



SLOVAK MEDALS AT THE PRAGUE CASTLE

The latest issue of Biatec briefly reported about the opening on June 22, 2000, of an exhibition of Slovak Medals from the Collections of Kremnica Museum (16th to 20th century). The ceremonial opening took place with the participation of representatives of our diplomatic corps in the Czech Republic, representatives of the Czech National Bank and the National Bank of Slovakia, Kremnica Mint, Czech and Slovak medal makers, members of the Czech Numismatic Society, representatives of several Czech cultural institutions, and many other guests.

The cultural program prepared by the Slovak Institute in Prague featured our renown violin virtuoso Peter Michalica. Speaking on this occasion on behalf of the organizers was PhDr. Ladislav Kestner, director of the exhibition department of the Prague Castle administration, and Ing. Ján Mathes, Chief Executive Director of the Currency Division of the NBS. The concept and the contents of the exhibition was presented by the commissioner of the event PhDr. Nadežda Vitanovská.

The installation of the exhibition itself was preceded by an offer from PhDr. Ladislav Kestner to hold an exhibition of contemporary Slovak medal art at the Old Land Rolls Chamber of the Old Royal Palace at the Prague Castle. The objective was a loose follow up to the exhibition Czech Medals 1987 – 1996, which was held at the same premises. With regard to the fact that the Kremnica Museum has in its collections medals starting from the end of the fifteenth century, the organizers have altered the concept and agreed to introduce Slovak medal making throughout its entire historical development.

The exhibition consists of 21 showcases in which over 400 medals are installed, together with dies and plaster, wax, and bronze models. Accompanying text on twelve panels is in Slovak and English, similarly as the catalogue issued for the exhibition. Visitors are offered a chance to get acquainted with developments in medal making in Slovakia from Renaissance, through to Baroque and Classicism, to contemporary times. The exhibition is divided into three parts and mostly includes products of Kremnica Mint, which has been minting coins since 1328, but only started making medals at the beginning of the 16th century.

The first part of the exhibition is dedicated to medals minted from the 15th century until 1918. It is introduced by a cast medal of Hungarian King Matias Corvinus by Italian master Bertold di Giovanni, who was a student of Donatello and a teacher of Michelangelo. The oldest minted medal from Kremnica is a coronation medal of King Luis II from 1508 by an unknown artist. The first known medal maker in Kremnica and at the same time the founder of Renaissance medal making in this country is engraver Christopher Füssl. He created about thirty medals and one of the most beautiful ones is a portrait medal of Luis II with his spouse Maria issued on the occasion of the battle of Mohacs of 1526. His followers were Lukáš Richter Abraham Eisker, Joachim Elsholz, Michal Sock, Daniel Haller, Hans Guet, and others.

In the Baroque period, members of the Roth von Rothenfels family worked at the Kremnica Mint. Three of them worked as engravers: Christian Hermann, Hermann, and Jeremiah.

They have contributed to the origination of medals depicting St. George slaying a dragon.

These medals were widely popular throughout Europe because soldiers believed they would protect them from injury and death. In the 18th century the Mint in Vienna centralized engraving works to Vienna, which led to a decline of other mints of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, because they were deprived of the possibility to train their own engravers. In that period, reputable engravers appeared in Kremnica only occasionally (Daniel Warou, Hieronymus Fuchs).

The history of Slovak medal making also includes works by medal makers predominantly from Vienna, who were born in Slovakia but also worked abroad (František Stuckhart, Jozef Daniel Böhm, Štefan Schwartz).

The second part of the exhibition is the largest as to the number of exhibits. It presents medals by Slovak and in a narrower selection also Czech artists of the 20th century. The year 1918 was the beginning of a new phase in medal making in Kremnica. The common state of Czechs and Slovaks created the possibility of mutual cooperation. The Kremnica Mint had its own fine art studio it maintained contacts with leading Czech and Slovak medal makers. Its prominent collaborators included Professor at the Academy of Fine Art in Prague Otakar Španiel.

His school educated a number of young novices of medal art and many of them became renown representatives of this art form (R. Pribiš, A. Hám, L. Majerský, A. Peter, L. Snopek, A. Groma, J. Kulich, V. A. Kovanič, M. Knobloch, M. Bautler, J. Prädler, and others). All of them are represented by their works at this exhibition. Alongside renown Czech and Slovak medal makers, the exhibition also presents a selection of graduation works of graduates from the



50th anniversary of the National Theater in Prague, 1918, Otakar Španiel, bronze, face and reverse.

670 Years of the Mint in Kremnica, 1998, Štefan Novotný, tri-metal, face and reverse.

Bi-millennium, 1999, Roman Lugár, gold, face and reverse.

School of Applied Art in Kremnica founded in 1966. One of the study courses is engraving, and its graduates complete their education by creating a minted medal.

The last part of the exhibition is dedicated to contemporary independent medal art. The two preceding parts represent medals created on societal or special order using minting technology. Independent art medals are mostly cast in metal, which allows using greater sizes and more variable forms. Part of the exhibited cast medals come from symposiums of medal makers, which have been organized in Kremnica since 1983. Artists from various countries meet there and during their four week stays in Kremnica they make one minted and several cast medals. These symposiums serve as an occasion for establishing international contacts and in this way the museum acquires into its collections works by prominent medal makers.

The exhibition of Slovak Medals in the Collections of the Kremnica Museum is not merely an overview of five centu-

ries of medal making history, but also a testimony of eighty years of cooperation and continuity of Czech and Slovak medal makers in this branch. Relationships that developed have not been interrupted by the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. Several Czech medal makers still mint their medals in the Kremnica Mint. Mutual participation at symposiums by Czech and Slovak medal makers already became a tradition (Czech medal makers organize their symposiums in Uherské Hradiště). This exhibition too confirms the continued contacts. Both organizers, the Prague Castle administration and the NBS — the Museum of Coins and Medals in Kremnica hope that the exhibited medals would attract attention of local and foreign visitors and bring closer to the public works of art, which are not only pieces of art but also a historic document of the era when they were created.

PhDr. Nadežda Vitanovská
Photo: Archives of the Museum of Coins and Medals at Kremnica