



KESNER, Ladislav (ed.) a kol.: Mistrovská díla asijského umění ze sbírek Národní galerie v Praze (Masterpieces of the Asian Art Collection of the National Gallery, Prague). Praha, Národní galerie 1998. 197 s. Reviewed by Dagmar Pospíšilová.

One of the major projects implemented by the National Gallery's Non-European Art Department is the publication of a catalogue of Asian masterpieces, incorporating 165 works that represent the full range of important traditions in Asian art. The gallery's Non-European Art Department (initially the Oriental and subsequently the Asian Art Department) was established in 1952 to amass non-European art that, up to then, had been scattered in various collections at the Graphic Department of the National Gallery, the Oriental Institute of the Academy of Sciences, Prague Castle, the Museum of Decorative Arts, and castles around the country. Dr. Lubor Hájek (1921-2000), the chief curator of this collection, had a profound influence on the formation of the collection right from its very inception until 1986. The overall nature of the collection can be attributed to the efforts of several enthusiasts who, at the beginning of the twentieth century and (especially) in the inter-war period, travelled in the Far East. These collectors were Joe Hloucha (1881-1957) and Benedictine priest Sigismund Bouška of Broumov (1867-1942) in Japan, and the painters Vojtěch Chytil (1888-1976) and Josef Martínek (1888-1976) in China. Works of art from the Near East and South and Southeast Asia tended to make their way into the collection as individual donations. The collection

of ancient art from the archaeological excavations of Bedřich Hrozný (1879-1952) is of particular note. The Chinese collection, embracing all the different periods of history, is represented in the catalogue with examples of painting (including twentieth-century paintings from Shanghai School), Buddhist statues, tomb sculptures, earthenware, late bronzes, and textiles. The Japanese collection is represented by an important set of prints, numbering some four thousand specimens, as well as Buddhist sculptures, applied art, and earthenware. Temple banners, thangkas, and Buddhist bronzes exemplify Tibetan and Mongolian art. The South and Southeast Asian art exhibits comprise Buddhist sculptures, while Indian is represented by miniatures, mainly the works of the provincial Mughal style. A collection of carpets and lacquer painting are examples of Islamic and Near Eastern traditions. The number of exhibits from the different regions is proportional to the size of the individual collections: 15 specimens from South and Southeast Asia and the Near East; 20 from Tibet and Mongolia; and 130 examples divided almost equally between China and Japan.

This catalogue not only presents exceptional works of art, but also serves as an introduction to the permanent exhibition of Asian Art at the National Gallery, opened to the public in 1998 at Zbraslav Castle in Prague outskirts.

The catalogue's high-quality colour prints and the well-executed graphic design are in keeping with the traditional high standard of publishing by the National Gallery. The English version, currently under preparation, is sure to find an eager foreign audience.