

Murovec, Barbara

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NETHERLANDISH PAINTERS IN LJUBLJANA. A WORK BY PETER AUWERCX IN THE URSULINE CHURCH

BARBARA MUROVEC

The generally known facts about the presence of artists from the Netherlands in Central European countries in the second half of the 17th century and about the role of minor masters – when their works, mainly secular, were naturally included in the furnishings of imperial courts as well as aristocratic residences – are, in principle, fairly well corroborated by both archival documents and the very pictures, drawings or art prints that survive in public or private collections and churches. But it often proves to be difficult to determine the relation of the names and artworks listed in the inventories and other documents with the existing works, i. e. paintings that have been preserved until today. A survey on this theme was written – as the Hungarian contribution in the framework of the Year of the Baroque Central European Initiative – for the catalogue of the important exhibition *Baroque Art in Central Europe*, subtitled *Crossroads*, by the organizer and author of the concept, Géza Galavics.¹ An essential contribution to the knowledge about individual regional centres in which Dutch artists worked has also been made by Professor Lubomír Slavíček. I hope this essay will therefore be considered a convenient contribution for the occasion of his jubilee.

In addition to Prague, Brno, Salzburg and Graz, also Ljubljana (Ger. Laibach), the

capital of Carniola, one of the Inner Austria provinces, was one of the regional centres. The purpose of this paper is to call attention to the painters from the Netherlands who worked in Carniola, and to add Peter Auwercx to the list of the Netherlandish artists active in Central Europe. Although the name of Peter Auwercx was not unfamiliar in the published sources and Slovene art historical literature, it was only recently that we were able to relate him to a concrete, surviving work of art.² This attribution was subsequently corroborated during the restoration work, when the signature was found on the painting.³ It is thus a rare case of a reliable connection between an extant painting and the Flemish painter whose prolonged sojourn in Carniola, his life and work there can be followed through archival data.

The best-known and also the most enigmatic Netherlandish artist who worked in Carniola is the painter Almanach, known only by this pseudonym. Although he epitomizes Netherlandish painting in Carniola, the study exhibition of 2005 in the National Gallery of Slovenia⁴ proved that there were more ambiguities and open questions related to both his personage and oeuvre than reliable data which could serve as a basis for a convincing image of his life and work.⁵ As early as 1997, Uroš Lubej, the best expert on



Fig. 1: Almanach, *The Card Players II*, National Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana. Photo: Bojan Salaj.

archival materials related to Netherlandish painters in Carniola, published his hypothesis that Almanach was the pseudonym of the Dutch painter Herman Verelst;⁶ the periods of the documented activity of “the two” in Carniola match, and, moreover, the Verelst portraits of the *Wiederkehr*s can convincingly be placed in the vicinity of Almanach’s variants of card players at table (*Portrait of Johann Jakob von Wiederkehr*, *Portrait of Maria Elisabeth von Wiederkehr*, *The Card Players I*, *The Card Players II*, all: National Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana). Although no convincing counter-arguments have been provided to oppose the proposed identification of Verelst with Almanach,⁷ it has not been generally accepted. The main reason might be that Slovene art historiography prefers clinging to the myth of the enigmatic artist; but if it was bound to renounce it, its disintegration could be done only by an acceptable authority. Thus, among the Netherlandish painters who worked in Carniola, apart from Almanach – and even more than him – the only truly tangible personage with a concrete surviving oeuvre is

the Utrecht painter Justus van der Nypoort (c. 1645/1649–after 1699).⁸ For the time being, the majority of other artists whose works are listed in probate inventories – e.g. Ludwig de Clerick (died 1702), who was painter to the Estates of Carniola for almost forty years,⁹ or Sebastian Niderländer or Verpor to respectively (c. 1645–1708), who was delivered the letter of protection by the Estates for the first time in 1681¹⁰ – evade connection with the preserved paintings.¹¹

As mentioned before, Peter Auwercx, too, belonged to the painters from the Netherlands who worked in Carniola around the year 1700 (his name was also spelt as Auwerts, Auwerx, Aurex, Averex, Overeg, Werex). His native country was undoubtedly Flanders; if we can trust his contemporary, the Ljubljana chronicler Janez Gregor Dolničar (1655–1719), Auwercx was born in Antwerp. He might have even been related to the Flemish family of tapestry designers (*tapijntwerp*ers) bearing the identical surname most frequently spelt as Auwercx,¹² thus the variant Peter used to sign his pre-



Fig. 2: Herman Verelst, Portrait of Johann Jakob von Wiederkehr, National Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana. Photo: Bojan Salaj.



Fig. 3: Simone Gionima, Jakob Schell von Schellenburg, Ursuline convent, Ljubljana. Photo: Andrej Furlan.

served Ljubljana painting. Just as in the cases of his contemporaries, several concrete data have been also known about Auwercx's life in Carniola, but his work that could provide the basis for a judgement about his painting style and artistic merit was completely unknown until recently.

It is possible to trace Auwercx in Ljubljana by means of archival data from 1703 onwards, when, in a protocol signed on 24 September, he assessed the value of books, paintings and prints in the bequest of his late compatriot Ludwig de Cleric, whom he succeeded at the post of the painter to the Estates in 1706.¹³ We can assume that Auwercx was already married to Zanet(t)a/Johanna when he arrived in Ljubljana, as no records can be found in marriage registers, but between October 1703 and November 1709 the couple had four babies christened at St.

Nicholas' church.¹⁴ Most likely, Auwercx died outside Ljubljana (neither in this case a respective record can be found in Ljubljana death registers); according to Dolničar, it was on 13 February 1715, when the artist died as a celebrated painter who had earned eternal fame with his excellent paintings.¹⁵ Among these, there were no doubt both secular works (seascapes and landscapes) for aristocratic patrons and religious paintings for the Church.

Auwercx is mentioned at least in two probate inventories of Carniolan nobility; in 1705 he worked for Weichard Ferdinand count Barbo, and four seascapes and two landscapes by Auwercx were listed in the inventory of the possessions of Josef Xaver Lichtenurn.¹⁶ One work, i.e. a picture of St. Ursula in the Ursuline church, was also mentioned around the year 1715 in Dolničar's in-



Fig. 4: Peter Auwercx, *The Death of St. Ursula*, 1711, Ursuline convent, Ljubljana.
Photo: Andrej Furlan.

ventory of the paintings in the churches of Baroque Ljubljana, *Künstliche Mallerrey, welche in Laybach zu sehen*.¹⁷ Until recently, all these paintings were believed to have been lost, but during the study of the painting collection in the Ursuline convent in Ljubljana, a former

altarpiece featuring the death of St. Ursula was identified with Auwercx's *St. Ursula* listed by Dolničar.¹⁸ As already mentioned, during the subsequent restoration works the signature was found (and the badly damaged date, now illegible), which ultimately confirmed the attribution.

The Ursulines came to Ljubljana from Gorizia in 1702 and brought along some minor paintings, chiefly the portrayals of St. Ursula and St. Augustin.¹⁹ When they opened a chapel for public, consecrated on 27th June 1710, all of its altars were not yet furnished with altarpieces. The latter, however, were executed shortly after that. By the year 1726, when the Ursuline church was completed, the "old", or provisional, church had been decorated with the following paintings: the image of the *Holy Trinity* or the *Coronation of the Virgin* (140 x 118 cm) in the high altar, and *St. Augustin* (230 x 110 cm) and *The Death of St. Ursula* (230 x 110 cm) in the lateral ones. The painting of St. Augustin was donated to the Ursulines by the founder of the convent and its greatest benefactor, Jakob Schell von Schellenburg (1652–1715); his donation is testified also by the inclusion of his coat of arms in the scene. *St. Ursula*, on the other hand, was bought by the nuns themselves, as the entry in the book of accounts for the year 1711 shows: they paid 30 florins for it.²⁰ In his draft of the *Künstliche Mallerrey, welche in Laybach zu sehen*, Dolničar stated *St. Augustin*, too, as a work by Auwercx,²¹ but he left out the painter in the completed version.²² The groundlessness of such attribution is clearly evident from the great stylistic differences between the two works, which were commissioned by two patrons from two artists. As regards the artistic quality, *The Death of St. Ursula* was certainly superior, which can still be discerned today although it was badly damaged. In addition, in the rigorous 19th century the bodies of the two putti who are

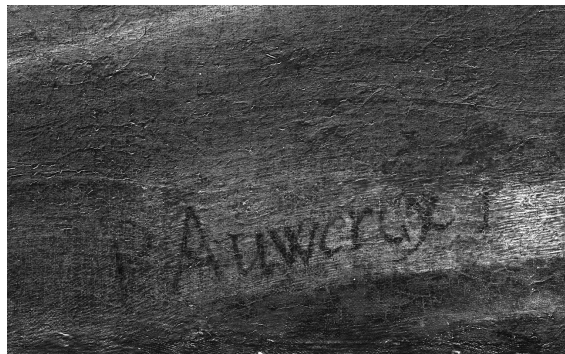


Fig. 5: Peter Auwercx's signature on *The Death of St. Ursula* (detail of fig. 4).
Photo: Andrej Furlan.

wreathing Ursula were overpainted with draperies to cover their nakedness.²³ The persuasive figure of the dying saint, her eyes almost closed and her face deadly pale, bears resemblance to the painting idiom of Franz Karl Remp (1675–1718), who around 1700 was one of the best painters in Carnio-

la, working under a strong influence of Italian, particularly Venetian, painting.

Although nothing certain is known about Auwercx's youth, his training and life prior to his arrival in Ljubljana, some indications support the surmise that before that he was staying in the Veneto region, where he supposedly met his (later) wife Zanetta. Auwercx can thus be placed among several Netherlandish artists who came to Central Europe via Italy.²⁴ Furthermore, his only known work, *The Death of St. Ursula*, demonstrates Venetian influences so convincingly that Janez Veider who was listing the painting collection in the Ljubljana Ursuline convent before the rediscovery of the painter defined it as "an excellent Venetian piece".²⁵

Of all Auwercx's "excellent paintings", as his oeuvre was defined by the painter's contemporary Dolničar, we have so far managed to identify only one. It is, however, a useful starting point for further study.²⁶

NIZOZEMŠTÍ MALÍŘI V LUBLANI. PRÁCE PETERA AUWERCXE V KOSTELE URŠULINEK (BARBARA MUROVEC) – RESUMÉ

Všeobecně známá fakta o přítomnosti nizozemských umělců ve střední Evropě ve druhé polovině 17. století a roli méně známých mistrů, jejichž práce, zvláště ty s profánní tematikou, byly přirozenou součástí vybavení interiérů na říšském dvoře i ve šlechtických sídlech, jsou v zásadě dobře podepřena jak archivními prameny, tak množstvím obrazů, kreseb a grafických listů, které se zachovaly ve veřejných nebo soukromých sbírkách a v kostelech. Často je však obtížné stanovit vazby mezi jmény a díly zmiňovanými v soupisech a jiných dokumentech vztahujících se k existujícím dílům, tj. obrazům, které se dochovaly. Vedle Prahy, Brna, Salcburku a Štýrského Hradce patřila mezi oblastní centra i Lublaň (Laibach), centrum Kraňska, jež bylo součástí vnitřního Rakouska.

Tento příspěvek upozorňuje na malíře ze severu, kteří do Kraňska přišli pracovat (Almanach nebo Herman Verelst; Justus van der Nypoort; Ludwig de Clerick; Sebastian Niderländer nebo Verporto), a připojuje k seznamu nizozemských umělců činných ve střední Evropě Petera Auwercx. Ten na pozici malíře provinčních panství vystřídal svého krajana Ludwiga de Clericka a podle Dolničara zemřel v Lublani roku 1715. Jeho jméno se v dokumentech a starší literatuře objevuje též v podobách Auwerts, Auwerx, Aurex, Averex, Owereg a Werex. Identické příjmení nesla bruselská rodina návrhářů tapiserií, a to ve variantě Auwercx, kte-

rou se podepisoval i malíř. K prokázání jejich případného příbuzenství však zatím neexistují žádné důkazy, přičemž Dolničar uvádí, že malíř pocházel z Antverp. Mezi slovinskými historiky umění byl Auwercx znám prostřednictvím archivních pramenů a starší literatury (zmiňuje ho např. Janez Gregor Dolničar ve svých *Annales Urbis Labacensis* jako jednoho z mistrů, kteří malovali plátina pro lublaňské barokní kostely), avšak až donedávna nikoliv na základě svého konkrétního díla. Při studiu malířské sbírky lublaňského konventu uršulinek byla malíři připsána malba zobrazující smrt sv. Uršuly, přičemž následné restaurační práce odhalily jeho signaturu a atribuci potvrdily. I když vročení na plátně je poškozené, a tudíž nečitelné, lze dobu vzniku obrazu zjistit z účetní knihy. Uršulinky si objednaly oltářní obraz pro boční oltář v roce 1711 a zaplatily za něj 30 zlatých. Toto je vzácný případ spolehlivě doložené souvislosti mezi dochovanou malbou a vlámským malířem, jehož dílo a dočasný pobyt v Kraňsku můžeme sledovat prostřednictvím archivních pramenů.

- 1 Géza Galavics, Netherlandish Baroque Painters and Graphic Artists in 17th-Century Central Europe, in: *Barokk művészet Közép-Európában. Utak és találkozás / Baroque Art in Central Europe. Crossroads*, exh. cat., Budapest 1993, pp. 22–44, 83–106.
- 2 Barbara Murovec, Galerija slik v ljubljanskem uršulinskem samostanu, in: Marija Jasna Kogoj (ed.), *Tristo let ljubljanskih uršulink. Zgodovina samostana, njegovih šol in kulturnih dejavnosti*, Ljubljana 2002, pp. 268–269.
- 3 Mateja Breščak – Matej Klemenčič – Barbara Murovec, *Almanach in slikarstvo druge polovice 17. stoletja na Kranjskem. Vodnik po razstavi. / Almanach and the Painting of the Second Half of the 17th Century in Carniola. Guide to the Exhibition*, Ljubljana 2005, pp. 36–37 (text: Some new discoveries. Conservation and restoration aspects of the exhibition).
- 4 For the guide to the exhibition see note 3. For the revised English edition of the Slovene monograph see Barbara Murovec – Matej Klemenčič – Mateja Breščak (edd.), *Almanach and Painting in the Second Half of the 17th Century in Carniola*, Ljubljana 2006.
- 5 See Matej Klemenčič – Barbara Murovec, *Almanach, Painting in the Second Half of the 17th Century in Carniola and the State of Art Historical Research*, in: Murovec – Klemenčič – Breščak (note 4), pp. 11–22.
- 6 Uroš Lubej, Prispевki k biografijam na Kranjskem delujočih flamskih in holandskih slikarjev druge polovice XVII. stoletja (Summary: Beiträge zu den Biographien der in der zweiten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts in Krain wirkenden holländischen Maler), *Acta historiae artis Slovenica* 2, 1997, pp. 33–52.
- 7 The performed technical and material analyses did not confirm the attribution nor did they ultimately refute it; see Ivo Nemeč – Katja Kavkler – Andreja de Gleria, The Paintings Attributed to Almanach and Herman Verelst – Material and Techniques, *Acta historiae artis Slovenica* 11, 2006, pp. 267–280, particularly 280.
- 8 His tour across Central Europe was complemented with numerous new data by Uroš Lubej, *Justus van der Nypoort. Življenje in delo holandskega umetnika na Kranjskem in v drugih deželah nemškega cesarstva* (doctoral dissertation), Ljubljana 2008.
- 9 Lubej, Prispевki k biografijam (note 6), pp. 35–42. – Idem, Clerick (Clerich; Cleris), Ludwig (Ludovicus), *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon. Die Bildenden Künstler aller Zeiten und Völker*, Bd. 19, München – Leipzig 1998, p. 534.
- 10 Lubej, Prispевki k biografijam (note 6), p. 49.
- 11 A good picture of the number and status of the painters who worked in Ljubljana in the last third of the 17th century is offered by the information, that there were twelve in 1678; six of them had the citizenship: Severin Praittenlakner, Andreas Brezl, Filip Jakob Jamšek, Elias Benedikt Stubenrauch, Johann Peter Gimpler, and Johann Killian Fleischmann; two did not have the citizenship: Johann Eisenhardt and Carlo Gentilli; Ludwig de Clerick and Johann Balthasar Schüssler were under the protection of the Estates; Herman Verelst and Justus van der Nypoort worked for private patrons; see Lubej, *Justus van der Nypoort* (note 8), p. 8, n. 16. – See also Julius Wallner, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Laibacher Maler und Bildhauer in XVII. und XVIII. Jahrhunderte, *Mitteilungen des Musealvereines für Krain* 3, 1890, pp. 107–115.
- 12 Jules Joseph Guiffrey, Auwercx, Familie von Brüsseler Teppichwirkern, in: Ulrich Thieme – Felix Becker (edd.), *Allgemeines Lexikon der Bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, Bd. 2, Leipzig

- 1908, p. 266. – Pieter Groenendijk, *Beknopt biografisch lexicon van Zuid- en Noord-Nederlandse schilders, graveurs, glasschilders, tapijtwevers et cetera van ca. 1350 tot ca. 1720*, Utrecht 2008, pp. 70–71.
- 13 Lubej, Prispjevki k biografijam (note 6), p. 42, n. 46, 47.
- 14 Nadškofijski arhiv Ljubljana (Archiepiscopal Archive), Ljubljana, Sv. Nikolaj, Krstne knjige (St. Nicholas', birth registers), 1700–1712. I warmly thank my colleague Dr. Ana Lavrič for her help in the search for this information.
- 15 Semeniška knjižnica (Seminary Library), Ljubljana, ms. 11: Ioannes Gregorius Thalnitscher, *Annales urbis Labacensis, metropolis inclity Ducatus Carnioliae, das ist, Jahrs-Geschichten der fürstl. Haupt Statt Laybach. Von Anno 1660, biss 1700. Dann continuiret von Anno 1700 biss 1718, 1701–1718*: “den 13 [febr:] hat auch der berühmte mahler alda, nambens Peter Owerex, von Antuerpen gebürtig das zeitliche am petzen [?] gesegnet, hat wegen seiner vortrefflichen Stukh ein vnsterblichen namben hinterlassen”; Slovene translation of the manuscript is published in: Viktor Steska, Dolničarjeva ljubljanska kronika od l. 1660. do l. 1718., *Izvestja muzejskega društva za Kranjsko* 11, 1901, p. 175.
- 16 Arhiv Slovenije (The Archive of the Republic of Slovenia), Zapuščinski inventarji (Probate Inventories), sign. 309/64, L66, Ljubljana, 18 August 1757: “[in the bedroom] 2 grosse See Stukh von Aurex; 2 glienere Laa: von nemblichen Meister; [in the room to the right] 2 See Stukhel von Aurex”; quoted from Lubej, *Justus van der Nypoort* (note 8), p. 10, n. 28.
- 17 The composition is an appendix to Thalnitscher (note 15); it was published in Slovene translation by Viktor Steska, *Slike v ljubljanskih cerkvah okoli* l. 1715, *Izvestja muzejskega društva za Kranjsko* 12, 1902, pp. 49 ss.
- 18 Murovec (note 2).
- 19 For the history of the Ursuline convent see the proceedings of the symposium: Kogoj (note 2), with bibliography, particularly the paper by Blaž Resman, *Uršulinski samostan in cerkev v Ljubljani*, pp. 41–54.
- 20 Arhiv Uršulinskega samostana v Ljubljani (the Archive of the Ursuline convent, Ljubljana), fascicle 22, XVI/3: *Ausgab Register 1702–39*: 1711 “vor das Bildt der H. Ursula in der Kirche 30”.
- 21 Transcription of the draft of the list in: Ana Lavrič, “Virtutis et musis”. Karlov plemiški kolegij v Ljubljani na Dolničarjevih risanih medaljah (Summary: “Virtutis et musis”. Collegium Carolinum in Ljubljana on the sketches of medals by Janez Gregor Dolničar), *Acta historiae artis Slovenica* 13, 2008, p. 44, n. 15.
- 22 *Ibidem*, n. 17.
- 23 See also Tamara Trček Pečak – Barbka Gosar Hirci – Miha Pirnat, Jr., The Conservation and Restoration of Paintings by Almanach and his Contemporaries, *Acta historiae artis Slovenica* 11, 2006, pp. 241–243.
- 24 Galavics, *Netherlandish Baroque Painters* (note 1), p. 94.
- 25 Janez Veider, *Slike v uršulinskem samostanu v Ljubljani*, *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino* 20, 1944, p. 108.
- 26 In the side altar to the right in St. Anthony's church at Verd, an identical (albeit overpainted) painting of St. Ursula (142 x 68 cm) from 1711 is mounted, which could also be painted by Auwercx. For a reproduction see: Marijan Marolt, *Dekanija Vrhnika. Topografski opis*, Ljubljana 1929 (= *Umetnostni spomeniki Slovenije* 2), pp. 59–60.

