

Press release, December 8, 2016

The National Gallery in Prague in 2017: From the Renaissance cabinet of art curiosities to art as a political gesture

The National Gallery in Prague will focus on distinctive art world figures in 2017. After this year's successful installation of Zodiac Heads by Ai WeiWei outside Prague's Veletržní Palace, this world-renowned conceptual artist from China is preparing a monumental installation "custom-made" for the Veletržní Palace's Large Hall. As part of the Czech-German Spring of Culture 2017, the National Gallery in Prague will be the first country in Central and Eastern Europe to stage a retrospective of the work of Gerhard Richter, one of the world's most inspiring contemporary artists. The NG is also preparing specially designed projects by Magdalena Jetelová and František Skála. Art of the Old Masters, to be presented in an extensive exhibition in the Wallenstein Riding School Gallery, will focus on one of the most interesting patrons of Renaissance art, Ferdinand II, Archduke of Austria and Governor of Bohemia, the knowledgeable founder of the famous Kunstkammer at Ambras Castle near Innsbruck.

2016 in review

In 2016, the National Gallery in Prague celebrated the 220th year of the foundation of its predecessor, the Picture Gallery of the Society of Patriotic Friends of the Arts. The NG organized the thematic exhibition *Generosity, the Art of Giving* whose opening was attended by almost 6,000 (primarily young) visitors. Some 30,000 people visited the National Gallery collections and exhibitions over the "anniversary" weekend. In addition to works by Ai WeiWei, the Gallery displayed works by Senegalese artist El Hadji Sy and Lucas Cranach the Elder, whose exhibition at the Šternberk Palace is still under way. The first Czech exhibition of artworks by Henri Rousseau is ongoing at the Kinský Palace through mid-January. More than 32,000 people have seen it to date. The National Gallery in Prague held festivities to commemorate the 700th anniversary of the birth of Charles IV. The exhibition *Emperor Charles IV: 1316–2016* at the Wallenstein Riding School Picture Gallery was visited by some 93,000 people, and can now be seen in a scaled down version in Nuremberg. Throughout the year, the National Gallery in Prague launched more than thirty short-term exhibitions presented for the second year at free admission openings. In the autumn, a new display focused on architecture was held in the re-opened Convent of St Agnes of Bohemia, which includes the first lapidarium and restored ruins of the Monastery of the Lesser Brothers. The project, supported by EHP grants, also restored the convent gardens, which are now open to the public year round and adorned with sculptures by leading Czech artists.

"This year, the National Gallery in Prague took another major step toward enhancing visitor comfort and making our offerings more attractive. We've kept the public interested in the Veletržní Palace – our openings continued to enjoy a great response from visitors; attendance was especially robust among younger visitors. Attendance at the Charles IV exhibition was close to what I expected," says Jiří Fajt, General Director of the National Gallery in Prague. The Gallery has extended its cooperation with Komerční banka that enables it to offer free exhibition admission to children under 18 and students up to 26.

Despite a lack of funds for contemporary art acquisitions, the National Gallery in Prague acquired some major artworks, including a collection of drawings by Josef Šíma and a meditation pavilion by well-known Japanese architect Kengo Kuma, which will be erected in the Šternberk Palace garden next year.

Key exhibitions in 2017

“The National Gallery in Prague will open the 2017 exhibition season with Charta Story in the Salm Palace. Founded and first signed forty years ago, Charter 77 was a major symbol of the bold defiance of a civic society against the repressive practices of the totalitarian regime, highlighting the necessity of actively defending basic human rights and liberties. The story told will be based on the fate of the poet and underground culture ‘patron’ Magor Ivan Martin Jirous,” says Fajt. In March, the Wallenstein Riding School Picture Gallery will host an exhibition of the work of František Skála called *The Riding School Picture Gallery*, conceived as exhibitions within an exhibition, museums within a museum, emphasising a re-definition of space, a diversity of thematic exhibitions and a challenge to established ideas of artistic practice and the artist’s role. The exhibition will include artistic events in Malostranské Square and a number of participatory programs.

The opening of the exhibition season 2017 – the “Grand Opening” – will take place on March 14, when two *site-specific* installations will be launched in the Veletržní Palace – one by Ai Weiwei in its Large Hall and another by Magdalena Jetelová in the Small Hall. Both installations will look at current socio-political themes. Moreover, three cycles focusing on contemporary foreign and domestic work will continue: Moving Image Department, Poetry Passage and Introducing, which will present, among others, British artist and musician Brian Eno. A Gerhard Richter retrospective, organized in cooperation with the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Goethe-Institut, will open on April 25 in the Kinský Palace. Some sixty artworks by this most influential contemporary artist will survey the full range of his work: from the photographic realism of his early works to the expressive abstraction of the 1980s and 1990s and his experimentation with the power of colourful materials and geometric abstraction of the last two decades.

An exhibition focusing on the art patronage of Ferdinand II, Archduke of Austria and Governor of Bohemia, son of Ferdinand I, Emperor and King of Bohemia, and Anna of Bohemia and Hungary, will present classic themes in the autumn. The exhibition called *The Renaissance Ruler and Art Patron between Prague and Innsbruck* will present some 300 varied exhibits in the Wallenstein Riding School Picture Gallery: paintings, rare arts & crafts objects, Renaissance armour and rare manuscripts, including a letter written by the Archduke, artefacts of nature and curiosities from his Ambras castle near Innsbruck.

National Gallery in Prague buildings and collections

Following this year’s St Agnes ANEW! project, the National Gallery in Prague will re-open the renovated Convent of St Agnes of Bohemia with a program called St Agnes LIVE!, which will gradually transform the entire Convent into a live cultural and recreational space. The Convent will also host two exhibitions arising from a long-term research project that examined the possibilities of researching mediaeval artworks. The project *Hidden from the Eyes* will present underdrawings in panel paintings from the 14th-16th centuries. This will be followed by *Exposed to the Eyes* focusing on decorative techniques used to adorn mediaeval sculptures and paintings.

National Gallery building renovations will continue in the Kinský Palace, where Café NG Kinský opened to visitors this year. Next year, the palace’s ground floor will be renovated to

make room for new visitor amenities such as a generously designed entrance lobby, a new box office and cloakroom, a visitors' centre and gallery shop. A new Týnská Lane entrance will be opened up to create a pass-through. In subsequent years, architectural work will begin on the Schwarzenberg and Šternberk palaces in Hradčanské Square.

Next year, the preparatory phase of the Veletržní Palace renovations designed to turn it into the main seat of the National Gallery in Prague will officially launch. *"I handed over the documents and materials to initiate this large project, including approval from the preservation authorities, to the Culture Minister in November. I assume that as soon as we debate the authorities' comments, this top priority project for the National Gallery in Prague and for Czech culture will be approved, and funds will be released for the project's first phase, i.e. the launch of an international architectural tender. We expect this in early 2017,"* explains Fajt.

Clubs of friends and patrons

In mid-November, the National Gallery in Prague launched a new membership program called *the Club of Friends of the National Gallery in Prague*. Regular National Gallery in Prague visitors can choose one of three membership categories in place of year-round admission and add a number of benefits to free admission to the permanent and short-term exhibitions. The Gallery continues to focus on the need to find alternative sources of financing outside the state budget. In 2017, the National Gallery plans to establish *the Club of Sponsors of the National Gallery in Prague*. *"We hope to create an attractive and inspiring place for cultural education, cultivation and enjoyment. The National Gallery in Prague wants to gather individuals who wish to have a positive influence on the direction of Czech society because today, more than ever, we should be aware that free thought, education and creativity, i.e. culture in the broadest sense, are not a mere luxury for which we lack time and money, but that it's the other way around: they connect and encourage people, helping overcome difficulties and open up new horizons. If we want to be successful on a global scale, we must be able to fully realize our potential to stimulate creativity and the capacity to seek out new solutions. And art can release these valuable hidden sources very efficiently,"* adds Fajt.

Selected exhibitions in 2017

Charta Story

Salm Palace

March 14, 2017 – January 19, 2019

Exhibition authors: Zuzana Brikcius, Eugen Brikcius, Ondřej Kohout, Eva Kohout-Voneš, Petr Blažek, Veronika Tuckerová

Partners: Libri Prohibiti, The Václav Havel Library, The Jan Patočka Archive

Curator: Irena Nývltová



The *Charta Story* exhibition commemorates the 40th anniversary of the establishment of Charter 77, an informal civic initiative criticizing violations of human and civic rights. The story of Ivan Jirous, a poet, art critic and representative of Czech underground culture, which is documented in photographs, written materials and personal belongings, reveals the life stories of people from various social circles who were linked by their affinity to the spirit of Charter 77 and were its signatories. The exhibition also presents a historical assessment by Petr Blažek and Veronika Tucker. While *Charta Story* is a documented account emphasizing creativity, the display of *Charter 77 in Photographs* captures the atmosphere at the time. This part of the exhibition will present photographs by Jiří Bednář, Jaroslav Brabec, Michael Dus, Bohdan Holomíček, Jan Kašpar, Jaroslav Kukul, Ivan Kyncl, Ondřej Němec, Viktor Stoilov, Oldřich Škácha and other photographers capturing events in the unofficial culture.

What the Eyes Cannot See & For the Eyes to Admire

The Convent of St Agnes of Bohemia – Mediaeval Art in Bohemia and Central Europe 1250–1550 exhibition premises

What the Eyes Cannot See: Underdrawing in Panel Paintings from the Collections of the National Gallery in Prague, 14th–16th Centuries

February 24, 2017 – September 17, 2018

For the Eyes to Admire: Decorative Techniques in Painting and Sculpture from the Collections of the National Gallery in Prague, 14th–16th Centuries

December 2017 – May 2018

Curators: Štěpánka Chlumská, Helena Dáňová



The exhibition *What the Eyes Cannot See: Underdrawing in Panel Paintings from the Collections of the National Gallery in Prague, 14th–16th Centuries* is the first of two displays prepared within the framework of a single dramaturgic edition subtitled “*Art and Natural Sciences*” and located in the exhibition premises of the Convent of St Agnes of Bohemia. At the end of the year, it will be followed by the exhibition *For the Eyes to Admire: Decorative Techniques in Painting and Sculpture from the Collections of the National Gallery in Prague, 14th–16th Centuries*. These conceptually non-traditional exhibitions will present the results of comprehensive research of top artworks in direct contrast to their originals. Visitors will be able to see well-known artworks anew, notice hidden details and learn about the workshop procedures of mediaeval painters and sculptors. The exhibition of underdrawings will offer a unique opportunity to see hidden preparatory designs of compositions and the technology behind how selected works came to life. The exhibitions, which will include detailed monographs and many accompanying programs, including for kids, are presented thanks to the grant project “*Historical technologies and modern research methods. Interpretive possibilities of specialized methods of researching mediaeval works of art employing innovative technologies*” (grantor: the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, NAKI program).

František Skála Riding School

Wallenstein Riding School Picture Gallery

March 10 – September 3, 2017

Curator: Tomáš Pospiszyl



The František Skála exhibition will focus on the artist's work since 2004. Skála seeks to provide a complex experience for the visitor within the author's architectural and exhibition concept in the Wallenstein Riding School Picture Gallery. The installation will be fully integrated with the venue's architecture and lighting and will include various exhibition pavilions or solitary monumental works, light installations and works done specifically for the site. The exhibition may be viewed as several thematic exhibitions, each seemingly challenging its predecessor and the established view of Skála's work. The full picture, however, will reveal a hidden order, a worldview, a point of artistic interest and examination, which the artist wishes to express through his work. The exhibition's underlying principle will be an assemblage of artistic materials in several pavilions designed by the artist, "museums within a museum". Skála will use the exhibition vocabulary to initiate different kinds and levels of dialogue between viewer and artwork. The display's unifying element will be light, which Skála examines and uses in all its forms. On a practical level, the light makes it possible to see the exhibits, but it is also a tool for understanding them; it can shine through materials and "enlighten" the viewer. Most of the space will be illuminated with artificial light, sometimes imitating natural sunshine. In some cases, the viewer will enter a space illuminated by natural sunlight coming in through the gallery's non-blackened out windows onto the Wallenstein Garden.

Ai WeiWei

Veletržní Palace – Large Hall

March 15, 2017 – January 7, 2018

Curator: Jiří Fajt in cooperation with Adam Budak



After having presented Ai Weiwei's groundbreaking sculpture in the public space, „Circle of Animals/Zodiac Heads“, the National Gallery in Prague will introduce the Chinese artist's magnificent oeuvre by staging his brand new, monumental and site-specific installation which will inaugurate a program of artistic statements in the impressive interior of a Big Hall.

Ai Weiwei is known for elaborating sculptural installations that enter a dialogue with a given space and correspond with the space's dimensions and architectural quality. „Sunflower Seeds“ – a vast installation in Turbine Hall of Tate Modern is one of the prime examples of it. His impressive installation „Forever Bicycles“ or a sculpture, „Bicycle Chandelier“ is yet another proof of Ai Weiwei's architectural sensitivity. The artist's interest in a high quality aesthetic experience always corresponds with his focus on important issues of political and socio-cultural nature. The criticism of contemporary world as well as a critical revision of the past have always underlined Ai Weiwei's way of thinking and his artistic practice at large.

His project in the Big Hall will certainly reflect urgent issues of today's world, driven by political and economic crisis as well as by the inflation of values and moral decline. As such, it will also act in a responsive way towards the vast volume and unique dimensions of the Big Hall.

Magdalena Jetelová

Veletržní Palace – Small Hall

March 17 – August 31, 2017

Curator: Milena Kalinovská



Magdalena Jetelová's installation, prepared especially for the National Gallery in Prague, will transform the Small Hall of the Veletržní Palace into an extended field providing insight into the artist's thought and work. The gallery space becomes an art site in which the limitations of classic categories of sculpture, installation or photograph cease to exist. The installation conducts a dialogue with the Veletržní Palace architecture, evoking a devastated landscape and sense of instability, seeking to remind the viewer of this instability and of the fragility of the global socio-political situation. Who is the leading figure in this world? How should one react when the passively observed landscape no longer appears idyllic? The landscape is a carrier of history, invisibly written on its surface. One who walks through this landscape traverses collective memory. The installation challenges spatial limitations and human presence, establishes the undefinable nature of the obvious, extends horizons and hampers coordination through disorientation.

Magdalena Jetelová began creating monumental installations and sculptures focused on the questions of power, political exploitation and our duty "to not forget" in the early 1980s. In a politically oppressed Czechoslovakia, she exhibited her work with other artists at a major event called *The Lesser Town's Backyards*. Her work began to be shown in many Western galleries and exhibitions in the mid-1980s, among them the Tate Gallery, the Biennale of Sydney, Die documenta 8 and in solo exhibitions at the Riverside Studios in London and MoMA in New York City.

Gerhard Richter

Kinsky Palace

April 26 – September 3, 2017

Curators: Jiří Fajt and Milena Kalinovská in cooperation with Gerhard Richter and his studio



The National Gallery in Prague, in cooperation with the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany and Goethe-Institut in Prague, will present a retrospective of German artist Gerhard Richter, his first in Central Europe. It will present selected works done by the artist in the last sixty years. More than fifty pieces will take the visitor through Richter's multi-genre oeuvre – from realism to naturalism, pop art, conceptual art and abstraction. The exhibition highlights Richter's painting styles centred around the theme of "history" – not only the history of Germany, but also of the artist's family and art itself. The theme of history links his well-known, often personal photo-realistic works with those focused on the history of art, seeking to express something that lay beyond the capacity of words.

The exhibition is chronological, emphasizing the "new" theme on which the artist embarked in each section. Richter absorbs many trends, ideas and contemporary events, always showing a desire to move art, and its capacity to move us, forward. Richter always experiments and seeks out a new vocabulary of stylistic expression. The exhibition's last section will acquaint the visitor with his new works – realistic paintings, still lifes, objects, abstraction and motifs in which the artist is interested at the moment. The exhibition will be organized as part of the Czech-German Spring of Culture 2017 on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Czech-German Declaration.

Ferdinand II, Archduke of Austria
A Renaissance Ruler and Art Patron between Prague and Innsbruck

Wallenstein Riding School Picture Gallery
November 3, 2017 – February 25, 2018
Curator: *Blanka Kubíková*



The National Gallery in Prague, in cooperation with the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna and the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, is preparing an exhibition dedicated to Ferdinand II, Archduke of Austria (1529–1595). The second son of Emperor Ferdinand I, King of Bohemia, spent his childhood in the company of his older brother Maximilian, the preordained successor to the throne. Starting from 1547, Ferdinand lived in the Czech Lands, where his father appointed him his successor. From an early age, the Archduke played a major role in the political and social life of the Czech Lands. He was given important tasks such as the restoration of the king's residence – Prague Castle, which he carried out under his father's supervision. Archduke Ferdinand also entered history as the designer and architect of the Hvězda Summerhouse, and as a keen collector, who amassed one of the largest libraries in Central Europe at the time and a large *Kunstkammer* (cabinet of curiosities) after the example of Italian aristocrats. He also owned a stunning collection of suits of armour of well-known figures. His father's last will bequeathed rule over the Tyrol to the Archduke, where Ferdinand II moved in 1567, living in Ambras Castle near Innsbruck. He rebuilt it into a magnificent residence and placed his large

collections there. Many rare items can still be seen at the castle. Ambras was one of the first museums north of the Alps and the only one that still stands in its original location. The Archduke's example served as an inspiration for many aristocrats in Bohemia as well as his nephew, the future Emperor Rudolf II, who shared his interests. Contact with Bohemia's aristocracy continued even after Ferdinand II left the country, and Innsbruck became a frequent stopover for Bohemian noblemen on their way to Austria, Italy or specifically the Tyrol.

The exhibition will first be presented at Ambras Castle near Innsbruck (June 15 – Oct. 8, 2017) and then in the Wallenstein Riding School Picture Gallery in Prague. While they will share a conceptual basis, the exhibition in Austria will be informed by Ferdinand II's reign in the Tyrol, and in Prague by his activities in the Czech Lands. The exhibition will include some 300 paintings, rare objects of artistic crafts, Renaissance armour and rare manuscripts, including a letter hand-written by the Archduke, natural materials and curiosities from his collections. The exhibition presents the Archduke as a historical figure intertwined with the fate of the Czech Lands and Renaissance art, and as a man with personal ties and interests. Archduke Ferdinand loved hunting and court festivities in which he often acted and sang.

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