



THE PHENOMENON OF COLLECTING

MIDNIGHT OF ART is coming to Kunsthalle Praha. This summer exhibition will present the private collection and activities of Karel Babíček – an important cultural mover and founder of the legendary 1990s Prague gallery Behémót.

Press release for the Kunsthalle Praha exhibition:

MIDNIGHT OF ART
Ways of Collecting: Karel Babíček's Collection
1/7–30/9 2022

On Friday, 1 July 2022, Kunsthalle Praha, a new venue for art in Prague's Klárov district, will unveil its new exhibition **MIDNIGHT OF ART. Ways of Collecting: Karel Babíček's Collection**. The exhibition, on view until 30 September 2022, is the opening chapter of a series entitled **Ways of Collecting**, which presents diverse approaches to collecting within Czech and international private collections. The series aims to answer such questions as: who collects and why? What are the relationships between collectors and artists, and how do private collections coexist with public ones? It will also offer a unique insight into art collections that are rarely accessible to the public.

- The first collector to be presented is **Karel Babíček** (b. 1956) – curator, dealer, and, last but not least, the founder of one of Prague's first private galleries during the post-communist era – **Behémót** (1991–2003), which followed the New York model and reflected the current art scene across generations. Babíček was one of the first to seek out works by conceptual artists for his collection and consistently supported their creation. The exhibition will cover the full range of Babíček's cultural activities including dozens of works from his collection. Artists on display include **Adriena Šimotová, František Skála, Josef Žáček, Jiří Příhoda, Jaroslav Róna, Jiří David, Kateřina Vincourová, Krištof**

Kintera, Margita Titlová-Ylovsky, Václav Stratil, Vladimír Merta, Vladimír Kokolia, and many others. The exhibition also includes works by award-winning international artists that Babíček presented at the progressive exhibition venue **Nová síň (New Hall) in Prague** from 1995 to 1998. These include works by British sculptor **Tony Cragg**, American sculptor **Nancy Davidson**, French sculptor **Philippe Ramette**, British artist **Julian Opie**, and controversial American filmmaker and photographer **Larry Clark**.

- MIDNIGHT OF ART will be Kunsthalle Praha's third exhibition since its opening on 22 February 2022. During its first four months of operation, 45,000 visitors have come through its doors, and the popular inaugural exhibition **Kinetismus: 100 Years of Electricity in Art** has been extended **until 29 August 2022** due to high interest.

"Art collectors, with their passion, together with art historians and curators, contribute to the vitality of the art scene. With the Ways of Collecting exhibition series, we want to pay tribute to their activities, which although overlooked, are an integral part of the art ecosystem. This is especially true in the Czech Republic, where for decades every collection accessible to the public was held solely by state institutions," explains **Christelle Havranek**, Chief Curator of Kunsthalle Praha.

The curator of Midnight of Art, Lenka Lindaurová, took inspiration for the title of the exhibition from Milan Kundera's 1988 novel *Immortality*, in which one of the characters comments distinctively on the art world: *'(...) midnight had struck on the dial of European art.'* The curator thus figuratively marks the time of newly gained freedom and connectivity in the Czech art world, embodied by the emergence of independent galleries and collections.

"The size of an art collection is not necessarily related to the number of works within it - instead, this lies in its history, and in the story of the collector himself. Karel Babíček began building his collection after 1989 as one of the first entrepreneurs in what was then Czechoslovakia. He claims that he chooses his art not with his head or his heart - but with his stomach. It sounds a bit bizarre, but it is believable - it is, after all, the collector's personal taste that defines the individuality of the collection, even though the term 'taste' is rejected by many experts because it doesn't capture the processes of interpretation and analysis," reflects curator **Lenka Lindaurová** on Babíček's unique approach to collecting.

Large scale Installations, objects, videos, and performances were created for site-specific exhibitions at Behémót, of which only limited photographic documentation has survived. After Behémót ceased its activities in 2003, Karel Babíček continued to seek out the studios of the emerging generation of artists and never stopped expanding his collection. Since 2002 he has participated in the exhibition programme for the arts festival **Brandýské mámení** in **Brandýs**

nad Orlicí, where he also initiated and supported the creation of public artworks.

The exhibition at Kunsthalle Praha will be accompanied by a catalogue that features contributions from art historian **Marisa Ravalli-Příhodová** and writer **Petr Borkovec**, who offer further insights on the phenomenon of collecting in the Czech Republic. Graphic designer **Robert V. Novák** will oversee the visual coherence of all *Ways of Collecting* catalogues, while the architecture of the exhibition itself is the work of artist **Jiří Příhoda**.

“The story that Midnight of Art tells is in many ways similar to one that gave rise to a place very dear to us – a new space dedicated to art and artists where visitors can continually discover and experience inspiring encounters. After all, Kunsthalle Praha was also founded by two passionate collectors,” adds **Christelle Havranek**, Chief Curator of Kunsthalle Praha.

Kunsthalle Praha is a new venue for art in Prague's Klárov district. As a non-governmental and non-profit platform for connecting the Czech and international art scenes, it was founded by **The Pudil Family Foundation** of Petr and Pavlína Pudil. Kunsthalle Praha was created through the conversion of the historical Zenger Transformer Station from the 1930s, which now offers a modern gallery environment for short-term art exhibitions, innovative educational programs, and cultural events. Kunsthalle's primary mission is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the Czech and international art of the 20th and 21st centuries. It has its own art collection focusing on modern, post-war, and contemporary art. Kunsthalle Praha officially opened to the public on 22/2/2022, with the large-scale multimedia exhibition **Kinetismus: 100 Years of Electricity in Art** (22/2–29/8/2022) and the historical exhibition **The Zenger Transformer Station: Electricity in Architecture, Electricity in the City** (22/2–30/5/2022). Over an area of **5,687 m²** the premises feature three large gallery spaces, a design shop, and a café with a historical terrace overlooking Petřín and Prague Castle.

MIDNIGHT OF ART

Ways of Collecting: Karel Babíček's Collection
1/7–30/9 2022

The exhibition *Midnight Art* presents the private collection and extensive cultural activities of Karel Babíček – an important collector and curator, and founder of Behémót, one of the first private galleries in Prague to open after the 1989 Velvet Revolution (1991–2003). During the 1990s, Babíček explored current artistic trends across generations, consistently supported the emergence of conceptual art, and was instrumental in organising the first exhibitions of major international names in the diverse programme at Prague's Nová síň (New

**Kunsthalle
Praha**

Hall, 1995-1998). *Midnight of Art* is the opening chapter of an exhibition series called *Ways of Collecting*, through which Kunsthalle Praha will continue to provide unique insights into private Czech and international collections.

Exhibition series concept: Christelle Havranek

Exhibition curator: Lenka Lindaurová

Exhibition architect: Jiří Příhoda

Graphic design of the exhibition and catalogue: Robert V. Novák

Graphic design of the exhibition's visual style: Zuzana Lednická, Andrea Vacovská (Studio Najbrt)

List of exhibited artists: Jan Bačkovský, Veronika Bromová, Tomáš Císařovský, Larry Clark, Tony Cragg, Jiri David, Nancy Davidson, Stanislav Diviš, Martin John, Stanislav Judl, Krištof Kintera, Vladimír Kokolia, Martin Krajc, Petr Kvíčala, Martin Mainer, František Matoušek, Jan Merta, Vladimír Merta, MICL, Michal Nesázal, Julian Opie, Peter Pisařík, Jan Pištěk, Viktor Pivovarov, Otto Placht, Jiří Příhoda, Philippe Ramette, Lukáš Rittstein, Jaroslav Róna, František Skála, Tomáš Smetana, Vít Soukup, Václav Stratil, Antonín Střížek, Adriena Šimotová, Pavel Šmíd, Margita Titlova-Ylovsky, Kateřina Vincourová, Josef Žáček

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