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To celebrate the 175th anniversary of Henryk Siemiradzki's birthday, an international scientific conference *Henryk Siemiradzki and the International Artistic Milieu in Rome* was held on the 7th-9th of November 2018 at the headquarters of the Polish Academy of Sciences Scientific Center in Rome. It was part of the ongoing work on the *Henryk Siemiradzki: Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings*, conducted by the Polish Institute of World Art Studies, under the direction of Professor Jerzy Malinowski.

Henryk Siemiradzki was an artist of fundamental importance for Polish and Russian culture in the second half of the 19th century, which is demonstrated, for example, by the fact that his works constituted the base of the national museums of these two nations – Polish, thanks to the artist's donation in 1879 of *Nero's Torches*, which initiated the existence of the National Museum in Krakow, and Russian through the purchase of *Phryne at the Feast of Poseidon in Eleusis*, made by Tsar Alexander III, which provided the starting point for the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg in 1891. Educated at the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts, Siemiradzki, in accordance with the tradition of his university, went to Italy in 1872. Upon seeing Rome he decided to settle there. The artist spent the next 30 years of his life in Rome. He created the city of the classics and he inscribed his work in the legacy of world academism, becoming, alongside Jean-Léon Gérôme, Lawrence Alma-Tadema and Frederic Leighton, one of the most important representatives of that painting movement, which depicts day-dreams about the ancient world.

The aim of the conference was to present the international aspect of Siemiradzki's *oeuvre* in various contexts, gathering in one place recognized scientific authorities from all over the world dealing with the art of the 19th century, with a particular emphasis on the researchers of the artistic output of the author of *Nero's Torches* and his milieu. The result of this meeting is a book, which we hereby present to our readers. It consists of 20 papers analysing Siemiradzki's *oeuvre* from different research perspectives. The book starts with an essay by Petra ten-Doesschate Chu showing the role of Roman studies in the formation of the academic artist. This context is further detailed in two following articles devoted to the role of Rome in the Russian culture of the mid-19th century. The first, by Pavel Klimov presents the Russian colony in Rome at the exhibition *Henryk Siemiradzki and Colony of Russian Artists in Rome* at the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg. The second one, by Leila Khasianova, presents the so far unknown plans to establish a Russian Academy in Rome, with the participation of Siemiradzki. The St. Petersburg theme of Siemiradzki's life and work is concluded by two essays. In the first, Kamilla Twardowska presents the artist's contacts with other artists on the Neva River on the basis of archival sources, while in the other, Nina Markowa analyses the painting *French Artist of the Times of Louis XV Paints a Portrait of the Marquise*, bringing closer the history of the artist and the tsar court.

The authors of subsequent studies employ various perspectives to analyse Siemiradzki's works already created in Rome, representative of his academic style. First, the author of *Nero's Torches* is portrayed as a painter exploiting the richness of antiquity, interpreting not only Roman antiquity – in a paper by Witold Dobrowolski, but also older Egyptian and Mesopotamian art in an essay by Grzegorz First. In the following articles, Siemiradzki's individual works are subjected to an in-depth and multi-faceted analysis: *Christ and the Harlot* by Michał Haake, *Phryne at the Festival of Poseidon in Eleusis* by Maria Nitka and *In the Silence of the Cloister* by Tatiana Karpova. From such detailed presentation of an individual work of art, the reader is then taken by the following essays to the issues that explore groups of works by Siemiradzki in a broader perspective. Agnieszka Rosales-Rodriguez considers the problem of aestheticisation of perception in the works of the author of *Christian Dirce* through the category of "fetishisation of sight" (R. Krauss). Agnieszka Kuczyńska analyses Siemiradzki's curtains as a new medium as this notion is understood by H. Belting. The decorativeness of such works is considered in the essay by Marzena

Królikowska-Dziubecka, devoted to Siemiradzki's ceiling-paintings. Maria Poprzęcka, on the other hand, looks at the influence of the new technique – photography – on the artist's workshop and work. Subsequent articles analyse yet another issue of the academic artist's activity – the reception of his works. First, the horizon of expectations of the viewers is outlined. Waldemar Okoń confronts Siemiradzki's artistic output with the poetry of the bards, highlighting the inspirations and tasks of the academic artist. The pendant to this essay is an article by Leonée Ormond analysing the works of Siemiradzki's rival, Frederic Leighton, in the context of their literary references. The following essays analyse the ways in which Siemiradzki's works were received. Two subsequent articles present Siemiradzki's participation in the international exhibition market: Agnieszka Kluczevska-Wójcik outlines the system of organising exhibitions as a distinguishing feature of the functioning of a modern academic painter, such as Siemiradzki, while Veronika Bogdan examines the role of individual exhibitions in the career of the artist. Lidia Gerc, in turn, outlines the reception of Siemiradzki's exhibitions in Vienna, by presenting the positions of artistic critique based on an in-depth study of the press from the Habsburg Empire. Anna Masłowska, on the other hand, analyses the role of new techniques of reproduction of works of art for the reception of paintings by the author of *Nero's Torches*. Since the volume is a collection showing various research perspectives, we decided to present also essays known so far only to the Polish reader, but prepared and presented in English at the conference, as is the case with the essays by Witold Dobrowolski, Maria Poprzęcka and Waldemar Okoń.

We do sincerely hope that such a multi-faceted presentation of Siemiradzki's artistic output by many researchers from all over the world will contribute to a better understanding of academic art in Central and Eastern Europe. It will also make it possible to present more fully the role of Rome as an important centre of artistic life at the end of the 19th century, a centre of "figurative", "representative" art, created on commission of the authorities and, sometimes only, for aesthetic pleasure, remaining outside the main movements of academic art and yet entering into a strong dialogue with them.

I would like to thank the Director of the Polish Academy of Sciences Scientific Center in Rome – Prof. Piotr Salwa, and the employees of the Scientific Centre for their hospitality and tireless work for the benefit of Polish science in the Eternal City, as well as all the participants of the conference and, last but not least, the co-organizers of that

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