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THE INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION WORKSHOP ON THE ISLAND OF LOPUD

During the last ten years, the International Trust for Croatian Monuments has been supporting, among other projects, the International Conservation Workshop on the small island of Lopud, a 45 minute boat journey from Dubrovnik. As all islands along the Dalmatian coast, Lopud has a long and rich history. There are over 30 churches and chapels scattered around its shores.

Some years ago, my late husband, Henry, and I made a brief visit to Lopud and met there for the first time Mrs Evica Nedeljkov, the moving spirit and the co-ordinator of the above named project on behalf of the Society for the Preservation of the Natural and Artistic Heritage of Lopud. This year, I returned to Lopud in the company of Robin and Dominique Holland-Martin who have been funding this project on our behalf through the Sandy and Zorica Glen Charitable Settlement.

Our guide on this occasion was a young conservator, Lana Kekez, from Split. I thank Lana for her expert guidance and the following here is, more or less verbatim, my translation of Lana's description of the workshop.
In the 1980s, Dr Karlfriedrich Lange Von Stocmeier, the Chancellor of the University of Applied Sciences in Cologne, came on holiday to Lopud and realised that there were treasures in its churches, needing attention. At Dr Stocmeier's initiative and with the help of the local parish priest, the first group of conservators/restorers from Cologne, lead by the distinguished Professor Knut Nicolaus, arrived at Lopud in 1987. They concentrated first on the collection of the Lopud Museum, working there every year in late summers. However, this practice was interrupted by the war in Croatia and then resumed in 1997, when the German group returned and started to work on the restoration of the wooden altar from the Dominican church of St Nicholas. This project was completed in 2001 when the workshop relocated to the church of Our Lady of Šunj. In 2003, at the invitation of their German colleagues, students and their teachers in conservation from the Arts Academy in Split and from Antwerp and in 2006 from Brussels, joined them, thus forming the International Conservation Workshop Lopud, or ICWL.
The team from Split was lead by teachers of conservation and restoration of easel paintings and polychromed wood. First to join were Jurica Matijević, who was initially one of our students in England, and Lara Aranza. Sagita Mirjan Sunara joined them in 2006 and Lana Kekez in 2012. Jurica and Lana are still participating in the project, together with two or three students from the Academy in Split who join them every year, working together for two weeks at the end of August.

Since 2001, two polychrome, gilded altarpieces, dating from the end of the 16th to the beginning of the 17th century, have been restored in the church of Our Lady of Šunj. One of them holds the easel painting with the scene of Annunciation and...
Saints and the other holds the sculpture in wood of Christ on the Cross. The work is still continuing on the restoration of the sacral furniture of the church.

In 2011, work began on the church of Our Lady of Spilice (Our Lady of the Grotto). Two smaller side reredos, carved in wood and gilded, from the first half of the 17th century, with paintings depicting Death of St. Joseph and Our Lady of Carmel, have almost been completed.

Lana now gives us a short history of these churches.

**OUR LADY OF ŠUNJ**

At the end of the 11th century, an Italian nobleman, Otto Visconti, returning on his ship from the First Crusade, was shipwrecked near the bay of Šunj. He erects a votive chapel there.

In 1416, the Brotherhood of Our Lady of Šunj was founded and they build a new, large church which was consecrated in 1488.
In 1527, Thomas Pidelli builds the north chapel, dedicated first to St Rock. At the end of the 16th century this changes to the Holy Cross and the present day altar is installed.

In 1572, an impressive polychrome and gilt main altar, dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin from a Venetian workshop, is installed.

In 1637, the southern chapel is added and a wood and gilt altar, with an oil painting dedicated to the Annunciation, is commissioned from Italy. The funding is provided by Bishop Nikola Brautić, a distinguished citizen of Lopud, who is buried in the chapel.

**THE CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF SPILICE**

This is the church of the former Franciscan friary, founded in 1483 and closed in 1808.

To the right and left side of the main altar, there are two smaller altars, dated to the first half of the 17th century, which are still in the process of restoration by the ICWL. The right one is dedicated to Our Lady of Carmel, containing a painting of...
A detail of work going on in the church of Our Lady of Sunj - learning and conserving
the same name and another, representing the Souls in Purgatory. The left altar, dedicated to the Death of St Joseph, contains the painting of this subject in the upper part and two smaller paintings on wood, parts of a polyptych from the Santacroce workshop and bought for the church in the middle of the 16th century, in the lower part. It is thought that both of these altars were placed in today's position after the closure of the friary in 1808, when the church ceased to be part of the Franciscan order and when many changes were introduced.

The conservation work on these two altars will be completed by 2017. This is when the workshop plan to begin the conservation work on the rare and beautifully carved choir stalls, which were also repositioned after 1808. The main polychrome and gilt altarpiece, dating from the 16th century, was conserved about 15 years ago by the Croatian Conservation Institute. There are also two smaller triptychs, one of them attributed to the workshop of Božidarović, two paintings on wood,
which once belonged to the polyptych of the Santacroce workshop, and two stone side altars, with paintings of St Anthony and the Holy Cross.

When we visited the church in October this year, most of the items mentioned above were either in storage in the Lopud Museum or under plastic covers. At present, the church is undergoing major refurbishment, on the exterior and the interior. In the 1990s, the friary was leased to Francesca von Habsburg, but the lease does not include the church itself, where regular services are held. However, Francesca, apart from renovating the friary complex to a very high standard, as we were told by conservators from the ICWL, is also making a considerable financial contribution towards the renovation of the church itself.

What made our visit especially worthwhile was the fact that we really understood how the whole project works. We realised that this is the effort of the whole
Participants of the first conservation-restoration workshop Komiža 2016 in front of the altar of Our Lady of Snow. From left to right: Julija Bačak, Kristina Krivec, Dora Krstić, Lana Kekez, Matea Milat, Jurica Matijević.
community of the island of Lopud. We knew that all students and their teachers arrive at Lopud at their own expense, bringing with them all the necessary conservation equipment, and that the Society for the Preservation of the Natural and Artistic Heritage of Lopud provides for the arriving conservators board and lodgings. We knew that our financial contributions go towards these costs. However, we did not know that hotels and citizens of Lopud, who usually offer private accommodation to tourists, let these rooms to the Society to accommodate the conservators at greatly reduced prices and that hotels and restaurants give them breakfast, lunch and dinner also at greatly reduced prices. They should all be highly praised for their contribution towards the common good and this is what makes this project so very special and successful.

The report from Lana now continues to the Island of VIS, where the team of conservators of easel paintings and polychromed wood from the Art Academy in Split plan to concentrate in the future. For the first time in May this year, they
organised a similar workshop in Komiža, on the island of Vis, working in the church of St Nicholas. The workshop was headed by Jurica Matijević and Lana Kekez, with the participation of students from the Academy in Split and with assistance from the Conservation Department of the Ministry of Culture in Split. Most importantly again, the parish priest and the local authorities provided accommodation and sustenance for all of them during their stay in Komiža.

The fortress church of St Nicholas, situated on a hill above Komiža, is part of the old Benedictine complex called Muster (fLat. Monasterium – samostan), recorded in documents since the 13th century. Our Trust, ITCM, have recently, by kindness of the Headley Trust, bought for the parish of Komiža conservation chests for the safe keeping of their rich and historic vestment collection. During this first workshop, the conservators concentrated on the polychrome and gilt altarpiece of Our Lady of the Snows and a collection of about 90 wood and gilt candlesticks.

Everybody participating in this project hopes that this workshop will be held every year, lasting two weeks and not just one as this year, giving the students such a very useful practical experience and providing, at the same time, the much needed care and attention for the local cultural heritage. They hope the workshop will develop into an international gathering, like the one on Lopud. They will be inviting students of conservation from other countries to join them. In order to achieve this, funding will be required. Although students and their teachers will do their work at no pay, and in return will have the satisfaction of knowing that they have preserved for the future works of art that otherwise may have perished, working, at the same time, in beautiful surroundings, there are costs with these projects which will need to be covered.

I would be delighted to give anyone interested more information about both Lopud and Komiža or, indeed, give direct contacts with Jurica and Lana.

This year, the International Trust for Croatian Monuments marks the 25th anniversary of its foundation. Please, look at our website, www.croatianmonuments.org, to read an article in the October issue of The Art Newspaper about this special landmark.

Jadranka Beresford-Peirse