

Paintings on glass

Paintings on glass are painted in the opposite order to those painted on canvas or paper; first, contours are outlined, then they are filled with details, and finally colours are applied.

Owing to their vivid colour and durability, paintings made with this technique competed with woodcuts, which were very popular in folk culture and could be often encountered in farmyard and rural cottages; therefore, their creators began to combine woodcut with painting on glass (for example, they painted only a part of the glass surface; from under the rest of the glass pane, a piece of wood engraving was visible).

The origins of folk paintings on glass can be traced back to the middle-class paintings; in the 17th century, glassworks in Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria and Silesia produced this type of pictures on a large scale, at first for burghers, and then also for customers from the countryside.

Marian and Christological motifs, along with depictions of saints were predominant in folk paintings on glass (secular themes were rare).

The tradition of creating colourful depictions on glass dates back to antiquity. In the Middle Ages, coloured glass was used, among others, to create parts of reliquaries and to decorate altars.

Decorative objects made with this method became more popular in the 16th century, when glassworks began to be established in Europe. The increased availability of paintings on glass in bourgeois circles helped this form to begin to penetrate rural areas. Another reason was the popularisation of the Augsburg paintings painted with oils on glass during this period.

Painting on glass was popular from the late 18th century until the end of the 19th century.

Images of this kind were common throughout the Carpathians. Due to the fact that at the end of the 19th century, in the areas inhabited by highlanders, there were few churches, the presence of images of patron saints in houses seemed natural.

Wandering painting traders who climbed the mountains and reached villages situated even in the highest regions were called *obraźnik*.

The sale of paintings took the form of a ritual. First, after entering the house, *obraźnik* prayed with the members of the household to the paintings they already had. Then he read relevant fragments of the Gospel and praised the benefits of praying to the images he was selling. After the transaction was completed, the trader hung the newly bought image on the wall by himself. In this way, it was very difficult for the peasants to refuse the purchase and their home collection of paintings expanded almost naturally.

This form is characterised by a simple, flat drawing, which does not create a sense of a three-dimensional, static composition (except for scenes with highland robbers, which include some dynamics of motion), as well as the compositional symmetry.

In depictions of saints, they can usually be recognised due to their attributes.

Plant motifs are also typical of paintings on glass. Characters often have strongly highlighted cheeks (red circles).

Glass panes used for painting often constituted the production waste of glassworks (they had small bubbles or numerous imperfections). However, defects in the materials proved to be an advantage in the hands of an artist, providing an element of uniqueness in the work (bubbles actually enhanced the visual effect).

Usually, small panes were also used as it was easier for traders to transport them through the mountains. As L. Lepszy wrote in 1921, the paintings on glass which can be seen in the museum space lost in some way a connection with their natural environment; that is, in the space of a dark peasant chamber, illuminated only by smoky candle light, they encouraged the household members to reflect, reinforced their religion, and became a part of the highlander's soul and consciousness. The flickering coloured patches on the glass hid a lot more in itself and gave a sense of communion with the sacred.

An additional argument supporting the attractiveness of this form was its longer life-span (paintings on the glass wiped with a cloth recovered its former glory, unlike paintings on canvas which faded over time).

Painting on glass, unlike painting on canvas, where corrections are possible, does not tolerate random brush strokes (it is hard to hide mistakes here), so creators often underlay the glass pane with a previously

prepared cardboard drawing.

Elaborated by Editorial team of Małopolska's Virtual Museums,



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See also:

[Painting on glass “Highland robbers — welcoming of Surowiec”](#)

[Painting on the glass “Christ in the grave“ from Orava](#)

[Painting on glass “Our Lady with Child of Mariazell”](#)

[Painting on glass “Our Lady of Ludźmierz” by Władysław Walczak-Baniecki](#)

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