

Honour and Vanity

100 Years of Decorations of the Republic of Austria 1922–2022

5 May–30 October 2022

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Introduction

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the passing of the Federal Law on the Creation of 'Decorations for Services to the Republic of Austria' in 1922. The Second Republic resumed this tradition and again established the 'Decoration for Services to the Republic of Austria', now with 15 grades and redesigned insignia in the form of Maltese crosses in red-white-red enamel.

On the occasion of these anniversaries, Universalmuseum Joanneum and the Austrian Phaleristics Society are, for the third time, organising a joint exhibition on decorations and awards.

Decorations of the Republic of Austria

100 years ago—on 4 November 1922—the National Council passed the Federal Law on the Creation of 'Decorations for Services to the Republic of Austria'. In terms of the design of the decorations, a conscious decision was made to depart from the orders of chivalry and merit of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in favour of the characteristic crutch cross in red or white enamel.

During the Federal State of Austria (Ständestaat), the decoration, while maintaining its appearance and its now 16 grades, was changed and renamed to the 'Austrian Order of Merit', with its affiliated decorations and medals of merit, by the federal government in 1934.

After Austria's 'Anschluss' to the German Reich in March 1938, the German system of awards was also introduced in the 'Ostmark', and the wearing of merit orders was forbidden.

70 years ago—on 2 April 1952—the National Council followed in the footsteps of 1922 by again establishing a federal decoration and created a 'Decoration for Services to the Republic of Austria' with 15 grades, but redesigned insignia in the form of Maltese crosses in red-white-red enamel.



Decoration for Services to the Republic of Austria (First Republic), Grand Decoration of Honour in Silver (1923-1925 edition)

Cat. no. 19, private collection



Decoration for Services to the Republic of Austria (First Republic), Grand Decoration of Honour in Gold

Cat. no. 15, private collection



Decoration for Services to the Republic of Austria (Second Republic), Grand Decoration of Honour in Gold

Decoration of General Eduard Fally (1929–2006)

Cat. no. 65, private collection

The exhibition features the following decorations:

- Decorations of Honour of 1922 and 1952
- Order of Merit of 1934
- Decoration of Honour and Crosses of Merit for Art and Science of 1934
- Decoration of Honour and Crosses of Honour for Science and Art of 1955
- and the decorations conferred by the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defence

In addition, a high-quality selection of decorations of the federal provinces are presented, with a specific focus on those of Styria.



Opening of the State Opera on 15 November 1955: Federal President of Austria Theodor Körner with Grand Star (accepted on 9 November 1953), Federal Chancellor Julius Raab and Federal Minister Karl Waldbrunner with the Grand Decoration of Honour in Gold with Sash for Services to the Republic of Austria (awarded on 31 March 1955 and 7 February 1955)

Photo: Austrian National Library (ÖNB), Vienna, 00186360

The classes of orders and decorations and the manner of wearing them

Orders and decorations are mostly awarded in several classes (grades), adapted to the services to be honoured, but also to the protocol ranking of the recipient of the award. The decorations of the various classes can differ in terms of appearance, size, material or manner of wearing.

The international nomenclature recognises five classes of orders. Each of these has a separate designation and manner of wearing:

Grand Cross

The insignia is worn on a sash, i.e., on a broad shoulder ribbon (most often from the right shoulder to the left hip); the corresponding star is usually worn on the left breast. The sashes for women are somewhat narrower than those for men. Grand crosses are presented to religious dignitaries and robe bearers (such as cardinals, archbishops or rectors) on a neck ribbon in the same width as the sash.

Grand Officer or Grand Commander

The insignia is worn by men on a neck ribbon which is considerably narrower than the sash, by women on a large bow; the corresponding star, usually somewhat smaller, is also mostly worn on the left breast.

Commander

The insignia is worn by men with a neck ribbon, by ladies with a bow.



Grand cross: Grand Star of the Decoration for Services to the Republic of Austria

Cat. no. 6, private collection

Officer

The insignia is usually worn on the left breast. Often the only difference between it and the Knight decoration is the rosette placed on the ribbon, which in turn is narrower than the neck ribbon. In Austria, the insignia are chest pinback crosses which are worn on a pin without a ribbon.

Knight or Lady

The insignia is usually worn on a ribbon on the left breast. In Austria, these ribbons are folded into a triangle for men and sewed into a bow for women.

These classes are followed in ranking by crosses of merit and afterwards by medals of merit, both of which often in the classes of gold, silver, and bronze.

In Austria, grand crosses are only conferred by the Republic. The highest decorations of the federal provinces are grand officers. Municipalities award medals or badges of honour with the municipal coat of arms; most of these are not intended to be worn, although there are a few decorations that are worn on a ribbon on the breast.

The Province of Styria's decorations of honour fit exactly into this hierarchy:

Grand Officer:

Grand Decoration of Honour in Gold with Star

Commander:

Grand Decoration of Honour in Gold

Officer:

Grand Decoration of Honour

Knight, Lady:

Decoration for Science, Research and Art and Decoration of Honour in Gold

Special Medal of Merit:

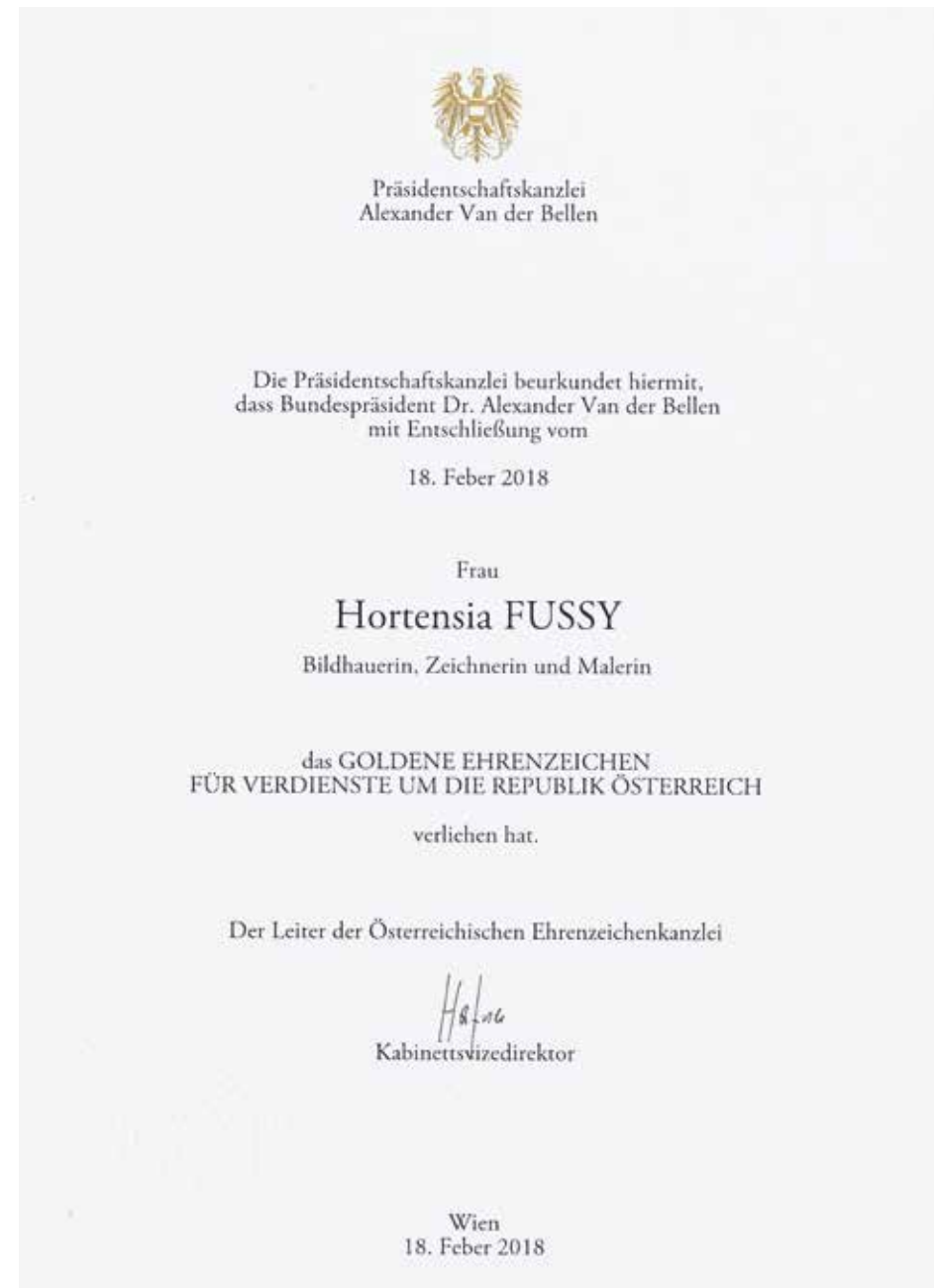
Lifesaving Medal on the White-Green Ribbon

Awarding and presentation of decorations

According to the federal law of 2 April 1952 on the creation of decorations for services to the Republic of Austria, such services are recognised by the awarding of decorations. The statute passed in 1953 on decorations for services to the Republic of Austria states more precisely that the decoration is awarded to persons who have made outstanding community achievements and performed great services for the Republic of Austria. In practice, the word "and" in the regulation is understood as "or".

Every person can submit suggestions for the awarding of a decoration to the competent federal ministry —except for yourself or for a close family member. The minister is then responsible for evaluating the services to be recognised from the different political, economic, cultural, or humanitarian areas. Following the express consent of the honouree, a request for decoration is made and, after a review, the decoration is conferred by the President of Austria with a certificate.

The decorations of honour, the crosses of merit, and the medals of merit of the Republic of Austria are awarded by resolution of the President of Austria based on the recommendation of the federal government. The presentation of the decorations and the certificates is performed by the President of Austria as part of a ceremony in rare cases; most of the time, he delegates this action to the provincial governors or the members of the federal government, who in turn often pass it on to top officials of the respective ministries.



Certificate of awarding of the Decoration of Honour in Gold for Services to the Republic of Austria to the sculptress Hortensia, Vienna, 18 February 2018



Decoration of Honour in Gold for Services to the Republic of Austria of the sculptress Hortensia

Cat. no. 69, private collection

The decorations of Styria are awarded by resolution of the provincial government on the recommendation of the provincial governor, who then also presents them in ceremonious form, mostly in the auditorium of the Old University or in the White Hall of the Burg of Graz. That the provincial deputy governor also takes part in the ceremony is a "Styrian tradition" that has been practiced for years.

All the decorations of the province are issued with a certificate and, like the decorations of the Republic, thereby pass into the possession of the honouree, but may only be worn by them and cannot be sold. The heirs are not obliged to return the decoration.



Provincial governor Hermann Schützenhöfer and the sculptress Hortensia at the awarding of the Decoration of Honour in the auditorium of the Old University of Graz on 26 November 2019, Photo: steiermark.at/Fischer

The history of provincial awards

The right to create and confer awards—including all orders, honour and merit decorations, jubilee, commemorative, or merit medals/crosses, etc.—rested in the hands of the ruler in the states governed by absolute rule. It also remained the sole authority of the emperor after Austria received its constitution in 1867.

On the very date of its 'birth', 12 November 1918, the Republic of German-Austria established that all rights entitled to the emperor by the constitution would for the time being pass over to the German-Austrian State Council. This means that they were declared 'federal matters'.

The provinces accepted this view during the interwar period and did not create any of their own general decorations for services. This would change after the Second World War.

Upon the urging of the fire brigade associations, the Austrian parliament passed in 1949 the law on the creation of a decoration for diligent and beneficial activity in the fire and rescue services (medals for 25 and 40 years of membership in an emergency service).

The provincial government of Vorarlberg thereupon submitted a motion to the constitutional court to have this law repealed because the federal government had thus impinged upon the authority of the provinces.



Grand Decoration of Honour of the Province of Burgenland

Cat. no. 108, Austrian Phaleristics Society



Decoration of Honour of the Province of Carinthia

Cat. no. 115, Austrian Phaleristics Society



Commander's Cross in Silver for Services to the Province of Lower Austria
Cat. no. 117, Austrian Phaleristics Society

The supreme court considered the matter and decided on 12 December 1950 that

'The creation of decorations for services to the Republic of Austria and for services in specific fields that are a federal matter in terms of their execution fall under federal legislation.

The creation of decorations for services to an individual province and for services in specific fields that are a provincial matter in terms of their execution fall under provincial legislation.'

This legal foundation has served ever since as the basis for the development of the diverse range of provincial awards.



Grand Cross of the Decoration of Honour of the Province of Salzburg (neck badge)
Cat. no. 127, Austrian Phaleristics Society



Grand Decoration of Honour in Gold with Star for Services to the Province of Vienna, insignia (neck badge)
Cat. no. 173, Austrian Phaleristics Society



Decoration of Merit in Gold of the Province of Upper Austria
Cat. no. 124, Austrian Phaleristics Society



Decoration of Honour of the Province of Tyrol
Cat. no. 161, Austrian Phaleristics Society



Grand Order of Montfort of the Province of Vorarlberg
Cat. no. 171, Austrian Phaleristics Society



Ring of Honour with the number 25 of the Province of Styria

Ring of Honour of Ökonomierat (Economic Councillor) Josef Wallner (1902–1974), Third President of the National Council
Cat. no. 132, private collection



Grand Decoration of Honour in Gold of the Province of Styria

Cat. no. 134, Universalmuseum Joanneum, Coin Cabinet

Styrian awards

In 1950, the constitutional court of the Republic of Austria awarded the Austrian federal provinces the authority to establish their own awards. Since then, 14 wearable decorations with 34 classes have been created in Styria, the diversity of which is reflected in this exhibition.

Of these awards:

- eleven have been created by provincial law, two by a resolution of the federal government (1960 Commemorative Medal and Lifesaving Medal), and one by a resolution of the provincial parliament (Provincial Parliament Medal of Honour)
- four have changed in appearance (Fire Brigade/Rescue Medal, Fire Brigade/Rescue Cross of Merit, and rings of honour)
- two have added classes (Fire Brigade/Rescue Medal and Fire Brigade/Rescue Cross of Merit)
- two have been created only for one occasion (1958 Flood Medal and 1960 Commemorative Medal)
- for one, another reason for which it could be awarded was established in 1966 (1960 Commemorative Medal).

General provincial awards

1959: Province of Styria Ring of Honour

1971: Province of Styria Decoration of Honour with five classes

- Grand Decoration of Honour in Gold with Star
- Grand Decoration of Honour in Gold
- Grand Decoration of Honour
- Decoration for Science, Research and Art (since 2017)
- Decoration of Honour in Gold

1997: Lifesaving Medal on a White-Green Ribbon

2017: Provincial Parliament of Styria Medal of Honour

Awards for fire and rescue service as well as civil protection

1952: Decoration 'Medal for 25 Years and 40 Years of Diligent and Beneficial Activity in the Fire and Rescue Services'; since 2006, also for 50, 60, 70, 75 and 80 years of activity or membership

1952: Cross of Merit for special achievements or outstanding services in the fire and rescue services; since 1978, in gold, silver, and bronze

2009: Styrian Disaster Relief Medal in Gold, Silver, and Bronze

Wearable sports awards

2015: Provincial Sports Ring of Honour (incl. predecessors)

2010: Sports Achievement Medal in Gold, Silver, and Bronze

2010: Sports Decoration of Merit in Gold (incl. predecessor), Silver, and Bronze

Awards that can no longer be conferred

1958: Medal for Services during the Flooding in 1958

1960: 1960 Styrian Commemorative Medal

1965: Flood Medal in Gold, Silver, and Bronze (until 2010)



Grand Decoration of Honour in Gold of the Province of Styria with Star in matching case

Decoration of retired provincial deputy governor Prof. Kurt Jungwirth
Cat. no. 133, private collection



Lifesaving Medal on the White-Green Ribbon

Cat. no. 139, Universalmuseum Joanneum, Coin Cabinet



Decoration for Services to the Republic of Austria (Second Republic), Grand Star, breast badge
Cat. no. 60, private collection

This booklet is published on the occasion of the exhibition

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1922-2022

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