**A MUCHA FOUNDATION EXHIBITION**

**TIMELESS MUCHA: BRIDGING THE WORLD**

**SYNOPSIS**

**Mucha and South Moravia**

*Timeless Mucha: Bridging the World* is a four-part exhibition presented in four locations in South Moravia: **Ivančice**, **Mikulov**, **Hrušovany** and **Moravský Krumlov**. The region has a special connection to the life and art of Alfons Mucha (1860-1939), providing a great inspiration for the artistic style of which Mucha was to become a preeminent exponent: Art Nouveau, which emerged in fin-de-siècle Europe and evolved to become an international style, bridging the decorative arts of East and West.

Born in **Ivančice** in 1860, Mucha had earnt a reputation as a local prodigy for his drawing skills from an early age. However, it was his encounter with Count Eduard Khuen-Belasi (1847-1896), the owner of the castles **Hrušovany** and Emmahof, that prompted the blossoming of Mucha's artistic talent. While he was working as a portrait painter and decorator in **Mikulov**, 22-year-old Mucha was spotted by Count Eduard as a 'promising artist'. This resulted in the Count commissioning Mucha to paint a series of frescos for his castles; his patronage enabled Mucha to receive formal artistic training in Munich and Paris, opening a path for Mucha to a career as a professional artist.

Although Mucha was away from his homeland for almost 25 years, during which he established his international fame as 'The Greatest Decorative Artist in The World' (*The* *New York Daily News*, April 3, 1904) with the highly influential style created for his posters, he stayed in close contact with his family and friends at home throughout those years. Furthermore, in designing his posters, Mucha consciously integrated decorative

motifs from his aesthetic roots, South Moravian folk art, in order to assert his Czech identity in Paris, one of the epicentres of the 'new art *(art nouveau)*' movement. After his return to the Czech lands, when conceptualising *The Slav Epic* (1912-1926), Mucha wished to shed light on the contributions of Moravian culture, as well as on key events in the history of Czech and fellow Slav peoples, in the shaping of European civilisation.

In 1928, on the 10th Anniversary of the Independent Czechoslovakia, Mucha presented all twenty canvases of *The Slav Epic* as a gift to the City of Prague on condition that the city should provide a suitable building for permanent exhibition, but no date by which this condition should be met was specified. After the first exhibitions in Prague (1928) and Brno (1930), the canvases were rolled up and put into storage; during World War II, Mucha's name and his work were largely forgotten.

**Mucha Revival and His Legacy**

It was through the efforts of the people of **Moravský Krumlov** and the Mucha family that Mucha's late masterpiece was revived during the 1960s; in 1968, after extensive restoration work on the canvases, the complete cycle of *The Slav Epic* was placed on public display for the first time (\*) in the castle of Moravský Krumlov. The town became a temporary home for the canvases until 2011; and then again from 2021, while the family's efforts to fulfil Mucha's wish continue today.

While Mucha's name began to re-emerge in Czech consciousness, the 1960s also saw the reappraisal of Mucha's work in Western Europe, triggered by a Mucha exhibition organised by the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, in 1963. Entitled *Art Nouveau* *and Alphonse Mucha*, it was the first major retrospective of the artist's work in the UK. Critics were unanimous in acclaiming Mucha's 'system' of curvilinear expression through flowing, spiralling lines, combined with graceful female figures: famously called *'le style Mucha'* in Belle Époque Paris, becoming synonymous with 'Art Nouveau'.

An immediate response to the 'Mucha curves' came from the youth counterculture (rock music, fashion and psychedelic art) in London and the US West Coast, amid a growing sense of crisis over Cold War politics. The peaceful fantasy world Mucha depicted with its floral motifs resonated with the Flower Power sensibilities of artists at the time. An influence of resurrected 'Mucha Style' appeared in numerous psychedelic posters and album covers in the 1960s as well as American comics and Japanese manga in the late 20th century, and this influence endures to this day beyond national and cultural boundaries.

At each venue, *Timeless Mucha: Bridging the World* will juxtapose works from Mucha and his followers, with viewers encouraged to explore their visual links.

Tomoko Sato

Curator, Mucha Foundation

**Note (\*)**

Mucha continued to retouch one of the paintings (XVIII. Oath of the "Youth" under the Slav Linden Tree), for the rest of his life. The painting remained unfinished and was never exhibited in public in his lifetime.