

ART GALLERY OF HAMILTON ANNOUNCES SALE OF PAINTING TO GOVERNMENT OF HUNGARY



Mihály Munkácsy (Hungarian 1844-1900)
Christ Before Pilate 1881
oil on canvas
417 x 636 cm
The Joey and Toby Tanenbaum Collection, 2002
Photo: Roy and Carole Timm of Wavelength

May 12, 2015 – Shelley Falconer, President and CEO of the Art Gallery of Hamilton today announced that the Government of Hungary has purchased the painting *Christ Before Pilate* by Mihály Munkácsy (1844-1900), one of Hungary's most venerated artists, for US\$5.7 million. The sale, which is about to close, is the culmination of a series of talks initiated by representatives of the Hungarian government here in Canada and abroad over the past several years.

The work is one of three paintings in Munkácsy's Passion Trilogy, which is arguably Hungary's most important historical work of art and is of singular importance—artistically and culturally—to the country.

The three paintings in Munkácsy's Passion Trilogy were exhibited at the Déri Múzeum in a purpose-built gallery until July 2014. The Trilogy was visited by tens of thousands each year, and remains an important field trip for Hungarian school children. The Déri Múzeum has also undertaken needed conservation work on the 134-year-old painting.

"Since the Art Gallery of Hamilton was established more than 100 years ago, it has developed one of the finest permanent collections in Canada," said Charles Criminisi, Chair, AGH Board of Directors. "The decision to part with a work from the Gallery's permanent collection, particularly one of the stature of *Christ Before Pilate*, was a difficult one for the board. We believe that *Christ Before Pilate* belongs in the Déri Múzeum where it can be permanently displayed as Munkácsy intended, in the context of the Passion Trilogy."

The massive painting, which measures approximately 417 cm by 636 cm (14 feet by 21 feet) and weighs 500 pounds, was donated to the AGH in 2002 by Joey and Toby Tanenbaum as part of their major gift of 19th-century European art works.

"Toby and I are delighted that the Government of Hungary has purchased *Christ Before Pilate* from the Art Gallery of Hamilton," said Joey Tanenbaum. "This painting is revered as a national treasure and we are very pleased that it will continue to be enjoyed by the people of Hungary."

The AGH followed a generous precedent set by the Tanenbaums by agreeing to loan the work for two extended periods from December 2002 to 2007 and again from July 2009 to July 2014 to the Déri Múzeum in Debrecen, Hungary. The painting was exhibited at the AGH in 2008.



"Museums bring meaning to an object by surrounding it with others of complementary subjects to create a context that is critical for the understanding of a given work," said Shelley Falconer. "The AGH 19th-century collection is rich in realist painting, portraits and narrative salon pictures of a different kind. Without other religious works with which to surround it, *Christ Before Pilate* is difficult to understand and loses much of its impact. At the Déri Múzeum, the painting will once again be presented as part of the trilogy originally devised by the artist. We are delighted that this truly important painting will be presented in context and on permanent exhibition."

The Art Gallery of Hamilton is a member of the Canadian Art Museum Directors' Association (CAMDO). The sale of *Christ Before Pilate* has been completed in strict compliance with the CAMDO Guidelines for De-Accessioning which are part of the organization's Ethics and Professional Practice standards. Prior to the completion of the sale the AGH contacted the members of CAMDO, who represent the major art museums across Canada, to offer the work for sale. No offers were received.

According to these Guidelines, funds received from the de-accession of a work from an art museum permanent collection cannot be applied to operating costs and must be used for acquisitions or for the benefit of the collection. The use of the funds must be approved by the AGH Board of Directors in conjunction with the President and CEO.

“The AGH will continue to follow the ethical practices set out in the CAMDO Guidelines for De-Accessioning,” said Charles Criminisi. “We will apply the funds we received from the sale to acquisitions and the care, conservation and benefit of the AGH permanent collection.

“Everyone needs to understand that we cannot use this money for operations or programming. We still very much need the support of our funders and donors, AGH Members, the greater Hamilton community, and our visitors from far and wide to ensure that the AGH remains the vital creative learning centre that it is today.”

About the Art Gallery of Hamilton

Founded in 1914, the Art Gallery of Hamilton is the oldest and largest public art gallery in southwestern Ontario. Its permanent collection, which is focused on historical Canadian, 19th-century European and Contemporary art, now numbers more than 10,000 works and is recognized as one of the finest in Canada. The AGH is a vital creative hub and centre of lifelong learning that enables people of all ages to enrich their lives by gaining a deeper understanding of art. For more information, visit www.artgalleryofhamilton.com.

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