

# HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE



Barbara Ernst Prey

Artist; Member of the National Council on the Arts

## Not to Be Missed: The Lobkowitz Collection in Prague

Posted: 02/13/2013 12:03 pm



*Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Haymaking 1565*

This year I returned to visit one of my early paintings commissioned by the Prince Lobkowitz family. It is a portrait of their daughter. Since the time that I painted the portrait, the Czech Republic returned to them much of their property, including a number of their castles and their artwork. The Lobkowitz family has the finest collection of European Paintings in Central Europe. I had seen the collection 10 years ago on exhibit at one of their castles, Nelahovenes while I was speaking at the opening of the art collection at the U.S. Embassy residence in Prague. My painting *Reunion at Dusk* was on exhibit at the U.S. Embassy residence through the U.S. State Department's Art in Embassies Program and I was invited to speak about my 9/11 series of paintings.

That first visit 10 years ago was a private tour through Nelahozeves Castle located 35 km north of Prague, high above the Vltava River. I recall the impressive Renaissance architecture as well as waiting in the Grand Drawing Room with important paintings by Jan Brueghel the Elder, Rubens, Veronese and Panini, along with exquisite pieces of pietra dura furniture. Situated below the Castle is the birthplace of the Antonín Dvořák. The house, owned by the Lobkowitz family and operated by the National Museum, is known as the Antonín Dvořák Memorial with an exhibit that focuses mainly on the composer's childhood and youth.

The Lobkowitz family has had the Lobkowitz Palace, part of the castle compound in Prague, returned to them which now houses their incredible collection as a museum. The museum is not to be missed for a number of reasons. This extraordinary collection offers visitors the opportunity to explore the history of Europe through the unique perspective of the Lobkowitz family.

I walked through the 22 well presented galleries visiting masterpieces by Canaletto and Velázquez; an impressive display of family and royal portraits; fine porcelain, ceramics and rare decorative arts dating from the 16th to 20th centuries; as well as an extensive collection of military and sporting rifles from the 16th to 18th centuries. It was, however, the music room where I had to catch my breath. The Lobkowitz family were patrons of Beethoven and Mozart and on exhibit were original scores and manuscripts by both, including Beethoven's 4th and 5th symphonies and Mozart's re-orchestration of Handel's Messiah. Beethoven dedicated his Eroica Symphony to Prince Lobkowitz as well as two of my other favorite symphonies, the 4th and 5th. For me it was exciting to think that the same family who were patrons and commissioned artworks of Beethoven and Mozart also commissioned a painting of mine thirty years ago.

The audio guide (which is free) is unique to this collection. The current Prince Lobkowitz and his family narrate and talk about the collection and the 600-year history of the Lobkowitzes, including the dramatic story of how the family lost everything twice and got it back -- twice. In 1939, the invading Nazi forces confiscated the Palace along with all other Lobkowitz family properties. The Palace was returned in 1945, only to be seized again after the Communist takeover in 1948. For the next forty years, the Palace was used for a variety of purposes, including State offices and as a museum of Czech history. After the Velvet Revolution of 1989 and the subsequent fall of the Communist government, President Václav Havel enacted a series of laws that allowed for the restitution of confiscated properties. Following a 12-year process, the Lobkowitz family once again became the rightful owner of its palace in 2002. It is by far one of the most unique and engaging audio guides I've come upon.

At 1:00 p.m. every afternoon there is a classical music concert performed in the beautifully decorated 17th century baroque concert hall with a varied program of solo and ensembles presenting works by Bach, Vivaldi, Mozart, Beethoven, and 19th century Czech composers, Dvořák and Smetana. Concert tickets may be purchased online at [www.matinee.cz](http://www.matinee.cz).

There is a great view from the Lobkowitz Palace Café terrace of Prague and the café is also a good place to take a break. I enjoyed a visit with Prince William Lobkowitz over a cup of peppermint tea. There is a nice selection of foods, homemade desserts and a fine array of award-winning Lobkowitz wine and beer. The [Lobkowitz Palace website](#) highlights the various museums, history and other helpful information.



*Barbara Prey (center) at the reception in her honor at the U.S. Embassy Residence Prague where she lectured about her artwork and her 9/11 painting series. Left: Geraldine Mucha, daughter in law of Alphonse Mucha.*