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GIFT-COLLECTIONS OF THE GALLERY OF MATICA SRPSKA AS A MODEL FOR CHERISHING LEGACIES

Abstract: *Keeping in mind its peculiar history, marked by endowments, Matica Srpska has always honored those who contributed to its activities since its establishment in the 19th century. Since the museum's founding—followed by its opening to the public in 1933, then transference to a separate building in 1958, when it became the Gallery of Matica Srpska—it showed its gratitude to the artists, heirs, and collectors who helped the expansion of the art collections. At the beginning of the 1990s, in specific social and political circumstances, the Gallery of Matica Srpska launched a series of exhibitions titled “Gift-Collection”. The goal of these exhibitions was to fill the art collections and encourage donations to museums, to contribute to the development of national culture. Gift-collection exhibitions included displaying artworks and publishing a single-page catalog featuring a short introduction and a list of donated works. In the 21st century, the presentation of Gift-Collections improved with better quality and more extensive catalogs, featuring expert comments and reproductions of all donated works. Moreover, the Gallery organized accompanying programs such as talks with the artists, guided tours, and educational workshops for children. The series of gift-collection exhibitions have changed, improved, and became more nuanced in the last three decades. Today, it is an excellent example of expanding art collections and cherishing a unique relationship with benefactors. Over time, it has become a brand that attracts artists, their heirs, and collectors to donate and join the Friend Club of the Gallery of Matica Srpska. Thus, their donation provided them, their works or collections, a permanent place in the history of Matica Srpska and the Serbian culture. The Gallery of Matica Srpska's gift-collections—specific forms of accepting, storing, and presenting artistic legacies—are unique phenomena in Serbian museums. This model points out the necessity of establishing a system for donating artwork and the need to continually upgrade and improve this system so that both the endower and the institution that accepts the gift are satisfied.*

Key words: *The Gallery of Matica Srpska, gift-collection, benefactor, collection, legacies*

The History of Endowment in Matica Srpska

The Gallery of Matica Srpska is one of the oldest national museums that houses almost 10,000 artistic items. It was founded in 1847 as part of the Matica Srpska under the name the Serbian National Fund or Museum, to collect items significant for the history of the Serbian nation. Since the beginning, the museum focused on contributions from notable Serbs who wanted to leave a trace in history. The forming of this collection began before the museum's official establishment when Sava Tekelija—the honorary president and a great benefactor—endowed 11 family portraits. Sava Tekelija recognized the value of education and schooling for national development and the need to establish institutions as pillars of national identity. Apart from creating the foundation Tekeljanum as a patriotic gesture for the Serbian nation to encourage young Serbs' education in Budapest, he donated family portraits, revealing the significance of works of visual art for building national identity and the culture of remembrance. His unique gift consisting of family portraits created an endowment model to which Serbian intellectuals, noblemen, and landowners who gravitated towards Matica Srpska looked up. This gift certainly encouraged Teodor Pavlović, the first secretary of Matica Srpska, to initiate the museum's founding in 1847. In the following decades, the Museum of Matica Srpska's fund expanded due to donations of single art pieces or groups of artistic and historical objects. The names of the endowers were noted, letters of appreciation were sent to them, and those more significant gifts were revealed in the press. Following the transference of Matica Srpska to Novi Sad in 1864, the work on the enlargement of the museum's collection continued, usually through ordering portraits of honorable

people of Matica Srpska and its benefactors. The museum's opening to the public in 1933 was a huge step, as this was the first time that a wider audience could see everything collected in Matica Srpska. As a result, an increasing number of benefactors felt the need to contribute to the museum and donate artworks. After the museum's opening, the section "The Museum of Matica Srpska" of the journal *Glas Matice Srpske* featured the names of contributors and a list of endowed works. In this way, they emphasized the significance and value of endowing and showed gratitude to individuals.

With the establishment of the Gallery of Matica Srpska, the dedicated work of collecting, analyzing, and displaying national works of visual art continued, and so did the expansion of the museum's collections through donations. After moving to a separate building in 1958, and the professionalization of specialist services and improvement of museum standards, its collection continually grew both through purchases and gifts. Endowers were still noted, appreciation letters sent to them, and their names placed on the roll of honor board in the hallway of the Gallery, and mentioned in Annual reports and publications of the Gallery of Matica Srpska. In 1990 it started organizing Ceremonial Sessions held on Gallery Day, where contributors and associates are commended. On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the museum in 1997, the annual journal *Imenoslov Galerije Matice Srpske* was launched, which lists those who contributed to the Gallery of Matica Srpska's work in the previous years through an endowment, donations, or other activities. In 1996, in line with European museums' practices, the Gallery founded the Friend Club, which had two categories: individual friends—great benefactors, benefactors, and donors—and institutional friends under the categories patron, sponsor, great friend, and friend. That way, we wanted to continue the practice of endowment and philanthropy, to encourage donations in line with the needs and spirit of our times.

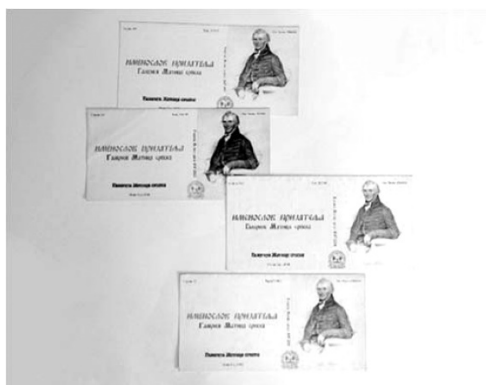


Photo 1 The journal *Imenoslov Galerije Matice Srpske*

Launching the Series of Exhibitions Dedicated to Gift-Collections in the Gallery of Matica Srpska

In the 1990s, in the politically and economically turbulent period for Serbia, the Gallery of Matica Srpska was forced to redefine its program. Left without financial resources and the possibility to engage in international cooperation in these uncertain times, it turned to exhibitions of objects from the fund, displayed in its spaces or other museums in Serbia. Simultaneously, it came up with a new form of shows dedicated to gift-collections, which aimed to present both the endowments and the endowers to the public. During this period, having been unable to expand the collection through planned purchases of works missing in the collection, the Gallery turned to gifts as the only possible model to expand it. Besides, this type of exhibition did not include transportation or insurance expenses, so it was easy to organize it and affordable. The long history of accepting artworks and the awareness of the significance of endowment led the Gallery's administration to establish a model of

gift-collections as a particular type of exhibition, which has been presented in the last three decades with excellent results.

In 1990, the Gallery publicly displayed a gift art collection at the exhibition “The Gift of Jovan and Milana Bikicki” for the first time. The couple Bikicki donated 14 works by the painter Milan Bikicki, which were presented to the public on this occasion. The same year, the exhibition “Gift-Collection of Arsa and Vojka Milatović” was taken over from the National Museum in Belgrade, which presented works donated to this museum. This sort of public display of endowed artworks inspired Matica Srpska to launch a series of exhibitions in the Gallery. Inspired by the name of the visiting exhibition from the National Museum in Belgrade, during the 1990s, the Gallery organized a series of exhibitions of gift-collection that arrived at the Gallery as gifts from artists, their families and heirs, or collectors.

In 1994, the exhibition “Gift-Collection from Vera Mijatović—the Works of Sava Stojkov” was held, and then in 1995, the “Gift-Collection of Jelena and Stojan Trumić”. As part of the Gallery's regular activities, in 1997, two exhibitions were held: “Gift-Collection of Jovana and Milana Bikicki” and “Gift-Collection of Vladimir Bogdanović”. The following year, in 1998, the exhibition “Works by Pavle Paja Radovanović—Gift-Collection of Gorana Štrbac” was organized, followed in 2000 by: “Gift-Collection of Sava Stojkov”, “Gift-Collection of Pavle Blesić”, and “Gift-Collection of Ivanka Acin”.

In the 21st century, we continued to present gift-collections programs, organizing four exhibitions in 2001. The “Gift-Collection of Olga and Dragan Ivković” included 105 works by the architect Dragan Ivković and two maps of reproductions donated in 2000 and 2001. The “Gift-Collection of Emina Čamo Lorbek” included 152 works created using different drawing and graphic techniques. In addition to her work, the artist donated several pieces of contemporary Serbian and European painters, which contribute to our understanding of visual arts in Yugoslavia in the second half of the 20th century. In the same year, the Gallery organized two exhibitions of artworks by the Mojak couple at the same time: “Gift-Collection of Ari Mojak” and “Gift-Collection of Petar Mojak”, who donated their drawings, paintings, and ceramics (2001); then, in 2002, there was the exhibition “Gift-Collection of Vera Hadži Mijatović Stričević”, a benefactor and collector who, in addition to the collection of paintings by Sava Stojković, donated numerous paintings by Serbian painters of the 20th century. In the same year, the exhibition “Gift-Collection of Bratsa Bonifacho, a Serbian painter from Canada” was held, which included nine works by the painter of Serbian origin who moved to Canada. And, finally, in 2003, the “Gift-Collection of Mirna Sredović Đorđičković” was displayed, who donated 101 sculptures by her mother Slavka Petrović Sredović, a famous sculptor, as well as seven works by other artists.



Photo 2 Catalogs from Gift-Collection Exhibitions

This type of exhibition serves two purposes. By publicly presenting donated works of artists, heirs, or collectors, the Gallery popularizes this sort of endowment and socially responsible behavior, and honors and expresses gratitude to the donors. At the same time, it encouraged others to contribute to the Gallery by expanding its collection. It was basically the endowment practice, already known to the museum, which gained a new form in the 1990s.

All the exhibitions mentioned above had simple one-page catalogs in the form of flyers, which contained biographical details about the endower and a list of donated works. The emphasis was on publishing the list of donated works and their display to the public. This modest printed form did not allow the possibility to present and analyze an artist's entire career or the donor's biography.

Improving the Model for Presenting Gift-Collections

This series continued with the exhibitions: the "Gift-Collection of Vanja Kraut" organized in 2005; the "Gift-Collection of Milena Jeftić Ničeva Kostić" and "Gift-Collection of Marica Radojčić" in 2009; and the "Gift Collection of Ružica Beba Pavlović" in 2011. The art historian Vanja Kraut donated a unique collection of 180 drawings and graphics she had gathered as a curator at the National Museum. At the same time, these three artists, together with curators of the Gallery, made a selection of their most representative works from different phases and made using different techniques. Over the years, this series has improved the way the gift-collections are formed and presented.



Photo 3 Catalog for the exhibition "Gift-Collection of Vanja Kraut" and the opening of the exhibition

The series of gift-collection exhibitions initially had catalogs in the form of flyers, i.e., leaflets, and has since adopted a new visual identity. In 2005, for the exhibition "Gift-Collection of Vanja Kraut" the first catalog for a gift-collection was made, with an introduction by Ljubica Miljković and a complete list of works with their reproductions, made by Mirjana Brmbota. This exhibition established a new form of publications for gift-collection exhibitions, and they featured a discussion text and a list of all the donated works with reproductions. That improved the presentation of gift-collections. In the following years, Irina Subotic, a long-time contributor to the Gallery, wrote an article about the work of Milena Jeftić Ničeva Kostić and Marica Radojčić, while Mirjana Brmbota, the Gallery's curator, wrote a text about the work of Ružica Beba Pavlović.



Photo 4 The opening of the exhibition “Gift-Collection of Marica Radojčić” and the opening of the exhibition “Gift-Collection of Ružica Beba Pavlović”

In addition to the gift-collections acquired at the beginning of the 21st century, the improvement of exhibitions and the accompanying catalogs, the Gallery decided to prepare, publish, and present the previously granted gift-collections. Their decision resulted in an exhibition in 2006, titled “Gift-Collection of Miloš Bokšan”. It was organized by Emica Milošević, a curator at the Gallery of Matica Srpska, with the desire to present to the public the gift of this famous lawyer and collector from Novi Sad, who was actively involved in the work of Matica Srpska between the two world wars. He made an endowment to the museum a few years after it opened for the public and later endowed many works of art in his will. On the occasion of 160 years of the Museum of Matica Srpska in 2007, the exhibition “Gift-Collection of Sava Tekelija” was organized, with a discussion text by the curator Snežana Mišić. The purpose of these exhibitions was to remind experts and the public of the great endowers from the past and to encourage contemporary collectors to make similar bequests. Curator Vanja Kraut was one of the more recent collectors. She was followed by art historian Vera Jovanović Dundin and writer Jovan Dundin, who donated their collection of graphics, drawings, and mixed techniques by artists of the 20th century. The gift-collection they endowed in 2011 contains 284 artworks: two printed maps of graphics, five drawings by the painter Stevan Maksimović and unique sketches by Milan Kerc. Due to the collection’s specific nature, we have still not presented it to the public, but we plan to do so in the following years.

Besides a more complex catalog, gift-collection exhibitions have become richer in content and have a more serious air to them than before. During the exhibition “Gift-Collection of Milena Jeftić Ničeva Kostić”, we organized a workshop, “Find the Tiger”, for preschool and young school children. It was the first educational children’s program adjusted to the ongoing exhibition of the gift-collection. After this, in line with the Gallery’s regular accompanying activities, we organized different programs: interpretations of the artist, conversation with artists, and educational workshops. In this way, gift-collections exhibitions were carried out in the same manner as other exhibitions at the Gallery of Matica Srpska.



Photo 5 The opening of the exhibition “Gift-Collection of Milena Jeftić Ničeva Kostić”

The Gallery's devotion to the donations has earned it the trust of contemporary artists and the artists' and collectors' heirs. Numerous gifts and collections formed in recent decades bear testament to this. Due to donated gift-collections at the beginning of the 21st century, the Gallery's contemporary art fund expanded significantly. Artists like Milena Jeftić Ničeva Kostić, Marica Radojčić, and Ružica Beba Pavlović donated their works. At the same time, Sava and Miroslava Sandić, Petar Đurčić, Vera Zarić, and Emina Čamo Lorbek added new pieces to previously granted collections.

One can observe a change in the quality of gift-collections in several recent donations. Ties between artists and the museum have existed since the museum first opened. Matica Srpska had its privileged painters in the 19th century as well. In the beginning, these were artists engaged in creating the Pantheon, a collection of portraits of significant figures of Matica Srpska. By the end of the century, they were painters with scholarships who attended European art schools thanks to foundations' help. Then, in the 20th century, artists like Uroš Predić, Đorđe Jovanović, and Milan Konjović were actively involved in its operations. In recent years, Vera Zarić and Petar Đurčić stand out as artists close to the Gallery. They attend every Gallery event and are quite active in expanding the collection of portraits of the Gallery of Matica Srpska's managers, becoming an integral part of the institution's everyday life. Both of them contributed a significant number of their own works. Vera Zarić donated 121 works—paintings and drawings—while Petar Đurčić donated 174 works—paintings, drawings, and pastels. Thanks to his decades-long friendship with the former manager Milan Solarov and the Gallery's curator Ratomir Kulić, a catalog featuring three texts by these authors came out, a product of their unique dialogue. The curator Jelena Ognjanović wrote a text about Vera Zarić, after carefully examining her works and engaging in long conversations with the artist. The gallery paid back to its benefactors with grand exhibitions and extensive catalogs that further strengthened their friendship and contributed to mutual respect.



Photo 6 The opening of the exhibition “Gift-Collection of Petar Đurčić”
and the opening of the exhibition “Gift-Collection of Vera Zarić”

The Gallery's devotion to gift-collections is visible in its decision to organize an exhibition dedicated to the “Gift-Collection of Ivanka Acin” on its 170th anniversary. Although the artist had already donated works in the previous decades, among them the plaster bust of the former manager Leposava Šelmić, her heirs Višnja and Mirko Petrović decided to donate the diverse collection of sculptures made by their mother. Although it came to the Gallery several years before the anniversary, we selected it as one of the three exhibitions to mark the occasion. In this way, we wanted to point out a unique feature of the Gallery: the way it expands collections through gifts and honors benefactors as some of its cornerstones that makes it stand out from other galleries.



Photo 7 The exhibition “Gift-Collection of Ivanka Acin”

Soon after, in 2018, the Gallery received another extraordinary gift. The gift-collection of Nikola and Radmila Graovac was donated by their daughter Smilja Graovac Cvetko. The cause for this was the casting and erecting of one of Radmila Graovac’s sculptures from the GMS’s collection in front of the Gallery’s building as part of its renovation plans following its adaptation and 170th anniversary. Upon discovery that the Gallery had chosen her sculpture as its trademark, Smilja Graovac Cvetko decided to endow to the Gallery the entire collection of works by her parents. She left to the Gallery to select from the rich artistic legacy of her parents. The collection consists of 21 paintings by Nikola Graovac and 22 sculptures by Radmila Graovac Ris. The preparation for this exhibition is underway and will soon be presented to the public.



Photo 8 Sculpture by Radmila Graovac, Female Act, outside the Gallery of Matica Srpska

Recently, in March 2020, the Gallery received another gift-collection of works by an exceptional artist from his heirs. Viktorija Brašovan and her daughter Olga Kovačev endowed 13 pieces of visual art and 30 items of applied art (watches, armchairs, mirrors, chandeliers, chests of drawers, and the similar) belonging to Dragiša Brašovan. This collection enables us to get acquainted with the creative, architectural world of Dragiša Brašovan as well as his intimate household objects, which show that he was a lover of art, a friend of the artists, and a collector of antiquities. With this gift, the Gallery’s recently formed and published applied arts collection became significantly richer. Besides, the Gallery now had the unique mission of honoring the memory of an architect whose masterpiece, the Banovina building in Novi Sad, shaped Serbia’s modern architecture. Work on the preparation and conservation of this collection has only just begun and will be presented in the future as a story about Dragiša Brašovan—an architect and collector.



Photo 9 Objects from the “Gift-Collection of Dragiša Brašovan” in the Hall of Sava Tekelija

The tradition of donating collections continued in the 21st century with one extraordinary collection. The group of great collectors and benefactors consisting of Sava Tekelija, Miloš Bokšan, Vanja Kraut, Vera and Jovan Dundin gained a new addition—the art critic Sava Stepanov. As a former employee of the Gallery and a long-term follower of its activities, he wanted to donate his collection of contemporary art, collected in half a century, to the Gallery of Matica Srpska. Together with Danilo Vuksanović, he made a selection of works, prepared the exhibitions, and gave an interview for the catalog. His donation consists of 75 pieces of art—paintings, sculptures, graphics, drawings, and works made in new media—enriching the Gallery’s collections with works from the second half of the 20th century that it was missing. This exhibition sparked great attention from the public and contemporary artists whose works were collected by Stepa Stepanov, which became available to the public and a part of the GMS’s collection. This exhibition attracted a new audience and proved itself to be an open space for contemporary artists.



Photo 10 “Gift-Collection of Sava Stepanov” and the opening of the exhibition

Gift-Collections as a Unique Model for Expanding Art Collections

We were cautious when selecting works for gift-collections. We did not want this series to be an excuse for artists to move their atelier into the museum depot. Instead, we worked together with them to make a selection of works that was well-rounded and diverse and in line with the Gallery of Matica Srpska’s collection. The joint work of the Gallery’s experts Gallery, on the one hand, and the artists and benefactors on the other resulted in a high-quality gift-collection, as well as a high-quality exhibition and catalog. The Gallery's experts demonstrated excellent knowledge and skills by nurturing, improving, and developing this practice until they finally succeeded in establishing the series of gift-collection exhibitions as a unique brand of its own. Our careful selection of benefactors, the respect with which we regarded their noble gestures, the way we honored our donors enabled us to create a model that sets a positive example in our country. This was not something that happened overnight, nor was it an easy task, and it raised several questions: What sort of gifts should we accept? From whom? When and how should we present a gift? Finally, how can each gift-collection help us expand the circle of contributors and friends of the institution?

The high satisfaction of benefactors and their families is best seen in the fact that many artists still expand their collections with new single pieces of work, or a large number of them. The heirs of Ivanka Acin added to her collection another 102 artworks. Milena Jeftić Ničeva Kostić, after forming her gift-collection in 2006, which contained 30 pieces, donated in 2019 another 37 works (11 paintings and 27 drawings).

All examples mentioned above show that the tradition of donating, which has existed in Matica Srpska since the founding of the museum, went through different stages, shifting models until it gained its final form as the Gift-Collection exhibition series and catalogs we have today. At first ordinary one-page flyers, the catalogs for gift-collection evolved into profound monographs that resemble scientific studies, while the exhibitions turned into genuine retrospectives. This series' improvement was to the mutual satisfaction of both the donors and the Gallery, which receives the works of art and presents them to the public. Simultaneously, by organizing exhibitions of gift-collections, the public gained the opportunity to get acquainted with contemporary artists' work, personalities, or the collector's choices. In that way, the tradition of endowment gained a new form, in the spirit of the times we live in, and it seems that this sort of concept is the key to success.

The idea of *sobornost* that inspires Matica Srpska, along with the awareness of the importance of leaving a trace through patriotic acts of donation, as something honorable and inspiring for generations to come, is woven into the model of gift-collections as a unique form of legacy cherished in the Gallery of Matica Srpska. Trust in the institution that accepts the gift and faith that it will preserve it for the future contributes to the model's endurance, making it significant in all times.

Our affirmative relation towards gift-collections relies on a conviction that in every society, one needs to preserve and encourage the tradition of patriotic philanthropy, that is, the donation of artworks and objects to national cultural institutions. The museum needs to promote the act of donating as a positive thing, as something necessary and praiseworthy, which encourages others to be donors and benefactors as much as they can. Therefore, by engaging in essential museum activities—expanding and presenting the art fund—that is, by promoting enduring values, we positively affect the society in which we are operating.



Photo 11 Flyers of the Friend Club and Friend Board

We are proud of our gift-collections and received donations, and continue to pave the way for future benefactors, patriots, and philanthropists through our positive relationship with endowers. Believing that positive examples from the past encourage the creation of even better ones in the future and that good and successful practices change our society for the better, we cherish our tradition of accepting gifts and organizing gift-collections exhibitions.

The gift-collections model in the Gallery of Matica Srpska from the last three decades results from a well-thought-out concept that aligns with our institution's mission. At the same time, this concept has improved and evolved over the years, depending on the time, strategies, and financial resources, and it will undoubtedly continue to change in the following years. In recent decades, our motto has been: *By respecting tradition, we create a tradition*, with the idea that all we do should be based on our

predecessors' best experiences and traits. We inherit ideas, adjust them to the time and conditions, and create new traditions for the future. The success of the model for cherishing legacies through gift-collections is specific for the Gallery of Matica Srpska. It is uncertain whether one could apply it to some other institution. It is undoubtedly successful in our institution—it helps us expand the art collection, learn about contemporary art through the works of artists who donate their pieces, and encourage a positive relationship of artists and heirs towards the Gallery. By showing how important the donors are to us—whether they are artists, their families, heirs, or collectors—by organizing exhibitions and creating catalogs, we demonstrate that museum institutions and creators are closely connected and build a unique system together. Similarly, by publicly expressing gratitude to benefactors, we encourage new benefactors and develop an awareness about the importance of patriotism and philanthropy for Serbian culture and society as a whole, proving that a successful institution and system are necessary for a prosperous society. Therefore, the gift-collection model goes beyond the mere purpose of expanding the collection of the Gallery of Matica Srpska. It is an example of socially responsible behavior and individuals who donate, and our institution that accepts gifts, protects, examines and presents them, and in that way popularizes art, philanthropy, while developing an awareness about the impact of an individual on the development of culture and society in the broad sense.

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Са српског превела Луси Стивенс