

Why Were There So Few Female Painters in Silesia during the Baroque Period?

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ABSTRACT On 8 March 2021, for the first time in the long history of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, three paintings created by female artists: Judith Jans Leyster, Gesina ter Borch and Rachel Ruysch were displayed in the Gallery of Honour. If the National Museum in Wrocław – the capital city of the historical region of Silesia (today in Poland and the Czech Republic) decided to take a similar bold step, it would stumble upon some serious roadblocks. During the Baroque period, only three women were active painters in Silesia: Anna Elisabeth Willmann, Dorothea Gloger and Antonina della Vigna. They did not achieve any significant professional success and their careers remained essentially unfulfilled. Out of the approximately 10,000 paintings of Silesian provenance dating from the Baroque period that have survived to our times, only five were painted by women. Why were so few female painters professionally active in Silesia in this period? Why did they produce so few works of art? The article, based on the results of the recent comprehensive study of Baroque painting in Silesia, attempts to bring exhaustive answers to these fundamental questions.

KEYWORDS female painters, painters' guilds, Silesia, Baroque period

ABSTRAKT *Dlaczego było tak mało malarek na Śląsku w okresie baroku?* W dniu 8 marca 2021 roku po raz pierwszy w długoletniej historii Rijksmuseum w Amsterdamie umieszczono w galerii honorowej trzy obrazy stworzone przez kobiety: Judith Jans Leyster, Gesinę Terborch i Rachel Ruysch. Gdyby na podobny krok zdecydowało się Muzeum Narodowe we Wrocławiu – główna instytucja zajmująca się gromadzeniem i eksponowaniem dzieł dawnej sztuki powstałych na Śląsku – to miałoby bardzo poważny problem z jego realizacją. W okresie baroku na Śląsku zawód malarki uprawiały bowiem jedynie trzy kobiety: Anna Elisabeth Willmann, Dorothea Gloger oraz Antonina della Vigna. Co więcej, nie odniosły one znaczącego zawodowego sukcesu, a ich kariery pozostały w zasadzie niespełnione. Spośród około 10 000 obrazów o śląskiej proveniencji z okresu baroku zachowanych do naszych czasów tylko pięć zostało namalowanych przez kobiety. Dlaczego tak mało kobiet zajmowało się zawodowo malarstwem na Śląsku w tym czasie? I dlaczego z tak mizernym rezultatem? Niniejszy artykuł, oparty na wynikach kompleksowych badań malarstwa barokowego na Śląsku, jest próbą odpowiedzi na postawione powyżej fundamentalne pytania.

SŁOWA-KLUCZE malarki, gildie malarzy, Śląsk, barok

ON MONDAY 8 March 2021, the International Women's Day, an important event took place in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. For the first time in the museum's long history, the Gallery of Honour – a prestigious exhibition room housing the most celebrated works of art, including Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* and Johannes Vermeer's *The Milkmaid* – displayed three paintings created by female artists: *The Serenade* (1629) by Judith Jans Leyster (1609–1666), *The Memorial Portrait of Moses ter Borch* (1667–1669) by Gesina ter Borch (1633–1690) and her brother Gerard ter Borch (1617–1681); and *Still Life with Flowers in a Glass Vase* (c. 1690 – c. 1720) by Rachel Ruysch (1664–1750). Distinguishing the works of three prominent Dutch female painters in this manner was a sign of a radical change in the Rijksmuseum's exhibition policy and a mark of appreciation of the significant role that women played in the cultural history of the 17th-century Holland.¹

If the National Museum in Wrocław – the main institution collecting and exhibiting works of old masters created in the historical region of Silesia (today in Poland and the Czech Republic) – decided to take a similar bold step, it would stumble upon some serious roadblocks. The results of the recent comprehensive study of Baroque painting in Silesia have shown that during the Baroque period (i.e. from around 1630 to around 1780), only three women painters were active in Silesia: Anna Elisabeth, a daughter of the famous Michael Willmann, the mysterious Dorothea Gloger, and Antonina della Vigna, a granddaughter of the Legnica guild master Jeremias Joseph Knechtel.

Moreover, the available biographical information and the few paintings that have survived to our times clearly indicate that these women artists did not achieve any significant professional success and that their careers remained essentially unfulfilled.² This is also confirmed by the fact that out of the approximately 10,000 paintings of Silesian provenance dating from the Baroque period that have survived to our times, only in the case of five can we conclude that they were certainly painted by women.³ Therefore – to paraphrase Linda Nochlin's famous question from 1971⁴ – why were so few female painters professionally active in Silesia in the Baroque period? And why did they produce so few works of art?

I

Undoubtedly, the main reason was the women's situation at the time – their low position in the society and strongly determined social roles of, above all, wives and mothers. This is easily visible in the *Self-Portrait* (1764) by Johann Georg Ernst, court painter to the dukes of Oleśnica, in which he depicted himself with the whole family in his studio (Fig. 1).⁵ In this extraordinary work of art – which can be perceived as a manifesto of the artist's social self-awareness – it is quite evident that only men, namely Ernst himself and his two sons, are actually interested in painting. Holding a palette and brushes in his left hand, Ernst is sitting in front of an easel working on a portrait of an unknown man, while one of his sons is busy browsing through a pile of drawings and graphic designs, and the other is looking with admiration at his father's

1. See: <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/press/press-releases/rijksmuseum-presents-women-artists-in-the-gallery-of-honour-for-the-first-time>, accessed February 4, 2022.

2. So far, the only attempts to comprehensively discuss the role of female painters in Silesia in the Baroque period are: Andrzej Koziół, ed., *Malarstwo barokowe na Śląsku* (Wrocław: VIA NOVA, 2017), 25; and Jolanta Lamla, *Kobiety a zawód malarza na Śląsku w dobie baroku* (Master's thesis, Instytut Historii Sztuki Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2021).

3. *Malarstwo barokowe na Śląsku*, 13.

4. Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (London: Routledge, 1994), 145–178.

5. For more on this painting, see *Malarstwo barokowe na Śląsku*, 22, Fig. 14.



1 Johann Georg Ernst, *Self-Portrait with the Family in the Artist's Studio*, 1764, Museum of the Silesian Piasts, Brzeg. Photo: Museum of the Silesian Piasts, Brzeg

canvas. In contrast, the women depicted in the painting are engaged in other activities. The artist's stately wife and four daughters of various ages are gathered around the table preparing sweet refreshments, while the fifth daughter is giving her father a full bowl with a spoon on the plate.

It is impossible to do justice to the women's situation in the Baroque society in just a few sentences.⁶ There is no doubt, however, that the position of women in the social hierarchy did not significantly change from the Middle Ages until the early modern period.⁷ Women were often deprived of legal rights; hence, few female names are found in the municipal documents. If they do appear, it is with the surname of their husband or father, because in that period, a woman was defined by her relationship to men.⁸ The low legal and social

status of women was caused by a long patriarchal tradition developed over the centuries, which can be traced back to the European culture rooted in Judeo-Christian values and Greco-Roman antiquity.⁹ According to the ecclesiastical view of a woman, only marriage and motherhood constituted her full humanity.¹⁰ Furthermore, as pointed out by Maria Ciechomska, the ideal of femininity promoted by the Catholic Church was characterized by modesty, perseverance, the ability to serve without reward, and a lack of ambition to exercise power.¹¹ Paradoxically, even Renaissance humanism did not significantly change the women's position, still placing them as subject to men.¹² Women were described as reckless and incapable of performing social roles. According to the returning values and medical traditions of Antiquity, the woman was once again perceived as "incomplete male."¹³

The patriarchal model of society – understood as the dominant position of men in the social, economic, and family spheres – meant that women were confined to the home environment. Moreover, home was a place where children were raised, which was one of the wife's main duties. A married woman's primary role – usually regardless of her social class – was taking care of her family and home. The exception to this rule were women who decided to live in a convent, which was often the only alternative to marriage when a woman wished to be treated with dignity by the society and the authorities.

How strongly these traditional social roles of women could determine their life choices is shown – as one might think – by Anna Elisabeth Willmann's

6. See more: Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1981); Maria Bogucka, *Gorsza płęć: Kobiety w dziejach Europy od antyku po wiek XXI* (Warszawa: Trio, 2005); Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012).

7. Bogucka, *Gorsza płęć*, 89–114.

8. Elżbieta Adamiak, *Milcząca obecność: O roli kobiety w Kościele* (Warszawa: Biblioteka, 1998), 16.

9. Bogucka, *Gorsza płęć*, 13–28.

10. Adamiak, *Milcząca obecność*, 119.

11. Maria Ciechomska, *Od matriarchatu do feminizmu* (Poznań: Brama, 1996), 239.

12. *Ibid.*, 65.

13. *Ibid.*



2 Anna Elisabeth Willmann, *The Earthly Trinity (The Kiss of St. Joseph)*, early 1680s, The Household Museum, Ziębice. Photo: Mirosław Łanowiecki

life. She was born on 18 November 1665 in Lubiąż, as one of five children of Michael Willmann and Helena Regina Lischka (née Schultz).¹⁴ She grew up in the Willmann family house in Lubiąż. An entry in the family chronicle reveals that on 17 June 1669, she had an unfortunate accident and narrowly avoided death.¹⁵ As a teenager, she was mentioned twice in the registry of St. Valentine's Parish Church in Lubiąż; the second entry, dated 24 October 1683, indicates that she became a godmother.¹⁶

Anna Elisabeth grew up among paints and easels in her father's studio, where she could observe the master at work and learn the craft. There is no doubt that she learnt it very well, as confirmed by the words of Joachim von Sandrart, who wrote Michael Willmann's biography, published in 1683 in the Latin version of *Teutsche Academie*. It reads: "[Willmann] has taught his daughter, Anna Elisabeth Willmann, an accomplished and virtuous lady, how to use the brush from a very young age. She already gives admirable indications of her craftsmanship and there is great hope for the flourishing future of her painting".¹⁷ Anna Elisabeth's highly valued skills were utilised in the Willmann family workshop, which operated like a small enterprise where family members were jointly creating paintings.¹⁸ It can therefore be assumed that

14. See: Augustin Knoblich, *Leben und Werke Malers Michael Lucas Leopold Willmann, 1629–1706* (Breslau: Buchhandlung von Goerlich dr Coch, 1868), 10; Andrzej Kozieł, *Michael Willmann i jego malarska pracownia* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2013), 28.

15. Michael Willmann's handwritten notes containing the family chronicle, written on the last page attached to the artist's copy of the third volume of the work of Gualtherus Hermenius Rivius, *Der furnembsten notwendigen der gantzen Architektur angehörigen mathematischen und mechanischen Kunst eygentlicher Bericht und verständliche Unterrichtung*, Nachdruck der Ausgabe Nürnberg 1547 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1981). See Kozieł, *Michael Willmann*, 28.

16. Joseph Effner, "Michael Lukas Leopold Willmann," *Schlesisches Kirchenblatt*, no. 31 (1864): 375.

17. Joachimi de Sandrart, *Academia nobilissima artis pictoriae* (Noribergæ: Froberger, 1683), vol. 2, book 3, 393.

18. Andrzej Kozieł, "Wielkie przedsiębiorstwo czy mała rodzinna firma? Kilka hipotez na temat warsztatu u Michaela Willmanna," in *Willmann i inni. Malarstwo, rysunek i grafika na Śląsku i krajach ościennych w XVII i XVIII wieku*, ed. Andrzej Kozieł, Beata Lejman (Wrocław: VIA NOVA, 2002), 92–100.

from around 1680, the young female painter actively participated in completing commissions and that next to Willmann's stepson, Johann Christoph Lischka, she was her father's main collaborator.¹⁹ Due to her physical capabilities, she probably did not participate in creating large-format canvases, but she specialised in painting smaller formats, using the workshop's collection of patterns.

Three small paintings that have survived to our times are the testimony of Anna Elisabeth's active participation in the Lubiąż studio. These are: the signed *Earthly Trinity (The Kiss of St. Joseph)* from Joseph Langer's collection, currently in The Household Museum in Ziębice (Fig. 2), *Madonna and Child with the Infant Saint John the Baptist* from the collection of the former Schlesisches Museum der Bildenden Künste in Wrocław (Fig. 3), now in a private collection in Prague, and a canvas of the same subject kept in the parsonage of the Parish Church of Our Lady of Sorrows in Tymowa (Fig. 4).²⁰ They were painted in a sketchy manner characteristic of Willmann's studio, and their compositions were modelled on engravings from the workshop's template portfolio. *The Earthly Trinity (The Kiss of St. Joseph)* was a faithful reproduction of a copperplate designed by Willmann and engraved by Johann Tscherning around 1678. The *Madonna and Child with the Infant Saint John the Baptist* housed in Prague was modelled after the reproduction of Pietro da Cortona's *The Madonna and Child with St. Martina* from the Louvre collection in Paris. Finally, the *Madonna and Child with the Infant Saint John the Baptist* from Tymowa is based on a copperplate by Carlo Maratta. Although Anna Elisabeth's works are not very innovative, they consistently display a high artistic level and are successful imitations of Michael

Willmann's works, both in terms of composition and the sketchy painting style.

Regrettably, despite the promising start to her career, the young painter left her family home in Lubiąż around 1685 and entered the Dominican convent of St. Catherine in Wrocław, where she took the religious name of Benedicta. Her parents donated 1,000 thalers to the congregation as a conventual dowry for their daughter. In addition, Michael Willmann gave the monastery two paintings (now lost), depicting Saint Catherine and Saint Apollonia.²¹ We have no information about Anna Elisabeth's later life. However, we can presume that she stopped painting and devoted herself to her new monastic duties, fulfilling the role of a nun assigned to women in the early modern society.

II

The second main reason why there were so few women painters in Silesia in the Baroque era are the very restrictive guild regulations concerning education. Although the first academies were established in Central Europe already at the end of the 17th century – for instance the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna (1692) or the Royal Prussian Academy of Arts in Berlin (1696) – and they offered a comprehensive painter's education, future painters in Silesia were educated primarily within the traditional guild system.²² Only the fortunate few could afford to travel and study at foreign academies.²³ For the majority of aspiring artists, the only option was the guild workshop, whose *modus operandi* – including the educational path – was strictly regulated by the guild statutes. In all known guild statutes from Central European cities, the education regulations are clear: only a boy born in a legitimate Christian marriage

19. Koziel, *Michael Willmann*, 113.

20. *Ibid.*, 566, 592, 609–610.

21. Knoblich, *Leben und Werke*, 10.

22. *Malarstwo barokowe na Śląsku*, 25.

23. Artur Kolbiarz, "Silesian Painters and Sculptors at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts in the Years 1726–1780. A Contribution to the History of Academism in the Early Modern Period," *Arts* 10, no. 86 (2021): 1–23.



3 Anna Elisabeth Willmann, *Madonna and Child with the Infant Saint John the Baptist*, early 1680s, private collection, Prague. Photo: Martin Mádl

could be admitted to the guild workshop.²⁴ The boy's parents or legal guardians were required not only to pay an admission fee to the guild fund, but also to present the guild authorities with an appropriate birth certificate (*Geburtsbrief*) confirming that he had been born in wedlock of free people. Not only women, but also illegitimate children, including foundlings and children born to subjects, prostitutes or clergymen, were excluded from guild apprenticeship.²⁵

The statutes of the two largest painting guilds in Silesia did not diverge from these European standards. In the first clause of the statutes of the Wrocław guild of painters, carpenters, glaziers and gilders, dating from 1593, we read: "Erstlichen sol kein Meister keinen Jungen aufnehmen zu lernen / under fünff Jahren und sol ein jeder Jung vor der Lernung / sein Geburts brief im Mittel auflegen".²⁶ The later statutes of the Legnica guild of painters and sculptors from 1666 clearly stated: "Erstlich, wann ein Lehr Junge Zu lernen aufgenommen wirdt, welches denn Zur [...] Quartals Zeit vor der Zunfft geschehen sol, so sol er Zwölft Silbergroschn in die Laden einzuschreiben geben, hierauf seinen geburts brieff einlegen, und

24. See, e.g., Karl Berling, "Die Dresdner Malerinnung," in *Neues Archiv für Sächsische Geschichte und Altertumskunde*, 11 (München: Wilhelm Baensch Verlagshandlung, 1890), 263–281; Leo von Stieglitz, *Zünfte in Württemberg. Regeln und Zeichen altwürttembergischer Zünfte vom 16. bis zum 19. Jahrhundert: Begleitbuch zur Ausstellung im Württembergischen Landesmuseum Stuttgart, 7.5.2000–17.9.2000* (Stuttgart: Landesmuseum Württemberg, 2000); Andreas Tacke, "Dresdner Malerordnungen der Frühen Neuzeit. Ein Quellenbeitrag zur Kunstgeschichte als Handwerksgeschichte," *Anzeiger des Germanischen Nationalmuseums* (2001), 29–47; Marina Beck, "Die Grundlage aller Dinge. Die Zunftordnung der Seidensticker, Maler, Glaser, Bildhauer und Steinmetzen der Stadt Ingolstadt," in *Der Künstler in der Gesellschaft. Einführungen zur Künstlersozialgeschichte des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Andreas Tacke, Franz Irsigler (Darmstadt: WBG Academic, 2011), 10–36.

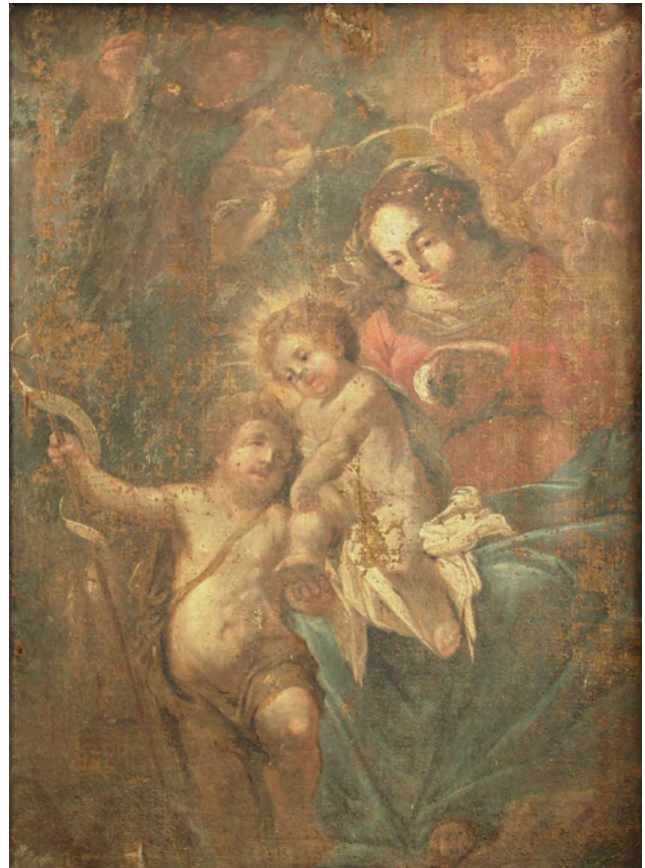
25. Marina Beck, "Der lange Weg zum Meister. Formular eines Lehrbriefs und die Gesellenordnung der Maler, Glaser und Sattler in Münster," in *Der Künstler in der Gesellschaft*, 39–40.

26. *Malarstwo barokowe na Śląsku*, 769.

gewöhnlich vorbürget werden”.²⁷ In both cases, the statutes mention only boys who can learn the craft, requiring a certificate of their legitimate birth. It can be safely assumed that in other Silesian cities, guild regulations regarding the painter’s education were exactly the same.

Such restrictive guild regulations officially prevented women from learning a craft in a guild master’s workshop. However, there was a loophole in this system. The statutes did not apply to the situations in which the painter’s wife or daughter was helping her husband or father run a family workshop, thus obtaining an opportunity to learn the profession. According to the guild statutes, this situation was permissible; and many female painters took advantage of this option.²⁸ This included not only Anna Elisabeth Willmann, educated in her father’s famous studio in Lubiąż, but also renowned European female artists, such as Artemisia Gentileschi, who studied painting from 1609 to 1612 in the studio of her father, Orazio Gentileschi,²⁹ or Gesina ter Borch, who learned to draw and paint from her father, Gerard ter Borch the Elder.³⁰

Unfortunately, this education path had a downside. Women who learnt painting in this somewhat “clandestine” way and then tried to obtain the right to pursue their chosen profession were not able to prove that they had completed the full education process as confirmed by an apprenticeship certificate (*Lehrbrief*). According to the guild statutes, not only in Silesian, but also in other Central European cities, the complete



4 Anna Elisabeth Willmann, *Madonna and Child with the Infant Saint John the Baptist*, early 1680s, Parsonage of the Parish Church of Our Lady of Sorrows, Tymowa. Photo: Andrzej Koziel

education should consist of five year’s apprenticeship in a guild master’s workshop,³¹ followed by an obligatory journey, which was an expensive and serious logistic undertaking. According to the third clause in

27. Ibid., 772.

28. Danica Brenner, “Exklusion und Partizipationsmöglichkeiten künstlerisch tätiger Frauen im zunftgebundenen Malerhandwerk,” in *Meisterstücke – vom Handwerk der Maler*, ed. Wolfgang P. Cilleßen, Andreas Tacke (Frankfurt am Main: Societäts-Verlag, 2019), 54–63.

29. Raymond Ward Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art: Critical Reading and Catalogue Raisonné* (Philadelphia: Penn State University Press, 1999), 23.

30. Jan Vos, “Gesina Ter Borch: schilderes, dichteres en model (1631–1690),” *Overijssel. Jaarboek voor cultuur en historie* 14 (1960), 28.

31. Andreas Tacke, “Valentin Wagners Gesellenwanderung. Grundlagen und Voraussetzungen nach der Dresdner und den Deutschen Malerordnungen,” in *Valentin Wagner (um 1610–1655). Ein Zeichner im Dreißigjährigen Krieg. Aufsätze und Werkkatalog*, ed. Holger Th. Gräf, Helga Meise (Darmstadt: Hessisches Landesmuseum, 2003), 26–27.

the statutes of the Wrocław painters' guild from 1593, the journey should last at least three years ("dreÿ Jahr gewandert")³², while the statutes of the Brzeg painters' guild from 1615 mention three or four years of journey ("drey oder Vier Jahr Inn der Wanderschafft").³³ In total, a comprehensive painter's education consisted of a minimum of eight years of training, which would include at least three years as a journeyman. This was practically unachievable for a woman who would want to run a guild painting workshop on her own.

This is confirmed by the case of Antonina della Vigna, who became a victim of the restrictive guild regulations.³⁴ It is assumed that she was born in the early 1730s in Legnica as the daughter of Antonius Chenin della Vigna, an Italian who in 1731 travelled from Vienna to Legnica to teach fencing at the local Knight Academy,³⁵ and Anna Francesca, the eldest of six daughters of the famous Legnica guild painter, Jeremias Joseph Knechtel. According to the census conducted in Legnica in 1748, young Antonina did not live with her parents at that time, but in her grandfather's house situated near the Glogauer Tor. There, under the old master's supervision, she learnt to paint, often helping him with the execution of numerous commissions, probably including also the *Fourteen Stations of the Cross* (1750), which are now located in the Dominican Church in Wrocław.³⁶ There is no doubt that in Knechtel's studio the young

woman had excellent conditions to obtain appropriate professional qualifications. Her grandfather was a popular and highly valued painter across Silesia and an elder of the Legnica painters' guild, who – apart from his own workshop – also ran a private painting school.³⁷ After Knechtel's death in 1750, Antonina spent some time finishing the commissions he had begun. Later, for several months in 1753, she studied and collaborated with the Wrocław guild master Johann Heinrich Kynast, who at that time was probably working in the Benedictine convent in Legnica.³⁸ The female painter was convinced that "ohne eigenen Ruhm soviel profitiert zu haben, dass sie in allen Gattungen der Malerei Stücke verfertigen könne".³⁹

At first, the authorities of the Legnica painters' guild tolerated della Vigna's activities. They reacted only in 1755, when the painter, through the mediation of her father, received her first independent commission – to paint the coats of arms on a coffin ordered by the dying Count von Gaschin. As the coffin was put on display after the contract was completed, the masters of the Legnica painters' guild, Josef Stumpf and Johann David, appealed to the municipal court, accusing della Vigna of operating outside of the guild and confiscating the coffin with the coats of arms as evidence of the crime. At that time, della Vigna, trying to legalise her painting activity, applied for admission to the Legnica painters' guild. The guild

32. *Malarstwo barokowe na Śląsku*, 770.

33. *Ibid.*, 771.

34. Emilia Kłoda, "Wszystko oprócz malowania. Środowisko legnickich malarzy w XVII i XVIII wieku," *Roczniki Sztuki Śląskiej* 25 (2016): 86; ead., "Vigna (Vinia) Antonina della (Antonia, Antonio)," in *Malarstwo barokowe na Śląsku*, 720–721.

35. *Scholastischer Adresskalender: Auf das Jahr 1760 darinnen nebst andern wichtigen Nachrichten die Namen und Ämter aller jeztlebenden Lehrer der Ritterakademien und Gymnasien in und Außerhalb Teutschland befindlich* (Erlangen: gedruckt u. verlegt bey Ioh. Dietr. Mich. Kammerer Universit. Buchdrucker, 1760), 60.

36. Emilia Kłoda, "Jeremias Joseph Knechtel – malarz zapomniany?" in *Jeremias Joseph Knechtel (1679–1750). Legnicki malarz doby baroku*, ed. Andrzej Kozieł, Emilia Kłoda (Legnica: Muzeum Miedzi, 2012), 42.

37. *Ibid.*, 41.

38. Arnold Zum Winkel, "Ernstes und heiteres aus dem Leben einer Liegnitzer Innung," *Wir Schlesier* 7, no. 21 (1926/1927): 647.

39. *Ibid.*

authorities gave their consent, but – in accordance with the provisions of the guild statutes – ordered the young painter to complete the entire eight-year training process, including a three-year journey, which della Vigna was unable to do. The desperate painter tried to obtain the privilege of “court freedom” from the king of Prussia, Frederick II, which would allow her to be an independent painter in Legnica, outside of the local guild. Although these efforts proved to be unsuccessful, the guild authorities were outraged by the artist’s actions, perceiving them as an attempt to violate the guild privileges and a dangerous precedent which could increase the number of painters operating outside of the guild in the future. Another argument against della Vigna’s efforts was the fact that her father had never obtained municipal rights in Legnica, and thus did not pay the city taxes.⁴⁰ Finally, the guild authorities decided to reach a compromise and end the dispute – della Vigna was allowed to pursue the painter’s profession in Legnica, but in a very narrow scope limited only to portraits and signboards, with a categorical ban on painting coats of arms.⁴¹ Most probably, she agreed to this amicable solution and was leading her painting workshop, with a limited scope, until the end of her life.

Sadly, no independent works by della Vigna have survived to our times. We have no traces of either the unfortunate coffin for Count von Gaschin or portraits and signposts the creation of which was approved by the Legnica painters’ guild. We know, however, about two religious paintings, which – despite the guild’s ban – she supposedly painted after 1755. Until 1991, the parish church of the Ascension of Christ in Jaskotle near Wrocław held a painting known as *The Holy Family with St. Elizabeth and St. John the Baptist*



5 Antonina della Vigna, *The Holy Family with St. Elizabeth and St. John the Baptist*, 1756, lost after 1991, previously in the Parish Church of the Ascension of Christ, Jaskotle. Photo: Instytut Sztuki PAN

(Fig. 5), signed and dated 1756.⁴² Unfortunately, this work of art was lost and today it is known only from an archival photograph. Based on the photo, in terms of composition this painting was a faithful copy of the painting from Raphael’s workshop known as *The Holy Family of Francis I* (The Louvre, Paris).⁴³ The second work, signed and dated 1760, was a copy of the miraculous painting of *Our Lady of Passau*. In 1967,

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. *Katalog zabytków sztuki w Polsce. Seria Nowa*, ed. Jerzy Łoziński, Barbara Wolff-Łozińska, vol. 4: *Województwo wrocławskie*, ed. Jakub Pokora, Mieczysław Zlat, *Sobótka, Kąty Wrocławskie i okolice* (Warszawa: Instytut Sztuki PAN, 1991), XLI, 29.

43. This painting from 1518 was a gift from Pope Leo X for Francis I of France. See: Lamla, *Kobiety a zawód malarza na Śląsku w dobie baroku*, 27.

this painting was in a private collection in Wrocław; today, it is known only from a poor-quality reproduction.⁴⁴ For someone whose ambition was to continue the activity of Knechtel's thriving studio, Antonina della Vigna's artistic achievements are strikingly meagre. It is hard to deny that the authorities of the Legnica painters' guild achieved their goal and nipped the young painter's promising career in the bud.

III

Given all these obstacles, did women of Silesia have any opportunities to legally work there as painters in the Baroque period? Of course, yes. The first option was to conduct independent artistic activities outside the guild structures, i.e. in those areas that were excluded from the municipal jurisdiction. For example, some cities had enclaves belonging to the Catholic Church, such as Ostrów Tumski, Wyspa Piasek, and the area around the Dominican monastery and convent in Wrocław, or Ostrów Tumski in Głogów. Outside the cities, work opportunities were offered in towns belonging to great monasteries and convents, including Lubiąż, Trzebnica, Czarnowąs, Lubomierz and Krzeszów.⁴⁵

It seems that this path was chosen by the third Silesian female painter known to us today – Dorothea Gloger.⁴⁶ We know about her existence from the signatures on two small paintings which were found in the rectory of the parish church of the Assumption of Our Lady in Lubawka, a town that belonged to the nearby Cistercian monastery in Krzeszów. They depict full figures of two female saints: Catherine of Alexandria

(Fig. 6) and Margaret (Fig. 7) with the signatures: *Dorothea Glogerin von Grüssau / Anno 1688* (in the former painting) and *Dorothea Glogerin, 1691* (in the latter). Although the artistic level of these works is not outstanding, they are proof of the painter's fully professional skills. Unfortunately, no information about Dorothea Gloger's life is available to us.⁴⁷ It can only be assumed that she was active in the 1680s and 1690s in Krzeszów and the surrounding area, where she created devotional art that was intended for pilgrims visiting this important religious site in Silesia.

The second option for female painters was an active engagement in a painting workshop run by her husband, father, or even grandfather.⁴⁸ This was possible due to the unity of the household and the workshop, which was a common practice at the time. The workshops were often family enterprises (handed down from generation to generation), whose interests in the guild were represented by the head of the family, i.e. the husband or father.⁴⁹ The system based on the unity of the workshop and the household allowed women to participate in the process of producing goods while taking care of the home. In the workshop, the wife's duties were not limited to supply issues; she often also performed the apprentice's tasks or helped the master with finances.⁵⁰ Using modern terminology, it can be said that the master's wife or daughter played the role of a multi-functional assistant who could successfully take over the managerial position during the absence of the workshop owner or in case of his death.

This was probably the role played by Marianna Hedwig Mangoldt, who was a daughter of Franz

44. Paweł Banaś, Stanisław Kozak, "Naśladownictwo innsbruckiego obrazu Łukasza Cranacha Starszego Maria z Dzieciątkiem na Śląsku," *Roczniki Sztuki Śląskiej* 4 (1967): 215, fig. 60.

45. *Malarstwo barokowe na Śląsku*, 37.

46. *Ibid.*, 414–415.

47. The preserved registry of the Krzeszów parish does not include any information about her.

48. Brenner, "Exklusion und Partizipationsmöglichkeiten künstlerisch tätiger Frauen im zunftgebundenen Malerhandwerk," 54–63.

49. Bogucka, *Gorsza pleć*, 91–92.

50. Agnieszka Patała, *Pod znakiem świętego Sebalda: Rola Norymbergi w kształtowaniu późnogotyckiego malarstwa tablicowego na Śląsku* (Wrocław: VIA NOVA, 2018), 81.

Joseph Mangoldt, a prominent sculptor active in Silesia, and a wife of the already mentioned Wrocław painter Johann Heinrich Kynast.⁵¹ As an artist's daughter, growing up with a direct access to a sculpting workshop, she learnt to draw and paint from her father – a skill she later used to help her husband run his painting workshop. According to Friedrich Albert Zimmermann's first list of Wrocław artists published in 1794, Marianna Hedwig Kynast – who “almost equalled her husband in talent and art” (“ist ihrem Manne an Talent und Kunst beynahe gleich gekommen”) – was supposed to have painted one of the two large-format paintings created by Kynast's workshop for the side altars of St. Carlo Borromeo and St. John of Nepomuk in the collegiate church of the Holy Cross in Wrocław around 1750.⁵² Regrettably, both paintings burnt down during the siege of Wrocław in 1945 and we are currently unable to verify this information.

However, as also the biographies of Anna Elisabeth Willmann and Antonina della Vigna prove, there is no doubt that women could actively participate in the family art workshop. With a paintbrush in her hand, a female artist could be tasked with creating a whole painting or just some of its fragments. Unfortunately, the exact scope of their involvement is currently difficult to estimate due to the collective nature of a workshop, where multiple collaborators often worked together on the same commission.

The wife's role in a guild workshop would expand dramatically in the event of the master's death. According to the law of the time, she would become the sole owner of the painting workshop and she could decide its fate.⁵³ The master's widow could marry one of the workshop's journeymen, for whom – according

to the guild statutes – this could provide a fast track for promotion to the guild master. For example, the third clause of the Wrocław painters' guild statutes stipulates that those journeymen who decided to marry the widow or a daughter of a deceased guild master could be exempt from obligatory two-year journeyman work after completing their education (*Jahreszeit*).⁵⁴ As evident from the available sources, many widows and many journeymen in Silesia took advantage of this opportunity.⁵⁵

The master's widow could also independently run the painting workshop inherited from her husband, acting as its manager. This was the third possibility for women to legally pursue a professional activity. The guild statutes not only permitted it, but also provided various advantages for women who wanted to follow this path. For example, in the sixth clause of the statutes of the Legnica painters and sculptors' guild, the master's widow was granted the right to employ as many as three apprentices in her workshop (in general, only two were allowed).⁵⁶ Not surprisingly, some widows of Silesian painters decided to assume this function. When Michael Willmann died on 26 August 1706 and four days later his son Michael Willmann the Younger also passed away, the master's widow, Helena Regina, took over the management of the Lubiąż workshop. She managed it until her son, Johann Christoph Lischka, finally returned from Prague to Lubiąż in 1708, took over the family business, and completed the commissions started by his stepfather.⁵⁷ Similarly, Barbara Jentsch, the wife of the Legnica guild master Gottfried, took over her husband's property and managed it after his death. As evidenced by the accounts of the city of Legnica from 1681, after Barbara Jentsch took over, her late

51. Alicja Bajdor, “Jan Henryk Kynast, malarz śląski II połowy XVIII wieku,” *Roczniki Sztuki Śląskiej* 4 (1967): 221–224.

52. Friedrich Albert Zimmermann, *Beyträge zur Beschreibung von Schlesien*, vol. 11 (Brieg: Johann Ernst Tramp, 1794), 431–432.

53. Brenner, “Exklusion und Partizipationsmöglichkeiten künstlerisch tätiger Frauen im zunftgebundenen Malerhandwerk,” 54–63.

54. *Malarstwo barokowe na Śląsku*, 770.

55. *Ibid.*, 35.

56. *Ibid.*, 773.

57. Koziół, *Michael Willmann*, 120.

6 Dorothea Gloger,
St. Catherine of Alexandria,
 1688, Parsonage of the Parish
 Church of The Assumption
 of Our Lady, Lubawka. Photo:
 Jerzy Buława
 7 Dorothea Gloger,
St. Margaret, 1691, Parsonage
 of the Parish Church of The
 Assumption of Our Lady,
 Lubawka. Photo: Jerzy Buława



husband's workshop painted in oil the coats of arms in the Legnica Town Hall, for which she received the payment of 7 thalers, 10 groschen and 7 hellers from the municipal treasury.⁵⁸

IV

Out of the three Dutch female artists whose paintings are now featured in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, only Gesina ter Borch was an amateur one, mainly creating watercolour illustrations for albums of love poetry.⁵⁹ The other two worked as professional painters and achieved a significant success. Judith Jans Leyster was not only admitted to the painters' guild in Haarlem in 1633, but also operated her own workshop there, training new apprentices, and her paintings – with a style and subject matters resembling the works of Frans Hals – were very popular with her contemporaries.⁶⁰

Rachel Ruysch, in turn, who in 1701 was admitted to the painters' guild in The Hague, gained such great international recognition as the best Dutch painter of flower still lifes that in 1708 she was invited to Düsseldorf to the court of Elector Palatinate Johann Wilhelm von der Pfalz, for whom she worked as a court artist until her patron's death in 1716.⁶¹ The question arises, then: if women could work as painters and achieve professional success in Holland in the 17th and early 18th century, why was it so difficult for female painters in Silesia in the same period?

Unfortunately, at the current stage of research, it is not possible to satisfactorily answer this question. We can only indicate two main factors that might have contributed to such considerable differences. The first was the huge disproportion between the size of the art market and the number of painters in Holland and Silesia. With a comparable population

58. Kłoda, "Wszystko oprócz malowania," 88.

59. Vos, "Gesina Ter Borch," 22–43.

60. Frima Fox Hofrichter, *Judith Leyster, leading star: Focus Exhibition, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington* (Washington: National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1993), 10–14.

61. Marianne Berardi, "Florale distinctie en detaillering. De receptuur van Rachel Ruysch," *Kunstschrift* 23, no. 1 (2000): 4–15.

and area of both territories, it is currently estimated⁶² that between 1580 and 1800, Holland had a total of about 5,000 active painters (making it, on the average, from 400 to 800 per year) who, working on Europe's leading free market, produced a total of 8–10 million paintings. Suffice it to mention that at that time, cities in Holland had the highest number of painters per 1,000 inhabitants in all Europe, ranging from 0.8 in Leiden to as much as 2.1 in The Hague.⁶³ In case of Silesia, we can only talk about a fraction of these numbers: a maximum of 800 painters were active during a similar period of time, who – operating on the provincial market for particular patrons – produced a total of 100,000–150,000 paintings.⁶⁴ The smaller and more conservative the art market, the fewer job opportunities it offered for painters, including women.

The second factor was a significant difference in the degree of control of guild organizations over the local painting markets. In Holland, despite their best efforts, the painters' guilds were practically unable to effectively control the education of painters as well as the production and sale of a huge number of paintings in the cities, especially the largest ones, like Leiden, Haarlem or, above all, Amsterdam, where the free market for paintings operated practically outside the control of the local painters' guild.⁶⁵

The situation in Silesia was diametrically different. The Silesian painters' guilds successfully guarded the much smaller painting markets, successfully eliminating internal and external competition, which is best evidenced by the preserved archival documents about



8 Julia Mihes, *St. Catherine of Alexandria*, around 1822, The National Museum in Warsaw. Photo: The National Museum in Warsaw, public domain

guild interventions preventing artists who wanted to paint portraits outside of the guild structures from entering the market.⁶⁶ Suffice it to say that Alwin Schultz, writing in 1882, concluded that the Wrocław guild's monopoly on painting production and hindering the settlement of foreign artists were the main

62. Ad van der Woude, "The Volume and Value of Paintings in Holland at the time of the Dutch Republic," in *Art in History, History in Art: Studies in Seventeenth-century Dutch Culture*, ed. David Freedberg, Jan de Vries (Santa Monica: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1991), 289–324.

63. Michael North, *Das Goldene Zeitalter: Kunst und Kommerz in der niederländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Köln–Weimar–Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2001), 75.

64. *Malarstwo barokowe na Śląsku*, 13.

65. Ed Romein, Gerbrand Korevaar, "Dutch Guilds and the Threat of Public Sales," in *Mapping Markets for Paintings in Europe 1450–1750*, ed. Neil De Marchi, Hans J. Van Miegroet (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 165–188.

66. Kłoda, "Jeremias Joseph Knechtel," 42, 63; *Malarstwo barokowe na Śląsku*, 31–37.

reasons for the weakness of this guild and its artistic conservatism.⁶⁷ The more efficient the guilds were in enforcing their regulations, the lower the chances were for women to become professional painters.

As a result, it is considered that the first female painter to achieve a full professional success in Silesia was Julia Mihes, who was born in Wrocław in 1786 and celebrated her greatest artistic triumphs in the early 1820s. During that time, she created her best paintings, inspired by the Italian Renaissance and the works of the Nazarene movement, such as *St.*

Catherine of Alexandria from around 1822 (Fig. 8), now in the National Museum in Warsaw, while the local press praised her as “our esteemed artist.” Significantly, it was her work, the *Madonna and Child* from 1823, and not the works of female painters from the Baroque period, that was accepted by the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C., as the earliest painting by an independent female artist from Silesia.⁶⁸

Translated by Malwina Zaremba

67. Alwin Schultz, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der schlesischen Maler (1500–1800)* (Breslau: Verlag von Wilhelm Gottlieb Korn, 1882), 12.

68. Joanna Lubos-Kozieł, “Wiarą tchnące obrazy.” *Studia z dziejów malarstwa religijnego na Śląsku w XIX wieku* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2004), 362–365.

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