

Basic Detail Report

"SZOPKA"

*derived
from the
Polish
word
meaning
"Shed"*

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The custom of exhibiting very simple Nativity scenes in town and monastery churches was brought to Poland in the 13th century by the Franciscan Monks. Toward the end of the 17th century the Szopka was made more attractive, adding contemporary figures and scenes.

The 18th century saw the introduction of a puppet theater to the Szopka. Apprentices and students organized portable szopkas, taking them to towns and marketplaces where they would put on puppet shows.

In the year 1855 Michal Ezenekier is credited with building the first Krakowska Szopka, an elaborate creche gilded with silver and gold.

Architectural development of the Szopka was influenced by Krakow's many Gothic and Renaissance buildings and castles, giving the makers of szopkas many ideas creating unique "fairytale" architecture.

In 1937 the Krakow Town Council organized the Szopka-Making Competitions, winners of which were awarded valuable prizes. This tradition was interrupted by the war, but in 1945, it was taken over by the Historical Museum of Krakow.

Today, among the people taking part in the competitions are school children, university students, and, as in the past, the masons.

Szopkas have the shapes of church facades, divided into many parts with horizontal cornices and small galleries, highlighted by two, three, or more towers. On the ground floor is a stage area as if for a puppet show, on the first floor, a similar recess in which the statues of the Holy Family, shepherds, Three Kings, etc., are placed.

Since 1981 a Szopka-Making Competition and Festival has been sponsored in Hartford, CT by the Polish Cultural Club of Greater Hartford. Anyone is eligible to take part and the competition has steadily increased in size and creativity.

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Primary Maker Polish Cultural Club of Greater Hartford

Medium Paper

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