



Lithuanian Ex-libris Exhibition

Goethe Institut, Rotterdam, 05.02– 13.03.09

Ex-libris, or bookplates as they are often called in English, are small graphic prints made by artists for bibliophiles who paste them into their books to indicate their owner. This tradition, which has existed for over half a millennium in Europe, originated in Germany just after the time of Gutenberg, when the mobile character press enabled the production of printed books and thus made culture much more widely accessible than ever before. Usually heraldic during mediaeval times, ex-libris motifs became more and more varied as books became less uncommon and libraries ceased to be the privilege of the aristocracy and the church. It is therefore very fitting that an exhibition of ex-libris (Bucheignerzeichen in German), be shown at the Goethe Institute – Perhaps the greatest early ex-libris were made by Dürer, Cranach, Jost Ammann and the ‘Kleinmeistern’ or ‘Masters of the small format’, which brought the art of engraving to its greatest heights.

Since the 1900s, many artists have made ex-libris. Some famous ones like Dali, Picasso or Klee, have made only a few. Others, more specialised in graphics, have made hundreds. Here, in this exhibition, we have 197 bookplates by sixteen different artists, all from Lithuania. This should be no surprise for visitors, as Vilnius has for a long time been an important centre of graphic production, and in particular of ex-libris. Bookplates are small, intimate images, and their motifs are usually the result of a choice discussed by the artist with the person commissioning the work. They require precision and patience, qualities perhaps especially widespread in Northern Europe - but also imagination, poetic spirit, and a sense of synthesis, which the artists shown here have in abundance.

Today, ex-libris have evolved. Essentially made to decorate the books of a library and say who they belong to, they have also today become objects of collection. In some countries, they have become very large and decorative, some of them never being glued in a book anymore. Fortunately, our Lithuanian artists have struck a balance: their ex-libris are beautiful works of art, but they also can be used for their original purpose.

Today, there are about 35 associations of ex-libris collectors in the world, and the Lithuanian Ex-libris Club with the Dutch-Lithuanian Culture Centre have been very active in organising this show. We wish them great success in bringing this art form, which the Japanese call ‘paper jewels’, to the public of Rotterdam.

Benoît Junod
Vice-President of FISAE



International Federation of Ex-libris Societies
www.fisae.org