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ICONOSPHERE OF ROMANTICISM

24.09 – 14.11.2010

Arranged to honour the two-hundredth birthday anniversary of Frederic Chopin, the exhibition presents the *milieu* of composer against the historical and artistic panorama of the first half of the 19th century. The exhibition reconstructs an artistic *imaginarium*, cultural spaces of Warsaw and Paris in the Romantic period. Almost 200 paintings, sketches, prints, sculptures and photographs unfold the world of the European Romanticism's *iconosphere*. The term *iconosphere*, borrowed from Mieczysław Porębski, is applied here to the *universum* of visual and symbolic culture of the period, which merges high art with the representations of everyday life, drawing room interiors with urban space, photography and press illustrations. The exhibition pays a special attention to the relationship between Chopin and Teofil Kwiatkowski, as well as Polish émigré poets, such as Adam Mickiewicz and Cyprian Kamil Norwid. It has been divided into eight thematic sections which refer to crucial artistic issues of Romanticism.

The first section entitled **Persons** introduces the viewer to the Parisian life of the period, including also the most significant figures of the post-Uprising émigré community. Portraits of people who were closest to the composer: George Sand, Delfina Potocka, Teofil Kwiatkowski and Ferenc Liszt, reveal the emotional intensity of Romantic portraiture

Places, the spaces imbued with an air of an intensive social, artistic and political life are the theme of the second part of the exhibition. The ambience of Chopin's favourite cities—Warsaw and Paris—is reflected in the 19th-century photographs by Karol Beyer, Achille Quinet, Édouard Denis Baldus and Bisson brothers, as well as in a lovely view of *Restaurant de la Cité* at boulevard des Italiens, frequented by the composer.

Historical paintings and drawings by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, Paul Delaroche, Piotr Michałowski, Józef Simmler and young Jan Matejko remind us of a dispute between the last adherents of classicism and Romantics over the significance of the **History and Tradition** as well as over the means of artistic expression appropriate for them.

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Images of the **Romantic Hero**, alienated and torn inside, both individual and collective are conveyed by the works of Delaroche, Antoine-Jean Gros and Ary Scheffer. Shared by the Polish and French nations, the fascination with great historical figures is reflected in the legend of Napoleon, one of the key themes of Piotr Michałowski.

A totally different model of the Romantic hero is defined in the next section of the exhibition entitled, after Baudelaire: **The Heroism of Modern Life**. It comprises caricatures by Honoré Daumier, genre scenes by Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps, Paul Gavarni, Piotr Michałowski as well as humorous drawings by Jean-Jacques Grandville. All of them portray an individual through the prism of bourgeois everyday life, which is now raised to the rank of a legitimate artistic theme, treated on equal terms with the Great History. In fact, Chopin's life itself embodies the idea of the heroism of modern life.

The section **Landscapes** presents a radical change in the approach to landscape painting in the Romantic period. The juxtaposition of the works by Polish artists, such as Wincenty Kasprzycki, Chrystian Breslauer, Wojciech Gerson or Józef Szermentowski with the landscapes by Jules-Louis Dupré or Charles-François Daubigny, shows the difference between the traditional heroic landscape and a new portrayal of nature, devoid of narrative character and stemming from direct observation, influenced by the Barbizon school.

The Artist's Studio shows artistic practices of the first-half-of-the-19th-century painters. Oil sketches and drawings by Eugène Delacroix's, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's study, or Henryk Rodakowski reveal the methods of their work, while a startling image of an artist's studio itself is shown by Delacroix's *Corner of the Studio, the Stove*.

The Chopin Legend throws some light on the birth and persistence of the Chopin myth in the European consciousness. It evolves largely around the theme of the artist's death, which is often represented, as in the works by Teofil Kwiatkowski, on the pattern of the traditional iconography of the death of a Christian martyr, a monarch or a leader.



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Most of the works on display come from the collections of the National Museum in Warsaw. Other exhibited works have been generously lent by the following museums in France and Poland: the Louvre, Musée de la Vie Romantique, Musée Carnavalet and Musée National Eugène Delacroix in Paris, Musée Ingres in Montauban and Musée Farbe in Montpellier, Nasjonalmuseet in Oslo and Dordrechts Museum, from National Museums in Cracow, Poznań and Wrocław, the Princes Czartoryski Foundation in Cracow, Raczyński Foundation at the National Museum in Warsaw, Ciechanowiecki Foundation at the Royal Castle in Warsaw, Pełkinie Foundation of Princes Czartoryski and the Fryderyk Chopin Museum in Warsaw, as well as from private collections in the UK and Poland.

The exhibition is accompanied by a scholarly catalogue, with essays in Polish and English, as well as detailed studies on individual works.

Exhibition curators: **Iwona Danielewicz** and **Andrzej Dzięciołowski**

Photos for the press:

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