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SOME IDEAS ABOUT A *FRENCH ARTIST OF THE TIME OF LOUIS XV* PAINTS THE PORTRAIT OF A MARQUISE BY HENRYK SIEMIRADZKI

In the process of consultations on the *catalogue raisonné* of works by Henryk Siemiradzki, on which Polish colleagues have been working on, it became necessary to clarify the place of the painting *A French Artist of the Time of Louis XV Paints the Portrait of a Marquise (The Studio of a Fashionable Artist of the 18th Century)* (fig. 23) in the master's *oeuvre*. This report reflects on the subject.

The author of the monograph on the artist Tatiana Karpova connects the *Marquise* with the interest of Siemiradzki, a student of the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts, in the history of France.¹ From his correspondence with relatives, we know that he worked on the painting *Louis XI after Signing a Death-warrant* in 1865 and collected material in the Public Library: he studied costumes, furniture, and the life of that time.² Now the location of the work with such a plot is unknown,

1] Татьяна Л. КАРПОВА, *Генрих Семирадский* (Tatiana L. KARPOVA, *Henryk Siemiradzki*), Золотой век, Санкт-Петербург 2008, pp. 19-21.

2] Archivio di Pontificio Istituto di Studi Ecclesiastici, Roma (PISE), 22 – Siemiradzki Legacy, file 1, Henryk Siemiradzki, letter to parents, St. Petersburg, 11.01. 1866, no. 29 f. 75 and St. Petersburg, [February] 1866, no. 30, f. 83-84vv.

therefore, as a further example reflecting Siemiradzki's youthful interest in French history, the author cites the *Marquise*.

However, 1860s seem to be too early as the date of painting the *Marquise*. Unlike the 1880s, the era of active development of salon painting, when such a plot could emerge as one of the many variations on the theme of *le nu* (female nude), for Russian art of the 1860s, "the Holy sixties", it would have been absolutely untypical. The emerging democratic trend focused on other issues. Even in the paintings by artists associated with the academic line of art in this period the image of a naked (at least partially naked) female body is extremely rare it is and always justified by the plot, representing scenes from mythology or ancient life. Artists who turned to this topic were associated, as a rule, with the Western European artistic tradition by origin (Carl Neff, Andrei Belloli) or worked and lived in Italy (Fyodor Bronnikov). The image of the "gallant 18th century" was also not relevant; the theme of "boudoir of the Marquise" with its erotic associations arose in Russian art only in the early 20th century. The few painters of the third quarter of the 19th century, who worked on subjects from the history of that era, considered "the century madly and wisely" from the point of view of the civil moral ideal: condemned the vices of the society or the ruler and glorified enlightened virtue. The author of the monograph herself notes that the *Marquise*, dedicated to the French history, with its courtly culture, devoid of a positive ethical ideal, was a random plot for Siemiradzki with his moralism.³

It is unlikely that such a picture would have emerged from under the brush of a student of the academy of arts, whose morals were very chaste. The female model began to appear in the nature class of St. Petersburg Academy of Arts only after the reform of 1893-1894. Students working with an erotic component would have caused a scandal. The picture also could not have been painted for the free art market as, in the 1860s, it was practically non-existent. High-ranking clients, able to order a picture with a similar theme, turned to Siemiradzki later, when he successfully graduated from the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts.

At the same time, stylistically, *Marquise* is undoubtedly an early work of Siemiradzki, close to his graduate picture *Alexander Macedon and his Doctor Philip* (*Alexander of Macedon's Trust in Doctor Philip*) (1870, Belarusian National Arts Museum). Therefore, most likely,

3] T. JI. KAPHOBA, op. cit., p. 21.

it could have been painted not in the 1860s, but shortly after graduating from the Academy, in the early 1870s.

The painting is kept in the State Art Museum of Uzbekistan in Tashkent⁴ and comes from the collection of Grand Duke Nicholas Konstantinovich (1850 – 1918), nephew of Tsar Alexander II, a passionate collector of various works of art (fig. 24). It is logical to assume that that Grand Duke was the commissioner of the picture, moreover, after graduating from the Academy, Siemiradzki immediately received orders from other great princes, two of Grand Duke's cousins – Alexander Alexandrovich, the future Tsar Alexander III (*A Roman Orgy from the Imperial Era*, 1872) and Vladimir Alexandrovich (*Christ and the Harlot*, 1873).

Grand Duke Nicholas Konstantinovich was an extraordinary person with an incredible biography. He was the first of the Romanovs who out of his own initiative received a higher education and graduated from the General Staff Academy in 1870 with a silver medal. At the same time, at one of the masquerade balls, Grand Duke fell in love with an American adventurer Harriet Blackford, who lived under the pseudonym of Fanny Lear, named after the heroine of Parisian vaudeville (fig. 25). This love affair continued from 1870 till 1874 and it developed turbulently, the lovers broke off the relationship several times, but then they would come back to each other again. Twice, in 1872 and 1873, they travelled abroad, visiting Warsaw and Vienna, Germany, as well as Italy, in particular Rome and Naples. This passion disturbed the parents of the Grand Duke strongly. He was removed from St. Petersburg, sent in the spring of 1873 with the Russian expeditionary forces on the march to Khiva. However, this did not help, and when Nicholas Konstantinovich returned from Central Asia their love affair continued.

It ended scandalously in 1874. The mother of the Grand Duke, Alexandra Iosifovna, discovered the loss of three diamonds from the frame of the icon with which Emperor Nicholas I blessed her marriage. The investigation concluded that the diamonds were stolen by Nicholas Konstantinovich, and the money had been spent on gifts for Fanny Lear. At the general meeting of the family, headed by the Emperor, a decision was made that caused minimum damage to the family reputation: the Grand Duke was officially declared mentally ill and permanently removed from the capital, Fanny Lear was

4] State Art Museum of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, no. inv. 3287.

also expelled from Russia forever. She never saw the Grand Duke again and died of consumption in Nice in 1886, leaving published memoirs about her stay in St. Petersburg and relations with the Grand Duke.⁵

Nicholas Konstantinovich was taken away from St. Petersburg in the autumn of 1874 and in seven years changed at least 10 places of residence. Since the summer of 1881 he was settled in Tashkent. Here, the Grand Duke, despite constant police supervision, led the life of a grand gentleman-tyrant: shocked administration officials and officials who came from the capital, clashed with local eastern princes, became a de facto bigamist, got numerous offspring, including illegitimate children, and even tried to enter into a third marriage. However, he really improved the city of Tashkent. He paved streets, built a theatre, a hospital for the poor, a poorhouse, a circus, and even a brothel with the money allocated by the tsar court for construction of his palace. He was engaged in business: he started photographic workshops, billiard rooms, the first cinema in Tashkent, selling kvass, rice processing, soap and cotton manufactories. With money from his businesses, he became engaged in the construction of irrigation canals in the Golodnaya Steppe and cotton plants using advanced waste-free technology. Despite the eccentricity of his behaviour, the Grand Duke was very popular among the local residents, who considered him their benefactor and sincerely mourned his death from pneumonia in 1918.⁶

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- 5] Fanny LEAR, *Le roman d'une Américaine en Russie accompagné de lettres originales*, A. Lacroix et Cie éditeurs, Bruxelles 1875.
- 6] Features of the biography of the Grand Duke provoke the authors of Internet and printed publications to exploit the most scandalous and sensational side of it; these are his popular biographies: Михаил АЗАРОВ, *Зазнобы августейшего ланьяка. Мемуары Фанни Лир* (Mikhail AZAROV, *Sweethearts of August maniac. The Memoirs of Fanny Lear*). Accessible online: <https://libking.ru/books/nonf-/nonf-biography/490309-mihail-azarov-zaznoby-avgusteyshego-manuyaka-memuary-fanni-lir.html/> ; Князь Михаил ГРЕЧЕСКИЙ, *В семье не без урода. Биография великого князя Николая Константиновича* (Prince Michael GREEK, *Every family has its black sheep. Biography of Grand Duke Nicholas Konstantinovich*), Zakharov, Moscow 2002. Accessible online: <https://mytashkent.uz/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/V-seme-ne-bez-uroda.pdf/>. This latest edition, written by the hero's great-nephew, interprets events in the most comfortable, ennobling relative light. Both authors use in their texts, the memoirs of Fanny Lear. Also informative memoirs are of interest: Михаил МАССОН, *Ташкентский Великий Князь. Из воспоминаний старого Туркестаниа*, (Mikhail MASSON, *Tashkent Grand Duke. From the memories of the old Turkestan*). Accessible online: <https://mytashkent.uz/2011/04/04/tashkentskij-velikij-knyaz-prodolzhenie-1/>; <https://mytashkent.uz/2011/04/04/tashkentskij-velikij-knyaz-prodolzhenie-2/>) and Михаил БАСХАНОВ, *Самодержец Голюдной степи. Великий князь Николай Константинович в воспоминаниях Александра Половинова*, (Mikhail BASKHANOV

During the trip to Europe in 1872 together with his beloved, the Grand Duke ordered the Neapolitan sculptor Tommaso Solari (1820-1889) to copy the famous statue of Paulina Borghese by Antonio Canova, representing the model as Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, holding in the hand her attribute – an apple. But instead of Paulina Fanny Lear was to lie on the marble bed (fig. 26). Of course, in the few days the couple's stayed in Naples it was impossible to make a marble statue, so the primary task was to give it a portrait resemblance. In her memoirs, Fanny Lear described the unpleasant emotions she felt while the plaster mask was being made of her face.⁷ After the statue was made, it was sent to St. Petersburg and decorated the new palace of Nicholas Konstantinovich, in which he settled his beloved.⁸

The story of the transformation of the statue of Paulina Borghese suggests that Siemiradzki's painting *A French Artist of the Time of Louis XV Paints the Portrait of a Marquise* is something similar – a kind of a “portrait” of the Grand Duke's mistress, an equally gallant manifestation of his feelings.

The plot of the picture is ambiguous, and its title does not quite correspond to what is depicts on it. If you look carefully at the picture on the easel presented on the canvas, a noble art lover poses semi-nude not for a portrait, but for a two-figure composition. A woman with a naked breasts is reclining leaning on her left hand, and the right one is raised up with either a receiving or a dismissing gesture. Draperies in the picture are the same as that of the posing model – pearl around the hips and scarlet next to the ground. There is another figure to the left and behind her, perhaps an angel, or a winged genius – a white paint spot looks like a wing – who either is handing something to the half-naked woman or is putting something on her head. In this

Autocrat of the Hungry Steppe: Grand Duke Nicholas Konstantinovich in the memoirs of Aleksandr Polovtsov. Accessible online: <https://nuz.uz/moi-uzbekistancy/20614-samoderzhec-golodnoy-stepi-velikiy-knyaz-nikolay-konstantinovich-v-vospominaniyah-aleksandra-polovcova.html/> – excerpts from the memoirs of A. A. Polovtsov Jr., stored in Государственный архив Российской Федерации ГАРФ (State Archive of the Russian Federation), Fond 5881, Op.1. D. 118. 226 l.

7] F. LEAR, op. cit., p. 157.

8] The Palace, bought for Grand Duke Nicholas Konstantinovich in October 1873, was rebuilt in 1857-1862 from a two-storey stone mansion of the late 18th century. It was faced with marble during the reconstruction, and it became the second palace in St. Petersburg after the Marble Palace by A. Rinaldi with a similar facade decoration, for which it was called the Small Marble Palace. It is more known by the name of the previous owner – Palace of N. A. Kushelev-Bezborodko (in our days the European University was till recently located in it).

way the painters of the 17th-18th centuries depicted the crowning of Christian martyrs or heroes. Among the works of the late Siemiradzki there is a composition perhaps similar to the motif of “picture inside a picture”. This is the central part of *The Judgement of Paris* (fig. IV), where there is an apple received by Aphrodite-the winner, and a wreath over her head, and even the likeness of a wing over the shoulder of the girl holding a wreath, formed by a piece of fluttering drapery.

As for the main action in the picture, it is also ambiguous: the model, tired of posing, lies down, holding in her hand a sanguine drawing or a print (something by François Boucher, for example). And the painter, putting the brush in his left hand, to the palette, and curving in a courtly manner, lifts the edge of the luxurious satin coverlet with his right hand, either intending to cover the nudity, or, on contrary, to remove the last covers.

In this context, the episode from the memoirs of Fanny Lear looks rather eloquent. The Grand Duke brought her to the palace for the first time to show her his new residence. It made a great impression on the young woman. Fanny left a three-page description of the palace’s interiors, where she mentioned a wide staircase of pink marble with magnificent vases and bronze figures, and a huge ballroom, white and gold, in the Renaissance style, and a Smoking room in the Moorish style; salon *à la* Louis XIV; another living room, decorated with Louis XV tapestries; boudoir in the style of Marquise of Pompadour, covered with pink silk with lace; dressing room with excellent marble bath-room; large dining room, decorated with Spanish leather; the Grand Duke’s office and more. All the rooms were filled with precious things, porcelain, paintings and carpets.⁹ During this tour, in one of the rooms, the Grand Duke suddenly invited her to settle on the couch and play the role of the Marquise. “I didn’t force myself to beg and in the best way possible portrayed the funny and stupid expression on the face of this woman; for his part, he showed all the gallantry of the hero-lover, and after that fleeting farce, he told me that this room would always be mine. I insisted he covered this couch, a witness to our love tricks, and he agreed”.¹⁰

In Siemiradzki’s *oeuvre* there are some drawings that can be associated with the picture of *Marquise*. One of them depicts a nude model

9] L. FANNY, op. cit., pp. 249-252.

10] *Ibid.*, pp. 250-251.

in the pose of the marquise, but in a mirror reflection (Kiev National Museum of Russian Art) (fig. 27).¹¹ The drawing was executed on yellowish paper, which indicates that it belongs to the early period of Siemiradzki's work — later he used grey-blue, grey-green paper. The drawing is well designed with black pencil and chalk, but the facial features are not visible: the profile is barely outlined or erased. If you look carefully – the model's cheek is crossed by a faint trace of another sketch of a female profile. Probably, as in the case of the statue of Fanny Lear – Venus by Solari, the body, executed with a model, was supposed to be supplemented with the head of another model. At the same time, if we compare the drawing with the statue, it is obvious that the woman's pose on the sketch is almost identical to that on the sculptures.

A few more sketches are to be found in albums stored in the Krakow National Museum.¹² One of them (fig. 28) is a sketch not quite clear as to the plot, where a naked woman is reclining on the bed in the left foreground side of the composition in the same position as on the drawing from Kiev. The lady is clearly posing, turning her head slightly to the right, where two more figures are outlined in the depths, one of them is also depicted reclining. A sketch of a man's head wearing a wig is another material for the *Marquise* (fig. 29). The content of the album suggests that Siemiradzki could have worked on the ordered *Marquise* picture while abroad, at the same time when he was thinking about the composition of the *Christ and the Harlot*.

Siemiradzki graduated in 1870, he went to Munich in the autumn of 1871, on the way visiting his father in Warsaw, stopping in Krakow and in Vienna. In Germany he travelled to Dresden, and from May 1872 he settled in Rome. He could have got the order to paint the *Marquise* both while in St. Petersburg or later, abroad, because his routes and the routes of the lovers lay in the same places, and they had an

11] No. inv. Pr – 1180. In the monograph of Karpova dates back to the 1880s (T. KARPOVA, op. cit. p. 78).

12] No. inv. MNK N. I.-318 432. According to the date on the flyleaf of the album, it was started in November 1869, but continued later. A group of the plaster sculpture studies (pp. 2-8) is dating back to 1869. The rest drawings are executed in a slightly different style and, obviously, made later. They include two sketches of mountain landscapes made from nature (pp. 12,16), as well as a picture of a bearded male figure dressed in the spirit of the XVI – early XVII century in a beret and with a knife behind his belt – the image is completely inexplicable in St. Petersburg realities, but possibly related to the Siemiradzki painting *Magdeburg wedding* planned in Germany.

opportunity to meet. For example, in 1873 in Vienna, where the World's Fair was held from May to November. It was visited by Grand Duke and his mistress. In the art section of the exhibition Russian painting was represented by Nikolai Ge (*Peter I Interrogating the Tsar-
evich Aleksei Petrovich*, 1871), Vasily Perov (*Hunters at Rest*, 1871; *Fisherman*, 1871), Ilya Repin (*Barge Haulers on the Volga*, 1873), Aleksei Savrasov (*The Rooks have returned*, 1871). Siemiradzki presented the already completed picture *Christ and the Harlot*, which received a medal "For Art".

Since the face of the statue of Venus by Tommaso Solari has retained the authentic features of the Grand Duke's beloved, it seems appropriate to compare it with the "marquise" profile in the Siemiradzki painting and the preserved photographic images of Fanny Lear. Unfortunately, among her photos which we know there is no one made in profile. All of them relate to the period after her expulsion from Russia (fig. 30, 31). Nevertheless, the result of such a comparison, if not absolutely convincing, does not provoke vehement objections. The only photo presented as a portrait of young Fanny Lear, by the way, the least resembling of both artistic images and later photographs, obviously captured the young wife of Grand Duke Nadezhda Alexandrovna Dreier, whom he married in Orenburg in 1878.¹³

The Palace which Grand Duke built in the center of Tashkent for his residence is one of the most notable sights in the city in our days. It serves as the House of International Receptions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan now. The interior of the palace was made with great luxury. Nicholas Konstantinovich got the furniture from Paris, porcelain from Limoges, glass and crystal from Venice, and managed to get from St. Petersburg a part of his art collection, including a statue by Solari, which he put on the top of the main palace staircase. Obviously he got the picture by Siemiradzki from St. Petersburg too.

13] Nadezhda Alexandrovna Dreier (1861-1929) was a daughter of Orenburg police chief. Grand Duke Nicholas Konstantinovich married her in December 1878. This marriage was dissolved by the Synod and remained civil. Emperor Alexander III legalized it as morganatic in 1899, Nadezhda Dreier received the title of "Duchess Iskander". The Grand Duke had two sons from this marriage.

In 1900 the *Marquise* changed its owner. It was either sold, or presented to Aleksandr Polovtsov Jr. (1867–1944), an official of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, sent in 1896 to Tashkent to study the problems of migration.¹⁴ During his stay in Tashkent, he managed to establish friendly relations with Grand Duke. Visiting the palace, he also had the opportunity to appreciate the Grand Duke's collection of painting, which contained a number of remarkable works of the 18th century, including some portraits by Dmitry Levitsky.¹⁵ Nevertheless, we do not know why and how, but Aleksandr Polovtsov became the owner of the Siemiradzki's picture for 5 years and parted with it, probably in connection with his departure to another place of service – as the Consul General in Bombay.

The picture changed its owners several times later¹⁶, but apparently did not lose touch with the name of Grand Duke Nicholas Konstantinovich, because after its acquisition by the state in 1962 from a private person it entered the State Art Museum of Uzbekistan, created in 1918 on the basis of the Grand Duke's art collection from his Tashkent palace. Now the picture by Siemiradzki and the statue by Solari are together again and adorn the museum collection.

The history of the painting *A French Artist of the Time of Louis XV Paints the Portrait of a Marquise* continues to be a mystery. The author is fully aware that the proposed hypothesis has no real justification. At the same time, it is also not so easy to dismiss it: too many indirect circumstances and coincidences make it tempting and believable. Confirm or refute this idea can further researches – a technical and technological study of the picture, a search in the Russian state archives and in the Siemiradzki archive stored in Rome.

14] Aleksandr Polovtsov, Jr. (1867-1944), the eldest son of a millionaire, Secretary of state Aleksandr Polovtsov from marriage to Nadezhda Yuneva, a pupil of Baron A. L. Stieglitz and illegitimate daughter of Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovich. Grand-nephew of Emperors Alexander I and Nicholas I. Diplomat, ethnographer, orientalist, historian, and expert on Russian art. Serving in the Ministry of internal Affairs, during his trips to the Transcaucasus, Turkestan and the Transcaspian region, he made many acquisitions for the Eastern collection of the Stieglitz Museum. In 1917 – Director of the Museum and the School of technical drawing founded by Baron A. L. Stieglitz, member of the art Commission of the Gatchina Palace. The first Director of the Pavlovsk Palace Museum. After emigrating in 1918, he settled in Paris, where he created his own antiquarian business.

15] M. БАЦАХАОВ, op. cit.

16] Acquires by State in 1962 from B. V. Kopelevich; earlier – a collection of O. E. Morozovich (1904-1943); A. A. Polovtsev (1900-1904); up to 1900 – a collection of Grand Duke Nicholas Konstantinovich In Tashkent. (Tatiana L. Karpova, H. Semiradzki's catalogue-raisonné, manuscript).

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23. Henryk Siemiradzki, *A French Artist of the Time of Louis XV Paints the Portrait of a Marquise (The Studio of a Fashionable Artist of the 18th Century)*, 1871, oil on canvas, 75.5 × 103 cm, State Art Museum of Uzbekistan, Tashkent. Photo Museum.



24. Charles Bergamasco, Photograph of Grand Duke Nicholas Konstantinovich Romanov, 1874. Photo in public domain.



25. The London Stereoscopic Company, Photograph of Fanny Lear. Photo in public domain.



26. Tommaso Solari, *Fanny Lear as Venus Victrix*, 1872-1873, State Art Museum of Uzbekistan, Tashkent. Photo in public domain.



27. Henryk Siemiradzki, *Reclining Nude (the Model)*, sketch, pencil, charcoal, chalk, yellow paper, 35.8 × 44.2 cm, National Museum, Kiev Fine Art Gallery. Photo Museum.

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28. Henryk Siemiradzki, sketch for *A French Artist of the Time of Louis XV paints the Portrait of a Marquise*, pencil, paper, 20 × 28.5 cm, National Museum, Krakow, no. inv. MNK III-r.a.- 18401/15. Photo Museum.



29. Henryk Siemiradzki, Sketches for *Christ and the Harlot* and for *French Artist of the Times of Louis XV paints the Portrait of the Marquise*, pencil, paper, 20 × 28.5 cm, National Museum, Krakow, no. inv. MNK III-r.a.-18401/9. Photo Museum.



30. Charles Reutlinger, Photograph of Fanny Lear. Photo in public domain.



31. Charles Reutlinger, Photograph of Fanny Lear. Album. Photo in public domain.