

**Venceslav Melka in the Collection of the Lucian Blaga Central University
Library in Cluj-Napoca**

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Abstract: The study analyzes the drawings of Venceslav Melka (1834–1911) preserved in the collection of the Lucian Blaga Central University Library in Cluj-Napoca. Following an excursus on the painter's artistic universe and a historiographical discussion of the theme, the paper continues with the artistic analysis of the drawings. An artist of Czech origin, Melka settled in Transylvania around the year 1870, where he, besides being an Art Professor at the University, also became the Official Painter of the Viennese Court, accompanying Archduke Rudolf on hunting parties. The subjects of his drawings are varied, ranging from landscapes to studies of trees, genre scenes and studies of hands and animals realized in the academic style.

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The 19th century witnessed an increase from an artistic point of view in the field of painting in Transylvania, a phenomenon attributed to some foreign artists attracted to this picturesque region. Among the artists who settled here, we can mention Niccolò Livaditti (1804–1858), Henrik Trenk (1818–1892), or Anton Chladek (1794–1882). Besides these an important figure in the Transylvanian context was Venceslav Melka (1834–1911), the painter who is the object of this study. A native of Bohemia, he completed his artistic training with specialized studies in Vienna¹ and Dresden.² In Dresden, where he perfected his talent and painting technique, he seems to have made the acquaintance with the Transylvanian nobles Sámuel Teleki and Sámuel Jósika, at whose invitation he came to Transylvania settling down in Cluj in 1870.³ His artistic education was carried out in the spirit of the official academic art, by making copies after the old masters and through studies of models. All these put their mark on the artistic language which characterizes Melka's style.

¹ At the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna he studied under the guidance of Maestro Joseph Adalbert Hellich. Negoită Lăptoiu, *Incursiuni în plastica transilvană*, vol. I, (Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1981), 23.

² Thieme-Becker, *Künstler-Lexikon*, vol XXIV, (Leipzig Verlag von E.A. Seemann, 1930), 364.

³ It is not known exactly why Melka moved to Cluj, but considering his acquaintance with the two noblemen, we may presuppose that they urged him to come to Transylvania.

Regarding Melka we have only summary information in the Romanian and Hungarian historiography. The first monograph in Romanian was Octavian Beu's *România în arta pictorului Venczeslav Melka* (Romania in the Art of the Painter Venczeslav Melka), published in the year 1944, which describes briefly and incompletely the life and the work of the artist. It reproduces only some pictures, without mentioning their origin. A more comprehensive study on the painter's activity was given only in 1981 by Negoită Lăptoiu in the first volume of his *Incursiuni în plastica Transilvană* (Incursions in Transylvanian Plastic Art). Here the author tried to make a general analysis on the artist's life work (what was known about it at that time), mentioning his sketch-books and the pictures in the possession of the National Museum of Arts in Cluj, the collection of drawings of the Lucian Blaga Central University Library in Cluj-Napoca, and other numerous paintings owned by different art collectors in Cluj, describing in brief these works at the same time.

In Hungarian historiography there are approximately four studies, one letter¹ and some isolated mentions² related to Venceslav Melka's artistic activity. The first mention of him dates back to the year 1883 and it refers to an exhibition organized in Cluj in February 1883³ where he participated with a few works.⁴ In 1911, Dezső Felszeghy made an introduction to the artist's biography, in which he enumerated a few pictures he considered valuable and he analyzed briefly three works.

On the other hand the article written in 1912 by the Professor and botanist Aladár Richter, is rather a homage to his department colleague than a documentary source regarding the artistic activity of the painter. More elaborated was however the study compiled in 1995 by Péter Sas. This contains new information on Melka's activity and the exhibitions organized after his death, but it is far from giving a complex view on the artist.⁵ Reading through all these studies a general view is outlined on the activity of the Transylvanian artist, but which, of course, contains a series of incomplete information.

Settling down in Cluj, Melka worked as a Professor at the Franz Josef University beginning with 1879. Moreover, he became a member to Archduke Rudolf of Austria's entourage, whom he accompanied to hunting parties in the Carpathian Mountains. Thus he became the official painter of the Viennese Court, realizing a series of drawings and sketches about these hunting activities. Some of these works, at the order of Emperor Franz Joseph, were taken to the residence of Laxenburg. Another part of the drawings were used by Gusztav Morelli to realize the lithographies illustrating the book entitled *Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia Írásban és Képben* (The Austro-Hungarian

¹ We refer to the letter addressed by Lajos Kelemen (historian at the Transylvanian Museum) in 1930 to art historian Károly Lyka at the latter's request. "Kelemen Lajos levele Lyka Károlyhoz" (Lajos Kelemen's Letter to Károly Lyka), *Művelődés*, 4–5 (1995).

² György Versényi, "Jókai emlékezete" (The Memory of Jókai) *Erdélyi Múzeum*, 8 (1904), 442. The article mentions the extraordinary qualities of the artist Vincze Melka, who succeeded in representing the beauties of Transylvania accessibly to everyone, but who did not receive much attention from the part of the public.

³ He participated along with Mihály Munkácsy, Simon Hollósy, György Vastagh, Károly Telepy, Béla Spányi, István Sárdi, Endre Kőváry.

⁴ *Kolozsvári Közlöny*, March 1, 1883.

⁵ Sas Péter, "Melka Vince festőművészről" (On the Painter Vince Melka), *Művelődés*, 4–5 (1995).

Monarchy in Words and in Images), a work financed by Archduke Rudolf.¹ Melka's artistic preoccupations comprised a wide range of themes. Besides the hunting scenes he created panoramic landscapes (among them views of Cluj), various natural sights, portraits of different personalities, and a series of scenes presenting country life (a country fair, a peasant's courtyard, or the interior of a peasant house). Not being able to make a general evaluation of his creation, we try to offer an image on what has been written about him. We can state that he respected within certain limits the academic norms in elaborating the drawing, and the colouring, especially in the portraits, was in conformity with the principles accepted in the age; brownish, greyish, and ochre nuances being predominant. When painting landscapes, he succeeded in detaching himself from the sombre chromatics, but he maintained the minute outlining of forms.

Literature reveals who own Melka's different works, more precisely, who owned them when the respective articles were written. Octavian Beu informed the public in 1944 that, apart from the works preserved in Laxenburg Castle, another part can be found in the collections of the barons Bánffy, Bethlen, Huszár, Jósika, Teleki, and Wesselényi. A few others are in the collections of Ionel Pop, Ștefan Boeru, Emil Isac, and Iacob Iacobovici.² A great part of the remaining works, under circumstances unknown to us, came to the possession of some institutions such as the Transylvanian Museum,³ the University of Cluj or the National Museum of Budapest.⁴ Nowadays the National Museum of Art in Cluj owns three sketchbooks and a few pictures of Melka.⁵ The Transylvanian Museum held numerous pictures and sketches by Melka due probably to the relationships between its members and the artist.

We find an eloquent example to this in the letter addressed by Lajos Kelemen to Károly Lyka. From this we can find out first of all that Aladár Richter came to own a great number of works, being for a while very close to Melka,⁶ but the exact number of these works is unknown. Lajos Kelemen had the advantage of being the secretary of the Transylvanian Museum Society, and thus he had access to much information related to the acquisition of Melka's works. He mentioned in his letter that a member of the Society who lived in the painter's neighbourhood purchased approximately 25–30 of his works.⁷

After the artist's death, as a sign of respect, the Transylvanian Museum organized a memorial exhibition of his works. Melka's works were also displayed in 1919 on an exhibition presenting the works of artists from Cluj.⁸

¹ Ibid., 18.

² Octavian Beu, *România în arta pictorului Venczeslav Melka* (Romanian in the Art of the Painter Venceslav Melka), (Sibiu: Tipografia "Cartea românească din Cluj", 1944), 9.

³ When the Franz Joseph University was founded in 1872, the Transylvanian Museum Society offered its library to the new institution in exchange for a sum of money. Initially the collection was moved to the University, and after the University Library, the construction of which began in 1906, was built, the Library of the Transylvanian Museum merged with the University Library. Ion Mușlea, "Biblioteca Universității din Cluj" (The Library of the University in Cluj), *Boabe de Grâu*, 1 (1930), 290–298.

⁴ Lăptoiu, *Incursiuni în plastica transilvană*, 22–34.

¹³ Ibid.

⁶ We find out from here that Melka was the godfather of one of Richter's sons, who seized every opportunity to obtain some additional works from the painter.

⁷ "Kelemen Lajos levele Lyka Károlyhoz", 19–20.

⁸ Sas, "Melka Vince festőművésze": 18.

The objects of our study are the drawings preserved in the engraving collection of the Central University Library in Cluj-Napoca.¹ These drawings are mentioned in the literature only by Negoită Lăptoiu in the book we have already mentioned. He analyzed some of the sketches and through them the entire collection. The author mentioned only 25 works, which are in fact 31 (some cardboard sheets have drawings on both sides). Lăptoiu also overlooked another fact, namely that the works had belonged to the collection of the Transylvanian Museum, which was donated to the Franz Joseph University. The works can be found in folder XXV, having shelfmarks from 90 to 102. Lăptoiu's reference to the inventory numbers is incorrect, as he in fact mentioned the shelfmark of these drawings. 14 of these works are signed inside the frame, usually in the right lower corner as "V. Melka" or "Melka", in black pencil, and 27 bear the property stamp of the Transylvanian Museum "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára" (the manuscript collection of the Transylvanian National Museum). The works are of small dimensions, most of them being sketches. The techniques are limited to pencil, Indian ink, white chalk, and wash drawing. From the point of view of the subjects they can be divided in three categories: landscapes, genre scenes, and studies.

There are 22 drawings depicting nature in this collection. Melka followed the current of his age which emphasized the representation of nature, which was the ideal of each painter. Nature was realistically represented, with a surprising naturalness where abstraction could not enter. The various aspects of nature differ in the degree of completeness, some of them being only the preliminary stages of elaborating a picture, while others are simple studies of trees.



Venceslav Melka [*Landscape with Houses*]

¹ See the appendix with the catalogue of the collection.

The study sketches representing a tree or a shrubbery mark the attention the painter paid to reproduce the value effects by which he delimited the shaded and lighted areas. The work above, though it seems to be only a study, is in fact a landscape with a mountain village. However, it has not been finished, the artist limiting himself only to the foreground where there are some trees.



V. Melka, [*A Tree: detail*]



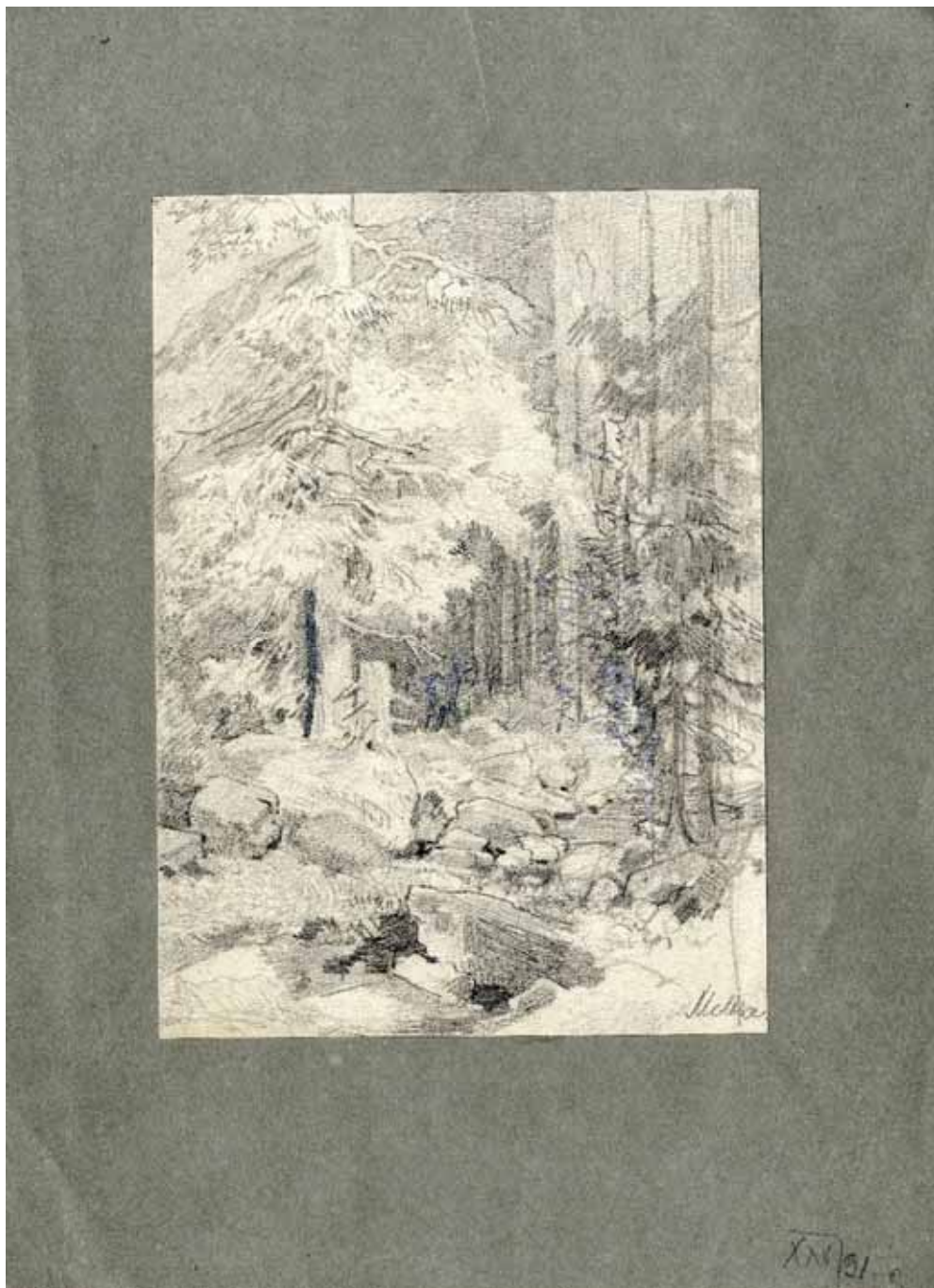
V. Melka, [*Landscape with the Detail of a Tree*]

Trees are treated differently in these two studies, where with simple hatches of pencil Melka succeeded in individualizing each material, both that of the tree bark and that of the leaves. The leaves are not minutely depicted; they are only suggested by means of lines of different dimensions or by means of points. It is attempted here to place this tree in its natural environment. We can observe the suggestion of perspective on the left side by means of the line of horizon very vaguely perceived, and in the right, in the depth of the picture there are some trees depicted by some faint hatches. Besides the study of a single tree, the atmosphere characteristic to the skirts of a forest is represented.

Impressed by the natural beauties of Transylvania, Melka had a passion for depicting the mountain landscapes of the region, a fact indicated by the title of some of his pictures, such as: *Retezat*, *Zănoaga*, *The Road towards Borsec*,¹ *Old Oak in the Pass of Surduc*, *The Peak of the Retezat Mountain*, *Waterfall in the Transylvanian Carpathians*,² etc.

¹ These works are mentioned by Dezső Felszeghy, "Melka Vince", *Erdélyi Lapok*, 20 (1911): 599–601.

² The rest of the mentioned compositions are reproduced in Beu, *România în arta picturului Venczeslav Melka*, 7–13.



V. Melka, [*Forest Interior*]

There is an extensive study depicting a corner of forest in the collection we are analyzing. The drawing is glued on a piece of cardboard, which creates the effect of a passe-partout, and which, at the same time, emphasizes its values. The drawing reveals Melka's skill as a graphic artist, for he used pencil as well as white chalk in elaborating the work. He made good use of the clearing in the wood he was interested in, conferring an important role to the lower part of the ground as well, which he elaborated in detail, giving the impression that we look at it from a low position. The fawn is the end point of the perspective in the sketch; behind it, as a screen lies the dark forest. Without idealizing nature, the artist represented reality naturalistically, with all its defects he could perceive, such as the cut down pine trunk. Moreover, we have the impression that a moment from nature is depicted, especially because the fawn's spontaneous attitude.



V. Melka [*View of the Citadel*]

We find the same low perspective in the study of the *Citadel Hill* of Cluj. It records with a great amount of naturalness the aspects of some improvised huts and the poor community that lived there. It emphasizes the atmosphere of the work, the people being only vaguely sketched. Melka did not only limit the shapes by means of lines, he also succeeded in conferring volume to the objects with the aid of hatches of different intensity. On the verso of the picture there is a note which specifies the whereabouts of the represented sight: *Részlet. Fellegvár oldalból (Kolozsvár)* [Detail. Citadell Hill from the side (Cluj)].

We can find out from the literature that the artist had made other studies of this area, for example a watercolour entitled *Under the Citadel*. In this picture also a romantic feeling is predominant as nature is evoked, but without the painter entering in the deeper layers of reality and seeking other effects apart from the picturesqueness of the area.¹ Cluj was also depicted by Venceslav Melka on canvas, but in another form, namely as a panorama, as some human stages of life, or as details of architecture. Having a clear documentary character, these works inspired by the urban world were much appreciated from an artistic point of view. This is proved by the fact that they were copied by Jolan Felszeghy and circulated in a wider circle.²

In the case of sights from nature, for example the studies of trees, we find the same techniques. Having studied in Vienna and Dresden, Melka conformed to the patterns of the dominant artistic current of the age. The programme of these institutions was similar to the line of other Academies, such as those of Munich and Budapest. Most of the Transylvanian artists of the age studied in these institutes, which led to the uniformization of the artistic ways of expression. Classicism was the dominant current, characterized by the precise contour and the exact representation of the shapes. From among the Transylvanian artists we mention Constantin Lecca, Mișu Popp, and Octavian Smigelschi. The latter, being a student at the Academy of Budapest, made a series of study trips in Munich, Vienna, Dresden, completing thus his knowledge with the ideologies promoted by these institutions.³ As compared to Melka, Smigelschi later left behind these themes, taking up monumental painting. What is interesting in this comparison is the fact that the landscapes from the period 1886–1890 of the painter from Sibiu have a similar style with some landscapes in the collection of the Central University Library. We mention here a landscape signed by Smigelschi preserved in the Brukenthal Museum in Sibiu.

¹ The mentioned watercolour is to be found in the Gh. Isac collection according to Lăptoiu, *Incursiuni în plastica transilvană*, 27.

² Lăptoiu, *Incursiuni în plastica transilvană*, 32.

³ Virgil Vătășianu, *Octavian Smigelschi*, (Ed. Meridiane, București 1982), 9–10.



V. Melka, [*Landscape*]

We encounter the same kind of depiction in the above landscape. The lack of details, the emphasis on the grouping of the masses, the rhythmical variation of shaded and lighted areas are some of the common characteristics in Melka's and Smigelschi's works. They implicitly led to Melka's integration from the point of view of style into the late 19th century Transylvanian artistic context.

Even if in this landscape a part of nature is represented as it really was, Melka created the impression of a balanced drawing in which the place of the masses is well calculated.



V. Melka, [*Mountain Village*]

The drawing *Mountain Village* is based on the same compositional principle, having well proportioned elements. This subject was several times depicted by the artist, this collection having three sketches which seem to be studies of the same landscape.

The sketch reproduced here is much more elaborated than the others, and it represents a panoramic image on a village situated in a mountain hollow. We can identify on the basis of the outlines the church and the roofs of some houses, all of them being surrounded by vegetation and some mountaintops. The composition occupies the entire surface, and because the line of horizon is placed very high, the sky can hardly be seen. An interesting addition to this work is the Czech note made by Melka. He described in a rather ambiguous language how the finished work should have looked like, what colours he would have had to use and where.



V. Melka, [*Landscape with a Wooden Church*]

Landscape with a Wooden Church is a more elaborated drawing. Here he used several techniques, such as pencil, white chalk, and Indian ink. He created an effect of picturesqueness by means of the contrast between the white chalk and the blackness of Indian ink. This sketch illustrates another stage in Melka's art, conveying the murmur and the lyricism of the landscape.

He did not mark the forms clearly, instead he delimited with the Indian ink the parts he wished to highlight. He emphasized in the composition especially the representation of the wooden church and of the tree in the foreground. Thus the figures are outlined only with a line without being particularized. The technique and approach of this work resembles a watercolour.

There are also some landscapes in this collection which differ from the ones mentioned so far. Such landscapes as *Pressburg*, *Landscape with a Village*, *The Village*, or, *The Ruins of a Castle* belong to another stage of study, being characterized by the detailed and very precise elaboration of the forms without an interest in creating an atmosphere. It can be supposed that they were realized during the study trips made by Melka abroad, after he settled in Transylvania.¹

¹ Péter Sas informs us that Melka, after he settled in Transylvania, that is, after 1870, made some study trips abroad, but he returned to Transylvania. He stayed for a longer time only in Egypt, where he accompanied Baron Miklós Jósika. Sas, "Melka Vince festőművésről": 599–601.



V. Melka, [*Pressburg*]

Among these, the only work in which the author specified the location where it was realized is *Pressburg* (Bratislava). Elaborated in an academic spirit, with a precise delineation, the work represents a panorama of the castle and the houses under it as seen from the direction of the Danube. The composition is balanced, with a clear perspective even in the background of the sketch. The side where the city is represented is especially emphasized, the point of interest of the drawing being thus highlighted. The foreground and the left side with the trees are only suggested, the artist resorting to a hatch and a weak line. The minute details he succeeded in reproducing on the paper reveal Melka's skill as a graphic artist.

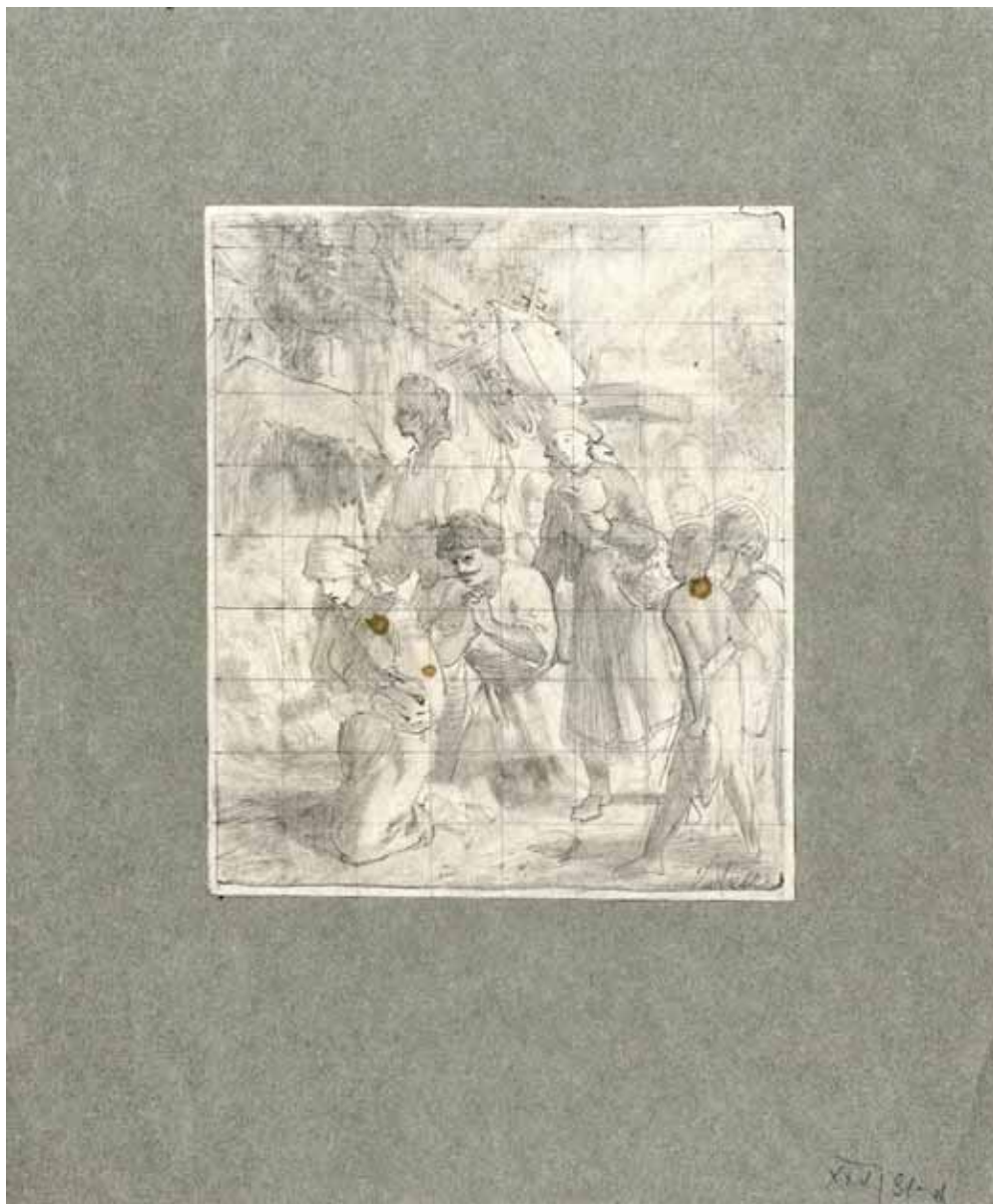


V. Melka, [*Landscape with a Village*]

A similar technique can be observed in the panorama of a village. We do not know where this sketch was made, however, we suppose that it can be a landscape from another country. Made in pencil, with a line that delimits exactly the volumes, the landscape represents a village surrounded by vegetation. The composition is formed by the roofs of the houses (which marks that the sketch was taken from some height) and the poplars which confer rhythmicity to the drawing. The line of the horizon is in the middle of the composition, conferring equal spaces to the elaboration of the sky and of the other elements. We do not find the image of a church here in contrast to the other landscapes of mountain villages made in Transylvania.

The second category of the collection consists of 6 genre scenes. The scenes depicted in these reveal Melka's interest in social issues, especially with respect to the Romanian world. He immortalized Transylvanian (Romanian, Gipsy, etc.) folk customs and peasant characters. With regard to Romanian social issues, his interests were similar to Smigelschi's who did not hesitate to turn towards traditions related to *Epiphany*, *Anointing*, or *Romanian Funerals*.¹

¹ Vătășianu, *Octavian Smigelschi*, 29.



V. Melka, [*Religious Procession*]

There is a scene drawn by Melka which represents a religious procession. The artist immortalized the moment when the characters have stopped to pray, two of them kneeling in prayer, and a woman standing and reading from a book. Certain elements of the composition, such as the banners, suggest that this is a funeral procession. The characters' outlines define clearly their position in that medium. Melka used hatching to suggest the people's characteristic clothing. Without making portrait studies for the human figures, the painter succeeded in individualizing them and in reflecting their inner

feelings by means of simple lines. It is a pyramidal composition due to the arrangement of the figures in the foreground, the top of the pyramid being the double cross. The perspective is suggested by structural elements such as the different treatment of the volumes, those in the background being merely sketched, and also by the low intensity of the construction line. The place where this ceremonial takes place is not clearly defined, the artist being interested in the scene itself. The rid on the surface of the drawing was meant to help the artist in redrawing the image on a larger surface. The smallness of the sketch made Melka glue it to a more resistant support. This helped preserve the drawing better.



V. Melka, [*The Gipsy Caravan*]

The two scenes from the life of Gipsies record other occupations. In *The Gipsy Caravan* the artist depicted a scene from the everyday life of a nomadic people. The scene is complex, with characters differently occupied. The characters in the foreground are placed in a way not to obstruct the perspective towards the further planes. Their attitude reveals that the artist studied thoroughly the positions. We may mention here the position of the man sitting to the right with his back turned toward the viewer, having the role to close the composition. Melka individualized the portraits of the characters with great subtlety. The framework of lines has the role of making the enlarging of the sketch easier. For sure, all the sketches which have such lines correspond to a finished picture.



V. Melka, [*Dance scene*]

This dance scene was also inspired from Gipsy life. The composition is similar to that of the previous work with respect to the arrangement of the characters. The difference lies in the spontaneity Melka represented this with. The use of wash drawing also facilitated the recording of a moment. The artist limited himself to using simple lines of different thickness and only in some places accentuated the shaded areas. It is a closed ellipsoid composition. Two characters in the foreground are depicted with their back towards us in order to limit the composition to the action taking place there. The central part is left deliberately free to emphasize the dance of the two women. The quickness of the execution synthesizes the forms revealing even better the preoccupation of the painter with the rigorous organization of the surface, and also the well calculated relationships between the characters. Melka did not use any artifices to idealize his subject in these genre scenes, remaining a realist interpreter.

Nevertheless, Melka is best represented by his hunting scenes, which were his favourites. Having the opportunity to accompany Archduke Ferdinand to a few hunting parties in the Southern Carpathians, he became closely acquainted with all the rituals of this sport. Among his works which focus on this subject we mention: *Hunting at Zănoaga Lake*, *Hunting in Gurghiu*, *Bear and Deer Hunting*, *Bear Hunter*, *Bear Hunters*, *Goat Hunters on the Retezat*, *Capercaillie Hunter*,¹ etc. Most of these pictures were sent to Laxenberg Castle, however the artist made a series of copies after them at the request of different customers.

¹ The titles are enumerated by Beu, *România în arta pictorului Venczeslav Melka*, 9, 13.



V. Melka, [*Bear Hunting*]

A sketch for a future picture of the analyzed collection is *Bear Hunting*. Melka depicted the moment when the hunting party rejoices over the killing of a bear. The composition is pyramidal, being minutely elaborated. In its centre the hunter,¹ who seems almost to have a halo, is raising his hat as if in thanksgiving for his success, and with his other hand he is pointing to the dead bear. Two other persons are sitting on the right² with their gaze directed towards the hunter. In the drawing we can see two

¹ The same figure appears in the picture *Bear Hunter*, described by Dezső Felszeghy, in which a Romanian hunter is represented beside his pray. Felszeghy, "Melka Vince": 599–601.

² We may suppose that one of them, more precisely the figure pointing towards the bear is Archduke Rudolf, and the one behind him is the painter himself. This supposition is made on the

children who are most probably talking about the success of the shooting party, since one of them points his finger to the bear. The drawing is well elaborated and complex. More than that, the characters' gestures confer to the work a rather external symbolism. We can deduce from them the joy over the success of a rather difficult hunting. The complexity of the hatches and the precision of the lines which outline the characters, create an atmosphere in the work. The figures are well individualized, revealing, together with his studies of hands, Melka's academic education. The background of the picture is not elaborated, the artist emphasized the action in the foreground. The grid on the drawing has the same role of facilitating the enlarging of the sketch as before. The picture was probably made in 1880, since, as literature reveals, Melka made a great number of drawings in pencil, chalk, and watercolours during the hunting party of that year organized by Prince Rudolf.¹ The hunting parties were described by Venceslav Melka in a manuscript also preserved in the Lucian Blaga Central University Library in Cluj-Napoca.² From here we can find out that after a successful hunting party, the Romanians in the entourage of the Prince either danced or played all kind of games.³



V. Melka, [*Rest during the Hunting*]

analogy of some information given by Dezső Felszeghy, who in the description of a picture mentions among the characters the Archduke Rudolf and the artist. Felszeghy, "Melka Vince": 599–601.

¹ Péter Sas, "Melka Vince festőművészről": 18.

² Lucian Blaga Central University Library, Special Collections, Ms. 1841, *Crown Prince Rudolph of Austria's Hunting Parties in Transylvania*, (sic!) [Cluj, 1901–1904], 21 f.

³ "This is customary when the hunt is successful or when the track was difficult. When they had drunk their spirits, they began to dance their national Rumanian dance in which men alone dance... Sometimes the merriment takes another form; a witty fellow mounts a piece of rock uses it as a pulpit and preaches imitating the Popa (priest)." Ms. 1841, f. 10–11.

The drawing *Rest during the Hunting* seems to belong to this series. It is only summarily sketched, and on the left below there is a frame with some characters. The composition of this, however, differs from the big one, being organized in an elliptic form. It appears that a game is depicted, but it is rather difficult to figure it out due to the lack of details. The composition is structured diagonally, the focus being in the middle of the drawing. The outlines of forms are not concise, which suggests that the artist sketched a moment and he did not modify it later. The forms are stylized and the action is not temporalized.

All these sketches which depict genre scenes point to an artist preoccupied by recording from a realistic point of view different social activities, or customs. We see him as an excellent observer and a good graphic artist.

The third category of his works in the analyzed collection consists of three plates with studies. They have a classical style, defined by two components, namely: the line which has the role only to outline the objects and hatching which has the role to confer plasticity to the picture.



V.Melka, [*Study of animals*]

This study of some cows demonstrates Melka's skill in painting animals. The expressivity of the drawing and the vitality of these animal bodies, as well as the hatching were carried out in an academic manner. These studies of animals helped the artist to exercise the rendering of movement and volume. The studies were used later in greater compositions which represented cows. Such studies were compulsory in the classes of 19th century Academies. We can also mention here Smigelschi, who made a

series of such studies while he studied at the Academy of Budapest.¹ We can observe, considering a concrete case, the fact that the classicizing programme promoted in most institutions was uniform almost everywhere.



V. Melka, [*Study of a Hand*]

The study of a hand reveals a similar, more sombre academic spirit. We can observe here the precision with which the forms of the hand are outlined without any retouch. The shaded parts of the hand are hatched following the anatomic forms, and the fingers are left in the light, being at some points accentuated with white chalk. The rose is even more sketchy, the drawing being however similarly rigorous.

¹ Vătășianu, *Octavian Smigelschi*, 23.

Once he had become attached to Transylvania, Venceslav Melka acquired all the particularities of this environment, both from a thematic and stylistic point of view. He did not join a certain artistic movement or a group of painters, he realized both what he found attractive and what he was asked to do. Taking a look on the drawings in the analyzed collection, we observe their heterogeneous character both in their technique and in their subjects. We find him sometimes a good graphic artist, on other occasions a good plastic artist, and, as we have seen in his last presented drawings, an academic artist. He knew how to depict things from panoramic landscapes to details of forest and the characters in different genre scenes. With some of these sketches he involuntarily adhered to the artistic movement of the late 19th century in Transylvania, becoming similar to such artists as Octavian Smigelschi. This only went that far as a similarity between the treatment of the subject in some sketches realized by Smigelschi and some landscapes by Melka. This cannot be accounted for by a mutual influence or the integration of a certain current, but by the artistic education the two artists received at the Academies of Budapest, Munich, Vienna, or Dresden, which was almost uniform.

Having the occasion to travel in different regions of Transylvania, he also had the opportunity to make direct contact with those realities, a fact which facilitated the realistic recording of nature for him. Even if he could take only sketches or make watercolours, he later transposed them by another technique and to another surface. Therefore his sketches in the collection of the Lucian Blaga Central University Library are full of spontaneity, being the direct recording of nature or of scenes from everyday life. They reflect the artist's first impression after the impact with the chosen subject, sometimes with small modifications. His scenes, though realistic, penetrate the depth of the subject, but without being lost in useless details. By the aid of drawing, in these sketches he created entire compositions, from the outlining of forms by hatching to the sensation of an atmosphere conferred by some scenes. The artist resorted in these small scale works to a series of technical methods such as white chalk, Indian ink, or wash drawing. White chalk makes surfaces vibrate, Indian ink, especially the black, helps highlighting some areas, while wash drawing can convey the best the sensation of spontaneity through the sinuosity of the line. Without becoming exuberant, Melka maintained in these sketches as well his naturalistic line, now and then with small lyrical escapades.

As a conclusion to our study, we mention that all the arguments in favour of Melka's drawings in the Lucian Blaga Central University Library underline their value within his entire work, and also particularize his skills as a graphic artist.

Appendix

The catalogue of Venceslav Melka's works in the collection of the Lucian Blaga Central University Library

1.	<p>Engravings XXV/93 d</p> <p>[<i>A Tree: detail</i>. S.l., s.a.] Pencil, 200x270 mm. Inv. 3764/1959. Notes: On the verso: [<i>Landscape with houses</i>]. Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára".</p>
2.	<p>Engravings XXV/91</p> <p>[<i>Wooden church</i>. S.l., s.a.] Pencil, Indian ink and chalk, 147x181 mm. Inv. 3781/1954. Notes: Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára". Signed inside the frame, on the right below "Melka". In pencil.</p>
3.	<p>Engravings XXV/91 b</p> <p>[<i>Household</i>. S.l., s.a.] Pencil, 117x169 mm. Inv. 3787/1959. Notes: Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára". Signed outside the frame, in the right lower corner "V. Melka". In pencil.</p>
4.	<p>Engravings XXV/91 a</p> <p>[<i>Forest interior</i>. S.l., s.a.] Pencil and chalk, 181x131 mm. Inv. 3786/1959. Notes: Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára". Signed inside the frame, in the right lower corner "Melka". In pencil.</p>
5.	<p>Engravings XXV/91 c</p> <p>[<i>Pedlar</i>. S.l., s.a.] Pencil, 140x115 mm. Inv. 3785/1959. Notes: Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára".</p>

6.	<p>Engravings XXV/93 a</p> <p>[<i>Landscape</i>. S.l., s.a.] Pencil, 200x268 mm. Inv. 3766/1959.</p> <p>Notes: Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára". Signed inside the frame, in the right lower corner "V. Melka". In pencil.</p>
7.	<p>Engravings XXV/95</p> <p>[<i>Landscape</i>. S.l., s.a.] Pencil, 309x240 mm. Inv. 3834/1959.</p>
8.	<p>Engravings XXV/93 d</p> <p>[<i>Landscape with Houses</i>. S.l., s.a.] Pencil, 200x270 mm. Inv. 3764/1959.</p> <p>Notes: On the verso: [<i>Tree: detail</i>] Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára". Signed inside the frame, in the right lower corner "V. Melka". In pencil.</p>
9.	<p>Engravings XXV/100</p> <p>[<i>Landscape with a Castle</i>. S.l., s.a.] Pencil, 115x182 mm. Inv. 3779/1959.</p> <p>Notes: Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára". Signed inside the frame, in the right lower corner "Melka". In pencil.</p>
10.	<p>Engravings XXV/93 f</p> <p>[<i>Landscape with the Detail of a Tree</i>. S.l., s.a.] Pencil, 200x266 mm. Inv. 3770/1959.</p> <p>Notes: Signed inside the frame, in the right lower corner "V. Melka". In pencil. Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára".</p>
11.	<p>Engravings XXV/98</p> <p>[<i>Landscape with a Lake</i>. S.l., s.a.] Pencil, 142x226 mm. Inv. 3780/1959.</p> <p>Notes: Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára". Signed inside the frame, in the right lower corner "V. Melka". In pencil.</p>

12.	<p>Engravings XXV/92</p> <p>[<i>Landscape with Ruins</i>. S.l., s.a.] Pencil, 135x325 mm. Inv. 3775/1959. Notes: On the verso: <i>Pressburg</i>.</p>
13.	<p>Engravings XXV/94</p> <p>[<i>Landscape with a Village</i>. S.l., s.a.]. Pencil, 235x310 mm. Inv. 3845/1959. Notes: Signed on the verso "Melka V.". In pencil.</p>
14.	<p>Engravings XXV/96</p> <p>[<i>Rural Landscape</i>. S.l., s.a.]. Pencil, 97x263 mm. Inv. 3776/1959. Notes: Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára". Signed outside the frame, in the right lower corner "V. Melka". In pencil.</p>
15.	<p>Engravings XXV/97</p> <p>[<i>Landscape: Panoramic View</i>. S.l., s.a.] Pencil, 102x263 mm. Inv. 3774/1959. Notes: Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára". Signed outside the frame "V. Melka". In pencil.</p>
16.	<p>Engravings XXV/92</p> <p><i>Pressburg</i>. [Bratislava, s.a.]. Pencil, 135x325 mm. Inv. 3775/1959. Notes: On the verso: [<i>Landscape with Ruins</i>].</p>
17.	<p>Engravings XXV/91 d</p> <p>[<i>Religious Procession</i>. S.l., s.a.]. Pencil, 149x127mm. Inv. 3788/1959. Notes: Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára". Signed inside the frame, in the right lower corner "V. Melka". In pencil.</p>

18.	<p>Engravings XXV/93 g</p> <p>[<i>Rest during the Hunting</i>. S.l., s.a.]. Pencil, 195x275 mm. Inv. 3767/1959.</p> <p>Notes: Signed inside the frame, in the right lower corner "V. Melka". In pencil. Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára".</p>
19.	<p>Engravings XXV/93</p> <p><i>Detail. View of the Citadel (Kolozsvár)</i>. [Cluj-Napoca, s.a.]. Pencil and white chalk, 267x222 mm. Inv. 3768/1959.</p> <p>Notes: Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára". Signed inside the frame, in the right lower corner "V. Melka". In pencil.</p>
20.	<p>Engravings XXV/93 c</p> <p>[<i>Mountain Village</i>. S.l., s.a.]. Pencil, 200x267 mm. Inv. 3772/1959.</p> <p>Notes: On the verso: [<i>Study of Trees</i>]. Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára". Signed inside the frame, in the right lower corner "V. Melka". In pencil.</p>
21.	<p>Engravings XXV/93 i</p> <p>[<i>Mountain Village</i>. S.l., s.a.]. Pencil, 200x265 mm. Inv. 3769/1959.</p> <p>Notes: Signed inside the frame, in the right lower corner "Melka". In pencil. Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára".</p> <p>Author's note: "Cotatye / Svetla barevné branavite površek / zlutave skalky hole ve stinu šedive žlutý. / v meste studene sedive zelyny stiny mure / prostredni hora zelena vecer svetlo zlute / pozadi stejno barevne / rano stromi stinave se delj vecer žlute / brilliantne zeleny." In pencil.</p>
22.	<p>Engravings XXV/93 e</p> <p>[<i>Mountain Village</i>. S.l., s.a.]. Pencil and chalk, 200x260 mm. Inv. 3771/1959.</p> <p>Notes: Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára". Signed inside the frame, in the right lower corner "V. Melka". In pencil.</p>

23.	<p>Engravings XXV/101</p> <p>[<i>Dance Scene</i>. S.l., s.a.]. Wash drawing, 220x398 mm. Inv. 3777/1959.</p> <p>Notes: Signed on the verso "Melka". In pencil. Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára".</p>
24.	<p>Engravings XXV/93 b</p> <p>[<i>Study of Animals</i>. S.l., s.a.]. Pencil, 200x268 mm. Inv. 3772/1959.</p> <p>Notes: On the verso: [<i>Study of Trees</i>]. Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára". Signed inside the frame, in the right lower corner "V. Melka". In pencil.</p>
25.	<p>Engravings XXV/93 c</p> <p>[<i>Study of Trees</i>. S.l., s.a.]. Pencil, 200x267 mm. Inv. 3772/1959.</p> <p>Notes: On the verso: [<i>Mountain Village</i>]. Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára".</p>
26.	<p>Engravings XXV/93 h</p> <p>[<i>Study of Trees</i>. S.l., s.a.]. Pencil, 200x265 mm. Inv. 3765/1959.</p> <p>Notes: Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára". Signed inside the frame, in the right lower corner "V. Melka". In pencil.</p>
27.	<p>Engravings XXV/93 b</p> <p>[<i>Study of Trees</i>. S.l., s.a.]. Pencil, 200x268 mm. Inv. 3772/1959.</p> <p>Notes: On the verso: [<i>Study of Animals</i>]. Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára".</p>
28.	<p>Engravings XXV/90 a</p> <p>[<i>Study of a Hand</i>. S.l., s.a.]. Pencil, white chalk 155x161 mm. Inv. 3784/1959.</p>

	<p>Notes: Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára". Signed inside the frame, in the right lower corner "V. Melka". In pencil.</p>
29.	<p>Engravings XXV/90 b</p> <p>[<i>Study of a Hand</i>. S.l., s.a.]. Pencil, 130x173 mm. Inv. 3783/1959.</p> <p>Notes: Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára". Signed inside the frame, in the right lower corner "V. Melka". In pencil.</p>
30.	<p>Engravings XXV/102</p> <p>[<i>The Gipsy Caravan</i>. S.l., s.a.]. Pencil, 153x300 mm. Inv. 3778/1959.</p> <p>Notes: Signed inside the frame, in the right lower corner "V. Melka". In pencil. Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára".</p>
31.	<p>Engravings XXV/99</p> <p>[<i>Bear Hunting</i>. S.l., s.a.]. Pencil, 194x184 mm. Inv. 3782/1959.</p> <p>Notes: Property stamp: "Az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Kézirattára". Signed inside the frame, in the right lower corner "V. Melka". In pencil.</p>

Translated by Ágnes Korondi