

PRESS RELEASE

The fascinating story of Gottfried Lindauer and his portraits of the Māori is the major exhibition of Pilsen – European Capital of Culture 2015

50 portraits of New Zealand Māori are presented in the hometown of the artist in the most expensive and most demanding exhibition project in Pilsen's history. The first retrospective of Gottfried Lindauer is organized by the Gallery of West Bohemia in Pilsen in cooperation with the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.

"This challenging and extensive project proves how the title of European Capital of Culture helps cultural institutions in Pilsen to rise to the European level. Even the National Gallery would be proud of such an exhibition. Moreover, it would not be possible without the European Capital of Culture, considering the budget we are working with. At the same time, however, it requires a high level of expertise and professionalism from the organising institution, which the Gallery of West Bohemia, under the leadership of Roman Musil, undoubtedly has at its disposal," says the Programme Director of Pilsen 2015, Jiří Sulženko.

"Even the preparation itself has been very sensitive and demanding – we are bringing a New Zealand national treasure to Pilsen, and this corresponds with a great deal of care and interest from the Māori side. The Gallery of West Bohemia in Pilsen has prepared the first retrospective exhibition of Gottfried Lindauer at an international level and in cooperation with the Auckland Art Gallery, which owns the largest and finest collection of Lindauer's works created in New Zealand. This involves loaning 44 of his artworks that have never travelled to Europe before," says the Director of the Gallery of West Bohemia in Pilsen, Roman Musil.

In addition to Māori portraits, the exhibition presents Lindauer's early works, including pieces from Czech state, church and private collections, thus showing work created before he left for New Zealand.

A native of Pilsen, Gottfried Lindauer was an artist with a remarkable life story whose work has been left unacknowledged for a long period of time. While in the Czech Republic his work has been known to only a small number of specialists, in New Zealand, where he moved from Pilsen in 1874, his paintings of the indigenous Māori people are considered a part of the national cultural heritage and Lindauer is one of the most popular painters of the colonial era there.

In order to reflect on the full extent of Lindauer's work, at the exhibition we present works which have Czech provenance, are located here, and come from the Roman-Catholic parish in Valašské Klobouky, the Museum of West Bohemia in Pilsen and the National Museum in Prague – the Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures, together with a unique collection of paintings from New Zealand. Thanks to the great understanding and extraordinary support of our colleagues from Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, and also from Haerewa, an advisory body that brings together Māori artists and scholars, and with the assent of all the descendants of the famous ancestors depicted in Lindauer's paintings, the Gallery of West Bohemia could present this absolutely unique collection of forty-eight portraits and two genre paintings, which are being exhibited outside New Zealand for the first time – the only exception being the recent exhibition in the Alte Nationalgalerie in Berlin, which immediately preceded the exhibition in Pilsen. Both exhibitions have been coordinated together, though each has a different art historical approach with the first one concerned solely with Lindauer's Māori portrait painting. For the Gallery of West Bohemia the exhibition is one of the most demanding projects in its history and is one of the top achievements of the project Pilsen – European Capital of Culture 2015.

According to a well-known statement by Ernst Hans Gombrich, anything is possible in art history but not in every time or in every place. Gottfried Lindauer was in the right place at the right time and thus achieved the seemingly impossible: as a Central European by origin and art training he became one of the key figures in art in distant New Zealand.

LOANS

The majority of the loans come from Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki: 44 Māori portraits and 2 large genre paintings. Additionally, 4 portraits come from Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington. Further loans come from the National Museum – Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures, Prague (2 Māori portraits) and one newly rediscovered Māori portrait comes from a private collection in Prague.

Lindauer's early European work is represented by loans from the Museum of West Bohemia in Pilsen (10 portraits of Pilsen citizens, including his early self-portrait) and Roman-Catholic parish Valašské Klobouky (9 religious paintings)

In addition to paintings, the exhibition presents objects and documents related to the artist's personality and work: especially objects of ethnographic character (garments, cloaks, wooden clubs etc.) and documents presented as either originals (correspondence) or facsimile (Lindauer's drawings, letters and photographs) from the Náprstek Museum again.

A historic visitors' book (*Pukapuka Mo Nga Manuhiri Tangata Matakītiki. Lindauer Visitors Book*, H E Partridge, 1901–1918, E H McCormick Research Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki) is part of the exhibition as well.

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