

Life for the Art: The Unknown Story of Nicholas Lochoff

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Abstract

The story of Nicholas Lochoff is a fascinating journey of an artist whose influence on the art world extends beyond his relative obscurity in his native Russia. Lochoff, a self-taught copyist, devoted a significant portion of his adult life to studying and reproducing the masterpieces of Renaissance artists from collections of the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, and various churches and monasteries in Italy. His collection in Pittsburgh, USA continues to inspire successive cohorts of American art historians.

My research, supported by comparative historical analysis of previously unknown archival materials, documentation, recent historiography related to the subject, and an examination of Lochoff's acquisitions by Helen Frick in 1958 for the Department of Art History at the University of Pittsburgh, has revealed numerous previously undisclosed aspects of this exceptional artist. It sheds light on his youth, and artistic and political activities in St. Petersburg and Switzerland, illuminating a frequently overlooked segment of art history. The tale of Nicholas Lochoff serves as a testament to the power of passion, commitment, and resilience in adversity. Furthermore, the research allows the author to elaborate on the significant role played by philanthropy in the formation of collections within numerous American art institutions.

Published documents and archival materials have been instrumental in shedding new light on the cultural and educational endeavors of Helen Clay Frick, whose philanthropy donated Pittsburgh and its university with a Renaissance-style cloister that preserves the collection of Lochoff's copies. Due to the recent nature of research about Nicholas Lochoff in the annals of 20th-century art, it unfortunately lacks documentation on his life in Italy. The possibility of discovering and scrutinizing such materials and documents in the future holds promise for unveiling further insights into this captivating artist and his enduring contributions. The current research will form the foundation for a monograph detailing the life and work of the exceptional copyist.

Keywords: Nicholas Lochoff, Helen Clay Frick, cloister