**PRESS RELEASE**

**Jan Švankmajer celebrates his 90th birthday with an exhibition at GASK**

*‘Surrender to your obsessions. It’s the best you have anyway. Obsessions are relics from childhood. And it’s in the depths of childhood that the best treasures are found.’*

Jan Švankmajer

*GASK marks this jubilee year with an exhibition of the lifelong work of internationally renowned artist Jan Švankmajer and his wife Eva. The exhibition follows on a series of projects presenting great figures of Czech animated film (Aurel Klimt, Jiří Trnka) that GASK has held over the past several years. Held in the year of Švankmajer’s ninetieth birthday, the exhibition DISEGNO INTERNO covers all the creative fields in which this internationally acclaimed Surrealist has been active – collage, printmaking, object art, book illustrations, automatic drawing, tactile experiments, collecting and, of course, film. An important part of the exhibition will be a presentation of paintings by his wife Eva Švankmajerová. The exhibition will be accompanied by a series of lectures, film screenings and guided tours, and the GASK Learning Centre will offer special programmes for schools, as well as workshops for families and children.*

**Jan Švankmajer** strictly avoids labelling himself as an artist and his work as art, an attitude that stems from his embrace of Surrealism, for Surrealism is not art but a way of thinking, a life attitude, a modern alchemy. Even so, Švankmajer is generally seen as an **important creator in the fields of cinema, art, literature and theatre**. ‘He sees his work as one fixed whole and doesn’t prefer one means of expression over another, even though the general public sees him mainly as a film director’, says Petr Adámek, who has organised the exhibition’s programme of accompanying events.

Švankmajer’s work can be divided into several categories according to his (often obsessive) sources of inspiration. These include **Rudolphine Mannerism** (Kunstkammers, cabinets of curiosities and the work of Giuseppe Arcimboldo), **puppet theatre** and the ‘Baroque’ tradition of ancient Czech puppetry, **Art Brut**, **eroticism** (the Marquis de Sade and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch are important figures for Švankmajer in this regard), **the art of natural peoples** (fetishes), **Max Ernst** (collage novels) and **works by various important figures of world literature** (Edgar Allen Poe, Lewis Carroll). A kind of secondary part of Švankmajer’s oeuvre, one that could be described as ‘applied art’, includes his **scenic design for theatre** and his **animation work for Czechoslovak film**. His **book illustrations**, however, should be considered a part of his regular work, for they relate to literature closely linked with his obsessions and his view of the world. In recent years, he has also produced several **artist’s books**, which Švankmajer calls ‘novels’ even though they are difficult to categorise in terms of genre, containing as they do elements of literature combined with essay writing, memoirs, journal entries and excerpts from screenplays.

**Eva Švankmajerová** was a Czech painter, scenographer, poet, writer and distinctive representative of Surrealism. Her meeting with Jan Švankmajer in 1960 was a decisive moment in her life, and the two were married in November of that same year. Although Eva Švankmajerová created her art independently from that of her husband, their work was often collaborative (besides film, this includes the ceramic work they presented under the shared pseudonym of Kostelec – a reference to Eva’s place of birth, the town of Kostelec nad Černými lesy, known for its ceramics). Jan Švankmajer always made his wife’s paintings and sculptures a part of his exhibitions. ‘I have a weakness for your paintings, for that painted journal of our life that is as open as sesame and as refined as Chinese cuisine’, he once wrote to his wife.

The exhibition by Jan Švankmajer and Eva Švankmajerová at the Gallery of the Central Bohemian Region aims to offer a representative survey of the work of these two partners in life and art with a special emphasis on the dialogue in which they engaged. ‘A central theme of this exhibition is the concept of ***disegno interno***, meaning ‘inner design’ – the artist’s imaginative understanding of the essence of a particular motif.In Švankmajer’s work, this concept combines Rudolphine Mannerism with Surrealism’s “inner model”’, says exhibition curator Richard Drury. The exhibition and its programme of accompanying events will explore the connection between their work (in particular in terms of the Baroque, alchemy and the phenomenon of the Sedlec Ossuary) and the unique spiritual memory of the former Jesuit College and the town of Kutná Hora itself.

**The exhibition’s diverse programme of accompanying events** includes screenings of films by Jan Švankmajer as well as a series of lectures of guided tours. The GASK Learning Centre has put together several educational events for schools, art workshops for families with children, and workshops on the subjects of animation, collage and assemblage.

This exceptional gallery event is a collaborative effort between Jan Švankmajer, GASK and the Athanor film production company. The exhibition runs from 3 March until 4 August 2024.

It is held under the patronage of Czech Minister of Culture Mgr. Martin Baxa and Mgr. Petra Pecková, Governor of the Central Bohemian Region.

**DISEGNO INTERNO – Eva Švankmajerová / Jan Švankmajer**

**3 March – 4 August 2024**

Exhibition conception: Jan Švankmajer

Curator for GASK: Richard Drury

Exhibition venue: Gallery 1, GASK

Exhibition production: Adéla Šimonová (GASK), Pavla Kalistová (Athanor)

Graphic design: Pavel Tichoň

Accompanying programme: Petr Adámek, Karin Vrátná Militká, Veronika Zikmundová, Karolína Šteffková

Let yourself be guided (and beguiled) by art in 2024 as well!

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GASK – Gallery of the Central Bohemian Region is located in the former Jesuit College in Kutná Hora. It is an art institution focused on collecting and exhibiting art from the 20th and 21st centuries.