperation my priority would be the Croatian Museum of Naive Art. The first 19th century folk reverse glass paintings were included in the Museum's collection about fifty years ago. However, programmed acquisition began relatively recently, in 2005, when – thanks to the *Art of the Hlebine School* exhibition – greater attention began to be paid to the affinity, in terms of technique and morphology, with the paintings of the masters of the Hlebine School. Just as in the case of the Ethnographic Museum, the locality of these objects is northern Croatia, mainly Podravina, but “the possible import from Upper Austrian (Sandl), Styrian, Tyrolean or Bavarian (Murnau), or Slovenian workshops (Škofja Loka, Celje), the products of which also reached northern Croatia, still remains to be investigated” (Crnković 2012: 165).

The investigation mentioned above by the director of the Croatian Museum of Naive Art is precisely what the collection of folk sacral reverse glass paintings of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb would desire. The task could undoubtedly be achieved much easier and faster and the results, I believe, would please both institutions which could present them by a joint exhibition and/or a similar project.

On the international scale, Croatia's accession to the European Union has opened the door to more reliable and easier cooperation with foreign institutions. Renowned European museums holding collections of folk sacral reverse glass paintings include the *Mühlviertler Schlossmuseum* in Freistadt, with a sizable collection of 531 reverse glass paintings produced between 1770 and 1930, the *Oberösterreichisches Museum* in Linz, the Viennese *Österreichisches Museum für Volkskunde*, the *Schlossmuseum* in Murnau and the *Regional Museum* in Ptuj-Ormož. This is an opportunity for establishing connections with colleagues in the parent countries of *Hinterglasmalerei* and clarification of the complex art, political and commercial streams throughout history in the now united community. Therefore, let me use the visionary words of Tomislav Šola, referring to the new theory and communication technology in the context of the European idea: “The logic of computer science is here. It implies a new synergy of the media, it means a new synthesis of knowledge, and it

will eventually bring about much closer contacts between institutions dealing with heritage” (Šola 1997: 75-76).

On the other hand, in terms of the concrete *musealisation* of objects, in addition to the needs of overviews and/or comparative exhibitions of sacred pictures mentioned above, the same objects can be used in exhibitions of varied sacral themes from the art and ethnographic standpoint (e.g., the exhibition *The Wonderful World of Angels* authored by J. Barlek and L. Ivanišević at the Ethnographic Museum in 2007/2008), also considering the different views about “The Everyday and the Holiday of the Croats” (cf. Čapo et al. 1998).). I am referring to the illustrative function of sacral objects in displays presenting man’s living environment in the 19th and early 20th century (e.g., the use of furniture and house inventory with the possible presentation of a *holy corner* or *house altar*, and the going to sleep ritual with the prayer to the patron saint; customs related to major holidays like Christmas and Easter, i.e., actions related to major occasions/holidays within the annual/lifelong cycle; etc.). Potential uses can also be sought at exhibitions presenting the skill of reverse glass painting with the participation of masters still engaged in this type of art although in a somewhat different variant (e.g., in Podravina, the naive art of the Hlebine School) – but technically identical to the one used in painting Biblical scenes and favourite patron saints a hundred years ago. In this way, with an obvious *homage* to a past time, the door of the museum would open not only to the profession and/or *highbrow* public, but also to the local community. The museum would thereby acquire new users, and the local population would gain awareness of the value of something that is regarded, in most cases, only as a part of a dying memory of the (*nonrepresentative*) life of the ancestors, but also get the promotion of its own specific characteristics in present-day conditions in which peoples draw closer at an ever increasing rate in a world in which the identities of a community survive precisely owing to involvement at the local level.

7. CONCLUSION

The systematic work on folk sacral reverse glass paintings from the Painting Collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb in 2012/2013 resulted in 131 cleaned, preventively protected, measured, photo-documented and digitally (re)inventoried objects.¹⁵

15 In the same period almost the whole Painting Collection (841 objects) was processed in the

In addition to the practical value of the work for the Museum, I found it a precious empirical learning experience and an excellent foundation for gaining insight into the work of a curator, i.e., as an introduction to my future professional activity. It also raised a number of questions related to the museological treatment of material as well as to other fields of science and art, questions I have endeavoured to highlight and/or provide answers through the trans-disciplinary concept of this paper. The complicating circumstances certainly include the impossibility of a deeper analysis of certain problems because of the established quantitative-qualitative (substantial) parameters of professional work rather than because of their existence within a conditionally 'foreign' area and matter. Therefore, I shall leave the tackled questions and theses (such as the provenance of paintings found in the mentioned localities, possible authorship and linkage with objects from the parent countries of *Hinterglasmalerei*, etc.) open for later verification and elaboration – my own and that of interested colleagues and fellow experts.

A critical remark regarding sources, I believe, is also called for, since the theme of folk sacral reverse glass painting has really been minimally explored, especially if one considers the studies in the Republic of Croatia and papers in Croatian (the only directly related work is the article by Mirko Kus-Nikolajev; there is also a partly related overview by Ljerka Albus). This holds equally good for ethnology and for the history of art; that, course, could be explained as an omission, but it is also, in the spirit of educational optimism, an excellent opportunity of the interdisciplinary cooperation of experts (and museum institutions of both fields. If we add greater dedication in the digitisation of collections, the road to new scientific knowledge (re/interpretation) but also a new way of sending messages to the museum audience (re/presentation) is almost guaranteed.

Along the same line, I shall sublimate the thoughts and the execution of this paper (and, partly, justify it to myself, accustomed academically to a more specialised, ethnological expression), again with the help of Tomislav Šola and his emphasis in the epilogue to his *Essays*: “Museology is an eclectic discipline which finds its sense precisely in trans-disciplinarity, thus following both museums and heritage itself, and, I would say, the nature of life itself. By borrowing from specialist fields of science and practice we, engaged in heritage, are on the threshold of creating a genuine, great profession. Until that time there will be unwilling ‘borrowers’ and doubts regarding our inter-

same way.

disciplinarity. I think that this is obvious in a world which observes new syntheses with suspicion” (1997: 346).

TRANSLATED BY: JANKO PARAVIĆ

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