

Art around 1900 in Central Europe

#2 Academies of Fine Arts

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In this popular culture series we will examine one of the most inspiring moments in the history of European culture.

The turn of the 19th and 20th century was a **special period for the art of Central Europe**, with various artistic trends occurring in a short time and an intensified cultural exchange between countries politically connected with the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

We will deal with paintings, architecture and sculpture, but also other important cultural phenomena, such as international exhibitions and art collections. We present a panorama of **the Belle Époque** by comparing artists from Central European countries.

Emil Orlik (CZ), *Model*, 1904,
National Gallery Prague



Academies of Fine Arts in the 19th Century

Fine arts academies played a **key role** in the art movement of the 19th-century. Traditional subjects were painting and sculpture, but with time decorative arts also appeared. In our presentation we will take a closer look at how painting was taught.

The sheer fact that painting and sculpting was taught at higher education institutions gave artistic professions **more prestige**.

Painting was therefore considered not only a craft skill, but an **intellectual activity** requiring higher education.

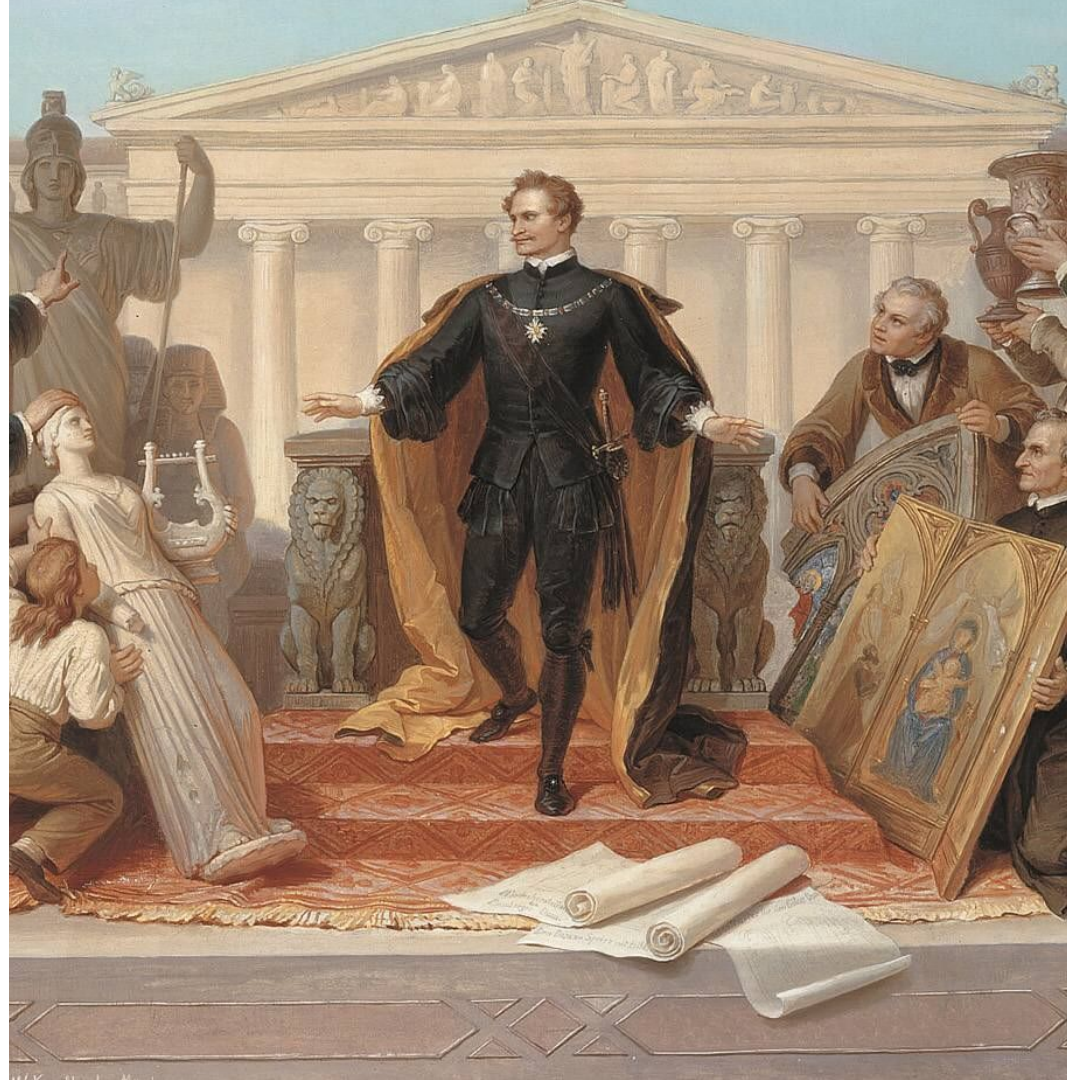
Marcin Zaleski (PL), *Interior of School of Fine Arts in Warsaw*, 1858, National Museum in Warsaw



Academies existed in **almost every European capital**, and most other larger cities. The teaching structure was similar, but programs of individual academies differed slightly.

Since the Renaissance, it was common for academies to be under state rule, showing the interest in culture by leaders. The **royal and princely protectorate** turned academies into institutions of great prestige.

Wilhelm von Kaulbach (DE), *King Ludwig I, surrounded by artists and scholars, descends from the throne to contemplate the sculptures and paintings that are on display* (detail), 1848
Bavarian State Painting Collections





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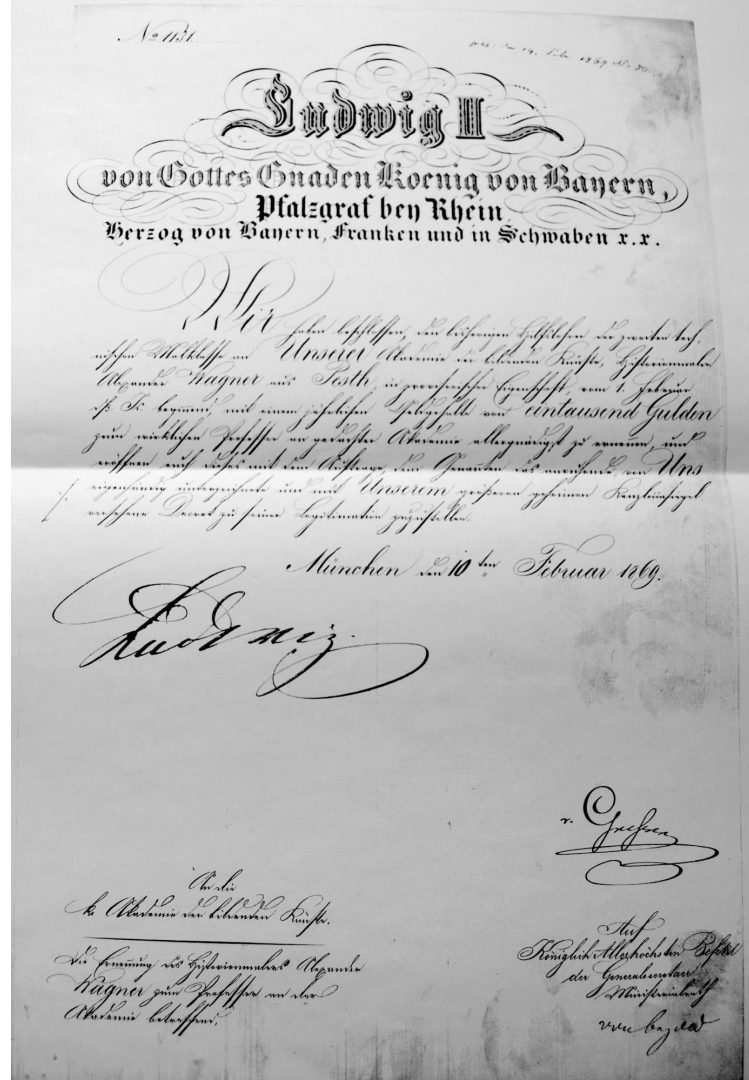
Bavarian State Painting Collections

Academy Professors

Becoming a professor at an academy was considered a **great honour**. Not only did it guarantee a good salary, but it was also associated with other benefits such as increased sales of personal works (due to greater recognition), or invitations to deciding circles regarding purchases for state collections.

Interestingly, academies awarded professorships not only to their employees, but also to other prominent painters.

Royal document promoting Sándor Wagner to full professor at the Academy in Munich, 1869



Around the Academy

As an institution, there was a focus on other practices of the art world at academies as well. For example, **competitions and shows** organized regularly within its walls attracted audiences who were looking to discover new talents.

In cities where academies were of special importance (i.e. Paris or Munich), private schools were also established, where painters (also amateurs) could improve their skills with recognized masters.

Academies also awarded **foreign scholarships** (i.e. Prix de Rome from the Paris academy), which often determined the further development of an artist's career.



Aleksander Gierymski (PL), *In artist's studio*,
circa 1869-1870, National Museum in Warsaw

Academies and Art Works

In academic teaching, improving one's skill by **copying recognized works of art** was quite important. It was believed that nothing showed understanding of a style more than the ability to exactly replicate the work of a known artist.

Hence, when choosing their place of study, artists considered the **art collections** in a given city. This was the reason why Paris with its Louvre, St. Petersburg and its Hermitage, and Munich with the Alte and Neue Pinakothek, enjoyed great popularity.



Carl Goebel d. J. (AT), *Der Stammbaumsaal*, 1883, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna

Academies collected **replicas of ancient sculptures**, as well as **plaster and bronze casts** depicting the human form and its elements. They served to teach replication.

Moreover, with the growing importance of historical props and the need to perfectly reproduce them in historical painting, academies started **collections** of items from past eras.

As an example, Jan Matejko bought elements of Polish armaments from the 17th century in Cracow, which he later depicted in his paintings.



Jan Matejko (PL), *A study of Stephen Báthory's armor*, sketch, 1871, National Museum in Cracow



Jan Matejko (PL), *A study of Stephen Báthory's armor*, sketch, 1871, National Museum in Cracow



Jan Matejko (PL), *Stephen Báthory at Pskov*, 1872, The Royal Castle in Warsaw – Museum

Maximilian Lenz (AT), *The artist's studio*, late 19th century, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest



Poles in Munich, woodcut
from "Die Kunst für alle.
Malerei, Plastik, Graphik,
Architektur", 1887/1888



Die Polen in München.

Von J. K. Kofen, M. von Howalski, S. Buchhalter, H. von Biegungs, W. Syren, J. Ejanow, J. von Staudt, J. Selet

Paris

Around 1900, Paris began to play a larger role – not only because of its academy, but mostly because of its lush **artistic life**.

Private schools for painters, exhibitions, an absorbent art market, developed art criticism and a lot of interesting personalities – all this was a magnet attracting artists from around the world.

Not without significance was **the legend of Paris**, a city considered the capital of the continent (cultural and otherwise), if not the world.



Antonín Chittussi (CZ), *Paris seen from Montmartre*, 1887,
National Gallery Prague

Choice of academy – other factors

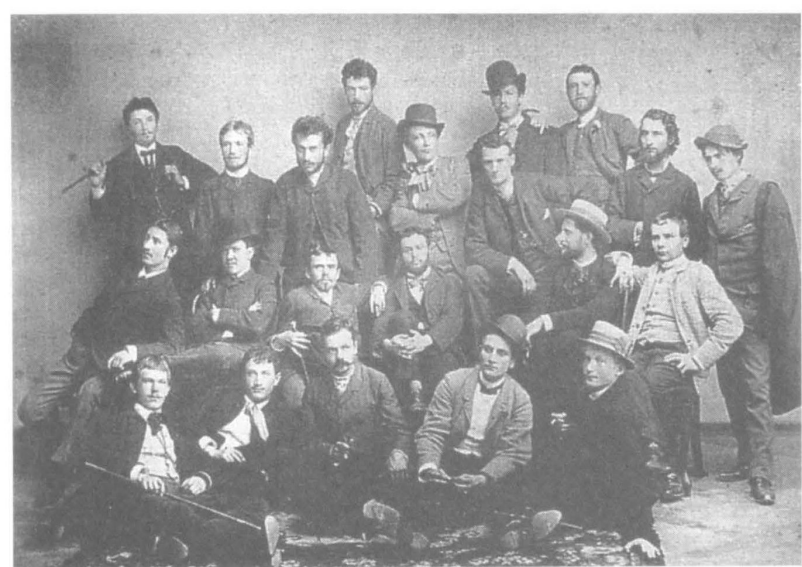
The reasons for choosing an academy were many. The choice was made primarily based on opinions on the **quality of education**, but there were other factors as well.

Munich, for example, became particularly attractive to Poles after the January Uprising (1863-1864). Students of the Warsaw School of Fine Arts took part in the uprising, which resulted in the closure of the academy.

Along with the growing number of Polish students, **family and social issues** also began to play a role. Aleksander Gierymski left to study in Munich to join his brother Maksymilian.



Charles Johann Palmié (AT), *Morning fog in Munich*, circa 1905, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna



Czech artists in Munich,
1886



Polish artists in Munich, photo by Carl Holzer, circa 1870,
Polish Academy of Learning, Cracow

Paris was very attractive to **women**, who for a long time were not allowed to study at state academies. They were able to study at **private painting schools**, many of which were in Paris. We will discuss this problem in more detail in the following presentation.

It is worth noting that individual academies were perceived as more or less current for their time. The Academy in St. Petersburg was considered the most conservative and the most reliable for antique style. This was probably the reason why Henryk Siemiradzki, who later specialized in this style, chose it.



ART-STUDENTS AND COPYISTS IN THE LOUVRE GALLERY, PARIS.—DRAWN BY WINSLOW HOMER.—[SEE PAGE 26.]

Art-students and copyists in the Louvre Gallery, Paris
(from “Harper’s Weekly”), after Winslow Homer (US), 1868,
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Role of Professor

The professor – a **teacher and mentor** – played a key role in the academy. It was based on the professor's interests that students chose their studio.

With their personality and creativity, professors **influenced their students** and **shaped their habits**. Sometimes it was the professor's reputation that made young painters choose a given academy.

Wojciech Gerson (PL) with his students,
circa 1895, National Library in Warsaw



Artistic Contacts

By following letters between students from individual academies, like those in Munich, we can see how **artistic contacts** developed between painters from Central Europe.

About **40 Polish students** were counted among the pupils of the Hungarian painter **Sándor Wagner** (also known as **Alexander von Wagner**). This group included the most outstanding Polish artists of the time, like Maksymilian Gierymski, Józef Chełmoński, Teodor Axentowicz, Leon Wyczółkowski, and Alfred Wierusz-Kowalski.

Without a doubt, Wagner influenced the style of many Polish artists, but also many Czechs and Austrians, and of course Hungarians.



Portrait of Sándor Wagner from Hungarian illustrated magazine "Vasárnapi Ujság", 1888

Sándor Wagner (HU), *Wrangler Race*,
1870s, Hungarian National Gallery,
Budapest



Maksymilian Gierymski (PL), *Departure on hunting*, 1871,
National Museum in Warsaw



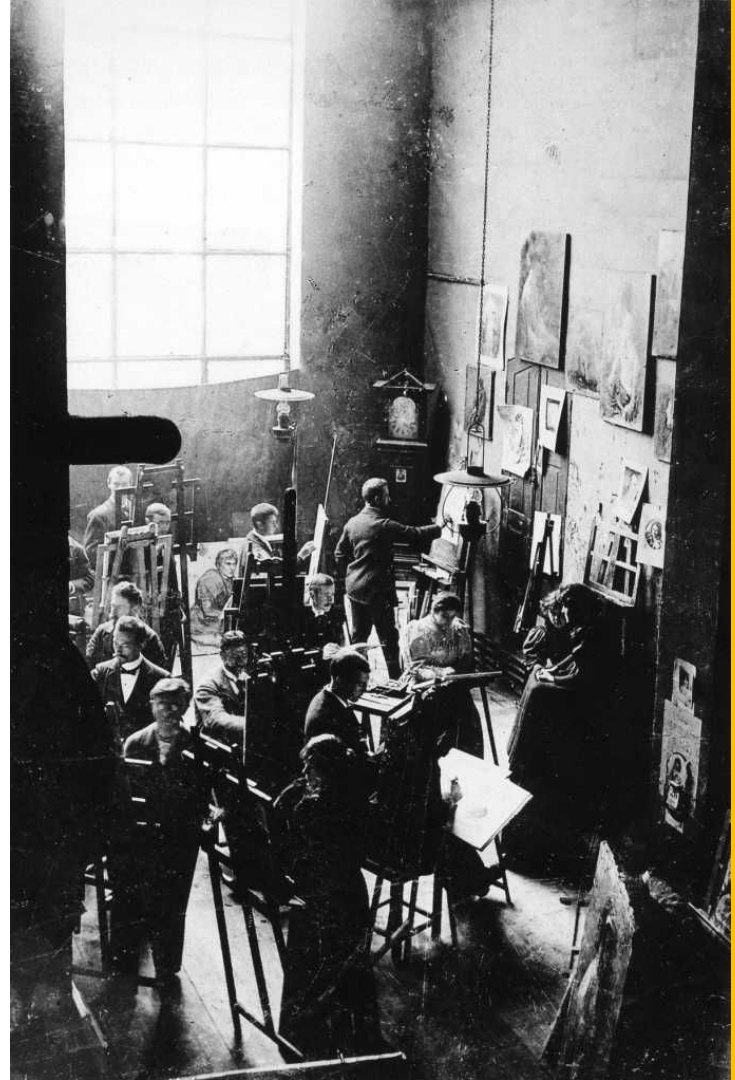
Józef Chełmoński (PL), *Horse market in Balta*, 1879, National Museum in Warsaw

Another example is **Anton Ažbe** (1862–1905) – an artist of Slovenian origin. He studied in Vienna and then in Munich, where he later became a **professor**.

Among others, he taught painters who became the **first Slovenian impressionists** (Rihard Jakopič, Ivan Grohar, Matija Jama and Matej Sternen), but also Wassily Kandinsky, a pioneer of European abstract art.

This example shows how much the artistic trends that we recognize today as complete opposites coexisted around 1900, creating a **diverse mosaic of European culture at the time**.

Students of Anton Ažbe (SI) in studio, circa 1900, National Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana



Anton Ažbe (SI),
Black Woman, 1889,
National Gallery of
Slovenia, Ljubljana



Rihard Jakopič (SI), *Head of
a Black Man*, 1890, National
Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana

Matejko in Prague?

The cooperation between artists from various Central European countries was not limited to the “master-student” relationship. It is wise to note that these countries at the time were part of the same empire.

In 1873 Jan Matejko was offered the position of director of the **Academy of Fine Arts in Prague**, which demonstrated his high standing throughout the Habsburg monarchy.

Matejko refused, mainly because he was then involved in establishing the **Cracow School of Fine Arts**, of which he later became director. With time, this school turned out to be one of the most important art academies in Poland.



Students of Cracow
School of Fine Arts,
1870s, National Digital
Archives, Warsaw



The teaching system at the academies was based on the French model developed in the 17th and 18th centuries. The main element was the ability **to properly depict the human body**.

The process of artistic education at the academy lasted several years. A final work was the basis for passing each stage of education.

In higher years, the best works among the students were selected, and exhibitions organized for them – even awarding them with medals.



Cyprian Dylczyński (PL), *Drawing classes in Warsaw School of Fine Arts*, 1856, National Museum in Warsaw

The first stage consisted in **learning drawing from engravings and plaster molds of the human body.**

However, most education began with learning to draw individual parts of the body and later combining them into the entire human form over time.

Following this, students moved on to studying bronze casts that taught how to properly show *chiaroscuro* (light and shadows) on the human body.

Jacek Malczewski (PL), *A study of classical sculpture*, circa 1900
National Museum in Warsaw



The next stage was **drawing live models**.

This was an essential, and in addition to learning how the human body looks in various poses, it also signalled that nature must sometimes be “corrected” in order to conform to canons of beauty of the times.

The models posed naked to allow the artist to depict the human body as accurately as possible, and to later “dress” it.



Vojtěch Bartoněk (CZ), *A study of a sitting male nude*, 1889, National Gallery Prague

The final stage was learning **composition** – the arrangement of objects on the canvas.

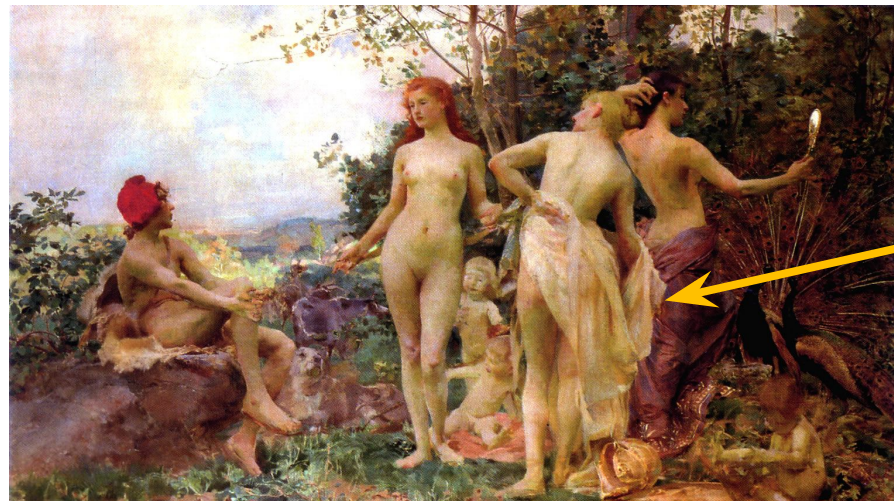
In fact, it was proper distribution of characters in a painting that decided about its narrative.

Teaching began with drawings and larger sketches, which were then transferred to the canvas. The importance of this stage is shown through the thematic competitions for composition held at academies.

Vojtěch Bartoněk (CZ), *A study of a sitting female nude*,
1889, National Gallery Prague

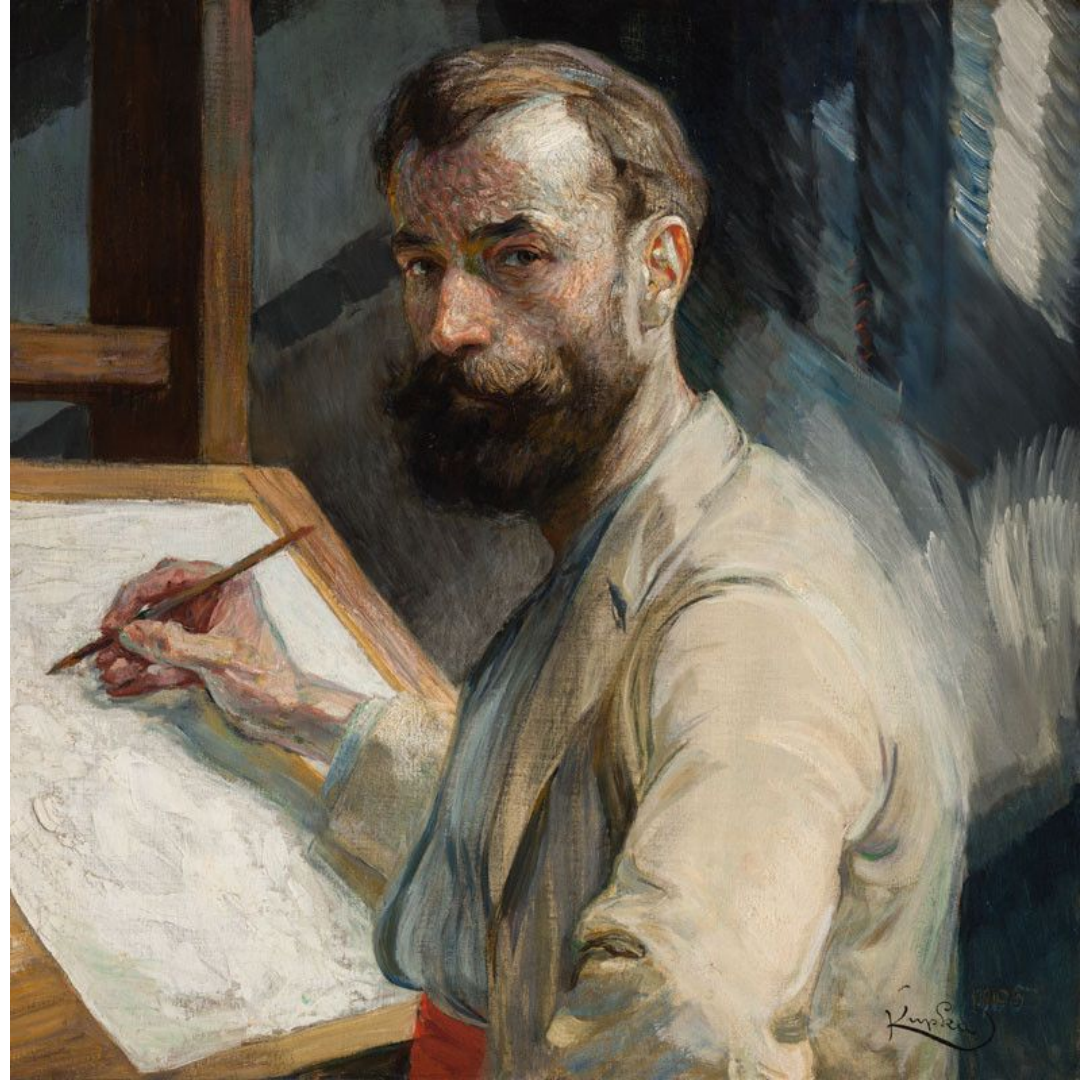


Vojtěch Hynais (CZ),
The Judgement of Paris, 1892:
sketch, final work and study
of Athena



The act of painting figures on the canvas was therefore preceded by a long reflection period and subsequent drawing attempts made on a different scale.

Painting was more and more considered an **intellectual activity** in which the rational element (not just artistic expression) was very important.



František Kupka (CZ), *Self-portrait* [in his own studio], 1905, National Gallery Prague

Role of the Model

As already mentioned, **models** played an important role, not only in the process of education, but also in the creation of the work.

Their positioning and poses were an important element in creating paintings.

Aleksander Gierymski (PL) setting up
a couple of Italian children for a
photo, Rome, circa 1875,
National Museum in Warsaw



Szeroka street in Warsaw,
woodcut after Aleksander
Gierynski's drawing,
"Tygodnik Powszechny"
1884, National Museum in
Cracow



ULICA SZEROKA W WARSZAWIE.

1884



Aleksander Gierynski (PL), *The gate in Old Town
in Warsaw*, 1883, Museum of Art in Łódź



Model in an 18th-century costume posing for a painting by Aleksander Gierymski (PL), Rome, circa 1876, National Museum in Warsaw

Aleksander Gierymski (PL), *In the bower*, 1882, National Museum in Warsaw



In Munich, models for hire gathered daily in the academy's vestibule.

Interestingly, one of the topics at the Munich academy was **Italian regional dress**. We know of two paintings by Polish painters, Teodor Axentowicz and Leon Wyczółkowski, that followed this theme. Moreover, the painting by Wyczółkowski was created in the Sándor Wagner studio.

As you can see, painting a portrait of an Italian woman did not require a trip to Italy.



Max Joseph Ebersberger (DE), *The “model market” in the vestibule of the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich*, woodcut from “*Illustrierte Zeitung*”, 1891

Leon Wyczółkowski (PL),
Study of Italian woman,
1876, National Museum in
Warsaw



Teodor Axentowicz (PL), *Italian flower seller*,
1882, National Museum in Warsaw



Role of Landscape

Contrary to popular belief, 19th century academies were also interested in **landscape painting**. While it was not a separate subject, excursions and sketches in nature were encouraged.

Initially these types of **outdoor studies** were not perceived as independent works, but as material for other paintings.



Zdenka Braunerová (CZ), *A quiet valley at Roztoky*, circa 1886, National Gallery Prague

Students of Warsaw School
of Fine Arts *en plein air*,
1905, National Library in
Warsaw



Role of Literature

Apart from the painting skills themselves, the **choice of subject** matter was equally important. Therefore, painters read – not only belles-lettres, but also historical works – to gain inspiration.

Some motifs or characters repeated many times in the paintings of artists. The goal of each painting was a **slightly different approach** to a given topic.



László Hegedűs (HU), *Cain and Abel*, 1899,
Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

Theory and Practice

The appeal of the academy, as well as its entire system, was primarily due to the skilful combination of theory and practice.

It is worth noting that academies – especially individual studios – were places of **exchange of practical skills**.

Through observation of their teachers, students learned the technical aspects of a painter's work, i.e. the choice of paints, finishing the work or varnish.

Jurij Šubic (SI), *The painter Desrivières with his mother in a studio*, 1882, National Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana



Social Life

An important part of the academy was also... social life. Groups of artists who had left their hometowns formed their own **social circles** where they not only discussed art, but simply enjoyed each other's company.

It was conducive to the persistence of the phenomenon of “**artistic bohemia**” – the perception of the artistic community as a group of people liberated from unnecessary conventions, whose life focused on creating art.



Alphonse Mucha with his friends in Munich, 1885

Reforms

As mentioned earlier, in 1873 Matejko became the director of Cracow School of Fine Arts.

However, already around 1900 the curriculum he has implemented **required reforms**. The changes were made by Julian Fałat. He placed more emphasis on **landscape**, and more professors who dealt with the subject were hired.

Thanks to this change, in 1900, the Krakow School of Fine Arts became an Academy. We can see through this that although academies seemed conservative, they were **constantly changing**.



Students during the classes at Cracow Academy of Fine Arts, 1928, National Digital Archives, Warsaw

Students during the classes
at Cracow Academy of
Fine Arts, 1928, National
Digital Archives, Warsaw



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