

MEDIA RELEASE

Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger | KBH.G shows the private collection of gallerist Miklós von Bartha:

A New Life for Hidden Treasures

Basel, 25 August 2020 – **Opening on 25 August 2022, *Transylvania's Hidden Treasures* will be the first major exhibition to present the highlights of Miklós von Bartha's private collection of Transylvanian folk art, in an unprecedented collaboration with the fashion and interior designer JJ Martin, founder of La DoubleJ. 186 of the most relevant objects have been chosen from the 600 pieces collection of Transylvanian folk art and design that Miklós von Bartha has built over the past 50 years. The rare collection of Hungarian and Saxon ceramics and textiles has been a particular inspiration to JJ Martin, who will conceive an entire room of the exhibition. Transylvanian ceramics have made a fundamental contribution to European pottery. The region's abundant clay deposits, its late industrialization, the influence of Eastern as well as Western culture, the area's world of forms, and the long preservation of living traditions characterise Transylvania's crafts.**

The family of Miklós von Bartha originally came from Nagyborosnyó, a small village 50 kilometres east of Braşov (German: Kronstadt), which at that time belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary, the Principality of Transylvania and the Habsburg Monarchy and is now part of Romania. From the house of his grandparents, who left Cluj-Napoca in 1918, a single plate survived the two world wars (cat. 97). This plate was the first piece in von Bartha's collection. Most of the objects were acquired in Hungary, where high-quality pottery was in high demand. The arts and crafts from Transylvania always had great idealistic significance for the Hungarians and were collected especially after Romania took over the region.

The ceramics and textiles in the collection are classic folk art. The plates and jugs were not only intended for everyday use in Transylvanian households but served as decoration in simple peasant homes. The Transylvanian textiles selected for the exhibition are intended to show how a traditional formal language was preserved in these pieces of contemporary home decor. Sixty pieces, which were made in the Kalotaszeg region (Țara Călatei) between the 19th and 20th century will be presented in the exhibition. These textiles were used as parade pillowcases, curtains, and decorative wall protectors. Textile culture from Țara Călatei became famous mainly due to the quality of the materials used, and to the wide variety of decorative patterns with their local peculiarities.

The von Bartha's ceramic collection consists exclusively of pieces from the late 17th and 18th centuries and can be divided into three groups: Habaner pottery, Saxon pottery, and Hungarian pottery. The Habaner ceramic art, which is highly decorative, influenced all rural ceramics of the time. The Habans, a Hutterite Protestant group that faced constant persecution due to their religious beliefs, made their way from Switzerland to Eastern Europe and settled in the vast Carpathian region. Smaller communities of Habans, such as the Anabaptists, immigrated to Slovakia, as well as to northern Hungary. Starting in 1621, Prince Gábor Bethlen settled the Habans in the territory of Transylvania, primarily in Vințu de Jos. Here, the Habans were assured religious freedom provided they remained in this locality. The Habans brought the Italian faience technique, combined with their own floral ornamentation, to Eastern Europe. They practised a very strict method of production: The best potters did the work on the wheel, while the most skilled painters took care of the decoration. Their products were of particular beauty and Haban pottery soon became the benchmark of quality in Europe. Characteristics are the bright colours and the great variety of floral, animal, and abstract motifs. A number of sublime pieces in the exhibition present this meticulous decoration.

Moreover, a selection of shiny blue ceramic dishes represent a post-Haban period attributed to the region of Saschiz. They are made using a special technique in which the vessels are first covered with white clay and finally with a blue tin glaze. The decoration is either incised as a sgraffito or created using a wax reserve technique. The village of Saschiz played an important role in the development of post-Haban pottery, and the first recorded ceramic workshop was established in 1702. From 1766 to 1840, ornamental pottery of the highest quality was produced in the village. The exhibition also

presents a selection of blue and white, brush-painted Saxon ceramics Draas peasant majolica from mid-end 1800. The ornamentation and richness of colour seem timelessly modern today and strikingly reflect the taste and lifestyle of our time, but it is not the material value of the collection that von Bartha was interested in: "The commercial value of the objects has never interested me. It's important for me to document an extinct craft for future generations," explains Miklós von Bartha, who continues passionately to research and collect new Transylvanian artefacts to this day.

Fateful encounter in the Villa Flor

The first encounter between the Swiss gallery owner and the American Milan based designer JJ Martin happened in a small but illustrious breakfast room in the Swiss mountains. A lively exchange and a friendship developed. In 2015, JJ Martin, former editor of Wallpaper* magazine, among others, founded her fashion and home textiles label La DoubleJ in Milan. As the creative director of her label, the former journalist has remained true to her passion for research and sifting through archives. Today, those are the archives of traditional Italian textile, glass, or porcelain producers. Here she gets inspiration for the bright, colourful, and large-format prints that characterise both her fashion and living line. The encounter between von Bartha and JJ Martin inspired a new La DoubleJ collection that referenced the ornamentation and richness of colour in Bartha's collection and was immediately sold out. Using the exhibition space as canvas, JJ Martin will produce an immersive setting that will embed the Transylvanian artefacts and turn it into a dreamlike space presenting an enticing dialogue between past and present. The director of the KBH.G Raphael Suter says: "I quickly realised that we had to reunite Miki von Bartha and JJ Martin for our exhibition. This is a great proof of how much power and influence traditional colours, patterns and motifs have and how much classic folk art has established itself very successfully in the areas of lifestyle and design today. "

25 August - 6 November 2022

TRANSYLVANIA'S HIDDEN TREASURES – *Ceramics & Textiles from the Bartha Collection*

Daily (except Tuesday) 11am to 6pm

Catalogue and admission are free

Further information:

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About Kulturstiftung Basel H. Geiger | KBH.G

The Basel H. Geiger | Cultural Foundation was founded KBH.G 2019 by the philanthropist Sibylle Geiger (1930-2020), who named the foundation after her grandfather, the Swiss pharmacist and entrepreneur Hermann Geiger (1870-1962). The foundation has the aim to provide a new type of forum for art and culture for the city of Basel and its residents and visitors. All activities of the Basel H. Geiger Cultural Foundation aim to add a new topic to the rich cultural offerings of the city of Basel. The foundation plans to carry out two to three artistically independent exhibition projects each year; Admission and the accompanying catalogue are both free of charge.

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About Miklós von Bartha | VON BARTHA

In 1970, Miklós von Bartha and his wife Margareta founded the "Galerie Minimax", later VON BARTHA, which has been managed by Stefan von Bartha since 2008. The gallery has established a contemporary program and represents a range of international artists including Marina Adams, Imi Knoebel, Claudia Wieser, Landon Metz, Barry Flanagan and many more. As one of the oldest international galleries for contemporary art, VON BARTHA promotes young generations of artists while supporting the ever-evolving work of its established artists. VON BARTHA has had its own stand at Art Basel since 1978.

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About JJ Martin | La DoubleJ

La DoubleJ is a multi-tasking Milanese brand that edits the very best of Italy. Founded by American journalist J.J. Martin in 2015, the company has expanded from a shoppable magazine selling just vintage clothing and jewellery, to a full lifestyle label offering new fashion made with archival prints, cool home design and rare vintage. All La DoubleJ's creations—from its content, editorial projects and pop-up shops to its product design and wildly patterned showroom in Milan—are distilled through a lens of pure joy, eye-popping print, and love of all things maximal and dedicated to all the Great Gorgeous Girls who rock it with style.

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