

Summary

DIANA CODOGNI-LANCUCKA (Wrocław University Library) / The Silesian Museum of Fine Arts in the time of the Third Reich

For The Silesian Museum of Fine Arts in Wrocław, like for many other German art museums, which used to exhibit avant-garde works since the 1920s, the beginning of the national socialist rule in 1933 meant a complete change. Nevertheless, during the period of 13 years of the Third Reich the Wrocław museum was not a monolithic institution. The analysis of the hitherto unpublished sources allowed us to reconstruct the chequered history of this institution between 1933 and 1945, and indicate chosen aspects of policy concerning building up the collection, exhibiting and public activity adopted by the museum's successive directors.

In the very first month of the new rule of the national socialists – under the directors, Paul Abramowski (1933) and Wolf Marx (1933–1945) – the ambitions of transforming the museum into a model national socialist “people’s museum” came in the foreground. Since the end of 1934 a new director, an art historian, Cornelius Müller, who in 1939 changed his name into Müller-Hofstede, was called from Berlin, and by taking possible chances, he attempted to protect the museum against political influence, and he tried to transform it into an elite institution. Thanks to his professional competencies and tactical manoeuvres, balancing between opportunism and risk, initially he was able to save the museum from complete ideologisation, and held monographic exhibition of the living artists, distant from propaganda art of that time. Still, he could not resist the temptation of morally doubtful, opening after 1933 occasions to extend the collection. Eventually, he also lost the battle against possessive instrumentalisation of the museum by officials of the national socialist apparatus.