

Martin Baxa awarded the Artis Bohemiae Amicis medal to Dutch collector Felix Hess

Prague, 11 March 2022 - **Minister of Culture Martin Baxa has awarded the Artis Bohemiae Amicis medal to the Dutch professor Felix Hess for his lifelong outstanding work in the field of collecting and spreading the good name of Czech culture abroad and in Czech cultural institutions. The award is also a great thanks for his extensive donation of Japanese Zen paintings from the Kaeru-An collection to the National Gallery in Prague, which will present the unique works at the Salm Palace this spring. The medal with a letter of thanks from the Minister of Culture Martin Baxa was presented to Mr. Hess in the Netherlands today by the Deputy of the Cultural Heritage Section of the Ministry of Culture Vlastislav Ouroda.**

Felix Hess donated the unique collection of Japanese Zen ink paintings and calligraphy from the 17th to the 20th centuries to the National Gallery in 2019. With its size of more than 520 works and its artistic quality, it is a unique collection of Zen art not only in the European context. In Zen painting and calligraphy, ink becomes both an artistic medium and an intermediary of a didactic message. Zenga paintings are thus above all a tool for meditation and spiritual enlightenment.

"It is a great honour for me to be able to award a medal to Professor Felix Hess for donating the result of his half-century-long collecting efforts to the National Gallery in Prague. Such an act of philanthropy and patronage is quite unique in the Czech Republic. I am sure that the Professor's decision will ensure adequate and lasting care for the donated works. The National Gallery in Prague will thus become the most important holder of a Zen painting collection in Central Europe and one of the most important in the world. The Gallery will guarantee not only the preservation of the integrity of the collection, but also a high professional level of its presentation to the professional and general public. With this donation, Felix Hess makes a significant contribution to the promotion of Czech culture and at the same time, he has long been involved in spreading the good name of Czech culture and the care of cultural heritage in the Czech Republic. I greatly appreciate his extraordinary contribution to Czech culture, and I thank him again, not only on my own behalf but on behalf of thousands of grateful visitors," said Minister of Culture Martin Baxa.

Mr Felix Hess, originally a mathematician and physicist by profession and later also a renowned artist in the field of "sound design", began to build this exceptional collection twenty years ago, mainly through purchases in Japan. It contains works by distinguished artists who are represented in museums and private collections in Japan and abroad. Over the years, Felix Hess has collected more than 570 scroll paintings. The total collection includes several unique scroll paintings and calligraphies from as early as the 15th and 16th centuries, as well as works by well-known masters such as Hakuin, Sengai, Fūgai, Nantenbō and many others, including examples of younger works from the late 19th and 20th centuries.

In 2018, after several meetings with his long-time friend Professor Christiaan Jörg and Associate Professor Filip Suchomel, former Vice-Rector of the Academy of Performing Arts, Professor Hess decided to donate the collection as a whole to the National Gallery. Mr Suchomel was authorized to negotiate about the collection with institutions in the Czech Republic. As Felix Hess wished his collecting activities to be known also in his native Netherlands, he dedicated about 30 scroll paintings, mainly calligraphies, to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. The rest of the collection of over 524 paintings will be acquired by the National Gallery in Prague as a donation with an estimated value of approximately tens of millions crowns. Another seven paintings were bequeathed by the donor to National Gallery in his will.

Selected works from the Kaeru-an collection will be exhibited by the National Gallery in Prague from this May at the Salm Palace. The new permanent exhibition of Asian art at Salm Palace will feature more Zen paintings from this exceptional collection.