



## The Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague: Sustainably Designed Exhibitions



Anyone who enters the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague quickly realizes: History lives here. At the same time, the present pulses in the house – and always a bit of the future as well. Since its founding, the museum has been collecting and showcasing treasures from crafts and applied arts. It bridges the early, delicate crafts to modern design and weaves them closely with architecture and visual arts.

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# JOSEF KOUDELKA: RUINS

The photographs of the latest series by Josef Koudelka were taken from 1991 to 2017 at over 200 archaeological sites in the Mediterranean region, including Albania, Egypt, Greece, Italy, and Turkey. Some images from the series Ruins were already shown in 2017 in the exhibition Returning at the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague. The photographs on display are part of the generous donation of around 2,500 works from Koudelka's life's work that he has handed over to the museum in recent years. Architect: Jan Roháč

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The building itself is already an experience. The architect Josef Schulz built it between 1897 and 1900 in the French Neo-Renaissance style. The decorative elements, lush

and detailed, testify to the generosity of those dedicated supporters without whom the museum would not be conceivable. Names like Bohumil Bondy, Václav Němec,

and Josef Wohanka represent a long line of patrons. However, outstanding remains Vojtěch (Adalbert) Baron von Lanna, a passionate collector who left half of his own

glass collection to the house – a gift that still leaves visitors in awe and provides unique insights into the development of glassmaking from antiquity to the present.





The people who have led the museum also demonstrate the vibrancy of this place. The first director, Dr. Karel Chytil, was actively involved in the preservation of monuments in Bohemia. He was followed by František Adolf Borovský, František Xaver Jiřík, and Karel Herain, under whose leadership the museum played an important role in Czechoslovak design and applied arts. The history of the institution also reflects the turmoil of the 20th century: during World War II, the museum had to be relocated due to the takeover by the German aircraft company Junkers, and many collections found space in rural depots and the National Museum. In 1949, the institution was nationalized, was part of the National Gallery from 1959 to 1969, and has been operating as an independent, state-established institution since 1970. Emanuel Poche, Jiří Šetlík, Dagmar Hejdová, Jaroslav Langer, and

after 1989 Helena Koenigsmarková shaped it as Directors also shape the development. Since 2024, Radim Vondráček has been leading the institution.

Today, the Museum of Decorative Arts is a true treasure trove: over half a million objects are stored in the central depot – glass, porcelain, ceramics, graphics, photography, textiles, fashion, furniture design, clocks, metals, jewelry, toys, and countless documents and images. Anyone familiar with collection management knows: it involves a lot of care, passion, and logistical mastery.

Between 2014 and 2017, the historic building was fundamentally renovated. 17 exhibition halls, a spacious vestibule, shop, restaurant, lecture hall, and an extensive library make the museum a vibrant meeting place for art enthusiasts of all generations

today. Since the renovation, the institution has been a venue for an intensive exhibition program. Highlights include the collection of modern glass (opened in the third floor from 2018 to 2020) and the new permanent exhibition in seven halls on the second floor, which concluded in 2023. Flexibility is key: The ground floor and the third floor are reserved for changing projects and fresh impulses from all collection areas.



## THE POWER OF LACE. LACE – ART – GARMENT

The Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague has been intensively addressing the phenomenon of lace for many years – as an expression of Czech applied and fine arts. Therefore, it was presented on an international stage at the ICOM General Conference 2022. The exhibition linked three perspectives: lace as a garment, as fine art, and as a source of inspiration for contemporary artists. A total of 23 objects were shown in a spatial installation by Pavel Mrkus, accompanied by a soundtrack from K.L.A.R.A. in cooperation with the graphic studio Monsters. Architect: Pavel Mrkus

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#### MARTIN JANECKÝ: STARMEN AND OTHER STUDIO WORK IN GLASS (2022)

Martin Janecký is an international icon of glass art – his transnational influence is based on his extraordinary mastery of complex hot glass techniques. His artistic approach is as versatile as his choice of themes: the spectrum ranges from figurative sculptures to large-format heads. In the Czech glass landscape, he is considered a new type of solitary. His extraordinary development is due not only to his uncompromising focus on work but also to the societal changes of the last thirty years, which aligned with his personal attitude.

At the age of thirteen, Janecký began working in his father's glassworks in Poděbrady. The open borders from the mid- 1990s allowed him longer study stays abroad – including in Africa, India, Alaska, and especially in the USA, such as at the renowned Pilchuck Glass School near Seattle or at the Corning Museum of Glass. There, he deepened his knowledge and specialized in the so-called \*Inside Sculpting\* – the free shaping of a glass bulb from the inside, directly at the furnace. This technique, which is only mastered at a comparable level by two other artists worldwide, is unique in the Czech Republic. Janecký has adapted it to his artistic ideas and thus developed a completely unique form language that made him internationally known.

Today he travels the world, gives workshops, demonstrates his technique, and realizes his own works. His virtuosity, work ethic, and impressive results receive great recognition in the Czech space – and at the same time raise questions: How will his path develop further?

A possible answer was given by Janecký in his exhibition STARMEN AND OTHER STUDIO WORK IN GLASS.

Among other things, large-format heads of stargazers made from molten glass in the studio of Zdeněk Lhotský in Pelechov near Železný Brod were shown there. The Museum of Decorative Arts dedicated a comprehensive exhibition to the artist born in 1980, making his recent work accessible to both a national and international audience. Architect: Dušan Seidl.

(Editorial museum.de)

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#### FASHION IN BLUE. INDIGO IN JAPANESE AND CZECH TEXTILES THEN AND NOW (2021/22)

Curated by Markéta Vingerlová and Setsuko Shibata, the Prague Museum of Decorative Arts showcases historical and contemporary textiles from the Czech Republic and Japan that were made using the indigo dyeing technique (Shibori).

Yukata from the 19th century to the present, Katagami stencils, and fabrics illustrate how this traditional technique continues to be applied in art and fashion – in East and West. The exhibition highlights

"Japan Blue" as a cultural symbol and contrasts it with local developments: Moravian folk costumes, works by Liběna Rochová from the Center for Folk Art (ÚLUV), as well as fashion by Pavel Ivančic, Alice Klouzková, and others. Installations by Adéla Součková and Petra Gupta Valentová showcase contemporary artistic perspectives.

Architect: Lenka Míková  
(Editorial museum.de)





Dipl. Ing. Dušan Seidl  
Head of the presentation of the collections Head of exhibition and publishing department

Mr. Seidl is the author of this article and provides an overview of selected exhibitions from recent years in which the Mila-wall system was used.

In the context of the complex operation of the historical building, the economic efficiency of the operation and thus the short setup time of the exhibitions as well as their quick opening are paramount. A key role is played by a universal exhibition inventory that the museum acquired step by step between 2017 and 2019. We opted for the Mila-wall partition wall system and the LED lighting system from the company Etna. Both systems have proven to be versatile in exhibition operations. We have 700 wall modules of various heights, most of which are 3 and 4 meters high, and widths of 1 and 0.5 meters. Wall modules of different types: standard, radius, acoustic. The lighting park includes 800 lights in four basic designs, which are mounted on a fixed rail grid. This enables us to set up, illuminate, and, after the exhibition ends, dismantle the complete exhibition architecture including ceilings in a short time, within 2 to 3 days. Due to the complexity of the system, the setup of the partition wall inventory can be carried out by two to three employees. The wall modules can also be stacked on top of each other to achieve continuous walls with a height of up to 5 meters. Especially thanks to the robust construction and the surrounding aluminum frame, the partition walls are almost universally applicable.



GLEAM of GOLD,  
BLAZE of COLOURS

On the occasion of the 135th anniversary, the UPM presented a comprehensive exhibition of historical reverse glass paintings in 2020 – almost exclusively from its own collection. The basis was years of research and restoration studies. 135 works from late antiquity to the 19th century were shown, including works by Hans Jakob Sprüngli, the "Master VBL", and Gerhard Janssen. A special focus was on 30 pieces restored between 2001 and 2017. Architect: Dušan Seidl (Editorial museum.de). © Applied Arts Museum in Prague, Photos: Ondřej Kocourek





The walls are easy to handle and are characterized by a simple and practical setup and takedown. High sustainability/reusability, the wall modules are used repeatedly.

Over the course of seven years, we have realized almost fifty spatially very different exhibitions. I have personally used both systems, Mila-wall and lighting, in over fifteen exhibitions and often combined the wall modules with glass walls and showcases or built stages or other small architectures (e.g., video booths for film screenings from the Acoustic modules) from them. And always with high aesthetic quality.

This was evidenced by exhibitions of reverse glass painting, exhibitions of porcelain, historical glass, tapestries, furniture, photographs, as well as exhibitions on the topics of lifestyle, interior, textiles, and fashion. Thanks to the Mila-wall system, we not only save time but also significant financial resources that we would have to spend on conventional construction methods with MDF or particle boards. Another significant advantage is the environmental friendliness, dust-free nature, and easy maintenance. We repeatedly take the opportunity to paint the walls to achieve different surfaces; each exhibition has a different color.



# MAD SILKMAN. ZIKA & LÍDA ASCHER: TEXTILES AND FASHION (2019)

Zika Ascher, born in 1910 in Prague, was not only a successful skier but also a co-founder of a textile company that made fashion history. Together with his wife Lida, he fled the Nazis to London in 1939. There, they founded Ascher (London) Ltd. in 1942, which soon became known for innovative printed fabrics. Zika attracted artists like Matisse and Moore for designs that became world-famous as "Ascher Squares." Their fabrics shaped collections from Dior to Chanel – a unique interplay of art and fashion. Architect: Pavel Mrkus (editorial museum.de) Photos: © Kunstgewerbemuseum in Prague



Please scan the QR code to watch the film about the exhibitions

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#### KOUDELKA: RETURNING (2018)

The exhibition presented a comprehensive retrospective on the 80th birthday of Josef Koudelka and simultaneously honored his generous donation to the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague. Architect: Emil Zavadil (Editorial museum.de)

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We have also used the Mila-wall system to full satisfaction at trade fairs and commercial exhibitions (Designblok). Compatible with the new developments, the latest wall generation can continuously be combined with the already existing walls and the existing stock can be supplemented.

Together with the universal lighting system from the company Etna, which adapts to any exhibition, the Milawall system significantly contributes to the successful and economical exhibition operations of the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague.

Author: Dipl. Ing. Dušan Seidl  
Head of Collection Presentation Head of Exhibition and Publishing Department.



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MBA-Design & Display Product GmbH  
Siemensstrasse 32  
72766 Reutlingen  
Tel: +49 7121 1606-0  
info@mba-worldwide.com  
www.mila-wall.de