

CHINESE CABINET

Historical names: King's Chinese Cabinet (17th century),
Lacquered Chinese Cabinet (18th century),
Lacquered Side Chinese Cabinet/ Lacquered Chinese Cabinet (19th century),
Chinese Cabinet (20th century).
Years of origin: 1670s
Architects: Agostino Locci - 1676-1679.
Artists: Martin Schnell - varnish and painting wall decoration, 1731-1732.
Description:

The decoration of the Chinese Cabinet, located in the oldest part of the palace, was made between 1731 and 1732 and referred to the original, also Chinese, decoration of the royal cabinet (1680s).

During the reign of Jan III the walls of the cabinet were covered with white satin, embroidered with multicoloured flowers, birds and Chinese people. The interior was filled with furniture and Chinese handicrafts adapted to the character of the whole room. Only the white marble fireplace has survived from the 17th century décor of the study.

The present decoration was created by the aulic painter and varnisher of Augustus II, Martin Schnell. The ceiling was covered with fresco painting depicting exotic birds and dragons. The walls received wainscoting decorated with imitation of eastern lacquer ("European lacquer"). This technique involved coating a wooden plane with varnish and then powdering it with powdered copper to give it a metallic sheen. Figural scenes were placed in polychrome frames decorated with carved mascarons at the bottom and fantastic birds at the top. Heads of some of the mascarons are tied with ribbons with Chinese characters referring to figural scenes from stories known from Chinese literature. The panneau decoration is oversaturated with rich Chinese symbolism and in fact expresses universal messages about the origin and functioning of the universe. Similar decoration has been given to the doors and doorframes as well as to the relief overdoor.

The interior has recently undergone extensive renovation, which has restored the original colours of the paintings, altered by the passage of time.

Selected literature:

Fijałkowski Wojciech, *Wnętrza pałacu w Wilanowie*, Warsaw 1986, p. 102.