

The Collections and Acquisitions Policy of the Sinebrychoff Art Museum

Kirsi Eskelinen // PhD, Director, Sinebrychoff Art Museum



Antoine Watteau, *The Swing*,
c. 1712, oil on canvas, 95cm x
73cm, Hjalmar Linder Donation.
Finnish National Gallery /
Sinebrychoff Art Museum
Photo: Finnish National Gallery /
Matti Janas



Jacopo Bassano, *Virgin and Child with John the Baptist and Saint Anthony the Abbot*, early 1560s, oil on canvas, 108cm x 130cm, Ester and Jalo Sihtola Fine Arts Foundation Donation. Finnish National Gallery / Sinebrychoff Art Museum
 Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Aaltonen

The Sinebrychoff Art Museum houses the most important collection of Old Masters in Finland, including paintings by Rembrandt, Cranach and Watteau. Often, as is the case with *Monk Reading* (1661) by Rembrandt, they are the only examples of their kind in Finland. The collection includes paintings, sculptures, graphics and antiquities from the 14th to the 19th centuries. There are also a small number of Old Master drawings. The whole museum collection comprises more than 6,000 works of art and antiquities.

The Old Master collections in Finland are very limited in number and they are mainly the result of the activity of private collectors such as Paul Sinebrychoff, Karl Hedman, Gösta Serlachius or Amos Andersson, who were the key collectors active in the 20th century. The core of the Sinebrychoff Art Museum is the collection of Paul and Fanny Sinebrychoff, which was donated to the Finnish State in 1921, and which is now permanently on display on the second floor of the house museum in Helsinki. Actually, the collection of Sinebrychoff Art Museum also includes numerous other donations made over a long period and the most important pieces have entered the collection in this way. One of the most significant collections recently donated to the Finnish National Gallery is the Jalo and Ester Sihtola collection. It includes 10 Old Master paintings, among others a work by Jacopo Bassano (above), which is the most important Italian Renaissance painting in Finland.

To summarise, in the past the most important works have entered the collection through donations and even in the future the value of this kind of generosity is not to be

underestimated. Donations are still considered a relevant way of developing the collections and actually this principle is included in the acquisitions policy of Sinebrychoff Art Museum. The support of the Friends of Sinebrychoff Art Museum and the donations they have made so far should also be mentioned and in the future we hope to develop this collaboration further.

However, stressing the importance of donations does not mean that an active acquisitions policy should be overlooked. On the contrary, it is very important that Sinebrychoff Art Museum can develop its collections by acquiring significant works of art. At the moment the yearly budget for acquiring works of art for the collection is very low – around 89,000 Euros. It is self-evident that with such a small amount of money it is not possible to make acquisitions of great masters. In our new strategy we are therefore combining our annual budget grant over several years to gather together larger sums so that we will be able to buy significant and high quality pieces of art.

Future acquisitions will be based on research into the existing collection and on careful planning. It is by no means our goal to fill the gaps, as that would be impossible. The collection is like a mirror: what it contains, and also what it lacks, reflects the various appreciations and taste of previous experts in charge of it. First of all, it is crucial to identify the strengths and innate possibilities of the collection that we want to strengthen further. The aim is to develop it in a way that takes into account and respects the features that are characteristic of this collection. As a point of departure for us is the high quality of the acquisitions and the enhanced value that they may bring to the collection. A work of art can be significant from many different viewpoints, such as art history, cultural history or research. When a decision is made to acquire a work of art, its condition and the possible conservation treatment it may require are also taken into consideration. It goes without saying that the provenance of the art work has to be documented and well known. The current collection also covers antiquities. They are part of the donation made by Paul and Fanny Sinebrychoff and are displayed as a part of the house museum. However, a decision has been made not to collect antiquities, the only exception being items/objects that have belonged to the Sinebrychoff family. Besides donations, acquisitions are made from auctions, art dealers, and private individuals. The same criteria of evaluation apply to donated works as apply for purchasing artworks.