



MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

BUDAPEST, HEROES' SQUARE

CURATOR - MARIANNA DÁGI

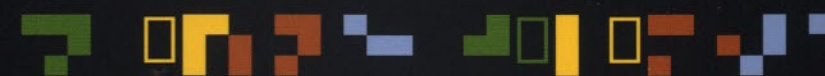
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HIGHLIGHTED WORKS OF ART

2010 SPRING SUMMER AUTUMN WINTER

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS - COLLECTION OF ANTIQUITIES

THE LIBER ANTIQUITATIS

The Fejérváry-Pulszky Collection has thus far been the largest, internationally acknowledged private collection of antique works of art in Hungary. Its founder, Gábor Fejérváry (1780–1851) was of noble descent from an old family of modest means in Sáros. In 1830 he rented the Vörösvágás opal mines from the royal chamber for 15 years in a joint enterprise with a Viennese banking house. In 1831 he moved to Eperjes (today Prešov, Slovakia) close to the mines, to the main square house of his brother-in-law, Károly Pulszky the elder (1754–1841). Fejérváry established his collection on the significant income he derived from the opal trade during the almost two decades he spent in Eperjes. From time to time he made lengthy trips to Italy and other parts of western Europe — accompanied by his nephew Ferenc Pulszky (1814–1897) —, and made purchases from the most well-known art dealers of the era in Venice, Florence, Rome, Naples, Paris, Antwerpen and London, bought freshly recovered pieces from excavations in Italy and

Xanten, and even took part in Paris auctions through his representatives. By the middle of the 1840's Fejérváry's collection numbered more than a thousand, generally small pieces, which originated from the most diverse periods and regions, in a variety of genres and materials. The collection, which was completely unique in character in Hungary, was created on a cultural anthropological basis, i.e.: Fejérváry tried to acquire remnants from every known historical culture in the world, which attested to the way of life, customs and cults of the peoples living then and there. The collection was complemented by a reference library of about five hundred volumes, which was just as unique in character and size in contemporary Hungary as the collection itself. (Thanks to Ferenc Pulszky the books are today preserved in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.)

After Fejérváry's death Ferenc Pulszky, who had by then fled to London, after having been sentenced to death and to a confiscation of his property in Hungary because of his role in the 1848 War of Independence, managed to acquire the works of art. During Pulszky's years in London and later in Italy the collection went through significant changes: Pulszky sold certain groups of objects, and bought others — primarily gems and Italian Renaissance works of art. It was with this transformed collection that he returned to Hungary from Florence in 1866–1867. In 1869 he was appointed to the



position of director of the Hungarian National Museum, a post he was to hold for around a quarter of a century. He sold his private collection by public sale in Paris in 1868. It was through this auction that the majority of his objects were directly or indirectly acquired by the great museums of the world. A number of pieces and groups of objects were not put out to auction, or were bought back by Pulszky himself, the majority of which are

now preserved in the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts: ancient pottery, Egyptian bronzes, as well as Renaissance stone, bronze and terracotta sculptures. Included among this material are the Grimani Jug, an emblematic piece of the Collection of Classical Antiquities, the statue of Imhotep, a masterpiece in the Egyptian Collection, and Verrocchio's Man of Sorrows, which is central to the Collection of Old Sculptures. Gábor Fejérváry had wanted to publish an illustrated catalogue of a selection of objects in his collection, which was planned to come out in folio size and in 300 copies. The necessary watercolours were begun in Eperjes in the autumn of 1842 by two young Viennese artists, Wolfgang Böhm (1824–1890) and Josef Bucher (1821–1882). A number of these are painted on paper bearing watermarks of 1843, 1846, and 1847, which means that the illustration of the objects went on for years, with a third artist joining the team — his pointillist works are the most beautiful. Among the large painted leaves, which are made with a mixed technique: applying, in addition to the watercolours, gold, silver, yellow and white wash to imitate the glittering of metal objects — a folio designed as a cover for the volume with the inscription *Liber Antiquitatis* (Book of Antiquities), the title generally used to refer to the paintings. The objects are drawn individually or in smaller or bigger groups, usually in their original size. The cover here presented shows, for example, 26 objects. Today the large (67x49 cm) album with gilded leather binding consists of 106 watercolours, but the number of completed paintings was originally much higher. About half of these works have since been lost and are only known from photographs taken before the Second World War.

In the autumn of 1842, when the painting of the objects began, proofs were even printed in Vienna. Ferenc Pulszky, however, never finished the text for the planned work, which also upset the publication of the illustrated catalogue. The watercolours were received by Pulszky even before the death of Fejérváry. He displayed some of them in London, and sent others on to Rome with slips of paper containing information on the depicted objects. Prints of the latter group appeared in the publications of the Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica, the forerunner of the German Institute of Archaeology in Rome. After his return to Hungary, Pulszky donated the watercolours to the Hungarian National Museum.

The present exhibition is occasioned, and made possible by the fact that a restoration has begun of the watercolours and the album — which were presented to the Collection of Classical Antiquities by the National



Museum in 2007 —, and of the archival photographs documenting the lost sheets. The exhibition displays some of the freshly restored leaves together with the objects they illustrate: pieces that are presently preserved in Budapest museums, the majority in the Museum of Fine Arts. One of the pages, for example, shows an Egyptian royal statuette dated to the 7th-6th century BC displayed here. The six Classicizing cameos in the showcase (portraits, triumphant charioteer, Eros on horseback) are preserved partly by the Collection of Classical Antiquities, and partly by the Metalwork Collection of the Budapest Museum of Applied Arts. The identification of these objects was based on the photographs taken of the lost sheets of the album. The ancient Greek material of the collection is represented by an Attic red-figure crater showing a symposium scene and dated to about 400 BC; both sides of the vessel are illustrated in the album. The bronze statue of a striding putto, the work of a Florentine master in the beginning of the 16th century, which formed part of the Pulszky-Collection, is preserved in the Collection of Old Sculptures.

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