

## “You old beast, so close to my heart”

### Summary

Feliks Jasiński's private correspondence was not discovered by the National Museum in Krakow until the 1950s, which was nearly thirty years after the Museum received his entire collection. Found in a hiding place perfectly contrived in one of his desks, it comprises letters, postcards and visiting cards sent in 1883–1923 by the most celebrated figures of Polish cultural life to the addressee: a promoter, champion and sponsor of artists; an art collector and dealer; a dictator to the artistic life of Krakow in the age of Young Poland; a sensitive eccentric, a subtle connoisseur, an arrogant and impertinent dilettante and an *enfant terrible* of his time; a writer and art historian; a musician, composer, musicologist and musical critic.

The volume of the correspondence and the problems it raises forced the Museum to make a selection and narrow down the review of it to several subject areas discussed in several chapters.

Correspondence with the literary world with which Feliks Jasiński was integrated by virtue of his work, is presented in the chapter *My Young Writer*, which comprises reviews of on the book *Manggha. Promenades a travers le monde, l'art et les idées*, the quarterly “Lamus”, and the publication *Sztuka Polska. Malarstwo*, and excerpts from his correspondence with the composer Konstanty Górski, the poet Maria Komornicka, the playwright Gabriela Zapolska and the poet Zenon “Miriam” Przesmycki.

Letters to and from Stanisław Witkiewicz, Stefan Żeromski and Edward Raczyński, which are brought together in a chapter called *My Friend!* and which focus on Feliks Jasiński's “Sztuka” Club in Krakow, and the bulkiest portion of the correspondence, headed *My Man of Gold* and *To Our Dearest Supporter* form separate parts. The latter two show how Feliks Jasiński's art collections developed, and discuss letters from artists such as Józef Pankiewicz, Stanisław Dębicki, Leon Wyczółkowski, Jacek Malczewski, Olga Boznańska, Ferdynand Ruszczyc, or those whose offers of artworks were rejected by Jasiński: Tymon Niesiołowski and Wojciech Kossak. Problems of not only artistic nature but also artists' opinions on and interference with the way Jasiński built his collection recur in Jasiński's mail, just like comments on his holding, methods of making financial deals as well as purchase or exchange offers. For example the poet Maria Komornicka confesses: “...Nothing new comes to my mind”; the poet Tadeusz Miciński: “I am submitting to you my latest book”; the playwright Gabriela Zapolska: “...Can I ask you for a copy of *Manggha*? I am going to write a review”; the novelist Stefan Żeromski reported: “They are demonstrating Polish art fervently here [i.e. in Zakopane] at art and literature evening salons”. Ferdynand Ruszczyc wrote: “From the depth of my heart I congratulate on your achievement”, referring to *Sztuka Polska*. His relationships with friends can be traced in the words of the sculptor Olga Niewska (“I am using your ship skin... and taking good care of it”); the painter Olga Siemaszkowa, who reported on her financial troubles; the painter Józef Pankiewicz, who outlined an ambitious plan to set up the Polish Institute of Fine Arts in Paris, which was later to become affiliated to Krakow's Academy of Fine Arts; the painter Józef Mehoffer, who complained that “...a hundred-headed hydra is

growing behind my back"; and the painter Ferdynand Ruszczyc, who offered Jasiński "... all the elements, as soon as I paint them."

Requests to purchase an artwork were different in tone, such as that from the painter Tymon Niesiołowski, who admitted: "Here I stand, in utmost poverty", or Wojciecha Koszak, who noted: "A nobleman has come but with no money, scoundrel".

At times friendly, at times very straightforward, the style of the correspondence is a good illustration of the interests, conflicts, problems or even pranks and jokes of the art dealers' circles, as well as current collecting methods and art prices. Yet above all, it tells us more about the unique personality of Feliks Jasiński nicknamed "Manggha" by some, and "Felix the Globetrotter", "Supporter", "Monkey", "Friend", "Filidor", "Man of Gold", "Mio Caro", "Lucky Dołęga", "Prometeion", "the Darling Madman", "Vieux-Serpent-aux lunettes", "Art Salesman", and "the Stormy Master" by others.