

THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

HISTORICAL PAINTINGS
OF THE SLAVIC NATIONS
BY ALPHONSE MUCHA

JUNE SEVENTEEN TO JULY NINETEEN, 1920



No. 1

ALPHONSE MUCHA has been recognized for a number of years as one of the foremost mural painters of the world. In 1904 he attracted wide attention with his poster of Sarah Bernhardt in the character of Gismonda. Many other products of his brush followed rapidly and he was soon famous as a poster artist, illustrator and decorative designer.

Mr. Mucha came to America in 1905 and in the next few years met with great success as a teacher of advanced pupils at the Art Institute of Chicago and at the New York School of Applied Design for Women. In 1908 he delivered the Scammon lectures in Fullerton Hall and in the following year a series of lectures on composition. These lectures and his teaching gave him a secure place in the hearts and memories of those who were associated with the Institute at that time.

During his visit in Chicago an exhibition of Mr. Mucha's decorative designs and mural panels was held in the Institute, attracting great interest and attention from the general public as well as from artists and students.

The present temporary exhibition is part of an uncompleted series of pictures, the most ambitious work yet undertaken by Mucha. Mr. Mucha, who was born in the Czecho Slovak country of Moravia, many years ago conceived the idea of a great series of mural paintings which, through the portrayal of historic incidents, should symbolize the character of the Slavonic nations. Mr. Mucha states that he felt if he could portray the development of the Slavic races from the most ancient to present times he would be accomplishing something perhaps of greater value than would be possible if he lived for art alone. In America Mr. Charles R. Crane, at that time a resident of Chicago and now our minister to China, was a great friend of Mr. Mucha. He sympathized deeply with the project of the artist and gave



No. 2

it his financial support at once. When the projected twenty paintings are completed they are to be presented to the city of Prague as the joint gift of Mr. Mucha and Mr. Crane.

The paintings were begun in 1911 and eleven have been finished. Five of the eleven are now on exhibition in the Art Institute on the north and south walls at the head of the grand staircase. The painting marked No. 1 represents the Festival of Svantovit in Rujane (Ruegen). From ancient times, the country which is the eastern Germany of to-day, up to the Baltic sea and some of its islands, was populated with Slavs. Their culture was recognized by all Europe, especially the Renu branch of the race which inhabited the island of Rujane. In the famous old city of Arkuna was the great temple of Svantovit which because of its artistic beauty attracted visitors from as far away as Spain, and Byzantium. The crowds came to consult the priests about their future just as the Greeks in ancient times visited the oracle of Delphi. After the harvest they held a great festival to praise the God Svantovit. The beginning of this festival is lost in antiquity. It was continued until the XIII century when Arkuna was captured by the Danish Germans and the temple destroyed. In the upper left corner is shown Thor with his wolves, the destroyers of the defenders of Svantovit. The last soldier is dying on the sacred white horse. Svantovit is at his side and is taking from his hand the sacred sword. Then came the fall of the Baltic Slavonic race. Picture No. 2 commemorates the freeing of the serfs by the czar of Russia in 1861. The proclamation within the Kremlin has just taken place. Many peasants have remained in the great public place to give thanks. The painting marked No. 3 represents John Huss preaching in the Bethlehem chapel. In 1412 people of all classes of society came in crowds to hear the sermons of the great preacher. On the right in the picture is shown Queen Sofie, wife of King Vaclav the Fourth, with ladies of her court. Picture No.







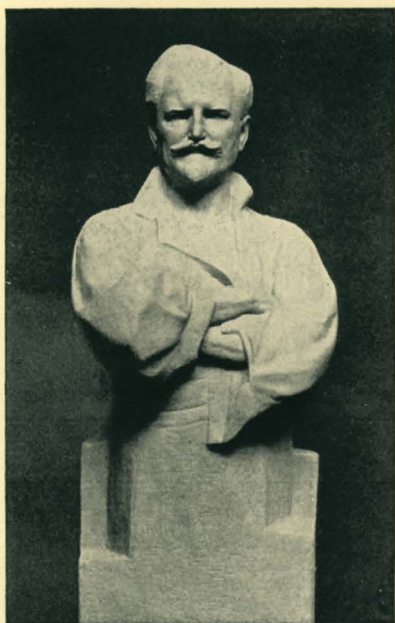
No. 4

4 portrays Milic standing on the ruins of wickedness while the women of the underworld are casting aside their jewelry and gew-gaws as they beg for absolution. Milic preceded Huss by a few decades in arousing the religious enthusiasm of his countrymen. In No. 5



No. 5

the people are coming from far and near to meet at a road crossing to hear the preacher Koranda on St. Michaels' day 1419 and to prepare for giving armed assistance to Prague against the Emperor's party.



[It is the intention of a number of the friends of Mr. Mucha to publish a limited number of fine reproductions of the Slavonic pictures in portfolio form, adding to the set each new picture as soon as it is completed. Those who wish full information in regard to this portfolio, without obligating themselves in any way, may address Dr. Vojan, care of The Bohemian Arts Club, 2004 South Albany Avenue, Chicago.]