

The future for Rahn's slides

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THE FUTURE FOR RAHN'S SLIDES

Certain questions may crop up occasionally which are difficult to answer. They may concern the expert, or they may crop up when the amateur art lover sees a picture which captures his imagination. For instance, it is interesting to know that pictures of the Renaissance and Baroque periods show the angel coming from the right or the left in the representation of the Annunciation, but from which side? Or you may like to know how many times Hans Holbein the Younger painted Henry VIII, and where these pictures are. In the National Gallery in London there is the famous picture by van Eyck "The Marriage of Cenami and Arnolfini" – how can this be explained iconographically? Or the "Night Watch" by Rembrandt at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam?

These are just a few questions which have been put to the Founder of the unique collection in Zürich. The answers are given in its catalogue which has the title "RAHN'S COLOURED SLIDE COLLECTION". It is an iconographical classification of master paintings from 1430 to 1810.

Now you may ask who this Hans Rahn is and how he, a merchant of chemical products (Hans Rahn & Co. Zürich), has been able to start a collection of by now some 10,000 coloured slides and their iconographical evaluation. I asked him when he was in London a short time ago. He told me that he had always been deeply interested in

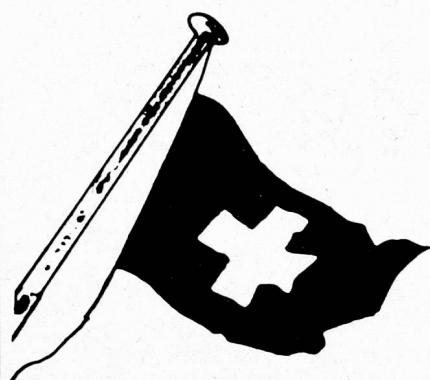
music and painting, and that after a visit to the Prado Gallery in Madrid in 1959, he had the idea to build up a private collection of about 300 coloured slides of standard pictures (Renaissance and Baroque), just like some music lovers compile a record collection. Due to his job he travelled extensively in Europe and the U.S.A. and had many opportunities of visiting museums and art galleries where he could buy coloured slides. The aim of 300 was reached in a relatively short time, and already the real instinct of the collector reared its head and he was attracted by the beauty of the pictures, and his enthusiasm grew. He wanted to learn more and more about the paintings.

"A lot of time-consuming and detailed work brought me in contact with expert professional photographers who made their own coloured slides, and they became my regular suppliers. My orderly mind and inclination to classify and summarize made me think of using the computer, and soon I found a practicable solution. The ICL Branch in Zürich advised me."

Mr. Rahn then went on to explain that it was a question of selecting keywords and of dividing them up into generic terms. His knowledge of the Bible also helped him in connection with religious themes used by artists in the Renaissance and the Baroque periods. He discovered new aspects which enabled him to define a picture according to six

keywords. By accident he met a publisher who wished to publish his work. That was Herbert Lang & Co., AG, Berne, and subsequently, Dr. Lucas Wuethrich, curator at the Swiss National Museum in Zürich, agreed to write the preface. It became evident very soon that no such work existed, either in Europe or America. After 16 years of intensive work at home, the first steps were taken into the outside world. At the end of November 1975, the first volumes left the printing press in Berne, and immediately the experts showed great interest. Discussions started up in Paris, London and Holland with specialists on iconography. At the moment, the Rahn Collection is being expanded in co-operation with the computer centre of Zürich University. It is hoped that the 373 key words used at the moment may be increased to 1000, and that some 5000 coloured slides will be added to the Collection *per annum*.

"In order to realize these plans", said Hans Rahn, "I have created a Foundation in which all universities and art institutes in Switzerland are interested. The subject of iconographic classification has become very topical and is being discussed in expert circles everywhere. Thus a great future is assured, and the Collection is open to professionals as well as amateurs interested in art. From a very small indoor plant a strong tree is to grow, a tree which may bear much fruit." M.M.



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