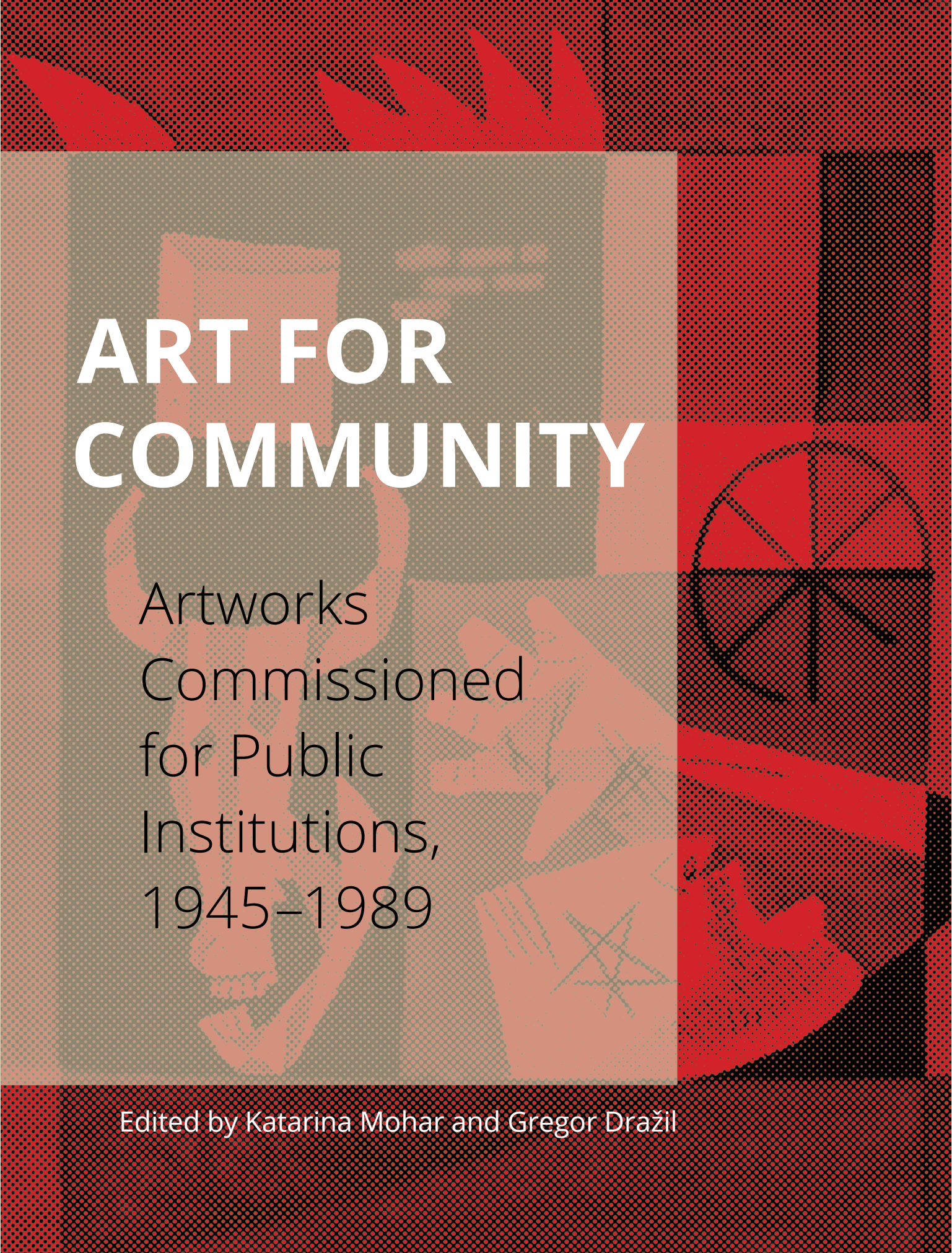




# ART FOR COMMUNITY

Artworks  
Commissioned  
for Public  
Institutions,  
1945–1989

Edited by Katarina Mohar and Gregor Dražil





Založba ZRC







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Ljubljana, 2026

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# INTRODUCTION

A substantial body of postwar art created for institutional environments remains hidden in plain sight: in schools, hospitals, municipal offices, factories, hotels, shops, and other spaces of everyday life. Some works remain intact, others survive in altered interiors or as partial material remains, and still others are known only through scattered archival records, photographs, and uncertain memories. Many have been covered, relocated, destroyed or forgotten, even though they formed an important part of postwar public space and visual culture. The chapters collected here examine this fragile artistic production from an international perspective, exploring specific artworks and artists as well as the broader political, institutional, social, and artistic contexts in which they were commissioned and created.

This volume is a result of the research project *Art for Community: Registration and Assessment of Artworks Commissioned for Public Institutions in Slovenia, 1945–1991* (J6-50206), funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency. Conducted between 2023 and 2026 by researchers at the France Stele Institute of Art History at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the project identifies, documents, analyses, and assesses this dispersed corpus, makes its records accessible through an open-access digital registry, and contributes to its preservation. It also seeks to position these works within Slovenian, Yugoslav, and international art history, reassess artists' oeuvres, investigate cultural policies and commissioning procedures, and involve citizens in identifying undocumented works. At the time of writing, the project had identified approximately four hundred and fifty works, of which three hundred were already available through an online registry (<https://www.umetnostzaskupnost.si/>). The resulting corpus includes many works previously absent from scholarship and allows comparisons across periods, regions, media, institutional settings, and states of preservation. The conference *Art for Community: Artworks Commissioned for Public Institutions, 1945–1989*, held in Ljubljana on 26–27 September 2024, extended this inquiry beyond Slovenia. The revised contributions gathered here extend it to Sweden, West Berlin, Romania, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Italy, and Portugal.

The project and volume use different endpoints. For the Slovenian project, 1991 marks independence and the end of the Yugoslav institutional framework in which its corpus was formed. The volume retains the conference's 1945–1989 frame as a comparative Cold War horizon, whereas some contributions begin earlier and several follow the works' later histories. The volume focuses primarily on artworks commissioned for public institutions. Several chapters extend this scope to other institutional



environments or consider acquisitions and other forms of placement when these formed part of comparable strategies. The public character of these settings depended on access as much as on ownership. Among the works discussed are those integrated into architecture and movable objects conceived for specific interiors, with unrealised commissions also considered. In the title, “community” refers to the groups that institutions claimed to represent or serve, although actual audiences and patterns of access changed over time.

## Main themes

The volume pays particular attention to the institutional conditions under which artworks were commissioned and produced. Funding arrangements influenced how commissions were organised, and commissioners and professional bodies shaped the selection of artists and the development of individual works. Artists participated actively in these processes: they negotiated the terms of projects and sought to influence cultural policy through professional associations.

Several contributions consider how the ideal of the synthesis of the arts was realised through the relationship between art and architecture. The form this took varied across political and institutional settings: hierarchies within institutions shaped collaboration between artists and architects, and individual commissions provided a scope for testing new forms of artistic expression. A closer examination of production also brings into view those that translated artistic designs into material form; their contribution was often obscured by attribution to the artist that conceived the work. In some cases, this division of labour was explicitly gendered.

The relationship between artworks and their settings continued to shape their fate and meaning after installation. Alterations to buildings could conceal or damage works, and relocation sometimes ensured their survival at the cost of the original context. Preservation therefore involves attention to physical condition as well as interpretation. Inventories provide a basis for assessing dispersed material, and digital methods help document change and visualise lost spatial relationships.

## Contributions

The chapters approach these questions from various geographical and institutional perspectives, often moving across the themes outlined above.

Oscar Svanelid and Marta Edling begin with the Swedish system of state-supported public art. Their chapter examines the tension between

the governmental infrastructures and the political agency of art in state environments, testing claims of cultural democracy against the uneven distribution of commissions. Barbara Vodopivec broadens the comparison by placing established European percent-for-art schemes alongside professional advocacy and non-binding initiatives in socialist Yugoslavia, with particular attention to Slovenia. Annette Tietenberg then examines a single unrealised project, reconstructing the competition that selected Ed and Nancy Kienholz's proposal for *Ernst-Reuter-Platz* (Ernst Reuter Square) as well as the administrative and political circumstances in which it failed to obtain a building permit.

Burcu Selcen Coşkun examines related questions of patronage and architectural setting in postwar Istanbul. Drawing on projects involving public or private commissioners, she examines the dialogue between artworks and buildings, and then addresses the conservation problems caused by alterations to their architectural settings or their demolition. Gregor Dražil turns to mural production by Ivan Seljak Čopič during the 1950s and early 1960s. His artist-centred account traces Seljak Čopič's movement away from realism toward an increasingly geometric, semi-abstract idiom and situates this development within broader changes in Slovenian art of the period.

Irina Cărbăș expands the comparison to socialist Romania through Jules Perahim's murals. She examines how the ideas of synthesis and monumentality operated within cultural policy and the changing built environment. Professional networks shaped access to commissions, and later material losses were accompanied by the erasure of Perahim's role from historical narratives. Andreja Rakovec returns to the Slovenian National Assembly, using newly discovered drafts and archival material to reconstruct the development of Ive Šubic's mosaic. Its repeated revisions show how the final design emerged through negotiation between the artist and those overseeing the commission.

Nadja Zgonik shifts the focus to Marij Pregelj's tapestries for the Koteks Tobus boutique. She relates their design for Oton Jugovec's interior and their production at Atelier 61 to the wider revival of tapestry as a prestigious modern medium and a movable form of public art. Their later dispersal and recovery reveal the particular vulnerability of movable works. Nataša Ivanović develops these questions through Zoran Mušič's embroidery for the first-class lounge of the Italian ocean liner *Augustus*. She places the embroidery within the liner's coordinated interior design and its role in representing Italian culture abroad, drawing attention to the contribution of Mušič's wife and mother-in-law to its production. The

chapter also traces the work after its removal from the ship, including its restoration and later museum display.

Patricia Počanić moves from an individual textile commission to the broader artistic furnishing of Yugoslav hotel interiors in Istria and the Kvarner Gulf. Her case studies show how socially owned hotel companies combined direct commissions with acquisitions, guided by tourism policy and a desire to present Yugoslavia as a modern country to foreign visitors. Collaboration between artists and architects was central to the resulting interiors. Blaž Šeme subsequently turns from individual histories to a systematic inventory of socialist-era mosaics in Slovenia. Condition assessment and risk analysis show how building type and heritage status affect the preservation and vulnerability of these works.

Begoña Farré Torras concludes with Dordio Gomes's mural *The Myth of Prometheus*, painted for the Porto Higher School of Fine Arts during the *Estado Novo* period. She traces its changing reception and examines the debate over whether a political intervention added in 1974 should be removed or preserved. The chapter also considers how photogrammetry and digital visualisation can document the work and inform decisions about its future.

This volume contributes to the transnational study of art commissioned for public institutions, a field that remains unevenly researched across national contexts. The chapters broaden accounts of postwar public art by drawing attention to its presence in everyday institutional environments. They also consider movable works and different forms of collaboration in the production of artworks. Together, they show how institutions used art to shape their environments and how later changes in use or ownership affected the works' meanings and prospects for preservation.



## UVOD

Številne likovne umetnine, ki so bile po drugi svetovni vojni ustvarjene za institucionalna okolja, so danes spregledane, čeprav jih srečujemo skorajda na vsakem koraku. Nahajajo se v šolah, bolnišnicah, občinskih uradih, tovarnah, hotelih, trgovinah in drugih prostorih, ki jih obiskujemo vsak dan. Nekatere so še danes v izvornem stanju, druge so ohranjene v močno spremenjenih interierjih ali pa so desetletja od svojega nastanka preživele le delno, v obliki fragmentov. O nekaterih pričajo le še arhivski zapisi, fotografije ali megleni spomini. Čeprav so bile pomemben gradnik javnih prostorov in vizualne kulture, so bile številne zakrite, predstavljene, uničene ali pozabljene. V poglavjih v monografiji je ta ranljiva skupina umetnostne dediščine obravnavana z mednarodne perspektive, posamezna dela in umetniki pa so umeščeni v širše politične, institucionalne, družbene in umetnostne kontekste, v katerih so bile te umetnine naročene in ustvarjene.

Monografija je rezultat raziskovalnega projekta Umetnost za skupnost: Evidentiranje in vrednotenje umetniških del, naročenih za javne ustanove v Sloveniji, 1945–1991 (J6-50206), ki ga je financirala Javna agencija za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijsko dejavnost Republike Slovenije. V okviru projekta, ki smo ga med letoma 2023 in 2026 izvajali raziskovalci Umetnostnozgodovinskega inštituta Franceta Steleta ZRC SAZU, smo umetnine evidentirali, dokumentirali, analizirali in vrednotili, pridobljene podatke pa objavljali v odprto dostopni digitalni evidenci in s tem skušali prispevati k ohranjanju te dediščine. Dela smo umestili v slovensko, pa tudi širšo jugoslovansko umetnostno zgodovino in v mednarodni kontekst, na novo smo ovrednotili opuse nekaterih umetnikov in proučevali kulturno politiko, vključno s postopki naročanja. Do časa pisanja uvodnika nam je s pomočjo širše javnosti uspelo evidentirati približno 450 del, podatki o 300 delih pa so bili že dostopni v digitalni evidenci (<https://umetnostzaskupnost.si/>). Nastali korpus vključuje številna dela, ki v dosedanjih raziskavah niso bila obravnavana, omogoča primerjave med obdobji in mediji, pa tudi med institucionalnimi okolji in stanji ohranjenosti. S konferenco Umetnost za skupnost: Umetnostna naročila za javne ustanove, 1945–1989, ki je potekala 26. in 27. septembra 2024 v Ljubljani, smo raziskave razširili tudi onkraj slovenskega prostora. Na podlagi konferenčnih prispevkov so nastala poglavja pričujoče monografije, ki obravnavajo umetnine, naročene za javne ustanove na Švedskem, v Zahodnem Berlinu, Romuniji, Jugoslaviji, Turčiji, Italiji in na Portugalskem.

V projektu smo se osredotočili na jugoslovanski okvir med koncem druge svetovne vojne in osamosvojitvijo Slovenije leta 1991, v monografiji – ki je tako kot konferenca zastavljena bolj mednarodno – pa zlasti na primerjalni

okvir znotraj blokovske delitve sveta med hladno vojno do leta 1989. Kljub temu avtorji v nekaterih poglavjih obravnavajo tudi čas pred letom 1945 ali pa sledijo usodi umetnin v času po padcu Berlinskega zidu. Monografija se osredotoča predvsem na umetnine, naročene za javne ustanove. Posamezna poglavja ta obseg razširjajo na druga institucionalna okolja ali obravnavajo pridobitve in druge oblike umeščanja, kadar so bile te del primerljivih strategij. Javni značaj teh okolij je bil od dostopnosti odvisen prav toliko kot od lastništva. Med obravnavanimi deli so tista, ki so del arhitekture, premične umetnine, zasnovane za določene interierje, upoštevana pa so tudi neuresničena naročila. V naslovu monografije se »skupnost« nanaša na skupine, ki naj bi jih ustanove predstavljale ali jim služile, dejansko občinstvo in načini dostopa pa so se skozi čas spreminjali.

## Osrednje teme

V monografiji je posebna pozornost namenjena institucionalnim pogojem, v katerih so umetnine naročali in ustvarjali. Načini financiranja so vplivali na organizacijo naročil, naročniki in strokovna telesa pa so usmerjali izbor umetnikov ter razvoj posameznih del. Umetniki so te procese dejavno sooblikovali: pogajali so se o projektnih pogojih in prek strokovnih združenj skušali vplivati na kulturno politiko.

V več prispevkih v pričujoči monografiji se v povezavi z razmerjem med umetnostjo in arhitekturo pojavlja vprašanje uresničevanja ideala sinteze umetnosti. Način njenega uresničevanja se je razlikoval glede na politično in institucionalno okolje; hierarhije v ustanovah so vplivale na sodelovanje umetnikov in arhitektov, posamezna naročila pa so odpirala prostor za preizkušanje novih načinov likovnega izražanja. Podrobnejša analiza procesov nastajanja umetnin razkriva tudi vlogo posameznikov, ki so umetniške zasnove prenesli v material. Njihov prispevek je pogosto ostal spregledan, saj je bilo avtorstvo pripisano umetniku, ki je delo zasnoval. V nekaterih primerih je bila delitev dela izrazito spolno zaznamovana.

Razmerje med umetninami in njihovim okoljem je tudi po umestitvi v prostor določalo njihovo usodo in pomen. Spremembe stavb so dela lahko zakrile ali poškodovale, premestitev pa je včasih omogočila njihovo ohranitev za ceno izgube prvotnega konteksta. Ohranjanje zato vključuje skrb za fizično stanje dela in premislek o njegovi interpretaciji. Pri tem je inventarizacija podlaga za ocenjevanje razpršenega gradiva, digitalne metode pa pomagajo dokumentirati spremembe in vizualizirati izgubljena prostorska razmerja.

V poglavjih monografije so ta vprašanja obravnavana z različnih geografskih in institucionalnih vidikov, obenem pa pogosto prehajajo med zgoraj predstavljenimi temami.

Oscar Svanelid in Marta Edling najprej predstavita švedski sistem javno financirane umetnosti. V poglavju obravnavata napetost med infrastrukturo vladanja in politično avtonomijo umetnosti v prostorih državnih ustanov, trditve o kulturni demokraciji pa preverjata ob neenakomerni razporeditvi naročil. Barbara Vodopivec uveljavljene evropske sheme odstotka za umetnost primerja z nezavezujočimi pobudami v socialistični Jugoslaviji, ki so jih spodbujala strokovna združenja, posebno pozornost pa nameni Sloveniji. Annette Tietenberg obravnava neuresničen projekt: v svojem poglavju rekonstruira natečaj, na katerem je bil izbran predlog Eda in Nancy Kienholz za Trg Ernsta Reuterja (*Ernst-Reuter-Platz*) v Zahodnem Berlinu, ter upravne in politične okoliščine, v katerih zanj ni bilo mogoče pridobiti gradbenega dovoljenja.

Burcu Selcen Coşkun na primeru povojnega Istanbula obravnava sorodna vprašanja naročništva in arhitekturnega okolja. Na primerih javnih in zasebnih naročil proučuje dialog med likovnimi umetninami in stavbami, nato pa se posveti konservatorskim težavam, ki so jih povzročile spremembe ali rušenje arhitekturnega okolja. Gregor Dražil se posveti stenskemu slikarstvu Ivana Seljaka Čopiča v petdesetih in zgodnjih šestdesetih letih 20. stoletja. Na umetnika osredotočena obravnava sledi njegovemu odmiku od realizma k vse bolj geometrični, delno abstraktni likovni govorici ter ta razvoj umešča v širše spremembe v slovenski umetnosti tega obdobja.

Irina Cărăbaş primerjavo razširi na socialistično Romunijo z obravnavo stenskih poslikav Julesa Perahima. Proučuje, kako sta ideji sinteze in monumentalnosti delovali v okviru kulturne politike in spreminjajočega se grajenega okolja. Strokovne mreže so določale dostop do naročil, poznejše materialne izgube pa je spremljalo brisanje Perahimove vloge iz zgodovinskih pripovedi. Andreja Rakovec se vrne k slovenskemu parlamentu in z novoodkritimi osnutki ter arhivskim gradivom rekonstruira razvoj mozaika Iveta Šubica. Večkratne spremembe kažejo, kako se je končna zasnova oblikovala v pogajanjih med umetnikom in tistimi, ki so odločali o naročilu.

Nadja Zgonik posveti pozornost tapiserijam Marija Preglja za butik Koteks Tobus. Njihovo zasnovo za interier Otona Jugovca in izdelavo v Ateljeju 61 poveže s širšim prepovedom tapiserije kot prestižnega sodobnega medija ter premične oblike javne umetnosti. Njihova poznejša razpršitev

in ponovno odkritje razkrivata posebno ranljivost premičnih del. Nataša Ivanović ta vprašanja nadalje razvije ob vezenini Zorana Mušiča za salon prvega razreda na italijanski čezoceanki *Augustus*. Delo umesti v celostno zasnovo ladijske notranjščine in predstavi njegovo vlogo pri zastopanju italijanske kulture v tujini, obenem pa opozori na prispevek Mušičeve žene in tašče k njegovi izvedbi. V poglavju sledi tudi usodi umetnine po odstranitvi z ladje ter obravnava njeno restavriranje in poznejšo muzejsko predstavitev.

Patricia Počanić predstavi umetniško opremo jugoslovanskih hotelskih interierjev v Istri in Kvarnerju. Njene študije primerov kažejo, kako so hotelska podjetja v družbeni lasti neposredna naročila dopolnjevala z nakupi obstoječih del. Na te odločitve sta vplivali turistična politika in želja, da bi Jugoslavijo tujim obiskovalcem predstavili kot sodobno državo. Pri opremi interierjev je imelo pomembno vlogo sodelovanje umetnikov in arhitektov. Blaž Šeme nato preide od posameznih zgodovin k sistematičnemu popisu mozaikov socialističnega obdobja v Sloveniji. Ocena stanja in analiza tveganj pokažeta, kako vrsta stavbe ter status dediščine vplivata na ohranjenost in ogroženost teh del.

Begoña Farré Torras monografijo sklene z delom Dordia Gomesa *Mit o Prometeju*, naslikanim za Visoko šolo za likovne umetnosti v Portu v času *Estado Novo*. Sledi spreminjajoči se recepciji dela in obravnava razpravo o tem, ali naj se politični poseg iz leta 1974 odstrani ali ohrani. V poglavju predstavi tudi možnosti uporabe fotogrametrije in digitalne vizualizacije pri dokumentiranju dela ter odločanju o njegovi prihodnosti.

Monografija prispeva k transnacionalnemu proučevanju umetnosti, naročene za javne ustanove, saj je to področje v različnih nacionalnih okoljih še vedno neenakomerno raziskano. Prispevki širijo pogled na povojno javno umetnost in opozarjajo na njeno prisotnost v vsakdanjih institucionalnih okoljih. Pozornost namenjajo tudi premičnim delom ter različnim oblikam sodelovanja pri nastajanju umetnin. Skupaj kažejo, kako so ustanove z likovno umetnostjo oblikovale svoja okolja ter kako so poznejše spremembe namembnosti ali lastništva vplivale na pomen umetnin in možnosti za njihovo ohranitev.









# THE GOVERNMENT OF ART: DEMOCRACY AND STATE PUBLIC ART IN SWEDEN 1937–2027

Oscar Svanelid  
Marta Edling  
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University

What can public art do for democracy? Should it be understood primarily as an instrument, as a means to an end, deployed by the state to strengthen the social contract, or rather as an autonomous practice that opens spaces for agonism, dissent, and alternative imaginaries? Swedish cultural policy researchers and art historians have argued that art plays a vital role in the development of the welfare state due to its inherent creative freedom, which, they suggest, enables citizens to envision the diversity and openness needed for an egalitarian society. Some go further, claiming that art can stimulate the imagination in ways that encourage the public to resist oppression and counter authoritarian tendencies.<sup>1</sup>

Since 1937, the Swedish state has used a “1% funding model” for public art commissioned for state facilities. Although this has functioned as a recommendation rather than a binding financial commitment, the intention has been to provide public art while safeguarding artistic freedom through the “arm’s-length principle.” This principle is meant to ensure that artists can create without political interference.<sup>2</sup> The two thousand artworks commissioned for the state between 1937 and 2025 have played a significant role in the creation of modern and contemporary public art in Sweden. In this chapter, we outline the research design for our project *The Government of Art: Democracy and State Public Art in Sweden 1937–2027*, which aims to analyse the function of these artworks using a novel multidimensional approach.<sup>3</sup> We will also present findings from Oscar Svanelid’s postdoctoral research project *Public Art in Closed Spaces*, highlighting the fact that the artworks have been located in closed institutions, such as prisons and nuclear power plants, as well as in more open spaces, such as universities and railway stations. Together, our preliminary findings point to the critical insight that state facilities have been designed not only as spaces for governance and public administration but also as cultural arenas where site-specific art is presented to the general public as well as civil servants, politicians, students, soldiers, and prisoners, etc.

However, it is obvious that the “arm’s-length principle” is not without contradiction. Institutions often influence artistic outcomes by making

aesthetic judgements about which artists and projects receive public funding.<sup>4</sup> Our project will set out from the premise that the history of state support for public art has complicated, and in many ways contradicted, the idea that art in Sweden is structurally independent of political governance. This tension is evident not only in the aesthetic discrimination determining which artists receive funding, a process that shifts in response to prevailing aesthetic norms and preferences, but also in the selection of environments for commissioned public artworks. Together, these mechanisms reveal how state structures influence the conditions of artistic production, despite claims of preserving its autonomy.

On the other hand, artworks should not be viewed as independent entities but as agentic subjects that, through their embedded placement in state environments, perform governance tasks. This notion of the agency of state-commissioned art draws on the post-Foucauldian philosopher Thomas Lemke's understanding of "environmentality".<sup>5</sup> We propose that this perspective offers an approach to analysing the political agency of publicly funded art and its relationship to the governance and democratic responsibilities of the state as *operating within*, rather than standing free from or in opposition to, state governance.

Our project thus asserts the value of reinstating the state as a key concept for discussing public art and its relationship to governance. This position stems from our historical and geographical focus, which traces the integration of art within the Swedish welfare society, characterised during the postwar period by "a continuous expansion of state-produced welfare services",<sup>6</sup> as well as the subsequent dismantling of the welfare state through neoliberal reforms in recent decades. In the project, we primarily define the state as a complex infrastructure of state-administered material and physical environments, while simultaneously acknowledging, as state theorist Bob Jessop notes, that "the precise boundaries between the state and/or political system and other institutional orders and systems are generally in doubt and change over time."<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, we understand the state not only as a set of "social relations" but also an aesthetic order whose appearance and legitimacy are reproduced, in part, through the state-commissioned artworks we examine.<sup>8</sup> This is not to suggest that the state, or the art produced under its auspices, constitutes a monolithic entity. On the contrary, we are interested in how these artworks renegotiate and transform the boundaries and functions of the Swedish state within specific material, temporal, and institutional settings.

“Environmentality” is defined by Thomas Lemke as a set of governance policies, strategies, and techniques “that seek to steer and manage performances and circulations by acting on and controlling the heterogeneities and differences that make up a milieu.”<sup>9</sup> This theoretical frame thus describes a mode of governance that extends beyond, yet also overlaps with, the disciplinary society’s technologies for normalising and standardising behaviour, shifting instead towards a stronger emphasis on how governance shapes material conditions in ways that optimise systemic functioning.<sup>10</sup> While Lemke analyses environmental technologies of power primarily through examples drawn from urban planning and “vital systems security”, we propose that environmentality is equally useful for examining welfare state initiatives for commissioning art to engage with, transform, and recalibrate the material and physical conditions of state spaces where people reside, visit, and work.

We also argue that this theoretical framework is advantageous because it transcends the idea of artworks as unique objects, while also challenging the idealised view of art as an “unbound force with freedom of speech as its ground,” as a recent Swedish report on artistic freedom phrases it.<sup>11</sup> As artworks in government buildings must adapt to the expectations and regulations of each site, which, of course, vary significantly between, for example, prisons and universities, they are neither free nor “unbound”. This, however, does not mean that the works analysed in this project are to be viewed as passive and inert. On the contrary, our project set out to demonstrate that artworks may possess the capacity, if not necessarily the effect, to generate dissensus and challenge power structures within state environments. This theoretical perspective aligns with philosopher Juliane Rebentisch’s argument that the “aestheticization of politics” should not always be seen as a populist distortion or spectacularisation of the political sphere, as Walter Benjamin famously suggested, but can also serve as a medium for cultivating a critical sensibility within democratic societies.<sup>12</sup>

Our project aims to develop a digital methodological approach for analysing art in government buildings that differs from the case studies of unique works, projects, and singular artists that have dominated the research field of public art both internationally and in the Nordic countries.<sup>13</sup> This approach addresses an observation raised in the online lecture series for the Artl@s 2023-2024 Conversation Series in Digital Art History regarding the urgent need for more productive and sustained collaborations between traditional and digital art history.<sup>14</sup> However, thus far, these collaborations have tended to perpetuate outdated theories



and the traditional art historical canon.<sup>15</sup> Our project will suggest a way out of this dilemma by applying a quali-quantitative analysis<sup>16</sup> to empirical material not incorporated into the art historical canon, starting from a research question that does not rely on any implicit assumptions about the quality of individual artworks or artists. Our digital analysis will enable us to “think relationally” and record all kinds of features, including those that appear generic.<sup>17</sup> This will potentially reveal features that are structurally determinant as well as those that are distinctive or singular within the dataset.

We set out to analyse a dataset comprising two thousand permanent works commissioned for state environments over the past ninety years. It provides searchable metadata on the artwork’s title, year of production, geographic region, governmental authority, medium, size, and material. This allows us to map the geographic distribution of state-commissioned artworks across Sweden. We will also analyse the distribution of art among policy sectors to determine if certain social groups have been favoured while others have been marginalised as recipients of state resources for public art commissions. The metadata also offer numerous opportunities for relational analysis between categories. This can yield significant results, for example, regarding either the concentrations of or the absence of a medium, such as textile art or sculpture, within specific institutions or during particular periods.

Our project will also analyse photographs of the two thousand state-commissioned artworks in the database and code their visual data into straightforward classifications. These include, for example, whether humans, animals, or other living creatures are present in the image or object, and whether it features representations of nature or organic materials. We will also consider whether the work is abstract or figurative and if it explicitly relates to a topic associated with the commission site. Lastly, our visual analysis will progress along a diachronic axis, focusing on how the interactions between artworks and state environments have evolved over time. This methodological step will also include identification of data clusters across the extended time period of 1937–2025. For example, this could involve grouping works that share similar traits, which may reveal how the role of art changes in response to socio-political and cultural policy shifts. A key example is how the gradual erosion of the Swedish welfare state in favour of neoliberal governance starting in the 1980s has affected the role of state-commissioned public art. Within this final step, we will conduct studies on specific environments to closely examine the viewing situations of the artworks and how these are altered

by architectural or functional modifications of buildings. We will also consider the reception of artworks in the media or within the institution, and discuss how our understanding of their critical agency shifts over time in response to broader socio-political transformations.

Our preliminary findings demonstrate the potential of our multidimensional analysis to produce interesting results. We have already identified a wide geographical distribution of state-commissioned permanent art, addressing individuals and groups ranging from the Prime Minister and government officials to workers at nuclear power plants, employees at the state-owned train company's wheel workshop, and teenagers in juvenile detention centres. This breadth, we argue, underscores the relevance of our theoretical approach. The Swedish state has cultivated an artistic domain that embodies a principle of fundamental equality, where everyone is both a subject and a target audience of state art, regardless of whether they wield state power or are governed. Therefore, we propose that the state initiatives for permanent art commissions can only be fully understood through an analytical lens that looks beyond the dichotomy between governors and governed, or between a paternalistic government and its citizens, towards a more comprehensive account of state-commissioned art as a component of environmental modes of governance.

### **"Art for all" since 1937**

Like that of its Nordic neighbours, Swedish cultural policy is characterised by relatively high public subsidies for the arts. Until recently, there has been a strong consensus among political parties regarding the importance of "democratising culture", which has often been interpreted to imply governmental initiatives promoting public access to the arts.<sup>18</sup> This viewpoint was articulated in the government's rationale for establishing the Public Art Agency Sweden (*Statens konstråd*) in 1937, and this agency has played a crucial role in shaping the physical environment of the Swedish welfare state by commissioning new, site-specific permanent artworks for public buildings ever since. This initiative framed the social democratic welfare state as the leading investor in the arts, taking over from the church, "pomp-loving princes", and bourgeois patrons.<sup>19</sup> With a state funding model based on a "1% rule", art was envisioned "to become in the possession of all (*konsten ska bliva allas egendom*)" by being integrated into "public buildings, assembly halls, as well as workplaces, factories, and offices."<sup>20</sup> Since 1937, the Public Art Agency has been the main

national agency responsible for administering state funding for public art. Alongside this national framework, separate funding structures exist at regional and municipal levels, which also support public art through their own cultural budgets.

Yet the cultural governance of the Swedish state should not be understood solely as a mechanism for funding public art; it should also be recognised as a key recipient. Between 1937 and 1996, policy directives stipulated that the Public Art Agency's primary responsibility was to commission or acquire art for newly constructed state buildings. Consequently, state agencies, enterprises, and organisations have received approximately 90% of the permanent artworks commissioned with state funds up to the present day. Other sites, such as municipal buildings, regional hospitals, public squares, parks, and other communal spaces not managed by the state, fell under the jurisdiction of municipal or regional administrations, as well as private and corporate actors.<sup>21</sup> This arrangement changed in 1996, when the Public Art Agency received a new set of policy directives from the government which, as architectural historian Catharina Gabrielsson notes, "was based on the use of the public environment rather than ownership, while at the same time highlighting society's responsibility for shaping this environment as an aesthetic whole."<sup>22</sup> This shift is also evident in the statistics, with a significant increase in permanent works created for non-state environments since the late 1990s, which constitute 36% of the total number of newly produced artworks since the turn of the millennium (187 out of 510 works).

Cultural theorists have pointed out that Sweden's cultural policy for "democratising" the arts has served not only to enhance public access to art as a cultural good but also to function as a form of "aesthetic engineering"<sup>23</sup> of the population designed to foster "citizen subjects",<sup>24</sup> or even "quality people",<sup>25</sup> capable of self-regulatory participation in government policy.<sup>26</sup> In other words, state-commissioned art has long been expected to act as a tool, even an engine, for Sweden's "cultivated development, both of the individual as a person and of society as a democratic community."<sup>27</sup> While governance structures for public art have changed since 1937, we argue that the underlying expectation that art should be active in shaping environments that optimise the functioning of the state system has persisted to the present day.

## Art for students, soldiers, and the political elites

Our preliminary study of the artworks commissioned for state environments reveals geographic and temporal clusters, as well as an uneven distribution of artistic media and visual themes across different policy areas. We found a high concentration of state-funded permanent art at universities (28%) and the Swedish Armed Forces (11%). Art commissions for universities remained stable from the 1940s to the 1970s, during which they accounted for around one-fourth of the total number of works. After a decline in the 1980s, universities have become even more significant recipients of state-commissioned art, reaching a peak in the 1990s when these institutions received nearly half of all works (178 out of 388 works).<sup>28</sup> The effort to provide universities with permanent artworks in lecture halls, seminar rooms, libraries, canteens, and other spaces where students spend their days indicates the existence of a tacit aesthetic curriculum in Swedish higher education, parallel to scholastic and intellectual training. Since higher education is also accessible to the working classes through free education and student loans, it can indeed be viewed as an instrument to acclimatise students from the working class to the “stylization of life” that accompanies social advancement, which is the aim of their education.<sup>29</sup> By encouraging them to adjust their “popular taste”, the artworks accustom them to develop a distance from “necessity” in matters of taste and adopt a more “disinterested” attitude towards art that higher education and well-paying jobs produce.<sup>30</sup>

When it comes to the Swedish Armed Forces, a more irregular temporal spread can be observed. It was not until the mid-1960s that military facilities were recognised as suitable venues for state-commissioned art, with the monumental mural *Utan titel* (Untitled, 1956, Gert Kaffa) in the dining room at the Karlskrona Coastal Artillery Regiment premises being the only exception. The initial neglect was counterbalanced by a large-scale initiative in the 1970s and 1980s, during which as many as 168 new artworks were created for Swedish military sites such as regiments, headquarters, and military schools. This contrasts with developments since the turn of the millennium, when only 13 new works were commissioned for these sites.<sup>31</sup> This stark shift highlights the need to consider state investments in permanent art as interlinked with changes in other policy areas, particularly defence policy in this instance. As Svanelid has discussed more thoroughly elsewhere, the state’s investment in art for the military reflects the shift from Sweden’s neutrality policy during the Cold War – which depended on maintaining a robust military presence across the country – to the post-national defence policy that led to the disbandment of several regiments in the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>32</sup>





Figure 1.  
Knut-Erik Lindberg,  
*Mor och barn, Fostran*  
(*Mother and Child,*  
*Upbringing*). Marble,  
1953. Commissioned for  
*Småskoleseminariet* in  
*Landskrona*.  
Photo: © Sten Vilson.

These findings reveal that Sweden's state funding for public art, although grounded in the principle of equality, reveals discrepancies in its distribution. We have observed that soldiers and conscripts, along with university students, have been the primary beneficiaries of state-commissioned art and thus form the foundation of its welfare vision of "cultivated development". Therefore, our understanding of the 1930s vision that the state would make art accessible to all should be refined as the data suggest that this accessibility is heavily reliant on particular social contexts or positions. Distinct concentrations can be observed at the university campuses of Lund and Uppsala, which together have received 94 artworks. In contrast, areas with a weaker state infrastructure have received fewer works, such as the Västmanland and Kronoberg regions for which the state has only produced 33 works. In terms of funding for permanent art, the state's strategy has not been to distribute its resources evenly across the population

but rather to create art clusters within specific governmental sites and policy fields.

The 1937 vision of enhancing the accessibility of art was also grounded in a social concern: art was to be understood as a public good rather than a luxury reserved for the wealthy elite population. The government maintained that art played a vital role in fostering and supporting the population, and that this role was especially significant in places where needs were greatest.<sup>33</sup> This approach was particularly evident in the 1940s and 1950s, when state-run hospitals, schools for the education of girls (*Högre allmänna läroverket för flickor*), and institutions for training primary school teachers (*Småskoleseminariet*) became key sites for state-commissioned art [Figure 1].

However, examining the data of the two thousand works reveals patterns that contradict the idea that the Swedish welfare state focused its art resources on permanent art for groups considered to have special needs

rather than the elite. We have found, for example, that between 1937 and 1989, more artworks were commissioned for government departments or ministries in Stockholm (31 works) than for all Swedish prisons during the same period (26 works), despite the latter representing a much larger government sector. The County Administrative Boards of Sweden (*Länsstyrelsen*), a governmental body responsible for implementing the state's political policy at the regional level, have also been major recipients of public art commissions. Therefore, it can be argued that the Swedish state's cultural policy for democratising art has led to a substantial concentration of art resources in the corridors of political power. This argument is further supported by a lack of interest in commissioning art for government authorities responsible for marginalised and/or socio-economically disadvantaged groups such as immigrants (*Migrationsverket*) and the unemployed (*Arbetsförmedlingen*), which, over the past ninety years, have received only three permanent works.

## Art in action

By mapping the locations of state-commissioned permanent art, we can gain a clearer understanding of where the art is expected to operate. The next step in our analysis, which remains an ongoing process at this stage, is to determine what characterises these works and how they relate to the state environments for which they were commissioned and created. First, it should be noted that the artworks commissioned for government sites, such as universities, the Prime Minister's office, military facilities, and judicial buildings, have, with few exceptions, refrained from displaying images of heroes or great men. The works also typically do not include symbols that convey socio-economic prestige or fame. Instead, we have observed a large body of abstract as well as figurative works – tapestries, murals, sculptures, photography, etc. – which have been used to decorate government buildings over the decades and across various policy sectors. The significance of these works should not be downplayed, as they embody the government's key aim of using art as a tool to enhance the aesthetic value of state environments.

This highlights a cornerstone of the Swedish welfare state's aesthetic engineering, which has sought to “manipulate the sensual fabric of everyday life so as to mold even the simplest needs and behaviors into an aesthetic form.”<sup>34</sup> This decorative function is exemplified in the monumental works of geometric abstraction commissioned in the 1950s for the Lund University (*Vertikal composition*, 1956, Arne Jones), the Halland County



Figure 2. Arne Jones,  
*Vertikal composition*  
*(Vertical Composition)*.  
 Copper sheet, 1956.  
 Commissioned for  
 Lund University Medical  
 Faculty.  
 Photo: © Ricard Estay.

Administrative Board (*Konkretistiska kompositioner*, 1958, Axel Olson), and the post offices at Landskrona (*Vertikal miljö*, 1955, Martin Holmgren) and Östersund (*Paket i långa banor*, 1952, Lennart Rodhe), to name but a few examples [Figure 2].<sup>35</sup> Although the governance goal of linking art to decorative values faced increasing criticism in the following decades, works with this function have continued to be produced for the most diverse Swedish state environments, ranging from the black bronze sculptures of flowers at the entrance of the medical faculty at the Linköping University (*Wallflowers*, 2005, Katrine Helmersson) to a large-scale colour field painting on the façade of the central guard facility at the high-security Kumla Prison (*Inrainbow*, 2010, Britta Kjellgren Jäger).

Another category identified in the analysis consists of artworks that illustrate or, in other ways, engage with the activities of government spaces. This isomorphic type is common in universities, where works affirm the educational focus associated with the department for which they are created. This is evident in the monumental sculpture *Från Leonardo* (From Leonardo, 1971, Koman Ilhan and Kanra Çetin), which is based on Leonardo da Vinci's famous drawing, Vitruvian Man, and created for the School

of Architecture in Stockholm, whose motto is “Art and Science”. The sculpture *Mitos* (Mitosis, 1991, Lena Cedergren), created for the former Department of Zoophysiology at Lund University, illustrates the cell division process, mitosis, a fundamental basis for zoophysiological studies. The way artworks interact with the site also extends into the mythological sphere, as seen, for example, in depictions of mermaids and sirens in works commissioned for the Swedish Navy. This is similarly true for Nils Möllerberg’s bronze sculpture of the deity Sigyn from 1941, commissioned for the Department of Geology at the Lund University. Drawing on a well-known episode from Norse mythology, the sculpture portrays Sigyn as she protects the earth from earthquakes by holding out a bowl to catch the venom dripping from a snake in the cave where Loki is imprisoned. There are also examples of artworks that adopt a more agonistic or ironic stance towards their institutional contexts, such as Armand Rossander’s mosaic of the “Tax Devil” (*Skattedjävulen*), created for the Swedish Tax Agency in 1952.

Over the decades, state-commissioned permanent artworks have also served the purpose of promoting moral values in governance. The fresco *Livet fyller världen* (Life Fills the World, 1940, Tor Hörlin), commissioned for a communal area for nurses at the Karolinska Hospital, depicts a naturalistic scene of a mother holding her infant while a young woman gently cradles a bird. This painting conveys to the nurses the moral (and patriarchal) message that caring for the weak is not only their professional duty but also a natural instinct arising from their femininity. The hanging sculpture *Relationair* (2006, Karin Lind) at a public high school features a circle with neon signs that repeat the phrase “we are” in several European languages and Arabic. This work serves as a reminder to students about the foundational human equality that bridges language gaps and cultural divides. We are, in this sense, equal to each other. The street art mural *Urban allemansrätt* (Urban Commons, 2005, Daniel Diaz, Ossian Eckerman, and Arvid Wretman) at the Police Academy in the garage of the National Task Force conveys a quite different type of moral message. In this setting, police recruits train for challenging and high-risk situations where people’s lives are at stake. The moral message of the mural is delivered as a provocation, which suggests – as does its title – that urban space is for everyone, including those who do not behave well or appear suspicious. Through the inclusion of strange-looking creatures and pot-smoking teens, the mural can be viewed as cautioning the police recruits against making judgments based on stereotypical notions of good and bad [Figure 3].

Within this moral category are also works that take an agonistic stance to their placement within the government authority. Lenny Clarhäll’s wooden





Figure 3. Daniel Diaz, Ossian Eckerman, Arvid Wretman, *Urban allemansrätt* (Urban Commons). Acrylic, lacquer, ink, 2005. Commissioned for the National Task Force at Police Academy, Sörentorp. Photo: © Annika Jansson Selim.

relief *Under kurbitsen* (Under the Kurbit, 1982), commissioned for the entrance of a government ministry building in central Stockholm, depicts a modern urban landscape where a group of people have assembled to advocate for peace and protest against nuclear power, which refers to demonstrations organised by the Swedish feminist peace movement in the late 1970s. The scene also features a man who has passed out in a treetop beside his bottle, as well as a line of male bureaucrats heading towards a control room filled with screens and wires. Situated in the entrance hall, the work confronts politicians and state officials daily as they pass through on their way to their offices. Invoking a moral appeal, it urges them to listen to concerned citizens engaged in feminist and political peace movements and to address their issues. The moral and critical significance of *Under kurbitsen* is arguably even stronger today than when it was first installed in the early 1980s, as it stands in clear opposition to contemporary governmental aims of military mobilisation and further investments in nuclear power [Figure 4].

State-commissioned works may also infuse the architecture of government buildings with a human touch, conveying a sense of care and existential lightness that softens their appearance as mere vessels of state power and control. This governance function is particularly evident in works created for carceral facilities, such as the colourful play installations designed for children of inmates at various high-security prisons





Figure 4. Lenny Clarhäll, *Under kurbitsen* (Under the Kurbitsen). Wood relief, 1982. Commissioned for the Government Office in Stockholm. Photo: © Mailis Stensman.

in Sweden. This function is also discernible in the mural *10 scener M-Ö* (10 Scenes M-Ö, 2004, Thomas Elovsson), which transforms the concrete walls of an exercise yard at a detention centre in Uppsala into a playful scenography, greeting individuals awaiting their sentence with cheerful images of colourful stars and a very cute and smiling baby giraffe.

There are also works that, rather than injecting a sense of humour and play into the executive and judicial branches of the government, emphasise feelings such as sadness and loss. The sculptural work *Tårkanal* (Tear Channel, 1993, Gösta Sillén), created for the entrance of a police station that also includes a custody area, transforms part of the wall by angling the bricks and incorporating an open, cylindrical terrazzo shape. When viewed in light of its title, this work conveys the impression that the police building is weeping while also collecting its tears into a channel. The focus on affectivity in state-commissioned Swedish art also accommodates critical reflections on the effects of government authority over life, as seen in the sculptural installation *Egen ingång* (Private Entrance, 2014, Johan Thurfjell) at a juvenile home in Lund where young offenders are detained. This work features a miniature model of a private entrance with a locked bronze door. As the door remained shut, access to the space behind it was left solely to the imagination, making the model a representation of the privacy that the young individuals confined in this facility lacked.<sup>36</sup>

## **A novel approach to art in governmental buildings**

Our project will contribute to a more complex understanding of the notion of the autonomy of art and of the ways in which its potential for agency can be understood. We argue that research on public art should move beyond notions of the importance of the “arm’s-length principle”, understood as a defence against inappropriate political intervention, and instead focus on what it means for art to claim political agency within state space. The autonomy of art is often presented as a primary value for democratic culture, but we argue that this capacity is not only useful for maintaining a distance from the state but also for intervening in, reinforcing, or creating dissent from policy strategies. Our project seeks to identify instances where art interacts in these ways with the dominant sensory regime of a given environment.

Consequently, the project will contribute significantly to our understanding of the relationship between art and democracy. Rather than assuming the relative independence of art from the field of political governance, we start from the observation that for more than eighty years public art has been considered a key component in the material and physical design of Swedish state institutions. This agency of art and its capacity to engage in state space is our focus. It will allow us to identify which themes and issues have come to dominate state-commissioned artworks and how these relate to different constructions of norms and values essential to democracy, for example in relation to gender. We will also be able to explore the presence of issues that reflect the concerns of minority groups, as well as possible blind spots and exclusions.

The project will also be of value to art history as part of the digital humanities, as it will demonstrate how the use of computational methods can increase the quality and complexity of the expected outcome of the research questions, as well as the feasibility of the project. It relies on an innovative research design by linking digital tools with “relational thinking”. The analytical model combines data-driven analysis, digital coding, qualitative image analysis, and archival studies, presenting a multidimensional analytical framework for understanding the role of art in Swedish democracy.

Our project will also generate societal value as the results will be significant for Swedish cultural and administrative organisations working with public art. It will provide new and complex information on a large corpus of public art and analyses of artistic design as a dynamic component of cultural democracy, establishing specific regimes of sensory organisation. The results will also provide information on the actual outcomes of cultural policy for the arts and how the privatisation of state property

has affected them. This will be an important contribution to the ongoing discussion about whether privatisation can be seen as weakening the political power of the arts, ultimately undermining the democratic values it embodies and enacts. The current plans to build several new military facilities and prisons also offer an opportunity to examine the role of art, including its potential political agency, in the expansion of the Swedish Armed Forces and the Swedish Prison and Probation Service.

## **Funding**

Oscar Svanelid's contribution to this article was completed with funding from the International postdoc grant by the Swedish Research Council for the project Public Art in Restricted Space: Rethinking Art and Democracy in Sweden and Norway 1940 to 2023 [grant number 2023-00396, 2023–26].

## Endnotes

- 1 Stefan Jonsson, *Den otyglade skönheten: 5 saker konsten vet om demokratin* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2022); Lena Johannesson, "Demokratins symbolrum. Bild och självbild," in *Demokratins estetik. Demokratiutredningens forskarvolym IV.*, ed. Erik Amnå and Lena Johannesson (Stockholm: Fakta info direkt, 1999).
- 2 Per Mangset et al., "Editors' Introduction: Nordic Cultural Policy," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 14, no. 1 (2008): 1–5. Swedish cultural policy is often seen as a dual structure balancing the protection of institutional autonomy for cultural organisations and art councils with the perspective of these entities as organisational bodies that manage and develop governmental support programmes, including grants and public commissions. See, for example, Per Mangset, "The Arm's Length Principle and the Art Funding System: A Comparative Approach," in *What About Cultural Policy? Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Culture and Politics*, ed. Miikka Pyykkönen, Niina Simanainen and Sakarias Sokka (Helsinki: Minerva, 2009), 293–295.
- 3 Our research project "The Government of Art: Democracy and State Public Art in Sweden 1937–2027" is still in the project-planning phase, and no start date has yet been set.
- 4 Merja Heikkinen, "Administrative Definitions of Artists in the Nordic Model of State Support for Artists," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 11, no. 3 (2005): 325–340; Erik Erlanson, "Towards a new historical context for the understanding of cultural policy, or, the common enterprise of French Surrealist André Breton and Swedish Minister of Culture Ragnar Edenman," *Nordisk kulturpolitisk tidskrift* 24, no. 2 (2021): 106–108.
- 5 Thomas Lemke, *The Government of Things: Foucault and the New Materialisms* (New York: New York University Press, 2021), 168.
- 6 Bengt Larsson, Martin Letell and Håkan Thörn, "Transformations of the Swedish Welfare State: From Social Engineering to Governance?: An Introduction," in *Transformations of the Swedish Welfare State: From Social Engineering to Governance?*, ed. Bengt Larsson, Martin Letell and Håkan Thörn (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 3.
- 7 Bob Jessop, *State Power: A Strategic-Relational Approach* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 10.
- 8 The view of the state as a "social relation" that is continuously inscribed and transformed within an "institutional materiality" was famously advanced by sociologist Nicos Poulantzas. We would, however, like to extend this argument by emphasising that the state as a social relation, that is materialised through institutions, also encompasses an aesthetic order that forms part of its governance of things. Thus, the specific type of social relation through which state power is reproduced should also be seen to go through encounters with artworks. Cf. Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism* (London: Verso, 1978).
- 9 Lemke, *The Government of Things*, 168.
- 10 Lemke, *The Government of Things*, 168–171.
- 11 Myndigheten för kulturanalys, *Så fri är konsten: Den kulturpolitiska styrningens påverkan på den konstnärliga friheten* (Göteborg, 2021), 10. For further analysis of this governmental report, see Josefine Wikström, "An Art for Art's Sake or a Critical Concept of Art's Autonomy?," *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 32, no. 65 (2023): 74–100.
- 12 Juliane Rebentisch, *The Art of Freedom: On the Dialectics of Democratic Existence*, trans. Joseph Ganahl (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 1–13. Rebentisch argues that Walter Benjamin's famous remark about the aesthetisation of politics in fascism actually constitutes a form of anaesthetics "that desensitizes its own aesthetic nature", where the latter term is conceived as an operation within the socio-political and ethical realm that may promote a democratic culture of freedom. Rebentisch, *The Art of Freedom*, 230.
- 13 The modus operandi of public art research focusing on unique artists, art projects, and works, rather than on a systemic analysis of a larger dataset, is manifest in influential books such as Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); Cameron Cartiere



- and Shelly Willis, eds., *The Practice of Public Art* (London: Routledge, 2008); Cameron Cartiere and Anthony Schrag, eds., *The Failures of Public Art and Participation* (London: Routledge, 2023).
- 14 See Artl@s/Visual Contagions Lecture Series in Digital Art History, "Do We Really Need Digital Art History?," org. Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, Catherine Dossin and Nicola Carboni, accessed April 8, 2024, <https://www.unige.ch/visualcontagions/seminars/dah-conversation/2023-2024-do-we-really-need-digital-art-history>.
  - 15 Anna Näslund Dahlgren and Amanda Wasielewski, "The Digital U-Turn in Art History," *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift/ Journal of Art History* 90, no. 4 (2021): 249–266.
  - 16 Cf. Anna Näslund Dahlgren and Amanda Wasielewski, "Critical Digital Art History: An Introduction," in *Critical Digital Art History: Interface and Data Politics in the Post-Digital Era*, ed. Anna Näslund Dahlgren and Amanda Wasielewski (Bristol: Intellect, 2024), 1–19.
  - 17 Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 224–247. For further discussion on Bourdieu's relational method, see, for example, Shaun Rawolle and Bob Lingard, "Bourdieu and Educational Research: Thinking Tools, Relational Thinking, Beyond Epistemological Innocence," in *Social Theory and Education Research: Understanding Foucault, Habermas, Bourdieu and Derrida*, ed. Mark Murphey (London: Routledge, 2022), 129–149.
  - 18 Mangset et al., "Editors' Introduction," 2; Kevin V. Mulcahy, "Preface: The Social-Democratic Model of Cultural Patronage," *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 31, no. 1 (2001): 4.
  - 19 Statens konstråd, *Statens konstråd: En orientering samt redogörelse för rådets tre första verksamhetsår* (Stockholm: Ivar Hæggströms boktryckeri, 1940), 5.
  - 20 "Kungl. Maj:ts proposition 1937:157," Sveriges riksdag, accessed April 4, 2025, [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/proposition/kungl.-majlis-proposition-nr-157\\_dy30157/html/](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/proposition/kungl.-majlis-proposition-nr-157_dy30157/html/).
  - 21 Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe, *Skulptur i folkhemmet: Den offentliga skulpturens institutionalisering, referentialitet och rumsliga situationer* (PhD diss., Stockholm: Makadam, 2007), 50–54.
  - 22 Catharina Gabrielsson, *Att göra skillnad: det offentliga rummet som medium för konst, arkitektur och politiska föreställningar* (PhD diss., Stockholm: Axl Books, 2006), 224–225.
  - 23 Erik Erlanson and Peter Henning, "Estetisk ingenjörskonst och konstens ekologisering: Richard Bergh, Mänskian och nutiden och Öyvind Fahlström," *Konsthistorisk tidskrift / Journal of Art History* 91, no. 2 (2022): 57–73.
  - 24 Cf. Étienne Balibar, *Citizen Subject: Foundations for Philosophical Anthropology*, trans. Steven Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).
  - 25 Alva Myrdal and Gunnar Myrdal, *Kris i befolkningsfrågan* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1934), 246.
  - 26 Bo Stråth, "Nordic Modernity: Origins, Trajectories, Perspectives," in *Nordic Paths to Modernity*, ed. Jóhann Páland Árnason and Björn Wittrock (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2012), 25–48.
  - 27 Tobias Harding, "Culture Wars? The (Re)Politicization of Swedish Cultural Policy," *Cultural Trends* 31, no. 2 (2022): 117.
  - 28 Statistics of state-commissioned works at Swedish universities (including *högskolor*) compared to the total number of works, organised by decade: 1940s: 6/21 (29%), 1950s: 19/80 (24%), 1960s: 27/111 (24%), 1970s: 76/333 (23%), 1980s: 94/562 (17%), 1990s: 178/388 (46%), 2000s: 103/324 (32%), 2010s: 42/122 (34%), 2020–2025: 6/22 (27%). These statistics show significant differences in the number of works produced across decades. Notably, the 1980s stand out as a peak, marked by a significant mass production of state public art in Sweden with a total of 562 newly produced works, whereas the percentage of universities as recipients reached a high between 1990 and 2020.
  - 29 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (New York and London: Routledge, 1986), 54–55, 174–175. The "stylization of life" is a citation from Weber, see Max Weber, "Class, Status,

Party," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. Hans H. Gerth and Mills C. Wright (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 191.

- 30 Bourdieu, *Distinction*. Sweden still has a class system. In 2015, 49.3% of the population belonged to the working class, see Göran Ahrne, Niels Stöber and Max Thaning, "Struktur, klass och inkomster," in *Klass i Sverige. Ojämlikheter, makten och politiken i det 21:a århundradet*, ed. Daniel Suhonen, Göran Therborn and Jesper Weithz (Lund: Arkiv förlag, 2021). Sweden was also one of the countries with the greatest social bias in recruitment to higher education when compared to other OECD countries, see *Svensk högre utbildning i internationell belysning: en studie baserad på internationell statistik* (Stockholm: Universitetskanslersämbetet, 2019), 25.
- 31 State-commissioned works for Swedish military sites, including schools and academies for military education: 1940s: 0/21, 1950s: 1/80 (1%), 1960s: 11/111 (10%), 1970s: 49/333 (15%), 1980s: 119/562 (21%), 1990s: 25/388 (6%), 2000s: 5/324 (2%), 2010s: 6/122 (5%), 2020-2022: 2/22 (9%).
- 32 Oscar Svanelid, "Welfare Art in the Swedish Military: The Changing Roles of State-Commissioned Permanent Artworks from Cold War Neutrality to Postnational Defence," *Konsthistorisk tidskrift / Journal of Art History* 93, no. 3 (2024): 175–195.
- 33 "Kungl. Maj:ts proposition 1937:157" (1937), 4–5. The central argument of the 1937 proposition concerns "the considerable importance of art in cultivating the public (konstens stora folkfostrande betydelse)", asserting that this need is greatest in institutions where people were considered most in need of the presumed beneficial effects of the formative arts, for example, hospitals and schools.
- 34 Erlanson and Henning, "Estetisk ingenjörskonst," 69.
- 35 Apart from the illustrations accompanying this article, all photographs of artworks referenced in the article are easily accessible in the digital archive of *Statens konstråd*. See Statens konstråd, accessed March 3, 2026, <https://statenskonstrad.se/upplev-konsten/sok-i-samlingen/>.
- 36 For a more detailed analysis of the role of state-commissioned public art in carceral spaces in Sweden and Norway, see Oscar Svanelid, "Public Art Behind Bars: Governance and Carceral Aesthetics in Sweden and Norway Since the Early 2000s," *Public Art Dialogue* 16, no. 1 (2026), 96–120. Accessible at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21502552.2025.2564475>.

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## Vladanje z umetnostjo: demokracija in javna umetnost v državnih naročilih na Švedskem v letih 1937–2027

### Povzetek

V poglavju je obravnavana politična avtonomnost javne umetnosti, nastale v okviru državnih naročil na Švedskem od leta 1937 do danes. Čeprav švedska kulturna politika načelo neodvisnosti umetnosti od neposrednega političnega odločanja (*arm's length principle*) tradicionalno razume kot varovalo umetniške avtonomije, naše raziskave kažejo, da so bila državna naročila vpeta v infrastrukture vladanja, zato so jih sooblikovale institucionalne prioritete, estetske norme in spreminjajoči se politični konteksti. Izhajajoč iz koncepta »okoljskosti« nemškega sociologa Thomasa Lemkeja, v poglavju zagovarjava tezo, da umetnine v državnih ustanovah – na univerzah, vojaških območjih, v zaporih, vladnih stavbah, bolnišnicah in policijskih postajah – delujejo kot sestavni deli okoljskega vladanja, saj sooblikujejo materialno in senzorično organizacijo vsakdanjega življenja. Javna umetnost zato ni niti zgolj instrument državne politike niti povsem avtonomno področje; politično učinkuje prav s svojo zmožnostjo, da utrjuje, preoblikuje ali izziva normativne ureditve države.

V poglavju je predstavljena raziskovalna zasnova projekta *The Government of Art: Democracy and State Public Art in Sweden 1937–2027*, v okviru katerega bo analiziranih dva tisoč umetniških del, stalno nameščenih v državnih ustanovah. Vključene so tudi ugotovitve podoktorskega projekta Oscarja Svanelida *Public Art in Closed Spaces*; avtor v njih opozarja, da so umetnine umeščene tako v zaprte ustanove – zapore in jedrske elektrarne – kot tudi v bolj dostopne prostore, na primer na univerze in železniške postaje. S kvalitativno-kvantitativno metodologijo, ki združuje analizo metapodatkov, digitalno kodiranje podob, relacijsko mapiranje in arhivsko raziskovanje, avtorja identificirava geografske, institucionalne in časovne zgostitve umetniške produkcije. Preliminarne ugotovitve kažejo, da so bila državna naročila razporejena neenakomerno: univerze in obožene sile so prejele nesorazmerno velik delež umetnin, državni organi, namenjeni marginaliziranim skupinam, na primer brezposelnim in priseljencem, pa so bili večinoma spregledani. Podatki razkrivajo tudi širok razpon vizualnih in tematskih strategij – od abstraktnih, dekorativnih del do prostorsko specifičnih (*site-specific*), moralizirajočih, ironičnih in kritičnih intervencij – ter kažejo, da je umetnost v državnih ustanovah sodelovala pri oblikovanju političnih, pedagoških in afektivnih okolij.

Z obravnavo javne umetnosti kot dela materialne arhitekture socialne države je v poglavju predlagana ponovna vpeljava države kot ključne kategorije pri raziskovanju umetnosti v javnem prostoru. Umetnine pri tem niso izolirani estetski objekti, temveč dejavniki, ki sodelujejo pri produkciji demokratičnih norm, družbenih imaginarijev in oblik državljske subjektivnosti. Tak pristop problematizira idealizirane narative o umetniški avtonomiji in v ospredje postavlja produktivne napetosti med politiko in umetniško avtonomijo. Projekt s tem prispeva k razpravam o kulturni demokraciji, državni estetiki in vlogi digitalnih metod v umetnostnozgodovinskem raziskovanju, obenem pa ponuja spoznanja, pomembna za sodobno kulturno politiko in za načrtovane širitve državnih ustanov, denimo zaporov in vojaških objektov.









# **“PERCENT FOR ART” SCHEMES: ARTISTIC AGENCY, CULTURAL POLICY, AND PUBLIC ART IN EUROPE AND POSTWAR SLOVENIA/YUGOSLAVIA**

Barbara  
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Percent for art schemes are a cultural–political mechanism to promote art by allocating a share of construction – or, more recently, renovation – investment funding to art interventions. Rather than a single measure, such schemes comprise a range of initiatives, approaches, and regulatory frameworks. They can be legally binding or function as a recommendation implemented at national, regional, or local levels, as well as through dedicated funding schemes that may also involve private investment. In recent years, percent for art initiatives have encompassed a wide spectrum of artistic practices – from visual art to music and intermedia projects – integrated into new buildings, installed in surrounding public spaces, or commissioned independently through designated funds. In each case, public accessibility is an important aspect. The share allocated to art commonly varies between 0.5% and 2% of construction costs, although some regulatory frameworks use flexible percentages depending on the scale of investment.

This article proceeds from a historical overview and then moves to the current situation in Slovenia. First, it situates percent for art schemes within selected European historical trajectories. Austria is highlighted as a comparative example of decentralised implementation, demonstrating that the effectiveness of such schemes depends not only on legal mandates but also on institutional capacity and local cultural–political frameworks. This historical and comparative framework contextualizes a case study of socialist Yugoslavia, where artists and professional associations advocated percentage-based public art mechanisms long before their formal legal adoption. The focus then shifts to the 1958 and 1959 recommendations issued in Serbia, which proposed allocating specific shares of construction budgets to artistic decoration and emphasised cooperation between artists, architects, and urban planners. The remainder of the article focuses primarily on post-1945 Slovenia. Although the country formally introduced its percent for art scheme only in 2017, public dialogue about allocating a share of building investment to artistic interventions in publicly accessible spaces had already emerged in the early postwar decades.

## Europe: Historical trajectories of percent for art policies

The historical development of percent for art schemes is closely linked with the development of the concept of public space as an important part of spatial identity. The turning point came with modernism and reduced integration of art within the built environment. In his essay and lecture, first given in Vienna in 1908, the architect Adolf Loos (1870–1933) wrote: “The evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornamentation from everyday objects” (*Evolution der kultur ist gleichbedeutend mit dem entfernen des ornamentes aus dem gebrauchsgegenstande*).<sup>1</sup> Whereas architecture readily adapted to this “evolution” with functionalism, art required further incentives – including percent for art schemes – in its struggle to come up with an appropriate response.

In 1933, the Weimar Republic adopted measures to ensure state protection of art, which marked the beginning of the Art in Architecture (*Kunst am Bau*) model by also drawing on the tradition of the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.<sup>2</sup> Under Nazism, art was used explicitly as an instrument of propaganda; in 1934, the Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda (*Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda*), headed by Joseph Goebbels (1897–1945), issued the Art-in-Construction Ordinance (*Kunst am Bau Verordnung*), stipulating the share of investment to be allocated to art while abrogating its autonomy for propaganda purposes.<sup>3</sup> For example, the sculpture *Zehnkämpfer* (Decathlete), together with its female counterpart *Siegerin* (Champion), both by the artist Arno Breker (1900–1991), still stand in their original locations in the portico of the House of German Sports (*Haus des Deutschen Sports*), which was built according to the plans of the architect Werner March (1894–1976) in Olympic Park for the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin [Figure 1]. Both works were created as part of the Art in Architecture scheme and represent the ideal of the physical strength and supremacy of the Aryan race as a propaganda element of the Nazi regime.<sup>4</sup>

Following the Second World War, percent for art schemes developed along various trajectories across Europe and beyond.<sup>5</sup> The French scheme originated during the interwar period and was legally formalised after the war. Norway and Sweden introduced theirs in the 1930s, as did the Netherlands. East Germany and West Germany instituted the aforementioned Art in Architecture policy during the late 1940s and 1950s.<sup>6</sup> In 1949, Italy established its scheme based on guidelines from the 1930s. In the 1950s regulatory arrangements were also passed in Finland (a distinctive aspect of its system, which also dates to the 1930s, is that it funds art from the National Lottery proceeds) [Figure 2],<sup>7</sup> the Netherlands (1953), the UK, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland, and Ireland. In the 1980s, percent for



Figure 1. Arno Breker, *Zehnkämpfer* (Decathlete), bronze, 1935–1936, Haus des Deutschen Sports, Berlin. Photo: Cordula Kerlikowski, 2021, CC BY 4.0. Source: Bildhauerei in Berlin, <https://bildhauerei-in-berlin.de/bildwerk/zehnkampfer-7211/>.



Figure 2. Anssi Kasitonni, *Suomen tuntemattomin runoilija* (The Least Known Poet in Finland), bronze, 2013, Varvinpuisto, Penttilänranta, Joensuu. Commissioned by the City of Joensuu under the percent-for-art scheme. © Anssi Kasitonni.

art schemes were introduced in Canada and Australia; after 1989, they were gradually adopted by former Eastern Bloc countries such as Estonia (2011)<sup>8</sup> and Slovenia (2017).<sup>9</sup> Since 1991, Croatia has used its percent for art scheme, known as *Postotak za umjetnost*, to grant tax benefits for sponsorship.<sup>10</sup>

Despite these differing legislative trajectories, percent for art schemes have consistently reflected broader political, cultural, and social priorities. Their development has depended not only on legal regulation but also on changing conceptions of the role of art in society and of public investment in culture. In the United States, for example, the origins of public art policy are closely linked to the conditions created by the Great Depression,

when President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882–1945) set up the Works Progress Administration (WPA, 1933–1942) as part of the New Deal. The programme provided jobs to more than 3,000 unemployed artists. As the cultural economist Andrej Srakar observes, “a byproduct of the programme was the establishment of the New York School, which developed a novel and unique style through its abstract expressionism, effectively promoted by the state during the Cold War as the living proof of creative freedom in Western democracy.”<sup>11</sup> The WPA thus demonstrates that public investment in art could simultaneously serve cultural, political, and economic objectives: while contributing to state representation during the Cold War, it also functioned as an instrument of economic recovery through the employment of artists. Today, percent for art schemes in the United States are implemented at city, state, and federal levels.<sup>12</sup>

Although percent for art schemes are not normatively regulated at the EU level due to the principle of subsidiarity in culture,<sup>13</sup> the EU does intervene in this area with an array of strategic and development documents. Much like the New Deal policy framework, the European Green Deal constitutes a sustainability-led approach to growth,<sup>14</sup> whereas the New European Bauhaus initiative mirrors the historical Bauhaus in its vision of merging art, crafts, and technology to improve the living environment.<sup>15</sup> Great importance is attached to strengthening the understanding of culture and creativity as the drivers of development. In light of the green transition, which clearly champions renovation and adaptive reuse, and thus the preservation of cultural heritage over new construction, it is therefore vital that percent for art schemes also extend to building renovations. Percent for art schemes have also met with criticism over the years, most commonly due to cooperation between contractors and project planners on the one hand and artists – who have all too often been reduced to an appendage of the already completed project – on the other.

Austria presents a valuable example for analysing a percent for art scheme due to its decentralised cultural policy system, under which the 1988 Federal Art Promotion Act (*Kunstförderungsgesetz, KunstFG*) legally mandated that 1% to 2% of public building allocations be directed toward art. However, the implementation has varied from one federal state to another, abiding by local laws and institutions.<sup>16</sup> Through three Austrian examples, key differences in implementation can be observed. In the largest federal state, Lower Austria, the structured KOERNOE programme has led to the realisation of over six hundred projects [Figure 3].<sup>17</sup> In Salzburg, a policy shift from mandatory funding to need-based allocations has resulted in more than ninety completed projects. At the





Figure 3. Edith Payer, *10 Jahre Jury Weikendorf* (10 Years Weikendorf Jury), poster project, 2023. Funded under the KOERNOE programme (Kunst im öffentlichen Raum Niederösterreich). Image: © Edith Payer. Source: KOERNOE, <https://koernoe.at/de/projekt/1111/10-jahre-jury-weikendorf>.

federal level, the BIG ART initiative, which was launched in 2005 by the state-owned real estate company *Bundesimmobiliengesellschaft* (BIG), has commissioned over thirty artworks nationwide. The Austrian example demonstrates that the scheme's effectiveness is shaped less by legal mandates than by institutional capacity, cultural policy orientation, and local engagement, illustrating how decentralisation allows more flexible, inclusive, and context-responsive approaches to public art.

The historical overview presented above should not be taken to imply that countries without statutory percent for art schemes lacked prac-

tices of commissioning public art or discussions on percentage-based funding. As the case of socialist Yugoslavia and Slovenia demonstrates, public building projects incorporating works of art, together with proposals for allocating a fixed share of public investment to artistic commissions, developed well before the legal institutionalisation of percent for art schemes.

### Yugoslavia: Early percent for art initiatives

Historically, neither Austria-Hungary nor Yugoslavia had a specific regulatory framework mandating that a fixed share of public building allocations be earmarked for art, as stipulated in present-day percent for art schemes. Building construction initially fell under the purview of building laws and subsequently under regulations on spatial planning, culture, and cultural heritage. Socialist Yugoslavia only set forth normative provisions for the acquisition of artworks, as illustrated below.

According to Andrej Srakar, after the Second World War, public art primarily served the purpose of commemorating historical events and places, or it was employed to symbolise the state-monopolized historical legitimation

and progress.<sup>18</sup> Many publicly funded tenders were organised by the state as well as a multitude of cultural centres, societies, municipalities, enterprises, self-governing communities, and “basic organisations of associated labour” (i.e., companies). Although the international Forma Viva sculpture symposiums did not represent a formal percent for art scheme, they serve as an exemplary model for successfully integrating art into public spaces. During the 1960s, as the art historian Marjeta Ciglencéki writes, Forma Viva symposiums emerged throughout Europe, North America, and Japan as an attractive way of furnishing public spaces with art and creating an opportunity for sculptors selected through tenders to meet. The primary idea of symposiums originating in Austria was that artistic creation should remain unaffected by politically established borders. The symposiums therefore brought together artists irrespective of the political systems in their home countries. In Yugoslavia, including Slovenia, the symposiums’ popularity also resulted from the new orientation of cultural policy, which was opening up to the West, and the non-alignment policy, which, serving as cultural diplomacy, also had an impact on artistic creation.<sup>19</sup> Forma Viva proved the existence of a certain way of funding art to furnish public space with high-quality artworks. Companies, the municipality, and the cultural community, for example, co-financed the symposiums in Maribor, which were held between 1967 and 1986 and turned out to be a great success, considering that their works still form an identifiable feature of the city’s urban landscape.

During the 1950s, discussions on a percentage allocation for art in Yugoslavia were closely linked to broader efforts to improve artists’ material conditions and to regulate the state purchase of artworks. The federal Instructions on Purchasing Works by Visual Artists and Craftsmen (*Navodilo o kupovanju del upodabljajočih umetnikov in umetne obrti*),<sup>20</sup> passed in 1951, established the basic framework for such purchases. The instructions authorized all state offices and institutions to purchase works of visual art and artistic crafts from funds specifically allocated for this purpose (Article 1). Until the end of 1951, purchases for federal offices and institutions were coordinated by the Scientific and Cultural Council of the Federal Government, whereas education, scientific, and cultural councils of republic governments were responsible for purchases on behalf of all other state offices and institutions. Museums, galleries, and schools of visual art and artistic crafts were likewise authorized to purchase works to expand their collections (Article 4). Works exhibited at officially organised exhibitions could be purchased based on selections made by the jury of the Visual Arts Society (Article 2). Consequently, debates over exhibition

policy and the criteria for selecting works assumed particular importance because inclusion in an exhibition was directly connected with the possibility of a state purchase and thus with improving an artist's material position. At exhibitions held independently by artists or by other individuals and institutions, however, state offices and institutions could purchase works only upon the recommendation of special expert committees established in each republic by the education, scientific, and cultural councils of republic governments. These committees were responsible both for recommending purchases and for assessing the value of the proposed works (Article 2).<sup>21</sup>

The discussion on quality criteria and kitsch was particularly pertinent in relation to art purchases made by companies, which lay beyond the association's direct influence. That is, the federal instructions of 1951 also stipulated that state companies and their associations, as well as social organisations and their enterprises and institutions, were free to purchase works of visual art and crafts without being required to follow the recommendations issued by committees from Article 2 (Article 3). According to the Slovenian Visual Arts Society, this was also the reason why "the public [had] been exposed to so much kitsch through the Artists' Cooperative."<sup>22</sup>

On 28 March 1958, these endeavours to regulate art purchases and the material status of fine artists in Yugoslavia finally bore fruit when the Cultural Council of the People's Republic of Serbia and the Urban Planning Council of the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Serbia issued the Cultural Council of the People's Republic of Serbia's Recommendations on the Creation and Use of Artworks in Construction Investments (*Preporuka Saveta za kulturu Narodne Republike Srbije o izvođenju i korišćenju radova i dela likovnih umetnosti u investicionoj izgradnji*).<sup>23</sup> The recommendations were compiled at the initiative of the Association of Fine Artists of Yugoslavia to address the situation of fine artists while also promoting wider accessibility of art.<sup>24</sup> The document initially summarised the situation in fine art and established that there was no connection between fine artists and builders in planning and implementing new building projects, and that the acquisition of art fell beyond the scope of the investment scheme and was included at a later stage for decorative purposes only. The recommendations highlighted the significance of the aesthetic and artistic aspects of buildings, without considering artworks to be a luxury: "[T]hey create an uplifting atmosphere in individuals' lives and foster improved social conditions within communities."<sup>25</sup> The decision-makers were aware that the systematic, regulatory support for the

inclusion of artworks in new building investment schemes laid a solid groundwork for improvement and further development in this particular area. Unlike cultural policy, which regarded artists primarily as instruments of the state and its propagation of socialist ideology, the document not only touched upon the selection of motifs and artistic styles, but it also called for a greater quality of artistic creation. This shows that the recommendations were mainly written by artists themselves; although the influences of state and systemic structures in that period cannot be overlooked, by the end of the 1950s cultural policy had taken a small step in breaking away from their rigid control.<sup>26</sup> Specifically, the authors of the recommendations proposed including works of fine art in urban designs and investment schemes for major buildings of “public and social significance” and ensuring appropriate resources to do so. Facilities listed as relevant were squares, parks and public areas, public cultural and educational buildings (schools, universities, libraries, institutes, theatres, cinemas, concert venues, playgrounds, exhibition and conference spaces, cultural centres, adult education centres, open-air theatres, etc.), health institutions (hospitals, clinics, health resorts, etc.), monumental buildings (administrative buildings, prestigious hotels, etc.), sports facilities (training grounds, stadiums, etc.), commercial and tourist facilities (hotels, holiday homes, bathing places, mountain lodges, tourist offices, etc.), industrial facilities (workshops, factory plants, etc.), amenities in public areas (public passenger transport waiting spaces, kiosks, etc.), and residential areas and common spaces in neighbourhoods. To ensure the quality of artworks, they proposed a consistent implementation of tender procedures and expert committees comprising representatives of the investor, an urban planner, an architect, fine artists, the responsible public authorities, and cultural institutions, depending on the nature of the project. They further emphasised the importance of concluding a contract with the selected artist, which should specify the conditions of production and delivery of work, as well as the artist’s fee and the necessity of cooperation between artists and builders already during construction planning.<sup>27</sup> To translate the recommendations into a normative framework, the document authors also prepared material for the act on artworks in new buildings. The material further specified the percentage of investment value of the building project to be allocated for artworks by category: monumental buildings (people’s assemblies, class A hotels, central railway stations, etc.): 3% to 5%; educational buildings (schools, universities, libraries, theatres, cultural centres, and other educational and cultural institutions): 1%; social and administrative buildings (people’s committees, etc.): 2%; training grounds (stadiums, pitches, etc.): 1% to 2%; commercial



facilities (shops and department stores): 1%; health institutions (hospitals, health centres, outpatient clinics): 1%; and tourism facilities (hotels, bathing places, mountain lodges, etc.): 2%. For parks, the investor specified the percentage based on their purpose and importance, and for the other facilities (including transport infrastructure, industrial facilities, amenities in public areas, residential areas, and common spaces in neighbourhoods), 1% to 2% was envisaged.<sup>28</sup>

Although these recommendations were issued in socialist Yugoslavia and did not turn into a normative act, they also had a considerable later impact on individual republics: notably Slovenia, as presented below, and Croatia. The year the document was published, the Croatian architect, urban planner, and academy member Andrija Mutnjaković (born 1929) critically addressed the administrative allocation of resources for art. While expressing his understanding that the enactment of a percent for art scheme in new buildings would improve artists' material situation, he also stressed that art should not settle for one percent. What about the remaining ninety-nine percent, he inquired, providing a long list of examples from architectural history in which a building was viewed as an integrated work of art and a synthesis of different art genres. On the other hand, he also had reservations about enforcing the recommendations as mandatory. The developments that unfolded over the following decades proved that his concerns had merit.<sup>29</sup>

A year after the first recommendations were published, on 12 March 1959, the Cultural Council of the People's Republic of Serbia issued two more recommendations: on purchasing works of contemporary fine art and erecting public monuments.<sup>30</sup> The basic aim of these recommendations, which – like their predecessors – were not legally binding, was to regulate art purchases to increase the quantity of artworks bought while also ensuring their quality. The document thus called for a preliminary opinion to be issued by an expert committee for art purchases, composed of at least three representatives of fine artists, critics, art historians, and others. The committee's opinion would then provide the basis for assessing appropriate funds for art purchases in the financial plans of social and commercial organisations.<sup>31</sup> In its introduction, the document further noted that public monuments also frequently failed to meet quality criteria. This was mainly because commissions were awarded to certain individuals "whose work [had] failed to warrant the monument's artistic value" in the absence of prior expert assessment. In addition, there was also insufficient cooperation in this area between commissioning authorities, artists, and urban planners. The recommendations therefore envisaged

commissioning based on conceptual sketches or models as well as tender procedures for major projects. The sole criterion of expert assessment stated in the document was the artistic value of work submitted.<sup>32</sup>

### **Slovenia: The long road to institutionalising a percent for art scheme**

Efforts to enact a percent for art scheme also have a long history in Slovenia and can be traced back to the years immediately following the Second World War. During that period, members of the Slovenian Fine Arts Society (DSLJU) – called the Slovenian Visual Arts Society (DSUU) between 1945 and 1953<sup>33</sup> – worked within the framework of the official cultural policy of the time.<sup>34</sup> They primarily discussed the issue of visual artists' social security, along with the role and status of fine art in the newly emerging socialist society, and established ties with their peers from other republics. The common thread of their discussions, both during that period and over the subsequent decades, was exhibition policy and the association's role in what was ultimately their top priority: the criteria for and method of selecting artworks for exhibitions, since exhibition selection was directly linked to state purchases of artworks and, consequently, to artists' material conditions.

Given that the Council of the Government of the People's Republic of Slovenia for Education and Culture was the statutory holder of loans earmarked for art purchases and that the representative of the DSUU also held a place on this council's Education and Culture Committee, it was crucially important whom the association elected to this body. It is therefore no coincidence that France Mihelič (1907–1998), a painter, graphic artist, and illustrator, as well as a prominent member of the association, was appointed in May 1951 as the association's first representative in the Education and Culture Committee of the Council<sup>35</sup> [Figure 4]. Just a few months earlier, in January 1951, Slovenia's education ministry set up the committee for art purchases, comprising representatives of the ministry, a critic, an art historian, and artists. The association appointed the following members and prominent artists to the committee: Miha Maleš for graphic art, Zdenko Kalin for sculpture, and Gabrijel Stupica for painting.<sup>36</sup> In 1952, the committee's composition included the following members appointed by the DSUU: painters Marij Pregelj, Gabrijel Stupica, Maksim Sedej, Milan Berbuč and Milan Bizovičar, together with the sculptor, draughtsman and illustrator Jakob Savinšek. Meanwhile, Mihelič was replaced by the artist Stane Kumar as the DSUU delegate to the Council of Culture.<sup>37</sup>

Figure 4.  
*France Mihelič, Kurenta*  
*(Two Kurents), painting*  
*commissioned for the*  
*building of the People's*  
*Assembly of the People's*  
*Republic of Slovenia*  
*(LRS; now the National*  
*Assembly), Ljubljana,*  
*1958. Photo: Andrej*  
*Furlan, ZRC SAZU.*



The preserved minutes of general meetings further confirm that the DSUU fully understood the importance of delegating its members to republic and federal bodies that decided on the purchases of artworks. Its members drew attention to a complete lack of supervision over the quality of works put on sale: “I firmly believe that, in order to maintain the integrity of our association, this cooperative must operate as an artistic entity rather than a conventional trade venue,” stressed Božidar Jakac (1899–1989), painter and graphic artist, professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana and member of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, one of the key figures in shaping the institutional framework of post-war Slovenian visual art, at the DSUU general meeting in 1952.<sup>38</sup>

An important turning point with regard to art purchases came with the adoption of the constitutional law of 1953,<sup>39</sup> introducing a new socio-political system of socialist self-management and workers’ self-administration. Self-governing bodies in enterprises, local communities, and cultural institutions became decision-makers, whereas workers were to manage economic organisations through workers’ councils. However, the DSUU was concerned that this lessened the role of the state as a patron of the arts. The association observed a declining number of state-funded purchases and recognised the need to redirect its focus to travelling exhibitions, which would bring art closer to working people and organisations and set



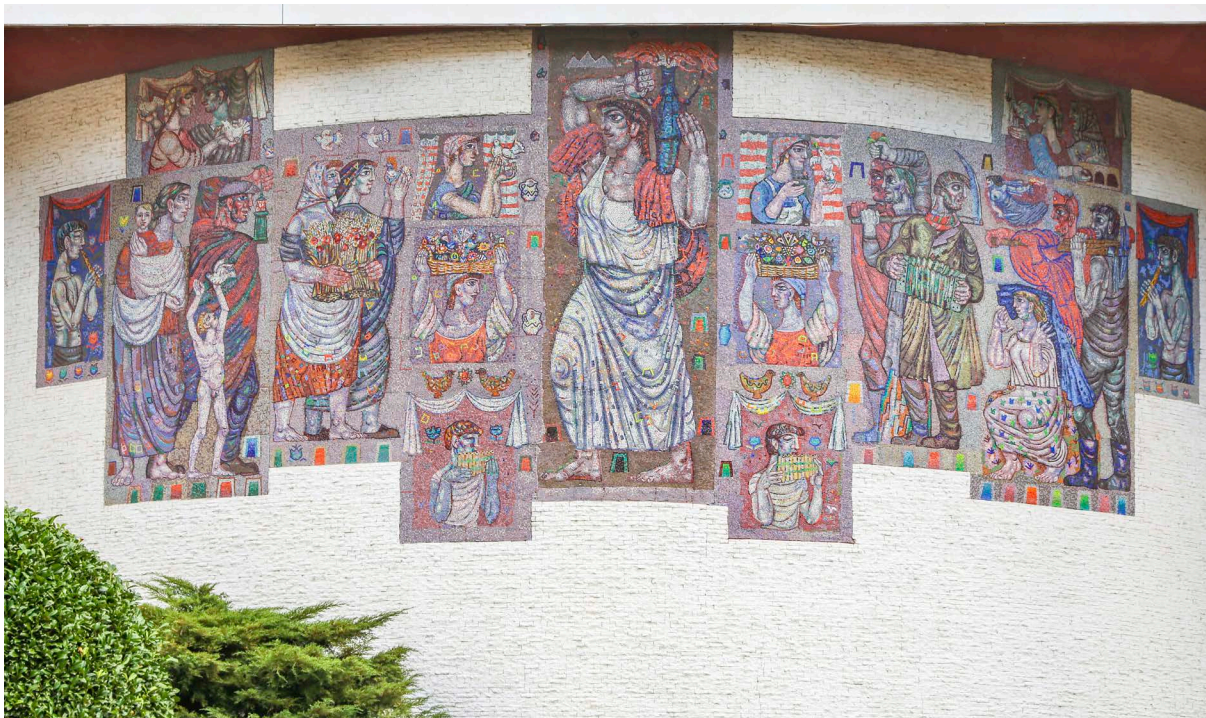


*Figure 5. Slavko Pengov, fresco in the building of the Municipality of Nova Gorica, 1952. Detail. Photo: Andrej Furlan, ZRC SAZU.*

the basis for permanent art collections or galleries in local environments.<sup>40</sup> Only in this way would the quality of art purchased be improved, as the DSUU's Maribor branch already stressed in the 1952 annual report in resolution no. 6, which read: "The acquisition of [art] is unattainable due to kitsch makers in companies, who deceive workers by offering low prices, causing great harm to art[ists] as well as companies."<sup>41</sup>

A year after the adoption of the constitutional law, the association's secretary Slavko Pengov (1908–1966), after 1945 the painter of high-profile state commissions for the artistic decoration of prestigious buildings<sup>42</sup> [Figure 5], highlighted the following at the general meeting: "We must be ready today for workers' councils, mass organisations, and the field to become our main buyers."<sup>43</sup> At the initiative of the Yugoslav Visual Arts Association, the DSUU further endeavoured to set up art studios in public buildings and schools, where active artists would also teach art to children. This measure, the association envisioned, would have a positive impact on work organisations by granting them direct access to quality art, while also motivating artists amid the persistent shortage of art studios. The members of the DSUU thus included the following among their conclusions reached at the general meeting in 1956: "In cooperation with competent authorities, the association should aim to rectify the





*Figure 6. Marij Pregelj, mosaic at the Workers' Hall, Trbovlje, 1957. Detail. Photo: Andrej Furlan, ZRC SAZU.*

issue concerning purchasing quality artworks and displaying them within commercial institutions, factories, and various other enterprises, which would significantly aid the development of the working people's aesthetic taste while also having a motivational effect on fine artists."<sup>44</sup>

However, the effects on the ground were not achieved overnight. At the general meeting in 1957, the Maribor-based artist Lajči Pandur (1913–1973) described the situation in the city as deplorable in terms of the quality of artworks showcased in factories: "Now every factory has its own in-house painter or sculptor, who is in fact a worker with a primitive skillset. But it's also true that this brings them somewhat closer [to the collective] and facilitates the promotion of their shoddy work. Come to Maribor, and you'll see no shortage of tastelessness across factories, everything from Marshal [Tito]'s portraits and so forth. Some of these people, many well past their youth, older than forty, came to ask me how long it would take them to learn portraiture and such. This is very detrimental."<sup>45</sup> Marij Pregelj (1913–1967), a painter and graphic artist, the most prominent of all Slovenian visual artists of the twentieth century to devote himself to mural painting,<sup>46</sup> added that true art education was not only to be found in schools but that artists should go among factory workers, hold lectures, and teach them how to recognise quality. He substantiated

his statement by describing his experience in Trbovlje [Figure 6]: “In my profession as an artist, specifically, when dealing with simple workers and miners in Trbovlje, it was a daunting task, believe me, to make them see that there is such a thing as perspective, that it exists, and to teach them how to use discernment in recognising quality in these drawings. This, I believe, is proper education, not some cheering on while art education has been reduced to four years because of our failure to come up with a real programme.”<sup>47</sup> Six years later, the DSUU continued to press for urgent improvements in the purchasing policy for economic institutions, factories, and enterprises, reiterating that this would also significantly aid the development of the working people’s aesthetic taste while also having a motivational effect on fine artists.<sup>48</sup>

The DSUU also directly addressed the allocation of a certain share of funding for art in connection with the material status of artists and finding a solution for its improvement. The measure was given various names, from “art percentage” to “measure for including art purchases in new building investment.” Already at the general meeting in 1953, the urgency of joining forces with the architects’ association and making sure that no new building was constructed without art furnishings was highlighted.<sup>49</sup> In 1954, the DSUU’s Maribor section passed a decision advocating the implementation of a share for art and pointed out that other republics showed greater decisiveness in tackling the issue of art purchases and regulating fine artists’ material status: “A resolution or petition should be drawn up [and submitted] to the Executive Council of the LRS [People’s Republic of Slovenia] and the Council of Education and Culture, stating that other republics take a much more proactive approach to purchasing art ... [t]he document should further add that a fixed percent for artistic decoration should be mandated for new buildings.”<sup>50</sup>

The artists’ association continued to address similar topics in the 1960s. In its discussions on the material situation of artists, it drew attention to the persistently low level of art purchases and promoted the enactment of a percent for art scheme,<sup>51</sup> stating: “We must continue to strive to develop a regulatory framework that will ensure that a certain percentage of investment for public buildings be allocated for their artistic enrichment.”<sup>52</sup> The association saw solutions in tax benefits and art purchases as well as in enhancing art education in schools and raising awareness about the importance of fine art in factories and enterprises.

## Enacted into law

Slovenia introduced its percent for art scheme as a statutory requirement in 2017. The regulatory framework defines the share of funding to be allocated to art from public investment projects for new building construction or major building renovation. The allocated funds may be used for commissioning and installing artworks and, where required, for implementing cultural heritage protection measures. The objectives of the scheme are to enrich public spaces with works of art, stimulate the Slovenian art market, ensure more stable conditions for Slovenian artists, particularly freelancers, and raise awareness of the quality of the built environment. The legislation is neutral with regard to artistic style, genre, and the number of artists.<sup>53</sup> The Rules on Public Tenders for the Selection of Works of Art in Public Projects (*Pravilnik o izvedbi javnega natečaja za izbiro umetniških del v javnih investicijskih projektih*), passed in 2018, further regulate the implementation of the scheme. Under the 2017 legislation, if public financing or co-financing is less than €10 million, the share for art should amount to at least 1.25% of the value of construction, craftsmanship, and installation work commissioned. However, if public financing or co-financing is €10 million or more, the share for art should amount to at least 1%. In both cases, at least 70% of the allocated funding should be earmarked for artworks integrated into public spaces. The obligation does not apply where the amount available for the implementation of the scheme is less than €2,000. Where the implementation of cultural heritage protection measures is required, all resources from the art percentage may be used for this purpose. The rules further regulate the public competition and specify the composition and decision-making procedures of the expert committee responsible for selecting the artworks.<sup>54</sup>

In practice, however, the implementation of the scheme remained limited.<sup>55</sup> The legal framework was therefore amended in 2025 to strengthen the implementation of the scheme while largely retaining the existing percentage allocations. The amendments increased the minimum share of allocated funds to be spent directly on artworks from 70% to 80%, while retaining the 70% threshold for allocations below €15,000. They also introduced special provisions for projects with public financing or co-financing exceeding €17.5 million and strengthened planning, reporting, and governance requirements. Under the amended provisions, the percent for art measure must be planned from the earliest stage of public investment projects. The amendments also improve transparency through mandatory reporting and public registers.<sup>56</sup>

## Conclusion

Placed within a broader European context, the case examined here illustrates differing trajectories in the development of percent for art policies. Although many European countries institutionalised such schemes through binding legislation during the twentieth century, their implementation depended not only on legal regulation but also on institutional capacity, cultural policy priorities, and governance structures. Contemporary examples such as Austria further illustrate that similar legislative frameworks may give rise to different institutional arrangements and implementation practices.

The historical case of socialist Yugoslavia reveals a different aspect of this development, in which public discussion and professional initiatives unfolded over several decades without being codified in law. Fine artists' associations played a key role in advocating the introduction of a legally prescribed percent for art scheme and, more broadly, in shaping discussions on cultural policy and the institutional conditions of artistic production. Throughout the 1950s, however, the commissioning of artworks for public institutions remained unsystematic and was hampered by the absence of public competitions and expert committees, resulting in a lack of transparency and, as artists themselves repeatedly warned, often in works of inferior quality. The situation improved during the 1960s through increasingly vocal professional initiatives advocating artistic quality as the primary criterion and through projects such as Forma Viva, which, although not a percent for art scheme, provided an opportunity for Yugoslavia to position itself internationally within the visual arts.

The Slovenian case further highlights the importance of artists' agency in the development of cultural policy. Archival material from the Slovenian Association of Fine Arts Societies (ZDSLJ) shows that Slovenian artists consistently advocated the introduction of a percentage-based mechanism for public art and linked these demands to broader discussions on art purchases and commissions, exhibition policy, and artists' material conditions. These initiatives demonstrate that artists were not merely passive recipients of cultural policy but active participants in negotiating the institutional conditions of artistic production. Although the percent for art scheme was not enacted in law in Slovenia until 2017, this study shows that many of its underlying principles, including the allocation of a fixed share of public investment for art, public competitions, expert evaluation, and cooperation between artists, architects, and public authorities, had already been articulated by artists and their professional associations during the socialist period. Examined through the lens of the percent for art scheme, the Slovenian and Yugoslav case deepens the



understanding of socialist cultural policy by highlighting the active role of artists and their professional associations in shaping the institutional frameworks through which public art was commissioned, evaluated, and integrated into public building projects.

## **Funding**

This chapter was written as part of the basic research project Art for Community. Registration and Assessment of Artworks Commissioned for Public Institutions in Slovenia, 1945–1991 (J6-50206) and the research programme Art in Slovenia at a Cultural Crossroads (P6-0061), both funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency from the state budget of the Republic of Slovenia.

## Endnotes

- 1 Adolf Loos, "Ornament und Verbrechen (1908)," in *Sämtliche Schriften in zwei Bänden – Erster Band*, ed. Franz Glück (Vienna: Herold, 1962), 278. See also: Jiří Kočica and Andrej Srakar, *Shema deleža za umetnost: umetniška dela v investicijskih projektih v Sloveniji in državah EU* (Ljubljana: Zavod za kiparstvo, 2009), 23.
- 2 The Art in Architecture (*Kunst am Bau*) scheme is a public cultural policy mechanism designed to promote the integration of contemporary art into public building projects. It originated in the German-speaking world after the Second World War, with early precedents in the Weimar Republic, and gained institutional traction in West Germany and Austria during the second half of the twentieth century.
- 3 Claudia Maria Gröss, *Kunst im öffentlichen Raum oder Kunst als öffentliches Ärgernis* (master's thesis, Graz: University of Graz, 2014), 11.
- 4 Claudia Büttner, *Geschichte der Kunst am Bau in Deutschland* (Berlin: Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung, 2011), 10–19.
- 5 Cf. Martin Seidel, *Kunst am Bau im internationalen Vergleich*, BMVBS-Online-Publikation, no. 15/2012 (Berlin: Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung, 2012), [https://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/veroeffentlichungen/ministerien/bmvbs/bmvbs-online/2012/DL\\_ON152012.pdf](https://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/veroeffentlichungen/ministerien/bmvbs/bmvbs-online/2012/DL_ON152012.pdf); Tihana Hrastar, "Izdvajanje postotka graditeljskih investicija za umjetničke intervencije. Inicijative i propisi druge polovice 20. stoljeća u Hrvatskoj i svijetu," *PROSTOR* 26, no. 1(55) (2018): 70–72; Kočica and Srakar, *Shema deleža za umetnost*, discuss Austria, Italy, West Germany, Norway, and the UK as case studies by drawing on the literature and questionnaires; Teja Baloh, *Primerjalno-pravni pregled sistema prostorskega načrtovanja glede sodelovanja javnosti* (Ljubljana: Pravno-informacijski center nevladnih organizacij – PIC, 2013), 10–34 (contains a comparative survey of the systems in West Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Finland, Sweden, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary).
- 6 Büttner, *Geschichte*, 20–43 (East Germany); 44–60 (West Germany).
- 7 For more on the scheme in Finland, see Miisa Pulkkinen, *The Handbook of the Percent for Art Principle in Finland* (Helsinki: Artists' Association of Finland, 2019).
- 8 "Commissioning of Artworks Act," Riigi Teataja, accessed May 19, 2025, <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/506122017003/consolide>.
- 9 Zakon o spremembah in dopolnitvah Zakona o uresničevanju javnega interesa za kulturo (ZUJIK-G), *Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, no. 61/17 (2 November 2017); Resolucija o nacionalnem programu za kulturo 2024–2031 (ReNPK24–31), *Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, no. 61/24 (22 July 2024).
- 10 Hrastar, "Izdvajanje postotka," 68–81; Romana Matanovac Vučković, Aleksandra Uzelac, and Dea Vidović, *Pregled kulturnog razvoja i kulturnih politika u Republici Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb: Ministarstvo kulture i medija Republike Hrvatske, 2022), 195.
- 11 Kočica and Srakar, *Shema deleža za umetnost*, 26.
- 12 For an overview of the implementation of the scheme in the United States, see "State Percent for Art Programs," National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, accessed May 19, 2025, [https://nasaa-arts.org/nasaa\\_research/state-percent-art-programs/](https://nasaa-arts.org/nasaa_research/state-percent-art-programs/); "About Percent for Art," NYC Percent for Art, accessed May 19, 2025, <https://www.nyc.gov/site/dclapercentforart/about/about.page>.
- 13 European Union, Treaty on European Union (Maastricht, 7 February 1992), *Official Journal of the European Communities* C 191 (29 July 1992).
- 14 European Commission, *The European Green Deal* (Brussels: European Commission, 11 December 2019), COM(2019) 640 final.
- 15 European Commission, *The New European Bauhaus: Beautiful, Sustainable, Together* (Brussels: European Commission, 2021), COM(2021) 573 final.

- 16 For a comprehensive survey of art in Austrian public space and a comparative overview in the German milieu, see Gröss, "Kunst." The scheme introduced by the 2017 Slovenian legislation was informed by a comparative study of arrangements in Austria, as well as in Italy, Germany, Great Britain, Norway, and Finland; see the draft act "Zakon o spremembah in dopolnitvah Zakona o uresničevanju javnega interesa za kulturo," submitted to the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia by a group of deputies on 7 July 2017, whose explanatory memorandum includes an analysis of the selected countries (the act was adopted later that year); "Zakonodaja," Računovodstvo.net, <https://www.racunovodstvo.net/zakonodaja/predpis/11066/predlog-zakona-o-spremembah-in-dopolnitvah-zakona-o-uresnicevanju-javnega-interesa-za-kulturo-zujik-g>; accessed July 7, 2026. For more on legal provisions about the scheme in Slovenia, see the section "Enacted into law."
- 17 For more detailed descriptions of schemes and projects, see "Projekte," Kunst im öffentlichen Raum Niederösterreich, <https://koernoe.at/de/projekte> (for Lower Austria); "Projekte," Kunst am Bau, <https://www.kunstambau.at/projekte/> (for Salzburg); "Projekte," BIG ART, <https://www.big-art.at/projekte> (for BIG ART); all accessed May 19, 2025.
- 18 Kočica and Srakar, *Shema deleža za umetnost*, 29.
- 19 On Forma Viva sculpture symposiums, see Marjeta Ciglencič, "Forma Viva Maribor 1967–1986," in *Art in Slovenia at a Cultural Crossroads*, ed. Mija Oter Gorenčič and Barbara Vodopivec (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2022), 519–585.
- 20 Navodilo o kupovanju del upodablajočih umetnikov in umetne obrti, *Uradni list Federativne ljudske republike Jugoslavije*, no. 39 (20 August 1951).
- 21 The 1951 instructions retained the provisions permitting the purchase of art and craft items directly from visual artists that were citizens of Yugoslavia as stipulated by the 1950 Decree on Purchases by State-Owned Enterprises, Offices, Institutions, Cooperatives, and Social Organisations from Private Individuals (Odredba o nakupih državnih gospodarskih podjetij, uradov, ustanov, zadrug in društvenih organizacij od zasebnikov, *Uradni list Federativne ljudske republike Jugoslavije*, no. 35, 13 May 1950), which defined the conditions for such transactions.
- 22 Archives of the Republic of Slovenia (SI AS), SI AS 1286, Zveza društev slovenskih likovnih umetnikov, t. e. [technical unit] 4, II/1/7, Poročilo upravnega odbora na VII. Občnem zboru DSUU, 1 February 1952, 5.
- 23 Savet za kulturu Narodne republike Srbije, *Preporuka Saveta za kulturu Narodne Republike Srbije o izvođenju i korišćenju radova i dela likovnih umetnosti u investicionoj izgradnji* (Belgrade, 1958). I thank Patricia Počanić for providing the regulations. See also: Hrastar, "Izdvajanje postotka," 68–81; Patricia Počanić, "Kulturna politika i umjetnička djela za interijere javnih institucija u Zagrebu 1950-ih i 1960-ih godina," in *Zagreb 1924.–1930. i 1945.–1967. Društvo, kultura, svakodnevica. Zbornik radova s Desničinih susreta 2018*, ed. Drago Roksandić (Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet, FF Press, 2019), 209–233.
- 24 Hrastar, "Izdvajanje postotka," 74.
- 25 Savet za kulturu Narodne republike Srbije, *Preporuka*, 1958, 2.
- 26 For more, see Aleš Gabrič, *Socialistična kulturna revolucija. Slovenska kulturna politika 1953–1962* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1995).
- 27 Savet za kulturu Narodne republike Srbije, *Preporuka*, 1958, 2, 3.
- 28 Andrija Mutnjaković, "Umjetnost i arhitektura," *Čovjek i prostor* 5, nos. 80–81 (1958); Hrastar, "Izdvajanje postotka," 72.
- 29 Mutnjaković, "Umjetnost i arhitektura," 8; Hrastar, "Izdvajanje postotka," 72; Počanić, "Kulturna politika," 220, 221, 225.
- 30 Savet za kulturu Narodne republike Srbije, *Preporuka o otkupu dela likovne primenjene umetnosti. Preporuka o podizanju javnih spomenika* (Belgrade, 1959).

- 31 Savet za kulturo Narodne republike Srbije, *Preporuka*, 1959, 1, 3.
- 32 Savet za kulturo Narodne republike Srbije, *Preporuka*, 1959, 4, 5.
- 33 On the history of the association, see Špelca Čopič, "Društvo slovenskih likovnih umetnikov," in *Enciklopedija Slovenije*, vol. 2, ed. Alenka Dermastia (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1988), 359–360; Miha Valant and Beti Žerovc, "Društva za likovno umetnost na Kranjskem v obdobju od 1848 do 1918," *Likovne besede* 113 (2019): 4–13; Miklavž Komelj and Mojca Zlokarnik, "Iz gradiva o zgodovini ZDSLU v Arhivu Slovenije," *Likovne besede* 113 (2019): 14–31.
- 34 For more, see Aleš Gabrič, "Slovenska agitpropovska kulturna politika 1945–1952," *Borec* 43, nos. 7–9 (1991): 469–655; Gabrič, *Socialistična kulturna revolucija*; Počanič, "Kulturna politika," 209–233; Barbara Vodopivec, "Umetnost ljudstvu. Slovenski likovni umetniki in kulturnopolitični okvir v desetletju po koncu druge svetovne vojne," *Umetnostna kronika*, 2026 (in press). The case study of Slovenia is based on archival material preserved in the Archives of Slovenia, fond SI AS 1286, Zveza društev slovenskih likovnih umetnikov (the Slovenian Association of Fine Arts Societies), (ZDSLU); this fond also contains records of DSLU and DSUU.
- 35 Ukaz o določitvi članov Sveta vlade LR Slovenije za prosveto in kulturo, *Uradni list Ljudske republike Slovenije*, no. 16 (8 May 1951); Ukaz o določitvi odborov Sveta vlade LR Slovenije za prosveto in kulturo ter o imenovanju in potrditvi njegovih članov, *Uradni list Ljudske republike Slovenije*, no. 22 (3 July 1951). France Stele was appointed a member of the council as one of the representatives of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts; see Milček Komelj, "Mihelič, France," in *Enciklopedija Slovenije*, vol. 7, ed. Alenka Dermastia (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1993), 128–129.
- 36 SI AS 1286, t. e. 4, II/1/6, Zapisnik VI. rednega občnega zbora Društva slovenskih upodablajočih umetnikov v Ljubljani, 16 February 1951, 6, 11.
- 37 SI AS 1286, t. e. 4, II/1/7, Zapisnik Občnega zbora DSUU, 1 February 1952, 4.
- 38 SI AS 1286, t. e. 4, II/1/7, Zapisnik Občnega zbora DSUU, 1 February 1952, 2.
- 39 Odlok o razglasitvi Ustavnega zakona o temeljih družbene in politične ureditve Federativne ljudske republike Jugoslavije in o zveznih organih oblasti, *Uradni list Federativne ljudske republike Jugoslavije*, no. 3 (14 January 1953).
- 40 SI AS 1286, t. e. 4, II/1/7, Poročilo upravnega odbora na VII. Občnem zboru DSUU, 1 February 1952, 10, 13.
- 41 SI AS 1286, t. e. 4, II/1/7, Letno poročilo mariborskih upodablajočih umetnikov, II.
- 42 Donovan Pavlinec, "Slovenski inženirji človeških duš: monumentalne stenske poslikave socialističnega realizma," *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, n. s., 44 (2008): 114–138.
- 43 SI AS 1286, t. e. 4, II/1/9, Zapisnik občnega zbora, 15 February 1954, 5.
- 44 SI AS 1286, t. e. 4, II/1/11, Zapisnik Občnega zbora Društva slovenskih likovnih umetnikov, 16 January 1956, 2.
- 45 SI AS 1286, t. e. 4, II/1/12, Stenografski zapisnik občnega zbora Društva likovnih umetnikov Slovenije, 11 February 1957, 10.
- 46 Jure Mikuž, "Pregelj, Marij," in *Enciklopedija Slovenije*, vol. 9, ed. Alenka Dermastia (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1995), 273–274.
- 47 SI AS 1286, t. e. 4, II/1/12, Stenografski zapisnik občnega zbora Društva likovnih umetnikov Slovenije, 11 February 1957, 11.
- 48 SI AS 1286, t. e. 4, II/1/15, Sklepi občnega zbora DSLU, 2; SI AS 1286, t. e. 4, II/1/15, Zapisnik rednega občnega zbora Društva slovenskih likovnih umetnikov, 15 March 1963.
- 49 SI AS 1286, t. e. 4, II/1/8, Občni zbor 9. februar 1953, Zapisnik VIII. rednega občnega zbora DSUU, 9 February 1953, 11.



- 50 SI AS 1286, t. e. 4, II/1/9, Zapisnik občnega zbora, 15 February 1954, 3.
- 51 SI AS 1286, t. e. 4, II/1/14, Stenografski zapiski rednega občnega zbora Društva slovenskih likovnih umetnikov, 10 February 1961.
- 52 SI AS 1286, t. e. 4, II/1/15, Sklepi Občnega zbora, 15 March 1963, 3.
- 53 Zakon o spremembah in dopolnitvah Zakona o uresničevanju javnega interesa za kulturo (ZUJIK-G). *Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, no. 61/17 (2 November 2017).
- 54 Pravilnik o izvedbi javnega natečaja za izbiro umetniških del v javnih investicijskih projektih, *Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, no. 9/18 (16 February 2018).
- 55 The Action Plan up to 2027 for the Realisation of the Resolution on the National Programme for Culture 2024–2031 addresses the percentage for art scheme within the framework of “Solution 68”: Facilitating the Implementation of Mandatory Share for Art in Public Investment Projects. The indicator is the “number of public investment projects implementing the percent for art requirement,” with a baseline of three projects in 2023 and a target of fifteen or more projects by 2027. This points to the relatively limited implementation of the measure. Republika Slovenija, Ministrstvo za kulturo, “Akcijski načrt do leta 2027 za izvajanje Resolucije o nacionalnem programu za kulturo 2024–2031,” 70–71, accessed July 23, 2026, <https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MK/Javne-objave/Strateski-dokumenti/ANKultura2.docx>. On the implementation of the law in practice, see: Vanja Pirc, “Umetnost za skupnost,” *Mladina*, 9 January 2026, 54–57.
- 56 Zakon o spremembah in dopolnitvah Zakona o uresničevanju javnega interesa za kulturo (ZUJIK-I), *Uradni list Republike Slovenije*, no. 77/25 (7 October 2025). As of July 23, 2026, the implementing Rules on Public Tenders for the Selection of Works of Art in Public Investment Projects (*Pravilnik o izvedbi javnega natečaja za izbiro umetniških del v javnih investicijskih projektih*) had been proposed but not yet adopted. The draft regulates the preparation and conduct of public competitions, the appointment and remuneration of expert committees, the establishment of a register of experts, and the awarding of prizes and acquisition of selected artworks. It was published for public consultation on December 15, 2025, with comments due by January 9, 2026. Republika Slovenija, eUprava, Predlogi predpisov, “Pravilnik o izvedbi javnega natečaja za izbiro umetniških del v javnih investicijskih projektih,” accessed July 23, 2026, <https://e-uprava.gov.si/si/drzava-in-druzba/e-demokracija/predlogi-predpisov/predlog-predpisa.html?id=18445&lang=si>.

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## Shema »odstotek za umetnost«: vloga umetnikov, kulturna politika in javna umetnost v Evropi ter v povojni Sloveniji/Jugoslaviji

### Povzetek

V prispevku je obravnavan kulturnopolitični mehanizem, poljudno imenovan »odstotek za umetnost«, ki določa, da se del sredstev javnih investicijskih projektov za gradnjo ali prenovo nameni naročanju in umeščanju umetniških del v javni prostor z namenom spodbujanja umetniške ustvarjalnosti ter zagotavljanja njene javne dostopnosti. Uvodoma je orisan zgodovinski razvoj sheme od prvih pobud v prvi polovici 20. stoletja do njenega širjenja po Evropi po drugi svetovni vojni ter predstavljeni izbrani evropski modeli. Posebna pozornost je namenjena Avstriji kot primeru decentraliziranega sistema, ki kaže, da uspešnost izvajanja ukrepa ni odvisna zgolj od zakonske ureditve, temveč tudi od institucionalnih zmogljivosti, kulturnopolitičnih prioritet ter sodelovanja državnih, regionalnih in lokalnih akterjev. Primerjalna analiza obenem pokaže, da se sheme odstotka za umetnost v Evropi niso razvijale po enotni poti, temveč v različnih zakonodajnih, upravnih in kulturnopolitičnih okvirih.

Empirično jedro prispevka predstavlja študija primera socialistične Jugoslavije in Slovenije, ki temelji na arhivskem gradivu Zveze društev slovenskih likovnih umetnikov (ZDSLJU). Avtorica ugotavlja, da socialistična Jugoslavija predstavlja posebno razvojno pot sheme odstotka za umetnost. Medtem ko so številne evropske države takšne mehanizme institucionalizirale z zakonodajo, so se v Jugoslaviji strokovne pobude, razprave in predlogi več desetletij razvijali brez formalne zakonske ureditve. Analiza pri tem razkriva pomembno vlogo strokovnih društev likovnih umetnikov pri oblikovanju kulturnopolitičnih razprav in institucionalnih rešitev za odkupe umetniških del in naročanje javne umetnosti ter pokaže, da umetniki niso bili zgolj tihi izvajalci državne kulturne politike. Posebna pozornost je namenjena priporočilom Kulturnega sveta Ljudske republike Srbije iz let 1958 in 1959, po katerih so bili predvideni namenitev določenega deleža investicijskih sredstev za umetniško opremo javnih objektov, uvedba javnih natečajev in strokovnih komisij ter tesnejše sodelovanje umetnikov, arhitektov in urbanistov. Čeprav priporočila niso bila uzakonjena, so pomemben zgodnji poskus oblikovanja sistema, primerljivega sodobnim shemam odstotka za umetnost, in kažejo, da so se številna temeljna načela tega mehanizma na območju Jugoslavije oblikovala več desetletij pred njegovo pravno institucionalizacijo.

Prispevek prizadevanja za uvedbo odstotka za umetnost umešča v širši okvir prizadevanj likovnih umetnikov za izboljšanje njihovega materialnega položaja, razvoj umetnostnega trga ter sistemsko ureditev državnih odkupov in naročil umetniških del. Pokaže, da so jugoslovanski in slovenski umetniki že od prvih povojnih let zagovarjali uvedbo zakonsko predpisane deleža javnih investicij za umetnost, pri čemer so svoja prizadevanja povezovali z razpravami o razstavni politiki, strokovnih merilih za izbor umetnin, o javnih natečajih, strokovnih komisijah ter zgodbem vključevanju umetnikov v načrtovanje javnih investicij. Čeprav je Slovenija shemo odstotka za umetnost zakonsko uvedla šele leta 2017 in njeno izvajanje dodatno okrepila z novelo leta 2025, raziskava pokaže, da so bila njena temeljna načela – namenitev deleža javnih investicij za umetnost, dosledna in transparentna izvedba javnih natečajev, strokovno vrednotenje umetniških predlogov ter sodelovanje umetnikov, arhitektov in javnih oblasti – v strokovnih razpravah oblikovana že v socialističnem obdobju. Prispevek z analizo razvoja sheme odstotka za umetnost pogloblja razumevanje okoliščin, v katerih so umetniki in njihova strokovna združenja v prevladujočem sistemu državnega usmerjanja socialistične kulturne politike iskali možnosti za uveljavljanje svojih strokovnih in eksistencialnih interesov ter si pri tem prizadevali vplivati na institucionalne okvire naročanja, vrednotenja in umeščanja umetnosti v javne investicijske projekte.





FREIHEIT  
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FRIEDE

# ED AND NANCY KIENHOLZ'S PROPOSAL FOR *THE BERLIN FOUNTAIN* (1981/83): AN IRONIC COMMENTARY ON THE FUNCTION OF ART IN PUBLIC SPACES IN EAST AND WEST BERLIN DURING THE COLD WAR

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Even the unrealised concept of a public artwork can be highly significant – and thus must be interpreted in its site-specific context, historical framework, and political environment. The example discussed below – a little-known unrealised sculpture whose model was displayed at an exhibition at Technical University of Berlin (*Technische Universität Berlin*) in West Berlin in 1983 – is particularly revealing when viewed in the context of the Cold War. During this time, two competing political systems vied for supremacy in a divided city, each of them cultivating its distinct notions of society, community, and art. Ed and Nancy Kienholz's proposal for a fountain in West Berlin<sup>1</sup> can be described as site-specific insofar as it is defined in terms of its intended placement, urban integration, and sculptural reference system [Figure 1].<sup>2</sup>

Below, I first reconstruct the urban, social, political, and aesthetic contexts for today's readers; these were self-evident to the local politicians that decided to prevent the realisation of the Kienholzes' sculpture in the early 1980s. Since the 1990s, the term "community-based art" has been used in the context of New Genre Public Art (NGPA)<sup>3</sup> to describe participatory projects that aim to achieve social and integrative action.<sup>4</sup> However, I argue that traditional object-like sculptures in public space also serve as occasions for communication and action – and, not least, as identification factors for social and political communities. It is therefore necessary to clarify which recipients – or, more precisely, which type of *community* – the Kienholzes targeted with their proposal. Notwithstanding a small number of essays on the topic in German, Ed and Nancy Kienholz's proposal has not yet been systematically examined.<sup>5</sup> My contribution therefore primarily relies on the competition reports,<sup>6</sup> newspaper articles,<sup>7</sup> and exhibition catalogues of the time, as well as on the artists' own statements.

In the early 1960s, Ed Kienholz, born in Fairfield, Washington, in 1927, startled the art world with his environmental installation (or "tableau")





Figure 1. Ed and Nancy Kienholz, *The Berlin Fountain*, 1983. Illustration: Gerd Neuhaus. Aerial photograph: Berliner Morgenpost. Source: University Archive, Technical University of Berlin.

ROXYS (1961), which reconstructed a Las Vegas brothel from the 1940s. The piece established him as an uncompromising and socially critical artist in both the United States and Western Europe.<sup>8</sup> Kienholz's environmental installations, consisting of assembled pieces of painted furniture, dolls, and industrially produced objects bearing signs of wear and tear that were collected from flea markets, are reminiscent of theatre stages and film sets. These "tableaux" were exhibited in Western Europe as neo-Dadaist "anti-art" and were shown at important venues such as *documenta 4* (1968) and *documenta 5* (1972) in Kassel. Such classifications based strictly on art styles, however, relativize the shock value of the pieces. It is therefore important to emphasize that this self-taught artist – who, prior to his artistic career, had earned his living as a vacuum cleaner salesman, car dealer, band manager, and healthcare assistant – produced a distinctive and implacable form of West Coast American art.<sup>9</sup> He gained recognition within this field for his involvement with the Art of Assemblage<sup>10</sup> or Junk Culture.<sup>11</sup> Through his work, Kienholz relentlessly denounced the abysses of Western societies, such as sexism, racial

Figure 2. Squatters in  
Kreuzberg, West Berlin,  
1981.  
Photo: Tom Ordelman.



discrimination, militarism, exploitation, excessive resource consumption, and media dependency.<sup>12</sup> Because of the radical and highly political content of his work, he was accused – by the critic Barbara Rose, among others<sup>13</sup> – of adopting a journalistic approach and thus merely visually *reproducing* grievances instead of evoking positive counter-images.

In August 1973, Ed Kienholz – already an internationally recognized artist at the time – accepted an invitation from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) to spend twelve months in West Berlin. Upon moving there in September 1973 together with the photographer Nancy Reddin Kienholz, whom he had married a year earlier, he had a clearly defined plan: during his scholarship, he intended to create a tableau based on a concept he had conceived a decade earlier, *THE ART SHOW*. It would take four years, however, before Ed and Nancy Kienholz were able to carry out this project together.<sup>14</sup> Once in West Berlin, the Kienholzes were fascinated by the enclave, where border fortifications, tangles of barbed wire, warning signs, systems of self-protection, watchtowers, and barricaded subway “ghost stations” – in which armed East German police officers patrolled in empty underground spaces – were everyday occurrences. West Berlin offered freedom beyond the pressure of economic exploitation, ensuring the creative scene a relatively carefree niche existence. A certain culture of conflict was more pronounced here. When the media reported on the politicized student body and the escalating conflicts between the extra-parliamentary opposition and the state authorities from

the mid-1960s onward, West Berlin was at the forefront. It was here that universities were among the loudest in calling for a reappraisal of Nazism, questioning the capitalist economic model, and demanding solidarity with Third World countries. Their legacy was then taken up by alternative movements with their self-governing institutions and broad resistance to clear-cutting redevelopment and land speculation. The women's movement and the gay and lesbian scene were also highly visible, which offered opportunities for self-confident development. Many of the emancipatory and participatory projects were pilot projects that spread throughout West Germany and contributed to social change throughout it [Figure 2].

In 1997 Jörn Merkert – director of the Berlin Gallery (*Berlinische Galerie*) from 1987 to 2010, where Kienholz's estate is located – recalls a remark made by Ed Kienholz. In his early days in West Berlin, Kienholz realised that the most frightening aspect about Los Angeles was that it gave one the impression that it had “no past nor future – only an eternal, dizzying present.”<sup>15</sup> Berlin, on the other hand, was the exact opposite: its peculiarity lay in “the presence of its overpowering past.” Few cities on earth, Merkert observes, have had such a physically palpable, constricting, and paralyzing sense of how profoundly the past defines the present; the Germans' attempts at suppressing this feeling of numbness often only increased it. Thus, the city's existence as a “consequence of the past” reflected the “immured status quo of the divided world.”<sup>16</sup> Elsewhere in the same catalogue, Merkert aptly describes this historical place as “a juxtaposition of East and West Berlin as a showcase of the two world systems . . . , as a confrontation of thesis and antithesis, immovably awaiting the solution of synthesis, . . . as a violent, embedded collage.”<sup>17</sup>

Such contradictions aligned with Ed Kienholz's manner of thinking and working, and it is in light of these considerations that I examine the project the Kienholzes began developing in 1981 for Ernst Reuter Square (*Ernst-Reuter-Platz*) in West Berlin. The Kienholzes proposed setting up a carwash thirty meters long in the centre of Ernst Reuter Square, which would operate day and night, brushing and spraying a white Mercedes – a world-famous status symbol of West German economic performance – until the car disintegrated to scrap. Significantly, it was during this time, too, that Ed and Nancy Kienholz's work began to bear both of their names, marking the official beginning of their collaborative practice. In 1983, the artists exhibited their model in the foyer of Technical University of Berlin; their proposal was one of the three winners of the competition for participatory projects. As documented by jury member Karl Ruhrberg, it took two years to persuade the West Berlin administration to allocate public



## Zum Vorlauf

Dieser Präsentation waren Jahre vorausgegangen. So mußten z. B. Verwaltungen für die Idee der „Partizipationsprojekte“ gewonnen werden. Danach sollen die öffentlichen Gelder an der TUB nur noch solchen Kunstobjekten zugeführt werden, die einen engen Bezug zur Technik und zum Standort TUB haben. Zu dem ersten Wettbewerb dieser Art lud die TUB 18 Künstler — unter ihnen Gianni Colombo, Rebecca Horn, Edward Kienholz, Bernhard Leitner, Rudolf Valenta — ein. Unter Vorsitz von Otto Pieni, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, und Mitarbeit des Kulturbefauftragten des TUB-Präsidenten, Kanzler Michael Hobich, wählte die Jury die Vorschläge von Colombo, Kienholz und Leitner aus und empfahl sie zur Realisierung. Welche Kraft der Aussage in „The Berlin Fountain“ steht, läßt bereits die knappe Kienholz'sche Einführung erkennen. Was Kienholz macht und will und warum das Projekt verwirklicht werden soll, beschreibt anschließend Professor Karl Ruhrberg, Museum Ludwig Köln.

## Kienholz:

„Mit diesem Werk soll nicht Mercedes Benz lächerlich gemacht werden, sondern ganz im Gegenteil, ich glaube, daß Deutschland heutzutage in der Massenproduktion die besten Automobile herstellt. Der Wagen soll lediglich als Beispiel der technischen Entwicklung dienen. Dieselbe Technologie, die solche exzellenten Autos hervorbringt, produziert jedoch auch Überfluß, Automation, Abfall, sozialzerstörerische Arbeit, Frustration, und die Liste nimmt kein Ende. Viele derjenigen Studenten, die in unseren großartigen westlichen Zivilisationen vom Kindergarten bis zur Universität ausgehildet wurden, finden keinen Arbeitsplatz. Einige Roboter und Computer verrichten bereits die Arbeit schneller und besser. Die Zeit wird ihnen lang, und die Sinnlosigkeit des Lebens ist niederdrückend. Ich sehe in der Stupidität eines Autos, das sich endlos hin- und herbewegt und von innen heraus verrottet, einen Ausdruck dieser Sinnlosigkeit.“

## Eine Einführung von Professor Karl Ruhrberg

Die Auslober des Wettbewerbs „Kunst am



Präsident und Kanzler der TUB hatten gerufen und alle, alle kamen. Hier: B., H., v. d. Lancken, E. Kienholz, N. Kienholz, M. Robich, G. Kupsch. Rechte Spalte oben: Raue, Sawade, Jones. Mitte: Wittwe, Lakatos, Vetter. Unten: Biekey, Sedgley. Fotos: Seite 24: Beyermann, Seite 25: Lowmatsch

Bau — Technische Universität“ haben es sich nicht leicht gemacht, indem sie mit der Forderung nach „Partizipationsprojekten“ konventionelle Lösungsvorschläge in der üblichen Kunst-am-Bau-Routine von vornherein ausschlossen und sich stattdessen dem Risiko aussetzten, die Integration von bildender Kunst in den weiten Bereich einer technischen Hochschule nicht nur visuell sondern auch durch einen permanenten Kontakt mit den Lehrenden und Lernenden, durch Teilnahme am künstlerischen Prozeß und seiner Realisierung zu verlangen, die Konzipierung von Ideen und deren Ausführung nachprüfbar und erlebbar zu machen, somit „Langfristig ein kontinuierliches Kulturleben an der TU Berlin einzuleiten.“

Jeder, der als Juror bei solchen oder vergleichbaren Projekten mit so hohem Ziel je tätig war, weiß, wie groß, ja unüberbrückbar die Distanz zwischen Anspruch und Wirklichkeit am Ende sein kann. Als ehemaliger Chef des Berliner Kunstlerprogramms muß ich die letzte Konsequenz lebhaft begrüßen, daß nämlich die Praisträger in das Berliner Kunstleben einbezogen werden und engen Kontakt zu den in Berlin lebenden und arbeitenden Kollegen finden sollen. So ist, wenn das Werk gelingt, die Gefahr ausgeschaltet, daß aus einem einmaligen Vorgang am Ende doch nur wieder eine folgenlose Episode wird und Anekdote bleibt, was als Zukunftsprojektion gedacht war.



Figure 3. Model for Ed and Nancy Kienholz's *The Berlin Fountain* on display at Technical University of Berlin, 1982. Source: TU-Journal 3/4 (1983).

funds for such a high-risk project.<sup>18</sup> The artists' proposal for Ernst Reuter Square was called *The Berlin Fountain* – a succinct and neutral-sounding title, which can be read as the designation of a conventional square design, but also, significantly, as a reference to Marcel Duchamp's famous readymade *Fountain* (1917) [Figure 3].

## The importance of urban strategic planning

Although the car wash may, at first, appear to be a matter of mere amusement, the concept assumes much greater significance when viewed from a political and urban planning perspective. For a better understanding, it is necessary to first visualize the urban strategic planning: Ernst Reuter Square was once a crossroads in Charlottenburg, and therefore located in West Berlin. Planned as a counterpart to Strausberg Square (*Strausberger Platz*) in East Berlin – the crowning glory of a metropolitan boulevard leading eastward from the historic city centre – Ernst Reuter Square played an important role during the Cold War. After the establishment of East Germany in 1949, Big Frankfurt Street (*Große Frankfurter Straße*) and Frankfurt Avenue (*Frankfurter Allee*) in East Berlin were renamed Stalin Avenue (*Stalinallee*) on the occasion of Joseph Stalin's seventieth birthday. As part of the Berlin National Reconstruction Program, two solitary pergola residential housing blocks, designed by Ludmilla Herzenstein and Hans Scharoun, were erected there. The tradition of the Weimar Republic was consciously followed – not only in the architectural design, but also in the choice of two progressive architects that were familiar with the construction of housing estates in the 1920s. In 1951, the architectural and urban planning concept underwent a change: the East German leadership decided to rebuild Stalin Avenue as “Germany's first socialist avenue,” modelled on Soviet monumental architecture. A rigorous separation of work and residential functions, propagated in the West as a sign of modernity, was rejected in favour of a “city crown” – a dominant city centre [Figure 4].

As a result, a boulevard ninety meters wide and 2.3 km long was built following the plans of Hermann Henselmann, whose “workers' palaces” were intended to programmatically herald the impending “golden age” of communism. The façades of the steel-frame constructions were decorated with ceramic tiles, prompting West Berliners at the height of the Cold War to deride the buildings as “Stalinist confectionery style.” Wide, tree-lined sidewalks invited pedestrians to take a stroll. Restaurants such as *Haus Budapest* and *Café Moskau* tempted people with culinary delights. The highlight of the communist flagship project was Strausberg Square. At the edge of the square stood a statue of Stalin nearly five meters tall, mounted on a three-meter pedestal. This site was for a period a place of Stalin worship, especially when the dictator died in March 1953 [Figure 5].

The first construction phase of Stalin Avenue was completed in 1955. In response to this communist flagship project in East Berlin, an urban planning competition was held in Berlin-Charlottenburg, a part of the city in West Berlin that had been known as the New West (*Neuer Westen*) since the





*Figure 4. Strausberger Platz, Stalinallee, East Berlin, ca. 1955.  
Postcard published by Volkskunstverlag Reichenbach.*



*Figure 5. Statue of Stalin on Stalinallee, East Berlin, ca. 1955.  
Postcard published by Volkskunstverlag Reichenbach.*

Figure 6. Festive decorations along the East–West Axis at night on the National Day of the German People, 1 May 1939. Retouched photograph. Postcard published by König's Postcards, Berlin.



1920s. The site, once known as the Knee (*Knie*) due to its bend in the road, had been completely destroyed during the Second World War, but it was by no means a blank slate. Located at the junction between Berlin City Palace and Charlottenburg Palace since the early eighteenth century, the square was part of the East–West Axis (*Ost-West-Achse*) during the Nazi era and thus central to Albert Speer's planned reorganisation of Berlin into the "world capital of Germania". Under Nazism, plans were made for military parades to march along this four-lane boulevard fifty meters wide [Figure 6].

According to Speer's plans, the perimeter development of the main street would have looked similar to today's Ernst Reuter Building (*Ernst Reuter Haus*, 1938–1942), a gigantic, neoclassical, three-winged building that now houses the Berlin Senate Library. In the 1950s, the plans of West Berlin adhered to Albert Speer's idea of a roundabout, but, instead of the monumental buildings of the Nazi era, they envisioned a solitary office tower development that was meant as a reference to American architecture [Figure 7]. The plans were drawn up by the German architect Bernhard Hermkes, who had just been appointed to Technical College Charlottenburg (*Technische Hochschule Charlottenburg*), later renamed Technical University of Berlin. The architecture historian Harald Bodenschatz aptly interprets Hermkes's first model as a reaction to the urban planning of East Berlin:

First, we see a proper roundabout surrounding a huge central island, on which a large outdoor fountain was planned.



Figure 7.  
Ernst-Reuter-Platz,  
West Berlin, ca. 1964.  
Postcard, publisher  
unknown.



... In terms of the central island, the new square differed little from *Strausberger Platz* . . . The grouping of the buildings, however, was decisive. Whereas a closed square development in traditional architectural language was created in East Berlin, Bernhard Hermkes favoured a composition of solitary buildings in modern architectural language, which were to be connected by bridges and supplemented by an office tower. All the buildings, however, reference the large *Ost-West-Achse* because they are parallel to or at right angles from it. The difference in height was also striking: the office block dominated the composition, . . . whereas all the other buildings not directly on the square were significantly lower. The composition was therefore centralized and hierarchical.<sup>19</sup>

## The social situation

The social situation of Ernst Reuter Square is likewise significant. In the 1950s and 1960s, a car-friendly roundabout was created, with five main roads intersecting with it. Vehicle traffic has since had to go around a green central island that features a large fountain in its middle. The tram – the once-progressive means of transportation in the Weimar Republic – was pushed out of the cityscape. Instead, public transportation was provided by an underground rail system, and pedestrians were thus rel-

egated to the subways – or were otherwise left to wait for better times, at the no fewer than sixty-seven traffic lights installed around the square. The car was undoubtedly the only winner here. Notably, there are no residents in this area: until 1968, office and administrative buildings for electronics and IT industries were erected on the lots that the city administration had acquired from various private owners through expropriation proceedings. Gradually, tall steel or steel-frame constructions such as the Telefunken, AEG, Osram, or IBM buildings, as well as a number of unconnected institutes of Technical University of Berlin, were built. The cubature of the buildings is based on geometric forms, the façades are gridded, and the large expanses of glass promise transparency. Despite such unifying elements, one cannot overlook the fact that Ernst Reuter Square is surrounded by free-standing buildings. Constructed on the historic site of the technical university, which was founded in the nineteenth century, these free-standing buildings of the twentieth century can be understood as a structural expression of a social order based on private property and self-interest. In contrast, the connected communist residential and commercial buildings on Strausberg Square could be interpreted as a closed social body. Two opposing economic models are thus visibly competing in Berlin's urban space.

Social spaces such as shops, cafés, and other attractive sites where city dwellers could spend their time are nowhere to be found on Ernst Reuter Square. The West Berlin Senate administration reserved the public space solely for industrial, administrative, and educational institutions. However, the inhospitality of the square was by no means criticized in the 1960s. On the contrary, Bodenschatz remarks that “the square was the subject of effusive praise and massive propaganda from the West Berlin Senate building administration well into the 1960s.” It “was hailed as the ‘most modern square in Germany’, or as the ‘most beautiful square’ in Berlin. Its fountains have been compared to the Trevi Fountain.”<sup>20</sup> The ideal perspective over Ernst Reuter Square – as one can see in the coloured photographs of the time – is the bird's eye view: necessarily from above, and from a safe distance. The pedestrian's ground-level perspective does not correspond to the urban planning concept. Instead, the preferred, privileged view is the one seen from the window – an overview of the exemplary, tidy new city below, which the heads of the administration could enjoy from the upper stories of the glass towers.<sup>21</sup>



## Political events of the Cold War

Ernst Reuter Square and Strausberg Square must also be seen in the context of the political events of the Cold War. Strausberg Square was the nucleus of a popular uprising in East Germany that involved around one million people in seven hundred towns and communities. The uprising of 17 June 1953 began the evening before, at a construction site on Stalin Avenue. The agreed-upon increase in standards – namely, the state-mandated increase in labour output for the same wages – had provoked work stoppages. As a result, demands were made for better living and working conditions, as well as for free elections. Heiner Müller's play *Der Lohndrucker* (The Scab), which premiered in Leipzig in 1958, refers to these events. The occupying Soviet Union finally put a violent end to the uprising with tanks and army troops. Fifty insurgents were killed and some fifteen thousand East German citizens imprisoned. Just five days after the bloody suppression of the East German uprising, Charlottenburg Highway (*Charlottenburger Chaussee*), the former East-West Axis of the Nazi era, was renamed 17 June Street (*Straße des 17. Juni*). This was a warning, but also a triumphant gesture: the victory of capitalism, which had fuelled the "economic miracle" in West Germany, now seemed secure, in view of the shortage of goods and the willingness of East German citizens to defend themselves against their own communist government and against the Soviets as an occupying power.

A few months later, on 1 October 1953 – two days after the death of the former city councillor and West Berlin mayor Ernst Reuter – the former Kneie was named after the politician. Reuter had been a member of the Social Democratic Party of Germany since 1912 and the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) since 1919, and the latter's general secretary since 1921. Imprisoned in a concentration camp during the Nazi era and forced to flee to Turkey, Reuter was a blameless anti-fascist – by no means a norm in postwar West Germany. During the Berlin Blockade – during the almost twelve months, from June 1948 to May 1949, when the inhabitants of West Berlin, blockaded by the Soviets to starve, could only be supplied with food airlifted in – Ernst Reuter made a famous speech about perseverance. On 9 September 1948, at a rally of three hundred thousand people standing in front of the shattered Reichstag building, Reuter called on the world not to abandon the western part of Berlin, which was cut off by the Soviet blockade: "If hundreds of thousands of Berliners stand up here today, we know that the whole world will see this Berlin. ... Behind these political acts stands the will of free people that have recognized that a bulwark, an outpost of freedom, has been erected here, in this city, which no one can abandon with impunity."<sup>22</sup> Ernst Reuter had thus become Stalin's victorious adversary and a

symbol of Western freedom. The idea of erecting a gigantic memorial commemorating the victims of 17 June – the fighters for freedom – on Ernst Reuter Square was discussed as early as 1953.<sup>23</sup> At the beginning of 1954, a pylon six meters high with a gas flame burning in a bowl was erected on Ernst Reuter Square as part of a Prisoners of War Week. This “flame of freedom” was seen as a temporary memorial to Ernst Reuter, who, during his time in office, had called on Berliners to place candles in their windows on Christmas Eve as a sign of hope in memory of the German prisoners of war in the Soviet Union. In 1955, the West Berlin building and planning committee convened to discuss the prospect of erecting an Ernst Reuter memorial in the centre of the square bearing the politician’s name.<sup>24</sup> In the meantime, the regional associations of German expellees had already received an iron sacrificial bowl as a memorial to the victims of flight and expulsion on Theodor Heuss Square (*Theodor-Heuss-Platz*), also located on East–West Axis – the former Imperial Chancellor Square (*Reichskanzlerplatz*), which was called Adolf Hitler Square (*Adolf-Hitler-Platz*) from 1933 to 1945 [Figure 8].

### **The aesthetic premises of the sculptures in East and West Berlin**

For Ernst Reuter Square, the aim was to retain the symbolism of the flame, but not to link it to a specific historical event or group of victims, instead establishing it as a representation of the desire for freedom and democracy for all Berliners. In December 1960, West Berlin’s senator for construction announced that the artist Bernhard Heiliger had been commissioned to design a permanent memorial for Ernst Reuter. It was no longer to be located in the centre of the square – where a fountain designed by Bernhard Hermkes and Werner Düttmann had been installed – but in front of the planned Architecture Institute of Technical University of Berlin, on the northeast corner of Ernst Reuter Square. Heiliger, who had already created a bust of Ernst Reuter, was favoured by Reuter’s widow and also the politicians. Heiliger’s first design still had a figurative element. A bust of Reuter was to be erected next to a monolithic pillar nine meters high. This first construction, described by the press as a “pillar of fire”, was intended to symbolize the city’s desire for freedom.

The historical situation, however, changed fundamentally: on Sunday, 13 August 1961, the construction of the Berlin Wall – which would separate East and West Berlin for twenty-eight years – commenced. The connecting lines between Strausberg Square and Ernst Reuter Square were cut. This would likewise mark the end of the cult of personality in the Soviet

*Figure 8. Eternal Flame: Memorial to the Victims of Flight and Expulsion, stone ashlar, iron sacrificial bowl, and gas flame, 1955. Erected on the initiative of the Landsmannschaften der deutschen Heimatvertriebenen at Reichskanzlerplatz, formerly Adolf-Hitler-Platz and renamed Theodor-Heuss-Platz in 1963, West Berlin, 1985. Photo: Annette Tietenberg.*



Union – and thus also in East Germany. On the night of 14 November 1961, soldiers of the East German National People's Army arrived and toppled the Stalin monument from its pedestal with a bulldozer. The statue was transported on a flatbed truck to a construction company, where it was crushed; only a few pieces, including an ear, were left. By the time the residents went to work on Monday morning, not only had the monument disappeared, but all the street signs had been replaced as well: the western section of Stalin Avenue was now called Karl Marx Avenue (*Karl-Marx-Allee*), and the eastern section Frankfurt Avenue.

In this context, Bernhard Heiliger made numerous changes to his original design. He finally decided on the symbol of a blazing flame fused with a pair of extended wings. According to contemporaries, the sculpture “not only echoed the idea of a ‘flame of freedom’ and the peace symbol of the dove, but also manifested the city’s defiant self-confidence”.<sup>25</sup> This symbolism reaffirmed the relationship between abstraction in art and political freedom – a concept previously invoked by the *documenta*. The plaster model was cut up in the studio, and the pieces were transported to the Noack bronze foundry. The bronze elements were welded together on 11 September 1963, and then the sculpture was lifted onto a low loader and anchored to the ground with iron struts. The result was the largest abstract bronze sculpture in West Germany to date. At a height of seven meters, the abstract *Die Flamme* (Flame) was on a par with the figurative Stalin statue in East Berlin – but unlike the latter, *Die Flamme* stood at



Figure 9. Bernhard Heiliger, *Die Flamme* (Flame), bronze, 1962–1963, 700 × 500 × 450 cm.  
 Photo: Lothar Wolleh. © Lothar Wolleh Estate, 2025.

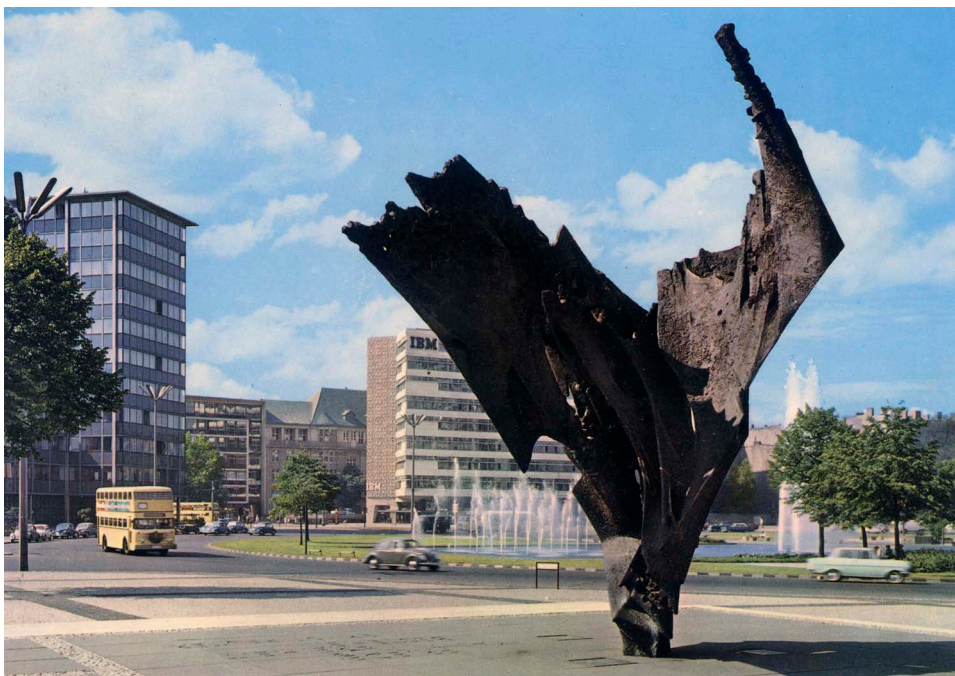


Figure 10. Bernhard Heiliger, *Die Flamme* (Flame), bronze, 1962–1963, 700 × 500 × 450 cm.  
 Postcard published by Hans Andres Edition, Berlin, 1964.



ground level, albeit on a staircase. It was not enthroned on a pedestal, but shared its position with the viewers – a sign, supposedly, of a democratic understanding of art [Figure 9].

*Die Flamme* was erected to commemorate the tenth anniversary of Ernst Reuter's death under considerable time constraints, in the middle of a construction site where work was simultaneously being carried out at the Architecture Institute of Technical University of Berlin. In an evening ceremony on 28 September 1963, it was unveiled by Mayor Willy Brandt – who would later serve as federal chancellor – with the following words: "The upward movement of this sculpture may be a symbol of . . . the perpetual struggle for human freedom."<sup>26</sup> The ceremony was over "when the spotlights embedded in the ground illuminated the sculpture for the first time – and thus, in a sense, set it alight."<sup>27</sup> However, that was not the end of the light show. According to newspaper reports from 1963, the light of the flame was symbolically carried on by "the youth". These were students that carried five hundred torches toward the Free University of Berlin during the nighttime ceremony. The forecourt of the Free University of Berlin was also illuminated by two columns of flame. A memorial service for Ernst Reuter was held there. The message was that the Free University of Berlin would continue to serve as a torch of the spirit, in keeping with Ernst Reuter's legacy. The question was not asked whether the fascination with the play of light of an eternal flame might be connected to Albert Speer's Dome of Light and the torchlight processions of the Nazi era. The fact that Bernhard Heiliger had studied under the sculptor Arno Breker, one of the most important artists of Nazi Germany, that he had worked in Breker's sculpture studios during the Second World War, or that he had used Breker's large sculpture studio in Berlin-Dahlem since February 1949, did nothing to diminish the enthusiasm that the public commissioners showed for his abstract "eternal flame". Later, an inscription was carved into the floor slabs, which read: "Peace can only exist in freedom" [Figure 10].

## The competition

In the early 1980s, Ed and Nancy Kienholz reacted with bitter irony and biting humour to the Cold War pathos of freedom and the collective repression of guilt in the cheerful intoxication of the West German economic miracle. Their proposal, *The Berlin Fountain*, was designed to interrupt the former East–West Axis with a thirty-meter-long carwash located in the middle of a large oval outdoor fountain on the central island of Ernst Reuter Square. A transparent plexiglass pavilion with fountains spraying from



*Figure 11. Ed and Nancy Kienholz, The Berlin Fountain, 1983. Illustration: Gerd Neuhaus. Aerial photograph: Berliner Morgenpost. Source: University Archive, Technical University of Berlin.*

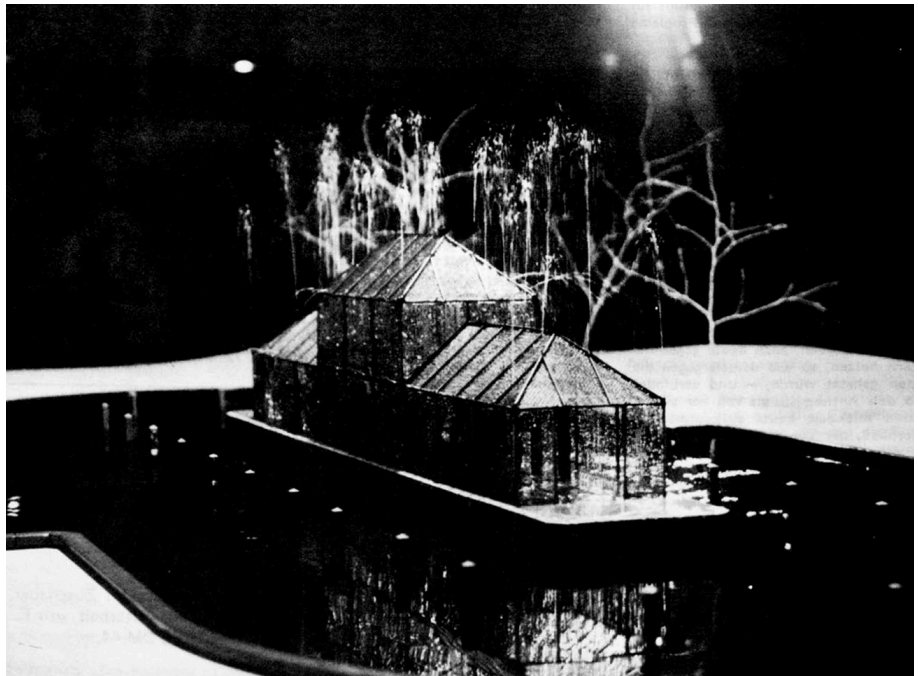
the roof would cover the carwash. Just like a glass-protected work of art in an exhibition, the inaccessible carwash – a ready-made – would have been admired from afar. A pristine white Mercedes inside the carwash – likewise a readymade, although with its engine removed – was to be automatically pulled back and forth. The car would have been continuously processed by rotating brushes until nothing was left of it but a pile of scrap metal, later to be replaced by a

new vehicle. This ironic representation of a fountain – which symbolized the unrestrained consumption of resources under capitalism – was also intended to be spectacularly illuminated at night. As befits a fountain in a public space, spotlights would have bathed the carwash in coloured light from below in the dark [Figure 11]. Ed Kienholz often used cars in connection with his environments. He was aware of how closely cars were linked to the exploitation of resources and environmentally damaging oil production, but also to sexual experiences, violent fantasies, and the myth of unlimited freedom.<sup>28</sup>

A jury chaired by the artist Otto Piene selected the project in a public competition organised by Technical University of Berlin and proposed it for completion.<sup>29</sup> The jury member Karl Ruhrberg, the director of the Ludwig Museum and a close friend of Ed Kienholz, explained the result of the competition in more abstract aesthetic and political terms:

The shock arises from “alienation” – to borrow Bertolt Brecht’s term – the seemingly mundane, which we constantly deal with and therefore barely notice, which we repress and no longer give any thought to, until it is brought back into our consciousness in an irritating, painful way. In this case, this here is a very ordinary carwash, placed at a traffic junction. The water fountains are integrated as part of the whole, bubbling out of artificial bird beaks, reflected in black water. Inside the glass case, a car displayed as a moving sculpture – a technical masterpiece of its kind, a status symbol and a symbol of road safety, illuminated by floating traffic lights un-

Figure 12. Ed and Nancy Kienholz, model for *The Berlin Fountain*, 1983. Source: *TU-Journal* 3/4 (1983).



der the flag of the United States ... Linked with the water's blackness ... a colourful theatre play will emerge – a piece not of dramatic, but of epic theatre, with no beginning or end: a Perpetuum Mobile.<sup>30</sup>

Even though the Berlin branch of Mercedes refused to cooperate, the proposal found many supporters in the 1980s. Daimler boss Edzard Reuter – Ernst Reuter's son – signalled his approval. The Friends of the National Gallery in West Berlin collected donations totalling DM 250,000 to cover the expected additional costs.<sup>31</sup> The provocative proposal was never officially rejected, but neither was it granted a building permit. Without a permit, however, the proposal could not be carried out. After all, *The Berlin Fountain* was not to be installed on the university campus, but in a prestigious public space in West Berlin – which naturally required the approval of the construction, urban planning, and district authorities.<sup>32</sup> There has been much speculation about the reasons why *The Berlin Fountain* was not carried out. Was it because the art critics were not keen on realizing the design? "Why all this?" asked the theatre critic Reinhard Beuth in the daily newspaper *Die Welt* on 7 July 1983. Rushing to answer his own rhetorical question, he added: "Well, Kienholz, a great allegorist, sees the 'stupidity' of the car moving back and forth and rotting as an expression of the 'senselessness' of a 'technology' that produces 'abundance, automation, waste, socially destructive work, frustration'"<sup>33</sup> [Figure 12].

Ten years later, the newspaper *taz* suspected, as Bernd Nicolai had previously done,<sup>34</sup> that it was the city councillor for construction in Charlottenburg and the senator for the interior of Berlin that had forbidden the creation of *The Berlin Fountain* in 1985.<sup>35</sup> Did the local politicians understand the “divergence between technical perfection and moral underdevelopment”<sup>36</sup> better than the art critics? Did they realise that Ed and Nancy Kienholz intended to denounce the West Germans’ attempt, after 1945, to cleanse themselves of their historical guilt – the Holocaust – and to instead define themselves by a growing economy? Were they aware that Ed and Nancy Kienholz wished to draw attention to the fact that there can be no new beginning on the former East–West Axis, where Speer’s streetlamps still stand? Or that the Kienholzes wished to ask a painful question: “For whom does *Die Flamme* on Ernst Reuter Square actually burn today?” For Ernst Reuter, the Social Democrat? For the former torchbearers of Nazism? Or for the freedom of West Germans, which always comes at the expense of dissenters or the exploited? After all, in the 1980s, the art scene – for example, in Hans Haacke’s installation for *documenta 8* – loudly criticized the fact that Mercedes Benz supported apartheid in South Africa and had risen to become the largest arms manufacturer in West Germany.

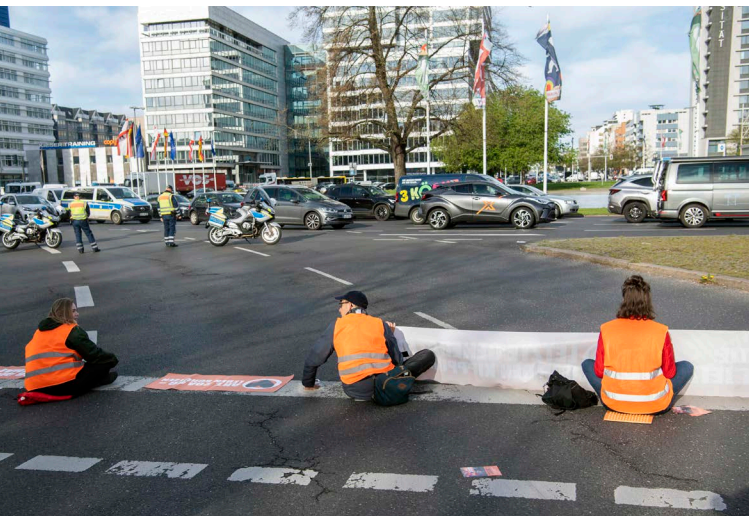
My research has shown that the competition had a longer history. As early as 1967, when demonstrators in West Berlin began to question hierarchies and oppose the continuation of Nazi traditions – whether in terms of personnel, structures, or urban planning – a competition was announced for a new building for Technical University of Berlin on 17 June Street: an institute building for mathematics was to be constructed. The runners-up, Georg Kohlmaier and Barna von Sartory, were ultimately awarded the construction contract. However, planning did not begin until 1973. Kohlmaier and von Sartory’s design is an early example of solar architecture and ecological construction. The mathematics building was conceived as a “sun trap” with maximum light incidence based on a greenhouse principle, in which daylight is used as a heat source and heating sources can be switched on as needed. Triple glazing was used for the first time in an office building for the transparent façades. A light protection system equipped with sun guards also reacts sensitively to sunshine. The institute was scheduled for completion in 1981, but it was delayed by three years. According to my research, the Technical University of Berlin competition, which produced three winners – Gianni Colombo, Bernhard Leitner, and Ed and Nancy Kienholz – was for an art-in-architecture project for this very mathematics building that was under construction. In



line with the ecological standards of the new building and the accompanying redefinition of relations between people and the environment in the 1970s, the competition was announced with a focus on “participatory projects”. In 1983, the journal of Technical University of Berlin, *TU-Journal*, offered an idea of how novel this was at the time. It states: “For example, administrations had to be won over to the idea of ‘participatory projects’. According to this, public funds at Technical University of Berlin should only be allocated to art projects that have a connection to technology and the Technical University of Berlin location.” In the same issue, Karl Ruhrberg, a member of the jury that vehemently advocated for the installation of *The Berlin Fountain*, pointed out in his introduction that Technical University of Berlin, “through permanent contact with teachers and students, through participation in the artistic process and its realisation”, demanded “that the conception of ideas and their execution be verifiable and tangible”.<sup>37</sup> For the jury, this meant that it was first necessary to solve a “terminological-definitional problem”. Initially, they addressed the difficult question of “What is participation?”

Even though the jury did everything in its power to prioritize the design by Ed and Nancy Kienholz among the three winners, another project was ultimately carried out: Bernhard Leitner’s *TON-RAUM* (Sound Room). The permanent sound installation was set up in 1984 in the interior of the main building of Technical University of Berlin – and not in the Mathematics Institute. Bernhard Leitner fitted a passageway, connected to three corridors, with sound-absorbing cladding in which twenty-four broadband and eighteen high-frequency loudspeakers are embedded, invisible to the building’s users, which project sounds into the room. The administrations of the Berlin Senate and Technical University of Berlin thus opted for a media extension of art, enclosed within the walls of the university.

Ed and Nancy Kienholz’s *The Berlin Fountain*, on the other hand, would have made visible the fact that public spaces are venues for social conflicts. They owed their understanding of technology to the California counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s – and thus “the unique alliance between hippies and cyberneticists, nature romantics and technology worshippers, between psychedelia and computer culture, who found common ground in their rejection of hierarchical power structures and authoritarian institutions and in their search for utopian outlaw areas,” as Anselm Franke wrote in 2013 in the catalogue for the exhibition *The Whole Earth* at the HKW.<sup>38</sup> It is not difficult to guess where this attitude of California counterculture found resonance in West Berlin. Even though Ed and Nancy Kienholz’s studio was located at Meineke Street (*Meinek-*



*Figure 13. Climate protest at Ernst-Reuter-Platz: activists from the Last Generation group block an exit, 24 April 2023. Photo: picture alliance/dpa / Paul Zinken.*



*Figure 14. Entrance to the Ernst-Reuter-Platz U-Bahn station, 2012. Photo: Tom Ordelman.*

estraße) 6 in Charlottenburg, not far from Ernst Reuter Square, they were likely in contact with the squatter scene protesting the demolition of large old neighbourhoods in Schöneberg and Kreuzberg. With a total of over two hundred squatted houses and an estimated five to six thousand participants in the first half of the 1980s, West Berlin was a stronghold of the squatter scene. Squatters that set about renovating dilapidated houses at their own initiative, citizens' initiatives, and architects that had been meeting since 1979 to prepare for the International Building Exhibition (IBA) put pressure on the West Berlin Senate and actually succeeded in getting it to abandon the so-called area redevelopment plan.<sup>39</sup> I assume that self-help projects and alternative lifestyles in Kreuzberg in the early 1980s were tolerated by the West Berlin Senate to integrate young punks and dropouts into the labour market and channel the protest potential of squatting. In Charlottenburg, however, and especially at Ernst Reuter Square, West Berlin's prestige project, anarchic protests against the car-friendly city were undesirable.

Two years after the award, Ed and Nancy Kienholz, who had never created a work for a public space before, abandoned the project as part of a performance. They demonstratively sank their model into the fountain on the central island of Ernst Reuter Square.<sup>40</sup> Ed Kienholz later recalled: "We won a competition for a fountain on Ernst Reuter Square in Berlin ... I

am content to say that *The Berlin Fountain* was never realised and the DM 600,000 approved for the project disappeared down some bureaucratic hole.”<sup>41</sup> Whimsical as it is, *The Berlin Fountain* had the potential to serve as an effective counter-monument to Bernhard Heiliger’s *Die Flamme*. At the same time, it could have been an antidote to the rivalry between abstract and figurative art during the Cold War. Finally, the piece would have provided a further perspective to the burgeoning critique of the urban planning concept of the car-friendly city at the beginning of the 1980s, which degraded its inhabitants to staffage figures.<sup>42</sup> Last but not least, it was a design that, in an astonishingly humorous way, raised explosive questions about the limits of growth, the fixation on the car-friendly city, and the extent to which citizens should be involved in urban planning. The Kienholzes’ anarchistic project could have led to an alliance between the squatters and the art scene [Figure 13].

Although *The Berlin Fountain* remained a proposal, I argue that it is important to integrate this design – so typical of the countercultural movements of the 1980s in the United States and West Berlin – into the history of public art. At times, it is precisely unrealised designs that can bring to light conflicts and different perceptions of history and politics. The story of *The Berlin Fountain* shows that democratic procedures in which aesthetic decisions are delegated to a jury are always highly *political* processes – especially regarding the design principles of urban space.<sup>43</sup> Only a small number of the drivers, passersby, and partygoers that walk or drive through Ernst Reuter Square every day are likely to be familiar with the square’s design or with its aesthetic, historical, and political reference systems. All they see is an inhospitable roundabout and the entrances to the underground, where they can quickly take refuge [Figure 14]. Although this could be a reason for despair, it could also provide the necessary fuel to efforts to impart knowledge of art history – namely, so that the art *for* the community can one day become the art *of* the community.

## Endnotes

- 1 I would especially like to thank Luciana Tamas for reviewing my English text so carefully and competently. I would also like to thank the archivists at Technical University of Berlin, in particular Claudia Schülzky, and the curators at the Berlin Gallery (where Ed Kienholz's estate is located), especially Guido Faßbender, for their kind support in bringing to light some previously unpublished illustrative material from the Kienholzes' project.
- 2 See Nick Kaye, *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (London: Routledge, 2000), 1.
- 3 Suzanne Lacy, ed., *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1994).
- 4 Such projects have often been criticized for supporting dysfunctional social systems and compensating for citizens' feelings of powerlessness while failing to change the real power relations. See Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012).
- 5 Bernd Nicolai, "Berliner Brunnen von Begas bis Bonk: Historische Entwicklung in Einzelanalysen," in *Neptuns Reich an der Spree: Berliner Brunnen von Begas bis Bonk (von 1886 bis 1986)*, ed. Elke Messner, Bernd Nicolai, and Wolfgang Schuster (Berlin: Transit, 1986), 83–84; Jörn Merkert, "Eine Berliner Zeitreise oder Ed und Nancy Kienholz in Berlin," in *Kienholz Retrospektive: Edward und Nancy Reddin Kienholz*, ed. Walter Hopps (München: Prestel, 1997), 36–51; Tabea Metzel, "Ed Kienholz und Nancy Reddin Kienholz. The Berlin Fountain 1981," in *Kunst in der Stadt: Skulpturen in Berlin*, ed. Hans Dickel and Uwe Fleckner (Berlin: Nicolai, 2003), 166, 167.
- 6 "The Berlin Fountain: Ein neues Gesicht für den Ernst-Reuter-Platz," *TU-Journal* 3/4 (1983): 24–26.
- 7 Reinhard Beuth, "Langsam rostet der Mercedes vor sich hin: Die Berliner Brunnenphantasien des Edward Kienholz," *Die Welt*, 7 July 1983, 17; Katrin Bettina Müller, "Das Portrait: Ed Kienholz," *taz*, 13 June 1994, <https://taz.de/Ed-Kienholz/!1558228>; Harald Fricke, "Im Tal der Puppen," *taz*, 7 February 1997, <https://taz.de/Im-Tal-der-Puppen/!1415378>.
- 8 See Knut Nievers, "Ed Kienholz und die Aktualität der Kunst," in *Edward Kienholz: Roxys and Other Works*, ed. Ilona Lindenberg (Berlin: Sammlung Reinhard Onnasch, 1982).
- 9 Together with Walter Hopps, Ed Kienholz founded the Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles in 1956, which later established New York Pop Art and the conceptual approaches of CalArts on the West Coast under the influence of Irving Blum. See Kristine McKenna, *The Ferus Gallery: A Place to Begin* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009).
- 10 This was the title of an exhibition that took place at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1961.
- 11 See Lawrence Alloway, "Junk Culture," *Architectural Design* 31, no. 3 (1961): 122–123.
- 12 *The exhibition Ed Kienholz: 11+11 Tableaux* (1970/71), curated by Pontus Hulten, toured from Stockholm to Amsterdam, Düsseldorf, Paris, Zurich, and London, cementing Ed Kienholz's reputation.
- 13 Barbara Rose, "New York Letter," *Art International* 7, no. 3 (1963): 65.
- 14 *THE ART SHOW* was finished in 1977. The work thematizes the opening of an art exhibition in a gallery. For the figures, the artist couple modelled nineteen friends and personalities from the art scene of the 1970s. *THE ART SHOW* has been part of the collection of the Berlin Gallery since 1996.
- 15 Merkert, "Eine Berliner Zeitreise," 36. My translation.
- 16 Merkert, "Eine Berliner Zeitreise," 36. My translation.
- 17 Merkert, "Eine Berliner Zeitreise," 37. My translation.
- 18 "The Berlin Fountain," 25.
- 19 Harald Bodenschatz, "Städtebau und Architektur des ERP," *Bauhaus Reuse*, accessed May 14, 2026, [https://www.bauhaus-reuse.de/index.php/content/bau\\_und\\_architektur\\_des\\_erp/](https://www.bauhaus-reuse.de/index.php/content/bau_und_architektur_des_erp/). My translation.



- 20 Bodenschatz, "Städtebau und Architektur." My translation.
- 21 As Dagmar Gausmann points out, in the 1950s, architects assumed that in the future the city would be perceived from the perspective of helicopters or civilian air taxis. Dagmar Gausmann, *Der Ernst-Reuter-Platz in Berlin: Die Geschichte eines öffentlichen Raumes der fünfziger Jahre* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 1992), 75.
- 22 Ernst Reuter, speech before the Reichstag, Berlin, 9 September 1948, cited from Berlin.de, "Ernst Reuters Rede am 9. September 1948 vor dem Reichstag," last modified 22 December 2023. <https://www.berlin.de/geschichte/8481767-3689745-ernst-reuters-rede-am-9-september-1948-v.html>. For the archival audio and historical context, see ARD Archivradio, "Ihr Völker der Welt, schaut auf diese Stadt!" – Ernst Reuters Rede vor dem Reichstag," SWR Kultur, last modified 6 December 2024, <https://www.swr.de/swrkultur/wissen/archivradio/voelker-der-welt-schaut-auf-diese-stadt-ernst-reuters-rede-vor-dem-reichstag-102.html>. My translation.
- 23 Gausmann, *Der Ernst-Reuter-Platz*, 47.
- 24 Gausmann, *Der Ernst-Reuter-Platz*, 92.
- 25 Marc Wellmann, *Bernhard Heiliger 1915–1995* (Köln: Wienand, 2005), 164–165. My translation.
- 26 Wellmann, *Bernhard Heiliger*, 165.
- 27 Wellmann, *Bernhard Heiliger*, 165.
- 28 After his death in 1994, Ed Kienholz was buried in his car, a 1940 Packard, at his own request – along with an urn containing the ashes of his dog, a bottle of red wine, and a dollar.
- 29 Even though their friends and supporters did not speak about it openly, they knew that Ed and Nancy Kienholz had been intensively researching the historical layer of Nazism in Berlin. Ed and Nancy Kienholz explored the role played by the media during Nazism in their *Volksempfänger* (people's receiver) series. To this end, they bought radios from the Nazi era at flea markets, which they then incorporated into their assemblages. *Volksempfänger* radios were also scattered around their studio, prompting visitors to recount stories from the war, which Nancy Kienholz recorded and collected.
- 30 "The Berlin Fountain," 27.
- 31 Metzel, "Ed Kienholz und Nancy Reddin Kienholz," 167.
- 32 Metzel, "Ed Kienholz und Nancy Reddin Kienholz," 166.
- 33 Beuth, "Langsam rostet der Mercedes."
- 34 Bernd Nicolai mentions that the city councillor of Charlottenburg, Wolfgang Antes – who was involved in one of West Berlin's largest corruption scandals and was sentenced to five years in prison in 1986 for bribery and accepting benefits in office – rejected the draft. Nicolai, "Berliner Brunnen von Begas bis Bonk," 83.
- 35 Müller, "Das Portrait: Ed Kienholz."
- 36 "The Berlin Fountain," 27.
- 37 "The Berlin Fountain," 26.
- 38 Anselm Franke, "Earthrise und das Verschwinden des Außen," in *The Whole Earth: Kalifornien und das Verschwinden des Außen*, ed. Diedrich Diederichsen and Anselm Franke (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt and Sternberg Press, 2013), 12–18.
- 39 Reinhild Kreis, "Heimwerken als Protest: Instandbesetzer und Wohnungsbaupolitik in West-Berlin während der 1980er Jahre," *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 14 (2017): 41–67.
- 40 Metzel, "Ed Kienholz und Nancy Reddin Kienholz," 167.
- 41 Walter Hopps, ed., *Kienholz Retrospektive: Edward und Nancy Reddin Kienholz* (München: Prestel, 1997), 285. My translation.

- 42 At this time, the West Berlin squatter scene was very active and the International Building Exhibition IBA (1987), which pursued the concept of careful urban renewal, had been in preparation since 1978.
- 43 Such competitions for Ernst Reuter Square are still being held today: ProStadt, "Durchführung eines städtebaulichen Workshopverfahrens für den Ernst-Reuter-Platz," accessed May 14, 2026, <https://www.prostadt.de/staedtebauliches-workshopverfahren-ernst-reuter-platz-202.html>; Berlin Open Data, "Ideenwettbewerb: Smart City Berlin – Ernst-Reuter-Platz," accessed May 14, 2026. <https://daten.berlin.de/artikel/ideenwettbewerb-smart-city-berlin-ernst-reuter-platz>.

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## **Predlog Eda in Nancy Kienholz za *Berlinsko fontano* (*The Berlin Fountain*; 1981/83): ironični komentar o funkciji umetnosti v javnem prostoru Vzhodnega in Zahodnega Berlina v času hladne vojne**

### **Povzetek**

V poglavju je obravnavan natečaj za umetnine v javnem prostoru, ki ga je leta 1981 razpisala Tehniška univerza v Zahodnem Berlinu. Med zmagovalci sta bila umetnika Ed in Nancy Kienholz iz Kalifornije s predlogom fontane z naslovom *Berlinska fontana* (*The Berlin Fountain*), izbranim kot reminiscenca na Marcela Duchampa. Na Trg Ernsta Reuterja (*Ernst-Reuter-Platz*) sta se odzvala s posmehom: predlagala sta 30-metrsko fontano v obliki avtopralnice, ki bi neprekinjeno delovala dan in noč, dokler beli mercedes v njeni notranjosti – statusni simbol zahodnonemške gospodarske moči – po škropljenju in krtačenju ne bi bil zrel za odpad.

Trg Ernsta Reuterja, nekdanji paradni projekt Zahodnega Berlina, je v petdesetih letih nastal na med vojno močno porušenem območju Charlottenburga kot veliko, avtomobilom prilagojeno krožišče, v katero se je stekalo pet glavnih cest. V njegovem središču je bila urejena zelena površina, vendar ni delovala kot dostopen javni prostor, saj so jo z vseh strani obdajale ceste, pešci pa so nanjo lahko prišli le skozi podhode. V osemdesetih letih je zato Trg Ernsta Reuterja postal simbol povojnega urbanizma, podrejenega avtomobilu, ki so ga okoljsko ozaveščena civilnodružbena gibanja ostro kritizirala. Krožišče je bilo zasnovano tudi kot zahodnoberlinska protipodoba reprezentativnemu socialističnemu Strausberškemu trgu (*Strausberger Platz*) v Vzhodnem Berlinu. V Vzhodnem Berlinu so bile stanovanjske in poslovne stavbe zasnovane kot simetrično sklenjene socialistične družbene strukture, Trg Ernsta Reuterja pa so obdajale univerzitetne stavbe in predvsem prostostoječe zgradbe v lasti zasebnih podjetij, kot so Telefunken, Osram, AEG in IBM. V skladu s tradicijo Speerove osi vzhod–zahod tu za meščane – niti za prebivalce soseske – ni bilo prostora.

Ed Kienholz in Nancy Reddin Kienholz sta bila med tremi zmagovalci prvega natečaja za participativne projekte, ki ga je razpisala Tehniška univerza v Berlinu in na katerega je bilo povabljenih skupaj osemnajst umetnikov. Njun model je bil leta 1983 razstavljen na Tehniški univerzi v Berlinu. Žirija, ki ji je predsedoval umetnik Otto Piene, soustanovitelj umetniške

skupine ZERO in profesor vizualnega oblikovanja okoljske umetnosti na MIT v Cambridgeu v Massachusettsu, se je odločno zavzela za uresničitev *Berlinske fontane*. Še desetletja pozneje so mnogi obžalovali, da ta jedka, ogorčena, a hkrati humorna kritika z avtomobilom obsedene družbe blaginje ni bila postavljena v javni prostor.

O razlogih, zakaj *Berlinska fontana* ni bila nikoli uresničena, je bilo veliko ugibanj. Ali lokalni politiki niso hoteli, da bi Ed in Nancy Kienholz opozorila na zgodovino kraja, zaznamovano z nacionalsocializmom? So se bali, da bi bila skulptura razumljena kot podoba poskusa Zahodnih Nemcev, da bi se po letu 1945 očistili svoje zgodovinske krivde – šoa – in se namesto tega opredelili s prikazom gospodarske rasti? So hoteli preprečiti, da bi Ed in Nancy Kienholz na Trgu Ernsta Reuterja ustvarila protipodobo kipu *Plamen* (*Die Flamme*), ki ga je v zgodnjih šestdesetih letih ustvaril Bernhard Heiliger, nekdanji učenec Arna Brekerja?

V poglavju je predlagan širši pogled. Natečaj, na katerem sta sodelovala Ed in Nancy Kienholz, je bil prvi natečaj za participativne projekte v Zahodnem Berlinu. Povezan je bil z novim razumevanjem mesta. Skvoterji v Zahodnem Berlinu so okrepili zavest, da je treba pri urbanističnem načrtovanju upoštevati tudi interese prebivalcev. Anarhistični projekt Kienholzevih bi lahko pripeljal do zavezništva med skvoterskim gibanjem in umetniško sceno. Čeprav je *Berlinska fontana* ostala neuresničena, se v poglavju zagovarja mnenje, da je treba njeno zasnovo, značilno za kontrakulturna gibanja osemdesetih let v ZDA in Zahodnem Berlinu, obravnavati kot del zgodovine umetnosti v javnem prostoru.









# THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN ART AND ARCHITECTURE DURING THE POSTWAR PERIOD IN TURKEY: CASES FROM ISTANBUL

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Collaboration between architects and artists has emerged as a response to discussions around the loss of identity in architecture. Countries in North America and Latin America in particular have played important roles in putting these ideas into practice.<sup>1</sup> Turkey was among the countries that followed this path. Significant examples of collaboration between architects and artists were produced in Istanbul between 1950 and 1980.

The shift in Turkish state policy in the 1950s placed a heavy burden on artists that until then had mostly been commissioned by the state. They had to search for new means beyond canvas painting to continue their production. International-style public buildings acquired through competitions emerged as new platforms for artistic work. In addition to state commissions, artworks started to appear in private buildings and were installed in or on buildings such as factories, banks, cinemas, and swimming pools. The artworks integrated into buildings thematically reflected the artists' hesitation between identity and modernity while also bearing evidence of the industrialisation of new materials in the country, such as ceramics, glass, and paint, during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>2</sup>

This study outlines a general framework for the integration of art and architecture based on the case of Turkey. Because there is extensive research on this topic by scholars,<sup>3</sup> this study approaches the preservation of this twentieth-century heritage from a holistic perspective. To familiarise readers with the context, a brief introduction to art and architecture dialogue is provided, followed by a section on emerging modernist approaches in Turkey during the founding years of the republic. I then focus on the 1950s through the 1970s and on Istanbul as a venue that nurtured the dialogue between architects and artists. Significant cases from Istanbul are introduced and discussed as examples. I conclude by examining common threats and maintenance issues affecting the artworks and the challenges involved in protecting the artworks together with the modernist buildings they form part of.



## International frame of the integration of architecture and art, 1950–1980

Art will not only continue but will realise itself more and more. By the unification of architecture, sculpture, and painting, a new plastic reality will be created. Painting and sculpture will not manifest themselves as separate objects, nor as “mural art” which destroys architecture itself, nor as “applied” art, but being purely constructive will aid the creation of a surrounding not merely utilitarian or rational but also pure and complete in its beauty.<sup>4</sup>

After the Second World War, the reconstruction of war-damaged cities was one of the priorities of the architectural agenda in Europe. It was increasingly argued that “industrialization and mass production had populated the world with ugliness and poor aesthetics.”<sup>5</sup> There was an evident crisis in architectural theory, and reactions soon triggered proposals on how to inspire a new aesthetic. This issue was placed on the agenda of the International Congresses of Modern Architecture (*Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne*, CIAM) during the late 1940s (Bridgewater, 1947; Bergamo, 1949) and early 1950s (Hoddesdon, 1951), and a synthesis of the arts and architecture was suggested as a solution. The same idea was intensely promoted in journals such as *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* (The Architecture of Today).<sup>6</sup> These suggestions favoured the realisation of artworks as a mutual practice of the architect and artist, working on equal terms on the same project, with the architect taking the leading role. Le Corbusier was the “emblematic figure” that responded to the issue of integrating the arts into architecture and became its early defender.<sup>7</sup> He wrote the short article “Vers l'unité, synthèse des arts majeurs: Architecture, peinture, sculpture” (Toward the Unity and Synthesis of the Major Arts: Architecture, Painting, Sculpture), pointing out the great potential of collaboration between art and architecture.<sup>8</sup>

Among significant efforts in Europe to combine art with the community, an artists' initiative established in 1951 by André Bloc and Félix Del Marle, Groupe Espace, envisaged art as a social phenomenon and aimed to achieve the synthesis of the arts in everyday life. In the summer of 1954, the group's exhibition in an olive grove in the form of a festival [Figure 1] showcased its production to the public.<sup>9</sup>

World expos also became alternative platforms where architects and artists experimented with working together. Especially at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair, whose theme was the “evaluation of the world for a more humane world,” the Austrian, Yugoslav, and German pavilions focused on this concept, as did Le Corbusier's Philips Pavilion, where the building itself was a synthesis of the arts.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 1. Entrance to the exhibition held by Groupe Espace, Biot, 10 June–10 September 1954. Photo: Dimitri Tibislawsky. Source: Diana Gay, “Fernand Léger et le groupe Espace à Biot.”



Erkol notes that between 1960 and 1980 “new architectural discourses, formal strategies, and debates concerning localism and identity” were evaluated and studied worldwide using revisionist approaches.<sup>11</sup>

Among the best practices that came out of exchanges between artists and architects, UNAM in Mexico City, as part of the *integración plástica* movement in Mexico during the 1950s, Burle Marx’s designs in Brazil, and the Gustavo Capanema Palace (*Palácio Gustavo Capanema*) in Rio de Janeiro are worth mentioning.<sup>12</sup>

## Early practices of modernist art in Turkey

Although the presence of an independent artistic sphere<sup>13</sup> was felt strongly during the founding years of the Republic of Turkey, it would be meaningful to trace this back to the last decades before the decline of the Ottoman Empire for Turkish modernism – namely, the end of nineteenth century and onward.

As part of westernisation attempts in the second half of the nineteenth century within the Ottoman Empire, selected officers and bureaucrats of the Ottoman imperial army and those working for the state institutions were encouraged and sent to Paris and Berlin to study painting and art. This attempt caused the emergence of a new intellectual class, which was later criticised by another group of educated bureaucrats, who favoured a nationalist approach toward art and literature.<sup>14</sup>

*Figure 2. Galatasaray Exhibitions. Source: SALT Archive, ARTMH021003.*



Soon after the proclamation of the republic in 1923, politicians defined modernism as a new vocabulary for architecture. Similar to the other nation-building states of the same era, Turkey ordered the use of modernism for the public institutions of the capital, Ankara, which were concrete symbols of the commitment to the basic promises of the revolution, such as delivering education, healthcare, and mass housing. This deliberate shift toward modernism aimed at a departure from Ottoman culture and contributed to the new nation, which was being constructed according to the current political agenda of the Kemalist ideology. The new government was targeting rapid progress in society, so that Turkey would overcome the intellectual and economic gap with the Western nations through a series of reforms.<sup>15</sup> As early as 1923, Turkey's founder and first president, Mustafa Kemal, emphasized the role of art, sculpture, and science for a nation's progress in his speech at Bursa.<sup>16</sup>

During the 1930s, the state treated painting as a superior communication tool compared to other arts because of its potential to share modernist and nationalist values with society, and painting exhibitions became important activities for emanating the political messages of the state.<sup>17</sup>

Going back to the Ottoman period, the Galatasaray Exhibitions (1916–1945) were a valuable attempt to promote “state-sponsored modernism”

in art.<sup>18</sup> Paintings by eminent artists and their students were exhibited each year in August in Istanbul's Galatasaray district. The patron of the first years of these exhibitions was the sultan's son Abdülmecid Efendi, who was also a painter. Organised by the Society of Ottoman Painters, they became the first traditional group exhibitions in Turkey. They honoured and supported painters, whose pictures were sold according to the artist's choice. Starting from July 1923 until his death in 1938, Mustafa Kemal showed great care for and interest in these exhibitions, from which the state itself regularly purchased pictures. It is estimated that, during the thirty-five years the exhibitions were held, a total of 350 artists exhibited approximately six thousand pictures<sup>19</sup> [Figure 2].

In 1938, as part of the Kemalist state's policies, an act was declared to send selected artists, consisting mainly of painters,<sup>20</sup> to various rural provinces of the nation. The state organised and funded these "country tours" (1938–1946)<sup>21</sup> and asked the artists to reflect the essence of the national culture in their paintings. They travelled to various Anatolian towns and villages and, each in their own artistic way, documented what they had observed in those places. The paintings were honoured each year by a committee of politicians and exhibited at state galleries in major cities. Between 1938 and 1946, around 710 pictures were produced by fifty-four painters.

Although Turkey was neutral during the Second World War, the state struggled economically during these hard times. However, the promotion of artistic production by the Republican People's Party (CHP), the responsible government by then, continued without interruption. The significance of fine arts applied in accordance with the spirit of Kemalist ideology was emphasized in the party's programmes of 1931, 1935, and 1939, whereas in its 1943 programme the state even took more responsibility by declaring that it would play a major role in supporting and promoting fine arts.<sup>22</sup>

From the founding years of the republic, the Group D art initiative (1933–1951) is noteworthy for early modernist Turkish painting and sculpture. The group's members, including Nurullah Berk, Zeki Faik İzer, and Cemal Tollu, aimed to achieve "a synthesis between modern art and Turkish art," and, because almost all of them were tutors at the Academy of Fine Arts, they had a serious impact on future artists.

Another remarkable event of the 1940s was the Republican People's Party (CHP) Art Awards, which were given in seven areas of art by the government from 1942 to 1947.<sup>23</sup> For the CHP, these contests were vehicles



## The art and architecture scene in postwar Istanbul

of political propaganda to strengthen and disseminate its ideology. The winning artists and writers were paid quite a good wage and honoured with the awards. The awards system was cancelled in 1951, soon after the Democrat Party (DP) came into power.

During the first decades of the republic, the state was occupied with construction of the capital, Ankara, whereas Istanbul lost its glamour and national significance. With a shrinking population during that period, the city was facing important issues with “crumbling infrastructure, old buildings and empty plots that were not built after successive fires had taken their toll”.<sup>24</sup>

In 1946, the transition to a multi-party system opened up a new chapter for politics in the country and introduced a sharp turn in Turkish politics, when the Kemalist regime was defeated in the 1950 elections by the liberal DP. Having become a NATO member in 1952, Turkey started developing closer relationships with the United States.<sup>25</sup> There was rapid transformation in social and cultural policies throughout the country. The liberal politics introduced by the new government and the quest for finding adequate accommodation for people migrating to major cities such as Istanbul and İzmir led to an evolution in architecture. Istanbul started to gain a new momentum related to the DP's goals to distinguish itself from the former government, which focused on Ankara as the capital city. Holding the majority votes of the nation, the DP prioritized the former Ottoman capital, Istanbul, in order to use the city as a stage to demonstrate its achievements to the citizens. The redevelopment of Istanbul, already determined a decade earlier by the French urban planner Henri Prost, was one of the primary targets of the DP government.<sup>26</sup> To open new space for larger boulevards and public buildings, the municipality of Istanbul, supported by the DP, carried out excessive demolitions in historic quarters and allowed the construction of international-style modernist public buildings<sup>27</sup> on the empty plots created by these demolitions.<sup>28</sup> In addition to the attempts at urban redevelopment, the historic core of the city was damaged by the heavy infrastructure related to small industries and squatters as newcomers to the city.<sup>29</sup>

The patron of the artworks that appeared in these public buildings (such as the city council offices, hospitals, and universities) was the municipality or the government. Many of these buildings were acquired through architectural competitions, thus reflecting the contemporary understanding of architectural design very similar to what could be seen in the West.

On the other hand, private clients brought vitality to the architecture profession. New recreational and commercial complexes housing theatres, cinemas, and clubs, which preferred the use of the vocabulary of modernism, started appearing in the urban sphere.<sup>30</sup> Yasa Yaman<sup>31</sup> highlights the increase of tourism-oriented hotels and banks between 1950 and 1960 and mentions the role of artists in the creation of more humanistic<sup>32</sup> spaces inside these buildings.

An important initiative between 1955 and 1959 was Türk Grup Espas, which was initiated by the sculptors İlhan Koman and Hadi Bara,<sup>33</sup> together with the architect Tarık Carım.<sup>34</sup>

Beginning with a coup d'état, the years between 1960 and 1980 were important milestones for Turkish history with regard to economic developments.<sup>35</sup> The shift in politics during these years was obvious in the overall cultural policies, including art. Especially throughout the 1960s, a departure was observed from figurative artworks of nationalist ideology and classicized examples of modern architecture of the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>36</sup>

The collaboration between architects and artists started toward the end of 1940s in Istanbul and continued through the 1970s. After 1980, artists started creating more conceptual art, and the relationship between art and architecture gradually faded.

I now present some cases from Istanbul, primarily focusing on public buildings that were built during the period discussed above.

### **The Lido swimming pool, hotel, and casino**

Although there were special recreational facilities during the Ottoman period, beaches and swimming were culturally marginal for the Ottoman Empire,<sup>37</sup> and it was a slow process until they started being enjoyed first by the elites and then by the general public following the foundation of the Republic of Turkey.

The Lido Club and Swimming Pool (1943) – like Florya Beach, the İnönü Promenade (today Gezi Park; 1940), and the club Taksim Gazino (1940) – was one of the early recreational spaces of the city, which offered the possibility of experiencing the city in a more democratic way. The project was developed and designed by Halit Femir (1910–1954) in 1942,<sup>38</sup> on the fire-damaged site of a seaside timber mansion, which then belonged to a wealthy businessman (the architect's uncle). Taking its name from one of the most popular beaches of Venice, the Lido Club soon became one of the “spaces of encounter and entertainment” for the Istanbul

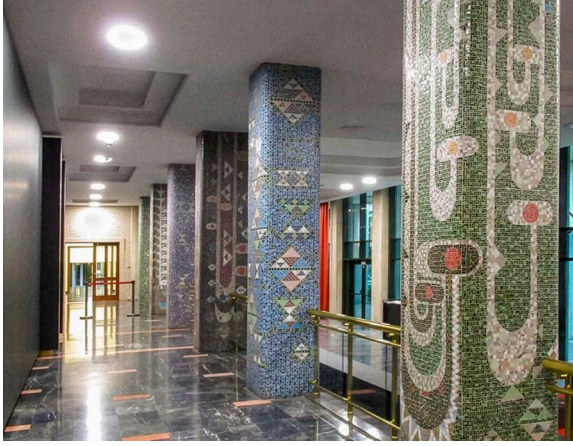
elites,<sup>39</sup> which it served until 1961.<sup>40</sup> It housed a hotel, a restaurant, and an Olympic-size pool, which brought men and women together and contributed to establishing socio-cultural norms in urban life.<sup>41</sup> After being purchased in the 1990s by another entrepreneur, the buildings suffered severe damage through excessive refurbishment and were almost demolished after the Istanbul nightclub shooting terrorist attack on 1 January 2017.

The Lido club project was an important case for Turkish art because it used to house one of the early examples of art integrated into a modernist building. Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu<sup>42</sup> contributed to the project with some murals, which were his initial wall installations. Placed behind the bar facing the swimming pool,<sup>43</sup> the artwork *Plajın Fethi* (The Conquest of the Beach) consisted of five murals produced using adhesive paint directly on the wall surfaces. Boats, mermaids, horses, and fish were depicted with the addition of angels parachuting from the sky onto the beach.<sup>44</sup> Although Femir published an article about his project in the architectural magazine *Arkitekt* as early as 1944,<sup>45</sup> with photos from the façade, staircase, and interiors, he included only one image, most probably Eyüboğlu's work, without any explanation about the artist. The other limited images of the works<sup>46</sup> dating from 1943 [Figure 3] were later published in the magazine *Ülkü* by the artist himself in his article "Yapı ve Resim" (Building and Picture),<sup>47</sup> with his complaint that he was displeased by the quality of the photos of his works. He also underlined that these works had been his first art for a public space. Eyüboğlu stated that he had difficulty in working with the new material he used for the Lido project and that during his production phase at the bar space he was annoyed by the columns that restricted his work.

Eyüboğlu's work was destroyed together with the swimming pool and the building that housed the restaurant, when it was decided to refurbish the site.



Figure 3. One of Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu's murals for the Lido Swimming Pool. Source: Eyüboğlu, "Yapı ve Resim."



*Figure 4. Mosaic work on the columns by Atilla Galatalı.  
Photo: Burcu Selcen Coşkun, 2021.*



*Figure 5. The pool and the parliament block of the Istanbul City Hall complex. Photo: Burcu Selcen Coşkun, 2021.*

## **Istanbul City Hall**

In 1953, the project for Istanbul City Hall was acquired through an architectural competition. The building, which still serves as the headquarters for the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, is located at the historic core of the city. The complex consists of a pure international-style office block with a lower presidency block,<sup>48</sup> which followed the international style closely and was therefore criticised as being insensitive toward the dense classical Ottoman architectural texture of its surroundings. The complex houses various artworks. The two-storey-high stained-glass work designed by Nazım Koşkan in the parliament block is one of the remarkable artworks integrated into Istanbul City Hall. Facing the entrance hall and an upper foyer, it welcomes the people entering the space on the ground floor and accompanies them up to the first floor via a spacious staircase. As Yavuz states, Koşkan's artwork serves as a structural element and creates a unique atmosphere at the same time.<sup>49</sup>

Other artworks at Istanbul City Hall include Atilla Galatalı's mosaics on the columns [Figure 4] and Şadi Çalık's<sup>50</sup> pool with a ring motif at the entrance [Figure 5]. Both date from 1953, indicating that they were conceived as part of the original complex. Çalık's second work for the building, *Eti Güneş Kursu* (Hittite Sun Disk), dates from 1960 and was later relocated to the outdoor car park.<sup>51</sup>



## The Hilton Hotel

As part of the tourism development policies in Turkey, the Hilton Hotel welcomed its first visitors in 1955. This hotel, the first large-scale modern tourist enterprise in Turkey, had 258 rooms and was a rectangular prism measuring  $21 \times 100$  m. It occupied a green area, which had been designated as the second park area at Henri Prost's urban plan for Istanbul, and so the selection of this plot was controversial. As the first Hilton Hotel outside the United States, the budget for its construction was financed by the state and its administration was undertaken by the Hilton Company.<sup>52</sup> The project was developed in 1952 by the architects Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), and the Turkish architect Sedad Hakkı Eldem took responsibility during the construction phase in Istanbul. Eldem also designed a restaurant with a *divanhane* (a Turko-Islamic traditional reception room) theme, a concrete entrance canopy in the form of a "flying carpet" [Figure 6], and ceramic tiles to be used in the entrance area, whose patterns were an interpretation of the iconic Ottoman *çintemani* motif.

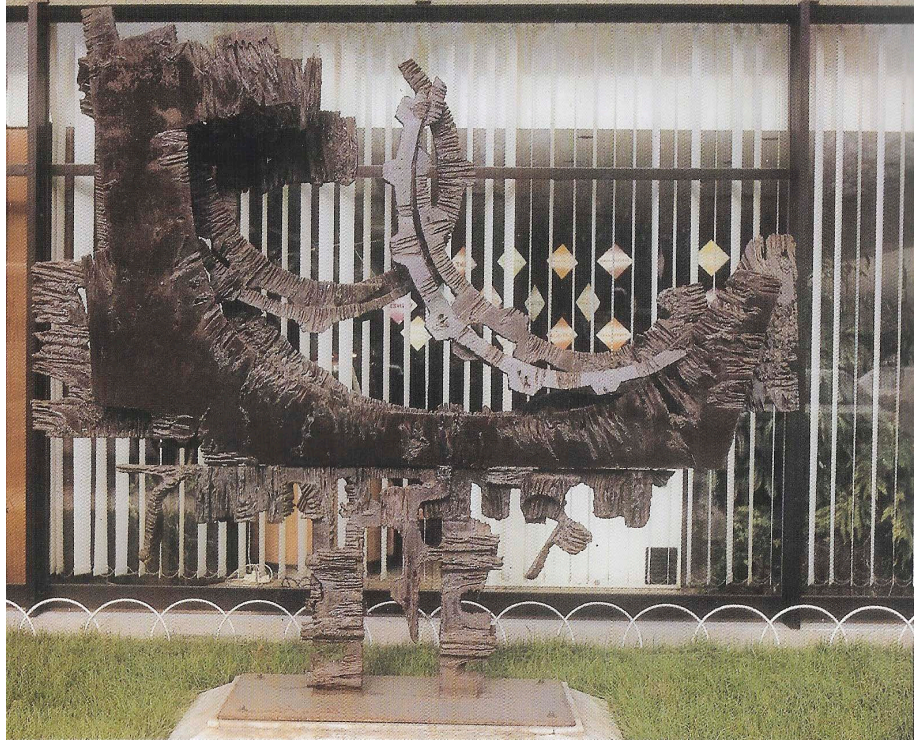
The Hilton Hotel introduced many new habits to social life in Istanbul, such as afternoon teas, fashion shows, and musical dinners, which shaped Istanbul during that period.<sup>53</sup>

Figure 6.  
The Hilton Hotel,  
1952–1955, entrance  
with Sedad Hakkı Eldem's  
canopy design. Source:  
Bozdoğan, Özkan, and  
Yenal, Sedad Eldem.



Figure 7. Füreyâ Koral with the coffee table she designed  
for the Hilton Hotel, 1954. Source: Aliotti, Şaşmaz, and  
Aksoy, Füreyâ Koral.

*Figure 8. İlhan Koman's sculpture from the lobby of the Divan Hotel, later moved outside close to the entrance. Source: Haydaroğlu and Torre, İlhan Koman: Retrospektif / Retrospective.*



Unfortunately, there are no images of the mural created by Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu for the hotel. Only a low-quality photograph survives, showing the mural with traditional figures that Eyüboğlu created in 1954,<sup>54</sup> which was hung on the walls behind the counter of the Karagöz Bar. For the Hilton Hotel, the ceramic artist Füreyâ Koral<sup>55</sup> also worked on a design for a coffee table for the hotel lobby [Figure 7].

## **The Divan Hotel**

Located close to the Hilton Hotel, the Divan Hotel was designed by Rüknettin Güney and Avedis Hubeser and built with local capital in 1956. During its refurbishment in 1966, the architect Abdurrahman Hancı preferred to invite artists to upgrade the profile of the hotel. He worked with Füreyâ Koral, who created her ceramic mural *Kuşlar* (Birds, 1968) for the patisserie, which became a landmark for the hotel later, and with the sculptor İlhan Koman, who “came to Istanbul from Sweden specifically to create this sculpture in his studio” [Figure 8]. Koral’s mural *Kuşlar* (Birds) acted as “a welcoming element, which contributed significantly to the space.”<sup>56</sup>

In addition to Koral and Koman, Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu contributed to the hotel with his gypsum relief, and Mustafa Pilevneli, Jale Yılmabaşar, Gencay



Kasapçı, and Balkan Naci İslimyeli also produced various artworks for the building. When the hotel was demolished in 2008 due to the needs of its owners, the artworks were saved and later exhibited at the new hotel, which was designed and constructed on the same plot.

### The residential complex in the fourth Levent district

The apartment blocks in the fourth Levent district of Istanbul are renowned for their artworks by eminent Turkish artists. Following the completion of the initial phases (starting in 1947), which had been the first housing units in Turkey designed for the middle class, the last (fourth) phase of the complex was built in the second half of 1950s.<sup>57</sup>

The principal architect, Kemal Ahmet Aru, invited his artist colleagues from the Academy of Fine Arts – Nurullah Berk, Sabri Berkel, Eren Eyüboğlu, Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu,<sup>58</sup> Ercüment Kalmık, and Ferruh Başağa – who all agreed to collaborate with the architect.

Eyüboğlu, who created five different mosaic panels for the facades of the residential units, explained his attitude toward working with architects: “It is a clear fact that it is the architect that supplies the greatest audience to any kind of painting, the will to be part of life. The painting is destined to live a nomad’s life; in other words, to be buried without living a life or to dive into deep sleeps in the museum corridors, if it is never touched by an architect.”<sup>59</sup>



The artworks were commissioned to be placed to the side façades of the modernist blocks, where no windows had been planned by the architects, so that the artists used these surfaces to mount their artworks [Figure 9]. Over time, seven of these were covered with simple insulation materials and six of them with commercial signboards. Two were unfortunately destroyed. Through the campaigns run by the Contemporary Levent Trust, the location was registered as an “urban site” and taken under legal protection. However, the buildings are still not individually listed and are at risk of demolition. In 2012, a total of twenty wall mosaics were registered by the Regional Conservation Board of Istanbul. After the preparation of a detailed survey and the approval of the conservation projects, they were recently restored.<sup>60</sup>

*Figure 9. Mosaic by Eren Eyüboğlu on one of the residential blocks, 2017. Photo: Eda Kılınç.*

*Figure 10. Sadi Diren's ceramic panel at the entrance of the AKM. Source: SALT Research, Hayati Tabanlıoğlu Archive, THTPAKMH040001.*



## **The Atatürk Cultural Centre**

Toward the end of 1960s, a new cultural centre at the heart of the city opened its doors. The project was designed by the architect Hayati Tabanlıoğlu, and the lighting design was carried out by Johannes Dinnebier, who also designed an illuminated column for the entrance space next to the freestanding spiral staircase. A competition for the artworks was held by the Ministry of Public Works for the Atatürk Cultural Centre (*Atatürk Kültür Merkezi, AKM*).<sup>61</sup>

Sadi Diren, a Turkish ceramic artist and professor at the Academy of Fine Arts, created large-scale ceramic panels for hotels, factories, and office buildings, and a unique ceramic mural for the headquarters of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, some of which are still preserved intact.<sup>62</sup> Diren's lengthy ceramic wall at the AKM building acted as "a reference point that provided visibility" for the building itself and framed the entrance to direct the visitors<sup>63</sup> [Figure 10]. This wall continued throughout the inner and outer spaces of the building, acting as an element to divide the entrance hall. Diren also created ceramic tiles for the foyers of the large hall, which was partially saved when the building underwent extensive renovation in 2008.



## The Vakko Textile Factory

The Vakko Textile Factory, a fine clothing company in the Merter district, was designed by the architects Haluk Baysal and Melih Birsal, who had an active partnership throughout the 1960s. The complex was constructed in 1969, and both the notable architecture of the factory and the artworks, which reflected the style of the 1960s, were praised together as “constitutive elements of the original design concept”.<sup>64</sup> The abstract artworks fitted the space elegantly.<sup>65</sup> The architects stated that they invited artists to create artworks at this industrial site with the intention of providing a humanistic and inspirational space for the employees. The outcome of this collaboration proved to be one of the best practices of art and architecture dialogue in Turkey.<sup>66</sup>

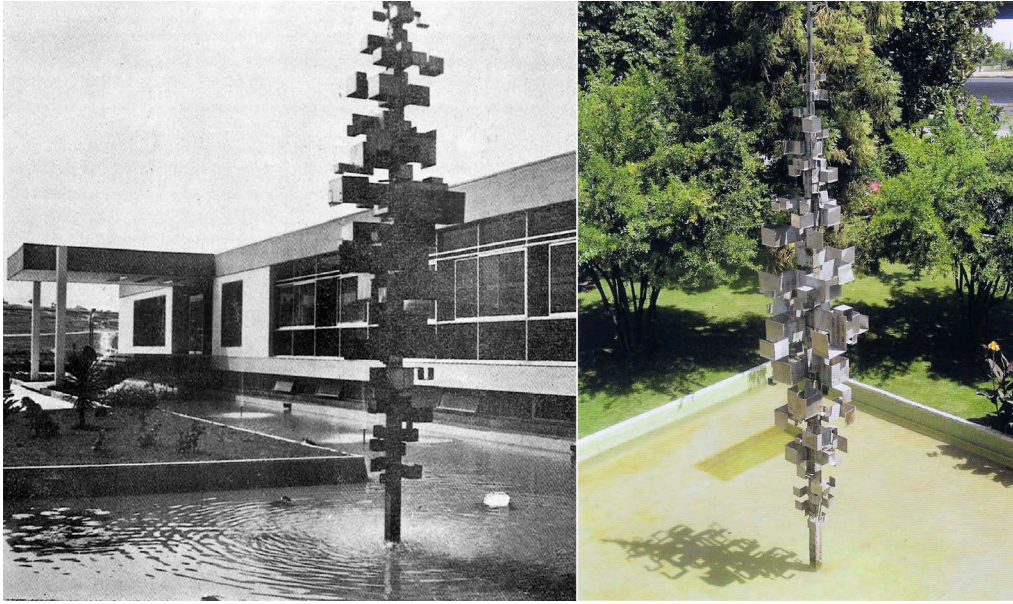
I would like to mention two artworks from the complex. Şadi Çalık’s<sup>67</sup> metal sculpture [Figure 11] was located inside the pool in the gardens of the factory, close to the entrance. Çalık’s work was an organic integration of abstract modern art in a neatly designed space.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu’s work at the factory stood next to the fence and one of the walls of the security post at the entrance gate, intended to designate the entrance of the factory. It contributed to the space as an artwork and enriched its environment.<sup>69</sup>

Unfortunately, the building was demolished in 2006, and all the artworks were relocated to Vakko’s new headquarters in Istanbul’s Nakkaştepe neighbourhood. Although the removal offered the artworks a new life, it can be questioned how well they fit into their new location<sup>70</sup> [Figure 12].

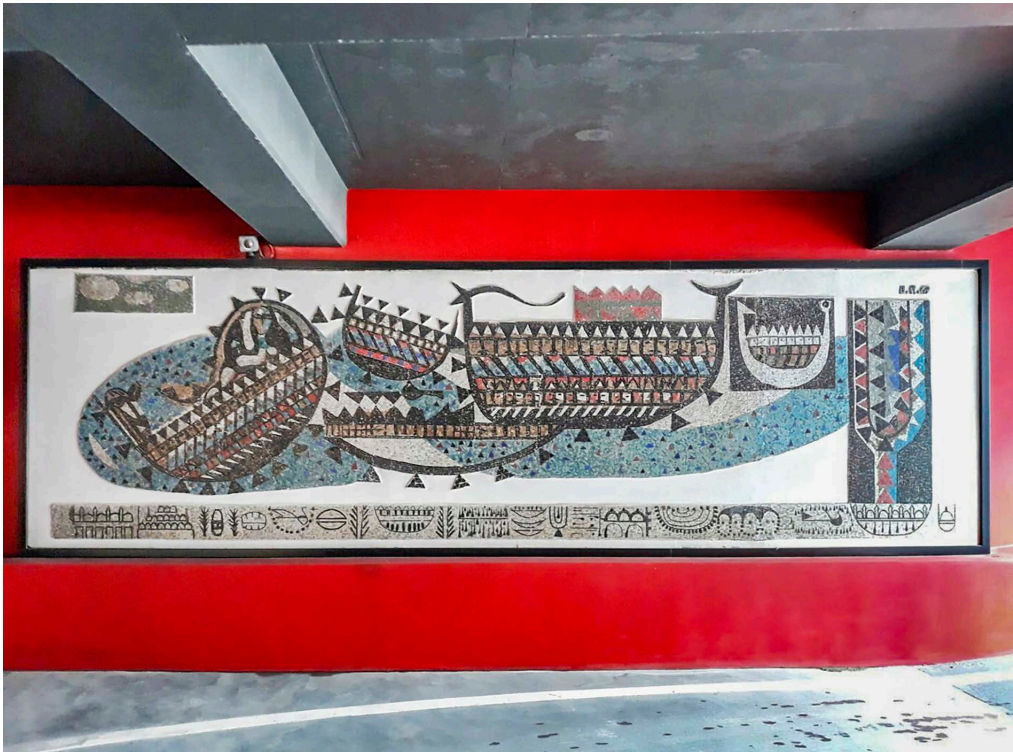
## The Istanbul Textile Traders’ Market

Some of the young architects of the postwar era were searching for creative modernist solutions in the historic core of the city and were eager to work with artists to enrich their design with artworks. Related to this fact, the Istanbul Textile Traders’ Market (*İstanbul Manifaturacılar Çarşısı*, İMÇ) is a special case. The artworks produced for the İMÇ turned the complex into a unique case that quickly distinguished itself from its contemporaries in Istanbul.

The brutalist complex (1961–1968), housing 2,300 shops, was obtained through an architectural competition in 1960, following the approval of the master plan for the site, which was also acquired through an urban design competition. The project is renowned for its historical references, respect for historic urban morphology, and, at the same time, its strict modernist character. Located on the outskirts of the sixteenth-century Ottoman complex, the young architects Doğan Tekeli, Sami Sisa, and Metin Hepgüler



*Figure 11. Şadi Çalık, Abstract Sculpture, stainless steel, 1969, 620 × 90 × 110 cm. Source: Çalık, Şadi Çalık.*



*Figure 12. Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu's mural for the Vakko Textile Factory, 1969, at Nakkaştepe Vakko Fashion Centre since 2019. Photo: Aynur Çiftçi, 2021.*





*Figure 13. The façade of Block 1 and Kuzgun Acar's iron relief Kuşlar (Birds).  
Source: SALT Research Doğan Tekeli Archive, TTSPIMCH012.*



*Figure 14. Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu's mosaic mural integrated into the façade of a shop in Block 2.  
Photo: İnan Kenan Olgar, 2025.*

focused on a variety of references that they derived from the surrounding area.<sup>71</sup> They knew well that art would add value to their design, and so they held an invitation-only competition in 1964 for the selection of the artworks, whose locations were determined by the architects. Between 1965 and 1967, artworks created by the leading artists of the time, in the form of glass, mosaic, and ceramic panels, sculptures, and a sculptural relief, were installed at the determined locations. In time, they have become a valuable layer of the complex.<sup>72</sup>

The artists that contributed to the İMÇ were Kuzgun Acar [Figure 13], Füreyâ Koral, Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu [Figure 14], Eren Eyüboğlu, Yavuz Görey (decorative pool sculpture), Ali Teoman Germaner, Sadi Diren, and Nedim Günsur.

Among these artists, especially Kuzgun Acar's metal relief contribution played a significant role and became a symbol. It was integrated onto one of the main façades of the complex, which the architects had left intentionally bare.<sup>73</sup>

The İMÇ case also shows that there is no holistic approach for the preservation of modernist creation in Turkey from the state's perspective. Several attempts at listing the complex by Docomomo Türkiye were turned down by the Regional Conservation Board of Istanbul. However, all nine artworks at the complex are registered in the national inventory of cultural heritage and thus are legally under state protection.<sup>74</sup>

There have recently been attempts to raise awareness of the public to the modernist values of İMÇ, such as using the place as a venue for the 10th International Istanbul Biennial (2007)<sup>75</sup> or public walks. Contemporary artists and architects rent shops at İMÇ to use these spaces as their studios or practices so that the complex will be occupied, busy, and lively, and to build an atmosphere for collaboration between various creative groups. As one of the best examples of Turkish modernist architecture, the complex attracts the attention of scholars and those fond of modernist art and architecture.

## **Preservation issues and concluding remarks**

In the second half of the 1940s, Turkish artists started collaborating with architects, who were also in search of references derived from local culture. By the 1950s, "architecture was assigned the role of providing a suitable location for the artwork."<sup>76</sup> Erkol states that the art and architecture dialogue in Turkey was an outcome of "revisionist approaches to



Modern Architecture" within the nation.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, this was the period when Turkey witnessed the rise of the private sector and industrialisation in accordance with the political agenda of the DP, all of which triggered the emergence of pluralistic vocabulary in architectural production.

Yavuz underlines the dominant role of the architects within these collaborations,<sup>78</sup> whereas Kaçel sees the art–architecture synthesis in Turkey as "a political device for artists to navigate beyond the cultural policies of the 1950s, and at the same time, as a professional device for initiating new collaborations with architects and designers".<sup>79</sup>

At first, the dialogue that emerged between architecture and artworks seemed to mimic the Western world in the way art was integrated into architecture. Yet, because of the way most of these artists were educated during the early republican period of the 1930s and 1940s, and the fact that they were asked to reflect the unique culture and traditions of the country, they were later inclined to interpret and use authentic Turkish elements and forms in a diverse and unique way by making use of folkloric elements, such as scenes of people from Anatolia or extracts from Anatolian landscapes, which they had intensely studied long ago. These contributions were to some extent narrative artworks, unlike the entirely abstract examples observed in the West. Therefore, the modernist artworks in Turkey during this period did not resemble cases elsewhere in the world. The artworks obviously reflected a dichotomy between local and universal – in other words, the hesitation of the artist between identity and modernity, while at the same time bearing evidence of the industrialisation of new materials in the country, such as ceramic, glass, and paint during the postwar era of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>80</sup>

Since the 1970s, many important artworks on public buildings have been lost.<sup>81</sup> Although there are initiatives fighting to preserve the artworks, there is not a sufficient legislative framework to secure their future. The lack of governmental protection leads to decisions in favour of demolition. The decisions to demolish many modernist public buildings have had a significant impact on the artworks. Because it is a difficult task to move artworks to other locations, they are often destroyed. The current theoretical approaches in contemporary heritage studies demand that buildings and sites no longer be treated as isolated entities and that their tangible and intangible values be protected with a holistic understanding. ICOMOS (2017) emphasizes that "elements of a heritage place or site may include its layout/planning, interiors, fittings, associated furniture and art works," and thus, in any intervention to protect the building, the artworks and architecture should be treated as one entity.

Figure 15. Members of an NGO working on the preservation of Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu's mosaic. Source: *Kültür Bilincini Geliştirme Vakfı, "İMÇ Sanat Eserleri Temizliği,"* accessed April 16, 2026, <https://kulturbilinci.org/tr-tr/projeler/imc-sanat-eserleri-temizligi>.



One of the most important preservation issues regarding modernist artworks in Turkey is their relocation to other places. As an example, the artworks commissioned for the Vakko Textile Factory were taken to another location and rescued. However, this is not a good solution with regard to place authenticity. Various international guidance documents such as the ICOMOS principles (Article 9.2) state that “contents, fixtures, fittings, machinery, equipment, artwork, plantings or landscape elements that contribute to cultural significance should always be retained on the heritage site where possible.”<sup>82</sup> Moreover, ICOMOS describes the detachment and transfer of artworks as “irreversible operations that severely affect the physical composition, material structure and aesthetic characteristics” and suggests in-situ treatment instead of detachment.<sup>83</sup>

One of the cases in this study, the İMÇ complex, has outstanding artworks such as Kuzgun Acar’s iron relief *Kuşlar* (Birds) on the boulevard façade. The restoration of the relief was carried out through collaboration between the Sabancı Museum and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. This restoration was recognized as an achievement in the artistic sphere.<sup>84</sup> Other artworks at İMÇ have also been conserved several times [Figure 15], most recently with collaboration between Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Restoration work

in 2022 became a platform for capacity building for many conservators and students of heritage conservation.<sup>85</sup>

There has also been positive news about artworks in and on modernist buildings in Kadıköy, a municipality and district of Istanbul, which declared a protective act for artworks attached to residential buildings that were to be demolished within its borders in 2014.<sup>86</sup> The municipality is responsible for dismantling works, classifying them in an archive, and protecting them in a warehouse, but it does not secure their reinstallation in a particular space, which means there is still a risk that the detached artwork may never be displayed again.

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize once again that artworks and buildings should be protected together as socio-cultural elements of urban life. Artworks reflect the taste and aesthetics of a specific period in art history, and those installed in or on public buildings enrich society's life by providing easier access to art for everyone. To ensure their continuity, it is necessary to talk more about the modernist aesthetics and heritage value of these buildings. Users' consciousness should be raised through educational activities such as public talks, guided tours, and children's and youth activities, so that society can establish social and emotional bonds with these tangible assets of its recent past.

## Endnotes

- 1 Hilde Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999); Horacio Torrent, "On Modern Architecture and Synthesis of the Arts: Dilemmas, Approaches, Vicissitudes," *Docomomo Journal* 42 (Summer 2010): 6–13, <https://doi.org/10.52200/42.A.CYZLHO7G>; Esra Akcan and Sibel Bozdoğan, *Turkey: Modern Architectures in History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012); Nikolaos Drosos, *Modernism with a Human Face: Synthesis of Art and Architecture in Eastern Europe, 1954–1958* (PhD diss., New York: City University of New York Graduate Center, 2016).
- 2 Ezgi Yavuz, *An Aesthetic Response to an Architectural Challenge: Architecture's Dialogue with the Arts in Post-war Turkey* (PhD diss., Ankara: METU Architectural History Graduate Program, 2015); İdil Erkol, *Türkiye Mimarlığı'nda Modernizmin Revizyonları (1960–1980) / Revisions of Modernism in Turkey's Architecture (1960–1980)* (PhD diss., Istanbul: Istanbul Technical University, 2016), YÖK Thesis Center 444218.
- 3 Sena Özeren, *Mimaride kurgulanan sanatın tasarımda oluşturduğu bellek ve İMÇ örneği / Creation of the Memory through the Usage of Art in Architectural Design and İMÇ* (master's thesis, Yıldız Technical University, 2008), YÖK Thesis Center 230723; Yavuz, "An Aesthetic Response to an Architectural Challenge"; Selda Bancı, Turkish Pavilion in the Brussels Expo '58: *A Study on Architectural Modernization in Turkey during the 1950s* (master's thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2009), YÖK Thesis Center 250718; Erkol, *Türkiye Mimarlığı'nda Modernizmin Revizyonları*; Aynur Çiftçi, "Loss of Synthesis of Modern Architecture and Art in Istanbul: Case of İzzet Şefizade Villa," *Journal of Architectural Conservation* 28, no. 1 (2022): 46–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13556207.2021.2010431>.
- 4 Piet Mondrian, *Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art: Six Essays* (New York: Wittenborn and Co., 1939).
- 5 Torrent, "On Modern Architecture and Synthesis."
- 6 Two volumes of the journal in 1945 included the essays by its founder André Bloc on the synthesis of major arts (architecture, painting, and sculpture). Erkol, *Türkiye Mimarlığı'nda Modernizmin Revizyonları*; Yavuz, "An Aesthetic Response to an Architectural Challenge," 139.
- 7 Torrent, "On Modern Architecture and Synthesis."
- 8 Ann Knoll, *The Synthesis of the Arts in the Context of Post-World War II: A Study of Le Corbusier's Ideas and His Porte Maillot Pavilion* (PhD diss., New York: City University of New York, 1999).
- 9 Diana Gay, "Fernand Léger et le groupe Espace à Biot: Un terrain d'expérimentation pour une modernité critique," *In Situ* 32 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.4000/insitu.14660>.
- 10 Bancı, "Turkish Pavilion in the Brussels Expo '58," 12.
- 11 Erkol, *Türkiye Mimarlığı'nda Modernizmin Revizyonları*.
- 12 Although it is one of the most remarkable modernist landmarks in Brazil, privatization attempts have placed the building at risk. The SAH (2021) Heritage Conservation Committee recently ran a campaign to raise awareness of the building's current situation. See SAH, "Statement on the Preservation of the Palácio Gustavo Capanema, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil / 2021," accessed March 31, 2026, [https://www.sah.org/docs/default-source/preservation-advocacy/sah\\_statement\\_palacio-gustavo-capanema\\_6-september-2021\\_as-approved.pdf?sfvrsn=64db279b\\_2](https://www.sah.org/docs/default-source/preservation-advocacy/sah_statement_palacio-gustavo-capanema_6-september-2021_as-approved.pdf?sfvrsn=64db279b_2).
- 13 There were some very talented painters working in the army during the Ottoman period, who mostly painted landscapes and portraits in an expressionist manner. For further reading about this period, see Mustafa Cezar, *Sanatta Batı'ya Açılış ve Osman Hamdi*, 2 vols. (Istanbul: Erol Kerim Aksoy Kültür, Eğitim, Spor ve Sağlık Vakfı, 1995).
- 14 Güner states that this new approach in the empire during the beginning of the twentieth century had semantic similarities with Russia with regard to the artists' search for modernism. Opposing mainstream western imperial ideas, it sought to form a new language that reflected Turkish national identity, and it was



firmly connected with the ideas that fed the nationalistic resistance movement. Kağan Güner, *Modern Türk Sanatının Doğuşu Konstrüktivist Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Kültür ve İdeoloji* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2014), 63.

- 15 Akcan and Bozdoğan, *Turkey: Modern Architectures in History*, 18.
- 16 Bengü Aydın Dikmen, *İnkılabı Nakşedecek Resimler, Tek-Parti Döneminde Resim ve Siyaset* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2023), 220.
- 17 Çağatay Olgun, "Perception of Modernism in Turkish Painting in the 1930s," *Ordu Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Araştırmaları Dergisi* 14, no. 1 (2024): 259–260, <https://doi.org/10.48146/odusobiad.1250650>.
- 18 Akcan and Bozdoğan, *Turkey: Modern Architectures in History*; Güner, *Modern Türk Sanatının Doğuşu*, 63.
- 19 Mustafa Berk, *Yurt gezileri ve resim sanatına yansımaları (1938–43) / Reflections of Country Tours to the Art of Canvas Painting* (master's thesis, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, 2018), YÖK Thesis Center 274468.
- 20 During these founding decades, monumental sculptures depicting the war of independence and the president at the time, Mustafa Kemal, as the leader of the Turkish army were the main topics for sculptures. Emel Coşkun, "1950–1960 Yılları Arası Türk Heykel Sanatı," *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 35, no. 2 (2011): 131–149.
- 21 A recent study by Aydın Dikmen (2023) indicates that the tours ended in 1946, instead of 1944, as was formerly suggested.
- 22 Hakan Uzun, "Türkiye'de Sanat ve Sanatçıların Teşvik ve Ödüllendirilmesi: 'Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi Sanat Mükafatı' Yarışması," *Türkiyat Mecmuası* 28, no. 1 (2018): 216–217, <https://doi.org/10.18345/iuturkiyat.437812>; Malike Bileydi Koç, "Cumhuriyet Dönemi Kültür ve Sanat Politikaları Bağlamında İnkılâp Sergileri ve Yurt Gezileri (1923–1943)," *Marmara Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi* 10 (Cumhuriyet'in 100. Yılı Özel Sayısı) (2023): 52–53, <https://doi.org/10.16985/mtad.1332286>; Aydın Dikmen, *İnkılabı Nakşedecek Resimler*, 264.
- 23 Uzun, "Türkiye'de Sanat ve Sanatçıların Teşvik ve Ödüllendirilmesi," 217.
- 24 Akcan and Bozdoğan, *Turkey: Modern Architectures in History*, 109.
- 25 Elvan Altan Ergut, İpek Yada Akpınar, and Zafer Akay, "Architecture in İstanbul in the Republican Period," in *History of Istanbul from Antiquity to the XXI. Century*, vol. 9 (İstanbul: TDV Islamic Research Center and İstanbul Municipality, 2015), 578–640; Akcan and Bozdoğan, *Turkey*, 114; Bülent Batuman, *New Islamist Architecture and Urbanism: Negotiating Nation and Islam through Built Environment in Turkey* (London: Routledge, 2018), 21–23.
- 26 Murat Gül, *The Emergence of Modern Istanbul: Transformation and Modernisation of a City* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 131–132.
- 27 Batuman suggests that the dissolution of the top-down nation-building project became evident with the ruling DP's attempts from 1950 to 1960 to reconcile it with Turkey's Islamic identity, with nationalist-conservative ideology emerging as a counter to the modernist secularism of the early republican years – this time through appropriating modernist architecture. Batuman, *New Islamist Architecture and Urbanism*, 21.
- 28 Gül, *The Emergence of Modern Istanbul*.
- 29 Starting in the 1950s, rapid urbanization was experienced throughout the entire country. The newcomers were mostly immigrants from Anatolian towns in search of new jobs. Burcu Selcen Coşkun, "Interventions in the Historic City: The Role of Three Women Conservation Architects during the 1950s," in *Transformations of Public Space: Architecture and the Visual Arts in Late Modern Istanbul 1950–80*, ed. İpek Akpınar, Elâ Güngören, Johan Mårtelius, and Gertrud Olsson (İstanbul: Swedish Research Institute in İstanbul, 2021), 124–125.
- 30 Akcan and Bozdoğan, *Turkey: Modern Architectures in History*, 114.
- 31 Zeynep Yasa Yaman, "Monument and Sculpture in Public Sphere, As Political and Aesthetical Signs," *METU Journal of the Faculty of Architecture* 28, no. 1 (2011): 83.

- 32 By the term *humanistic*, one can understand “modern, healthy, and hygienic” urban areas designed for new social practices, where “different sexes could mix and move around freely”. Ceren Hamiloğlu, “Modernity and Leisure: The Construction of Florya Beach in Istanbul (1935–1960),” *Journal of Urban History* 48, no. 6 (2022): 1266, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00961442221089870>.
- 33 Kaçel states that Hadi Bara and İlhan Koman had been working intensely on abstract art that was based “on the search for spatially defined expressions of form, material, and movement”. Ela Kaçel, “Integration of Arts and Architecture in Postwar Turkish Modernism,” *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 28 (2016): 216–218.
- 34 Yasa Yaman, “Monument and Sculpture,” 82; Kaçel, “Integration of Arts and Architecture,” 218; Ela Güngören, “Reminiscences and Revivals: Reimagining the Public Square in Istanbul under Coups d’État,” in *Transformations of Public Space: Architecture and the Visual Arts in Late Modern Istanbul 1950–80*, ed. İpek Akpınar, Elâ Güngören, Johan Mårtelius, and Gertrud Olsson (Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 2021), 85.
- 35 İdil Erkol, “In Search of Local Modernism: The Istanbul Drapers’ and Furnishers’ Bazaar,” in *Transformations of Public Space: Architecture and the Visual Arts in Late Modern Istanbul 1950–80*, ed. İpek Akpınar, Elâ Güngören, Johan Mårtelius, and Gertrud Olsson (Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 2021), 45.
- 36 Kaçel, “Integration of Arts and Architecture.”
- 37 Hamiloğlu, “Modernity and Leisure,” 1266.
- 38 After his graduation in 1937, Halit Femir worked at the offices of Le Corbusier and Sven Markelius for two years. Returning to Istanbul, he began working as a teaching assistant at the academy and started his practice in 1943. He was known to be a strict functionalist. Bilge Ekin İnan, *Halit Femir’in (1910–1954) Hayatı ve Mimarlığı* (master’s thesis, Istanbul Technical University, 2020). YÖK Thesis Center (634590); Yavuz, “An Aesthetic Response to an Architectural Challenge.”
- 39 Altan Ergut, Yada Akpınar, and Akay, “Architecture in İstanbul in the Republican Period,” 580; Hamiloğlu, “Modernity and Leisure,” 1267.
- 40 Halit Femir, “Lido Yüzme Havuzu (Lido Swimming Pool),” *Arkitekt* 155–156, nos. 11–12 (1944): 244–249; İnan, “Halit Femir’in (1910–1954) Hayatı ve Mimarlığı.”
- 41 Meltem Ö. Gürel, “The Transformation of Seaside Practices from Sea Baths to Mid-Century Beaches in Istanbul,” in *Transformations of Public Space: Architecture and the Visual Arts in Late Modern Istanbul 1950–80*, ed. İpek Akpınar, Elâ Güngören, Johan Mårtelius, and Gertrud Olsson (Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 2021), 29.
- 42 Eyüboğlu was one of the most eminent Turkish artists. After dropping out of the academy, he went to Paris to practice French and to build contacts in the artistic spheres. He returned to Turkey in 1936 and started working as a teaching assistant at the academy in addition to practicing art. He was among the artists that went to small Anatolian towns as part of the state programme of the 1940s. His artistic approach usually included many local elements. He depicted folklore scenes and scenes of rural life and people in his own style.
- 43 Eyüboğlu published his important text “Yapı ve Resim” in the journal *Ülkü* in the same year that the swimming pool opened to the public. Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, “Yapı ve Resim,” *Ülkü*, no. 49 (1 October 1943): 1.
- 44 Eyüboğlu, “Yapı ve Resim”; Yavuz, “An Aesthetic Response to an Architectural Challenge”; İnan, “Halit Femir’in (1910–1954) Hayatı ve Mimarlığı.”
- 45 Femir, “Lido Yüzme Havuzu (Lido Swimming Pool),” 248.
- 46 In her dissertation on Halit Femir’s architecture, İnan points to other murals by Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, such as one with women carrying food and a cat, which was intended to be placed on the wall behind a bar counter. İnan, “Halit Femir’in (1910–1954) Hayatı ve Mimarlığı.”
- 47 Eyüboğlu, “Yapı ve Resim,” 1.

- 48 Nevzat Erol, "İstanbul Belediye Sarayı," *Mimarlık*, no. 15 (1965): 9.
- 49 Yavuz, *An Aesthetic Response to an Architectural Challenge*, 176.
- 50 The sculptor Şadi Çalık stayed in Paris during the 1950s and attended conferences at the Abstract Art Workshop (*Atelier de l'Art Abstrait*). As one of the most important sculptors of the modernist Turkish art and a professor at Fine Arts Academy in Istanbul, he produced many abstract sculptures for public buildings during the postwar period. Siren Çalık, *Şadi Çalık* (Istanbul: İş Bankası, 2004).
- 51 Erol, "İstanbul Belediye Sarayı," 9. Later in the article, the architect states that the inclusion of artworks was planned from the outset.
- 52 Hande Atmaca Çetin, *Reading the Modern through Hotel Interiors of the 1950s: Divan and Çınar Hotels in Istanbul* (PhD diss., Istanbul: Istanbul Technical University, 2019), 104, YÖK Thesis Center 605461.
- 53 Atmaca Çetin, *Reading the Modern*, 100.
- 54 Bancı, "Turkish Pavilion in the Brussels Expo '58," 78.
- 55 Füreyâ Koral was the first Turkish female ceramic artist. Raised in a family of intellectuals, she discovered ceramic art while she was undergoing treatment for tuberculosis in Switzerland in 1947. Having received support from the ceramic artist Georges Serré in Paris, she opened her first exhibition in 1951. A self-taught artist, Koral had a unique style that brought traditional and modern art together. Ayşe Kulin, *Füreyâ* (Istanbul: Everest Yayınları, 2012); Karoly Aliotti, Nilüfer Şaşmaz, and Farah Aksoy, eds., *Füreyâ Koral* (Istanbul: MASA/Kale Group, 2017).
- 56 Yavuz, *An Aesthetic Response to an Architectural Challenge*.
- 57 Erdem Erbaş, "Örnek bir Prestij Konut Alanı olarak Levent Mahallesi," *Tasarım ve Kuram*, no. 8 (2012): 5–7.
- 58 After his work at the Levent complex, Eyüboğlu received the Grand Prix for his mosaic at the Turkish Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair. Bancı, "Turkish Pavilion in the Brussels Expo '58," 79.
- 59 Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğlu, "Mozaik Hakkında," *Cumhuriyet*, 13 March 1952.
- 60 Çiftçi, "Loss of Synthesis of Modern Architecture and Art"; Altan Ergut, Yada Akpınar, and Akay, "Architecture in Istanbul in the Republican Period," 580.
- 61 Kaçel suggests that in the 1960s more artworks emerged in public buildings, and a regulation on the provision of artworks was then announced, regarding the integration of art into public buildings. Kaçel, "Integration of Arts and Architecture," 216, 225.
- 62 Kaçel, "Integration of Arts and Architecture," 225; Emre Zeytinoğlu, *Sadi Diren Retrospektif 1957–2008* (Istanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2019).
- 63 Yavuz, *An Aesthetic Response to an Architectural Challenge*.
- 64 Akcan and Bozdoğan, *Turkey: Modern Architectures in History*, 132.
- 65 Artworks for the factory were produced by Bedri Rahmi, Eren Eyüboğlu, Metin Şahinoğlu, Nevzat Yüzbaşıoğlu, Jale Yılmazbaşar, Haluk Tezoner, Tankut Öktem, Şadi Çalık, Hasan Kavruk, Mustafa Pilevneli, and Teoman Madra. Kaçel, "Integration of Arts and Architecture."
- 66 Esen Özdamar, "A Small Loss for an Expanding City: Vakko Textile Factory," *Journal of Architectural Conservation* 25, no. 3 (2019): 192–210, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13556207.2019.1631590>.
- 67 Çalık was a strong figure in Turkish art, who offered a new perspective about simplicity and purity in Turkish art.
- 68 Yavuz, *An Aesthetic Response to an Architectural Challenge*.
- 69 Yavuz, *An Aesthetic Response to an Architectural Challenge*.
- 70 The same question can be raised for Koral's ceramic works at the Başak Insurance Company's offices in the

Harbiye neighbourhood, designed by Asım Mutlu, Utarit İzgi, and Esad Suher. Koral was commissioned to produce a ceramic mural for the company in 1966; Kulin, *Füreya*. Due to the demolition of the building in 2013, the murals had to be taken down. They were preserved and installed at the new offices.

- 71 Doğan Tekeli, Sami Sisa, and Metin Hepgüler, "İstanbul Manifaturacılar Çarşısı," *Mimarlık* 3, no. 15 (1965): 23–25; Akcan and Bozdoğan, *Turkey: Modern Architectures in History*, 131–133; Erkol, "In Search of Local Modernism."
- 72 Özeren, "Mimaride kurgulanan sanatın"; Doğan Tekeli, *Manifaturacılar Çarşısı. Mimarlık: Zor Sanat* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2012), 161–183; Kaçel, "Integration of Arts and Architecture," 222.
- 73 Yavuz, *An Aesthetic Response to an Architectural Challenge*.
- 74 Directorate of Conservation of Cultural Heritage, 2026.
- 75 Shops and common areas hosted twenty-seven art projects, which was an excellent contribution to the complex and the solidarity of artists against possible threats to the site. At the same biennial, the AKM was also selected as another venue for the same purpose.
- 76 Yavuz, *An Aesthetic Response to an Architectural Challenge*.
- 77 Erkol, *Türkiye Mimarlığı'nda Modernizmin Revizyonları*.
- 78 Yavuz, *An Aesthetic Response to an Architectural Challenge*, 193.
- 79 Kaçel, "Integration of Arts and Architecture," 216.
- 80 Yavuz, "Mimarlık–Sanat Birlikteliğinde 1950–70 Aralığı."
- 81 As an unfortunate example, Rüknettin Güney's Konak Cinema in Istanbul's Nişantaşı neighbourhood was demolished to open space for new construction. The artworks were designed by Şadi Çalık (Altan Ergut, Yada Akpınar, and Akay, "Architecture in İstanbul in the Republican Period"). Another example is the extension of the Heybeli Island Naval Military Academy, which dates to 1955. Ferruh Başağa was commissioned to design a mosaic mural for one of the facades. It was the largest mosaic panel of its style in the nation, acquired through a competition, and it depicted a scene from a naval battle. When the earthquake-damaged building was demolished in 2000, the mural could not be detached because of a budget shortage and it was destroyed.
- 82 ICOMOS, "Madrid-New Delhi Document (2017)," accessed July 30, 2026, <http://www.icomos-isc20c.org/madriddocument/>.
- 83 ICOMOS, "Principles for the Preservation and Conservation-Restoration of Wall Paintings," accessed July 30, 2026, [https://admin.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/wallpaintings\\_e.pdf](https://admin.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/wallpaintings_e.pdf).
- 84 Sakıp Sabancı Museum, "Kuzgun Acar Birds, Story of a Restoration," 28 February 2024, video, 43 min. 9 sec., accessed July 30, 2026, <https://vimeo.com/917411064>.
- 85 "İMÇ Sanat Eserlerinin Restorasyonu," Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, accessed July 30, 2026, <https://imcsanat.msgsu.edu.tr/proje/>.
- 86 "Kadıköy'de Sanat Eserleri Yerinde Korunuyor," Kadıköy Municipality, accessed July 30, 2026, <https://www.kadikoy.bel.tr/tr/haber-detay/kadikoyde-sanat-eserleri-yerinde-korunuyor--5909>.



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## Dialog med umetnostjo in arhitekturo v poveljnem obdobju v Turčiji: primeri iz Istanbula

### Povzetek

Sodelovanje med arhitekti in umetniki se je sprva razvilo kot odgovor na vprašanje, kako preseči enoličnost modernistične arhitekture mednarodnega sloga, ki je do sredine 20. stoletja že odločilno zaznamovala arhitekturo po vsem svetu. Pri uveljavljanju novih zamisli so imele pomembno vlogo zlasti države Severne in Latinske Amerike. Podoben pristop se je uveljavil tudi v Turčiji, kjer so umetniki in arhitekti od petdesetih do osemdesetih let 20. stoletja modernistične javne stavbe uporabljali kot prizorišča za predstavljanje umetniških del.

Za razumevanje začetkov modernistične umetnosti v Turčiji so pomembna že zadnja desetletja Osmanskega cesarstva. Po razglasitvi republike leta 1923 je Turčija zapovedala uporabo modernizma na različnih področjih pod državnim nadzorom, med drugim pri gradnji poslopij za javne ustanove v novi prestolnici. Prvi predsednik republike Mustafa Kemal je v javnem govoru istega leta poudaril pomen umetnosti, kiparstva in znanosti za napredek naroda. V tridesetih in štiridesetih letih so turški umetniki ustvarjali predvsem figurativna dela, ki so odražala nacionalistično ideologijo države. V kiparstvu so prevladovali monumentalni spomeniki, posvečeni vojni za neodvisnost in Mustafi Kemalu kot poveljniku vojske. Od leta 1938 je država organizirala in financirala tudi posebna »potovanja po deželi«; na teh potovanjih so izbrani umetniki obiskovali manjša mesta in vasi ter ustvarjali slike s prizori tamkajšnje kulture. Te umetniške prakse so pričale o podpori mlade republike modernizaciji.

Vlada Demokratske stranke (DP) je med letoma 1950 in 1960 uvedla novo politično usmeritev, ki je pomembno vplivala tudi na družbeno življenje prebivalstva. Poveljno mednarodne politične razmere so ji omogočile, da je na novo načrtala smer notranje politike. Istanbul, ki je že v tridesetih in štiridesetih letih ostajal pomembno središče turškega intelektualnega in družbenega življenja, je v okviru vladne strategije dobil nov zagon in postal prizorišče predstavljanja kulturnih dosežkov države. Odprli so več novih bulvarjev, ob katerih so zrasle modernistične javne stavbe.

Politične spremembe so obenem ustvarile nove pritiske na turške umetnike, ki so se dotlej pretežno opirali na državna naročila ter na razstavljanje in državne odkupe štafelajnih slik za javne zbirke. Da bi si zagotovili



sredstva za nadaljnje ustvarjanje, so morali poiskati nove izrazne možnosti zunaj štafelajnega slikarstva. Ponudile so jih modernistične javne stavbe, ki so v Istanbulu nastajale na podlagi arhitekturnih natečajev in postale pomemben okvir novih umetniških praks. Od prve polovice petdesetih let se je tako spreminjal način naročanja in produkcije umetnosti: naročniki so bili država in zasebni investitorji, modernistična umetnost pa je v obliki mozaikov, keramičnih in steklenih stenskih panelov, reliefov in stenskih poslikav vstopala v javne in skupne prostore, kot so uradi, mestne hiše, univerze, kinodvorane, bolnišnice, banke in kopališča. Dela niso bila nameščena le na glavne fasade modernističnih stavb, kot v primeru Istanbulske tekstilne tržnice in stanovanjskega kompleksa 4. Levent. Nekatera so bila umeščena tudi v pritlične, javnosti dostopne lokale, denimo v kavarne in trgovine v hotelih Hilton in Divan, ter so bila tako v neposrednem stiku z obiskovalci.

Umetniška dela v javnih stavbah so izražala razpetost med lokalnim in univerzalnim ter med identiteto in modernostjo. Pri izbiri materialov in tehnik so umetniki pogosto posegali po keramiki, steklu in barvah, ki so jih proizvajale tovarne, ustanovljene v povojnem obdobju.

V poglavju je obravnavano sodelovanje umetnikov in arhitektov v Istanbulu od konca štiridesetih do sedemdesetih let 20. stoletja. Na izbranih primerih je prikazano, kako so bila dela turških modernističnih umetnikov, kot so Ferruh Başıağı, Bedri Rahmi Eyüboğılu, Füreyä Koral in Şadi Çalık, umeščena v različne dele javnih stavb. Hkrati je opozorjeno na današnje stanje teh del, osvetljena so tudi kompleksna vprašanja njihovega varovanja in konserviranja.

Raziskava temelji na podrobnem pregledu literature o arhitekturni in umetniški produkciji obravnavanega obdobja, zlasti v Istanbulu, na analizi arhivskega slikovnega gradiva ter na terenskem ogledu lokacij, na katerih so se obravnavana umetniška dela ohranila.









# THE MURALS OF IVAN SELJAK ČOPIČ IN THE 1950S AND EARLY 1960S: BETWEEN REALISM AND ABSTRACTION

Gregor Dražil

ZRC SAZU

Only a handful of artists in Slovenia produced a substantial body of murals in the period following the Second World War. Among them was Ivan Seljak Čopič (1927–1990), a prolific book illustrator, painter, and print-maker, but also a highly productive muralist. Given the breadth of his oeuvre, this discussion does not provide a comprehensive overview of his monumental painting projects, but instead interprets a specific phase of his career – the 1950s and early 1960s – which was the first major peak of his artistic development. At the same time, it contextualises this period within the broader framework of contemporary artistic trends in Slovenia. The chapter first outlines Seljak Čopič's early life, up to the end of the Second World War and his enrolment in the Ljubljana Academy of Fine Arts in 1945, before more closely examining his postwar years.

I have examined Seljak Čopič's murals from the 1950s and early 1960s, listed later in the introduction. This research involved investigating the state of preservation of individual works through site visits and correspondence with individuals knowledgeable about the history of the buildings housing the murals. Most preparatory sketches for the murals are held by members of the artist's family, with whom I have also been in contact. In addition, I studied Seljak Čopič's works held by the National Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia. I also surveyed all available literature and previous research on the artist.

The literature on Seljak Čopič's work – and even more so on his murals – is remarkably sparse. His first solo exhibition took place relatively late, in 1972, when he was already forty-five years old. Most of the catalogues accompanying his solo exhibitions are modest, largely commemorative publications containing brief texts that scarcely mention his murals. Although some press coverage of his exhibitions appeared from the 1970s onwards, his 1950s and 1960s murals were, as far as current research shows, almost entirely overlooked by contemporary critics and journalists. Consequently, little to no documentation exists regarding their critical or public reception at the time of their completion.

One early exception to the general lack of commentary is an article published in *Mladina* in 1954, which discussed the decoration of the Vuzenica



power plant.<sup>1</sup> A second and more significant contemporary source is a two-part article from 1963–1964 by the Slovenian cultural figure, philosopher, essayist, and critic Taras Kermauner. In this text, Kermauner reflects on the state of art criticism in Slovenia, proposing new interpretative approaches grounded in his own analysis of Seljak Čopič's art up to the early 1960s.<sup>2</sup>

The most valuable resource for the study of Seljak's oeuvre – and in particular his murals – is the catalogue of his solo exhibition published by the Idrija Municipal Museum (*Mestni muzej Idrija*) in 1988.<sup>3</sup> In addition to photographs and reproductions of his murals and preparatory sketches, the catalogue also includes examples of his prints, drawings, and paintings. It features a partial list of works compiled by the museum's curator, Janez Kavčič, which spans his Partisan-period works, book illustrations, monumental paintings, and other creations. The publication further provides a list of Seljak Čopič's exhibitions and a selected bibliography. A particularly valuable contribution is the accompanying essay by Marijan Tršar (1922–2010) – an artist, art historian, and friend of Seljak Čopič – which offers a detailed account of the artist's life and career. Tršar pays special attention to Seljak Čopič's education, his stay in Paris, and his artistic influences, while carefully tracing the development of his style across a wide and diverse body of work, including his murals.<sup>4</sup>

Among the more recent valuable contributions to the study of Seljak Čopič's murals is a doctoral dissertation by Katarina Mohar. Mohar's research situates the artist within the context of artworks commissioned for the building of the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia in Ljubljana, which includes a mosaic by Seljak Čopič discussed later in this chapter.<sup>5</sup> A more recent contribution is an article by Simona Kostanjšek Brglez focusing specifically on Seljak Čopič's murals in his hometown of Idrija.<sup>6</sup>

Chronologically, Seljak Čopič's murals created between approximately 1950 and 1965 include the following projects: a sgraffito at the Police Centre (*Dom milice*) in Ljubljana, dating from the late 1940s or early 1950s; sgraffiti for the Leatherworking High School (*Usnjarski tehnikum*) in Domžale, the predecessor of today's Domžale High School, completed in 1953;<sup>7</sup> an indoor fresco and an outdoor sgraffito for the former Kočevje Regional Museum building, also from 1953; wall decoration of the hydro-electric power plant in Vuzenica, created around 1954 in collaboration with Zoran Didek and Ive Šubic; a painted ceiling in the building of the Main Cooperative Union (*Glavna zadružna zveza*) in Ljubljana from 1956; two sgraffiti for the Čipka lace shop in Idrija, completed in 1957; sgraffiti for the Institute for Rehabilitation of the Disabled (*Zavod za rehabilitacijo*

*invalidov*), today the University Rehabilitation Institute, Republic of Slovenia – Soča (*Univerzitetni rehabilitacijski inštitut Republike Slovenije Soča*) in Ljubljana, also from 1957; a mosaic for the building of the People's Assembly (today the National Assembly) in Ljubljana, dated 1958; a mosaic for the Journalists' Centre (*Dom novinarjev*) in Ljubljana and two murals in the building's passages from 1959; a two-part mosaic in the Workers' Hall (*Delavski dom*) in Zagorje ob Savi, completed in 1961; two mosaics in Lipica from 1962; and three mosaics at Brdo Castle near Kranj from 1965.

The sgraffiti depicting portraits of Slovenian musicians on the façade of the building at Vega Street (*Vegova ulica*) 5, formerly home to the Ljubljana Music High School and now the Conservatory of Music and Ballet Ljubljana (*Konservatorij za glasbo in balet Ljubljana*), remain undated.<sup>8</sup>

Most of the artist's works listed above survive, although some are in poor condition. The sgraffiti at the Domžale Leatherworking High School and on the exterior of the former Kočevje Regional Museum building are lost, while the location and condition of the Lipica mosaics remain unknown; these are known only from designs preserved in the Seljak family archive.<sup>9</sup>

## Early life and education

Ivan Seljak Čopič<sup>10</sup> was born in 1927 in Idrija, an old mining town in the northwestern part of present-day Slovenia, which at the time was part of the Kingdom of Italy. He attended Italian schools during the late 1930s and early 1940s, but in 1943, at the age of sixteen, he joined the resistance movement.<sup>11</sup> It was during his years as a Partisan that he discovered his talent for drawing and came into contact with older, well-established artists who were also Partisans, including Dore Klemenčič, Božidar Jakac, France Mihelič, Nikolaj Pirnat, and the Vidmar brothers, Nande and Drago. Seljak Čopič soon became part of a group of artists who illustrated the Partisan newsletter of the Šercer Brigade, *Udarnik*, while simultaneously learning from his senior colleagues. Among these mentors, Nikolaj Pirnat – a renowned artist trained before the war – was especially influential. Pirnat's style, characterised by its raw and unromantic depiction of events, rough construction, and formal simplification, left a significant mark on Seljak Čopič's artistic development.

Among Seljak Čopič's Partisan-period works, his prints – particularly his linocuts such as *Morilci* (Murderers) [Figure 1] – are the best known, despite being relatively few in number. These prints have been exhibited and reproduced in exhibitions and catalogues dedicated to artistic production from the Second World War.<sup>12</sup> Stylistically, they are characterised

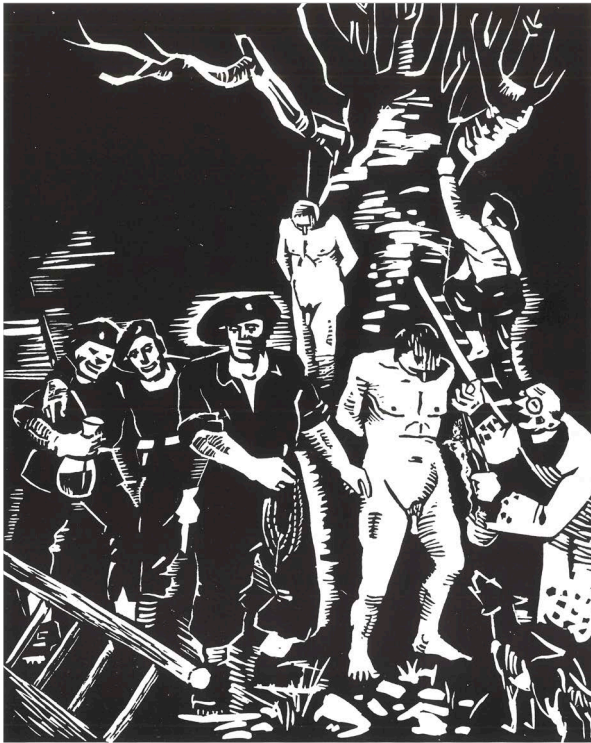


Figure 1.  
Ivan Seljak Čopič,  
*Morilci (Murderers)*,  
linocut, 1944.  
Source: Bassin,  
*Revolucija in umetnost*.

by simplicity – partly a consequence of the linocut technique – with minimal detail and a focus on using only the essential expressive means to convey powerful emotions. Through this pared-down style, Seljak Čopič vividly depicts the terror and tragedy of war-time violence.

It is important to emphasise that the Partisan movement was a defining experience for the young artist, both personally and artistically. He returned to this formative period repeatedly in his later work, expressing it across a wide range of formats, from small prints to monumental murals.

In 1945, still wearing his wartime uniform, Seljak enrolled at the newly established Ljubljana Academy of Fine Arts as a member of its very first class. The period of his education, during the late 1940s, coincided with the height of socialist realism in Slovenia

and Yugoslavia – a movement perhaps best exemplified by the murals of Slavko Pengov.<sup>13</sup>

The phenomenon of socialist realism, with a few exceptions,<sup>14</sup> still has not been researched sufficiently and has largely been left aside by researchers. According to the Slovenian art historian Igor Zabel, this is partly because “[s]ocialist realism was not regarded in general consciousness as an integral part of the artistic tradition, but rather as a kind of anomaly. It sharply broke with the modernist (although fairly moderate) tradition of pre-war (and partly also wartime) art – not so much in formal terms, but primarily in that it openly assumed an ideological function. As such, it was connected with the most orthodox and crude form of the communist system.”<sup>15</sup>

According to Zabel, both stylistically and iconographically, socialist realism in Slovenian art was not uniform. The artistic traditions of interwar moderate modernism – such as colour realism – and the socially critical art of the same period, alongside works created during the Second World War, were reshaped and adapted to the demands of the postwar era, resulting in a broad spectrum of realist styles. The ideological framework was similarly diverse: at one “extreme” were works that could be classified as official, party-endorsed, and engaged, often characterised by a “romantic

pathetic" style. Conversely, there were works that moved away from the customary themes of triumphant fighting and postwar reconstruction to embrace more "traditional human and artistic values," including themes of suffering, empathy, and meditation.<sup>16</sup> Zabel's interpretation, which emphasises the heterogeneity of Slovenian socialist realism, is accurate, but one should exercise caution when assessing the stylistic and iconographic range within the production of murals. Although individual artistic styles make different hands clearly distinguishable within the non-negotiable framework of realism, it would be difficult to argue that there was significant room for ideological diversity – or for the depiction of the traditional humanistic and artistic values Zabel identifies – in early postwar murals.

One notable aspect of the art system in the early postwar years was a concerted emphasis on murals – large-scale narrative compositions intended for public consumption – which was actively promoted by the curriculum of the newly established Academy of Fine Arts. Specifically, two postgraduate specialist classes, known as *specialke*, were introduced: a monumental painting class led by Gojmir Anton Kos and a mural painting class led by Slavko Pengov. This curriculum reveals the academy's deliberate encouragement of young artists to pursue careers in mural painting, emphasising its role as a form of public art.

Although it is true that during the late 1940s and early 1950s there were numerous voices – from art critics, politicians, and artists themselves – supporting what might be called socialist realism, the newly appointed professors at the academy were by no means unanimous in their endorsement. As Marijan Tršar recalls, it was common knowledge that professors such as Maksim Sedej, Gojmir Anton Kos, and Gabrijel Stupica were familiar with and even admired the works of artists such as Cézanne, Matisse, Braque, and perhaps, although quietly, Picasso.<sup>17</sup>

Although established artists occasionally created works reflecting the new socialist reality – depicting the struggle of the working class, rebuilding efforts, factories, or portraits of political figures – such themes were not predominant in their art. Instead, they largely continued to focus on traditional genres such as still lifes, portraits, and landscapes.

As Nikola Dedić writes, there was a significant "gap" between the demands of the few art critics who called for art adhering strictly to socialist realist criteria and the actual artistic production of the time.<sup>18</sup> This was especially true for art created in the "shelter" of artists' studios and intended for exhibitions, whereas public art – such as sculptural monuments and murals – more closely adhered to socialist realist principles. These principles



sometimes persisted in public art long after 1952 and the Third Congress of the Association of Writers of Yugoslavia, which “officially deleted socialist realism from the cultural-political vocabulary.”<sup>19</sup> A good example of the persistence of socialist realism is the fresco *Zgodovina Slovencev* (History of the Slovenians) by Slavko Pengov, commissioned for one of the most prominent architectural-artistic projects – the new parliament building in Ljubljana – and executed as late as 1958.<sup>20</sup>

This often contradictory environment shaped Seljak Čopič during his formative years as an art student. At the time, abstract art was still somewhat taboo, yet it was by no means absent from the artistic scene. These dynamics, of course, had a profound influence on the young artist.

Seljak Čopič enrolled in Gojmir Anton Kos’s monumental painting master class in 1950/1951. Kos’s best-known monumental painting project was a cycle of seven large canvas paintings for the Palace of the Drava Province (today’s Presidential Palace) in Ljubljana, completed in 1940. It was one of the rare examples of secular monumental painting in prewar Slovenia.<sup>21</sup> As Tršar notes, one of the key things Seljak gained from Kos was a mastery of composition – an element crucial to monumental painting.<sup>22</sup>

It was probably during his studies and shortly thereafter, in the early to mid-1950s, that Seljak Čopič began to travel: to Italy, where he admired historic painting, and to France, where, encouraged by the Slovenian painter Veno Pilon – who was living in Paris – he approached André Lhote in 1956.<sup>23</sup> This well-known French painter, writer, and teacher had run a private academy in Paris since 1925, through which hundreds of later-famous artists passed.<sup>24</sup> One of them was Seljak Čopič, and it is certain that this experience must have left a significant impression on the young artist. Because Seljak’s period of study in Paris is an important part of his biography, I sought to gather further information regarding it. Unfortunately, neither the André Lhote Archive,<sup>25</sup> nor the archive of the Veno Pilon Gallery in Ajdovščina,<sup>26</sup> nor the Seljak family archive has so far yielded any correspondence, photographs, or other documentation related to Seljak Čopič’s time in Paris.<sup>27</sup>

## Seljak Čopič’s early murals

There was a strong demand for mural painters in Slovenia and Yugoslavia when Seljak Čopič was completing his studies at the academy and starting his career in the early to mid-1950s. Works that could be seen by large audiences and conveyed a political narrative were actively encouraged. Commissions for public art were frequent and provided a means for

artists to support themselves financially. Established artists such as Slavko Pengov, Maksim Sedej, Riko Debenjak, and Marij Pregelj were recruited, but recent graduates from the Ljubljana academy – including Janez Vidic, Ivo Šubic, and Seljak Čopič – were soon involved as well.<sup>28</sup>

Mural production was also supported by the extensive postwar building programme. Existing buildings were nationalised and repurposed for the new government's needs, thus requiring new, appropriate visual decoration. As Stane Mikuž, an art historian and one of the strongest opponents of socialist realism among Slovenian art critics, wrote in two articles published in 1949 and 1950, "monumental fresco painting can only be developed where there are certain conditions of social development. Where the collective builds big works [buildings] for the community, conditions for the development of art of monumental proportions are created."<sup>29</sup>

Seljak Čopič produced monumental painting projects for a wide range of institutional settings, including restaurants, hospitals, schools, museums, factories, and government buildings. Most of his murals are located in semi-public interiors, whether in newly constructed or older buildings, while a few were placed outdoors and were fully visible to the public. In terms of technique, his early projects were mostly realised in sgraffito, whereas from 1958 onwards Seljak increasingly opted for mosaic.

The earliest known of Seljak's murals was probably the sgraffito in the building at Kotnik Street (*Kotnikova ulica*) 8 in Ljubljana [Figure 2]. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the building had been used by the Catholic Church, specifically by the Daughters of Charity (*Sestre usmiljenke*), sisters known for their charitable work as nurses. The sisters were evicted from the building, which had until then been known as the Marian Centre (*Marijin dom*). It was nationalised in 1948 and subsequently renovated and repurposed for use by the national police force, and the Police Centre was established. Both older and younger artists were called upon to decorate the building with wall paintings. At least three large murals were executed. The first two were created by Marij Pregelj<sup>30</sup> and Maksim Sedej,<sup>31</sup> while the third was a sgraffito by Ivan Seljak Čopič.<sup>32</sup> Pregelj's work featured a scene from the Second World War, whereas Sedej's focused on postwar life, depicting a group of

*Figure 2. Ivan Seljak Čopič, sgraffito at the Police Centre (Dom milice), after April 1948, most likely early 1950s. Location: Kotnikova ulica 8, Ljubljana. Photo: Gregor Dražil.*



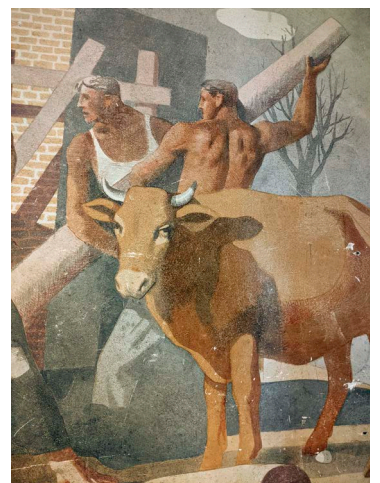
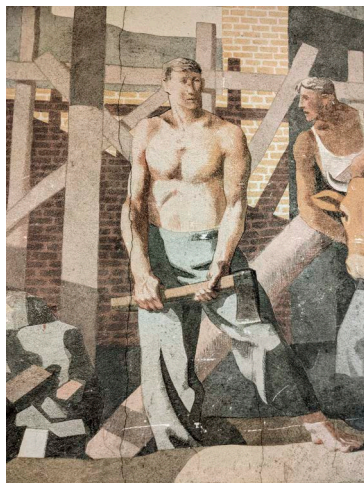
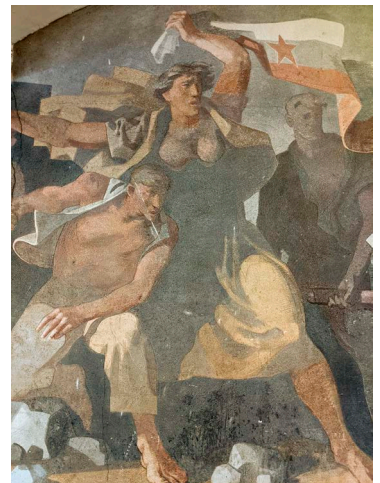
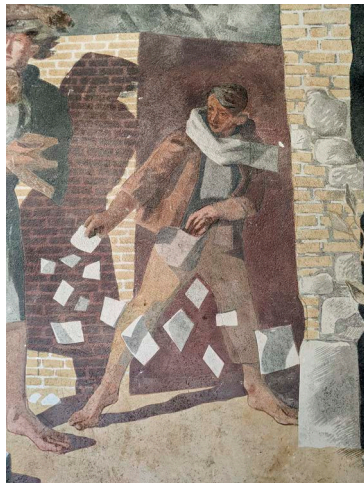
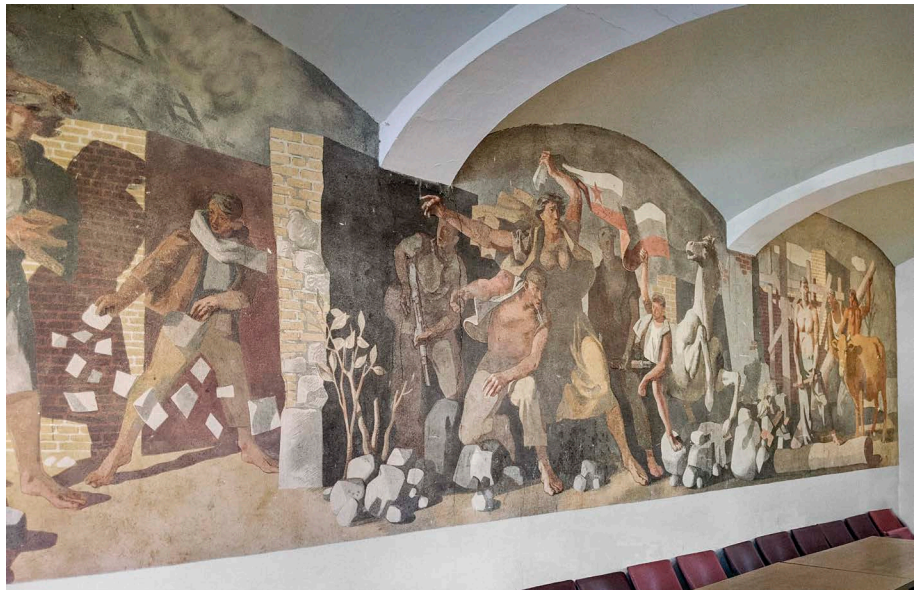
peasants and workers marching towards a larger central figure who functions as a kind of goddess of labour, emphasising the role of work in the new Yugoslav society.

Seljak Čopič's sgraffito,<sup>33</sup> located on the intermediate landing of a staircase in the Police Centre, depicts an armed Partisan looking over his shoulder and raising his arm, encouraging his fellow soldiers to join him in the attack against the enemy. Behind him is a female figure carrying a large flag on a pole. This is most likely one of Seljak Čopič's earliest works, created in the late 1940s or early 1950s, while he was still a student or had only recently completed his studies. The image remains fairly realist, although already somewhat stylised, with sharp, abruptly cut lines.

One of the first larger commissions Seljak Čopič received comprised a fresco and a sgraffito, executed respectively inside and in front of the building then used by the predecessor of today's Kočevje Regional Museum in the southern Slovenian town of Kočevje. As in the previous case, this was a prewar private building called the Skubec Mansion (*Skubizova vila*), which appears to have been nationalised after the Second World War. The building, which was in very poor condition, was designated for use by the newly founded Kočevje Museum Society (*Muzejsko društvo Kočevje*) – the future Kočevje Regional Museum – in 1953. It was renovated that same year, and the first exhibition in the former mansion opened on 2 October 1953, on the tenth anniversary of the Assembly of the Delegates of the Slovenian Nation (*Zbor odposlancev slovenskega naroda*) held in Kočevje in 1943.<sup>34</sup>

In the same year, Seljak executed a large fresco, more than ten metres long and over two metres high, for one of the halls in the building [Figure 3]. A brick wall both separates and visually links the three sections of the mural. The left section depicts the early stages of the war, with burning buildings, a mother saving or protecting her child from the flames, and a young boy distributing propaganda leaflets [Figure 4]. Following the chronology of events, the central section illustrates the Partisan uprising or National Liberation Struggle, with soldiers armed with rifles and grenades charging forward. They are accompanied on the left by a galloping horse, while a large female figure carrying a flag – as in the Police Centre sgraffito – stands among them [Figure 5]. The right section depicts peacetime after liberation and the effort to rebuild a country devastated by the war. In the foreground stands a man carrying an axe [Figure 6], accompanied by an ox, a draught animal used for ploughing and other farm work. Behind him, two further workers erect a wooden building [Figure 7].





Figures 3–7: Ivan Seljak  
Čopič, fresco in the  
former Kočevje Regional  
Museum building, 1953.  
Location: Trg zbora  
odposlancev 8, Kočevje.  
Photo: Gregor Dražil.



Stylistically, the fresco is more markedly realist than the earlier sgraffito at the Police Centre, probably partly because of the different technique.<sup>35</sup> There is little stylisation, and the only noticeable “deformation” lies in Seljak Čopič’s characteristic treatment of the human body: overly muscular torsos, elongated necks, and small heads.

Although currently inaccessible to the public, the fresco is in good condition. Unfortunately, the sgraffito, which was placed on an exterior wall of the building, has not survived. The collection of the Kočevje Regional Museum, however, contains an archival photograph depicting the artist at work.<sup>36</sup> As far as can be discerned from the photograph, the sgraffito depicted a large male figure carrying a torch in one hand and the emblem of the Liberation Front of the Slovenian Nation – later adapted as the coat of arms of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia – in the other.<sup>37</sup> The rest of the mural was covered with fluttering flags bearing symbols such as the Yugoslav five-pointed star and the hammer and sickle.

It can be assumed that both the fresco and sgraffito formed part of the renovation and repurposing of the building as a museum, which coincided with the tenth anniversary of the Kočevje Assembly – an important political event of the Second World War that gave the town national significance. The importance of the anniversary is further indicated by the erection and inauguration, on 3 October 1953, of *Spomenik svobode* (Monument of Freedom)<sup>38</sup> in the main square of Kočevje, only about one hundred metres away.

### **Towards abstraction: Seljak Čopič’s murals from 1957 onwards**

Around the time of the Kočevje project, from 1953 onwards, attitudes towards Western modernism in the visual arts began to change noticeably in Slovenia and Yugoslavia more broadly. The Yugoslav authorities recognised modernism and the arts, among other things, as a means of “shaping a more acceptable image of [Yugoslavia’s] ruling social and political order in the West”.<sup>39</sup>

From book illustration and printmaking to sculpture, painting, and photography, Slovenian artists began to experiment with and embrace (semi-) abstraction as a major artistic language.<sup>40</sup> Exhibitions of Western art – such as *Sodobna francoska umetnost* (Contemporary French Art, 1952),<sup>41</sup> featuring works by Picasso, Miró, Matisse, and other modernists – were mounted in galleries, especially at the particularly ambitious Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana (established in 1948). In this context, the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts – a large, international, but predominantly

West-oriented exhibition established in 1955 – is particularly worth emphasising.<sup>42</sup> These exhibitions strongly influenced artists eager to learn more about the prewar modernist legacy and contemporary trends. As in Seljak Čopič's case, artists began to travel – mostly to Paris at this early stage – where they could observe the latest international developments at first hand. Slowly but steadily, in the 1950s and especially the 1960s, Slovenian artists also began exhibiting abroad, again focusing on Western countries, with an especially large number of exhibitions held in Italy and West Germany.<sup>43</sup>

These developments were also reflected in mural painting. Numerous projects display tendencies towards stylisation and cubism, sometimes even approaching (semi-)abstraction. A particularly important example is the group of murals created for the new parliament building in Ljubljana, where – alongside the aforementioned socialist realist fresco by Slavko Pengov – abstract or semi-abstract mosaics by Marij Pregelj,<sup>44</sup> Ive Šubic,<sup>45</sup> Jože Ciuha,<sup>46</sup> and Seljak Čopič were installed.

This is reflected in Seljak Čopič's murals of the 1950s, a period in which he devoted much of his time and effort to this type of artistic production. He became one of the first artists to introduce abstraction into Slovenian mural painting. Although it is not possible to cover all the projects conceived by Seljak during this period and listed in the introduction, I focus here on a few key works.

In 1957, Seljak Čopič created two sgraffiti for the former Čipka lace shop in Idrija, the artist's hometown. Both sgraffiti, originally facing each other on opposite walls, are dedicated to two local Idrija traditions: mercury mining and Idrija lace.

The first sgraffito [Figure 8], still preserved in its original location, depicts a mercury miner carrying a torch used in the mines alongside a female lace-maker, recognisable by the lace she holds in her arms and the tools needed to create it. In the background, one of the Idrija mercury mine plants is visible. The second sgraffito [Figures 9, 10], moved from its original location and now housed in the Idrija

*Figure 8. Ivan Seljak Čopič, sgraffito for the Čipka lace shop in Idrija, 1957. Location: Mestni trg 17, Idrija. Photo: Ferdinand Rupnik.*





Figure 9. Ivan Seljak Čopič, sgraffito for the Čipka lace shop in Idrija, 1957. Transferred to the Idrija Municipal Museum in 2020. Location: Prelovčeva ulica 9, Idrija. Photo: Bojan Tavčar. Source: Idrija Municipal Museum Photo Archive.

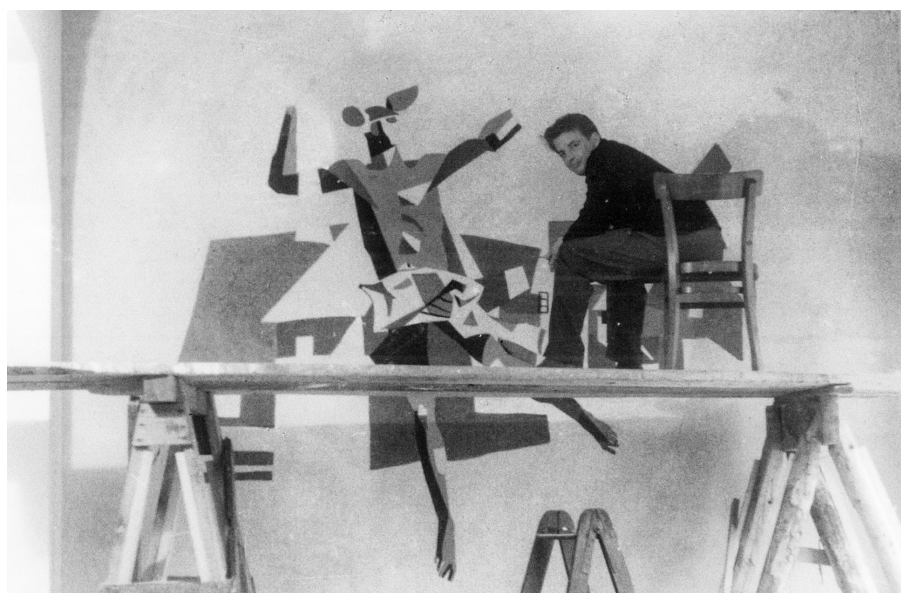


Figure 10. Ivan Seljak Čopič working on the sgraffito for the Čipka lace shop in Idrija, 1957. Source: Seljak family archive.



Figure 11.  
 Ivan Seljak Čopič,  
 mosaic in the building  
 of the People's Assembly  
 of the People's  
 Republic of Slovenia,  
 1958. Mosaicist: Alfio  
 Tambosso. Location:  
 Šubičeva ulica 4,  
 Ljubljana.  
 Photo: Andrej Furlan,  
 ZRC SAZU.



Municipal Museum, shows the god Mercury, the deity from whom the metal mercury (or quicksilver) gets its name and who is also depicted in the town of Idrija's coat of arms. Mercury carries a *bula* (lacemaking pillow) in one hand and Idrija lace in the other. The urban landscape of Idrija forms the background.<sup>47</sup>

Compared with the earlier projects, the Idrija sgraffiti show a marked stylistic change. The image is no longer a coherent, uniform mass but a sum of flattened surfaces that reveal different viewpoints of the same element or figure. This shift can be partly attributed to the sgraffito technique itself. However, even when compared with the Police Centre mural [Figure 2] – also a sgraffito – there is a clear evolution in the artist's use of the technique. In the span of just a few years separating the two works, he moved away from an approach that still exhibited tendencies towards realism – note, for example, the realist modelling of the face and the volume of the torso of the charging Partisan fighter – and embraced a style characterised by stylisation and the deformation of traditional modes of representation.

A similar tendency is reflected and amplified in another project: the mosaic in the National Assembly building, mentioned a few paragraphs earlier and dated 1958.<sup>48</sup> Given the national importance of the building, this commission could arguably be described as the first major high point of Seljak Čopič's career.

The mosaic [Figure 11] depicts the Battle of Dražgoše, one of the most famous battles between Partisan and German forces on Slovenian territory during the Second World War, which took place from 9 to 11 January 1942



in the small village of Dražgoše in Upper Carniola. Outnumbered Partisan fighters, defending the liberated village of Dražgoše, faced a large formation of German troops and successfully held their position for three days before deciding to retreat. After the Germans entered Dražgoše, they executed forty-one villagers in reprisal for their support of the Partisans and burned the village, ultimately demolishing it. Dražgoše was rebuilt after the war, and several memorials were erected to honour the memory of these wartime events. In 1976, a large monument commemorating the Battle of Dražgoše was inaugurated.<sup>49</sup>

Seljak Čopič's depiction of the events in Dražgoše focuses on a group of Partisan fighters at the Biček Cliff (*Bičkova skala*), a fighting position named after the platoon led by the Partisan Henrik Biček, which courageously defended the site. The Partisans, positioned amid rocky terrain, are shown fiercely holding their ground: the two soldiers in the foreground appear already to be losing the battle, while the two groups to the left and right continue firing their guns and waving flags. In the background, the village of Dražgoše is depicted in the aftermath of the battle, with Seljak Čopič emphasising the brutal reprisals by the German army: the village, from barns to people's homes, is engulfed in flames, completely devastated and devoid of any trace of life.

Stylistically, the work displays the distortion of depicted forms and the flattening of the surface discussed earlier. The distortion and fragmentation are even more pronounced here, requiring greater effort from the viewer to decipher the elements, figures, and events. This effect is further reinforced by the characteristics of the selected technique – mosaic – which inherently possesses a fragmentary structure.

Although mosaic had been used in Slovenian murals since the early post-war years, this was the first time Seljak Čopič selected the technique. Unlike sgraffito and fresco, which he had practised in previous years, the mosaic was not – at least in most cases – executed by the artist himself. The production of mosaics in postwar Slovenia was facilitated by the presence of the Italian mosaicist Alfio Tambosso and his team of assistants.<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusion

In addition to presenting the early murals of Ivan Seljak Čopič, this chapter has illuminated the complex context of the Slovenian and wider Yugoslav art scene of the late 1940s and 1950s, when Seljak received his education and embarked on his artistic career. As shown, this was a period marked by tension between the demands of socialist realism, which

retained vocal supporters throughout the period in question, and modernist artistic expression. The latter continued the tradition of moderate prewar modernism but also reflected increasingly strong contact with postwar artistic developments in the West.

Seljak Čopič's career as a muralist did not end in the 1950s. He continued to undertake projects in the first half of the 1960s and again from the late 1970s onwards, becoming one of Slovenia's most productive and sought-after mural painters. He continued to develop his style, although it rarely progressed from the geometric stylisation of motifs to complete abstraction. He emerges as an artist who rejected the uncritical adoption of Western modernism and instead carefully explored its possibilities, determining what suited him and what did not. In his own words, in a statement from the period addressed in this chapter (1961–1962):

The subordination of our art to socialist realism in the past, and to abstraction today, is misguided. These two extremes only allow us to recognise the place where we truly stand. It is neither anywhere in the East nor anywhere in the West, but right here. Our place – our standpoint – and the awareness of its value give us the true conditions for work in art, as well as for any other genuine work. Only then does our Slovenian, Yugoslav art gain the conditions to become truly universal, truly human.<sup>51</sup>

## Funding

This chapter was written as part of the basic research project Art for Community. Registration and Assessment of Artworks Commissioned for Public Institutions in Slovenia, 1945–1991 (J6-50206), funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency from the state budget of the Republic of Slovenia.

## Endnotes

- 1 The reportage documents the art critic Janez Dokler's visit to the Vuzenica power plant and his conversation with Zoran Didek, who, together with Seljak Čopič and Ive Šubic, was one of the creators of the artistic decoration inside the power plant. See [Janez Dokler] R. J., "Pomlad, konjske sile in pogovor o slikarstvu," *Mladina*, 28 December 1954, 7.
- 2 Taras Kermauner, "Red v enotnosti (1): ob slikarstvu Ivana Čopiča-Seljaka," *Perspektive: mesečnik za kulturo in družbena vprašanja* 4, no. 31 (1963–1964): 73–82; Taras Kermauner, "Red v enotnosti (2): ob slikarstvu Ivana Čopiča-Seljaka," *Perspektive: mesečnik za kulturo in družbena vprašanja* 4, no. 32 (1963–1964): 246–271.
- 3 *Ivan Seljak – Čopič: Pregledna razstava ob umetnikovi 60-letnici* (Idrija: Mestni muzej Idrija, 1988).
- 4 Marijan Tršar, "Pregledna razstava akademskega slikarja Ivana Seljaka-Čopiča," in *Ivan Seljak – Čopič: Pregledna razstava ob umetnikovi 60-letnici* (Idrija: Mestni muzej Idrija, 1988), 3–23.
- 5 Katarina Mohar, *Likovna oprema Ljudske skupščine Ljudske republike Slovenije: umetnostno naročilo in njegov kontekst* (PhD diss., Ljubljana: Podiplomska šola ZRC SAZU, 2015), 149–156. Mohar presents the artist and the state of research on him and then discusses Seljak Čopič's mosaic.
- 6 Simona Kostanjšek Brglez, "Slikar Ivan Seljak – Čopič in njegova dela v Idriji," *Idrijski razgledi* 66, no. 2 (2021): 45–53.
- 7 I would like to thank Tanja Stergar, a professor at Domžale High School, for her extensive help with the research on the sgraffito, which is unfortunately most likely lost. Fortunately, the drafts for it are preserved in the Seljak family's personal archive.
- 8 Also listed in the catalogue of Seljak Čopič's works are undated sgraffiti on the Academy of Music in Ljubljana, the exact location and existence of which remain to be researched.
- 9 One of the designs for the Lipica mosaic is also published and attributed to Seljak Čopič in the aforementioned source: *Perspektive: mesečnik za kulturo in družbena vprašanja* 4, no. 32 (1963–1964), n.p.
- 10 Basic biographical information on the artist can be found in Asta Znidarčič, "Seljak, Ivan (1927–1990)," in *Slovenska biografija* (Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, Znanstvenoraziskovalni center SAZU, 2013), accessed July 15, 2026, <https://www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi560021/>.
- 11 Seljak Čopič's Partisan years and his artistic activities during that time are described, based on archival sources, in Vera Visočnik, "Kipar Janez Weiss-Belač in slikar Ivan Seljak-Čopič," *Borec* 20, no. 4 (1969): 376–378.
- 12 See, for example, Aleksander Bassin et al., eds., *Revolucija in umetnost. Izbor slovenske partizanske grafike in risbe*, Knjižnica NOV in POS. Likovna zbirka, 2nd ed. (Ljubljana: Partizanska knjiga, 1982).
- 13 See, for example, Katarina Mohar, "Stensko slikarstvo Slavka Pengova pred in po letu 1945," *Studia Historica Slovenica* 16, no. 3 (2016): 759–766.
- 14 On socialist realism in Slovenian art see, for example, Marjeta Mikuž, *Socialistični realizem v slovenskem slikarstvu* (Ljubljana: Muzej ljudske revolucije Slovenije, 1986); Donovan Pavlinec, "Slikarstvo socialističnega realizma na Slovenskem: kritični pogled na problem njegove časovne zamejitve," *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, n. s., 39 (2003): 198–225. On socialist realism in Yugoslavia in general, see Dragoslav Đorđević, "Socijalistički realizam 1945–1950," in *Jugoslovenska umetnost XX veka: 1929–1950. Nadrealizam, socijalna umetnost*, ed. Miodrag B. Protić and Marija Pušić (Belgrade: Muzej savremene umetnosti, 1969), 68–81.
- 15 Igor Zabel, "Od socrealizma do analitične abstrakcije," in *Eseji o moderni in sodobni umetnosti I* (Ljubljana: Založba /\*cf., 2006), 9.
- 16 Zabel, "Od socrealizma," 12–13.
- 17 Tršar, "Pregledna razstava," 7.

- 18 Nikola Dedić, "Socijalistički realizam: Optimalne projekcije novog društva," in *Istorija umetnosti u Srbiji XX vek. Drugi tom. Realizmi i modernizmi oko hladnog rata*, ed. Miško Šuvaković (Belgrade: Orion Art, 2012), 235.
- 19 Aleš Gabrič, "Slovenska agitpropovska kulturna politika 1945–1952," *Borec* 43, nos. 7–9 (1991): 648.
- 20 Mohar, *Likovna oprema*, 93–94.
- 21 For information on the 1938 painting competition for the Palace of the Drava Province, the selection of Gojmir Anton Kos's proposal, and the subsequent execution of the commission, see Mohar, "Likovna oprema," 48–56; Asta Vrečko, "A Multiplied Mirror of Society: Slovenian Art in the 1930s," in *On the Brink: The Visual Arts in The Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929–1941)*, eds. Marko Jenko and Beti Žerovc (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija, 2019), 192.
- 22 Tršar, "Pregledna razstava," 6–7.
- 23 Marijan Tršar writes about Seljak Čopič's time at Lhote's school and its significance for the artist's development, based on Seljak Čopič's first-hand account, in Tršar, "Pregledna razstava," 8–11.
- 24 For more on the international importance and influence of the Académie Lhote, see the recently published volume by Zeynep Kuban and Simone Wille, eds., *André Lhote and His International Students* (Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2020).
- 25 Email correspondence with Dominique Bermann Martin, rights holder and custodian of the painter's works, 2024.
- 26 Email correspondence with Tanja Rijavec, curator of documentation at the Veno Pilon Gallery, Ajdovščina, 2024.
- 27 Andreja Seljak, the artist's daughter, personal communication with the author, 2024. She clearly recalled that her father stayed in Paris for extended periods on two separate occasions.
- 28 These works are mostly mentioned in volumes written by individual artists, whereas texts that assess a larger corpus of monumental paintings and summarise and integrate findings are rare. See, for example, Donovan Pavlinec, "Slovenski inženirji človeških duš: monumentalne stenske poslikave socialističnega realizma," *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, n. s., 44 (2008): 114–138.
- 29 According to Mikuž, in capitalist bourgeois societies, art of small proportions – such as landscapes, portraits, and miniatures executed in oil – flourished because these works were suited to individual bourgeois apartments. It was only when the bourgeoisie began to think beyond the "everyday worry of raising money" and turned their attention toward common values (such as pride in one's nation's history) that monuments and large-format paintings emerged. However, it was not until liberation and the establishment of socialism that truly monumental art – created in collaboration between architects, sculptors, and painters and intended to serve the common good – became possible. See Stane Mikuž, "Freska Rika Debenjaka," *Ljudska pravica*, 14 August 1949, 4; Stane Mikuž, "Freske Slavka Pengova v poslopju Centralnega komiteja KP Jugoslavije," *Delavska enotnost*, 1 January 1950, 12.
- 30 The unpreserved fresco is discussed, for example, in Katarina Mohar, "Big Themes, Big Paintings: Marij Pregelj's Mural Painting," in *Marij Pregelj: Retrospektiva*, ed. Martina Vovk (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija, 2017), 420–421.
- 31 For media response to the fairly recent discovery of the fresco by Maksim Sedej at Kotnik Street 8, see, for example, Vojko Urbančič, "Socrealistična podoba med sestrami usmiljenkami in tovariši miličniki," *Delo*, 2 April 2019, <https://www.delo.si/kultura/vizualna-umetnost/socrealisticna-podoba-med-sestrami-usmiljenkami-in-tovarisi-milicniki>.
- 32 A brief presentation of all three murals was among the subjects of the small panel exhibition *Kulturna dediščina Kotnikove 8* (The Cultural Heritage of Kotnik Street 8), which opened at the site in 2019. Produced in collaboration between the International Centre of Graphic Arts (MGLC), the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia (ZVKDS), and the Police Museum of Slovenia, the exhibition showcased the history of the building before and after 1948, as well as its socialist-realist decoration. See "Prvi obisko-



valci razstav Muzeja slovenske policije na Kotnikovi 8," *Policija*, 14 December 2019, accessed July 15, 2026, <https://www.policija.si/medijsko-sredisce/porocila-za-javnost/porocila-za-javnost-gpue/102087-prvi-obiskovalci-razstav-muzeja-slovenske-policije-na-kotnikovi-8>.

- 33 The sgraffito is not signed but can be attributed to Seljak Čopič based on the list of works published in the aforementioned 1988 catalogue.
- 34 Natalija Mihelčič, *Kultura Kočevske v času socializma* (PhD diss., Nova Gorica: Univerza v Novi Gorici, Fakulteta za podiplomski študij, 2013), 282.
- 35 Sgraffito is produced by scratching through one or more layers of differently coloured plaster to reveal the layer beneath. Its graphic character often favours simplified and sharply delineated forms.
- 36 I would like to thank Vesna Jerbič Perko, Director of the Kočevje Regional Museum, for generously sharing the photograph.
- 37 The coat of arms of the future Socialist Republic of Slovenia was gradually formed on the basis of the emblem of the Liberation Front of the Slovenian Nation, which developed artistically during the Second World War from 1941 onwards. See Janez Kos, "Grb Socialistične republike Slovenije," *Arhivi: glasilo Arhivskega društva in arhivov Slovenije* 6, nos. 1–2 (1983): 7–14.
- 38 The project was conceptualized by the artist Zoran Didek; the central sculpture is the work of Božidar Pengov, and the side figures were created by Lojze Lavrič, Marjan Keršič, and Stane Keržič.
- 39 Ješa Denegri, "Inside or Outside 'Socialist Modernism'? Radical Views on the Yugoslav Art Scene, 1950–1970," in *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes, and Post-Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991*, ed. Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 2003), 175. See also Ljiljana Kolečnik, "Konfliktne vizije moderniteta i poslijeratna moderna umjetnost," in *Socijalizam i modernost: Umjetnost, kultura, politika 1950.–1974.*, ed. Ljiljana Kolečnik (Zagreb: Muzej suvremene umjetnosti and Institut za povijest umjetnosti, 2012), 130; Miško Šuvaković, "Kulturalna politika od socijalističkog realizma do socijalističkog modernizma," in *Istorija umetnosti u Srbiji – XX vek: II: Realizmi i modernizmi oko hladnog rata*, ed. Miško Šuvaković (Belgrade: Orion Art, 2012), 369.
- 40 The Slovenian art historian Špelca Čopič provides insight into the artistic, institutional, exhibition, educational, and art-critical characteristics of the postwar decade (1945–1955): Jelisava-Špelca Čopič, "Povojno desetletje," *Mars, časopis Moderne galerije Ljubljana* 3, nos. 2–3 (Autumn 1991): 48–52.
- 41 "Sodobna francoska umetnost," Raz\_UME Database, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, accessed July 15, 2026, <https://razume.mg-lj.si/razstava.php?lang=en&id=101952>.
- 42 Seljak Čopič was one of the artists who exhibited at the second Ljubljana Biennale in 1957. For more on the history of the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts, see, for example, the recently published reader by Nevenka Šivavec and Gregor Dražil, eds., *70 Years of the Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts: A Reader* (Ljubljana: MGLC, 2025).
- 43 See Gregor Dražil, "The Ljubljana Biennale of Graphic Arts and Exhibiting Slovenian Artists in the West: The Cases of West Germany and Italy," in *Desires and Contradictions: Exhibiting Art and Architecture in Slovenia 1947–1979*, ed. Beti Žerovc, Miha Valant, and Vladimir Vidmar (Ljubljana: Igor Zabel Association for Culture and Theory and Ljubljana University Press, Faculty of Arts, 2026), 203–214.
- 44 "Marij Pregelj: mozaik v Državnem zboru, Ljubljana," Umetnost za skupnost: Evidenca umetnin 1945–1991, ZRC SAZU, accessed July 15, 2026, <https://umetnostzaskupnost.si/umetnisko-delo/mozaik-v-drzavnem-zboru-ljubljana-2/>.
- 45 "Ive Šubic: mozaik v Državnem zboru, Ljubljana," Umetnost za skupnost: Evidenca umetnin 1945–1991, ZRC SAZU, accessed July 15, 2026, <https://umetnostzaskupnost.si/umetnisko-delo/mozaik-v-drzavnem-zboru-ljubljana-4/>.
- 46 "Jože Ciuha: mozaik v Državnem zboru, Ljubljana," Umetnost za skupnost: Evidenca umetnin 1945–1991,

ZRC SAZU, accessed July 15, 2026, <https://umetnostzaskupnost.si/umetnisko-delo/mozaik-v-drzavnem-zboru-ljubljana/>.

- 47 For information on the sgraffiti and the relocation of one of them to the Idrija Municipal Museum, see Simona Kostanjšek Brglez, "Uspešno snet sgraffito Ivana Seljaka – Čopiča v Idriji," *Umetnostna kronika*, no. 68 (2020): 54–58.
- 48 The course of the mosaic commission, its iconographic and formalist interpretation, and its placement within the artist's opus are provided in detail in Mohar, *Likovna oprema*, 149–156.
- 49 Architect: Boris Kobe; sculptor: Stojan Batič; mosaic artist: Ive Šubic.
- 50 Tambosso, born in 1914 in Spilimbergo, came to Yugoslavia in 1949, according to his own account, and established a workshop with Slovenian assistants. An illustrated report on a visit to Tambosso's workshop was published in 1958 in the Slovenian magazine *Tovariš*: Asta Znidarčič, "Kamenček pri kamenčku," *Tovariš*, 26 October 1958, 1138–1139. Owing to the limited space available here, it is not possible to present Tambosso's life in detail or the role he played in shaping Slovenian postwar public art. His life and artistic contributions will be the subject of a forthcoming text.
- 51 Ivan Seljak Čopič, "Ivan Seljak – Čopič o svojem delu," *Mlada pota* 10 (1961–1962): 34.

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## Stenske poslikave Ivana Seljaka Čopiča iz petdesetih in zgodnjih šestdesetih let 20. stoletja: med realizmom in abstrakcijo

### Povzetek

Ivan Seljak Čopič (1927–1990) je bil eden redkih slovenskih umetnikov, ki so se v obdobju po drugi svetovni vojni intenzivno posvečali stenskem slikarstvu. V besedilu so obravnavana njegova stenska dela iz petdesetih in zgodnjih šestdesetih let, pri čemer je posebna pozornost namenjena prehodu od realizma, značilnega za njegova zgodnja dela, k vse izrazitejši stilizaciji in abstrahiranju v drugi polovici petdesetih let. Ob predstavitvi dela Seljaka Čopiča skušamo v poglavju omenjene slogovne premene umestiti v širši kontekst razgibanega umetnostnega dogajanja obravnavanega časa v Sloveniji.

Seljak Čopič se je leta 1945 vpisal v prvo generacijo študentov novoustanovljene Akademije upodablajočih umetnosti v Ljubljani in se pozneje izpopolnjeval v specialki za monumentalno slikarstvo pri profesorju Gojmirju Antonu Kosu. Njegova formativna leta so tako sovpadala s kratkim obdobjem socialističnega realizma v slovenski umetnosti, ki mu v besedilu posledično posvetimo več pozornosti.

Socialistični realizem, do dandanes razmeroma slabo umetnostnozgodovinsko raziskan pojav v slovenski umetnosti, ni bil slogovno enoten: umetniške tradicije medvojnega zmerne modernizma, med drugim barvnega realizma, družbenokritična umetnost istega obdobja ter umetnost, nastala med drugo svetovno vojno, so bile po letu 1945 preoblikovane in prilagojene zahtevam novega časa. V praksi je to pomenilo, da se je socialistični realizem v slovenski umetnosti pokazal v širokem razponu realističnih izrazov.

Druga značilnost socialističnega realizma v Sloveniji je, da kljub podpori, ki je bil deležen med kritiki, politiki in umetniki konec štiridesetih in v začetku petdesetih let, ne moremo trditi, da je bila ta usmeritev na slovenski likovni sceni enotno sprejeta. Dvoumna je bila na primer že situacija na osrednji izobraževalni ustanovi na področju likovne umetnosti, Akademiji upodablajočih umetnosti. Vemo namreč, da so nekateri profesorji dobro poznali in cenili zahodni modernizem. Tudi v ikonografskem smislu obdobje prvih povojnih let v slovenski likovni umetnosti ni bilo zaznamovano z vsesplošno in ortodoksno pripadnostjo načelom socialističnega realizma. Uveljavljeni slovenski umetniki so se sicer občasno lotevali motivov nove

socialistične stvarnosti, vendar so se – zlasti v ateljejski umetnosti – večinoma še naprej posvečali tradicionalnim žanrom, kot so krajina, portret in tihožitje.

V tem mestoma protislovnem in neenotnem umetniškem ozračju se je oblikovala umetniška osebnost Ivana Seljaka Čopiča, ki je kmalu po zaključku študija v začetku petdesetih let začel dobivati prva naročila za stenske poslikave. Stensko slikarstvo je bilo zaradi javne dostopnosti in možnosti posredovanja političnih vsebin širšim množicam v prvih povojnih letih posebej spodbujano, naročila za javne umetnine pa so bila razmeroma pogosta in za umetnike tudi pomemben vir zaslužka.

Med zgodnja dela Ivana Seljaka Čopiča sodijo sgraffito v nekdanjem Domu milice na Kotnikovi ulici 8 v Ljubljani ter poslikavi v nekdanji stavbi Pokrajinskega muzeja v Kočevju in pred njo. Ti dve poslikavi sta nastali leta 1953, ko je Seljak Čopič za na novo muzejski dejavnosti namenjeno vilo v Kočevju izdelal danes neohranjeni zunanji sgraffito in monumentalno fresko. Ta v treh vsebinsko povezanih delih pripoveduje zgodbo od vojnega trpljenja prek partizanskega boja do osvoboditve in povojne obnove. Kočevski projekt dobro ponazarja umetnikovo zgodnjo fazo, v kateri sta realistični izraz in politična ikonografija tesno povezana z novo funkcijo javnih stavb in širšimi potrebami povojne socialistične družbe po njihovi ustrezni likovni opremlitvi.

Od sredine petdesetih let se je jugoslovanski kulturni prostor vse bolj odpiral zahodnemu modernizmu. Razstave zahodne umetnosti in potovanja umetnikov v tujino ter njihovo vse intenzivnejše mednarodno razstavljanje so prispevali k uveljavljanju stilizacije in abstrahiranja v slovenski umetnosti. Kot številne druge umetnike in kulturne delavce tega časa, ki so vse pogostejše potovali na Zahod, je tudi Seljaka Čopiča močno zaznamovala izkušnja Pariza, kjer se je leta 1956 dodatno izobraževal pri francoskem kubistu Andréju Lhotu.

V zadnjem delu poglavja obravnavamo dva projekta, ki odražata prodiranje modernističnih tendenc v stensko slikarstvo Ivana Seljaka Čopiča v drugi polovici petdesetih let. Sgraffita za trgovino Čipka v Idriji iz leta 1957 tako že kažeta opuščanje nekaj let poprej še prisotnega realizma ter uporabo postopkov stilizacije in deformacije dotlej prevladujočega realističnega načina upodabljanja. Iste težnje je zaznati v mozaiku, posvečenem dražgoški bitki, ki je mesto leta 1958 dobil v stavbi Ljudske skupščine v Ljubljani. Vojni motiv umetnik upodablja izrazito stilizirano, fragmentirano in ploskovito, pri čemer k razgradnji podobe dodatno prispeva sama tehnika mozaika, h kateri se je umetnik tudi v nadaljnjih desetletjih večkrat vračal.





# JULES PERAHIM'S MURALS AND THE POLITICS OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT IN ROMANIA IN THE POST-STALINIST PERIOD

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In December 1962, in a central Bucharest gallery, Jules Perahim presented the mosaic panel *Tinerete* (Youth) [Figure 1], which later became part of one of the most ambitious mosaics created in socialist Romania, installed in the town of Mangalia on the Black Sea. Because of the very process by which monumental mosaics were produced, for a short time this fragment was able to be displayed as a self-contained work of art before being subsumed into a larger ensemble in situ. The transition from fragment to whole – from “easel painting” to mural, which in the cultural climate of the time served first and foremost as a vehicle of self-promotion – is emblematic of a broader set of changes that reshaped Romanian artistic policies, the built environment, and Perahim’s career itself.

Born Iuliș Blumenfeld, Jules Perahim (1914–2008) was a politically engaged artist that significantly contributed to the institutionalisation of socialist realism in Romania, both via his artistic output and his involvement in the postwar reorganisation of the artistic system. His commitment to communist ideals, however, predated this by decades: as early as the 1930s, he established himself as a graphic artist, concurrently publishing in surrealist magazines and antifascist journals in Bucharest.<sup>1</sup> Following the Second World War, Perahim ascended to a prominent status within the emerging cultural hierarchies, principally engaging in graphic art, particularly book illustration, a medium integral to the propaganda tactics of the communist regime. His standing, reflected in official positions and a continuous stream of state commissions, provided him not only a degree of flexibility but also the freedom to expand his practice into new domains, including murals, mosaics, ceramics, and stage design, while experimenting with various materials and formats [Figure 2].

Despite public art being ideally suited for socialist ideals due to its collective visibility and persuasive intent, Romania experienced a proliferation of such initiatives only during the late 1950s. By then, the discourse of socialist realism had begun to be largely absorbed into that of public art, which retained its militant ethos while no longer insisting upon classical formal norms. Public art, or what was then referred to as “monumental

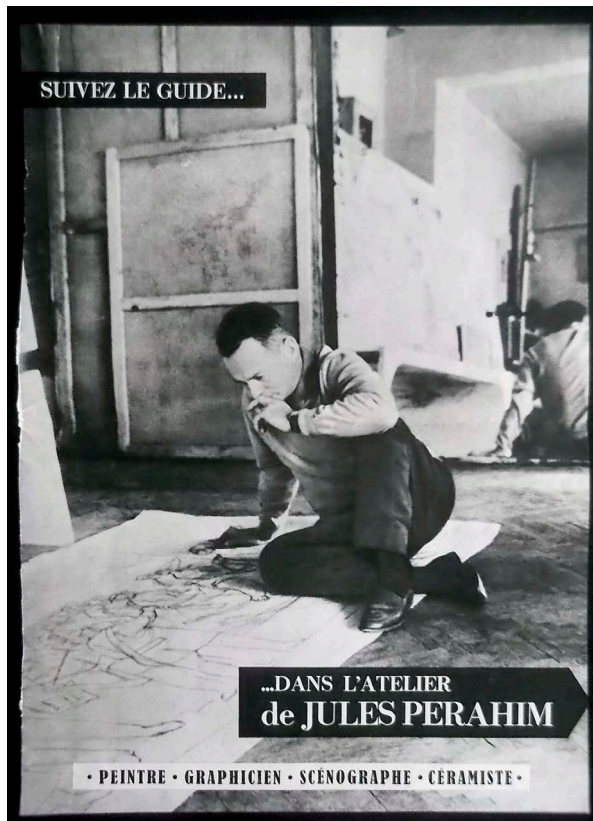


Figure 1.  
Jules Perahim and  
Ștefan Constantinescu,  
*Tinerețe / Revoluția  
culturală (Youth / The  
Cultural Revolution)*,  
mosaic, House of  
Culture, Mangalia,  
1962, detail.  
Source: *Contemporanul*,  
21 December 1962.



art”, was meant to operate in concert with architecture, facilitating the visualisation of the social contract and embodying the achievements of socialism in a modern built environment that was clean, legible, and aesthetically dignifying.<sup>2</sup> What had once been almost synonymous with conventional sculptural monuments was now reconceived as a synthesis of arts, closely aligned with modernist architecture. In this context, murals and especially mosaics emerged as a key medium of public art, rivalling sculpture. They proved capable of mediating the tension between modernist architecture and decoration, while also offering a cost-effective means of achieving the regime’s desired monumentality and synthesis.

This chapter takes Perahim’s career as a muralist as a case study to analyse these shifts, occurring simultaneously across artistic, architectural, and political registers. Drawing on novel archival sources, period press, and artists’ recollections, it delineates the circulation of the two primary notions in public art discourse – synthesis and monumentality – within professional and political contexts. These concepts proved remarkably adaptable, accommodating divergent artistic expressions and shaping artistic practices but also producing frictions among the various stake-



holders engaged in creating public art in socialist Romania. From the perspective of Cold War studies,<sup>3</sup> Perahim's trajectory is particularly revealing: despite geopolitical divisions, ideas and practices surrounding synthesis and monumentality circulated between East and West, and Perahim was one of the individuals that actively made these intersections possible.

*Figure 2. Jules Perahim in his studio, ca. 1958. Magazine cutout from an unidentified publication. Source: Archive of the "G. Oprescu" Institute of Art History, Bucharest.*

### **The synthesis of the arts: theory and practice in post-Stalinist Romania**

In a 1963 interview, Jules Perahim asserts that "a synthesis between architecture and monumental art is essential, necessitating a common mode of thinking. The architect and the visual artist must collaboratively start from a clean slate in conceptualising a future urban ensemble. This objective is achievable solely within a socialist system."<sup>4</sup> Perahim condensed the project of the ideal socialist city into a radical collective endeavour, conceived from the ground up in terms of space, aesthetics, and social relations. In this context, the concept of synthesis between art and architecture, which has been a recurring theme since the early twentieth century, was reinterpreted as a defining characteristic of socialist modernity, actively endorsed by Eastern Bloc regimes. At that time, the collaboration between art and architecture fulfilled three primary roles: it allowed modernist artistic concepts and practices to gradually replace the classical norms of socialist realism, it was also employed as a pedagogical tool in cultivating socialist citizenship; and it generated aestheticised environments for the rhythm of both labour and leisure.

For Perahim, the rapidly expanding field of mural art was not only a means of maintaining political authority in a shifting cultural landscape

but also a strategy of self-reinvention, apparently leaving behind socialist realism. He was not only actively engaged as a mere producer, completing significant mural commissions in Romania and abroad, but also as a contributor to the discourse that propelled and validated new practices in art and architecture. Under his leadership, the official art journal *Arta plastică* promoted monumental art with particular attention to murals.<sup>5</sup> In parallel, Perahim held institutional positions, serving simultaneously as an artist, a cultural official on the Committee for Art (within the Ministry of Culture), and member of the Commission for Monumental Art.

By the early 1960s, “synthesis”, a term used not only by Perahim but also very frequently in the cultural discourse in Romania, functioned at two levels: on the one hand, in the discussions and practice of artists and architects responsible for its implementation, and, on the other hand, in political and professional discourse, which set out principles, guidelines, and conditions for both art and architecture. Despite the frequent intersections between the two, each carried the mark of its own field, drawing back to specific traditions and concepts. Particularly between 1959 and 1963, Romania witnessed a proliferation of theoretical discussions on the interplay between art and architecture published in the press that aimed to define or refine the meaning of synthesis. What remains visible today from all these discussions is only the tip of the iceberg of the broader transformations and conflicts of a period throughout which the limits of the “thaw” were actively negotiated in every cultural field. Compared with other Eastern Bloc countries, Romania moved more cautiously in loosening cultural policy after Stalin’s death. Within this thorny context, the discourse of synthesis assumed increased relevance, becoming a site for recalibrations and tensions in Romania’s cultural landscape.

Art historians, critics, and architects held slightly diverging views on synthesis, often depending on how they envisioned the hierarchical (or non-hierarchical) relation between the two fields. Eugen Schilleru, a professor of art history at the Bucharest Institute of Fine Arts, understood synthesis as an integrative instrument compelling art and architecture to form “an entirely new image”.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, Petru Comarnescu, an art critic trained during the interwar period, regarded art’s role in synthesis as one of complementing and emphasising the function and style of the building.<sup>7</sup> Closer to Comarnescu’s perspective, the architect Anton Moisescu, the secretary of the Union of Architects, argued that the characteristics of architecture should be embraced by other arts as well, rendering them “economical, rational, constructive”. In the same vein, he encouraged artists to adopt new or prefabricated materials.<sup>8</sup> Although such arguments

might appear to open a window for abstraction, in practice the situation proved otherwise: collaboration between artists and architects was frequently marked by rivalries and misunderstandings. A series of articles published in *Scînteia* (The Spark), the official mouthpiece of the Romanian Communist Party, in 1962 reveals these disjunctions. Artists complained of being excluded from the early phases of architectural and urban design or of being assigned inappropriate sites for their work;<sup>9</sup> conversely, architects criticized artists for acting by themselves, disregarding architectural and urban contexts. Moiescu himself reproached artists for their inadequacy and conservatism.<sup>10</sup>

Undoubtedly, the collaboration between artists and architects often depended less on abstract principles than on personal relationships, institutional affiliations, or hierarchical positions within the Union of Fine Artists. Viorica Iacob – who, alongside her husband Gheorghe Iacob, engaged in numerous projects in mosaic and tapestry – later recalled how personal ties with architects influenced both the limits of artistic expression and the distribution of commissions.<sup>11</sup> Perahim, who held key positions across several institutions, proudly praised the collaboration between artists and architects in the Galați housing district, where he was assigned one of the best walls to be decorated with mosaics.<sup>12</sup> Undeniably privileged within the commission system, Perahim nonetheless contributed to shaping a discourse on socialist monumental art in Romania, one in which the concept of synthesis was central, bringing together multiple professions while also fostering new artistic practices.

The relational character of synthesis proved essential to all of its artistic expressions. “Monumentality”, in contrast, referred broadly to public art while also signifying an essential feature of such art, primarily grounded in the organisation of the image. Discussions on monumentality emerged in connection with the commissioning of large-scale mural paintings and sgraffito in Bucharest, projects that functioned as testing grounds for longer-term public art programmes.

### Youth cultural centres in Bucharest: laboratories for mural art

In 1958 and 1959, five youth cultural houses opened in Bucharest, each featuring large murals with a total of thirty projects. Jointly supported by the city council, the Ministry of Education, and the Union of Fine Artists, these works marked the first stage of a broader initiative. Until then, murals and mosaics had been confined to a small number of individual buildings. The murals were thematically aligned with the socialist realist



repertoire: peace demonstrations, cultural, artistic, and sporting activities, educational depictions of various professions, and revolutionary-historical themes. They represented both the regime's promises to the younger generation and the inclusion of youth as integral participants in socialist society. The collectives designated for these initiatives generally comprised very young artists, working under the supervision of a politically reliable senior figure.<sup>13</sup> Some of these coordinators brought experience from ecclesiastical mural painting, whereas others were entering the field for the first time. Perahim belonged to the latter category, turning toward public art at precisely the moment it became a vehicle of renewed political engagement for him. Such commissions also provided artists with significant remuneration, far exceeding the pay available through ordinary state acquisitions.<sup>14</sup>

Perahim was appointed the coordinator for all projects at the Vasile Roaită Youth House of Culture in the Grivița Roșie district, whose topography was highly symbolic for the history of the Romanian Communist Party. There he designed the largest piece for the auditorium, *Cultură și Sportul* (Culture and Sport), created in collaboration with Ion Minoiu and Vasile Melica (covered at a later unknown date). The composition, organised across two equal horizontal registers, featured processional groups of figures engaged in sports and artistic activities. Its style was fundamentally graphic, resembling an oversized book illustration, betraying Perahim's primary training as a graphic artist. The composition lacked spatial depth; instead, simplified figures were clustered in decorative ensembles against a quite flat background. Surviving only in black-and-white reproductions, the work cannot be reconstructed chromatically today [Figure 3]. Perahim's name also appeared, alongside Mihail Danu, Aurel Stoicescu, and Simona Vasiliu-Chintilă, on the two exterior sgraffito panels of the same house of culture, depicting *Arta și cultura* (Art and Culture) on one side and *Știința și tehnica* (Science and Technology) on the other (improperly restored by covering some figures).<sup>15</sup> Unlike the interior murals, these works drew more directly on the language of propaganda posters, a domain in which Perahim had previous achievements [Figure 4]. The translation from graphics to murals operated by Perahim allegedly gave those works the most distinctly modern character among the youth centre projects.

Yet, even before the murals were completed, they became the subject of critical scrutiny. The critique highlighted discontent with their deviation from the principles of socialist realism – namely, about the generalisation of human figures, their lack of convincing power, and their disproportion

Figure 3.  
Jules Perahim,  
Ion Minoiu, and Vasile  
Melica, *Cultura și  
Sportul* (Culture and  
Sport), fresco, Vasile  
Roaită Youth House  
of Culture, Bucharest,  
1959.  
Source: *Arta plastică* 7,  
no. 1 (1960).

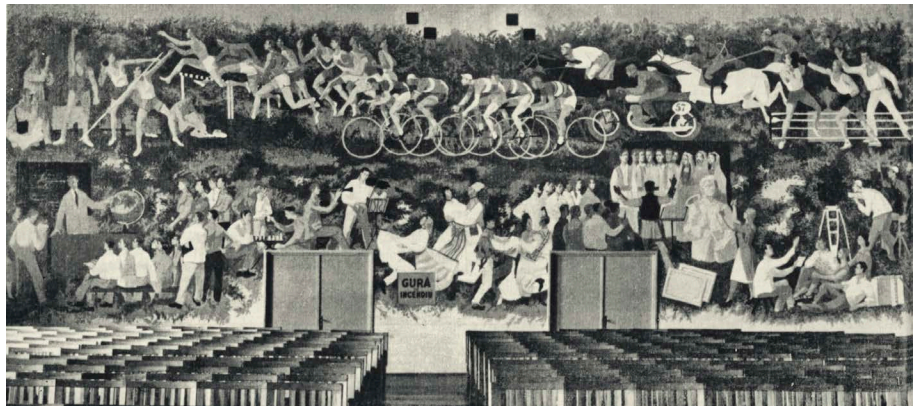


Figure 4.  
Jules Perahim, Mihail  
Danu, Aurel Stoicescu,  
and Simona Vasiliu-  
Chintilă, *Știința și  
tehnica* (Science and  
Technology) (left) and  
*Arta și Cultura* (Art and  
Culture) (right), sgraffito  
panels, Vasile Roaită  
Youth House of Culture,  
Bucharest, 1959.  
Source: *Arta plastică* 7,  
no. 1 (1960).



in relation to architecture.<sup>16</sup> These discussions that emerged in the press during the early 1960s also provided an opportunity to reflect on the specificity of mural painting as a distinct artistic discipline. Monumental painting, it was argued, needed its own principles, apart from being neither reducible to easel painting nor decorative art. Within the concept of monumentality, at least two contradictions became apparent. Initially, through these mural projects, the regime attempted to re-legitimize socialist realism, which had been weakened even more following the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romania in 1958. In exhibitions of the late 1950s and early 1960s, a more inclusive form of realism was tolerated, but the boundaries of this “thaw” remained unstable. The sculptor Dorio Lazăr, a prominent artist of the 1950s, warned that form must not be severed from content in pursuit of originality, which can be read as an implicit attack on modernism because such separation led to formalism, the enduring opponent of socialist

realism.<sup>17</sup> In fact, this indicated that the traditional standards of socialist realism conflicted with the regime's aspiration for a propagandist art that was simultaneously contemporary and compelling, a dynamic accurately characterized by Jessica Jenkins, in her analysis of East German mural art, as "competing visions".<sup>18</sup>

Overlying this conflict was an older one, between the pictorial and the decorative, in which the latter was associated with facility and superficiality that could sometimes destabilize the ontological status of painting. In the 1950s and 1960s, critics regularly addressed the tension between monumental and decorative elements, both of which were deeply entwined in monumental painting. Some inclined toward one pole, some toward the other, and yet others sought to reconcile both. The art critic Ion Frunzetti, for instance, referred to public mural painting as "monumental-decorative", referencing the authority of the Soviet sculptor Vera Mukhina.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, an identical language had also been prevalent in the 1930s in Romania during discussions over mural painting as a complement to architecture.<sup>20</sup> Monumentality thus intersected with synthesis, together providing conceptual frames that gradually allowed the introduction of modernism into mural practice.

When asked about the distinction between decoration and mural painting, the artist Ștefan Constantinescu (1898–1983), Perahim's collaborator on several major projects and a key link bridging interwar and socialist mural practices, explained that the difference lay in complexity: "Mural painting, without abandoning a decorative conception, stylisation, and integration with architecture, encompasses a wider range of elements, organises figures in a rhythm of broad movement, accentuates the human figure, engages in deeper problematization, and is at once an art of analysis and of synthesis."<sup>21</sup>

Without ever claiming the mantle of a theoretician, Perahim was instrumental in propagating a conceptual vocabulary for mural art, both as an art bureaucrat and as an artist. By the late 1950s, muralism had been promoted to one of the most important categories of official art, tasked with propagating state ideology. Defining the specificity of mural painting, however, became a site of negotiation between the requirements of socialist realism and what would later be referred to as socialist modernism. These negotiations decisively shaped the medium most favoured by official commissions in socialist Romania from the 1960s onward: mosaic, valued for both its durability and its relatively simple integration in a synthesis with architecture.

## Meanwhile in the West: Perahim in Geneva

At the very moment when discussions on mural art gained momentum in post-Stalinist Romania, the concept of synthesis was already far from novel. It not only possessed a conceptual history extending back before the Second World War but also functioned as a vital connective thread to different modernities. In the context of postwar reconstruction in the West, Le Corbusier became a prominent advocate of synthesis in his seminal article “Vers l'unité” (Towards Unity), whose rhetoric combined reconciliatory aspirations with distinctly collectivist inflections.<sup>22</sup> Numerous organisations placed the cooperation between art and architecture at the core of their mission, including the CIAM (*Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne*), the Association for the Synthesis of Plastic Arts (*Association pour une Synthèse des Arts Plastiques*) led by Henri Matisse, Le Corbusier himself, and André Bloc, and the AIAP (*Association Internationale des Arts Plastiques*). The AIAP, founded in 1954 under the aegis of UNESCO, had a worldwide influence that encompassed socialist countries.<sup>23</sup> The archives of the Artists' Union in Bucharest preserved documentation regarding the establishment of a Romanian section of the AIAP, as well as transcripts of international meetings at which artists of various origin expressed their intent to contribute to postwar reconstruction by invoking the principle of artistic synthesis.<sup>24</sup> At the 1963 AIAP Congress in New York, also attended by the Romanian representatives, a charter inspired by the Athens Charter was formulated to guide future collaborations between architects and artists.<sup>25</sup> The activities conducted by the AIAP could be a useful indicator for the extent to which artistic concepts circulated across the postwar world, demonstrating the permeability of the Iron Curtain despite ideological conflict.

These exchanges opened new directions for mural art. Their primary focus was to redefine monumentality by disentangling it from its fascist genealogies and rearticulating it as genuine and democratic.<sup>26</sup> The synthesis of the arts and the reinvented monumental vision were adopted not only in the Eastern Bloc but also within the cultural initiatives of Western governments, which aimed to create public art that was able to embody the new postwar aspirations while simultaneously negotiating the antagonisms of the Cold War.

Perahim held an exceptional position among artists living under socialism in the 1950s: despite the limitations on circulation, he benefited from direct exposure to monumental practices on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Shortly after completing his first large-scale mural commission in Bucharest, he received a special commission in 1960 for a mosaic intended for the new headquarters of the United International Bureaux



for the Protection of Intellectual Property (*Bureaux Internationaux Réunis pour la Protection de la Propriété Intellectuelle*, BIRPI, predecessor to the WIPO) in Geneva, an organisation affiliated with the United Nations. The building, designed by Pierre Brillard, who played a pivotal role in shaping postwar Geneva, was decorated with diplomatic gifts of member states. Although the architect's impact on the selection and the spatial distribution of these artworks remains unclear, the outcome was undoubtedly a synthesis of arts, although it occasionally deviated towards eclecticism when assessed against the criteria of international postwar modernism.<sup>27</sup>

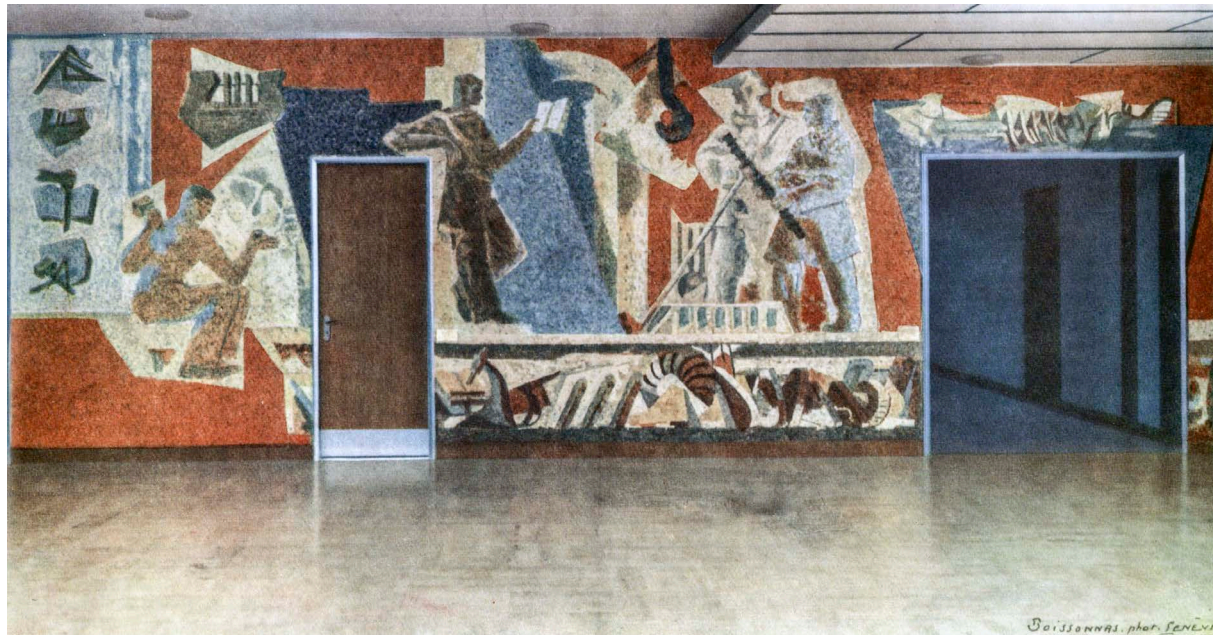
Romania's gift was among the most substantial ones. It marked the country's admission to the United Nations in 1956 after prolonged delays and political conflict.<sup>28</sup> Installed in August 1960, the 24 m<sup>2</sup> faience mosaic, designed in the colours of the Romanian flag, was created by Perahim in collaboration with Ștefan Constantinescu, who was twenty years his senior, and an experienced muralist as well as a professor at the Department of Mural Art at the Institute of Arts in Bucharest. Perahim himself acknowledged Constantinescu as the main author of the work, a reasonable claim considering the complexity of its compositional interdependencies and differentiated treatment of surface, neatly differentiating it from Perahim's earlier murals in Romania [**Figure 5**].

The mosaic's concept aligned impeccably with the institution's function of overseeing intellectual and industrial property. The iconography combined figurative and symbolic elements referencing industrial labour and infrastructure (steelworkers, a dam, and industrial products) as well as intellectual and artistic activities (a reader, a sculptor, and a lyre). The robust constitution of the figures and their worker's attire imparted a distinctly socialist aspect to the composition, emphasising that workers were the agents of both the conception and the performance of their labour [**Figure 6**]. This convergence of intellectual, artistic, and industrial labour echoed one of the central tropes of socialist realism, frequently used in Romanian monumental art. Thus, Romania succeeded in exporting socialist realism to the West, integrating it within a framework of artistic-architectural synthesis that was both connected to and yet distinct from its Eastern Bloc counterparts.

However, the project's reception felt less glorious. As a report written by Perahim after his return reveals, the Romanian authorities exhibited no enduring interest in advancing the commission, neither in Switzerland nor domestically, neglecting to leverage its potential propagandistic significance.<sup>29</sup> What might have been a diplomatic triumph turned into a missed



*Figure 5. Entrance hall of the United International Bureaux for the Protection of Intellectual Property (BIRPI), Geneva, 1963. Source: World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Archives, WIPO Historical Photograph Collection, item b000036.*



*Figure 6. Jules Perahim and Ștefan Constantinescu, Munca industrială și munca intelectuală (Industrial and Intellectual Work), mosaic, United International Bureaux for the Protection of Intellectual Property (BIRPI), Geneva, 1959. Source: Arta plastică 10, no. 7 (1963).*

opportunity. Only through Perahim's own efforts at self-promotion have a few reproductions of the mosaic, now absent in Geneva, survived in Romanian cultural publications, allowing the project to retain a place, however muted, in the visual record of socialist monumental art.

**The socialist  
contract  
of beauty:  
Perahim's  
mosaics in  
model urban  
spaces**

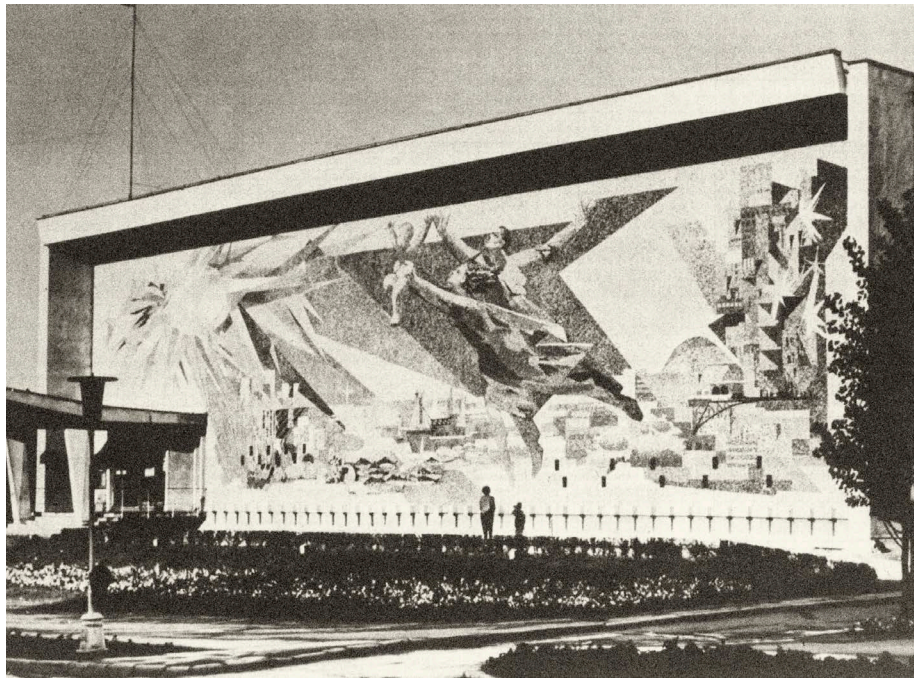
The late 1950s were a period of tentative exploration and adjustment for mural painting, whereas the 1960s in Romania saw extensive building campaigns that provided numerous opportunities to implement, test, and consolidate methods and techniques for combining the visual arts with architecture. Large-scale urban extensions were planned for both major cities and newly developed industrial towns, allowing the creation of housing ensembles with the goal of accommodating an increasing number of people while reflecting complex architectural ideas based on modernist principles. Simultaneously, these programmes served as guarantors of the regime's planned new social contract, which now relied not solely on coercion but on gaining benevolence on the part of its citizens and on the cultivation of desire as a social binding force. The pure forms of modernist architecture corresponded perfectly with the regime's desire to create a modern state identity capable of providing its subjects with both comfort and an aesthetically pleasing setting. As in other communist countries, the promotion of modernist architectural concepts arose from the junction of political decision-making and the professional agendas of architects and construction specialists. This growth was accelerated by the exchange of architectural ideas and practices between the West,<sup>30</sup> the Soviet Union, and other Eastern Bloc countries.

By adopting the period's conceptual vocabulary and stressing "monumentality" as the connective thread between architecture, decoration, and the viewer, Jules Perahim projected a magnificent aura on the purpose of artists working in large-scale urban and architectural projects: "The monumental vision demands embodiment in forms of powerful expressivity, in a vivid rhythm, and in expressive chromatic harmonies; all these must be fused into an image perceptible from afar, one that complements architecture and imposes itself through grandeur and sobriety."<sup>31</sup> This discourse coincided with the development of media, methods, and materials capable of embodying monumentality and everyday beauty: mosaic (both handmade and industrially made), sgraffito, monumental ceramics for interiors and exteriors, tapestry, urban design, and sculpture. Next to sculpture, large-scale mosaics, envisioned as an extension of painting, ranked first among state commissions, not only for their durability but also for their prestige, which drew many artists eager to participate in such public art projects.



Figure 7.  
Jules Perahim and  
Ștefan Constantinescu,  
*Tinerete / Revoluția  
culturală* (Youth / The  
Cultural Revolution),  
mosaic, House of  
Culture, Mangalia,  
1962.

Source: *Arta plastică* 10,  
no. 7 (1963).



Always strategically positioned, Perahim secured mosaic commissions in two of Romania's most prominent architectural projects of the 1960s and beyond. In both cases, he was granted the largest surfaces, and the most conspicuous places within the building complex.

The first to be completed was the commission for the house of culture in Mangalia, which went by several names, such as *Tinerete* (Youth), *Revoluția culturală* (The Cultural Revolution) [Figure 7], and more recently *Geneze* (Genesis; the sole mural by Perahim in good condition today). Located on the Black Sea coast, the town was part of the ambitious architectural and political programme for remodelling and expanding seaside tourism infrastructure, which began in 1955 and culminated in the 1960s. This programme had far-reaching implications, influencing forms of construction and planning throughout Romania's socialist era and transforming the coastline into a genuine modernist laboratory.<sup>32</sup> It also served as an experimental ground for mosaic, sgraffito, and mixed mural methods, all of which benefited from a sort of suspension of socialist realist orthodoxy, much like architecture. Depending on the artist and the function of the building, modernist idioms of various origins developed, putting pressure on the canons of both representation and architectural planning.

According to Carmen Popescu, the new coastal architecture served as a "modernist visual machine".<sup>33</sup> Following the same line, Juliana Maxim

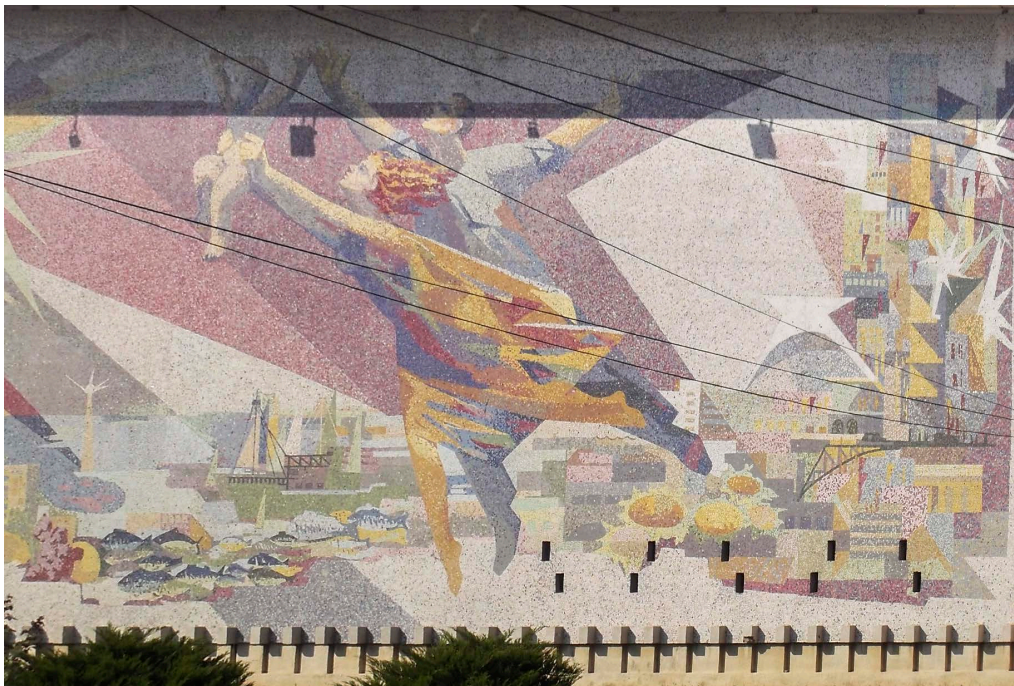


highlighted its importance in seducing the socialist citizen on vacation.<sup>34</sup> Urban and architectural ensembles became, thus, visions of tomorrow, designed to be perceived as complete environments. If extended beyond architecture to encompass the broader ensembles of urban design, sculpture, and murals, the arguments of the two authors acquire even richer significance. As a whole, they created a seductive visual machine from which the viewer could hardly escape.

Perahim's mosaic design for the house of culture in Mangalia, finished in 1962, again in collaboration with Ștefan Constantinescu, exemplifies the requirements for murals, including monumentality, expressive force, and rhythm, which were previously stated in his discourses. The building's main façade was purposefully designed as a flat surface with no openings to allow for large-scale decoration, a decision that the architect Nicolae Vlădescu also framed in terms of monumentality: "Employing simple elements, the chosen composition sought to achieve a sober, major architectural expression, whose monumentality was to be fulfilled by the mural decoration on the entire surface of the main façade."<sup>35</sup>

At the time of completion, the Mangalia mosaic was the largest in Romania. Its iconography focused on political rather than cultural themes, reflecting the important role that houses of culture throughout the country played in the regime's propaganda apparatus [Figures 8, 9]. The massive couple, lifting their child in the air in a dance-like movement, as though propelling it directly into the future, recalls the iconography of Soviet posters from the 1930s. Youth and family, depicted in idealised human bodies, were central to the political repertoire, reflecting the ideal socialist subject because traits associated with youth, such as strength and enthusiasm, were resonating with the spirit of political engagement. The environment in which the perfect family floats fluidly combines agricultural plenty, modernist housing, industrial buildings, and maritime activity, rendering both a complex landscape and the promise of prosperity in state socialism. By the early 1960s, Perahim and Constantinescu were among the first in Romania to go beyond the literal depictions of socialist realism while still maintaining an explicit political message. Perahim himself advocated art that would be instructive without being didactic or simplistic.<sup>36</sup>

As the urban planning and architectural design of Black Sea leisure resorts eventually extended into metropolitan contexts,<sup>37</sup> monumental and decorative arts followed. The Țiglina district of Galați was created in 1960 alongside the building of Romania's largest steelworks and finished in stages until 1966. Mosaics of varying sizes decorated the walls



Figures 8, 9. Jules Perahim and Ștefan Constantinescu, *Tinerețe / Revoluția culturală* (Youth / The Cultural Revolution), mosaic, House of Culture, Mangalia, 1962. General view and detail. Photo: Irina Cărbăș, 2015.



Figure 10. Cinema building, Țiglina district, Galați, 1962. Source: Digital Archive of the Union of Architects of Romania, © Uniunea Arhitecților din România.



Figure 11. Jules Perahim, *Arta cinematografică* (The Art of Cinema), mosaic, cinema building, Țiglina district, Galați, 1963. Photo: Irina Cărbăș, 2015.



of apartment blocks and cultural and commercial buildings, and green spaces were enriched with fountains, sculptures, and ceramic installations. The district cinema was designed by the architect Maria Bucur as a massive “street screen”, for which Perahim conceived a mosaic in accordance not only with the blind façade but also, at least formally, with the sculpture by Peter Balogh placed in front [Figure 10].

Perahim’s work was a kind of soft spot of the “visual machine” because of its reflexive character, focusing on vision itself. The mosaic (still on site but abandoned), installed in 1963, depicted an allegory of cinema: a glamorous monochrome female figure projected against a background of abstract concentric forms radiating from the film camera she holds into

the urban space. Although certain motifs suggested aquatic landscapes (a nod to Galați's location as a Danube port), the gradient from white to black of the abstract forms was designed to represent the play of light and shadow found in cinematic images [Figure 11]. As in all of Perahim's solo mural projects, the graphic dimension was explicit but here without any caution. However, more than any other of his monumental works, this mosaic boldly experimented with modernist, abstract, and surrealist elements, ultimately demonstrating that the expansion of the cultural "thaw" was not solely the responsibility of new generations or "alternative" artists but was also advanced by officially commissioned practitioners.

## Conclusion

The mosaic in Galați was the last large-scale work that Perahim's name was directly associated with in socialist Romania. A longtime legend in the Romanian art world attributes to him the monumental mosaic on the façade of the Museum of the Romanian Communist Party in Bucharest installed in 1966, which is officially ascribed to Ștefan Constantinescu. This mythology may indeed maintain the recollection of another collaboration between the two artists, still unconfirmed. Furthermore, by the late 1960s, socialist realism had been entirely relegated to the margins of the cultural field, and artists, like Perahim, that held significant power in the previous decade were tacitly relocated into secondary positions. Perahim's emigration to France in 1969 further contributed to the erasure of his name.

Murals, especially mosaics, were conceived as long-lasting witnesses to the definitive character of socialism and to the idea that, under socialism, society had reached the final stage of evolution, necessitating only refinement. Nevertheless, the murals Perahim produced in the 1950s and 1960s have either been covered/destroyed or obscured by historical misleads and myths. These multiple erasures can be read as a consequence of changing cultural policies during socialism and post-socialism, as well as a result of the artist's personal strategies of self-redefinition.

The first level of erasure was connected with the controlled oblivion of socialist realism during the cultural "thaw", when the regime itself encouraged amnesia to establish new legitimacy. A subsequent erasure entailed the systematic exclusion of Perahim's name from the historical narrative of monumental art in socialist Romania after his departure for France.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, in his endeavour to secure a place within the French art scene, Perahim deliberately obliterated the memory of works



that identified him as an artist once aligned with the socialist regime. His re-invention as a surrealist painter for the French art market (painting being only occasionally practiced prior to his departure from Romania) enjoyed some degree of success precisely because it was paired with the image of the artist as a free wanderer of imagination, creating an art that was self-contained and for which political strings would have been fatal. The post-socialist period in Romania later exacerbated and institutionalised these layers of amnesia, incorporating them into the broader project of extracting the communist experience from what was perceived as the “true” trajectory of local history, aligned with Western paradigms.<sup>39</sup> Perahim re-entered Romanian art history as an avant-garde artist when the local historical avant-garde was being reconsidered during the 1990s, with scholars cautiously avoiding any references to his prolific and multifarious career throughout the first two decades of the communist regime. Thus, reconstructing Perahim’s involvement in public art in socialist Romania still needs much investigation because it has to grapple with multiple lacunae and erasures both of his works and of his biography. But it also sheds new light on the ways in which the discourse on monumental art was constructed in postwar Romania, on the major architectural projects initiated by the regime, and on the complexity and contradictions of the artist’s social engagement during the socialist era. Furthermore, his public works represent, however faintly today, an aspirational image of collectivity without which a significant part of the local built environment under socialism would lose some of its initial meanings.

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- 6 Eugen Schilleru, [Debates], *Arta plastică* 10, no. 7 (1963): 377.
- 7 Petru Comarnescu, “Premise pentru o largă dezvoltare a picturii murale,” *Arta plastică* 6, no. 2 (1959): 37–39.
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- 10 Anton Moisescu, “Discuții despre arta monumentală. Modalități și procedee insuficient folosite,” *Scînteia*, 8 November 1962, 4; see also Marcel Locar, “Discuții despre arta monumentală,” *Scînteia*, 13 December 1962, 3. See also Magda Predescu, *Utopie și heterotopie în arta românească din România anilor 1950–1970. Variațiile canonului artistic* (Cluj-Napoca: Idea Design & Print, 2018), 281–282.
- 11 Viorica Iacob, interview by author, Bucharest, 8 August 2025.
- 12 Jules Perahim, “Text prescurtat al referatului prezentat de Jules Perahim, vicepreședinte al Consiliului artelor plastice din C.S.C.A., în cadrul plenarei lărgite, din 10 iulie 1963, a Consiliului artelor plastice,” *Arta plastică* 10, no. 7 (1963): 375.
- 13 N. Delaport, “Viitoarele decorații monumentale la casele de cultură ale tineretului,” *Arta plastică* 6, no. 2 (1959): 40–41; Costin Ioanid, “Decorarea caselor de cultură raionale ale tineretului,” *Gazeta literară*, 18 June 1959, 7.
- 14 Florin Mezopol, interview by author, Buzău, 6 August 2025; Mihai Mănescu, *Țarul cu flori* (Bucharest: Semne, 2004), 174.
- 15 It is not very clear what Perahim’s contribution to these panels was. Some sources name Aurel Stoicescu as the author of the project; for example, Paul Constantin, “Specificul picturii monumentale (decorația caselor de cultură ale tineretului din București ‘Vasile Roaită’ și ‘Tudor Vladimirescu’),” *Arta plastică* 7, no. 1 (1960): 16, whereas the captions of their reproductions in the same publication acknowledged him as the first author.
- 16 Jack Brutaru, “Realizări în domeniul picturii monumentale,” *Arta plastică* 6, no. 2 (1959): 35–36; Vasile Drăguț, “Semnificația majoră a picturii monumentale,” *Arta plastică* 6, no. 2 (1959): 36; Petru Comarnescu, “Premise pentru o largă dezvoltare a picturii murale,” *Arta plastică* 6, no. 2 (1959): 37–38.
- 17 Dorio Lazăr, “Discuții despre arta monumentală. O problemă de principii,” *Scînteia*, 29 November 1962, 2; Drăguț, “Semnificația majoră,” 36.
- 18 Jenkins, *Picturing Socialism*, 4.

- 19 Ion Frunzetti, "Monumental și monumentalitate," *Contemporanul*, 18 April 1958, 5.
- 20 Olga Greceanu, *Compoziția murală. Legile și tehnica ei* (Bucharest, 1935), 9–13. For a similar discussion in East Germany, see Jenkins, *Picturing Socialism*, 34.
- 21 Ileana Bratu, "Decorația în arhitectura litoralului," *Contemporanul*, 27 October 1961, 6.
- 22 Christopher Pearson, "Le Corbusier's 'Synthesis of the Major Arts' in the Context of the French Reconstruction," in *The Built Surface*, vol. 2, ed. Karen Koehler and Christy Anderson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 211–217.
- 23 Predescu, *Utopie și Heterotopie*, 263.
- 24 National Archives of Romania (*Arhivele Naționale ale României*), folder Uniunea Artiștilor Plastici, 27/1956, 43.
- 25 Mircea Popescu, "La cel de-al IV-lea congres al Asociației Internaționale a Artelor Plastice," *Arta plastică* 10, nos. 10–11 (1963): 591–592.
- 26 Romy Golan, "From Monument to Muralnomad: The Mural in Modern European Architecture," in *The Built Surface*, vol. 2, ed. Karen Koehler and Christy Anderson (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002), 200.
- 27 Archives of *Fondation Braillard Architectes*, 02.545.10. I thank Paul Marti for providing this document.
- 28 Paul Nistor, *Admiterea României comuniste în ONU: Între negocieri diplomatice și discreditare simbolică* (Iași: Institutul European, 2014), 187–198.
- 29 Diplomatic Archives of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Arhiva diplomatică a Ministerului Afacerilor Externe al României*), Switzerland/postwar, file 217, 1960, 41–44.
- 30 Carmen Popescu, "Looking West: Emulation and Limitation in Romanian Architectural Discourse," *The Journal of Architecture* 14, no. 1 (2009): 110–114, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602360802705072>.
- 31 Perahim, "Text prescurtat al referatului," 372–374.
- 32 Alina Șerban, Kalliopi Dimou, and Sorin Istudor, eds., *Vederi încântătoare. Urbanism și arhitectură în turismul românesc de la Marea Neagră în anii '60-'70 / Enchanting Views: Romanian Black Sea Tourism Planning and Architecture of the 1960s and 70s* (Bucharest: Institutul Prezentului, 2024).
- 33 Carmen Popescu, "An Effective Mechanics: The Romanian Seaside in the Socialist Period," in *Vederi încântătoare. Urbanism și arhitectură în turismul românesc de la Marea Neagră în anii '60-'70 / Enchanting Views: Romanian Black Sea Tourism Planning and Architecture of the 1960s and 70s*, ed. Alina Șerban, Kalliopi Dimou, and Sorin Istudor (Bucharest: Institutul Prezentului, 2024), 22.
- 34 Juliana Maxim, "Enchanting Views: The Politics of Seduction in Early Romanian Socialist Resorts," in *Vederi încântătoare. Urbanism și arhitectură în turismul românesc de la Marea Neagră în anii '60-'70 / Enchanting Views: Romanian Black Sea Tourism Planning and Architecture of the 1960s and 70s*, ed. Alina Șerban, Kalliopi Dimou, and Sorin Istudor (Bucharest: Institutul Prezentului, 2024), 100.
- 35 Nicolae Vlădescu, "Casa de cultură Mangalia," *Arhitectura* 9, no. 4–5 (1961): 66–69.
- 36 Perahim, Caragea, and Bițan, "Discuții despre arta monumentală," 3.
- 37 Maxim, "Enchanting Views," 89; Dana Vais, "Mamaia ca model: cartierul 'radios' de locuințe în anii 1960," *Arhitectura*, no. 1–2 (2024).
- 38 None of these books mention Perahim, although they refer to mural works that he co-authored with Ștefan Constantinescu: Mircea Grozdea, *Arta monumentală în România socialistă* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1974); Mircea Grozdea, *Arta monumentală în România socialistă* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1987); Mircea Grozdea, *Ștefan Constantinescu* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1978).
- 39 Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, "Decolonizing Eastern Europe: Beyond Internal Critique," in *Performing History. Catalogue and Supplement to the Romanian Pavilion of the Venice Biennial*, ed. Bogdan Ghiu (Cluj: Idea Design & Print, 2011).

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## Stenske poslikave Julesa Perahima in politika grajenega okolja v Romuniji v poststalinističnem obdobju

### Povzetek

V poglavju je skozi prizmo kariere umetnika Julesa Perahima (1914–2008) obravnavano oblikovanje javne stenske umetnosti v socialistični Romuniji, pri čemer je poudarek zlasti na Perahimovih projektih iz poznih petdesetih in šestdesetih let 20. stoletja. Na podlagi arhivskih dokumentov, sočasne periodike in pričevanj umetnikov je analizirano, kako sta koncepta »sinteze umetnosti« in »monumentalnosti« v poststalinističnem obdobju preoblikovala umetniško produkcijo, arhitekturno prakso in kulturno politiko. Osrednja teza študije je, da je umetnost v javnem prostoru postala pomembno prizorišče postopnega prehoda od socialističnega realizma k socialističnemu modernizmu, pri čemer je ohranila ideološko in pedagoško funkcijo. Ta proces je umeščen v širši povojni diskurz o sintezi umetnosti, ki je spodbujal sodelovanje arhitekture in likovnih umetnosti pri oblikovanju modernih socialističnih okolij. V Romuniji se je ta diskurz še posebej okrepil med letoma 1959 in 1963, ko so umetniki, arhitekti, kritiki in kulturni funkcionarji v razpravah skušali opredeliti vlogo stenske umetnosti v socialističnem mestu.

Perahim je bil pri uveljavljanju monumentalne umetnosti pomemben tako na institucionalni kot na umetniški ravni. Kot urednik in kulturni funkcionar se je zavzemal za povezovanje umetnosti in arhitekture, kot umetnik pa je sodeloval v nekaterih prvih večjih programih stenskega slikarstva v socialistični Romuniji. Mladinski kulturni domovi, zgrajeni v Bukarešti v letih 1958 in 1959, so delovali kot eksperimentalni laboratoriji na področju stenskega slikarstva. Perahim je vodil zasnovo likovne opreme Mladinskega kulturnega doma Vasila Roaite in ustvaril dela, v katerih je bil vizualni jezik grafike in propagandnega plakata prenesen v velike stenske kompozicije.

V poglavju je romunski kontekst postavljen tudi v mednarodni okvir. Kljub delitvam zaradi hladne vojne so se po drugi svetovni vojni – tudi prek organizacij, kot sta CIAM in AIAP – intenzivno širile teorije o sintezi umetnosti. V te mednarodne tokove je bil vpet tudi Perahim. Leta 1960 je s Štefanom Constantinescujem sodeloval pri monumentalnem mozaiku za sedež BIRPI v Ženevi, predhodnice Svetovne organizacije za intelektualno lastnino. Delo, ki povezuje socialistično ikonografijo z modernistično monumentalno estetiko, kaže, kako je romunska socialistična umetnost

lahko vstopala v mednarodno povojno vizualno kulturo in hkrati na Zahod posredovala socialističnorealistične teme.

Najobsežnejši del poglavja je posvečen Perahimovim mozaikom v velikih urbanističnih projektih šestdesetih let, predvsem v črnemorskem mestu Mangalia in industrijski četrti Țiglina v Galați. Ta okolja so utelešala novo »družbeno pogodbo« režima, ki legitimnosti ni gradil le na ideologiji, temveč tudi na obljubah udobja in na oblikovanju potrošniških želja. Monumentalni mozaiki so v teh modernističnih urbanih ansamblih postali ključni elementi posredovanja med arhitekturo, dekoracijo in vsakdanjim življenjem. Mozaik za Dom kulture v Mangalii, ki sta ga skupaj zasnovala Perahim in Constantinescu, prikazuje idealizirano socialistično mladino, družino, delo in blaginjo v monumentalnem, a vse bolj moderniziranem vizualnem jeziku. Pri kasnejšem mozaiku za kino v Galați je Perahim še izraziteje eksperimentiral z abstrakcijo in nadrealističnimi prvini, kar kaže, da so širjenje kulturne »odjuge« sooblikovali tudi umetniki, ki so delovali v okviru uradnih naročil.

V sklepnem delu besedila je obravnavan kasnejši izbris Perahimovega monumentalnega opusa iz javnega prostora in lokalne umetnostne zgodovine. Veliko njegovih stenskih poslikav je bilo uničenih, prekritih ali potisnjenih v pozabo, k zamolčanju njegovega ustvarjanja iz socialističnega obdobja pa je prispevala tudi umetnikova emigracija v Francijo leta 1969. Z rekonstrukcijo Perahimovega prispevka k socialistični umetnosti v javnem prostoru v poglavju ni razkrita zgolj kompleksnost umetniškega delovanja v državnem socializmu, temveč tudi osrednja vloga monumentalne umetnosti pri oblikovanju vizualne in ideološke krajine povojne Romunije.









# NEW INSIGHTS INTO IVE ŠUBIC'S MOSAIC IN THE SLOVENIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Andreja  
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Ive Šubic (1922–1989), one of the most prominent Slovenian artists during the second half of the twentieth century, created several works of art for public spaces, including various public institutions. The most prestigious commission in light of institutional importance was the mosaic created for the building of the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia (today the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia). This was Šubic's first solo monumental wall painting for a public institution<sup>1</sup> and the most prominent commission for a public institution in his oeuvre. Although the mosaic has so far received the attention of several authors,<sup>2</sup> the recent discovery of drafts that have been preserved in the artist's studio (where they are still kept) calls for this research gap to be filled. The article aims to shed light on how the mosaic was created, to complete the archival records with the inclusion of the preserved drafts, and, by drawing on both types of material, to tentatively reconstruct the development of the visual theme and work process. The mosaic, with its abstract design, stands apart from the rest of Šubic's works for public institutions, where most themes, developed throughout his creative period, relate to the National Liberation Movement. In addition, unlike other monumental wall paintings for public institutions, its content was dictated by an expert panel; this required Šubic to change his drafts several times, which was consequently the main reason for its delayed completion.

The building of the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia was constructed between 1954 and 1959, based on a design by Vinko Glanz.<sup>3</sup> To furnish such an important building with art, only the finest Slovenian artists were considered suitable:<sup>4</sup> Karel Putrih and Zdenko Kalin created the sculptural portal, the statue of Marshal Tito was the work of Boris Kalin; the fresco *Zgodovina Slovencev od naselitve do danes* (The History of the Slovenians from Settlement to Modern Times) was created by Slavko Pengov, the mosaic *Ljubljana v borbi* (Ljubljana at War) by Marij Pregelj, the mosaic *Bičkova skala* (Biček Cliff) by Ivan Seljak Čopič, and the paintings *Naše Primorje* (Our Littoral) and *Naš gorski svet* (Our Alpine World) were produced by Gojmir Anton Kos; the paintings *Trgatev* (The Grape Harvest), *Kurenta* (Two Kurents), and *Zeleni Jurij* (Green Jurij) were the work of France Mihelič, and *Jesen v Slovenskih goricah* (Autumn in the Slovenian

Hills) was painted by Janez Vidic. Although Gabrijel Stupica was also invited to take part in the commission, his draft *Plodovi naše zemlje* (The Fruits of Our Land) was rejected.<sup>5</sup> Šubic received the invitation to work together with his fellow painter and close friend Jože Ciuha (1924–2015), and their mosaics were viewed as a seamless whole.

Although Šubic was already mentioned in 1957 as part of the group of artists chosen to decorate the parliament building, no details are known about his selection.<sup>6</sup> It seems likely that he was selected based on both his previous artistic accomplishments and active involvement in the National Liberation Movement as a Partisan and the head of a Partisan print shop, where he worked with established Slovenian artists and also proved himself as a gifted artist.<sup>7</sup> Between 1956 and 1958, the period that overlaps with the time of the commission for the parliament, he was also highly active as the president of the Slovenian Fine Arts Society.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps he was selected at the recommendation of Luc Menaše, who was familiar with his work for Komen's Cooperative Hall (*Zadružni dom*) and wrote a critique of his sgraffito.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, unlike other members of the expert panel, such as Stane Mikuž and Lojze Gostiša, who both championed Socialist Realism, Menaše was partial to modernism.<sup>10</sup> A slight shift toward modernist visual expression in Šubic's works can be detected from the mid-1950s onward, when he first came into direct contact with Western art in the first half of the 1950s. In 1952, he visited an exhibition of contemporary French art at Ljubljana's Museum of Modern Art, which also displayed works by Picasso and Braque, and in 1953 an exhibition of Belgian art of the previous hundred years, which appealed to him more because of its figurative expression. However, it was especially after visiting Paris in 1956 that his art began to display a more pronounced influence of Chagall's surrealism and Braque's cubism (colourism and the geometric articulation of volumes).<sup>11</sup> A few such examples are the paintings *Mati* (Mother; 1958, Maribor Art Gallery) and *Vasovalec* (Serenader; 1958, private ownership), and an untitled painting, depicting a farmer suspended in the air above a village (1960, private ownership). Šubic was particularly captivated by Picasso's *Guernica*, which crucially inspired his drafts for the mosaic in the parliament building, even though he may have never seen the original painting and relied on reproductions.<sup>12</sup> Between 1953 and 1956, *Guernica* travelled to several European cities (e.g., Milan in 1953, Munich in 1955, and Brussels, Amsterdam, and Stockholm in 1956). In 1955, it was put on view by the Museum of Decorative Arts in the Louvre Palace as part of a major Picasso retrospective.<sup>13</sup> The exhibition was on view from 3 June to mid-October 1955. Because Šubic visited Paris a year



*Figure 1. Ive Šubic,  
Pokrajina (Landscape),  
mosaic, 1960,  
National Assembly of  
the Republic of Slovenia,  
Ljubljana.  
Photo: Andrej Furlan,  
ZRC SAZU.*

later, perhaps he only encountered the painting through reproductions, the exhibition catalogue or other materials.<sup>14</sup> It is noteworthy that Šubic's library contained a volume about Picasso from 1955,<sup>15</sup> which he may have purchased in Paris. Further testifying to his admiration of Picasso is the famous artist's photo portrait hanging on his studio wall.<sup>16</sup>

The mosaic *Pokrajina* (Landscape; 272 × 833 cm), completed in 1960, depicts an abstract landscape, inspired by Slovenian vernacular architecture [Figure 1]. The mosaic was produced by the Ljubljana-based workshop of Alfio Tambosso (1914–1992), an Italian mosaicist, who later created several more of Šubic's mosaics. This one was made using Sava River pebbles and glass. It took no less than two years for the expert panel to authorise the project. The panel, composed of the architects Vinko Glanz and Lojze Rojc and the art historians Lojze Gostiša (then still a student), Stane Mikuž, and Luc Menaše, was set up in 1957 and served an advisory role. The final decision was made by Ivan Maček Matija, a prominent communist politician.<sup>17</sup> Šubic and Ciuha were initially tasked with adorning the cornice in front of the small hall of the Chamber of Producers on the first floor of the parliament building with a mosaic showcasing the evolution of the Slovenian people from the emergence of the proletariat to modern times.<sup>18</sup> However, in October 1957, at Ivan Maček's behest, they were instead entrusted with adorning the staircase in the entrance vestibule:<sup>19</sup> Šubic was to cover the right wall with a figurative mosaic depicting the National Liberation Movement, and Ciuha was to cover the left wall with a mosaic



on topics related to industrial advances.<sup>20</sup> The wall surface was challenging to work with, considering that the staircase was flanked by columns partially blocking the view of the mosaics and visually dividing them into a one-third/two-thirds ratio.<sup>21</sup>

The progress of Šubic's mosaic can be outlined via a tentative reconstruction based on his preserved drafts and the panel's records. Initially, the panel did not specify a topic and let the artists devise a few proposals, which it reviewed and only then specified the content.<sup>22</sup> In December 1957, Šubic and Ciuha submitted sketches depicting peasant uprisings and the National Liberation Movement, along with sketches displaying scenes from industry, agriculture, war, peace, and labour, as well as decorative elements.<sup>23</sup> The panel rejected all the first drafts and proposed that by April 1958 the artists devise harmonised compositions in a warm colour palette<sup>24</sup> and vertically arrange the images of heavy industry workers, which was a task undertaken by Ciuha, and the figures of resistance fighters (a Partisan, a member of the underground movement, a nurse, and a wounded soldier), which was an assignment entrusted to Šubic. The panel further required the artists to include both male and female figures,<sup>25</sup> harmonise the mosaics with the portal, and give them a Slovenian expression. It repeatedly stressed that the figures should not be excessively "uniform" but convey humanity,<sup>26</sup> most likely referring to Socialist Realist depictions of figures that appeared distant and cold. The artists submitted new drafts in January 1958, but the panel rejected these as well and requested one more draft from each. However, with the deadline nearing rapidly due to the envisaged opening of the parliament, it decided that the walls should remain blank for the time being and the mosaic be subsequently created either by Šubic and Ciuha or by a third artist.<sup>27</sup>

Šubic's drafts with multi-figural compositions featuring themes of the National Liberation Movement can be classified as those that the panel reviewed at the end of 1957 and perhaps as belonging to the initial phase. Pencil drawings that provided the models for the colour draft [Figure 2] have been preserved. They depict a group of Partisans, with the one at the front portrayed on a much larger scale and holding the flag of the People's Republic of Slovenia, local inhabitants welcoming them as their liberators, and a fallen German soldier in the bottom right corner symbolising the defeated Axis forces. Whereas the number of Partisans slightly varies from one draft to the next, the composition reveals no major deviations. The figures are arranged in layers composed of rounded hills and rural houses: the painter abandoned perspective and hierarchically ordered size ratios set according to depth and lined up the figures in a

Figure 2. Ive Šubic,  
unrealised sketch for the  
mosaic in the building  
of the People's Assembly  
of the People's Republic  
of Slovenia.  
Photo: Andreja Rakovec,  
ZRC SAZU.



Figure 3. Ive Šubic,  
unrealised sketch for the  
mosaic in the building  
of the People's Assembly  
of the People's Republic  
of Slovenia.  
Photo: Andreja Rakovec,  
ZRC SAZU.



single plane, with hills rising in between. This arrangement of figures is somewhat reminiscent of Marc Chagall's early works as well as of late Gothic frescoes, particularly the theme relating to the Procession and Adoration of the Magi, where the uniform-sized figures are interrupted by rounded hills. The latter were known to Šubic from the history of Slovenian medieval wall painting, which he knew well from his local environment. The colour draft is dominated by ochre, grey, and white shades; the modulation of houses exhibits cubist influences, and the figure of the Partisan walking on the roof points to Chagall's influence.

Further drafts preserved by Šubic also feature the groups specified by the panel – Partisans, members of the underground movement, nurses, and wounded soldiers – and may therefore be categorised as the second group of drafts, produced between December 1957 and January 1958. Although the sketches vary in detail, the content remains consistent. Because the drafts are not chronologically documented, it can only be speculated how their development progressed. Perhaps the first draft was the one that bears the inscription *OF SLOV[E]NSKEGA NAR[ODA]*<sup>28</sup> [Figure 3],

Figure 4. Ive Šubic,  
unrealised sketch for the  
mosaic in the building  
of the People's Assembly  
of the People's Republic  
of Slovenia.  
Photo: Andreja Rakovec,  
ZRC SAZU.



considering that the figures in other drafts are more distinctly divided into two groups and include the added depiction of a Partisan sleeping. The standing figures are arranged at the same level, whereby Šubic apparently heeded the recommendation from Luc Menaše's critique of his sgraffito in Komen and refrained from creating a sense of depth in his composition.<sup>29</sup> One of the Partisans on the left is covered with a blanket, and the figure holding a scroll is a member of the underground movement delivering a message. In the colour draft, Šubic further enhanced the atmosphere of subversiveness by depicting the courier looking about warily with one hand tucked into his jacket [Figure 4]. This gesture could also be interpreted as an emblematic feature in the theme of underground movements in Slovenian art during that period (e.g., Frančišek Smerdu's statue *Ilegalec* (Underground Resistance Fighter), 1952). The wounded soldier appears next (two in one of the drafts), depicted on the right side of the composition in the other two drafts [Figures 5, 6]. All of Šubic's drafts include a female figure in the right half of the composition with a pot of food and often a boy standing next to her wearing a side cap (known as a *titovka*) as a representative of the civilian population aiding the Partisan struggle. Individual figures also feature in his other works; for example, a Partisan with a blanket and a Partisan sleeping on the ground (in the print *Počitek*, Rest, from 1958, etc.).<sup>30</sup> Šubic depicted a sleeping Partisan several times either in multi-figural compositions or independently. The oldest known representation is the linocut *Kolona v snegu* (Column in the Snow) from May 1944 with a soldier sleeping with a rifle in his hand in the bottom right corner,<sup>31</sup> suggesting that Šubic drew from his personal experience as a member of the Partisan movement. The background varied from one draft to the next: it was either rendered in a geometric formulation, with the ground level filled with small houses, or the artist added details to the house and tree(s) on top of the hill and added burned





Figure 5. Ive Šubic, unrealised sketch for the mosaic in the building of the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia. Photo: Andreja Rakovec, ZRC SAZU.



Figure 6. Ive Šubic, unrealised sketch for the mosaic in the building of the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia. Photo: Andreja Rakovec, ZRC SAZU.

houses and haystacks between the Partisans' legs at ground level. A horse occupied a prominent place in the centre of the composition and was also featured watching over the sleeping Partisan in a separate depiction.<sup>32</sup> This group further includes a draft created using a warm colour palette, in which the vertically split composition is even more geometricised, with each figure enclosed in its own block and full-body figures in upright rectangular fields alternating with those in square fields [Figure 6]: the composition is flanked by the full-body figures of a Partisan and a woman offering food. On the left side, more prominence is given to members of the underground movement compared to other drafts, featuring three of them preparing and distributing flyers. In the centre is a sleeping Partisan



with a horse leaning down over him, and on the right a wounded soldier along with two Partisans sitting next to him, enclosed in smaller fields. The totality resembles Marij Pregelj's mosaic from 1956–1957 at the Trbovlje Workers' Home, with figures in rectangular fields alternating between full-body and waist-up views. In 1958, the mosaic earned Pregelj the Prešeren Award. It is entirely possible that Šubic designed the bolder composition with Pregelj's work in mind, especially considering that in 1958 Pregelj furnished one of the staircases in the assembly building with the mosaic *Ljubljana v borbi* (Ljubljana at War).<sup>33</sup>

The panel also rejected these drafts and changed its mind regarding the vertical division of the composition, fearing that the figures might appear too large for the small entrance vestibule.<sup>34</sup> It instructed the artists to provide new drafts within two years, and, should they fail to meet the criteria, the project would be awarded to other artists.<sup>35</sup> By May 1958, Šubic and Ciuha had submitted five new drafts each on the subject of war and peace. The sketches were first rejected by Ivan Maček<sup>36</sup> and then by the panel itself, which nonetheless viewed them as a considerable improvement. The project was finally awarded to them, even though it would not be completed by the assembly's opening. According to the panel, the drafts employed an appropriate colour palette, whereby Šubic depicted war using darker tones and Ciuha employed brighter tones to convey peace. The panel merely suggested that the artists harmonise their work with the mosaicist Alfio Tambosso.<sup>37</sup> It approved Šubic's sketch that demonstrated a "coherent figurative composition with a clearly discernible set of themes", adding that he should "only slightly simplify or visually refine the draft ... to bring it closer to Ciuha's and its consistent use of visual means", making the remark that "the distinctions between 'early Chagall' and 'Picasso's *Guernica*' are still problematic at this point."<sup>38</sup> It is not clear what draft the panel specifically referred to, considering that none of the sketches preserved corresponds to the description above. Although the stenographic minutes of the panel's session present informative details regarding the drafts from this phase, they do not suffice for a reliable identification (e.g., that Šubic's draft is underlined by dynamism set in motion by a bird's flight; that he submitted drafts in different versions; that they had a narrative rather than decorative value; or that Šubic's work was more impactful than Ciuha's, but that his overcrowded composition necessitated simplification).<sup>39</sup>

This group includes drafts that Šubic titled *Vojna* (War) and that address the topics of occupation, resistance, the Axis forces' retaliation measures, and liberation by drawing on Picasso's *Guernica*. The starting point was

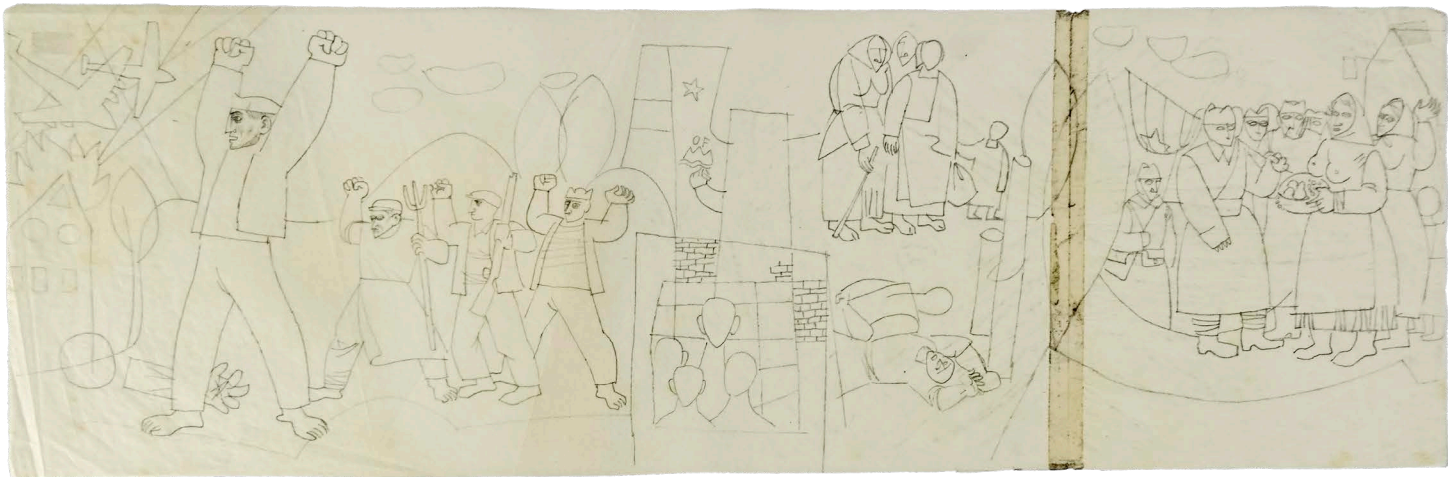


Figure 7. Ive Šubic, unrealised sketch for the mosaic in the building of the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia.

Photo: Andreja Rakovec, ZRC SAZU.

most likely the pencil sketch [Figure 7], which incorporated elements from earlier drafts, such as the hilly landscape, the group of Partisans with the Yugoslav flag (or the flag of the People's Republic of Slovenia), and the women with a pot of food. From left to right, the drawing depicts a burning house with two bombers flying over it, a man raising his hands high as a sign of resistance, and a severed hand lying behind his right foot, which is reminiscent of *Guernica*. Then follow farmers raising their tools, weapons, and fists, ready to engage the enemy. The underground movement is represented by a demolished wall displaying a five-pointed star and a hand drawing the Liberation Front (OF) symbol (a stylised three-peaked Mount Triglav) beneath it and above the depiction of internees behind bars. The next scene features deportees and two dead captives, one with hands tied behind his back. The final scene depicts the liberation: Partisans, one carrying a flag on his shoulder, and two mothers and a child welcoming the liberators with a bowl of food. In terms of size, he explicitly highlighted the figure of a resistance fighter next to the burning house, symbolically pointing to the overall emphasis of the whole: the resistance movement, which, although at the cost of great suffering, ultimately led to freedom. Perhaps the artist was inspired by the figure of the captive in a white shirt in Goya's *The Third of May 1808* (1814, Prado, Madrid) or the figure of resistance with upraised arms in *Guernica*.<sup>40</sup>

Šubic further refined the composition in subsequent drafts by considering the vertical division of the format and by prioritising symbolism over narrativity (e.g., he replaced the hand of an underground movement member drawing a star with the depiction of two schematised trees and a star drawn into one of them). Two of the drafts reveal a more pronounced

shift toward the Picassoesque visual syntagm. In the first, a pencil drawing [Figure 8], Šubic reduced the figurative aspect in favour of enhanced symbolism. Overall, he followed the original concept and retained all substantive clusters. In the depiction of bombardment, he replaced the bombers with a bird, and the burning house beneath it was drawn with inspiration from *Guernica*; the fatalities are presented only by two severed hands. The simplified resistance fighter remains the largest figure in the composition; he clenches one hand into a fist in front of himself while raising the other. The theme of resistance is reduced to hands raised in the air, surrounded by a rectangular field, and the underground activity is reduced to a five-pointed star on the trunk of one of the two trees. Internment is conveyed in the form of three horizontally outstretched arms, which may be interpreted as the arms of internees, desperately reaching out toward freedom. Then follows the vertical field, in which suffering is depicted in the form of tied hands representing captives as well as an animal skull and a human skull signifying death. Liberation and the Axis forces' defeat are summarised in the Yugoslav flag (or the flag of the People's Republic of Slovenia) rising above the fallen bird embodying the Axis forces. Finally, peace in the upper rectangular field is presented as a bird and an olive branch in the lower rectangular field, with the hands of the free outstretched toward it. Šubic turned the rich symbolism into a colour draft [Figure 9], from which he omitted several details (e.g., the dove) and depicted the figure of the resistance fighter according to the concept of heroic nudity, perhaps in alignment with the sculptures on the parliament building portal, created by Zdenko Kalin and Karel Putrih. This may have been one of the five drafts that Šubic presented to the panel. He created several sketches of the resistance fighter, varying from realistic to schematised. As the colour study in earthy tones suggests, he also tested colour tonality. In the next cluster of drafts, he took the reduction of themes a few steps further. The starting point was probably the pencil sketch [Figure 10], which maintained the composition of vertical division and the aforementioned themes but introduced more deviations: the depiction of the resistance fighter only comprises his head and raised fists, the number of raised fists is increased from six to nine, and the captives' tied hands are moved beneath them. Then follows the woman with a headscarf in strict profile, and the field containing a sequence of bust portraits of Partisans and women in frontal view and in strict profile arranged in four lines. The series is completed with the fallen bird, the dove with an olive branch in its beak symbolising freedom, and hands outstretched toward it. In a draft showing half the composition, Šubic drew the Yugoslav flag (or the flag of the People's Republic of Slovenia) behind the resistance fighter's fists



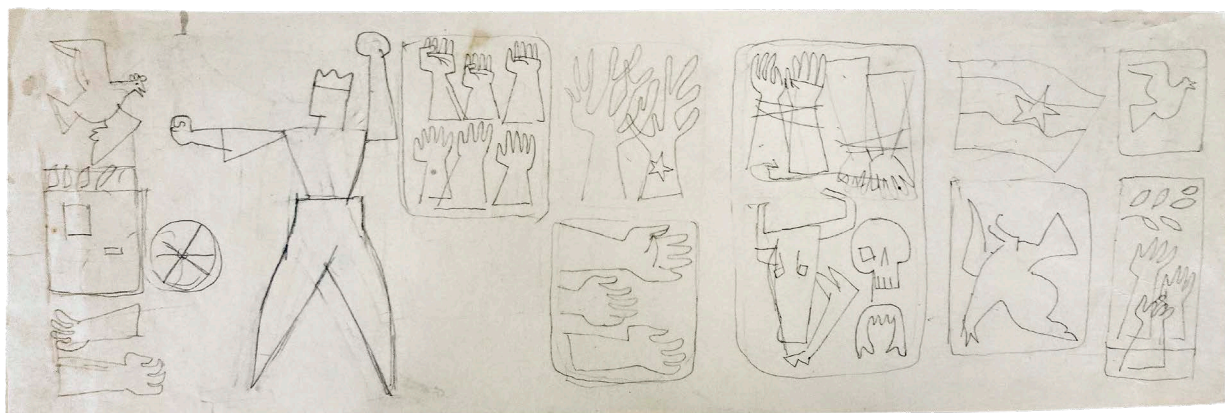


Figure 8. Ive Šubic, unrealised sketch for the mosaic in the building of the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia. Photo: Andreja Rakovec, ZRC SAZU.



Figure 9. Ive Šubic, unrealised sketch for the mosaic in the building of the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia. Photo: Andreja Rakovec, ZRC SAZU.

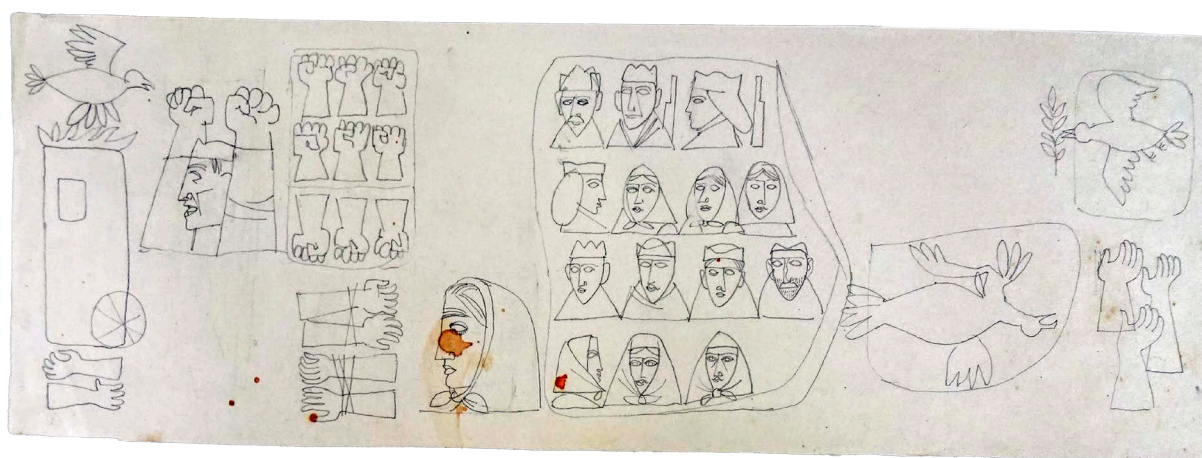


Figure 10. Ive Šubic, unrealised sketch for the mosaic in the building of the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia. Photo: Andreja Rakovec, ZRC SAZU.



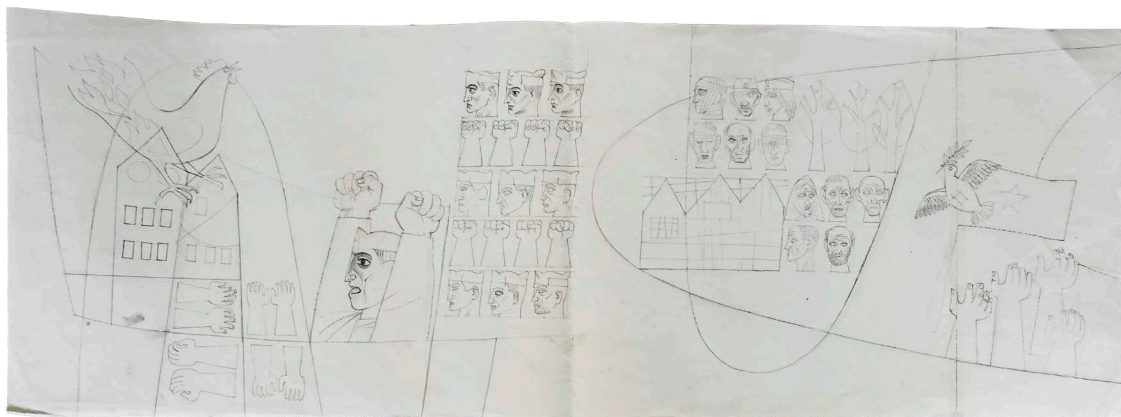


Figure 11. Ive Šubic, unrealised sketch for the mosaic in the building of the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia. Photo: Andreja Rakovec, ZRC SAZU.

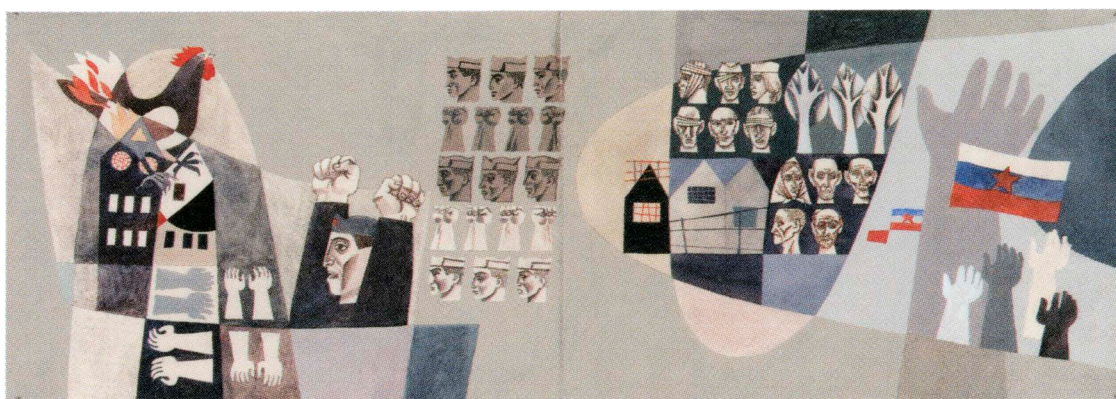


Figure 12. Ive Šubic, unrealised sketch for the mosaic in the building of the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia. Photo: Andreja Rakovec, ZRC SAZU.



Figure 13. Ive Šubic, unrealised sketch for the mosaic in the building of the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia. Photo: Andreja Rakovec, ZRC SAZU.

and moved the neck-up profile of the horse behind the captives' bound hands. Separate sketches have been preserved for individual figures, such as the resistance fighter with raised fists, the Partisans and the women giving them food, and the hands of the suffering and the liberated. In some places, Šubic used colour lines and background surfaces to intervene in the black-and-white line drawing of the bust portraits. He elaborated the composition further and added more variegation [Figure 11] by introducing parabolic curves into the vertical division to round out individual compositional clusters. Thus, he replaced the flames on the roof of the house with a rooster and placed the hands in the bottom part of the sketch. The resistance fighter's bust portrait is followed by a section with the Partisans' heads in profile and fists alternating in strips (because one of the drafts features the Partisans' heads screaming, he apparently experimented with various facial expressions). There are notable similarities between their heads in strict profile and the miners' heads in Pregelj's mosaic in Trbovlje, which are also presented in strict left profile. Parallels can also be drawn to the painting oeuvre by Jože Ciuha, who in the 1950s, inspired by Byzantine frescoes he saw on his study trip to Macedonia, introduced geometric flattening and depicted female figures as bust portraits in frontal view and in strict profile (e.g., *Žene v belem* (Women in White), 1957; private ownership). At the intersection of the two parabolas, human suffering is presented above in the form of wounded soldiers' heads and below as buildings with bars representing prisons and the heads of the afflicted local population along with the starving internees with sunken faces. The dove with an olive branch in its beak symbolises freedom, and behind it is the five-pointed-star flag with hands outstretched toward it. With a few changes, this draft was also created using the tempera technique, and it was probably among the five drafts submitted to the panel [Figure 12]. The colour draft corresponds to the sketch, except that the dove in the last section is replaced by a large hand surrounded by three flags of various sizes: the largest is the flag of the People's Republic of Slovenia, followed by the flag of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, and the smallest flag is that of the Communist Party. The colour palette is limited to muted and compatible grey, blue, and brown tones, which are contrasted by red accents in the flags and the rooster; the colour-contrasting surfaces enhance the impression of abstractness. Further development of the composition is demonstrated in the allegorical colour draft [Figure 13], which begins with the burning house and a dead man lying beneath it with an outstretched hand, both inspired by *Guernica*; carved into the dead man's cheek is the bloody symbol of a broken five-pointed star. The resistance fighter now faces right and carries a rifle on his back. His figure





is followed by a two-part geometrically articulated strip with profiles of Partisan heads above and a fallen captive beneath them, his left hand clenched frozen in a defiant fist. The composition is brought to completion by the personification of Freedom with an olive branch in her hand and the flag of the People's Republic of Slovenia behind it. The division into colour-contrasting surfaces heightens the impression of abstractness. In terms of content and design, this group may also include the colour draft [Figure 14], which is the only one created in the narrow vertical format and stands out from the others, which are rendered in landscape format, making it questionable whether it was indeed intended for the parliament building. The influence of *Guernica* is also apparent here. The composition ought to be viewed from the bottom up, as a sequence of hands raised in defiance, the burning house with the bodies of its dwellers and cattle, visibly inspired by *Guernica*, and the axle of a wheel from the broken wagon. Then follow the collapsed victim and the head portraits of Partisans in strict profile and with a war cry on their lips, the highest one holding a grenade. Above him is a horse depicted from its neck up, rising with its mouth open in terror, which is yet another detail borrowed from *Guernica*. At the top, the freedom won with great effort is guarded by a Partisan depicted as a bust portrait in strict profile and holding a rifle. Behind him are the Yugoslav flag and an olive branch.

This group further includes drafts with stylised figures of the occupying forces and suffering civilians, burning houses, and Picassoesque details that also appear in the aforementioned drafts. In one of them, the naked figure of a German soldier brandishing his sword is depicted at the beginning of the composition, with houses burning in the background; then follows the suffering family and captives depicted as full-figure nudes; in the lower section, suffering is depicted with the details of a headless female torso, a bleeding head with a ripped cheek, and hands sticking out from behind prison bars [Figure 15]. A synthesis of the features listed so far is encapsulated in the drafts combining full-figure depictions of captives or the heads of Partisans with *Guernica*-inspired symbolic details. One of the drafts [Figure 16] thus displays a burning house

Figure 14. Ivo Šubic, sketch.  
Photo: Andreja Rakovec, ZRC SAZU.

Figure 15. Ive Šubic,  
unrealised sketch for the  
mosaic in the building of  
the People's Assembly of  
the People's Republic of  
Slovenia.  
Photo: Andreja Rakovec,  
ZRC SAZU.



Figure 16. Ive Šubic,  
unrealised sketch for the  
mosaic in the building of  
the People's Assembly of  
the People's Republic of  
Slovenia.  
Photo: Andreja Rakovec,  
ZRC SAZU.



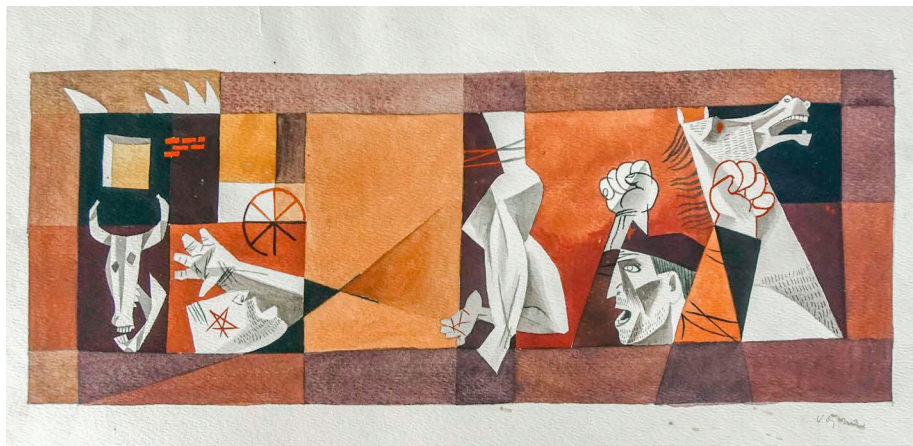
in the *Guernica* style, with a cow's skull looking through the window and a dead man lying on the floor with his mouth wide open in a silent scream. Then follow two executed female captives, one turned upside down and the other blindfolded and kneeling, with her hands outstretched in the air and a gushing wound below her neck. The next scene features the flag of the People's Republic of Slovenia and the profile of a Partisan beneath it, followed by a horse and a fist, and a schematised female figure. The geometric surface articulation is executed in the cubistic colour scale of grey, ochre, white, and black tones. The next two drafts are very similar, except for the number of burning houses and a few minor details. In the first, the body of a dead man lying beneath the burning houses shows a strong resemblance to the fallen soldier in *Guernica* [Figure 17]. The resistance is represented by the fist as the most prominent element in size within the composition, followed by the heads of Partisans and the terrified horse – which is, again, a detail taken from *Guernica* – and the flag of the People's Republic of Slovenia fluttering behind them. The other version depicts only one burning house and a naked female captive



Figure 17.  
Ive Šubic, sketch.  
Photo: Andreja Rakovec,  
ZRC SAZU.



Figure 18. Ive Šubic,  
unrealised sketch for the  
mosaic in the building of  
the People's Assembly of  
the People's Republic of  
Slovenia.  
Photo: Andreja Rakovec,  
ZRC SAZU.



instead of the fist; apart from slight variations in the figures of Partisans, no other deviations are observed. The panel was most likely presented with one of these drafts; considering the level of perfection, it seems safe to assume that it was a version that relied heavily on *Guernica*.

The most reduced versions of the original visual idea are represented by two colour drafts in red and orange tones, which only retained the key elements. The simpler draft likely served as the basis for the more elaborate one, which may have been submitted to the panel [Figure 18]. Šubic stripped the composition of all narrative detail and merely retained a few symbolic elements: the burning house in the *Guernica* style, with the cow's skull and the local inhabitant lying killed in front of it in the same vein as the fallen soldier in *Guernica*: reduced to a head with its mouth wide open in a mortal cry and bloody stars instead of eyes, the hand, outstretched behind the head in the first draft, now rises above it, with its form resembling the hand of the dead man in *Guernica*. The theme of

Figure 19. Ive Šubic,  
sketch for the mosaic  
in the building of the  
People's Assembly of  
the People's Republic of  
Slovenia.

Photo: Andreja Rakovec,  
ZRC SAZU.

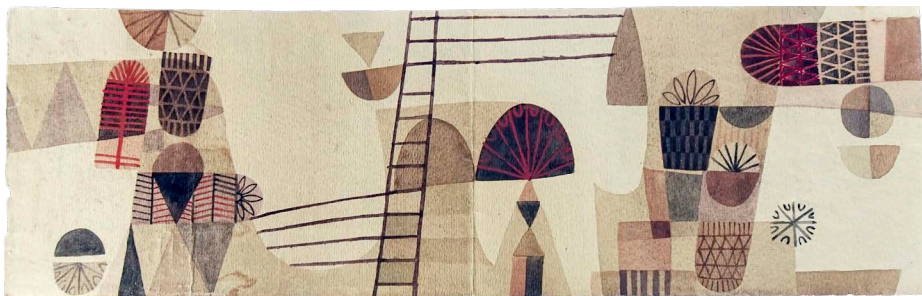
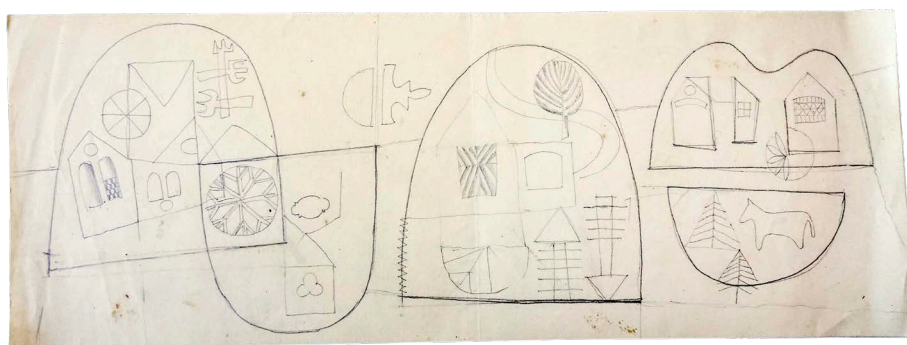


Figure 20. Ive Šubic,  
sketch for the mosaic  
in the building of the  
People's Assembly of  
the People's Republic of  
Slovenia.

Photo: Andreja Rakovec,  
ZRC SAZU.



suffering is completed by the torso of a female captive tied to a pole. The resistance is embodied in the shouting head of a Partisan raising his fists, and the whinnying horse depicted from the neck up may be interpreted as an image of the horrors and maelstrom of war.

The final group of drafts brings forth an entirely distinct set of themes that deviate radically from the panel's proposal. The sketches depict an abstract landscape with elements of Slovenian vernacular architecture. In his explanation, Šubic maintained that he abided by the panel's desire to use the mosaic as a decorative surface and designed it as a multifaceted, figureless surface conveying elements of the Slovenian landscape, including vernacular architecture and its specific features.<sup>41</sup>

The theme was probably based on the pencil drawing, in which houses are lined up in a seemingly mirrored arrangement. In further drafts, Šubic worked with individual architectural details, such as rosettes, brick lattices, windows, shutters, and gables, and he transformed them into abstract compositions. His watercolours were also studies of colour configurations in warm shades [Figure 19]. The final version is perhaps the pencil drawing, in which the decorative details of vernacular architecture are arranged into an abstract composition of rounded shapes representing hills or the undulating terrain of the Slovenian countryside known to Šubic from his native Poljane Valley [Figure 20]; perhaps the double hill is a schematic



*Figure 21. Ive Šubic, sketch for the mosaic in the building of the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia.*

*Photo: Andreja Rakovec, ZRC SAZU.*

representation of two mountains – *Mladi vrh* and *Stari vrh* – which he often incorporated into his works. The parabolic curve was employed in one of the earlier drafts. In two colour drafts [Figures 21, 22], the composition was elaborated with further details. The result was an abstract whole composed of schematised details of buildings and trees reduced to geometric surfaces. The final draft [Figure 22] was approved in September 1959. In addition, the panel also deemed it better than the figurative drafts. The panel described it as “pure ornament that will fit well in the creation of a natural-stone mosaic,” but it did not delve into the development of the theme and the artist’s explanation presented with it.<sup>42</sup> According to this explanation, Šubic divided the composition into three major undulating units echoing the rolling shape of the Slovenian hills, and he rhythmically alternated them with rural houses, windows, niches, and wood panelling, further adding a haystack and trees. Using multicolour surfaces and lines, Šubic created a congruent, colour-harmonious whole that exuded softness. He graded the colour scale in accordance with the natural colour of stone and envisaged a few colour accents in artificial stone.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps the final selection of the draft was also due to Luc Menaše, who championed modernism and believed that the art furnishing of the assembly building should also include decorative works that emanated individuality and intimacy.<sup>44</sup> The fact that the panel showed no interest in the content and approved the mosaic alongside Ciuha’s as an aesthetic contribution to the ambience of the space<sup>45</sup> sheds light on the attitude that the authorities at the time had toward their modernism. As early as the mid-1950s, even in the statements of the most ardent advocates of Socialist Realism, such as Boris Zihelr, it is apparent that they allowed for modernist form in certain cases (e.g., young artists following “fashion”), while rejecting modernism in terms of content.<sup>46</sup> Because Šubic’s mosaic did not radically depart from





*Figure 22. Ive Šubic, sketch for the mosaic in the building of the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia.*

*Photo: Tomaž Lunder.*

*Source: Arhiv Nives Lunder.*

the objective world in form, but rather maintained an associative link with it, it was also acceptable to a prestigious state institution. On the other hand, the content was also unproblematic because he chose a landscape theme, which is semantically neutral.<sup>47</sup> At the end of the 1950s, modernism with secular content was also approved as an apolitical artistic orientation within the framework of public commissions, allowing the Yugoslav state, as a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, to build an image of plurality and liberality and to navigate shrewdly between the Eastern and Western blocs.<sup>48</sup> On the one hand, the abstract mosaics on the staircase could be interpreted as an affirmation of the commissioner's public image because they complemented stylistically diverse artworks in the assembly building, and immediately at the entrance they confirmed the image that Yugoslavia had been cultivating in the world as a prominent representative of the so-called Third Way. On the other hand, the mosaics were located in a space that served merely as a passageway, and so they were less conspicuous. Nevertheless, abstraction in mosaics did not interfere with the interior of the staircase leading into the vestibule, where Boris Kalin's full-figure statue of Tito took centre stage in the parliament building.<sup>49</sup> Šubic's thematic and formal shift, as seen in the last group of drafts, was probably influenced by Jože Ciuha, who, on returning from his study trip to Paris in 1957, collaborated with Šubic and lived in his studio in Poljane nad Škofjo Loko for a while (at least until 1959, when he set out for Myanmar).<sup>50</sup> During that period, they worked on the drafts for the parliament,<sup>51</sup> addressing in particular the issue concerning the spatial arrangement of the mosaics<sup>52</sup> to establish harmony between the mosaics themselves and with the foyer, which had a cold ambiance due to its stone walls. Thus, it is not excluded that Šubic's final solution was owed to his collaboration with Ciuha. Specifically, Ciuha's oeuvre from the 1950s features a geometric flattening of the composition, landscape, and figures,





Figure 23.  
Jože Ciuha, *Kompozicija (Composition) or Sončno mesto (Sun City)*, mosaic, 1960, National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana. Photo: Andrej Furlan, ZRC SAZU.

which are comparable to Šubic's drafts from the last group. For Ciuha, too, the mosaic for the People's Assembly was the first mosaic in his oeuvre, and he, too, was acquainted with and profoundly impressed by Marij Pregelj's mosaic in the Trbovlje Workers' Home.<sup>53</sup> After submitting a series of variation drafts on his assigned topic of industry, Ciuha – like Šubic – created the mosaic as a decorative abstract composition [Figure 23]. He and Šubic then harmonised their drafts in terms of design but kept their themes distinct, Šubic opting for his favourite subject of his native rural environment.

Later, Šubic used some of the drafts for the parliament in developing compositions or details in other works for public institutions; for example, in the mosaic gracing the Partisan Lodge on the Vodice Pasture (*Vodiška planina*) in 1963 (completed in 1964) and in unfinished drafts for the fresco *Poljanska vstaja* (Poljane Uprising) in Poljane in 1981. He also used them for other kinds of commissions – for example, the monument of the Battle of Dražgoše in 1976 – by adding such details as hands, burning houses, and bust portraits of women with headscarves.

The abundance of preserved drafts for the mosaic in the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia attests that Šubic had explored the subject matter extensively. What also makes the commission for the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia exceptional in his oeuvre is that, unlike the rest of his works for public institutions, it was evaluated by an expert panel and a representative of the commissioning authority, which both repeatedly rejected his proposals. Ultimately, Šubic completely modified the design of his draft to bring it closer to Ciuha's and, by doing so, finally reached a compromise that convinced the panel to authorise its realisation.

The mosaic is also exceptional for its degree of abstraction, which Šubic did not repeat in his later work. The painter developed his artistic style under the influence of cubism, surrealism, and the art of Marc Chagall. He remained devoted to figurative art, which underpins all the other public works for which he conceived the design.

## **Funding**

This chapter was written as part of the basic research project Art for Community. Registration and Assessment of Artworks Commissioned for Public Institutions in Slovenia, 1945–1991 (J6-50206) and the research programme Art in Slovenia at a Cultural Crossroads (P6-0061), both funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency from the state budget of the Republic of Slovenia.

## Endnotes

- 1 Before that, in 1949, he created the sgraffito in Komen's cooperative hall in collaboration with Floris Oblak, and between 1953 and 1954 he most probably carried out the technical execution of the art decoration at the Vuzenica Hydroelectric Power Station, based on drafts by Zoran Didek and Ivan Seljak Čopič. R. J. [Janez Dokler], "Pomlad, konjske sile in pogovor o slikarstvu," *Mladina* 12, no. 52 (28 December 1954): 7; *Ivan Seljak-Čopič* (Idrija: Mestni muzej, 1988), 7.
- 2 Katarina Mohar, *Likovna oprema Ljudske skupščine Ljudske republike Slovenije: umetnostno naročilo in njegov kontekst* (PhD diss., Ljubljana: Podiplomska šola ZRC SAZU, 2015), 168–177; Kaja Širok, "Gradnja Skupščine Socialistične republike Slovenije in oblikovanje nacionalnega historičnega diskurza," in *Parlament – tri zgodbe: arhitektura, umetnost, spomin*, by Nika Grabar, Kaja Širok, and Martina Vovk (Ljubljana: Muzej novejšje zgodovine Slovenije, 2012), 57–71. See also Petra Čeh, "Loški spiritus movens," in *Ive Šubic: ilustrator in kulturni delavec*, ed. Petra Čeh (Škofja Loka: Loški muzej Škofja Loka, 2022), 37; Saša Bučan, "Ohranjanje starodavnega izročila," in *Ive Šubic: slikar Poljanske doline*, ed. Tomaž Krpič (Ljubljana: Modrijan; Škofja Loka: Muzejsko društvo Škofja Loka, 2013), 84–85.
- 3 See Nika Grabar, "Nastanek in gradnja parlamenta po načrtih Vinka Glanza," in *Parlament – tri zgodbe: arhitektura, umetnost, spomin*, by Nika Grabar, Kaja Širok, and Martina Vovk (Ljubljana: Muzej novejšje zgodovine Slovenije, 2012), 7–29.
- 4 Arhiv Državnega zbora Republike Slovenije (hereinafter ADZRS), Skupščina SRS, Stenografski zapisnik seje Komisije za pregled umetniških in kiparskih del v novi palači Ljudske skupščine LRS, 9 March 1958, 10.
- 5 See Tomaž Brejc, "Neznana umetnina v znanem času," in *Gabrijel Stupica: pozabljene podobe: risbe, akvareli in tempera*, ed. Miloš Bašin (Ljubljana: Bežigradska galerija 2, 2003), 3–45. Reprinted in Tomaž Brejc, *Študije o slovenskem slikarstvu v 20. stoletju* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 2010), 221–255; Mohar, *Likovna oprema Ljudske skupščine Ljudske republike Slovenije*.
- 6 Mohar, *Likovna oprema Ljudske skupščine Ljudske republike Slovenije*, 29.
- 7 On Šubic's creative work during the Second World War, see Vera Visočnik, "Ivan Šubic–Ive, slikar in grafik," *Borec* 19, no. 11 (1968): 913–916; "Pripovedi treh partizanskih likovnikov," *Borec* 16, no. 5 (1965): 462–468; Sonja Porle, "Pri Dovjakovih je bilo podobarstvo zmeraj doma," in *Ive Šubic: slikar Poljanske doline*, ed. Tomaž Krpič (Ljubljana: Modrijan; Škofja Loka: Muzejsko društvo Škofja Loka, 2013), 307–309.
- 8 On Šubic's engagement in the Slovenian Fine Arts Society, see Tina Fortič Jakopič, "Ive Šubic kot kulturni delavec in vloga njegove umetnosti v družbi," in *Ive Šubic: ilustrator in kulturni delavec*, ed. Petra Čeh (Škofja Loka: Loški muzej Škofja Loka, 2022), 56–58.
- 9 Luc Menaše, "Sgraffito – okras zadružnega doma v Komnu," *Mladinska revija* 5 (1949–1950): 277–278.
- 10 Mohar, *Likovna oprema Ljudske skupščine Ljudske republike Slovenije*, 33.
- 11 Cf. Fortič Jakopič, "Ive Šubic kot kulturni delavec," 68.
- 12 He might have been familiar with the reproduction published in Veno Pilon, "Pismo iz Pariza," in *Likovni svet: arhitektura – slikarstvo – kiparstvo in umetna obrt*, ed. Lojze Gostiša (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1951), 165.
- 13 Airpress, "A Press Release on the Opening of the Exhibition Picasso at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris," press release, 23 May 1955, Les Arts Décoratifs Archives, Paris, D1/296, article 5, Expo. Picasso, <https://guernica.museoreinasofia.es/en/document/press-release-opening-exhibition-picasso-musee-des-arts-decoratifs-paris>.
- 14 Maurice Jardot, *Picasso: peintures, 1900–1955* (Paris: Musée des Arts Décoratifs, 1955).
- 15 Wilhelm Boeck and Jaime Sabartés, *Pablo Picasso* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1955).

- 16 Maja Šubic, personal communication.
- 17 Mohar, *Likovna oprema Ljudske skupščine Ljudske republike Slovenije*, 32–34. A similar case in which the expert panel rejected drafts for the decoration of an important institution were Slavko Pengov's frescos in the Palace of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia in Belgrade, see: Elizabeta Šprager, *Slavko Pengov: freskant* (Bachelor's thesis, Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta, 1993), 39; Donovan Pavlinec, "Slovenski inženirji človeških duš: monumentalne stenske poslikave socialističnega realizma," *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, n. s., 44 (2008): 131.
- 18 The cornice measured 1.5 × 31.1 m. ADZRS, Skupščina SRS, Zapisnik sestanka glede notranje umetniške opreme nove palače Ljudske skupščine LRS, 26 June 1957.
- 19 ADZRS, Skupščina SRS, Poročilo o izračunu za umetniška dela na Palači Ljudske skupščine LRS, 15 October 1957; ADZRS, Skupščina SRS, Zapisnik sestanka glede notranje umetniške opreme nove palače Ljudske skupščine LRS, 26 June 1957.
- 20 Mohar, *Likovna oprema Ljudske skupščine Ljudske republike Slovenije*, 169.
- 21 Mohar, *Likovna oprema Ljudske skupščine Ljudske republike Slovenije*, 170. The plans for furnishing this space with art changed before Šubic and Ciuha were commissioned. According to the earliest preserved, undated source cited by Mohar, the walls were to be decorated with mosaics featuring soldiers and workers; in June 1957, however, the possibility of leaving the space without artistic decoration and covering the walls with marble was also considered. Mohar, *Likovna oprema Ljudske skupščine Ljudske republike Slovenije*, 168; ADZRS, Skupščina SRS, Zapisnik sestanka glede notranje umetniške opreme nove palače Ljudske skupščine LRS, 26 June 1957; ADZRS, Skupščina SRS, Stenografski zapisnik sestanka Komisije, 3 December 1957, 5.
- 22 ADZRS, Skupščina SRS, Stenografski zapisnik sestanka Komisije, 3 December 1957, 5; ADZRS, Skupščina SRS, Stenografski zapisnik seje komisije za izvedbo umetniških in slikarskih del v novi palači Ljudske skupščine LRS, 6 December 1957, 3.
- 23 Mohar, *Likovna oprema Ljudske skupščine Ljudske republike Slovenije*, 169.
- 24 This probably related to the proposed golden patina of the sculptural portal, with which the mosaics were to be harmonised. ADZRS, Skupščina SRS, Stenografski zapisnik sestanka Komisije, 3 December 1957, 3.
- 25 ADZRS, Skupščina SRS, Poročilo za Iveta Šubica in Jožeta Ciuho z oceno predloženih del in napotki za popravke na podlagi sestanka Komisije, 3 December 1957.
- 26 ADZRS, Skupščina SRS, Stenografski zapisnik seje komisije za izvedbo umetniških in slikarskih del v novi palači Ljudske skupščine LRS, 6 December 1957, 1–2, 4.
- 27 ADZRS, Skupščina SRS, Poročilo o dosedanjem delu (december 1957–januar, februar 1958) Komisije za pregled umetniških del in opreme v novi palači Ljudske skupščine LRS, 1–2.
- 28 The inscription abbreviates *Osvobodilna fronta slovenskega naroda* (Liberation Front of the Slovene Nation).
- 29 Regarding the sgraffito in Komen, Menaše maintained that building a composition in depth was more suitable for a fresco than for a sgraffito; moreover, where the same tone was used, the figures were not clearly discernible from the background. Menaše, "Sgraffito – okras zadružnega doma v Komnu," 278.
- 30 Reproduced in *Ive Šubic: slikar Poljanske doline*, 127.
- 31 The work is held by the National Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia.
- 32 A horse was the first animal Šubic drew as a child. After his uncle Metod, a joiner, drew a horse's head for him, the boy copied it many times until he finally drew an entire horse. Ladislav Lesar, "Njegovo dolenjsko partizanstvo," *Dolenjski list* 30, no. 14 (1979): 48. In Šubic's view, a horse represented the perfection of a living being that every good painter should know how to draw in full detail. *Ive Šubic: poet in glasnik Poljanske doline* (Poljane nad Škofjo Loko: OŠ Poljane, 2000), 50.
- 33 See Mohar, *Likovna oprema Ljudske skupščine Ljudske republike Slovenije*, 157–167.



- 34 ADZRS, Skupščina SRS, Komisija za oceno umetniških del, 2–3.
- 35 ADZRS, Skupščina SRS, Stenografski zapisnik seje Komisije za pregled umetniških in kiparskih del v novi palači, 9 March 1958, 1.
- 36 ADZRS, Skupščina SRS, Stenografski zapisnik seje komisije za pregled umetniških (risarskih in kiparskih) del v novi palači Ljudske skupščine, 21 May 1958, 2.
- 37 ADZRS, Skupščina SRS, Stenografski zapisnik seje komisije za pregled umetniških del, 21 May 1958, 6.
- 38 ADZRS, Skupščina SRS, Stenografski zapisnik seje komisije za pregled umetniških del, 21 May 1958, 1.
- 39 ADZRS, Skupščina SRS, Stenografski zapisnik seje komisije za pregled umetniških del, 21 May 1958, 3–4, 6.
- 40 Tomaž Brejc, *Guernica: eseji o slikarstvu, politiki in vojni* (Ljubljana: Delavska enotnost, 1988), 94–95.
- 41 ADZRS, Skupščina SRS, Osnutek za mozaik na levi stranski steni v avli Ljudske skupščine LRS.
- 42 ADZRS, Skupščina SRS, Poročilo Komisije za pregled umetniških del, 7 September 1959.
- 43 ADZRS, Skupščina SRS, Osnutek za mozaik na levi stranski steni v avli Ljudske skupščine LRS.
- 44 ADZRS, Skupščina SRS, Stenografski zapisnik seje Komisije za pregled umetniških in kiparskih del v novi palači, 9 March 1958, 10.
- 45 Širok, "Gradnja Skupščine Socialistične republike Slovenije in oblikovanje nacionalnega historičnega diskurza," 67.
- 46 On changes in the government's attitude toward contemporary visual art, see Aleš Gabrič, *Socialistična kulturna revolucija: Slovenska kulturna politika 1953–1962* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1995), 198–202; Mohar, *Likovna oprema Ljudske skupščine Ljudske republike Slovenije*, 102.
- 47 Critics influenced by communist ideology took a different stance toward Stane Kregar's abstract works, which had religious content. See Mohar, *Likovna oprema Ljudske skupščine Ljudske republike Slovenije*, 103.
- 48 See Mohar, *Likovna oprema Ljudske skupščine Ljudske republike Slovenije*, 101–107.
- 49 Mohar, *Likovna oprema Ljudske skupščine Ljudske republike Slovenije*, 104.
- 50 Jože Ciuha, "Biografija," in *Jože Ciuha*, ed. Radmila Ciuha (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 2000), 270.
- 51 Ciuha, "Biografija," 266.
- 52 Mohar, *Likovna oprema Ljudske skupščine Ljudske republike Slovenije*, 183.
- 53 *Jože Ciuha: med včeraj in jutri: mozaik 1959–2011*, ed. Radmila Novak (Ljubljana: Ustanova Fundacija Jože Ciuha, 2011), 8.

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## Nova odkritja o mozaiku Iveta Šubica v Državnem zboru Republike Slovenije

### Povzetek

Mozaik *Pokrajina* Iveta Šubica (1922–1989) v Državnem zboru Republike Slovenije je njegova prva samostojna monumentalna stenska poslikava za javne ustanove in najprezentativnejše naročilo. S pomočjo ohranjenih osnutkov skušamo dopolniti arhivske dokumente in rekonstruirati razvoj motiva. Mozaik izstopa med njegovimi deli za javne ustanove po abstrakciji, saj sicer prevladujejo motivi NOB, pa tudi zato, ker je vsebino narekovala strokovna komisija in je moral Šubic osnutke večkrat spreminjati. K izdelavi mozaika so ga povabili skupaj z Jožetom Ciuho in njuno delo obravnavali kot celoto.

Pri Šubicu zasledimo modernejšo likovno govorico od sredine petdesetih let naprej. V neposreden stik z umetnostjo Zahoda je prišel že v prvi polovici petdesetih, po obisku Pariza leta 1956 je opazen vpliv nadrealizma Marca Chagalla in kubizma Georgesa Braqua. Pomemben vir osnutkov za mozaik v parlamentu je bila Picassova *Guernica*, ki je najbrž nikoli ni videl v živo in si je pomagal z reprodukcijami.

Pot do realizacije mozaika, dokončanega leta 1960, je bila dolga dve leti, preden je strokovna komisija odobrila osnutek. Komisija (Vinko Glanz, Lojze Rojc, Lojze Gostiša, Stane Mikuž, Luc Menaše) je imela posvetovalno vlogo, končno odločitev je sprejel politik Ivan Maček - Matija. Sprva so umetnikoma namenili okras venca pred malo dvorano Zbora proizvajalcev v pritličju parlamenta, oktobra 1957 pa so jima na Mačkovo pobudo zaupali izdelavo mozaikov na vhodnem stopnišču.

Umetnika sta najprej naredila nekaj predlog in komisija je šele nato določila vsebino. Do decembra 1957 sta predložila osnutke na temo kmečkih uporov, NOB, industrije, kmetijstva, vojne, miru, dela in dekorativne motive. Mednje sodijo Šubičevi večfiguralni osnutki na temo NOB. Po risbah s svinčnikom je nastal barvni osnutek s partizani in prebivalci, ki pozdravljajo osvoboditelje, padli Nemec je simbol poraženega okupatorja. Viden je vpliv zgodnjega Chagalla in kubizma.

Komisija osnutkov ni potrdila in je predlagala, da do aprila 1958 izdelata enotni kompoziciji v toplih barvah, z vertikalno razdelitvijo z delavci v težki industriji, česar se je lotil Ciuha, in z borci oziroma revolucijo, ki naj predstavljajo partizana, ilegalca, bolničarja in ranjenca, česar se je lotil Šubic.



Na Šubičevih osnutkih, ki so nastali med decembrom 1957 in januarjem 1958, so predstavniki skupin, kot jih je določila komisija. Med njimi je tudi osnutek toplih barv, na katerem je vertikalno razdeljena kompozicija geometrizirana, saj so figure zaprte vsaka v svoj blok. Ni izključeno, da je imel Šubic v mislih mozaik Marija Preglja na Delavskem domu v Trbovljah.

Novih osnutkov, ki sta jih umetnika predložila januarja 1958, komisija ni sprejela. Naročila je še po en osnutek, ker pa je bil rok zaradi predvidenega odprtja parlamenta prekratek, je določila, da steni ostaneta prazni in mozaika namestijo pozneje ali pa naročilo zaupajo drugemu umetniku. Komisija je spremenila tudi mnenje glede vertikalne razdelitve kompozicije, ker naj bi figure v majhnem vhodnem prostoru delovale prevelike. Kljub temu sta umetnika do maja 1958 predložila po pet novih osnutkov na temo vojne in miru. Šubic, ki je osnutke poimenoval *Vojna*, je upodobil okupacijo, upor, povračilne ukrepe okupatorja in osvoboditev. Kompozicijo je postopoma izčistil in namesto narativnosti krepil simboliko. Izrazit zaslek h *Guernici* opazimo na dveh najbolj reduciranih osnutkih: trpljenje predstavljajo goreča hiša, kravja lobanja, ubiti domačin in torzo talke, privezane ob drog; upor pooseblja partizan v izrezu glave, ki dviga pesti v zrak in kriči, strah oziroma vojni kaos pa predstavlja rezgetajoči konj.

Čeprav so osnutke zavrnili, je komisija prepoznala izjemen napredek in naročilo le zaupala umetnikoma. Zadovoljna je bila s Šubičevim osnutkom, ki je prikazoval »sklenjeno figuralno kompozicijo z jasno spoznavno motiviko«, a je opozorila na očitne povezave s Chagallom in *Guernico* in želela, da bi se likovno približal Ciuhi.

Zadnja skupina osnutkov predstavlja popoln obrat. Šubic je sledil naročnikovi želji po mozaiku kot dekorativni ploskvi in ga je zasnoval ploskovito z elementi slovenske krajine in kmečkega stavbarstva. Nanj je verjetno vplival Ciuha, v čigar opusu iz petdesetih let opazimo geometrično ploščenje kompozicije. Osnutke sta oblikovno uskladila, vsebinsko pa se razmejila, pri čemer je Šubic izbral motiviko domačega kmečkega okolja. Septembra 1959 je komisija odobrila končni osnutek kot »čisti ornament«. To zgovorno priča o tedanjem odnosu oblasti do njunega modernizma. Že proti sredini petdesetih let v izjavah tudi najbolj zagrizenih zagovornikov socrealizma zasledimo, da so v določenih primerih dopuščali modernistično formo, vsebine ne. Ker je Šubičev mozaik v formi ohranil asociativno vez s predmetnim svetom in prikazoval pomensko nevtralno krajino, je bil sprejemljiv tudi za reprezentativno državno ustanovo.





# TAPESTRIES AS PUBLIC ART IN ELITE SPACES OF SOCIALIST YUGOSLAVIA: THE CASE OF MARIJ PREGELJ'S TAPESTRIES FOR THE KOTEKS TOBUS BOUTIQUE

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Immediately after the Second World War, the idea emerged in socialist Yugoslavia that art should play an active role in shaping the new society. Art in public space was seen as a tool for ideological education, political affirmation, and the visualization of collective values, intended to support postwar reconstruction and socialist development. Between 1945 and 1950, under Soviet influence, Socialist Realism prevailed, demanding art that served ideological goals. Following the Tito–Stalin split in 1948, however, Yugoslavia began to seek its own path to socialism, which was gradually reflected in the arts through openness to modernist movements. In the 1960s, Western-style modernism became fully established not only in galleries but also in the public sphere, and works of modernist art became an integral part of the architectural environments of official buildings, educational institutions, hospitals, hotels, shops, and other public areas.

Among the various monumental wall painting techniques flourishing at the time – fresco, sgraffito, and mosaic – tapestry also began to establish itself as the most prestigious in the early 1960s. Its appeal stemmed not only from its visual impact, but also from the symbolic connotations of uniting art and labour, collective creation, and the linking of tradition with modernity. Tapestry proved particularly well suited to the socialist context because its materiality, softness, warmth, and handcrafted nature made possible the refinement and visual elevation of public spaces and their users – workers, citizens, and visitors – to a symbolic level of cultural equivalence with the classes that had previously been able to possess art only in private interiors.

This chapter examines the role of tapestry as a vehicle for artistic and ideological messages in the public space of Yugoslav socialism, with a particular focus on its affirmation in the 1960s. The selected case study consists of tapestries by the Slovenian painter Marij Pregelj (1913–1967), one of the main representatives of Yugoslav postwar figurative painting with a strong expressive tone, created for the Koteks Tobus fashion showroom in Ljubljana in 1966–1967. The art furnishings are analysed in



terms of their artistic, spatial, and social functions, and within the context of the architectural environment designed by the architect Oton Jugovec.

### **The modernist revival of tapestry**

Over the centuries, tapestry has maintained its status as an exclusive art form. During the Middle Ages and up to the Renaissance, it was considered one of the most prestigious forms of visual art, often valued more highly than paintings on canvas.<sup>1</sup> It served several functions simultaneously: it narrated stories from history, mythology, and religion while also demonstrating exceptional craftsmanship. It brought warmth, colour, and richness of texture to the interiors of castles, palaces, and townhouses, contributing significantly to a pleasant atmosphere. In addition to its aesthetic and symbolic value, it offered a practical advantage – its portability allowed it to be easily moved between residences, distinguishing it from frescoes and paintings, which were difficult to transport.<sup>2</sup>

With the Renaissance and the growing emphasis on the artist's individual creativity, tapestry gradually lost its prestige. It shifted from the sphere of high art to the margins, understood mainly as decorative or applied art. The academies, which in the modern age established themselves as custodians of artistic knowledge, did not recognize tapestry as a fully-fledged artistic medium, further contributing to its marginalization.<sup>3</sup>

After the Second World War, textile art once again attracted the attention of artists and theorists. The avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century had already incorporated textile materials into artistic expression, primarily in the context of interior design and applied art.<sup>4</sup> After 1950, however, a breakthrough occurred: textiles returned to the wall as independent images, no longer playing a subordinate role in relation to the space, but actively shaping it. Tapestry thus once again became a visual medium with a legitimate place within modern art.

Although the technique remained closely linked to manual labour, this no longer excluded it from the discourse of high art. On the contrary, the connection between the artist's concept and masterful execution became the foundation of tapestry's new status. This was also supported by the boom in the art market in the postwar period, in which works of art became important indicators of social standing and cultural capital.<sup>5</sup> Artists that created tapestries gained a status comparable to that of painters, and tapestries achieved high market values as remuneration for the artistic concept (the cartoon) and the demanding, time-intensive execution in workshops.

Another significant advantage of tapestry in the postwar period was its mobility, making it ideal for inclusion in international exhibitions. The architect and artist Le Corbusier therefore dubbed it the “nomadic mural”.<sup>6</sup> This quality was recognized by Zoran Kržišnik, a central figure in the postwar art system in Yugoslavia, who chose tapestry – alongside printmaking – as a key medium for the commercial promotion of Yugoslav art abroad. As the director of the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana, the secretary of the world-renowned Ljubljana International Biennial of Graphic Arts, and a member of numerous international juries, he used a carefully considered curatorial and cultural strategy to consolidate the international recognition of Yugoslav art. Due to limited financial resources, the initial focus on printmaking was pragmatic – it allowed for mass production and easy transport. In 1963, however, tapestry was added to the programme, which, in addition to mobility, offered the possibility of prestigious presentation in large format and a higher price bracket. It allowed the affirmation of monumental painting, and at the same time, as an artistic medium, it met both the artistic and commercial criteria of the period.

### **A traditional technique for a new tradition**

The renaissance of tapestry in the 1950s was driven by developments in France, a country with a centuries-old tradition of tapestry weaving. In 1946, the exhibition French Tapestry from the Middle Ages to the Present Day was held at the Paris Museum of Modern Art before touring Europe.<sup>7</sup> In 1953, it also travelled to Yugoslavia, visiting Belgrade and Zagreb.<sup>8</sup> The exhibition featured modern tapestries produced in the Aubusson workshop between 1936 and 1945 under the direction of Jean Lurçat.<sup>9</sup> It made a strong impression on the painter and printmaker Boško Petrović and provided significant stimulus for the development of tapestry in Yugoslavia, coinciding with renewed global interest in the art form.<sup>10</sup>

Initially, a few artists began to explore the new medium individually. In 1959, at the 3rd Rijeka Salon, an exhibition that made a significant contribution to the establishment of Yugoslav modernism in the 1950s, tapestry works were presented by three artists from Serbia: Boško Petrović, Lazar Vujaklija, and Jelena Ćirković.<sup>11</sup> Petrović sought to ensure that Yugoslav tapestry would keep pace with global trends. He produced his first tapestries with the help of village weavers working on traditional horizontal looms.<sup>12</sup> He soon met Etelka Tobolka, who was already developing tapestry as a complex artistic practice, akin to the French Gobelin tapestry technique.<sup>13</sup>



*Figure 1. Weavers at the tapestry looms, supervised by the head of Atelier 61, Etelka Tobolka, 1971. Photo: © 2026 BRANKA ON TEXTILES, Source: [brankaontextiles.com](http://brankaontextiles.com).*

On 28 February 1961, Boško Petrović and Etelka Tobolka established Atelier 61, the first professional art studio for tapestry weaving in Yugoslavia<sup>14</sup> – in a studio at the Petrovaradin Fortress above Novi Sad, which the municipal authorities had allocated to artists after the war. With support from the local community, they installed vertical looms designed specifically for artistic tapestry. Soon, three more looms were added, and the studio began its work. The technique used by the weavers was based on flat tapestry weaving, similar to the traditional Balkan kilim rug technique [Figure 1].

Pirot, a town in southeastern Serbia, was one of the centres of kilim weaving, establishing a link to folk art with a strong regional tradition.<sup>15</sup> A distinctive feature of this technique was its reversibility – the front and back of the tapestry are identical. It is also worth noting that, from the Middle Ages onwards, European tapestry workshops were predominantly staffed by male weavers, where-

as at Atelier 61 this role was taken on exclusively by female workers, who often acquired their skills within the family environment. Atelier 61 thus organically combined folk tradition with modernist artistic expression.

The question of a shared cultural identity in Yugoslavia, which would unite the people of the republics and provinces with different cultural backgrounds, was never presented as a political programme. However, it became a key issue when Yugoslav art was presented internationally. When selecting artists for exhibitions abroad, the logic of the “republican quota” – meaning equal representation of artists from all Yugoslav republics – often prevailed, sometimes at the expense of artistic quality. Critics in the West, however, frequently assessed the exhibitions as representative presentations of “Yugoslav art” and questioned its identity. Due to its connection to the folk heritage of weaving – which, in various forms, was common to all Yugoslav republics – tapestry, in its modern interpretation, united the whole of Yugoslavia and became one of the most representative artistic media, a reputation most notably carried to the world by Jagoda Buić.

In June 1962, just one year after its establishment, Atelier 61 presented its first nineteen woven tapestries at the Yugoslav People's Army Building (*Dom JNA*) in Belgrade, and subsequently at the *Matica Srpska* Gallery in Novi Sad. By August, the exhibition had travelled to Slovenia, where it marked the opening of the new Piran City Gallery.<sup>16</sup> The exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue featuring a text by Zoran Kržišnik,<sup>17</sup> demonstrating his early interest in and support for tapestry, as well as the idea of expanding the project in Slovenia.<sup>18</sup> Following the exhibition, it was most likely Kržišnik that encouraged three well-established Slovenian artists – Janez Bernik, France Slana, and Marij Pregelj – to produce cartoons, which were then transformed into tapestries by the weavers of Atelier 61. By February 1963, their new works had already been included in the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana, which subsequently travelled to the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb.

In 1963, the exhibition of prints and tapestries by Atelier 61 began its tour of South America, visiting Brazil, Venezuela, and Mexico by 1965. In 1964, it was hosted in Oslo, and it later toured eastern Europe and the United States. The most ambitious project for promoting tapestry, however, was the exhibition French–Yugoslav Tapestries at the Adria Art Gallery in New York,<sup>19</sup> where Kržišnik displayed works by Yugoslav artists alongside French tapestries and works by Picasso, Klee, Miró, and other renowned names. The exhibition catalogue highlighted Janez Bernik, to whom the gallery dedicated a solo exhibition a month later, where he presented his paintings, prints, and tapestries.

The Adria Art Gallery<sup>20</sup> was a Yugoslav New York sales gallery that combined the strategic interests of the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana and the export company Intertrade from Ljubljana. Kržišnik, who was largely responsible for its establishment, regarded it as a key tool for entering the Western art market and for promoting Yugoslav art, particularly prints and tapestries as commercially viable genres. In an interview at the opening of the exhibition in 1967, he emphasized that he saw tapestry as “a fresh revival of traditional art as a new expressive medium”. In 1967, the gallery sold tapestries for \$33,500 (equivalent to approximately €287,000 today), which was more than the revenue for paintings (\$22,000) and prints (\$14,500). In the first half of 1968, sales increased by almost 50%.<sup>21</sup>

These figures confirm the soundness of Kržišnik's strategy: tapestry became a successful cultural export and a representative of Yugoslavia in one of the world's most important art markets, the United States.



## Marij Pregelj and tapestry

The painter Marij Pregelj was also represented at the tapestry exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana in 1963 – an exhibition that subsequently travelled to South America – with his first tapestry, titled *Kompozicija* (Composition) [Figure 2].<sup>22</sup> He was one of the most important figurative painters in Yugoslavia in the 1960s, recognized for his distinctly expressive style, in which existentialist themes, new figurative art, and the first influences of Pop Art intertwine. He was a versatile artist, mastering monumental painting, understanding it spatially in relation to architecture, and responding to commissions for frescoes, mosaics, sgraffito, and tapestries; he was also an illustrator and printmaker.

The theme of his first tapestry is linked to the mosaic work he was creating at the time. This was the monumental mosaic composition *Bitka na Sutjeski* (The Battle of the Sutjeska), commissioned for the new Federal Executive Council of Yugoslavia Building in Belgrade (now known as the Palace of Serbia), which he was completing in November 1962. In this work, a scene of a heroic, rebellious crowd plays a leading role. On the mosaic, measuring 500 x 1,400 cm, he created a compact block through the uniform arrangement of schematically depicted human figures, some of whom are screaming. He interrupted this rhythmic crowd divided into two bands by repeating vertical lines with the horizontal line of a bed occupied by lovers, who are also crying out for help with their mouths open. He first used the bed as a horizontal element in a mosaic at the Workers' Home in Trbovlje in 1957. With *Bitka na Sutjeski*, his work in mosaics came to an end, and within the context of mural painting he subsequently focused solely on tapestries.

Pregelj's first tapestry, *Kompozicija*, set off on the aforementioned world tour from the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana, along with other tapestries by Atelier 61. It was last listed in the catalogue of the New York exhibition French–Yugoslav Tapestries at the Adria Art Gallery in 1967, after which all trace of it was lost.<sup>23</sup> It may have been sold, or it may simply not have been returned and remained lost in a warehouse in the United States.

In 1965, Pregelj created another tapestry, this time of monumental dimensions, commissioned for the interior design of the House of Socio-Political Organisations in Maribor (now the Institute of Information Sciences, IZUM).<sup>24</sup> Pregelj produced the full-wall tapestry *Belo mesto* (The White City) on a monumental scale, measuring 405 x 770 cm, in 1964; it was woven in 1965 [Figure 3].<sup>25</sup> On this occasion, Pregelj was less expressive and more schematic in his depiction of figures, exercising greater control over the overall composition to maintain decorative harmony in the symmetry of the city depicted. The colour palette is subdued and



Figure 2. Marij Pregelj, *Kompozicija (Composition)*, woven tapestry, 1962, 246 × 195 cm. Produced by Atelier 61, Novi Sad, woven by Ana Horvat, Ružica Bačlija and Vida Ostojić. Location unknown. Source: Museum of Modern Art Photo Archive, Ljubljana.

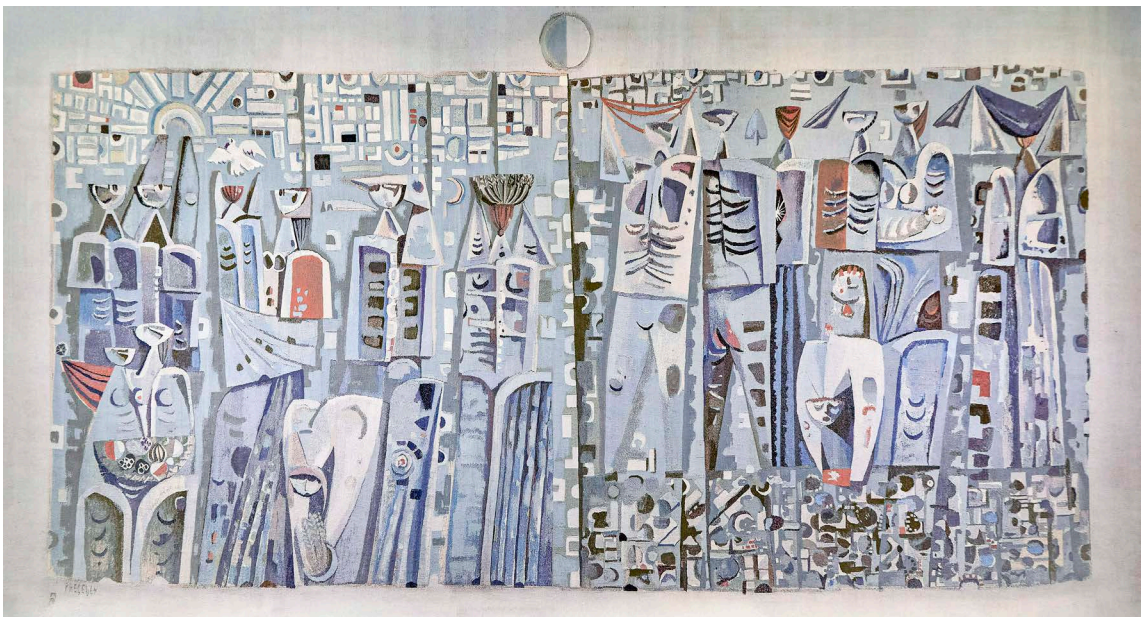


Figure 3. Marij Pregelj, *Belo mesto (White City)*, woven tapestry, 1965, 405 × 770 cm. Produced by Atelier 61, Novi Sad, woven by Smilja Lazić, Zora Lazić, Ana Horvat, Ružica Isakov, Milenka Isakov and Vida Ostojić. IZUM - Institute of Information Sciences, Maribor. Photo: © 2026 Rudi Uran.

harmonized in bluish and grey tones, with only a few red accents. His vision was to create a harmonious image of the city in its ideal form, drawing on his favourite iconographic theme of an ancient sun-drenched Mediterranean city. As an admirer of classical culture, Pregelj saw the city – which had grown from ancient foundations – as a well-organised community in which everything is in its place, a microcosm reflecting the cosmic order. With this radiant image of the city, believing that a painter can contribute to a better society, he optimistically evokes scenes of allegories of good governance in the city.<sup>26</sup>

### Commission for the Koteks Tobus Boutique in Ljubljana

The tapestries for the Koteks Tobus Boutique in Ljubljana were Marij Pregelj's final commission for a public space. Due to his untimely death in 1967, he most likely never saw them in their finished form. The Koteks Tobus Boutique, the first high-fashion shop in Ljubljana and one of the first in Yugoslavia, opened on 5 September 1967 on the ground floor of the Koteks Tobus company building (now KOTO d.o.o.) at Miklošičeva 5 in Ljubljana.<sup>27</sup> The term *boutique*, borrowed from French, reflected a connection with the Western urban model of consumption, which was becoming increasingly prevalent in Yugoslavia at the time. The Koteks Tobus Boutique was thus not merely a commercial project, but also a cultural indicator of the shift in the social paradigm from the collective to the individual, from the ascetic to the prestigious. The venue was part of a wave of boutique openings in Ljubljana – alongside it, the Jež and Kapetanović boutiques opened in the same year<sup>28</sup> – which already signalled a moderate liberalization of the market economy and the gradual establishment of private enterprise in socialist Yugoslavia [Figure 4].



The Koteks Tobus Boutique was conceived as a space for a narrow segment of the social elite, but it was not intended as an exclusive

*Figure 4. A visit by Jovanka Broz, wife of President Josip Broz Tito, shortly after the opening of the Koteks Tobus boutique in Ljubljana, 1967. Photo: Foto-Slovenija Agency. Source: KOTO Photo Archive, Ljubljana.*



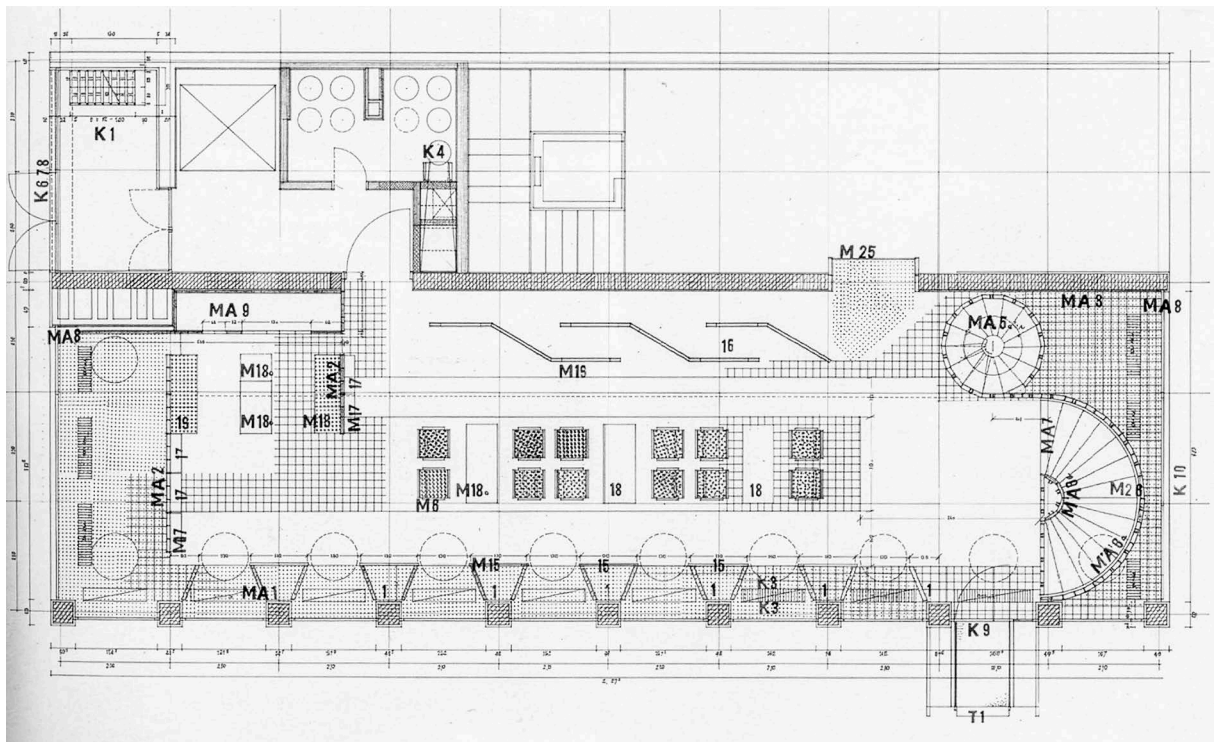


Figure 5. Oton Jugovec, floor plan of the Koteks Tobus boutique interior, 1966. Source: Zorec, "Oton Jugovec."

establishment; rather, it was meant to represent the opportunities offered to the individual by a Yugoslav-style socialist society, suggesting that the political system had led to a prosperity in which aestheticized luxury had become accessible even to the average citizen.

The architectural design of the ground floor interior of the 1964 office building, constructed following the plans of the architect Emil Medvešček, was taken over in 1966 by the architect Oton Jugovec, who had previously collaborated with Medvešček on the construction of the Main Cooperative Union in Ljubljana (1953–1956). This project, his first experience of a holistic synthesis of architecture and fine art, is also considered one of the first examples of its kind in postwar Slovenia.<sup>29</sup>

The boutique's interior design featured carefully selected materials and uniquely designed furniture: the circular staircase leading below ground was made from locally sourced Cordevolian limestone from Hotavlje, with a leather handrail. The curtains were richly draped, and unique light fittings, featuring strings of glass tubes, echoed the motif of the curtains. Jugovec's armchairs, designed specifically for the boutique, and clinker paving completed the ensemble.<sup>30</sup> The artistic furnishings were intended to give the space a special prestige. Jugovec invited Marij Pregelj, an established expert in mural painting, to collaborate.<sup>31</sup> The architect expected



*Figure 6. View of the interior of the Koteks Tobus boutique, 1967. Source: KOTO Photo Archive, Ljubljana.*



that Pregelj's contribution would not merely be decorative but would convey a message with a sharp focus on content [Figures 5–6].

Nothing is known of the guidelines for the commission that may have been provided by the management of Koteks Tobus, but it can be concluded that the architect and the painter had complete creative freedom because the idea of decorating a high-fashion clothing store with tapestries is rather extravagant. Furnishing an exclusive fashion space with tapestries was bold and aligned with contemporary practices, such as those introduced in Paris at the beginning of the twentieth century by Marie Cuttoli, an art patron and collector, and the founder of the Myrbor boutique.<sup>32</sup> In addition to clothing, she began exhibiting and selling tapestries by modern artists, woven by women in Algeria. Among the first contributors was Jean Lurçat, who later became a key figure in the revival of contemporary tapestry. Cuttoli conceived the boutique as a hybrid between an exhibition hall and a high-end shop – a practice that can be understood as a historical precedent for the Ljubljana example, although it is not known whether Jugovec was aware of it. As with Cuttoli, the Koteks Tobus project also regarded tapestry as an artistic medium that adds a layer of semantic and material exclusivity to a space.

Marij Pregelj created eight tapestry designs for the interior of the Koteks Tobus fashion boutique in Ljubljana in an exceptionally short period, as can be inferred from the surviving studies and sketchbooks held by the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana. In addition to those in sketchbooks,



*Figure 7. Marij Pregelj on the living floor of the studio at Svetčeva 1 in Ljubljana, 1960. Source: Museum of Modern Art Photo Archive, Ljubljana.*

the drawings were made on pages torn from the French fashion magazine *Elle*, which featured fashion images and advertisements printed on glossy paper. Such glossy paper was rare in Yugoslavia in the 1960s – imported magazines far surpassed domestic publications in print quality and, due to their price and exclusivity, were considered prestigious items. The painter's wife, Zlata Škafar Pregelj, a great lover of fashion, regularly purchased these magazines.

Pregelj's daily exposure to materials from fashion culture merged with his artistic work. He lived with his family in a live-in studio in Ljubljana's Rožna Dolina neighbourhood, where daily life was organically intertwined with his creative practice. Photos of the living area reveal textile interventions in the space – curtains not only covered the windows but also hung along the walls, dividing the interior into smaller units. This specific use of textiles as a spatial medium invites reflection on the mobility and softening of space, which also relates to tapestries as spatial elements and to the artist's relationship with textiles, fashion, and mass imagery [Figure 7].

In 1966, when he accepted a commission to create tapestries for a fashion boutique, Pregelj sought inspiration in contemporary fashion magazines. He primarily looked for photos of models in various poses and advertisements featuring distinctive textures and layers of colour. He overlaid these



*Figure 8. Marij Pregelj, Female head, 1966 (6 September), collage and gouache on magazine paper, 29 × 20.5 cm, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana. Photo: Dejan Habicht, Matija Pavlovec. Source: Museum of Modern Art Photo Archive, Ljubljana.*

with interventions in gouache – using a brush and black paint, he transformed the realistic figures into stylized images in the spirit of Cubism. For example, he retained the frontal eye from the original photograph while covering the entire face with a brushstroke and transforming it into a profile. At times, he also incorporated collage into the process – cutting, tearing, and pasting photographs, and transforming them into a new surrealist whole [Figure 8].

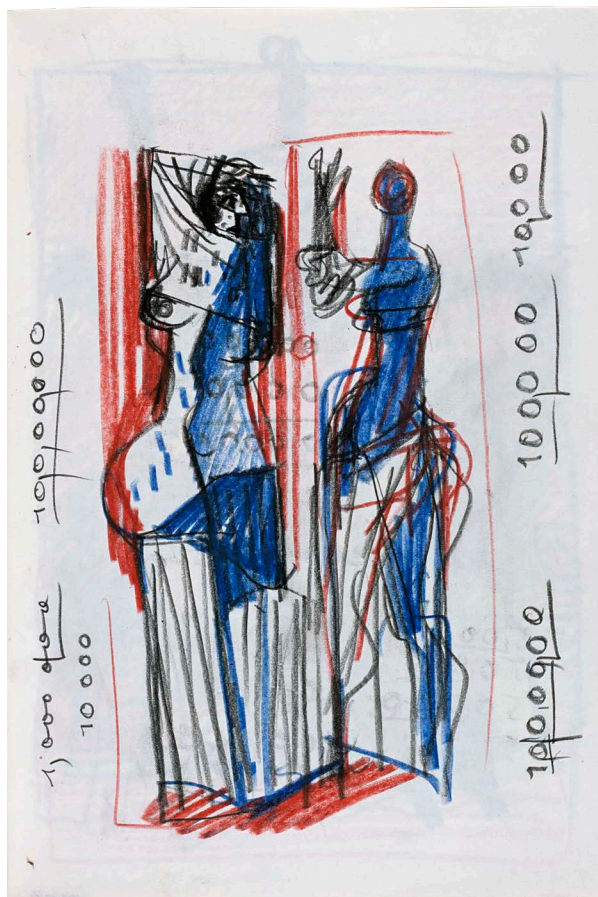
Based on Pregelj's studies held by the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana, it is possible to determine the timeframe for the creation of individual figurative compositions. Between 6 and 20 September 1966, he sought compositional solutions for the arrangement of figures,<sup>33</sup> and in the first week of October he devoted himself to the details.<sup>34</sup> He then sent the cartoons to Atelier 61 in Novi Sad, where work began immediately: six tapestries were completed before the end of

1966, and the last two in early 1967.<sup>35</sup> Although it was customary for the cartoons to be returned to the artist once the weaving was complete, they were not preserved in the artist's studio. Nor are the names of the weavers recorded in the archives of Atelier 61, from which it can be concluded that they were woven by Etelka Tobolka herself, who often carried out the most demanding projects independently during this period.

Eight tapestries in portrait orientation (each measuring 255 x 118 cm) present a sequential series of figural scenes with centrally positioned female figures in various combinations, poses, and cut-outs. There are individual figures, pairs, figures in mirror images, and sequences, alluding to the arrangement of images in fashion photography – more specifically in editorial photography, in which body posture is precisely determined to present the product. Pregelj's figures also appear reserved and posed; their movements are frozen and precisely codified. At times the women resemble ancient torsos, at other times dress forms, and sometimes they are brought to life by gestures. Gender identification is further emphasized by attributes such as a comb, a necklace, a belt, or a tailor's tape measure; a camera is also found among them [Figure 9].



Figure 9. Marij Pregelj, *Study for a figural composition*, 1966 (29 September), pastel on paper, 29 × 20.5 cm, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana. Photo: Dejan Habicht. Source: Museum of Modern Art Photo Archive, Ljubljana.



The visual cohesion of the series is achieved through a uniformly coloured background, which links all the figural groups into a single frieze, reflecting the artist's conception that all eight works form a unified scene. The background is dominated by Pregelj's characteristic Pompeian red, a colour he often used to denote intense emotional states, although in this instance in a tonally subdued shade. The pinkish-red hue creates a sense of psychological tension for the viewer, establishing a complex atmosphere – both aesthetically and in terms of content. The viewer sees a depiction of a ritual that is not elevated above the everyday, but is entirely secular, and depicts a female practice of beautification and narcissistic display. Oto Bihalji-Merin had already noted that, in this work, Pregelj's characteristic tragic intonation transformed into something witty, elegant, and decorative, as "befitting the purpose"<sup>36</sup> [Figure 10].

The humorous tone that pervades individual scenes in the tapestries does not exclude a critical edge. Through his irony toward the fashion world and consumer culture, Pregelj reveals a unique ambivalence: as an





Figure 10. Tapestries for the *Koteks Tobus boutique*, 1–4, 1966–67, each 255 × 118 cm, Ptuj-Ormož Regional Museum. Source: Ptuj-Ormož Regional Museum Photo Archive.







Figure 10. Tapestries for the *Koteks Tobus boutique*, 5–8, 1966–67, each 255 × 118 cm, Ptuj-Ormož Regional Museum. Source: Ptuj-Ormož Regional Museum Photo Archive.





artist that was not overly concerned with outward appearance himself, he maintained a distance from women's self-evident pursuit of beauty and vanity, which were simultaneously objects of ridicule and admiration. This tension between irony and empathy is subtly embodied by the female figures in his tapestries, who oscillate between stereotypical flirtatiousness and frozen detachment.

Pregelj's symbolic register is based on contrasts, with the archetypal image of the woman appearing both as a seductress and as a mother – the *magna mater*, the bearer of fertility and power. A telling example of this dialectic is the depiction of the pregnant actress Marija Lojk, whom Pregelj painted in accordance with his own artistic vision during the late stages of her pregnancy in 1966, while completing the cartoons for his tapestries. This further confirms the range of female representations, which extend from sexualized images to symbols of maternal transcendence.

The visual representation also functions as a network of cultural references. Through allusions to the art of antiquity – frontal figures, women's hairstyles characteristic of the Roman Republican era, and colouristic echoes of Pompeian frescoes depicting scenes from the cult of Dionysus in the Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii, also echoed in the principle of vertical tapestry panels, reminiscent of scenes "cut out" by black pilasters – Pregelj subtly bridges the past and the present. Even the famous torso of the Venus de Milo is transformed in his imagination into a cyclopean dress-maker's mannequin – with a single eye and painted toenails, standing on high heels, a characteristic prop of Greek theatre – thereby parodying the idealized classical image and embedding it in a consumerist context.

The synthesis of the figurative and the ornamental is achieved in these works through a pronounced emphasis on textile materiality. The vertical format of the tapestry intertwines with the horizontal logic of weaving, whereby the coloured bands not only shape the bodies of the female figures but also evoke the textile surface of the tapestry itself. This collage-like composition, which combines pictorial, textile, and symbolic layering, forms a distinctive visual language that transcends the boundaries between high and low art and the everyday aesthetics of mass imagery.

## Conclusion

Pregelj conceived the series of tapestries as an eight-part spatially dynamic frieze, composed of several sequences of related scenes, which, when arranged as a spatial screen, would function as a mobile wall. According to the architect's plans, the eight tapestries were to be mounted on three

*Figure 11. Model in the interior of the Koteks Tobus boutique in Ljubljana, with Pregelj's tapestries in the background, c. 1967. Photo: FotoStaut, Ljubljana. Source: KOTO Photo archive, Ljubljana.*



freestanding screens – two with three panels and one with two panels – which would conceal the cloakroom area on the ground floor [Figure 11]. The tapestries were created between late 1966 and early 1967. When they were delivered to Ljubljana in spring 1967, Pregelj – who died unexpectedly on 18 March 1967 due to post-operative complications – most likely never saw them, and he certainly did not live to see them installed.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, he was unable to oversee the final installation, which did not follow his original design: instead of being hung, six tapestries were nailed to wooden frames and mounted as a fixed wall against the rear wall of the upper floor, and the remaining two were placed in the basement. This significantly undermined the conceptual spatial dynamics of the original plan.<sup>38</sup> Even as part of the interior, the tapestries remained in place for only three years – before the end of 1970, they were removed from the shop to make room for additional shelving units, and, wrapped in polyvinyl, they were stored in the company's warehouse.<sup>39</sup>

Due to the persistent enquiries of the architect Maruša Zorec while preparing the 1998 exhibition on the architect Oton Jugovec at the *Can-karjev dom* Cultural and Congress Centre, five tapestries were found in the central warehouse of the KOTO company in Zalog, thanks to Alenka Pečenko. The remaining three were later found in the Triglav commercial building in Banja Luka.<sup>40</sup> The first five tapestries were restored between 2001 and 2002, and all eight were conserved, restored, and presented to the public in their entirety for the first time at an exhibition at the Ptuj Regional Museum in 2003.<sup>41</sup> In 2020, the Ptuj–Ormož Regional Museum,

with financial support from the Ministry of Culture, purchased the tapestries from the company KOTO, thereby bringing the entire collection into the public domain.

Pregelj's tapestries for the Koteks Tobus boutique occupy a special place in the artist's oeuvre. They represent one of the rare instances of a monumental work of art commissioned by a private client for a publicly accessible space that served neither a political nor a broader social function. The tapestries were designed for the interior of a fashion boutique, where art did not serve an ideological message but instead helped shape the aesthetics of the consumer experience. Nevertheless, Pregelj did not abandon his message; he introduced a gentle irony regarding consumerism and the blind pursuit of fashion into the series.

In this context, the tapestries for Koteks Tobus go beyond the scope of Pregelj's later work for public spaces. They represent a prime example of his understanding of art as visual storytelling in constant dialogue with everyday life. His work was characterized by a focus on humanistic themes and a desire to transcend modernist hermeticism. Pregelj believed that a work of art must convey universal themes and be clear enough to speak to the widest possible audience. Through his monumental wall painting – much like the Mexican muralists – he sought a synthesis between art and space and strove to bring it closer to the masses. By interweaving the figurative, the ornamental, and the architectural, he created monumental compositions not only in fresco and mosaic, but also in tapestry, which he understood as an equally valid medium for visual narratives of the contemporary world.

At the same time, the fate of these tapestries reveals the broader institutional context of postwar textile art in Yugoslavia. Paradoxically, at the time of Atelier 61's first international successes – achieved just a few years after its founding – headlines about the possibility of the workshop's closure had already appeared in newspapers. Although annual production in its most successful years reached up to 120 m<sup>2</sup> of tapestries, the studio soon encountered the limitations of the art market.<sup>42</sup> Excessive stock and the gradual decline of the public procurement system – which under socialism had served as a substitute for the private art market – became a serious problem in the 1970s because only the commercial art market could allow the workshop to operate independently. Nevertheless, Atelier 61 successfully weathered the politically and economically turbulent decades in two countries, Yugoslavia and later Serbia, and it continues to operate to this day. In the contemporary art context, textile art is re-establishing itself and becoming increasingly relevant – not only through its

materiality, which offers a respite from technological alienation, but also as a means of addressing current issues such as the role of women in art, collective creation, collaborative artistic practices, and market critique.

## **Funding**

This chapter was produced as part of research programme no. P6-0376 of the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS).



## Endnotes

- 1 Thomas P. Campbell, *Tapestry in the Renaissance: Art and Magnificence* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002), 4.
- 2 Campbell, *Tapestry in the Renaissance*, 23.
- 3 Glenn Adamson, *Thinking through Craft* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 68–69.
- 4 Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus 1919–1933* (Cologne: Taschen, 2019), 132–137.
- 5 K. L. H. Wells, *Weaving Modernism: Postwar Tapestry between Paris and New York* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 159.
- 6 Jean-Louis Cohen, “Walls of Wool,” in *Le Corbusier Nomadic Murals* (New York: Almine Rech Editions, 2023), 33.
- 7 See the exhibition catalogue *La Tapisserie française du Moyen Âge à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions des Musées Nationaux, 1946).
- 8 See the exhibition catalogue *Izložba francuskih tapiserija od srednjega vijeka do naših dana* (Zagreb: Muzej za umjetnost i obrt, 1953).
- 9 Jean Lurçat (1892–1966) was a central figure in the revival of tapestry in France in the twentieth century. Through his work in Aubusson, he significantly influenced contemporary visual art and redefined the medium of textile as a vehicle for autonomous artistic expression.
- 10 Goranka Vukadinović, “Atelje 61 – od zanatske radnje do centra tapiserije,” in *Tapiserije. Atelje 61*, ed. Goranka Vukadinović and Ivan Karlavaris (Novi Sad: Atelje 61, 2002), 19.
- 11 See the exhibition catalogue *3. Salon '59. Slikarstvo, kiparstvo, tapiserija* (Rijeka: Galerija likovnih umjetnosti, 1959).
- 12 Vukadinović, “Atelje 61,” 19.
- 13 Etelka Tobolka (1925–2006) was a key figure in Yugoslav textile art. Her expertise in traditional weaving and her experimentation with Gobelin techniques were crucial to the development of professional textile production at Atelier 61. She studied at the College of Applied Arts in Budapest, and she studied tapestry and weaving techniques in Vienna and Aubusson.
- 14 Atelier 61 was one of the few institutionalized artistic textile workshops in the socialist countries of that era, providing a direct link between artists and craftspeople (weavers). It is an institution that has survived all political changes and remains in operation today. See Laslo Silađi and Goranka Vukadinović, *50 godina “Ateljea 61”* (Petrovaradin: Atelje 61, 2011).
- 15 Pirot kilims were exhibited at numerous international fairs in the twentieth century as a representative product of Yugoslav folk art. For more information, see Milica Petković and Radmila Vlatković, *Pirotski ćilim = The Pirot Kilim* (Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 1996).
- 16 The exhibition at the Piran City Gallery in 1962 was among the first institutional presentations of contemporary tapestry in Slovenia. After this exhibition, thanks to Kržišnik, collaboration between Slovenian artists and Atelier 61 quickly became a regular practice. See the exhibition catalogue *Tapiserije: Atelje 61* (Piran: Mestna galerija Piran, 1962).
- 17 Zoran Kržišnik (1920–2008) was the most important figure in the internationalization of Yugoslav art, a member of international juries, and a curator with outstanding international connections, respected as an authority and dedicated to establishing networks of cultural exchange between East and West. This is discussed in greater detail in Beti Žerovc, *Kurator in sodobna umetnost. Pogovori* (Ljubljana: Maska, 2008), in the chapter “Pogovor z Zoranom Kržišnikom,” 38–48. See also: Beti Žerovc, *When Attitudes Become the Norm: The Contemporary Curator and Institutional Art* (Ljubljana: Društvo Igor Zabel za kulturo in teorijo; Berlin: Archive Books, 2015).

- 18 See Zoran Kržišnik's introductory text in the exhibition catalogue *Tapiserije. Atelje 61* (Piran: Mestna galerija Piran, 1962).
- 19 See the exhibition catalogue *French–Yugoslav Tapestries* (New York: Adria Art Gallery, 1967).
- 20 It was in operation for just over a year. See Nadja Zgonik, "Jugoslovenska socialistična umetnost na ameriškem trgu. Primer prodajne galerije Adria Art v New Yorku 1967–1968," *Časopis za kritiko znanosti* 49, no. 283 (2021): 30–43.
- 21 "Gallery zapira vrata," *Tedenska tribuna*, 9 October 1968, 5.
- 22 The tapestry measures 246 x 195 cm and was woven by Ana Horvat, Ružica Bačlija, and Vida Ostojić. The list of works in the Atelier 61 archive gives the date of completion as 21 December 1962. Atelier 61 Archive, list of works.
- 23 *French–Yugoslav Tapestries*, n. p.
- 24 Alongside Pregelj, the art commission selected Janez Bernik, Janez Vidic, and Janez Šibila.
- 25 It was woven by Smilja Lazić, Zora Lazić, Ana Horvat, Ružica Isakov, Milenka Isakov, and Vida Ostojić, and produced by Atelier 61 in 1965. Atelier 61 Archive, list of works.
- 26 It can be compared to the allegory of good and bad governance in Ambrogio Lorenzetti's work in the town hall in Siena.
- 27 I. V., "Nova modna trgovina," *Delo*, 5 September 1967, 3. Koteks Tobus was a successful import–export company that traded internationally in pig and cow hides, leather, shoes, and fur coats.
- 28 Marija Simčič, "Kaj je boutique?," *Tovariš*, 26 September 1967, 38.
- 29 Maruša Zorec, "Oton Jugovec arhitekt/architect: 1921–1987," *Piranesi* 8 (11/12), 2000/2001, 46–49. Works of art by Stojan Batič, Lojze Spacal, Ivan Seljak Čopič and France Mihelič were included.
- 30 Zorec, "Oton Jugovec," 82.
- 31 A newspaper article provides a telling detail about the approximate value of the investment, from which it can be deduced that a significant proportion was allocated to refurbishing the boutique's interior. The value of the commercial building was 400 million federation dinars and the cost of outfitting the boutique was 62 million federation dinars. I. V., "Nova modna trgovina."
- 32 Wells, *Weaving Modernism*, 162.
- 33 Nadja Zgonik, "Slikarji in arhitekti," in *Marij Pregelj: Tapiserije iz butika Koteks Tobus* (Ljubljana: Cankarjev dom, 2001).
- 34 Nadja Zgonik, "Žensko obredje lepoticenja in uživanja v razkazovanju," in *Marij Pregelj: Tapiserije iz butika Koteks Tobus* (Ptuj: Pokrajinski muzej Ptuj, 2003), 1–4.
- 35 All are marked in the characteristic manner of Atelier 61 tapestries, with the artist's monogram (*M* and a mirrored *P*) and the workshop's mark A61, usually on the lower edge toward the left side.
- 36 Bihalji-Merin, *Marij Pregelj*, 136.
- 37 The store opened on 5 September 1967. I. V., "Nova modna trgovina."
- 38 It is hardly possible to reconstruct the arrangement because only one of the surviving photos shows a fragment with three tapestries. Perhaps the distribution across the floors can be inferred from the markings recorded on the black-and-white photos from the photo archive of the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana. The only reliable information is that the tapestries were densely nailed to the wooden frames of the screen panels because they were found in this state, which caused the damage and rust stains.
- 39 Aleksander Bassin, "In memoriam ali vprašanje javnosti," *Tovariš*, 30 March 1971, 50–51.

- 40 Alenka Pečenko, "Bil je čisto navaden telefonski klic in globok ženski glas na drugi strani," *Kotopis*, no. 5 (November 2001): 10–11.
- 41 The conservation and restoration project was led by Eva Ilec, with contributions from Rozalija Bubnjevič and Hermina Golc. More on this in Eva Ilec, "Konserviranje in restavriranje tapiserij iz butika Koteks Tobus," in *Marij Pregelj: Tapiserije iz butika Koteks Tobus* (Ptuj: Pokrajinski muzej Ptuj, 2003), 9–12.
- 42 Vukadinović, "Atelje 61," 20.

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## Tapiserija kot javna umetnost za elitni prostor v socialistični Jugoslaviji: primer tapiserij Marija Preglja za butik Koteks Tobus

### Povzetek

V članku je obravnavana tapiserija kot specifična oblika javne umetnosti, namenjena oblikovanju reprezentančnih prostorov za družbeno elito v socialistični Jugoslaviji. Osredotoča se na cikel tapiserij, ki jih je Marij Pregelj leta 1966 zasnoval za butik Koteks Tobus v Ljubljani, jih analizira ter raziskuje, kako ta dela artikulirajo pojme prestiža, modernosti in družbenega statusa v socialističnem družbenem okviru.

Marij Pregelj (1913–1967) sodi med vodilne predstavnike jugoslovanskega povojnega figuralnega slikarstva. Ukvarjal se je s slikarstvom, grafiko, risbo in ilustracijo. Zaradi mojstrskega obvladovanja različnih tehnik monumentalnega slikarstva, kot so freska, sgraffito, mozaik in tapiserija, pa je bil pogosto vključen tudi v sistem javnih naročil, ki jih je bilo v tistem obdobju veliko. Tapiserija ga je pritegnila na začetku šestdesetih let, ko se je začela uveljavljati v jugoslovanskem prostoru. Odločilna za njeno obuditev je bila ustanovitev delavnice za umetniško tkanje Atelje 61 leta 1961 v Novem Sadu, ki sta jo po francoskem zgledu zasnovala slikar in grafik Boško Petrović in umetnostna tkalka Etelka Tobolka. Delavnica je postala osrednje produkcijsko mesto umetniške tapiserije v Jugoslaviji in deluje še danes. Atelje 61 je omogočil povezavo med sodobno umetniško zasnovo (kartonom) in vrhunsko izvedbo, s čimer je tapiserija ponovno pridobila status legitimnega medija visoke umetnosti. Hkrati je bila v jugoslovanskem kontekstu zaznamovana tudi z navezavo na tradicijo ljudskega tkanja, zlasti čilimarstva, kar je prispevalo k njeni identitetni in kulturni vrednosti.

Prva tapiserija, stkana po Pregljevem osnutku v delavnici Atelje 61, je bila *Kompozicija* (1962, danes izgubljena), namenjena galerijski distribuciji. Leta 1964 je sledilo večje javno naročilo za tapiserijo *Belo mesto* (405 cm × 770 cm) za Dom družbenih organizacij (danes IZUM) v Mariboru.

Leta 1966 je Preglja k sodelovanju pri opremljanju interierja butika, ki ga je odprlo podjetje Koteks Tobus v Ljubljani, povabil arhitekt Oton Jugovec. To je bil eden prvih prostorov visoke mode v Jugoslaviji, kar je bilo znamenje, da se socialistična družba pod zahodnimi vplivi od enakopravnosti že nagiba k razslojenosti, od množične mode k elitni. Pregelj se je

odločil, da bo zasnoval cikel osmih tapiserij (255 cm × 118 cm), ki jih je mogoče brati kot friz, sestavljen iz pokončnih pravokotnikov. Ženske figure so postavljene v središču na monokromnih rožnato-rdečih ozadjih v zaporednih sekvencah, posamično, v parih ali trojicah, vse nameščene v koreografiranem gibanju, ki spominja na modno brv ali modno fotografijo. Ker se je Pregelj pri ustvarjanju v veliki meri napajal iz antične kulture, je tudi tu navkljub modernistični stiliziranosti likov postavil drzno primerjavo. Ženske prikazuje pri lepotičenju, narcističnem ogledovanju v zrcalih in razkazovanju v nadzorovanem gibanju, kot bi šlo za kode skrivnostnega rituala. Žensko vdanost in čaščenje mode je soočil z obredjem posvetitve mlade ženske v Dionizijeve misterije, kot ga prikazuje poslikava v Vili misterijev v Pompejih. Uporaba rdeče barve za ozadja in način grajenja kompozicije, ko so v pompejanski vili prizori ločeni s črnimi pilastri, pri Preglju pa jih ločujejo cezure med tapiserijami, tudi vizualno poveže obe umetnini. Primerjava skrivnostnega kulta iz rimske antike z modernimi rituali pomeni subtilno ironizacijo zasužnjenosti s potrošniško miselnostjo in podrejenosti dominantni tržni ekonomiji. Tako delo ob estetizaciji ohranja sporočilnost, saj se s tem, ko v vizualni narativ vnaša distancirano, rahlo ironično refleksijo sodobnega potrošništva in modnih praks, posmehuje zahodnjaški kapitalistični doktrini. Tako umetnik do ambienta, ki ga sam opremlja, vzpostavi kritično distanco.

Pregljeve tapiserije za butik Koteks Tobus zavzemajo posebno mesto v njegovem opusu. So redke primer monumentalne umetnosti, ustvarjene po naročilu socialističnega podjetja za javno dostopen, a izrazito prestižni interier, v katerem umetnost ne deluje kot neposredni nosilec ideološkega diskurza, temveč kot soustvarjalka estetike potrošniške izkušnje. Opremljanje butika tako ni bilo zgolj komercialni projekt, temveč tudi kulturni indikator premika družbene paradigme od kolektivističnih k bolj individualiziranim in prestižnim oblikam reprezentacije, za kar je bila tapiserija idealen medij.









# ARTISTIC DECORATION OF SHIPS IN POSTWAR ITALY: ZORAN MUŠIČ'S EMBROIDERY *STORIA DI MARCO POLO*

Nataša Ivanović

Muzej Lah

This article presents the monumental embroidery *Storia di Marco Polo* (The Tale of Marco Polo) [Figure 1], created in 1951 by the painter, draughtsman, and printmaker Zoran Mušič (1909–2005) for the first-class lounge of the Italian ocean liner *Augustus*. Although Mušič rarely accepted commissions – his opus contains three more, including one from the Dornacher sisters in 1950 for the painting *La Stanza di Zurigo* (The Zurich Room), which adorned the former villa in Zollikon, and a commission for the huge abstract mosaic *Paesaggio dalmata* (Dalmatian Landscape) [Figure 2] for the entrance hall of Munich's Hilton Hotel from 1972 – this particular embroidery is one of the two artworks with which Italy promoted its reputation around the world.<sup>1</sup>

The contemporary perception of the embroidery is in complete contrast to the purpose for which it was created. It is currently displayed at Monfalcone's Shipyard Museum as part of the permanent exhibition on the development of shipbuilding in the Gulf of Trieste. Still state-owned, the embroidery was purchased when the ship was withdrawn in 1975 and handed over to the newly established Ministry of Culture and Cultural Heritage, which transferred it in 1983 to the National Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rome for safekeeping and permanent ownership.<sup>2</sup> The embroidery was first publicly presented in 2016 as part of the exhibition *Immaginario di viaggio: Zoran Mušič e Tranquillo Marangoni sulle motonavi Augustus e Giulio Cesare* (Visions of Voyages: Zoran Mušič and Tranquillo Marangoni on the Ocean Liners *Augustus* and *Giulio Cesare*) hosted by the Municipal Gallery of Contemporary Art in Monfalcone, for which the artwork had been restored. Apart from presenting the restoration process and content analysis in minute detail, the exhibition catalogue also placed the work in a wider context and within the overall artistic excellence of the vessel.<sup>3</sup> The embroidery's growing appeal for the Italian public is reflected in the interdisciplinary exhibition *I mondi di Marco Polo: Il viaggio di un mercante veneziano del Duecento* (The Worlds of Marco Polo: The Journey of a Thirteenth-Century Venetian Merchant) hosted by the Doge's Palace in Venice in 2024, which highlighted the life and accomplishments of the Venetian merchant and explorer.<sup>4</sup> Mušič's

embroidery figured not only as a unique contemporary art presentation of the subject matter addressed by the exhibition but also as a reminder that the twentieth century gave rise to a multitude of understandings of the story about Marco Polo. These ranged from the Fascist revival of his figure as a mythological embodiment of Italy's might and spirit of discovery to ambiguous deviations from reality in Polo's journeys to China and a "fictitious" text dictated to his fellow prisoner in Genoa, titled *Il Milione* (The Travels of Marco Polo). In any case, during the mid-1950s, there was no better way to relate the story about Marco Polo's travels than on board an ocean liner to passengers making their voyage knowing that they were retracing important moments in history.<sup>5</sup>

Over the last decade, only a few brief articles were published on Mušič's embroidery, largely summarising the discoveries made in 2016.<sup>6</sup> Nor were any fresh insights provided by the exhibition *La Stanza di Zurigo. Omaggio a Zoran Music* (The Zurich Room: A Tribute to Zoran Music) held at the Fortuny Palace in Venice in 2018, which showcased sketches, drawings, and photos on the creation of the embroidery, merely describing them as silent witnesses to the artist's legacy to the city.<sup>7</sup> Further mentions of the embroidery can be found in biographical records on the artist,<sup>8</sup> and concise or more detailed presentation articles can be encountered in the Italian daily press as well as the architecture, art, and design magazine *Domus*.<sup>9</sup> All newspaper texts were published in the early 1950s, around the time when the embroidery was created.

The question that remains to be answered is why the artwork was commissioned and who proposed the topic ultimately depicted by Mušič. The classical iconological question was to some extent unknowingly answered by Francesca Nodari, the curator of the exhibition, when at the end of 2017, barely a year after the first public presentation of the artwork, the same gallery in Monfalcone held a historical survey of the development of interior design and artistic decoration of Italian ships built between 1949 and 1967.<sup>10</sup> In her presentation of the construction, interior architecture, and design of the ocean liner *Augustus*, Nodari also mentioned a few art commissions, including Mušič's embroidery and the proposal by the Trieste architects Aldo Cervi (1901–1972) and Umberto Nordio (1891–1971)<sup>11</sup> to cover the first-class lounge wall with it. Her briefly mentioned but well-illustrated source is further explored in this research.

The commission appears to have been assigned to Mušič in 1950, especially considering that the initiative and the first plans for the ship were already proposed in August 1949. The Trieste State Archives hold the



Figure 1. Zoran Mušič, *Storia di Marco Polo* (*The Tale of Marco Polo*), tapestry (embroidery), 1951, 206 × 856 cm, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome, inv. no. 16129. Source: Krekic, Nodari and Bristot, *Immaginario di viaggio*.



Figure 2. Zoran Mušič, *Paesaggio dalmata* (*Dalmatian Landscape*), mosaic, 1972, 640 × 540 cm, Hilton Hotel, Munich. Executed by mosaicists Carlo Signorini and Verdiano Marzi. Source: Muzej Lah, *Zoran Mušič Documentation*, CR 4016.

sketches by Aldo Cervi, one of the four architects who designed the ship. Others were Romano Boico (1910–1985) and Vittorio Frandoli (1902–1978) and the aforementioned Nordio. As the designs for the lounges, bars, and walls of the ship's first-class interiors reveal, the placement of the embroidery was precisely determined on 14 October 1950.<sup>12</sup> Two months later, on 24 December 1950,



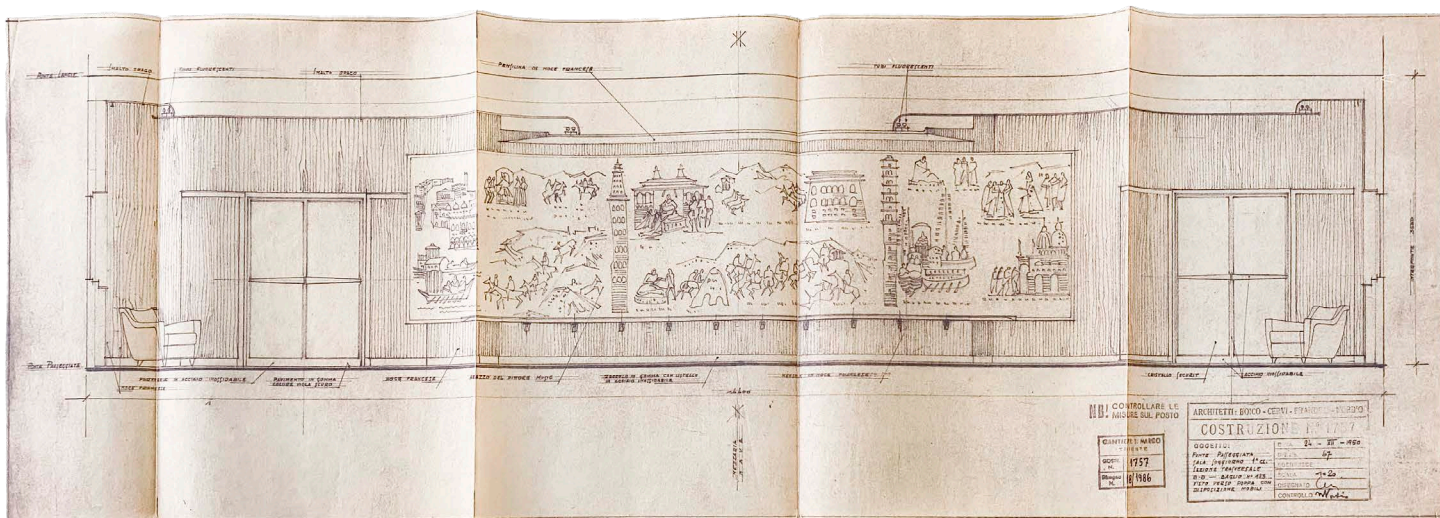


Figure 3. Aldo Cervi and Umberto Nordio, draft of the wall with Zoran Mušič's *Storia di Marco Polo (The Tale of Marco Polo)*, 1950. Source: Archivio di Stato di Trieste, Archivio dell'architetto Aldo Cervi, box 19, folder B2, construction plan no. 1757, 24 December 1950.

the thematic and compositional sketches of the embroidery were drawn, along with its rather unusual placement on the envisaged wall [Figure 3].<sup>13</sup>

The selection of Mušič to create the monumental embroidery did not come as a surprise, considering that he was already among the most popular contemporary artists in Italy at the time. Following his liberation from the Dachau concentration camp in 1945 and a few sojourns in Gorizia, Mušič soon returned to Venice, where he had already lived before his arrest. Together with his wife Ida Cadorin Barbarigo and her father, a fellow painter and prominent professor at the Venetian Academy of Fine Arts, Guido Cadorin (1892–1976), he took part in minor solo and group exhibitions across Italy and Switzerland.<sup>14</sup> It was certainly of pivotal importance for him to participate in the 24th Venice Biennale in 1948, the first held after the war, at which he presented himself side by side with his Italian contemporaries. Some of them also provided ocean liners with art furnishings. At the biennale, Mušič exhibited three paintings from the cycle *Cavallini* (Little Horses), which brought him recognition during the 1950s. He used the same theme in embroidery. At the 25th Venice Biennale in 1950, he presented the Dalmatian horses again, along with *Paesaggio umbro* (Umbrian Landscape), for which he received a monetary prize of 200,000 Italian lire, named after its sponsor, the magnate Riccardo Gualino.<sup>15</sup> Mušič's presence at the most prestigious Italian and international art events, coupled with the invitation to prepare what are now lost prints to decorate the vestibules and lounges of the ocean liner *Conte Biancamano*, restored in 1949,<sup>16</sup> testifies to his success and the interest that the four architects showed in his work. Not least, it was they,

alongside the architect and designer Gio Ponti (1891–1979), that decided who would create the art furnishing for the *Conte Biancamano*, whereas the decisions regarding the new ocean liner *Augustus* lay squarely with the Trieste architects.

The initiative to rejuvenate the most important shipyards in Trieste and Monfalcone as well as build new passenger liners and restore old ones that had suffered severe damage during the Second World War was given by the Allied military government and the Institute for Industrial Reconstruction. The state intervention also led to important commissions made to architects, craftsmen, engineers, designers, and artists. Marking the revival of Italy's merchant navy, the early 1950s were a period of intense activity for the four Trieste architects, whom the successful restoration of the *Conte Biancamano* (1949) and the designs for the twin vessels *Australia* (1951) and *Neptunia* (1951) earned the commission to prepare the designs for a sizeable group of first-class interiors for the second ocean liner *Augustus*, which was built and furnished at Trieste's San Marco Shipyard. In addition, they were entrusted with designing the most prominent first-class interiors – specifically, the foyer with a staircase, ballroom, chapel, lounge with a bar, salon, casino, and swimming pool.

The ocean liner *Augustus* was built and furnished under the supervision of the engineer Nicolò Costanzi (1893–1967). The rudder was attached on 1 June 1949, and the ship was launched on 19 November 1950. It was christened in Trieste by the wife of Italian Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi.<sup>17</sup> The ship was passed to the Italian shipbuilder Società di Navigazione Italia with its seat in Genoa on 20 February 1952, from where it set out on its first voyage toward Rio de Janeiro on 4 March 1952. It was intended to operate Latin American routes and became the longest-serving trans-Atlantic ship of the great Italian navy; it was dismantled no earlier than 2012 in Alang, India.<sup>18</sup>

Functionality, rationality, and refined elegance were key considerations in decorating the *Augustus*. In the prestigious first-class interiors, the architects designed an architectural space and combined individual art pieces into an integral artwork showcasing Italy's history and contemporary cultural achievements. In 1966, Boico noted that this created a fortunate circumstance that allowed the international liner to become a very effective cultural and educational platform for art.<sup>19</sup>

Boico, Cervi, Frandoli, and Nordio adhered to the principles of ship design that Gio Ponti already set during the interwar period. They furnished the *Conte Biancamano* and continued to improve their understanding of

Ponti's philosophy while collaborating on the *Giulio Cesare*, the twin ship of the Trieste-built *Augustus*.<sup>20</sup> According to Ponti, a ship's interiors should follow a uniform concept that harmonises the use of materials and sets limits on the imagination of an individual designer while ensuring freedom for innovation in general stylistic coordination, which does not necessarily completely dominate the entire ship but also does not shy away from repetition. During the 1950s, consistency was of crucial importance for ocean liners; it was championed over the incessant search for novelties, which combined too many artistic styles. The work was to be done by a single group of designers. The ideal result, a stylistically designed ship, was only attainable once all classes of accommodation and all interiors served as an expression of a uniform vision, a guiding hand that held the rein over the complete design.<sup>21</sup> Ponti viewed this as striving for lightness through extensive use of certain materials, particularly gold or silver anodised aluminium and light wooden materials with a natural feel, such as ash, walnut, white oak, birch, and cherry. Due to the technology and immense size of transatlantic ocean liners, the architects were advised to refrain from using solid wood and instead opt for laminated wood, plywood panels, coverings, and light frame constructions to enhance and highlight the sense of lightness. The aim was to move away from heavy objects to light ones, from thick to thin ones, from opaque to transparent ones, from dark to light ones, from colourless to colourful ones, from diversity to uniformity, and from complexity to simplicity and linearity.<sup>22</sup>

The preconditions for designing a ship's interior according to Ponti were as follows: from the technical point of view, a ship was to be fully operable as a mode of transport, whereas the degree of passenger comfort had to reflect that the ship also provided a living environment while mid-voyage; the main idea was for a ship to combine the reality of a sea voyage with the comfort expected to be experienced on land; and, finally, a ship had to be inviting. Passengers decided on their vessel of choice based on its comfort and aesthetic appeal. Therefore, designers also had to bear in mind that a ship's interior served as an expression of the state's relationship with its public.<sup>23</sup>

According to Ponti, the interior had to be dedicated to Italy and glorify it in one of two ways. First, it had to do so in a figurative manner, with the use of decorations, paintings, and ornaments that acquainted foreigners with Italian legends, Italy's distinct architecture, famous historical gardens, recurring festivals and saints' days (the Redeemer's Festival in Venice or the Festival of the Candles in Gubbio), its poetic lovers (Romeo and Juliet, Paolo and Francesca), famous landscapes, masks, theatre, notable



Figure 4. Presentation brochure for the ocean liner *Augustus*, 1952. Source: Muzej Lah, Zoran Mušič Documentation.

personalities, traditions, beautiful women, music and song, artists and craftsmen, enchanting ceramics, exquisite glass, famous enamels, and beautiful textiles. Second, he also deemed it important to view ships not only as means of transport moving passengers from point A to point B, but also as a way of building Italy's reputation.<sup>24</sup> It was essential that a ship be part of Italy wherever it travelled, and it had to embody the most prestigious and state-of-the-art aspects of Italian style, culture, and art.

The ocean liner *Augustus* [Figure 4] was built in its entirety using high-quality wood, steel, and rubber, along with exquisite textiles, crystals, and fluorescent lights. Great emphasis was placed on the sculpture decoration of interiors, such as the ballroom, the chapel, and the staircase with a railing made of large, hardened steel plates, supported by small copper-plated pillars, and decorated with a bronze acanthus-leaf frieze by Marcello Mascherini (1906–1983). The

staircase was closed off by walls of polished oak beams whose colour corresponded to Mascherini's bronze tones, and the dark violet rubber flooring served as a connecting element of all the interiors and a chromatic counterpoint. Indeed, the colour palette of the luxurious first-class ballroom built on the dark violet of the flooring and the satin-like yellow-gold walls, which matched silk drapes, suede sofas, and the gilded bronze tone of shell-shaped wall lamps, likewise designed by Mascherini. The main wall featured the monumental bronze sculpture composition *Il Mare* (The Sea). The door leading to the chapel was built by Carlo and Mirella Sbisà. Carlo Sbisà (1899–1964) and his wife Mirella (1921–2015) produced a series of multicolour glazed ceramics in abstract shapes of corals and shells. These were in stark contrast to the blackness of the side of the counter and the wall behind the bar. Lit within, they created a play of light shafts and shimmering pearly reflections. The maritime theme also prevailed in the first-class dining room, the only space that was designed by Gustavo Pulitzer Finali, who collaborated with Dino Predonzani (1914–1994) again on the *Giulio Cesare*. The walls were dominated by Predonzani's imposing tempera paintings depicting the sea bottom with vases, fragments of ancient pillars, and statues among fishnets, rocks, and algae. Predonzani designed the decorative mosaic for the first-class





Figure 5. E. Mioni, view of Zoran Mušič's *Storia di Marco Polo* (The Tale of Marco Polo) and the day salon aboard the *Augustus*. Source: Archivio di Stato di Trieste, Archivio dell'architetto Aldo Cervi, box 19, folder B2, no. 2206.

swimming pool and veranda created by the Venice-based mosaic cooperative Arte del Mosaico. The sculptor Ugo Carà (1908–2004) designed four luxury apartments and cabins; the gilded niche in the smoking room featured his wooden female nude playing a zither. The huge composition by Tranquillo Marangoni (1912–1992), titled *Serra* (Greenhouse), was last housed in the atrium of the large staircase. It depicted a significant number of exotic plants in vases, cacti, wildflowers, and water lilies. Most of the interior furniture with lighting was designed by Gio Ponti.

The analogy of themes depicted on Italian ocean liners adheres to Ponti's principles of Italy's recognisability. Thus, a passenger could observe Massimo Campiglli's monumental depiction of *Le suonatrici* (The Women Players) in the first-class ballroom of the *Giulio Cesare*, Salvatore Fiume's painting *Italia mitica* (Mythic Italy) in the first-class day salon, or Mušič's embroidery *Storia di Marco Polo* [Figure 5] in the day salon on the *Augustus*. Ponti's approach to ship design reveals how the architect – or, rather, interior designer – also defined individual elements of art decoration; often, he even submitted a draft demonstrating what a finished artwork would look like in terms of its form and content. One such example was his draft for the painting by Edina Altara, which graced the passage to the dining room on the ocean liner *Conte Grande*, or the architect's sketch *Arlecchino* (Harlequin) produced by Paolo De Poli for the *Conte Biancamano*.

Figure 6. Zoran Mušič, draft not included in the final version of *Storia di Marco Polo* (*The Tale of Marco Polo*), 1951. Source: Muzej Lah, Zoran Mušič Documentation, CR 4018.



Some artworks, among them Ponti's painting *Allegoria della partenza* (*Allegory of Goodbye*), which adorned the second-class dining room on the *Conte Biancamano*, were ultimately finished by the architects themselves.

The content of the embroidery was determined by the group of four mentioned above: its aim was to show the passengers the great voyage that the Venetian merchant Marco Polo made from Venice to China. Cervi's plan, dated 24 December 1950, in some of its contours even slightly resembling Ambrogio Lorenzetti's depiction of the *Effetti del Buon Governo in Città* (*Effects of Good Government in the City*) from 1338, points to a tripartite composition of space with several scenes depicted in individual fields. Mušič then divided the completed embroidery into five segments, the central one featuring a single theme, and the other four subdivided into two horizontal halves, each presenting its respective imagery. In both the draft and the finalised embroidery, the composition is divided by two high Oriental towers, and the stories in both unfold from left to right. Before delivering the final version, Mušič created several watercolour, pastel, and pencil drawings. He even embroidered a few depictions, which were not included in the final composition. One of these embroideries is now kept by the National Gallery of Slovenia in Ljubljana.<sup>25</sup> There are also photos of others, the current whereabouts of which are not known [Figure 6]. The embroidery in Ljubljana dates to the period of preparatory sketches; its composition closely imitates the arrangement of the galloping horses



Figure 7. Ida Cadorin Barbarigo and her mother, Livia Tivoli Cadorin, embroidering, 1951. Source: Muzej Lah, Zoran Mušič Documentation, CR 4016.

in the central field in Cervi's draft, and the little horses in the photo were positioned in Mušič's characteristic composition of three or four overlapping two-dimensional horses suspended above the rolling hills of Umbria or Siena.<sup>26</sup>

Following extensive preparations and explorations, Mušič completed the embroidery in earthy tones, with his distinct visual language of playful horses, the depiction of reclining female nudes, a hilly landscape, and the contours of variably recognisable panoramas of Venice. Due to the sheer scale of the work and the artist's exhibition engagements in 1951, he was assisted by Livia Tivoli Cadorin, his mother-in-law, and Ida, his wife and fellow painter, which was also confirmed by the Trieste journalist Aurelia Gruber Benco (1952)<sup>27</sup> and documentary photos published by Gio Ponti in *Domus* in 1952 [Figure 7], showing both artists presenting a detailed explanation of the embroidery.<sup>28</sup>

Unfolding from left to right, the narrative extends over five fields and is accompanied by citations from

*Storia di Marco Polo* in the fields above and below. The first scene in the upper left corner offers a view of poetic and charming Venice, with the recognisable Doge's Palace and the profile of St. Mark's domes, together with the belltower and two gondolas. It is the presentation of the place from which Marco Polo embarked on his voyage: "Here begins the journey of Mister Marco Polo from Venice, which brings forth many a novelty from Tartary and a multitude of other lands."<sup>29</sup> At the bottom, the galloping horses are depicted surrounded by rolling hills, just as Mušič had painted them since 1946; however, the scene is far from a faithful representation of the hostile welcome that Marco Polo received: "When they arrived in Layas, Bondoc Daire, the sultan of Babylon, descended upon the land with his formidable army and unleashed a great war."<sup>30</sup> The second field is set apart from the first one by a high Oriental tower that repeats in a smaller scale as a division between the fourth and fifth fields of the tapestry. At the top of the second field, another group of little horses is seen galloping, some as figures resembling Mušič's creation of *Motivo dalmata* (Dalmatian Theme) – women with parasols on horseback, appearing here as the messengers of the great Kublai Khan: "When the Great Khan learned that the two brothers and Marco were

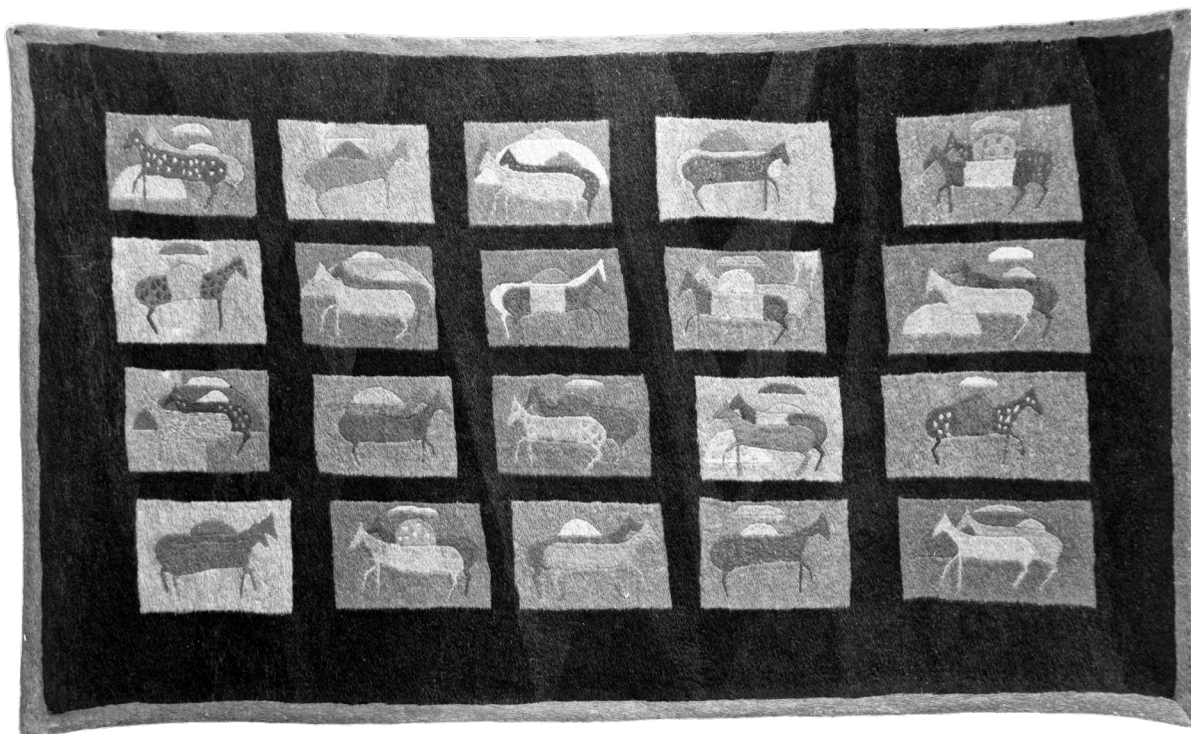




*Figure 8. Draft for an embroidery in Zoran Mušič's studio in Venice, 1951. Photo: Foto Giacomelli. Source: Muzej Lah, Zoran Mušič Documentation, CR 4017.*

coming, he sent an envoy to greet them."<sup>31</sup> In the lower field, the artist depicted Kublai Khan reclining in his palace with three cone-shaped domes, and his four wives portrayed in respective window niches: "Kublai Khan still has four wives, whom he considers his legal spouses. They call themselves empresses."<sup>32</sup> Mušič's imaginative compositional arrangement repeats in the lower part of the fourth field in the mirrored image of a woman reclining on a divan as a counterpoint to Kublai Khan: "He also has many concubines – I tell you, they are carefully selected and the most beautiful girls that the world has ever seen."<sup>33</sup> Both compositions resemble Mušič's reclining female nudes from between 1946 and 1948. It can certainly be said that the Great Khan in the first scene was a formalistically reproduced female nude by Mušič, just as the female nude in the second scene is positioned in the interior arches of an Oriental-style building, the palace that the painter depicted in the first scene. Especially in the latter case, the preserved photographs allow one to follow Mušič's creative process of making the embroidery, with the draft revealing his intention to depict himself together with his wife in one of the window niches [Figure 8]. From the Renaissance onward, artists liked including their self-depictions in important monumental works to affirm not only their authorship and their personal connection with the artwork, but also their equal footing with the figures they depicted. He ultimately abandoned the idea of incorporating his self-portrait into the final embroidery.

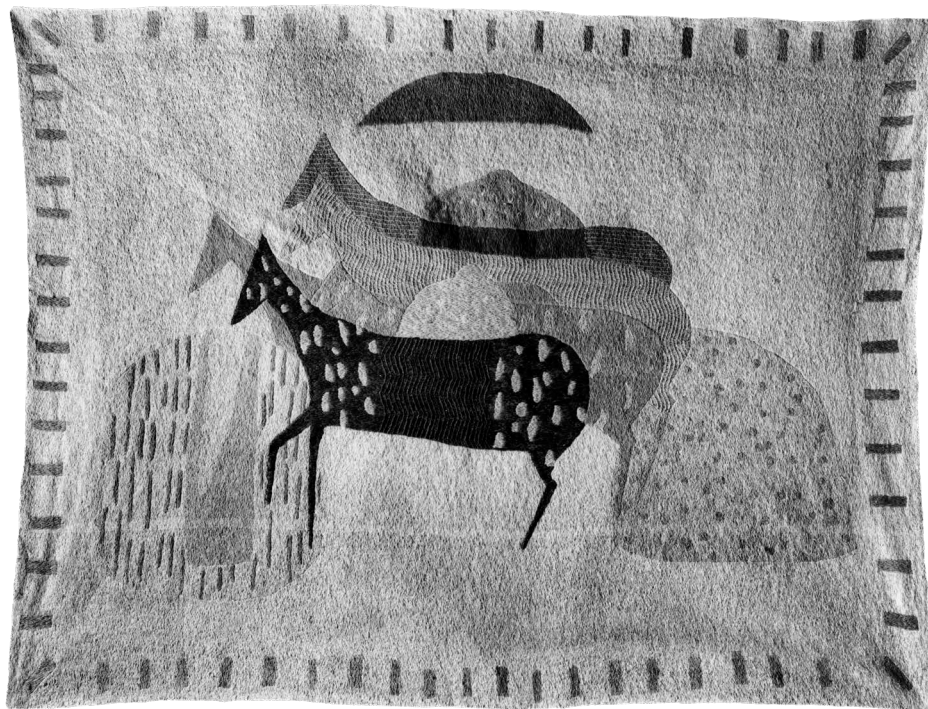




*Figure 9. Zoran Mušič,  
Motivo dalmata  
(Dalmatian Theme),  
embroidery, 1950,  
148 × 205 cm, location  
unknown. Source:  
Muzej Lah, Zoran Mušič  
Documentation,  
CR 4020.*

The central scene is large, taking up one-fifth of the tapestry; the figures of horses are larger and more playful, and they are set in Mušič's characteristic hilly landscape, despite being part of a fierce battle, as the embroidered narrative goes: "The battle that the Great Khan fought against Nayam, let it be known that it was very ferocious, marred by betrayal, and by all accounts the most devastating warfare of our time. Horses were mowed down, and human losses on both sides were inconceivable. The clamour was such that it would drown out the sound of thunder."<sup>34</sup> The fourth field mirrors the second one, with the reclining female nude at the bottom and Mušič's little horses and hills at the top, with further addition of birds and a leopard charging an antelope: "The Great Khan has many leopards, all of them superb predators and hunters of beasts."<sup>35</sup> The sketches preserved from Mušič's estate reveal that the artist invested much effort not only in selecting themes from the literary text, as may be gathered from several small sketches bearing captions, but also in painting exotic animals, which he had never done before. In one of the sketches, he drew himself and his wife in place of leopards' heads. Mušič's desire to depict himself in the sketches as a silent witness looking out his window or a personified leopard is rather unusual; although he abandoned the idea in the embroidery, it often recurs in his sketches. When

Figure 10. Zoran Mušič, *Cavallini (Little Horses)*, embroidery, 1950–1951, 115 × 195 cm, location unknown. Source: Muzej Lah, Zoran Mušič Documentation, CR 4019.



devising a premise for the embroidery, he was extremely personal; as he had stressed in many interviews, he only depicted people that he knew well but nonetheless ultimately decided on a more neutral approach. The upper section of the last, fifth field, set apart by a tower, presents the palace of the Great Khan with three gondolas of the Polo family ready to set sail: “Misters Nicolao, Matteo, and Marco asked to bid farewell and the Great Khan granted their wish with a heavy heart, for he loved them very much. They set out for Trebizond, then Constantinople, and from there to Negroponte, and finally to Venice – that was in 1295.”<sup>36</sup> The scene at the bottom repeats the theme of little horses, now set in an Oriental landscape with Mušič’s hills and a yurt pointing to the Polo family expedition.

It seems safe to note that the artist’s formalist language prevailed in the embroidery, adapted to selected segments of the literary basis. Although Cervi’s draft was saturated with scenes, Mušič aimed to make the narrative more illustrative for the viewer by refining the totality in the modernist language of minimalised scenes and defining the symmetric composition with the use of mirrored fields converging into the central depiction. In adherence to Ponti’s philosophy of interior design and bringing art aboard the *Augustus* closer to its passengers, he simplified the rather

complex literary basis with the use of figurative language, linearity, and two-dimensionality. Although postwar European art already aspired toward abstraction, this particular style was not the preferred choice for presenting historical, literary, and social innovations of postwar Italy. After the Second World War, many European artists turned toward abstraction to express the trauma and uncertainty of the time. However, in postwar Italy, abstract art was often not preferred because artists and filmmakers wanted to portray real social, political, and historical issues more directly. As a result, realist styles became more important for representing everyday life and the changes occurring in Italian society.

The embroidery constitutes one of the most monumental works in Mušič's opus, even though it is not the only embroidery that he had completed. Two photographs have been preserved of two smaller embroideries at unknown locations, *Motivo dalmata* (Dalmatian Theme) [Figure 9] and *Cavallini* (Little Horses) [Figure 10], both dated between 1950 and 1951.<sup>37</sup> Likewise unknown is the current location of the tapestry *Primavera* (Spring), which graced the ocean liner *Asia*. Mušič's commission not only testified to the great reception that his art was given in the 1950s but was also a reflection of Italian culture and technological advances, recognised even by the Italian authorities as the state's strongest means of presentation in the international arena.

## Endnotes

- 1 In the extensive literature on Mušič's life and work, one can also encounter a note concerning his commission for the ocean liner Asia, launched in March 1953. He created the smaller embroidery *Primavera* (Spring) for the bar and repeated the theme of playful horses in a hilly landscape with unusual Oriental trees, purposely depicted to reflect the ship's set course (from Italy to Pakistan and India). The sole photo of the embroidery is published in Francesca Nodari, *Boico/Cervi/Frandoli/Nordio: Interni navali tra arte e design 1949–1967* (Monfalcone: Comune di Monfalcone, 2018), 31.
- 2 Alessandra Lanzoni, "Arredi navali," in *Galleria nazionale d'arte moderna & MAXXI: Le collezioni 1958–2008*, vol. 2, ed. Stefania Frezzotti, Carolina Italiano, and Angelandreina Rorro (Milan: Mondadori Electa, 2009), 761.
- 3 Anna Krekic, Francesca Nodari, and Paola Bristot, eds., *Immaginario di viaggio: Zoran Mušič e Tranquillo Marangoni sulle motonavi Augustus e Giulio Cesare = Visions of Voyages: Zoran Mušič and Tranquillo Marangoni on the Ocean Liners Augustus and Giulio Cesare* (Monfalcone: Comune di Monfalcone, 2016).
- 4 Giovanni Curatola and Chiara Squarcina, eds., *I mondi di Marco Polo: Il viaggio di un mercante veneziano del Duecento* (Arezzo: Magonza, 2024).
- 5 Stefano Causa, "Le radici nel cuore, i rami nell'altrove. Usi e abusi del Milione nel mainstream," in *I mondi di Marco Polo: Il viaggio di un mercante veneziano del Duecento*, ed. Giovanni Curatola and Chiara Squarcina (Arezzo: Magonza, 2024), 157.
- 6 Anna Maria Cisint, "Sguardi transfrontalieri," in *Zoran Music: Il viaggio della vita: Sguardi transfrontalieri: Avanguardie di modernità nell'arte e nell'architettura dell'Europa ritrovata*, ed. Daniele D'Anza, Isabella Reale, and Maurizio Zanei (Monfalcone: Ponti d'Europa, 2022), 11–12; Chiara Mistelli, "Il viaggio di Marco Polo al Museo della Cantieristica," in *Zoran Music: Il viaggio della vita: Sguardi transfrontalieri: Avanguardie di modernità nell'arte e nell'architettura dell'Europa ritrovata*, ed. Daniele D'Anza, Isabella Reale, and Maurizio Zanei (Monfalcone: Ponti d'Europa, 2022), 85–89.
- 7 Daniela Ferretti, *La Stanza di Zurigo: Omaggio a Zoran Music / The Zurich Room: A Tribute to Zoran Music* (Venice: Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, 2018).
- 8 For example, Gojko Zupan, "Zoran Mušič, popotnik 20. stoletja," in *Zoran Mušič (1909–2005): Iz umetniške zbirke Ljubana, Milade in Vande Mušič: Narodni galeriji podarjena in posojena dela*, ed. Mateja Krapež (Ljubljana: Narodna galerija, 2016), 29–68; Gojko Zupan, *A Spanish Vision: A Documentary Exhibition on the 100th Anniversary of the Birth of Zoran Mušič* (Ljubljana: Narodna galerija, 2009).
- 9 "Opere d'arte sull'Augustus," *Domus* 272 (July–August 1952): 25–33.
- 10 Nodari, *Boico/Cervi/Frandoli/Nordio*.
- 11 Nodari, *Boico/Cervi/Frandoli/Nordio*, 26.
- 12 State Archives of Trieste (AS Trieste), Archivio dell'architetto Aldo Cervi, box 28, folder B38, construction plan no. 1757, 14 October 1950.
- 13 AS Trieste, Archivio dell'architetto Aldo Cervi, box 19, folder B2, construction plan no. 1757, 24 December 1950.
- 14 For example, the exhibition *Zoran Music e Cadorina*, Galleria d'Arte Trieste, November 1946.
- 15 La Biennale di Venezia, ASAC, Arti visive, Esposizioni biennali, mostre storiche e speciali, retrospettive e personali, box 30, Premi assegnati alla XXV Biennale, corrispondenza con i commissari e con gli artisti, Zoran Antonio Mušič. See also "Premiati alla Biennale," *Omnibus: Settimanale d'attualità e di cultura* 5, no. 13 (25 June 1950): 29.
- 16 "Informazione su alcuni ambienti del 'Conte Biancamano,'" *Domus* 245 (April 1950): 4, and Massimo De Grassi, "Il mare in una stanza: arte e cantieristica navale," in *Civiltà del mare e navigazioni interculturali*:



*sponde d'Europa e l'isola" Trieste*, ed. Cinzia Ferrini, Roberta Gefter Wondrich, Paolo Quazzolo, and Anna Zoppellari (Trieste: EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2012), 47.

- 17 Ugosar, "L'Augustus è scesa in mare," *Giornale di Trieste*, 21 November 1950, 4.
- 18 In 1976, it was sold to Great Shipping Investments Ltd. from Hong Kong, which renamed it Great Sea. Following its restoration in Hong Kong, the ship underwent several changes in ownership and name, and it was also used by the president of the Philippines as his private ship named *President* (1985–1987) and as a hotel and restaurant under the name *Philippines* (1999). In 2001, it remained docked in the port of Manila until it was dismantled. Nodari, *Boico/Cervi/Frandoli/Nordio*, 26.
- 19 Nodari, *Boico/Cervi/Frandoli/Nordio*, 20.
- 20 On 15 November 1949, the four architects submitted the project, with which they also presented their proposal for a logical division and lyrical articulation of spaces, comfort, and perspective effects, the unity of the concept, and the diversity of decorative ideas. AS Trieste, Archivio dell'architetto Aldo Cervi, box 19.
- 21 Gio Ponti, "Sulle nostre navi, gli stranieri devono conoscere l'Italia," *Corriere della Sera*, 21 March 1950, 3.
- 22 Paolo Piccione, *Gio Ponti: Le navi: Il progetto degli interni navali 1948–1953* (Viareggio: Idea Books, 2007), 199.
- 23 Ponti, "Sulle nostre navi," 3.
- 24 Gio Ponti, "Interni delle nuove navi italiane," *Domus* 263 (November 1951): 27.
- 25 Mateja Krapež, ed., *Zoran Mušič (1909–2005): Iz umetniške zbirke Ljubana, Milade in Vande Mušič: Narodni galeriji podarjena in posojena dela* (Ljubljana: Narodna galerija, 2016), 106.
- 26 For the preparatory sketches, see Muzej Lah, *Raziskovalni center*, digital catalogue raisonné of Zoran Mušič, CR 3697 and CR 3701.
- 27 Krekic, Nodari, and Bristot, *Immaginario di viaggio*, 43.
- 28 "Opere d'arte sull'Augustus," 33.
- 29 "Qui comincia il viaggio di Messer Marco Polo de Vinegia il quale racconta molte novità della Tartaria e altri paesi assai."
- 30 "Come vennoro a Layas Bondoc Daire, Soldano di Bambellonia venne con grande oste sopra quello contrada facciendo grande guerra."
- 31 "Quando il Gran Cane seppe che gli due fratelli e Marco venivano mandò loro messo incontro."
- 32 "Coblai Cane hae tuttavia quattro femmine le quali tiene per sue diritte mogli, Elle sono chiamate imperadricie."
- 33 "Egli tiene ancora molte amicie diròvi che sono iscelte e le più belle donzelle che vi sieno."
- 34 "La battaglia che il Gran Cane fece con Najam e sappiate che fu molto crudele e fellonesca e la più paurosa che fosse mai al nostro tempo e li cavagli cadevano e vi morirono tanta gente dall una parte e dal altra che farebbe maraviglia a credere ed eran tale lo romore che gli tuoni non si sarebbero uditi."
- 35 "Lo Gran Cane bene leopardi assai e che tutti sono buoni da cacciare e da prendere bestie."
- 36 "Messer Nicolao e Matteo e Marco vollero lo commiato e lo Gran Cane fece loro la grazia a gran pena tanto gli amava. Se ne vennero a Tripisonde e poi a Costantinopoli e poi a Negro ponte e poi Vinegia e questo fu negli anno MCCXCV."
- 37 Muzej Lah, *Raziskovalni center*, digital catalogue raisonné of Zoran Mušič, CR 4019 and CR 4020.

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## Likovna oprema ladij po drugi svetovni vojni v Italiji: vezenina Zorana Mušiča *Zgodba o Marku Polu*

### Povzetek

V prispevku je predstavljeno monumentalno delo, vezenina slikarja, risarja in grafika Zorana Mušiča *Zgodba o Marku Polu*, ki jo je leta 1951 ustvaril za salon prvega razreda italijanske potniške čezoceanske ladje Avgust. Čeprav je Mušič malokrat ustvarjal po naročilu, prav vezenina priča o enem izmed dveh državnih naročil, ki ga je Mušič prejel in s katerim je Italija širila svojo prepoznavnost v svetu. Sodobna recepcija vezenine se povsem razlikuje od namena njenega nastanka. Javnost je bila z umetnino prvič seznanjena leta 2016 na razstavi v Občinski galeriji sodobne umetnosti v Trzinu. Prav tako je bila Mušičeva vezenina edinstvena sodobna likovna predstavitev na beneški razstavi leta 2024, saj so z njeno prisotnostjo opozorili na različna razumevanja zgodbe o Marku Polu v 20. stoletju: od obujanja lika Marka Pola med fašizmom, ki je seglo v višave mitologizirane osebe, edinstvene za prikaz italijanske moči in odkritij, do dvomnih odstopanj od resničnosti v Polovih potovanjih do Kitajske in »domišljjskega« besedila po nareku sojetniku v Genovi *Potovanja Marka Pola*. Vsekakor pa sredi petdesetih let 20. stoletja ni bilo boljšega pripovedovanja o potovanju Marka Pola kot na samem plovilu, medtem ko so turisti pravzaprav potovali, zavedajoč se, da stopajo po sledih pomembne preteklosti.

Vse do danes je ostalo nerazrešeno vprašanje, kdo je naročil vezenino in kdo je bil iniciator teme, ki jo je nenazadnje upodobil Mušič. Na klasično ikonološko vprašanje je nezavedno delno odgovorila avtorica razstave o razvoju tržaškega ladjedelništva po drugi svetovni vojni Francesca Nodari. Pri predstavitvi arhitekturne zasnove potniške ladje Avgust, oblikovanja prostorov in notranje opreme je omenila tudi nekaj umetniških naročil, med drugimi Mušičevo vezenino in ob njej načrt stene salona prvega razreda tržaških arhitektov Alda Cervija in Umberta Nordia, za katero je bila določena vezenina. Njen bežno omenjeni, sicer tudi slikovno predstavljeni vir, je podrobneje predstavljen v pričujoči raziskavi. Najverjetneje je Mušič dobil naročilo leta 1950, saj so se pobuda in prvi načrti za ladjo začeli avgusta 1949. Iz ohranjenih načrtov salonov, barov in sten prostorov prvega razreda ladje lahko razberemo, da je bila pozicija vezenine že oktobra 1950 točno določena. Dva meseca pozneje pa sta bili celo definirani vsebinska in kompozicijska skica tapisrije ter njena nenavadna umestitev na predvideno steno.

Pobudo za pomladitev pomembnih ladjedelnic v Trstu in Tržiču ter obnovo in novogradnjo potniških ladij, ki so bile med drugo svetovno vojno močno uničene, sta začela zavezniška vojaška vlada Italije in Inštitut za obnovo industrije. Tako je ta intervencija italijanske države pritegnila tudi pomembna naročila arhitektov, obrtnikov, inženirjev, oblikovalcev in umetnikov. Čezoceanska ladja Avgust je bila zgrajena in opremljena pod vodstvom inženirja Nicòle Costanzija, kobilica je bila položena 1. junija 1949, ladjo pa so splavili 19. novembra 1950. Takrat jo je v Trstu krstila žena italijanskega premierja Francesca De Gasperi. Arhitekta Cervi in Nordio sta se držala načel, ki jih je pri oblikovanju ladij poudaril že znani italijanski arhitekt in oblikovalec Gio Ponti v času med obema vojnama. Po Pontiju je morala biti notranjščina posvečena Italiji in je morala častiti državo na dva načina: prvič, figurativno, z uporabo dekoracije, slik in okrasja, da so bili tujci seznanjeni z italijanskimi legendami, znano italijansko arhitekturo, znamenitimi zgodovinskimi vrtovi; in drugič, z razmišljanjem o ladjah ne le kot o sredstvih za prevoz od ene točke do druge, temveč kot o načinu, kako Italijo narediti znano. Ladja je bila več kot sredstvo za prevoz, morala je biti del Italije, kamor koli je šla, in morala je predstavljati najnaprednejše in prestižne vidike italijanskega sloga, kulture in umetnosti.

Tako Mušičeva vezenina o Marku Polu ponazarja vsa Pontijeva načela o prepoznavnosti italijanskih tem, je izjema v njegovem opusu tako glede tehnike kakor monumentalnosti in ne govori samo o sprejetosti njegovega likovnega dela v petdesetih letih 20. stoletja, ampak hkrati odraža tudi razmislek o italijanski tehnologiji in kulturi, ki so ju celo državni predstavniki prepoznavali kot najmočnejši predstavitveni potencial države v mednarodnem prostoru.







# ART FOR LEISURE ARCHITECTURE: ARTWORKS COMMISSIONED FOR HOTELS IN ISTRIA AND THE KVARNER GULF IN THE 1960S

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The rise of mass tourism in Istria and the Kvarner Gulf took place decades before the Second World War, but the golden age of Croatian and Yugoslav tourism occurred in the postwar years, with the state regulation of workers' leisure time. In postwar Istria and the Kvarner Gulf, tourism was one of the most important economic activities, which led to the construction of numerous workers' resorts during the 1950s (the period of social tourism), as well as resort towns, complexes, camps, and hotels during the 1960s and 1970s (with the rise of commercial tourism). The development of tourism infrastructure in postwar Yugoslavia depended on several key factors. After initially adopting the Soviet political and economic model, Yugoslavia distanced itself following the 1948 break with the USSR, which gradually led to increased Western influence, financial aid, and a degree of ideological liberalisation. During the early 1950s, state decentralisation and workers' (later social) self-management were introduced, and market liberalisation and the gradual acceptance of consumer culture created a specific framework for tourism that combined Eastern and Western models. Yugoslavia's ambivalent position in the Cold War, together with the establishment of new political and economic ties through the founding of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961, shaped the country's often-cited unique "third way". Consequently, newly built tourism facilities were expected to reflect the modern achievements of the young state and its socio-economic progress. Tourism, and therefore tourism architecture, thus embodied a combination of economic, cultural, and ideological aspirations.

In parallel with the socio-political and economic development of the country during the 1950s and 1960s, the synthesis of all the arts (architecture, painting, sculpture, and applied arts/design) was advocated at all levels of governance, as well as in professional art associations, especially for newly constructed socially owned buildings. Hotels and other tourist facilities were also affected by these initiatives, which led to close collaboration between architects and artists in an effort to create a "total work of art." Considerable investments also shaped the development of leisure architecture in Istria and the Kvarner Gulf, where architects and artists

similarly applied a synthesis approach. Based on archival, periodical, and field research, this article presents the socio-historical circumstances of tourism and tourist architecture and art in the 1960s in Istria and the Kvarner Gulf. Through several hotel case studies, it asks how, by whom, and through which modalities artworks were commissioned or acquired for hotel interiors, as well as which types of works were selected and why.<sup>1</sup> The article also explores the relationship between architecture and art, and the role of investors and the state in shaping the narratives surrounding these artworks, all set within the broader context of the internationalisation of Yugoslav tourism.

### **A brief history of tourism in Croatia, Istria, and the Kvarner Gulf**

The process of democratising and popularising travel, which began before the Second World War, underwent significant growth during the 1950s and 1960s in both the general European and Yugoslav contexts (the leisure boom), with tourism becoming a clear symbol of a more liberal consumer culture.<sup>2</sup> In postwar Europe, including Yugoslavia, tourism emerged as one of the most important economic and social phenomena. As such, the development of tourism architecture, infrastructure, and interior art and design was closely tied to the country's economic, cultural, and foreign policy agendas.

The development of tourism in Yugoslavia, including Croatia, unfolded in three distinct phases. In the first phase (1947–1951), under the influence of the Five-Year Plan and the Soviet economic model, state priorities were focused on the development of heavy industry, whereas tourism, as a tertiary sector, was largely marginalised.<sup>3</sup> The second phase began following the 1948 break with the USSR, the easing of ideological pressure, and the introduction of workers' self-management in 1950. This period saw the emergence of social tourism, driven by the legal recognition of the right to paid annual leave as early as 1946, along with the construction of state-run workers' resorts and private holiday homes along the Adriatic coast, supported by subsidised accommodation and travel allowances (*regres*).<sup>4</sup> The third phase, starting in the mid-1960s, marked a shift from social to commercial and mass tourism, propelled by a series of social, political, and economic reforms. These included the construction and regulation of the Adriatic Highway, the 1963 "decision to abolish visa requirements for all countries with which Yugoslavia maintained diplomatic relations,"<sup>5</sup> the adoption of state strategies such as the Seven-Year Tourism Development Plan (1964), and the establishment of numerous hospitality schools, training courses, lectures, and

professional journals dedicated to tourism and hospitality, which supported the growth of both private facilities and “commercial tourism in socially owned enterprises.”<sup>6</sup> In the golden decade of Croatian tourism (1965–1975), which coincided with the third phase of Yugoslavia’s economic development, tourism and hospitality became leading sectors, reflecting the country’s domestic and foreign policy efforts to adopt a “Western model” of consumer and commercial culture as a marker of socio-economic progress.<sup>7</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s, tourism became a key instrument of modernisation, a source of foreign capital, and an expression of the ideological and economic aspirations of the Yugoslav authorities – integrating elements of Western consumer culture into the socialist context of Yugoslavia.

The contradictions inherent in the convergence of the socialist economic model and consumerism reflect the broader ideological framework and Cold War dynamics of the period. Studies show that tourism during the 1950s and 1960s acted as an instrument of cultural diplomacy aimed at foreign, predominantly Western, visitors.<sup>8</sup> From the end of the Second World War, Yugoslavia, despite adopting the Soviet model of governance, remained open to international tourism.<sup>9</sup> Following the Informbiro Resolution, when the state sought to justify its legitimacy both to domestic audiences and to Western governments, tourism was largely directed toward domestic, social forms, but the 1950s saw a steady increase in foreign visitors.<sup>10</sup> The authorities’ interest in international tourism mirrored Yugoslavia’s foreign policy: the conflict with Moscow, despite security and espionage concerns, led to a focus on tourists from the West (particularly Western Europe, the United States, and Scandinavia), and the mid-1950s normalization of relations with Soviet bloc countries corresponded with an increase in visitors from that region.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the government viewed the policy of non-alignment not only as a factor in the development of international tourism but also as an ideological representation of its convictions (brotherhood, unity, and peace).<sup>12</sup> New agreements with foreign travel agencies across the West, the opening of borders in the 1960s, and the launch of a plan for the development of tourism along the Adriatic coast (the upper and lower Adriatic), initiated in 1967 in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme and the Yugoslav government, demonstrate the interweaving of Yugoslav and Western political and economic interests.<sup>13</sup> In this context, tourist architecture served the authorities as a stage for everyday diplomatic interactions and as a prerequisite for the country’s economic prosperity.





Figure 1. Yugoslavia, *Carta Turistica*, tourist map depicting Istria and Kvarner, 1969. Source: Hrvatski muzej turizma, inv. no. HMT-602.

The aforementioned economic and socio-political circumstances also had an impact on Istria and the Kvarner Gulf [Figure 1], which experienced a high level of tourism development in the postwar period, building on a long-standing tourism tradition shaped by favourable geographical, climatic, and transportation conditions. Its complex nineteenth- and twentieth-century history, transportation infrastructure, and proximity to Central European countries facilitated the early development of tourism.<sup>14</sup> Although tourism progress resumed after the Second World War, it was temporarily interrupted until 1954 due to the exodus and resettlement of the Italian population, postwar reconstruction, the nationalization of hospitality facilities, and the division of the Free Territory of Trieste into Zones A and B.<sup>15</sup> Following market liberalisation in the 1950s and 1960s, decentralised tourism policy shifted toward foreign markets, and international overnight stays soon surpassed domestic ones.<sup>16</sup> By 1981, the Kvar-

ner Gulf, with seventy-eight tourist destinations, and Istria, with forty-two, were among the most developed tourist regions in Yugoslavia.<sup>17</sup>

Among the many towns and settlements, Pula and Rijeka emerge as the largest and most significant economic, administrative, and social centres. However, for the purposes of this research, greater relevance is attributed to towns such as Opatija, which retained its status as an established tourist centre in the postwar period due to its long-standing tradition of health and hospitality tourism, as well as Poreč, Rovinj, and Umag with their century-long tradition.<sup>18</sup> The postwar tourism boom in these towns was marked by construction of 144 holiday resorts in Istria by 1975.<sup>19</sup> During the “golden age” of tourism, numerous accommodation and ancillary facilities were built, including A-, B-, and C-category hotels, campsites, holiday resorts, and recreational and entertainment centres. The period also witnessed the establishment and expansion of major hotel and tourism companies, such as Kvarner, Istraturist, Jadran, Jadranturist, Mošćenička Draga, Plava Laguna, Rabac, Riviera, Slavija, and Progres-

Valalta, which invested in hotel complexes. As socially owned enterprises with both an economic and ideological role, they were included in state initiatives for art in public spaces. Although the Istrian peninsula is divided among three countries today, and the Kvarner Gulf region administratively includes Gorski Kotar, due to the abundance of examples, this research focuses on the Croatian part of Istria. A selection of cases has been analysed, highlighting various modes of furnishing, acquisition, and commissioning, as well as the diverse use of media and artistic expression in tourist architecture.<sup>20</sup>

### **Models of acquisition and commissioning, and state initiatives in interior design and furnishing**

Building on interwar practices, as in both Eastern and Western bloc countries, the interior design of buildings reflected two fundamental principles: one rooted in the artistic-theoretical vision of a “synthesis of the arts,” and the other linked to state initiatives allocating a percentage of investment budgets to artworks. In the Yugoslav and international context, the idea of synthesising all arts in the postwar period implied the unification of painting, sculpture, design, and architecture into a single, total work of art.<sup>21</sup> The idea of synthesis is grounded in the theoretical concepts and practices of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century artists,<sup>22</sup> and it underpins the modernist notion of a synthesis of the arts. Within the framework of postwar neoconstructivism and neoconcretism, Le Corbusier conceived this synthesis as the unification of painting and sculpture under architecture.<sup>23</sup> Alongside Le Corbusier, other architects and theorists associated with CIAM promoted the idea of synthesis, as well as artistic groups such as Espace, Forma Uno, and MAC.<sup>24</sup>

It was precisely these artists, theorists, and architects that inspired the Zagreb-based painters, sculptors, and architects in the group EXAT 51 (Experimental Atelier 51), who approached abstract art and the synthesis of the arts not only as a project of total spatial aestheticisation but also as a means of social transformation.<sup>25</sup> Members of EXAT 51 played a key role in establishing the Studio for Industrial Design (*Studio za industrijsko oblikovanje*, SIO), which promoted the creation of a modern standard through well-designed industrial objects and environments.<sup>26</sup> Several members of EXAT and SIO, such as Ivan Picelj, Vjenceslav Richter, and Aleksandar Srnec, were also active in the international New Tendencies movement, engaging with neoconstructivist, neoconcretist, kinetic, optical, and computer art.<sup>27</sup> In light of the theoretical principles of these artists and groups, many advocated the integration of architecture and the

visual arts. However, this was by no means exclusive to them; many other artists working in both figurative and abstract art similarly engaged in these practices because the state, from its inception, actively promoted interior design in public buildings (including hotels) for ideological, economic, and social purposes.<sup>28</sup>

The practice of commissioning artworks and furnishing public spaces in Croatia and Yugoslavia changed and intensified after the Second World War. With the establishment and political structuring of Yugoslavia, the state became the primary commissioner of artworks intended for public spaces and institutions.<sup>29</sup> Although individuals and certain communities could, in principle, purchase or commission artworks, acquisitions and commissions were predominantly carried out through government bodies at the federal and republic levels,<sup>30</sup> via dedicated committees or juries responsible for evaluating and approving the acquisition or commission.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, cultural policy and legal and regulatory frameworks, in addition to various forms of cultural institutionalisation (such as departments for agitation and propaganda, cultural authorities at the federal and republic levels, independent cultural institutions, professional associations of visual artists, and other associations and cooperatives) played a crucial role in the acquisition and commissioning of artworks. For the purposes of this article, this process can be broadly categorised into two types: acquisitions and commissions of artworks.

Acquisitions were usually organised and carried out by acquisition committees at the federal, republic, and local levels of government, but artworks could also be purchased through cultural development fund committees, via direct acquisition from the artist, and, less frequently, through private acquisition.<sup>32</sup> Acquisitions were generally made for artworks not specifically created for a particular building. However, as the examples in this article show, in some cases there is a clear connection between the subject matter of the artwork and the specific space. On the other hand, artworks commissioned for newly built or renovated buildings (such as schools, hospitals, administrative buildings, and hotels) were usually procured through competitions (tenders, either open or closed) and evaluated by tender committees.<sup>33</sup> Because commission tenders were usually organised for artworks intended for specific spaces, several initiatives and by-laws were introduced in Croatia and Yugoslavia concerning the allocation of a percentage of investment construction project budgets for artwork.<sup>34</sup>

Although no official law mandating the allocation of a percentage of investment construction budgets for artworks was enacted in Yugoslavia, during the 1950s and 1960s several drafts of regulations, laws, and

recommendations were developed as guidelines for furnishing public buildings with artworks.<sup>35</sup> These initiatives were led by ministries, secretariats, and associations such as the Association of Fine Artists of Yugoslavia (SLUJ) and the Association of Fine Artists of Croatia (ULUH), aiming to regulate the commissioning of artworks and the allocation of a fixed percentage of funds for visual art within the investment construction projects.<sup>36</sup> The efforts of these associations, along with legal and regulatory acts, addressed these topics in a complex and detailed manner. The following key points can be highlighted: these documents primarily aimed to define the status of public buildings (administrative buildings, institutions, and enterprises), the status of public artworks (oil paintings, murals, frescoes, mosaics, tapestries, reliefs, sculptures, and stained glass), the work of federal and republic committees, the role of juries and the organisation of competitions, and the percentage of construction investment to be allocated for artworks – most commonly set at 1%. Hotels were also considered public (or social) institutions, and a percentage to be set aside for artworks – generally around 1% – was likewise proposed for them, particularly in the case of tourist facilities, lower-category hotels, holiday resorts, bathing establishments, mountain lodges, tourist offices, and similar establishments.<sup>37</sup> However, the percentage varied and could range from 3% to 5% in the case of top-tier hotels, or the A category.<sup>38</sup> This effectively placed hotels at the same level as monumental buildings, such as national assembly halls. The goals of such initiatives varied, but the most common justification for furnishing public institutions with artworks included the humanisation of living and work spaces, presentation of the state, the development of contemporary art, and the realisation of the synthesis of all the arts (painting, sculpture, design, and architecture), with the aim of stimulating the economy or securing the livelihood and social status of artists.<sup>39</sup> These very goals guided artists, architects, art historians, and commissioners in the construction and furnishing of numerous new hotels across Croatia – including Istria and the Kvarner Gulf – during the golden age of Croatian tourism development.

### **Artworks in hotel interiors in Istria and the Kvarner Gulf**

The following pages present a select number of examples from the area to illustrate the various modalities of acquisition and commissioning, the various types of artworks (paintings, sculptures, reliefs, prints, mosaics, and stained glass), and the roles of architects, artists, large hotel companies, and the state in shaping modern hotels on the Adriatic coast, particularly in Istria and the Kvarner Gulf. The examples are or-



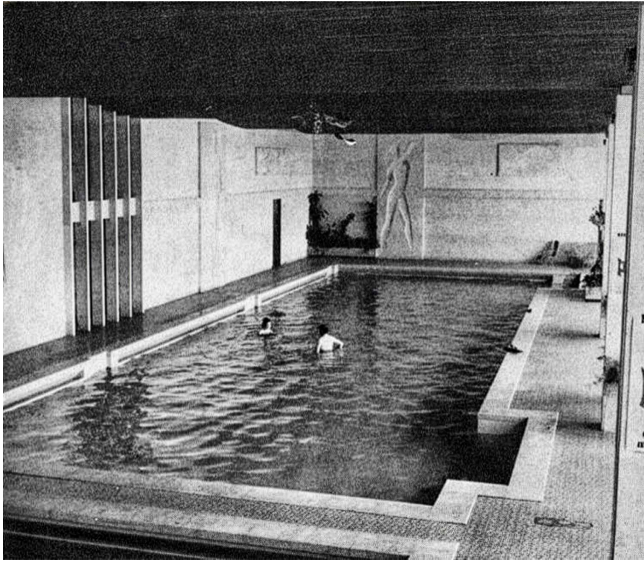


Figure 2.  
Aleksandar Rukavina,  
reliefs by the pool, Hotel  
Adriatic, Umag, 1967.  
Source: "Kamen Pazin,"  
*Arhitektura*,  
nos. 107–108 (1970).

Savudrija, and Umag, invested in the construction of the eleven-storey Hotel Adriatic, based on a design by the Umag-based architect Ilijo Zlatar and carried out by Industrogradnja.<sup>40</sup> As a first-class A-category hotel, it featured modern common areas such as a nightclub, casino, aperitif bar, and seawater swimming pool. Several artists were commissioned for the interior and exterior decoration. One of them was the Umag sculptor Aleksandar Rukavina (pseudonym Žohar), who created multiple works for the hotel.<sup>41</sup> During the 1960s, Rukavina worked on a series of relief compositions for the interiors of public institutions in Istria, but his first experience integrating sculpture into architecture took place precisely at the Hotel Adriatic.<sup>42</sup> In 1967, he was tasked with decorating the walls of the indoor pool, where he created white stone reliefs featuring sea and human themes [Figure 2].<sup>43</sup> The reliefs feature stylised figures of a nude woman and man, a fish, and a seahorse, rendered in a refined and slightly geometric style, with at times varying degrees of mimesis. Rukavina adapted the work to the space in both format and composition, placing the elements on vertically oriented panels that echoed the wall perforations surrounding the indoor pool. Following this commission, in 1970, Istraturist commissioned Rukavina to decorate the hotel bar, for which he created figurative reliefs organised into two thematic cycles: *Duga* (The Rainbow), based on a story by Dinko Šimunović, and a cycle with ethnographic elements.<sup>44</sup> In his reliefs, Rukavina employed stylised figuration to convey a narrative encompassing the hardships of everyday life, local traditions, and the

ganised topographically, starting from northern to southern Istria and then from the western to eastern Kvarner Gulf. The following case studies highlight instances in which modern artistic experimentation, the humanisation of leisure architecture, state presentation to foreign tourists, and support for artists are evident.

Starting from northern Istria, one of the most notable examples is the artistic furnishing of the Hotel Adriatic, located at the tip of the Punta resort in Umag. In 1964 the newly established Istraturist hotel and tourism company, responsible for the coastal area of Novigrad,

region's history. In addition to these reliefs, the aperitif bar was decorated with paintings by Šestić and Batušić, and the hotel restaurant featured a figurative mosaic by the painter and sculptor Maria Benedetti Keržić, depicting the goddess Fortuna and a ship at sea.<sup>45</sup> Outside the hotel, near the road entrance, a sculpture by Janez Pirnat Nejašmić was installed in 1966 as part of an initiative by Aleksandar Rukavina and the Municipality of Buje: *Grožnjan, grad umjetnika* (Grožnjan, the Town of Artists).<sup>46</sup> These works reveal that the investors were public enterprises as well as local authorities, and that the aim of both the commissioners and the artists was to present the region's history, customs, and identity through art, using a clear visual language, narration, integration of interior and exterior through form and content, and the installation of artworks in shared areas.

Many examples in Poreč testify to the importance of the town as a tourist destination in postwar Croatia. After the construction of social tourism infrastructure during the 1950s, Poreč entered a phase of mass tourism primarily aimed at foreign visitors. This period was characterised by the establishment of two major hotel companies – Riviera (1953) and Plava Laguna (1957) – which oversaw the construction of numerous accommodation facilities.<sup>47</sup> One of Riviera's most notable projects is the Hotel Neptun (1967–1968) in Poreč, designed by the architect Julije De Luca as an example of successful architectural interpolation.<sup>48</sup> De Luca, who already had experience in interior design, opted to include works by the renowned Croatian sculptor Dušan Džamonja in the hotel's main restaurant. For the restaurant wall, the sculptor created an abstract wooden relief [Figure 3] in which he multiplied segments of circular forms composed of small wooden beams, producing a rhythmic and vibrating structure that harmonised with the white grid pattern of De Luca's ceiling design.<sup>49</sup> One of these reliefs is still preserved today in the restaurant interior



relief [Figure 3] in which he multiplied segments of circular forms composed of small wooden beams, producing a rhythmic and vibrating structure that harmonised with the white grid pattern of De Luca's ceiling design.<sup>49</sup> One of these reliefs is still preserved today in the restaurant interior

*Figure 3. Dušan Džamonja, relief in Hotel Neptun, Poreč, 1968. Source: "Hotel Neptun u Poreču," Čovjek i prostor, no. 194 (1969).*

of the hotel, now known as Valamar Riviera, along with a metal relief in which the artist repeated the grid pattern and incorporated hemispherical forms. In addition to Džamonja, another prominent artist and member of the postwar group EXAT 51 contributed to shaping the hotel's identity. This was Aleksandar Srnec, who was responsible for the visual identity of the hotel.<sup>50</sup> Both the Riviera hotel company and the architect De Luca chose not only to engage those artists who had produced numerous public artworks across Croatia during the 1950s and 1960s, but also leading figures of abstract art whose works would resonate with the modern tastes of foreign – largely Western – tourists.

Alongside Riviera, Plava Laguna was the most important hotel company in Poreč and its surroundings, and it actively promoted the synthesis of all the arts in its hotel construction projects. Starting in 1965, Plava Laguna invested in the construction of several hotels and tourist entertainment centres in the Zelena Laguna area (Parentium Hotel, 1966; Lotos hotels: Zorna, Plavi, Gran Vista, and Istra, 1967; International Club, 1967).<sup>51</sup> These developments emerged during what was described as “the most successful investment cycle in the entire history of Plava Laguna’s operations.”<sup>52</sup>

The Parentium Hotel, designed by Branko Žnidarec and built between 1966 and 1967, was also equipped with numerous artworks, many of which are still preserved in its newly renovated interior. Edo Murtić created four oil paintings that are located at the reception desk and in the dining area of the Parentium Hotel.<sup>53</sup> In 1969, he also created an abstract enamel composition [Figure 4] for the dining room. At the centre of the composition, on a blue background, energetic lines in black, blue, red, yellow, green, and orange converge – colours whose intensity enlivens the space. Dušan Džamonja contributed a sculpture for the hotel lobby, Tomo Gerić created paintings, Goranka Vrus Murtić made tapestries, and the furniture was designed by Mirjana Šimanović.<sup>54</sup> In addition to these interior works, sculptures were also installed outdoors. Josip Diminić, the artist behind numerous monuments found throughout Istria, created the sculpture *Istarski vol – spomenik poljima Istre* (Istrian Ox – A Monument to the Fields of Istria; 1967–1977, Figure 5), located in front of the Parentium Hotel.<sup>55</sup> The piece represents the strength and resilience of the robust body of the Istrian native cattle breed known as the boscarin. Created without a pedestal, it appears to emerge and grow directly out of the red Istrian soil. However, considering its form, dedication, and title, the sculpture seems to harmonise more naturally with the landscape, earth, and pine forest than with the modern architectural complex of the tourist





Figure 4. Edo Murtić, enamel composition, Hotel Parentium, Poreč, 1969. Source: Hotel Parentium: Plava laguna, Poreč, Jugoslavija, tourist brochure.

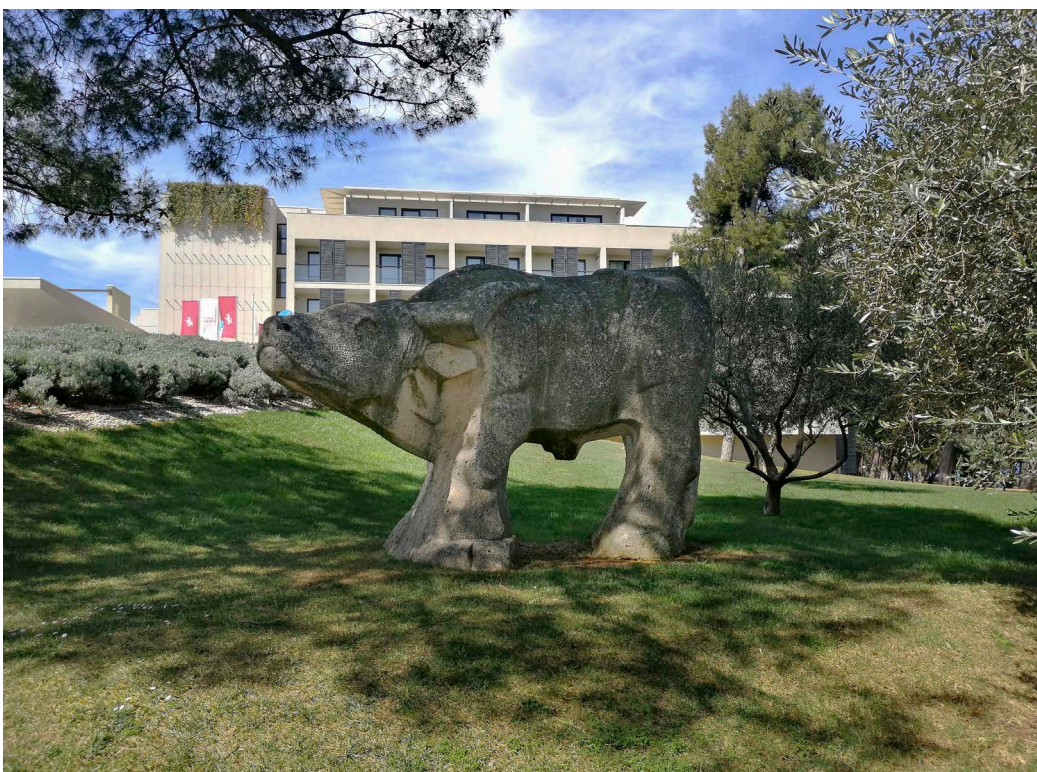


Figure 5. Josip Diminić, Istarski vol – spomenik poljima Istre (Istrian Ox – A Monument to the Fields of Istria), Hotel Parentium, Poreč, 1967–1977. Photo: Patricia Počanić, 2024.





*Figure 6. Edo Murtić,  
Obelisci (Obelisks), Hotel  
Parentium, Poreč, 1967.  
Photo: Patricia Počanić,  
2024.*

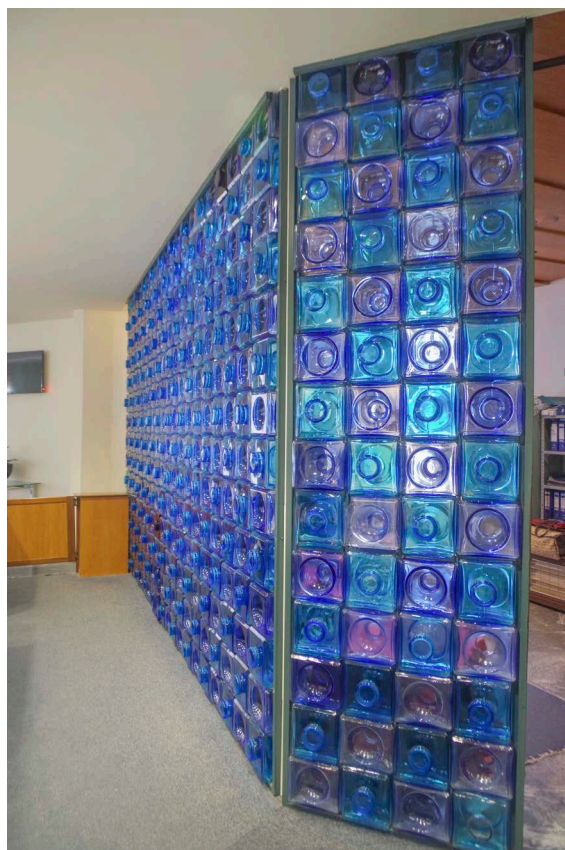
resort. In addition to these works, in 1967 Plava Laguna commissioned Murtić to create a unique series of sculptural mosaics [Figure 6] in a valley near the Parentium Hotel, nestled among pine forests and archaeological sites.<sup>56</sup> Murtić created 140 square metres of mosaic surfaces mounted on twelve faces of reinforced concrete obelisks, each fourteen metres tall, forming a unified sculptural group. He was assisted in creating this complex project by workers from the Zagreb-based Novogradnja construction company.<sup>57</sup> Murtić had long been envisioning and sketching out such a concept,<sup>58</sup> finally bringing it to realisation at Zelena Laguna. He translated the dynamism of his brushstrokes and colour palette – white, grey, vivid red, blue, and orange – from painting into sculpture, a process that took six months.<sup>59</sup> By bringing his work into open space, Murtić created a dynamic, site-specific artwork that shifts appearances with each change of perspective. The three vertical structures blend harmoniously into the landscape of the surrounding pine forest while also standing out as visual markers within the newly built tourist

resort near Poreč. The choice of mosaic as a medium should certainly be understood within the context of Murtić's broader oeuvre and his other interior works, but it can also be interpreted in relation to the history of the city. Poreč has a long-standing tradition of mosaic-making, with the most renowned examples found in the Euphrasian Basilica. This connection is more than a distant analogy, as evidenced by another 1967 commission from Plava Laguna. The company commissioned the sculptor Nenad Krivčić to recreate some of the most significant mosaics of the Poreč region on the walls of the "Istrian Atrium" of the Hotel Plava Laguna, based on a selection by Antun Šonje, the director of the Poreč Regional Museum.<sup>60</sup> In these cases, similar modes of commissioning artworks were employed: the commissioner was primarily the company, sometimes in coordination with municipal authorities and professionals. Engaged artists ranged from

locally trained, academy-educated practitioners to prominent figures such as Edo Murtić, who produced the largest number of abstract works for public institution interiors across Croatia and, later, in some Soviet Bloc countries. In addition, the involvement of another SIO member, Mirjana Šimanović, indicate the establishment of a modern standard in hotels. The partial preservation of these artworks (particularly site-specific pieces) and the fact that recent renovations have not maintained the integrity of the original concepts indicate limited appreciation of their significance.

The Rovinj area also features numerous examples of artistic furnishings in hotel and resort interiors, with the Jadran hotel company (founded in 1953)<sup>61</sup> having played a significant role in the acquisition and commissioning of artworks for hotel interiors in the region. One notable example was Jadran's investment in the interior of the Hotel Eden in Rovinj. In 1969, the architect Ivo Bartolić, who also designed the newly built Hotel Istra and its interior on nearby Red Island (*Crveni otok*), invited the architect Miroslav Begović to collaborate on the design of the Hotel Eden in Rovinj.<sup>62</sup> Completed in 1971, the hotel layout was a composition of broken-up volumes harmoniously integrated into the surrounding landscape.

*Figure 7. Raul Goldoni, glass wall, Hotel Eden, Rovinj, ca. 1970. Photo: Patricia Počanić, 2019. Today, the wall is concealed behind a reception-area partition.*



In the early 1970s, the renowned artists Edo Murtić and Raul Goldoni – who had previously collaborated on numerous public interior projects during the 1950s and 1960s – integrated their works directly into the architecture of the hotel.<sup>63</sup> Acting as a kind of artistic coordinator, Goldoni developed the interior design concept for the hotel's communal spaces. As part of this design, he created a decorative glass wall [Figure 7], similar in colour and form to his work in the House of Socio-Political Organisations (*Zgrada društveno-političkih organizacija*) in Zagreb. The wall positioned behind the central reception desk featured convex and concave glass cubes in varying shades of blue, forming a transparent surface that not only let light into the adjacent office space but also transformed the interior throughout the day as the light refracted through the prisms. Murtić's colourful tapestry [Figure 8], today displayed in the ground-floor breakfast room, is composed of abstract shapes and vibrant zigzag lines that





Figure 8. Edo Murtić, tapestry, Hotel Eden, Rovinj, 1970. Photo: Patricia Počanić, 2026.

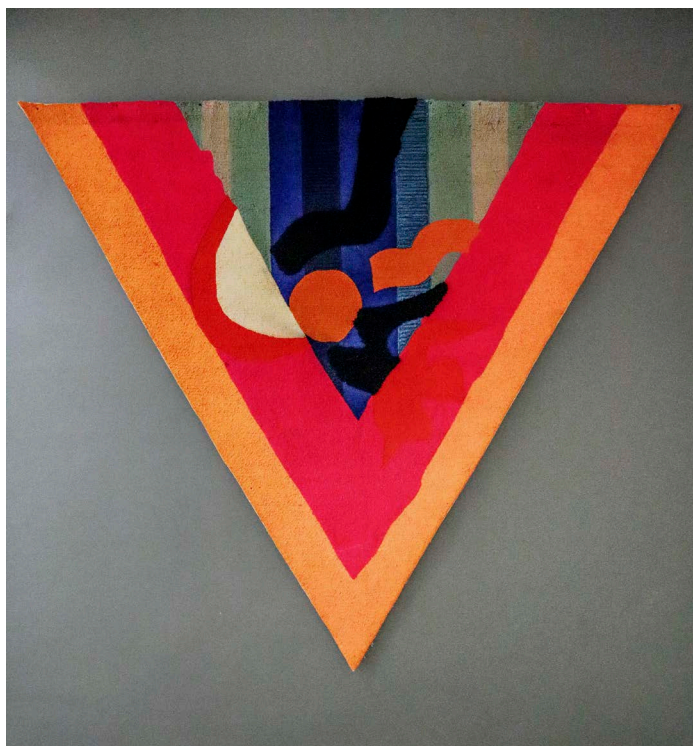


Figure 9. Tapestry attributed to Edo Murtić, Hotel Eden, Rovinj. Photo: Patricia Počanić, 2026.



Figure 10. Zlatko Prica,  
mosaic on the wall of  
the indoor swimming  
pool, Hotel Eden, Rovinj,  
1971. Photo: Patricia  
Počanić, 2026.



Figure 11.  
Dušan Džamonja,  
sculpture in front  
of Hotel Eden, Rovinj.  
Photo: Patricia Počanić,  
2026.



vertically slice across the multicoloured surface. Together with another smaller tapestry [Figure 9], now located near the wellness area, it represented the artist's new explorations in the early 1970s. Alongside these works, the wall of the indoor swimming pool still features a mosaic [Figure 10] by Zlatko Prica, who also created a monumental mosaic for the House of Socio-Political Organisations. Dušan Džamonja is represented by an abstract metal sculpture [Figure 11] placed in front of the hotel.



The works in the Hotel Eden testify to a continuity of abstract experimentation in interior design, as well as the ongoing collaboration between Goldoni, Murtić, Prica and Džamonja across numerous projects. Unfortunately, the latest renovation, with a new reception area, blocks the view of Goldoni's work, undermining the original interior concept and its play of light.

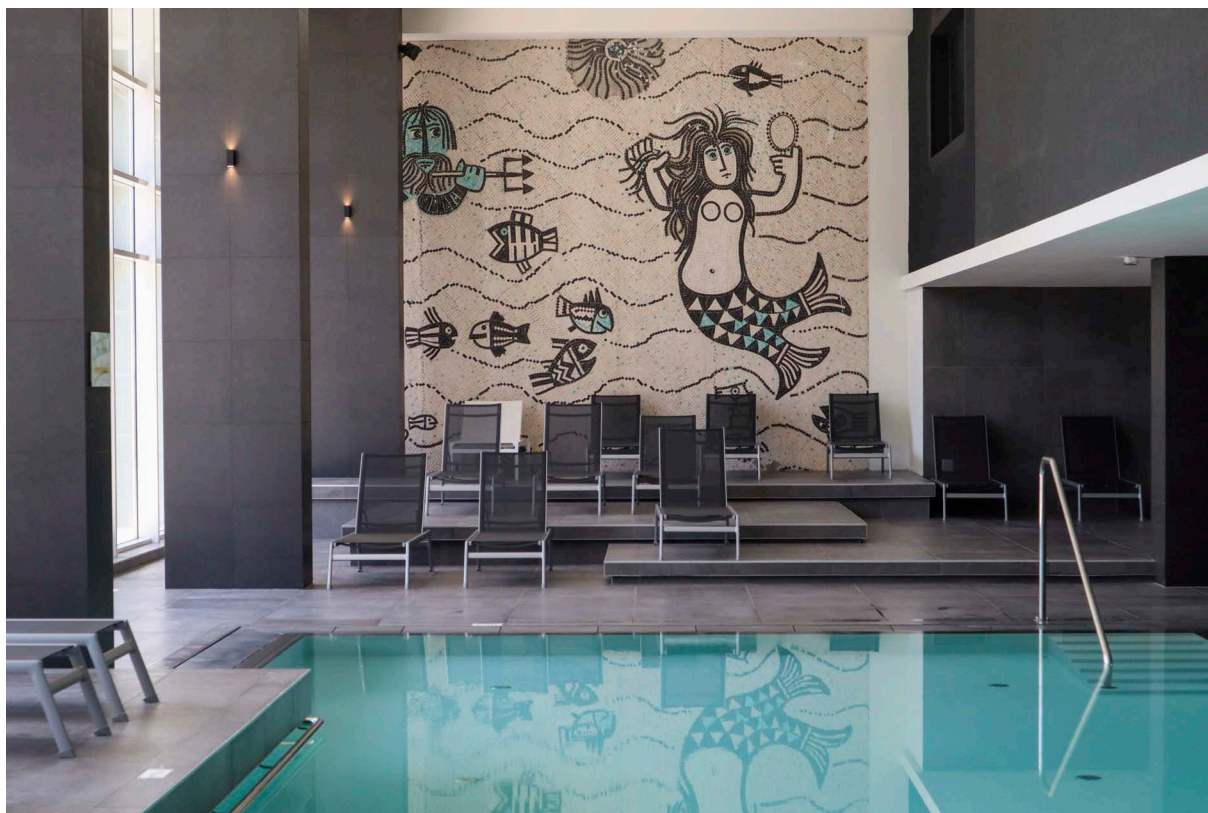
The Jadran hotel company was also responsible for an initiative that further sheds light on the process of purchasing and commissioning art for hotel interiors. During the 1960s, Jadran established collaboration with artists from the Rovinj art colony, and in 1969 it acquired 670 artworks (mostly oil paintings and watercolours) to furnish the common areas and guest rooms of its hotels.<sup>64</sup> This example illustrates the synthesis of the arts as a means of supporting artists' welfare. Many artworks in Yugoslavia were purchased to secure the social and material position of artists, who relied on state acquisitions to provide means for living and producing their work. Although this model was often criticised by professionals, who argued that it could compromise the quality of artistic output,<sup>65</sup> such initiatives were generally viewed positively because they were part of a supervised state-managed programme. According to contemporary newspapers, this purchase was "the largest one-time acquisition of artworks ever made by a Yugoslav company."<sup>66</sup> The acquired works were by artists such as Vilko Šeferov, Ljubo Škrljug, Stojan Aralica, Ljubo Ivančić, Vasilije Jordan, Zdenka Balić, Zora Matić, and Bruno Mascarelli.<sup>67</sup> The artists were highly satisfied with the collaboration because it provided them with steady work and financial security, and the company acquired the artworks at very favourable prices.<sup>68</sup> The initiative was praised by Pero Djetelić, a representative of the Republic Secretariat for Education and Culture, who regarded this as a model of good practice. He emphasised the secretariat's view that other companies should invest in artwork because it offers "the most direct connection to our culture and art."<sup>69</sup> The artists involved in this acquisition constitute the cultural milieu of Rovinj and were long-term participants in the colony, carrying out several public initiatives in the 1960s to secure their livelihoods.<sup>70</sup> Although such acquisitions could compromise artistic quality and were often motivated by extrinsic concerns (i.e., economic security), they remain significant, especially given that many uncontrolled direct purchases from artists occurred simultaneously. Unfortunately, it is not known which works were acquired or whether they have been preserved.

In Istria and the Kvarner Gulf, several other companies also played a significant role, such as Rabac, Mošćenička Draga, Kvarner, and Jadran. For

some of them – such as the Rabac hotel and hospitality company – the work of architects such as Zdravko Bregovac played a key role. Bregovac created numerous examples of tourist architecture that, at the time, provoked strong reactions from professional circles. His work within the firm Opatija-projekt transformed and innovated tourist architecture throughout Croatia. As a member of EXAT 51, he upheld the ideal of a synthesis of all the arts. In many hotels built during the 1960s, he personally designed the interiors (including the furniture) and actively encouraged and persuaded investors to include artworks in hotel interiors.<sup>71</sup> In the interiors of these hotels, he engaged numerous artists, including members of the SIO such as Aleksandar Srnec, Boris Dogan, and Inge Kostinčer-Bregovac.<sup>72</sup>

Bregovac's contribution to Opatija's tourist architecture tradition was the Hotel Ambassador, built between 1964 and 1966, during the peak of Yugoslav commercial tourism.<sup>73</sup> Designed by the architectural office Opatija-projekt, with the Kvarner hotel company from Opatija as the investor, and construction carried out by the Jadran construction company from Rijeka, the hotel is a prominent example of modern architecture.<sup>74</sup> Its typology, design, and execution were intended to meet contemporary tourism standards in both form and function. Classified as an A-category hotel, it was conceived as a luxurious building for both domestic and foreign guests. Its lavish character was further enhanced by a rich selection of artworks integrated into the architectural design of the interior.

Among the artists involved in designing the interior of the Hotel Ambassador were Zlatko Bourek, Boris Dogan, Dušan Džamonja, Ivo Kalina, Diana Kosec, Inge Kostinčer-Bregovac, Zvonimir Lončarić, Edo Murtić, Šime Perić, Ivan Picelj, Aleksandar Srnec, and Milan Vulpe. These were established painters, sculptors, and designers, most of whom had previous experience furnishing public buildings during the 1950s and, more specifically, tourist architecture during the 1960s. With the investor's approval, Bregovac selected the artistic collaborators, and the art historian and critic Boris Vižintin served as the artistic advisor in the selection of works for the hotel's interior design.<sup>75</sup> The artworks created for the hotel interior served various functions and largely reflected architectural relationships and the intended use of specific spaces. Some of the works, through their freeform style and relaxed interpretation of content, directly echoed the function of the areas they were designed for. For instance, Zlatko Bourek created six panels of black-and-white drawings with a humorous undertone for the aperitif bar interior. Boris Dogan created the wall painting *Leptiri umiru sa suncem* (Butterflies Die with the Sun) for the hotel's Golden Salon – a figurative depiction of butterflies on a golden



*Figure 12.*  
*Zvonimir Lončarić,*  
*mosaic on the wall of the*  
*indoor/winter swimming*  
*pool, Hotel Ambassador,*  
*Opatija, 1966.*  
*Photo: Patricia Počanić,*  
*2022.*

background, linking the salon's prestigious character with his own artistic explorations. Dogan also produced a ceramic series of 120 tiles featuring humorous and grotesque culinary elements and themes for the so-called Red Restaurant. Zvonimir Lončarić was the creator of what is today the only artwork preserved in its original location: a mosaic [Figure 12] depicting an underwater mythological world, created on the wall of the indoor swimming pool. His distinctive sense of humour, irony, simplified elements, and formal synthesis are evident in this work as well, which thematically relates to the surrounding environment.

The hotel also features several abstract works created by notable representatives of abstract sculpture and painting, such as Dušan Džamonja and Edo Murtić, as well as members of EXAT 51, SIO, and the New Tendencies movement, including Ivan Picelj and Aleksandar Srnec. Džamonja placed a sculptural composition [Figure 13] on the wall of the bridge-salon, consisting of repeating chain links and a wooden centre. This simple, refined, and abstract solution, according to Džamonja's concept, was in direct communication with the interior because the positioning of the work (determined before its creation) allowed for a dance of light and

Figure 13.  
Dušan Džamonja, relief  
in the bridge salon, Hotel  
Ambasador, Opatija,  
1966. Source: Vanda Ekl,  
“Likovniki in notranja  
arhitektura opatijskega  
hotela Ambasador,”  
Sinteza: revija za likovno  
kulturo, nos. 5–6 (1967).

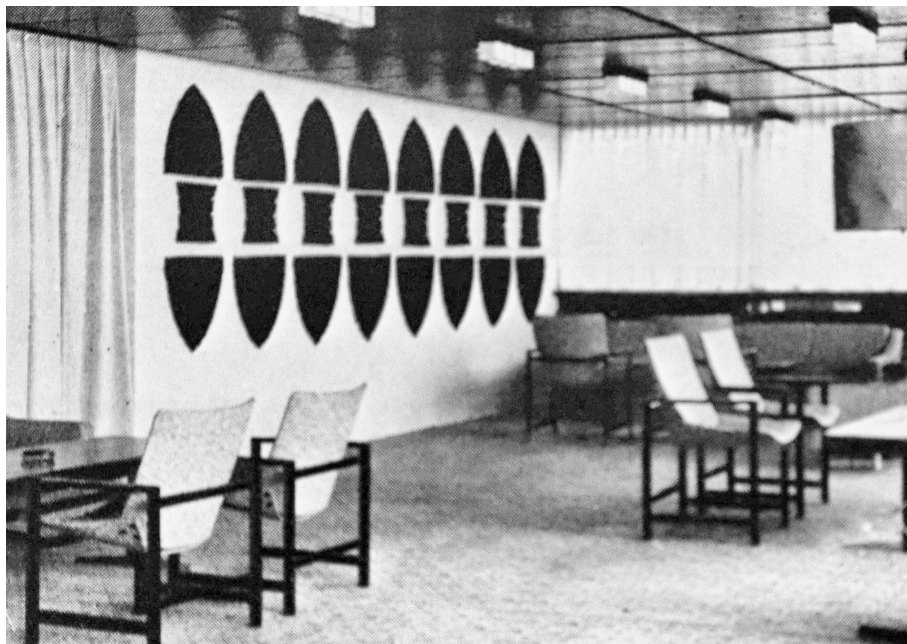


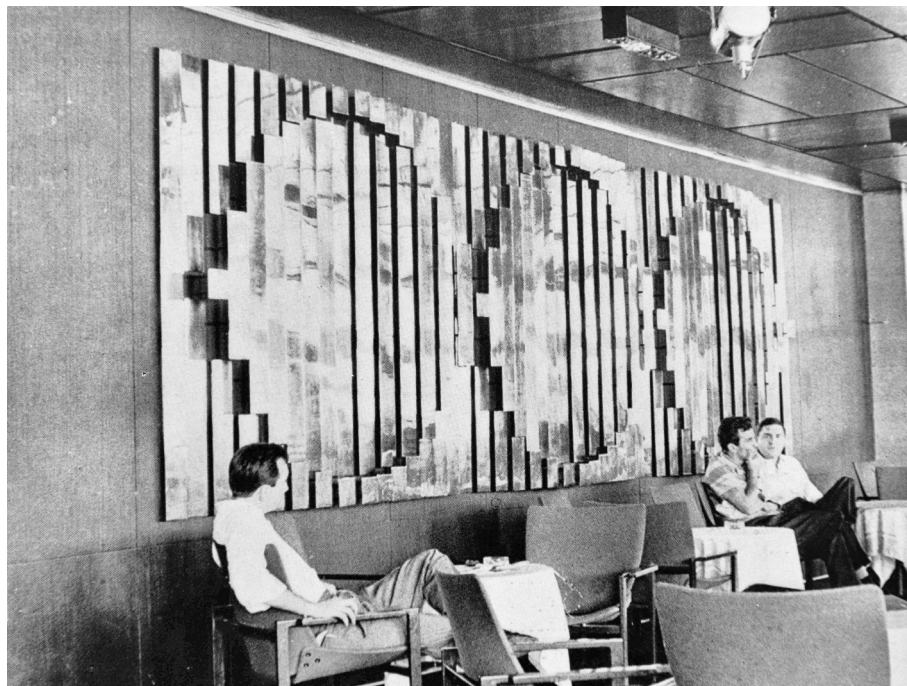
Figure 14. Ivan Picelj,  
wall painting in the  
restaurant, Hotel  
Ambasador, Opatija,  
1966. Source: Vanda Ekl,  
“Likovniki in notranja  
arhitektura opatijskega  
hotela Ambasador,”  
Sinteza: revija za likovno  
kulturo, nos. 5–6 (1967).



shadow. Picelj created a wall painting [Figure 14] for the interior of the Golden Restaurant on a laminated veneer board, where he repeated a modular unit of circles intersected by lines growing thinner from the centre to the edge, which then repeats horizontally and vertically, at right angles, giving the entire composition a sense of movement. In this way, Picelj explored programming qualities within the context of the New Tendencies movement. In the night bar adjacent to the sunroom (also known



Figure 15.  
*Aleksandar Srnec,*  
*relief in the night bar,*  
*Hotel Ambassador,*  
*Opatija, 1966. Source:*  
*Vanda Ekl, "Likovniki in*  
*notranja arhitektura*  
*opatijskega hotela*  
*Ambasador," Sinteza:*  
*revija za likovno kulturo,*  
*nos. 5–6 (April 1967).*



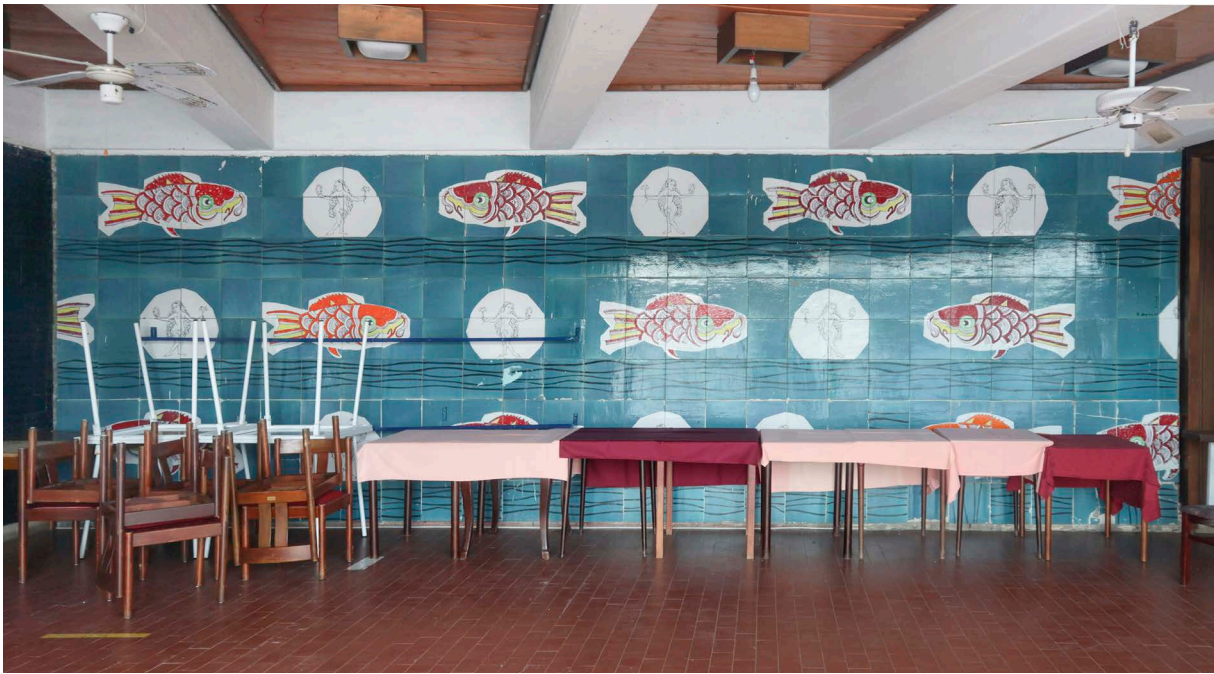
as the dancing area), Srnec covered the wall with a metal relief [Figure 15] made of yellow and grey strips of varying heights. The relief maintains Srnec's post-EXAT research, in which he uses his experience with geometric abstraction as a tool in considering the analytical dissection of forms. Depending on the penetration of light into the interior, the relief dynamically altered the space in various ways. The established painter and muralist Edo Murtić painted the wall in the so-called American Bar [Figure 16] and also created two oil paintings for the hotel's restaurant. These are examples of gestural abstraction, in which Murtić used strong brushstrokes and intense colours to complement the ambience intended for foreign visitors (in both name and function). The idea of a synthetic integration of art and architecture, as seen in these examples, was also reflected in product design. Bregovac's vision of the synthesis of all the arts was reflected in his commissioning of artists for the modern graphic design (Milan Vulpe), uniforms, and work attire (Inge Kostinčer-Bregovac and Diana Kosec). For the interior furnishings, Bregovac engaged local craftsmen and sourced electronic devices and furniture predominantly from domestic, Yugoslav factories.<sup>76</sup>

In addition, copies of renowned Yugoslav medieval frescoes were commissioned for the banquet hall and the mezzanine ceremonial hall. These were created by Šime Perić, based on frescoes from Sopoćani, Nerezi,

*Figure 16. Edo Murtić, mural in the American Bar, Hotel Ambassador, Opatija, 1966. Source: CCN-images Archive.*



Rakotule, and Beram. This use of a historical narrative within the framework of the modern synthesis of the arts can be attributed to Yugoslav cultural policy. In the late 1940s and 1950s, copies of medieval frescoes from across Yugoslavia were made for the newly opened Gallery of Frescoes in Belgrade and for Yugoslav medieval art exhibitions abroad in the postwar years.<sup>77</sup> Frescoes, along with other medieval art, played a central role in the state's cultural diplomacy, and these exhibitions were seen as a platform to affirm the historical and artistic significance of the art of the unified people's republics, as well as the ideological aspirations of the state.<sup>78</sup> Thus, the display of fresco copies from various parts of Yugoslavia reflects the effort to provide historical legitimacy to the newly formed socialist state in the eyes of foreign tourists. Examples from the Hotel Ambassador indicate that high modernism, as well as neo-avant-garde tendencies, programmatic art, and visual research of the 1960s, were not only intended for the "sacred" spaces of museums and galleries. In fact, contemporary art could be seen by domestic visitors and, even more importantly for the state, by foreign tourists. On the other hand, the walls of the hotel were seen as a platform for the affirmation and presentation of the state and its history. Modernist artistic language and fresco copies were both employed to appeal to and "educate" Western tourists, signaling Yugoslavia's modernity and historical importance.



*Figure 17. Boris Dogan, mural in the buffet, Uvala Scott, Kraljevica, 1967. Photo: Patricia Počanić, 2022.*

Artworks were also used to equip numerous hotels in the Kvarner Gulf area, in towns such as Rijeka, Crikvenica, Kraljevica, and Novi Vinodolski, and on the islands. A large number of artists were involved in furnishing the interior of the award-winning hotel complex Uvala Scott (Scott Bay), located near Kraljevica. The project was developed by the Civil Engineering Design Institute (GPZ) between 1966 and 1967, with Igor Emili serving as the chief architect (alongside a team of twenty-one collaborators).<sup>79</sup> Emili designed a coastal settlement that was both urbanistically organised and articulated through modernist architecture. He conceived a fully functional town, with small apartment units at varying levels and with all necessary communal facilities.<sup>80</sup>

To furnish the large number of rooms, the architect and the investor engaged a wide range of artists. In the central building, the artistic collaborators were Mario Černe, Boris Dogan, Stevan Luketić, and Šime Vulas.<sup>81</sup> Boris Dogan created a polyptych for the café, featuring a narrative about the life of Alexander Scott (who owned the bay in the nineteenth century) across six panels using intricate drawing techniques.<sup>82</sup> In the buffet area of the central section, Dogan also created a ceramic wall decoration with marine and mythological elements [Figure 17], which is still preserved in the interior. Because the buffet overlooks the sea, the artist aimed to integrate the work into its surroundings. In the large dining hall, two works were incorporated into the architecture as sculptural treatment of the wall surface: Šime Vulas created a wall composed of vertically arranged wooden segments, and Stevan Luketić designed a composition of metal geometric forms that animate the space through the effects of light and remain remarkably contemporary.<sup>83</sup> In the tavern and at the reception area, sculptural reliefs were created by Vladimir "Vlado" Potočnjak,



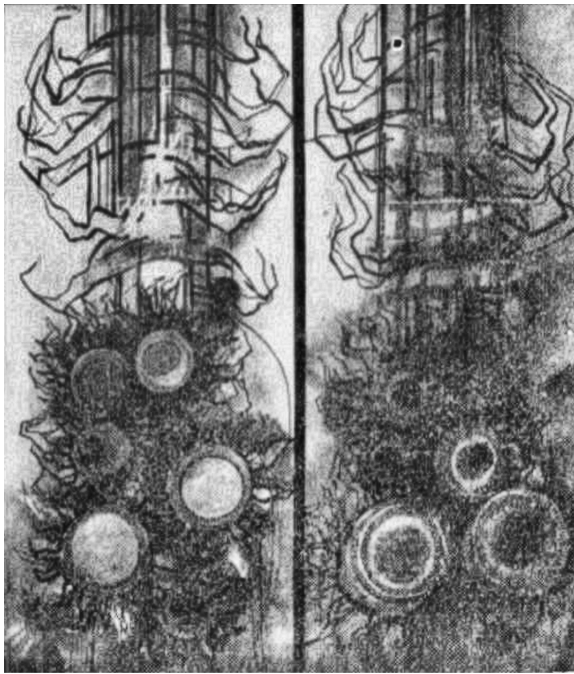


Figure 18. Vladimir Potočnjak, *Pomorski čičak* (Coastal Thistle), Uvala Scott, Kraljevica, 1967–1968. Source: Franković, “Hotel ‘Uvala Scott.’”

a self-taught painter and sculptor who spent his entire working life in Rijeka and produced an impressive number of works in the interiors of public buildings throughout the Kvarner Gulf region.<sup>84</sup> In the tavern, he installed *Morsko dno* (Seabed, 1968), a large-scale wooden relief sculpture (18 m<sup>2</sup>) made of charred wood, full of indentations, imprints, shapes, and figures that form a depiction of the seabed.<sup>85</sup> In addition to this piece, for the reception area Potočnjak created the panel *Pomorski čičak* (Coastal Thistle, 1968; Figure 18) on Formica sheets.<sup>86</sup> The two-part panel features a symmetrically arranged thistle – a frequent element in his painting and sculpture, which he explored both figuratively and abstractly, always aiming to evoke the aged and dried quality of the flower scorched by the blazing sun.<sup>87</sup> In the main reception area, Zdenko Balabanić created a decorative

panel depicting scenes of Rijeka’s bourgeois life, horsemen, and the City Tower.<sup>88</sup> In the exclusive club, artworks were created by Bogdan Borčić, Boris Dogan, Francina Dolenc, Dušan Džamonja, Oton Gliha, Ivo Kalina, Nives Kavurić-Kurtović, Ivan Lacković, Ivan Lovrenčić, Edo Murtić, Zlatko Prica, and Josip Veštek.<sup>89</sup> Each artist interpreted the theme of the white horse in his or her own distinctive visual approach. Although all the artworks were based in figuration, they ranged from realistic to abstract variations. The chosen theme referred to the history of the bay, specifically the biography of Alexander Scott, who built a summer residence, a fisherman’s house, and a stable there in the first half of the nineteenth century. The current fate of these works remains unclear, and at the time of this research it was not possible to establish their exact condition or location. The works by Dogan and Luketić appear to have been preserved within the interior, likely due to their integration into the architecture, and Potočnjak’s work at the reception desk seems to have been partially retained. Nevertheless, the artworks created for the interior of Uvala Scott stand as a strong example of an attempt at the synthesis of all arts, both formally and thematically – thus achieving a fusion of art and life, particularly within this architectural concept of a self-contained town.



## Total works of art for the (leisure) community

Cases of the artistic furnishing of hotel interiors in Istria and the Kvarner Gulf in the years after the Second World War reflect the socio-historical and economic circumstances of the period, Yugoslavia's foreign policy, various modalities of art commissioning, and the role of the state and socially owned enterprises. They also reveal the varied motivations behind the continuous advocacy for integrating artworks into leisure architecture along the Adriatic coast. Considering the state's foreign policy and its focus on international visitors, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, the architecture and furnishings of newly built hotels were adapted to the tastes of modern tourists, primarily from the West. Artworks were commissioned or acquired through several models: by investors, through direct acquisitions between architects and artists, or via initiatives by cultural institutions, local and state authorities, and artists organised through art colonies.

The artists selected for commissions and acquisitions can be grouped into three main categories: 1) academy-trained artists connected to a town in the region of the commission (e.g., the sculptors Josip Diminić and Aleksandar Rukavina completed a series of commissions in Istria; in Rovinj, works were acquired from artists associated with the Rovinj Art Colony; and Edo Murtić carried out numerous commissions in Istria and the Kvarner Gulf in the late 1960s, eventually settling there); 2) artists who established their profile through numerous large-scale state commissions for monuments and public institution interiors, such as Dušan Džamonja, Edo Murtić, and Raul Goldoni; and 3) artists, architects, and designers who were members of groups such as EXAT 51, SIO, and the New Tendencies movement, and who, beyond commissions, advocated for the synthesis of all the arts and the integration of architecture and art according to modern, plastic principles (e.g., Zdravko Bregovac, Ivan Picelj, and Aleksandar Srnec). Although there were some artists outside these categories, this classification makes it possible to draw several conclusions. In addition to academy training and public recognition, local contacts and personal networks were important in selecting artists. Furthermore, experience with numerous high-profile state commissions contributed to their selection. Finally, the choice of artists whose work was rooted in new, neo-avant-garde approaches to integrating art and life reflects both the sensitivity of the state and investors to new forms of art, as well as the working conditions of artists, whose projects could often be realised only with state support. It is also important to note that the research does not include the artists' reflections on state commissions, except in relation to specific projects they carried out. Nevertheless, it

is noteworthy that some artists, such as Diminić, Rukavina, Murtić, and Džamonja, recorded artworks created for interiors in their biographies and catalogues, whereas others, such as Picelj and Srnec, did so to a lesser extent (though this may reflect individual diligence). However, given the lack of information and discussion of state commissions in reviews of their oeuvres, it appears that such commissions were often secondary in their artistic research priorities. It can be assumed that the involvement of multiple stakeholders (architects, investors, and authorities) diminished the perceived value of the artists' individual contributions.

The motivation for furnishing hotels can be identified in four main parameters: modern artistic exploration, the humanisation of spaces, state presentation, and the welfare of artists. In almost all of the examples presented, the commissioners respected the artists' modernist expression (from figuration and abstraction to optical investigations), and it can be concluded that this artistic freedom was further supported by the desire to build hotels in line with contemporary, mostly Western standards. Furthermore, the furnishing of hotel common areas, accessible to both local residents and tourists, as well as the execution of large-scale in-situ works, attest to the ideological and artistic commitment to the humanisation of public spaces. This formed part of broader artistic advocacy for the synthesis of all the arts, which intensified in the postwar period in many countries of the East and West. These efforts were accompanied by Yugoslav state ambitions to humanise living spaces and workspaces, as well as to bring art into direct contact with the masses for the purpose of public enlightenment. The form and content of the artworks largely reflect state presentation and the connection between tourism and foreign policy. The need for state presentation is evident in the funding of A- and B-category hotels, which featured works aligned with modern artistic trends, including frequently debated abstraction and contemporary visual experiments. This was part of the state's strategy to present itself to foreign visitors as a nation capable of successfully competing with the Western market. Comparing these examples with other cases in the interiors of public institutions (e.g., schools, hospitals, and administrative buildings) in Croatia,<sup>90</sup> one can observe that modern art, including neo-avant-garde works, was generally more widely accepted in leisure architecture, as in the case of major state commissions for administrative buildings. However, one does not find examples of socialist realism or themes commemorating recent history (e.g., the National Liberation Struggle), prominent figures, or specific events, as is the case in public buildings for larger public use (e.g., hospitals and educational institutions). Nevertheless, ideological ambitions to

promote fraternity, unity, and a shared historical narrative are evident in the appropriation and commissioning of ancient and medieval heritage. In examples such as the commissioning of mosaic replicas in the Plava Laguna hotels in Poreč or frescoes in the Hotel Ambassador in Opatija, the artworks were selected to reinforce the historical legitimacy of the young multinational socialist state. The concept of the synthesis of the arts and state presentation were also reflected in the procurement of materials, electronic devices, and other equipment, and industrial design, most of which were sourced from Yugoslav factories, thereby supporting domestic production and demonstrating its capacity to create high-quality interiors. Finally, the motivation for furnishing hotel interiors can also be seen in the ambition to ensure artists' welfare. Cases such as the Rovinj-based Jadran Company, which organised and oversaw the acquisition of numerous works from prominent artists associated with the Rovinj Art Colony, demonstrate how such initiatives served both to secure the quality of the artworks and to support the livelihood of the artists. For all these reasons, it is evident that the artworks acquired or commissioned for hotel interiors during the 1960s in Istria and the Kvarner Gulf, and throughout Croatia and Yugoslavia, reveal a complex intersection of modern artistic research, humanisation of spaces, state presentation, and concern for artists' welfare.

## Funding

This work was supported in part by the Croatian Science Foundation under the project IP-2022-10-9843, Representation, Development, Education, Participation – Art in Society in 19th–21st Centuries.

## Endnotes

- 1 This chapter is based on research conducted for the author's doctoral dissertation "State as Patron – Commissions and Acquisitions of Artwork for Interiors of Public Institutions in Croatia from the Early 1950s to the End of the 1960s" (Zagreb: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, 2025). Certain parts of the research, related to the history of tourism in Istria and the Kvarner Gulf, as well as the operations of hotel enterprises, have been expanded for this chapter.
- 2 Igor Duda, *U potrazi za blagostanjem: o povijesti dokolice i potrošačkog društva u Hrvatskoj 1950-ih i 1960-ih* (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2005), 28, 35. A summarised overview of the development of tourism can be found in the tourism chapter of the doctoral dissertation by Patricia Počanić, *State as Patron – Commissions and Acquisitions of Artwork for Interiors of Public Institutions in Croatia from the Early 1950s to the End of the 1960s* (PhD diss., Zagreb: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, 2025); and in Patricia Počanić, "Luksuz na jugoslavenski način – Hotel Ambasador u Opatiji," *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti*, no. 46 (2023): 207–226.
- 3 Duda, *U potrazi za blagostanjem*, 44.
- 4 For more on the concepts of social, commercial, and mass tourism, as well as the related literature, see Počanić, "Luksuz na jugoslavenski način," 207–226. For more on the history and legalisation of the eight-hour workday in Europe and Yugoslavia, see Duda, *U potrazi za blagostanjem*, 74–77; Igor Duda, "Workers into Tourists. Entitlements, Desires, and the Realities of Social Tourism under Yugoslav Socialism," in *Yugoslavia's Sunny Side: A History of Tourism in Socialism (1950s–1980s)*, ed. Hannes Grandits and Karin Taylor (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 35.
- 5 Boris Vukonić, *Povijest hrvatskog turizma* (Zagreb: Prometej, 2005), 138.
- 6 Žarko Domljan, "Poslijeratna arhitektura u Hrvatskoj," *Život umjetnosti* 10 (1969): 30, 32; Maroje Mrduljaš, "Building the Affordable Arcadia: Tourism Development on the Croatian Adriatic Coast under State Socialism," in *Holidays after the Fall: Seaside Architecture and Urbanism in Bulgaria and Croatia*, ed. Elke Beyer, Anke Hagemann, and Michael Zinganel (Berlin: JOVIS, 2013), 172; Duda, "Workers into Tourists," 38, 80; Metod Šuligoj, "Neke ključne okolnosti (proteklog) razvoja turizma u Istri," in *Retrospektiva turizma Istre*, ed. Metod Šuligoj (Koper: Založba Univerze na Primorskem, 2015), 32.
- 7 Vukonić, *Povijest hrvatskog turizma*, 132, 153.
- 8 Igor Tchoukarine, "Jugoslavenski put do međunarodnog turizma: otvaranje, decentralizacija i propaganda u prvoj polovici 1950-ih," in *Sunčana strana Jugoslavije. Povijest turizma u socijalizmu*, ed. Hannes Grandits and Karin Taylor (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2013), 125–154; Sune Bechmann Pedersen and Christian Noack, "Crossing the Iron Curtain: An Introduction," in *Tourism and Travel during the Cold War: Negotiating Tourist Experiences across the Iron Curtain*, ed. Sune Bechmann Pedersen and Christian Noack (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 1–20; Sune Bechmann Pedersen and Elitza Stanoeva, "Tourism Diplomacy in Cold War Europe: Symbolic Gestures, Cultural Exchange and Human Rights," *Contemporary European History* 34, no. 1 (2025): 125–141.
- 9 Tchoukarine, "Jugoslavenski put," 127–128.
- 10 Tchoukarine, "Jugoslavenski put," 137.
- 11 Tchoukarine, "Jugoslavenski put," 130, 133, 139, 141.
- 12 Tchoukarine, "Jugoslavenski put," 134.
- 13 Karin Taylor and Hannes Grandits, "Turizam i stvaranje socijalističke Jugoslavije: Uvod," in *Sunčana strana Jugoslavije. Povijest turizma u socijalizmu*, ed. Hannes Grandits and Karin Taylor (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2013), 32; Tchoukarine, "Jugoslavenski put," 133, 137.
- 14 Ivan Blažević, *Povijest Istre i Kvarnera* (Opatija: "Otokar Keršovani," 1987), 22, 24, 305; Šuligoj, "Neke ključne okolnosti," 25.



- 15 Šuligoj, "Neke ključne okolnosti," 31, 32.
- 16 Šuligoj, "Neke ključne okolnosti," 32.
- 17 Blažević, *Povijest Istre i Kvarnera*, 22, 24, 305; Šuligoj, "Neke ključne okolnosti," 25.
- 18 For more on the history of tourism in Opatija, see Vukonić, *Povijest hrvatskog turizma*, 40, 43, 52, 54, 64, 119. On the history of tourism in Poreč, Pula, Rabac, and Rovinj, see Zrinka Zadel and Elena Rudan, "Povijesni razvoj smještajnih kapaciteta i poduzetništva u obalnom dijelu Istarskog poluotoka u Hrvatskoj," in *Retrospektiva turizma Istre*, ed. Metod Šuligoj (Koper: Založba Univerze na Primorskem, 2015), 160–162, 166–167.
- 19 Zadel and Rudan, "Povijesni razvoj," 171.
- 20 The research focuses on the Croatian part of the Istrian peninsula and the Kvarner Gulf, excluding Gorski Kotar, which is administratively part of this area. The author's doctoral dissertation includes a greater number of examples from towns and cities in Istria, such as Buje, Buzet, Labin, Pazin, Plomin, Poreč, Pula, and Rovinj, as well as in the Kvarner Gulf region, primarily in Rijeka, Crikvenica, Kraljevica, and Opatija, in addition to mentions of smaller examples from Senj and the islands. Given the large number of tourist destinations and examples of tourism architecture, the study focuses on the cases most pertinent to the research question.
- 21 Jasna Galjer, "Ideja sinteze i konflikt modernizma. Od Le Corbusiera i grupe Espace do grupe Exat 51 i Vjenceslava Richtera," in *Arhitektura in politika, Arhitekturna zgodovina 3: Zbornik povzetkov znanstvenega simpozija*, ed. Renata Novak Klemenčič (Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta, 2016), 109–118; Maroje Mrduljaš, "Architecture for a Self-Managing Socialism," in *Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980*, ed. Martino Stierli and Vladimir Kulić (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2018), 45; Počanić, "State as Patron," 75–95.
- 22 This ranged from the Romantic idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk, through the concepts of the Arts and Crafts movement, various forms of Art Nouveau and its workshops, and associations such as the Deutscher Werkbund, to the advocacy of different strands of historical avant-garde movements. Of particular significance was the promotion of collaboration among architects, sculptors, and painters; the integration of art and life; the self-constructed synthesis of all aspects of daily existence; and the concept of the "total work of art", as championed by proponents of De Stijl, the Bauhaus, and Vkhutemas. See Norbert M. Schmitz, "Synthesis and Total Artwork," in *Bauhaus*, ed. Jeannine Fiedler and Peter Feierabend (Köln: H. F. Ullmann, 2006), 302; Victor Margolin, *World History of Design*, vol. 1 (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 227, 235; Patricia Počanić, "Između ideje i realizacije: prilog poznavanju umjetničkih djela u interijeru Zgrade društveno-političkih organizacija – Kockice," *Život umjetnosti: časopis o modernoj i suvremenoj umjetnosti i arhitekturi* 110, no. 1 (2022): 109–112.
- 23 Počanić, "Između ideje i realizacije," 110.
- 24 Jerko Denegri, *Prilozi za drugu liniju. Kronika jednog kritičarskog zalaganja* (Zagreb: Horetzky, 2003), 27–28; Galjer, "Ideja sinteze i konflikt modernizma," 109.
- 25 Denegri, *Prilozi za drugu liniju*, 27–28; Ljiljana Kolečnik, "Konfliktne vizije moderniteta i poslijeratna moderna umjetnost," in *Socijalizam i modernost: umjetnost, kultura, politika 1950.–1974.*, ed. Ljiljana Kolečnik (Zagreb: Muzej suvremene umjetnosti and Institut za povijest umjetnosti, 2012), 147; Mrduljaš, "Architecture for a Self-Managing Socialism," 45, 49; Maroje Mrduljaš, "Toward an Affordable Arcadia: The Evolution of Hotel Typologies in Yugoslavia," in *Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980*, ed. Martino Stierli and Vladimir Kulić (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2018), 78–83.
- 26 Lovorka Magaš Bilandžić and Patricia Počanić, "Novi standard – Studio za industrijsko oblikovanje i suvremeno stanovanje 1950-ih," in *Fragmenti dizajnerske povijesti: dokumenti*, vol. 2, ed. Marko Golub (Zagreb: Hrvatsko dizajnersko društvo, 2022), 41–61.
- 27 Denegri, *Prilozi za drugu liniju*, 32.
- 28 Počanić, "State as Patron."

- 29 Počanić, "State as Patron," 95–197.
- 30 With the establishment of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia in 1945, governments were set up at the federal and republic levels. In the context of this study, the terms *federal* and *state* are used to denote the level of authority governing Yugoslavia as a whole, and *republic* refers to the highest level of authority within the People's (later Socialist) Republic of Croatia.
- 31 Počanić, "State as Patron," 141–197.
- 32 Počanić, "State as Patron," 141–197.
- 33 Počanić, "State as Patron," 141–197.
- 34 Počanić, "State as Patron," 141–197.
- 35 Počanić, "State as Patron," 184–197; Patricia Počanić, "Narudžbe i otkupi umjetničkih djela za interijere javnih institucija u Hrvatskoj 1950-ih i 1960-ih," *Peristil* 62, no. 1 (2019): 183–184.
- 36 Počanić, "State as Patron," 184–197; Počanić, "Narudžbe i otkupi," 183–184.
- 37 Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, Fond 318, Savezni Sekretarijat za obrazovanje i kulturu (AJ-318), folder 147; Savez likovnih umetnika Jugoslavije. Udruženje likovnih umetnika Srbije, *Projekt zakonskog teksta o umetničkim radovima na novogradnjama*, Beograd, 14 May 1956, 1–2.
- 38 AJ, Fond 318, Folder 147, *Projekt zakonskog teksta o umetničkim radovima na novogradnjama*, 1–2.
- 39 Počanić, "State as Patron," 511–518.
- 40 Goran Prodan, "Iljko Zlatar," in *Istrapedia* (Istarska županija, 17 September 2020), accessed June 3, 2026, <https://www.istrapedia.hr/it/natuknice/4119/zlatar-iljko>; Mirko Otočan, *Povijest turizma i kulturne baštine Umaga* (Umag: "Josip Turčinović"; Buje: Matica hrvatska, Ogranak, 2015), 76, 111.
- 41 In 1958, Rukavina completed his sculpture studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb, where his professors were Grga Antunac, Vjekoslav Rukljač, and Vanja Radauš. He was also a permanent collaborator at Radauš's master workshop (1959–1962).
- 42 Juraj Baldani, *Aleksandar Rukavina* (Umag: Mjesna zajednica Brtonigla, 1987), 40.
- 43 Baldani, *Aleksandar Rukavina*, 40.
- 44 Baldani, *Aleksandar Rukavina*, 40. The cycle The Rainbow consists of four reliefs depicting scenes from the literary work of the same name: 1) a scene portraying a girl with her mother and father beneath the moon, 2) boys playing with a dog while the girl watches from inside the house, 3) a conversation between the girl and a witch-like figure in a room interior, and 4) the girl running with outstretched arms under a rainbow, accompanied by realistically rendered folk elements. The second cycle consists of four copper reliefs with themes from folk life and medieval heritage: *Hrvatski troplet I* (Croatian Interlace I), *Hrvatski troplet II* (Croatian Interlace II), *Svirač na guslama* (Gusle Player), and *Svirač u mih* (Bagpipe Player). The interlace and musicians are presented against untreated backgrounds, with faceless figures and traces of geometric stylization.
- 45 Otočan, *Povijest turizma i kulturne baštine Umaga*, 76, 111, 112.
- 46 The information is inscribed on the pedestal of the sculpture itself.
- 47 Zadel and Rudan, "Povijesni razvoj," 171. Both companies were responsible for the construction of tourism infrastructure, including entertainment centres, sports facilities, and campsites (among them naturist camps), which helped position Poreč as a leader in both sports and naturist tourism.
- 48 Julije De Luca, "Hotel Neptun u Poreču," *Čovjek i prostor* 16, no. 194 (1969): 1. The building was constructed on Marshal Tito Coastal Road (*Obala Maršala Tita*) at the site of a structure that had been destroyed during the Second World War bombings.
- 49 The circles resembled Džamonja's similar works in metal, such as the one he created for the Youth Centre in Belgrade.

- 50 "Hotel Neptun," 1.
- 51 Boris Vukonić, *Plava laguna 1957. – 2007.* (Poreč: Plava laguna, 2007), 66, 71.
- 52 Vukonić, *Plava laguna*, 71.
- 53 Dubravka Erceg, "Skulptura i slika u jednoj cjelini," *Vjesnik*, 2 August 1967, 6.
- 54 Today the hotel also houses another abstract enamel composition by Edo Murtić, several of his prints, and mobile graphics by Miroslav Šutej. It is likely that these works were relocated from other hotels and acquired at a later time.
- 55 "Diminićev svijet spomeničke skulpture," *Čovjek i prostor* 25, no. 298 (1978): 26.
- 56 M., "Primjer Poreča. Turizam i kultura – zajedno," *Večernji list*, 18 February 1967, 9.
- 57 B. Sterle, "Murtićev 'svjetionik' u Zelenoj laguni," *Vjesnik*, 24 June 1967, 7.
- 58 Dubravko Horvatić, "Ni na nebu ni na zemlji," *Telegram*, 13 October 1967, 5; T. H., "Sa slikom u prostoru," *Večernji list*, 25 December 1966 (Arhiv za likovne umjetnosti HAZU, Edo Murtić File, Newspaper Clipping Collection).
- 59 Erceg, "Skulptura i slika," 6.
- 60 M., "Primjer Poreča," 9.
- 61 The company Jadran-turist d.d. Rovinj was founded in 1953 under the name *Turističko društvo Rovinj* (Rovinj Tourist Society), and in 1954 it was renamed *Ugostiteljsko poduzeće Jadran* (Jadran Hospitality Company). In 1956, it acquired properties on Saint Catherine Island (*Otočić Sveta Katarina*) and adopted the name Jadran Rovinj. M. Ferenčić, "Jadran-turist d. d. Rovinj," in *Istarska enciklopedija*, ed. Miroslav Bertoša and Robert Matijašić (Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2005), 351; Branimir Crljenko, "Hoteli – velike galerije," *Novi list*, 6 September 1969, 10.
- 62 "Hotel 'Eden' u Rovinju," *Čovjek i prostor* 20, no. 238 (1973): 4–7; Borka Bobovec, Luka Korlaet, and Nino Virag, "Arhitekt Ivo Bartolić. Prolegomena opusu," *Prostor* 23, no. 1 (49) (2015): 169.
- 63 Sketch for interior design, Hotel Eden, Rovinj. Tonko Maroević and Ive Šimat Banov, *Raoul Goldoni. Retrospektivna izložba 1942.–1983.* (Zagreb: Umjetnički paviljon, 2004), 108, 110.
- 64 Crljenko, "Hoteli – velike galerije," 10.
- 65 Počanić, "State as Patron," 138, 162.
- 66 Crljenko, "Hoteli – velike galerije," 10.
- 67 Crljenko, "Hoteli – velike galerije," 10.
- 68 Crljenko, "Hoteli – velike galerije," 10.
- 69 Crljenko, "Hoteli – velike galerije," 10.
- 70 *Umjetnička kolonija – Rovinj / Colonia artistica di Rovigno* (Rovinj: Muzejska zbirka Rovinj, 1969).
- 71 Bregovac left a lasting mark on specific areas and locations, and during the 1960s he completely transformed the landscape of Rabac by building hotels, resorts, and tourist complexes, including the resort village of Sveti Andrea (1963), the Hotel Lanterna (1965–1966), the resort village of Girandella (1967–1969), and Maslinica (1968–1970), as well as the Fortuna (1971) and Apollo (1971) hotels. Počanić, "State as Patron," 335–336.
- 72 Počanić, "State as Patron," 335–336; Magaš Bilandžić and Počanić, "Novi standard," 42–61.
- 73 A detailed study of the architecture and artworks in the Hotel Ambassador was published in Patricia Počanić's article "Luksuz na jugoslavenski način," 207–226.
- 74 "Hotel Ambassador Opatija," *Arhitektura i urbanizam*, nos. 45–46 (1967): 19–23.

- 75 "Hotel Ambasador Opatija," 21; "Impressum," *Arhitekt Zdravko Bregovac – Hotel Ambasador Opatija* (Zagreb, 1966).
- 76 The professional periodical literature states: "Blankets were made in Tetovo, furniture in Sevnica and in Zagreb and Samobor, elevators and awnings in Belgrade, carpets in Ivanjica (Serbia), armchairs in Gradiška, upholstery fabrics and curtains in Slovenia, bathroom ceramics in Zaprešić, etc." See "Hotel Ambasador Opatija," 20.
- 77 Katarina Mohar, "Slovenian Frescoes at Yugoslav Medieval Art Exhibitions during the 1950s," in *Medieval Murals: New Perspectives and Research Approaches*, ed. Mija Oter Gorenčič (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2024), 307–345.
- 78 Mohar, "Slovenian Frescoes," 322.
- 79 Rastko Schwalba, *Igor Emili* (Rijeka: Muzej grada Rijeke, 1999), 45, 102.
- 80 Boro Pavlović, "Turističko naselje u uvali Scott kraj Kraljevice," *Čovjek i prostor* 15, no. 182 (1968): 2. This included spacious dining halls, a café, a nightclub, a local tavern, an old-style wine cellar, an exclusive club, a seafood restaurant, a mini golf course, a swimming pool, and other amenities.
- 81 Pavlović, "Turističko naselje," 3.
- 82 Pavlović, "Turističko naselje," 3.
- 83 Pavlović, "Turističko naselje," 3.
- 84 Pavlović, "Turističko naselje," 3; Vanda Ekl, *Vladimir Potočnjak: skice za monografiju* (Rijeka: Tipograf, 1984), 8, 12, 20, 45. For other works, see Počanić, "State as Patron."
- 85 Ekl, *Vladimir Potočnjak*, 45.
- 86 Ekl, *Vladimir Potočnjak*, 45.
- 87 Ekl, *Vladimir Potočnjak*, 18.
- 88 Eugen Franković, "Hotel 'Uvala Scott'," *Arhitektura* 22, nos. 97–98 (1968): 16.
- 89 Pavlović, "Turističko naselje," 3.
- 90 Počanić, "State as Patron."



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## Umetnost za turistično arhitekturo: umetniška dela, naročena za hotele v Istri in Kvarnerju v šestdesetih letih 20. stoletja

### Povzetek

Na vrhuncu jugoslovanskega množičnega turizma v šestdesetih in sedemdesetih letih 20. stoletja so bili v Istri in Kvarnerju zgrajeni številni hoteli, turistični kompleksi in kampi, ki so trajno preoblikovali krajino, gospodarstvo in vsakdanje življenje lokalnih skupnosti. Razvoj turistične infrastrukture je potekal vzporedno z reformami jugoslovanske zunanje in notranje politike, z liberalizacijo trga ter postopnim sprejemanjem potrošniške kulture.

Razvoj turizma v povojni Jugoslaviji in na Hrvaškem je potekal v treh fazah; zadnji dve sta zaznamovali prehod od socialnega h komercialnemu in množičnemu turizmu. V zlatem desetletju hrvaškega turizma, v letih od 1965 do 1975, so bile ustanovljene organizacije, združenja in revije, posvečene turizmu in gostinstvu, s čimer se je spodbujal razvoj zasebnih nastanitev, hkrati pa tudi komercialnega turizma v okviru družbenih podjetij. V tem obdobju je turizem postal pomemben instrument modernizacije, ključni vir tujega kapitala ter izraz ideoloških in gospodarskih teženj jugoslovanskih oblasti.

Dolga tradicija turizma v Istri in Kvarnerju je bila rezultat kompleksnih zgodovinskih procesov, razvite prometne infrastrukture in bližine srednjeevropskih držav. Po drugi svetovni vojni so bili na tem območju zgrajeni številni turistični objekti, obenem pa so bila ustanovljena ali obnovljena velika hotelsko-turistična podjetja, kot so Kvarner, Jadran in Plava Laguna. Z vlaganji v hotelske komplekse so ta podjetja odigrala ključno vlogo pri razvoju turistične infrastrukture.

Vzporedno z družbenopolitičnim in gospodarskim razvojem države se je sistematično uveljavljala ideja sinteze vseh umetnosti – arhitekture, slikarstva, kiparstva in oblikovanja –, zlasti v novozgrajenih objektih v družbeni lasti. Ta prizadevanja so zajela tudi turistično arhitekturo ter spodbudila intenzivno sodelovanje med arhitekti in umetniki, usmerjeno v oblikovanje celostne umetnine. V povojnem obdobju je država postala glavni naročnik umetniških del, odkupi in naročila pa so potekali prek državnih organov na zvezni in republiški ravni oziroma prek posebnih komisij in odborov. Pomembno vlogo so imeli kulturna politika, institucionalizirane oblike kulture



in zakonski predpisi, ki so določali delež investicijskih sredstev, namenjenih za financiranje umetniških del.

Na podlagi tega konteksta ter arhivskih in terenskih raziskav, pa tudi analize sočasne periodike, so v poglavju obravnavani modeli naročanja umetniških del za hotelske interierje, motivi za takšna naročila ter vloga umetnikov, arhitektov, investorjev in države pri oblikovanju njihovih pomenov. Poglavje je zasnovano v geografskem zaporedju od severne Istre proti Kvarnerju, analiziranih pa je več izbranih primerov: umetniška dela v hotelu Adriatic v Umagu, hotelih Neptun in Parentium v Poreču, hotelu Eden v Rovinju, hotelu Ambassador v Opatiji ter v hotelskem kompleksu Uvala Scott pri Kraljevici. Pri vsakem primeru so predstavljeni osnovni podatki in okoliščine gradnje hotela, sledita analiza in interpretacija umetniških del.

Izbrani primeri razkrivajo večplastne pomene, ki presegajo zgolj estetsko funkcijo umetnosti. Umetniška dela v hotelskih interierjih so bila naročena in odkupljena na različne načine: prek investorjev, z neposrednim sodelovanjem arhitektov in umetnikov ali na pobudo kulturnih ustanov, lokalnih in državnih organov ter umetnikov, povezanih z likovnimi kolonijami. Med avtorji, ki so bili angažirani, so bili akademsko izobraženi umetniki z izkušnjami na tem področju umetniškega delovanja, ki so si ugled zgradili s številnimi državnimi naročili, pa tudi umetniki, arhitekti in oblikovalci, zbrani okoli neoavantgardnih umetniških skupin in gibanj. Motivi za opremljanje hotelskih interierjev z umetniškimi deli so bili večplastni: dela so lahko predstavljala sodobno umetniško raziskovanje, prispevala k humanizaciji prostora, sodelovala pri reprezentaciji države ter umetnikom zagotavljala ekonomski in družbeni položaj. Umetniška dela, naročena in odkupljena za hotelske interierje v Istri in Kvarnerju v šestdesetih letih 20. stoletja, zato pričajo o kompleksnem razmerju med umetniško produkcijo in državo.





# CONDITION AND RISK ASSESSMENT OF SOCIALIST-ERA MOSAICS IN SLOVENIA

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The preservation of cultural heritage relies heavily on systematic monitoring and evaluation of heritage objects and their environments. Condition and risk assessment serve as the two primary pillars of cultural asset management, providing the empirical data necessary to ensure the longevity of physical artefacts. Condition assessments focus on the present state of an object, documenting existing damage or degradation, whereas risk assessments identify potential future threats to the object. Condition assessment methods consist of visual inspection, non-destructive testing, material analysis, and environmental monitoring.

Work at the Research Institute at the University of Ljubljana's Academy of Fine Arts and Design (UL ALUO) over the past two decades has created a database of specific segments of publicly accessible artworks in Slovenia. These include wall paintings, sgraffiti, mosaics, and sculptures from various periods. The digital database contains photographic documentation and key information, including data on techniques, technology, iconography, conservation, endangerment, and past interventions. The data are obtained through visual inspection, the study of literature, and other sources (archives, inventories, oral sources, etc.). The result is an inventory of artworks, including a record of their condition and the risk factors.

Although works of art in public spaces are highly exposed to various harmful natural and human factors, there is generally no comprehensive inventory of these works at the national level, nor is there a system for systematically monitoring their condition and alerting relevant protection services to potential threats. Therefore, the main purpose of this work is to highlight the importance of further improvement of preventive conservation through research-supported data analysis.

This research can also be useful in art-historical, archaeometric (examining historical materials and techniques), etiological-phenomenological (identifying causes and forms of deterioration), axiological (assessing the value and significance of fine art conservation), and other in-depth studies. The insights gained are also valuable for educational and promotional purposes and for direct conservation-restoration work on the artworks examined.<sup>1</sup>

The first result of the research presented in this chapter is an inventory of preserved and destroyed works of art created between 1945 and 1990 in



Slovenia, but for the time being it is comprehensive only for mosaics. The sgraffito art in the Ljubljana area has been rather extensively researched and inventoried, and it has already been partially presented,<sup>2</sup> but it covers a wider time span of artworks from the Renaissance to the late 1960s. The inventory of mosaics recorded their basic identification data and historical information concerning past conservation-restoration and other interventions on buildings and their artworks. This was followed by a visual inspection of the condition of the artworks in situ. Risk factors were also identified, including an assessment of their likelihood and impact. The results of the risk analysis are presented in this chapter, although these are not necessarily the definitive results because the inventory of mosaics is continually being updated and improved. However, they provide clear insight into the current general state and endangerment of the mosaic heritage of public buildings and monuments from Slovenia's socialist period as a Yugoslav republic. Some preliminary results of the analysis were already presented at the ICCM conference in Plovdiv in autumn 2022,<sup>3</sup> but here the data have been updated and completed to a significant extent.

### On the significance of socialist art preservation

Slovenia has many surviving sculptures, frescoes, mosaics and other architectural decorations of buildings and monuments created by Slovenian and foreign artists during the socialist era. Especially in the early socialist period after the Second World War, the political authorities and society in general considered it important that public buildings, squares, and parks should be furnished with works of art. These works had not only an aesthetic function but also a symbolic or ideological function because they could be used to communicate intrinsic and instrumental human values such as freedom, comradeship, resistance, homeland reconstruction, community participation, work, progress, and prosperity. The manner of socialist realist depiction was particularly appropriate for communicating these values, which are also evident in the titles of some works: *Uporniki* (Rebels), *Ljubljana v borbi* (Ljubljana in Struggle), *Mladina se vključuje v proizvodnjo* (Youth Engaged in Production), and so on. Later, as artistic representations became more poetic and abstract, more intrinsic human values, such as beauty, harmony, playfulness, and serenity, became more prominent. Such examples include mosaics with the titles *Alegorija podeželja* (Allegory of the Countryside), *Sončno mesto* (Sunny Town), and *Pokrajina* (Landscape). Even today, socialist artworks reflect certain human values that are considered worth preserving and

can inspire,<sup>4</sup> although many can recognise content that is not necessarily positive, such as obligatory optimism, indoctrination, forced labour, and repression.<sup>5</sup>

According to the human values (Sln. *vrednote*) reflected in artworks, these works on their own possess certain qualitative and quantitative values (Sln. *vrednosti*): financial, aesthetic, historical, symbolic, ideological, commemorative, and so on.<sup>6</sup> In any case, the artworks do not create these fragile values (Sln. *vrednosti*) by themselves, as Jonathan Ashley-Smith points out with the metaphor “only people bleed,”<sup>7</sup> but it is people who assign values to them; these values are subject to change at different times and under different circumstances. Therefore, when evaluating art heritage, it is reasonable to distinguish between two basic meanings, which are quite clearly distinguishable in Slovenian. One is human values (Sln. *vrednote*) as ideas in the sense of psychological categories that people recognise in artworks or in the preservation of artworks (e.g., social welfare, community involvement, solidarity, and memory keeping), and the other is values (Sln. *vrednosti*) of things as characteristics that are assigned to the artworks themselves (e.g., symbolic, material, or historical value). In a similar way, the distinction in meanings is expressed by Randall Mason:<sup>8</sup> “*Values* is most often used in one of two senses: first, as morals, principles, or other ideas that serve as guides to action (individual and collective); and second, in reference to the qualities and characteristics seen in things, in particular the positive characteristics (actual and potential).”

As artworks with a certain value, they are deserving of physical preservation. The activity of conservation-restoration of cultural heritage is especially essential because it preserves or restores their values and meanings. Appropriate action must be taken to prevent the deterioration and destruction of the artworks, otherwise their values will be diminished or destroyed.

From a sustainable heritage protection perspective, it is crucial to make the best possible use of the resources available for protection and conservation. Timely and regular preventive action is generally more sustainable than delayed curative interventions. The cornerstone of sustainable prevention is record-keeping: regular monitoring of the condition and endangerment of artworks, together with the environment in which they are located. Especially in terms of socio-cultural sustainability, public information and awareness-raising, as well as the active involvement of interested individuals and groups, are also important for the conservation of art heritage. A good example of such an activity is the ZRC SAZU researchers’ invitation to the public to contribute any information on the

art heritage of the period within the national research project *Art for Community*,<sup>9</sup> which is a form of citizen science. The feedback may also help estimate the extent to which the public recognises and appreciates this art heritage.

### **Studying sources on socialist-era mosaics as a basis for an inventory**

Postwar mosaics are only now becoming the subject of in-depth art-historical research. Postwar murals have been examined in detail by Donovan Pavlinec,<sup>10</sup> but he focuses only on the art of socialist realism and has not dealt with mosaics in his studies. As he notes, the problem with studying the art of this period is the lack of a comprehensive list of artworks.<sup>11</sup> However, this is also true for the older, prewar artistic periods.

The initial task of compiling a list of mosaics from 1945 to 1990, which would form a basis for analysing their condition in situ, was rather difficult due to the poor documentation and near-anonymity of these works. One reason is certainly that artworks on architectural surfaces are often seen as artistically inferior because the artist is not completely free to create but must usually adapt to the wishes of the client, the constraints of the architectural surface, and the purpose of the space. This might explain why such works are often mentioned only briefly or are ignored altogether in many volumes and in analyses of works by individual artists. For example, in the chapter “Pregljeve človeške postave v kontekstu evropske umetnosti” (Pregelj’s Human Figures in the Context of European Art) in which Jure Mikuž discusses Marij Pregelj’s work,<sup>12</sup> particularly the artist’s gradual transformations of reclining and other figures, it is unclear why the analysis does not include his large-scale figurative mosaics in Trbovlje (which received the Prešeren Award, the highest Slovenian recognition in art) [Figure 1], his mosaics at the significant Yugoslav memorial complex on the island of Rab, and a smaller family grave mosaic at Dravlje Cemetery in Ljubljana [Figure 2]. The author only briefly touches on the monumental mosaic in the Palace of the Federal Executive Council in Belgrade. Sometimes it seems that mosaics are considered inferior, even compared to wall paintings. In an article by Donovan Pavlinec,<sup>13</sup> which admittedly focuses on wall painting, Pengov’s painting at Villa Bled is presented in detail; however, his equally monumental mosaic in the same complex is not even mentioned. This is why truly comprehensive art-historical studies of individual historic buildings are very valuable. Such is the study by Katarina Mohar in the case of Villa Bled.<sup>14</sup> The next reason for the neglect of mosaics from this period is ideological.



Figure 1. Marij Pregelj,  
mosaic, 1957, *Workers'  
Home, Trbovlje*. Detail.  
Photo: Andrej Furlan,  
ZRC SAZU, 2015.



Figure 2. Marij Pregelj,  
*Bog je videl in sprejel*  
(*God Saw and Accepted*),  
mosaic, date unknown,  
Dravljje Cemetery,  
Ljubljana. Distant view of  
the mosaic on the Pregelj  
family grave. Photo: Blaž  
Šeme, 2023.



Socialist realist public artworks had a certain indoctrination and manipulation function, and the artist was even less free to create. Following multiparty democratisation and Slovenia's secession from Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, a tendency emerged among artists, the public, and the ruling authorities to undermine the value of socialist-era creativity by silencing it, covering it up, and rebuilding it.<sup>15</sup> However, even earlier, the ruling Communist Party authorities were not sympathetic toward certain artists. Their public works were therefore sometimes ignored or destroyed, even though they dealt with socialist themes. From a review of the literature, it is possible to identify two indirect factors that, to some extent, threaten the mosaics of this period even today: lower awareness of their artistic significance and value, also due to the scarcity of studies on the subject, and potentially ideologically driven reasons for their neglect and destruction.

### **Field investigations of socialist-era mosaics as a basis for condition and risk assessment**

Before documenting the situation on site, it is necessary to check the accessibility of the artwork. Some are outdoors and therefore usually freely accessible, whereas access to those inside buildings often needs to be arranged and contact details need to be sought. At least for the first field inspection, no special equipment is used, apart from a camera with various lenses (normal, wide-angle, zoom, and macro) and perhaps a tape measure to measure the dimensions. Condition-record forms tailored to a specific type of art heritage are helpful during the survey. They make it less likely that important data will be overlooked during inspection and facilitate subsequent data analysis. Due to time constraints during the field inspection, the data were often entered later in the office when reviewing the photos taken, but it is still advisable to do this in situ. About half of the mosaics in the inventory were inspected and photographically documented in situ between 2022 and 2025; for some mosaics it was possible to assess the condition based on recent photos of sufficient quality taken by other photographers, and at least sixteen sites still need to be documented. Although the goal was always to photograph both the details and the entire mosaic, the latter was not always possible due to its size or because it was obscured by furniture and other objects [Figure 3]. For this research, photos of mosaics that include other objects within the space are even more important because they reveal the current function of the spaces (waiting lounge, furniture storage area, etc.), which can affect the condition and at-risk status of mosaics. Due to the nature of the fieldwork, which involved attempting to survey as many mosaics



Figure 3. Lojze Spacal, *Alegorija podeželja* (*Allegory of the Countryside*), mosaic, 1955, building of the former Main Cooperative Union (*Glavna zadrugna zveza*), now the District State Prosecutor's Office, Ljubljana. The view is partially obstructed by security equipment at the entrance. Photo: Blaž Šeme, 2020.

as possible within a limited timeframe in a certain geographical area, it was often not possible to obtain the highest-quality photos, particularly in terms of lighting. Nonetheless, photos of mosaics with partially shaded areas can also be very valuable for the research because they reveal which parts of the mosaics are more exposed to artificial or natural light, and in the case of exteriors to precipitation.

The types and extent of damage are recorded, and the cause of the damage is deduced from its form because this helps in the subsequent risk assessment

of the mosaics. In some cases, such as difficult access, remoteness, large dimensions, or coverage with furniture and other objects, it was not possible to obtain all the data. The different dimensions of the mosaics (from 183 m<sup>2</sup> to less than 0.5 m<sup>2</sup>) require different inspection times. Some mosaics are located on two or more walls of the same or adjacent buildings. Field visits are a chance to obtain additional useful information from the personnel contacted and from random passersby.

## The condition of socialist-era mosaics

To study and systematically preserve modern mosaics on a national scale, it would certainly be advisable to first create a mosaic register and then regularly monitor their condition so that action can be taken quickly in the event of a threat. Based on this research, we first created a list of mosaics in Slovenia. The list of mosaics includes all currently known mosaics created between 1945 and 1990, regardless of their artistic quality

or other selection criteria. Thus, the inventory also includes mosaics that are more decorative (e.g., the monument in Mislinja or the façade of the basilica in Brezje), illustrative (e.g., in Kostanjevica na Krki), or informative (e.g., in Log pri Brezovici). The inventory currently records sixty-four mosaic units (as of April 2025), which are part of fifty-eight buildings and monuments at fifty-six sites. The collected data form the basis for an initial assessment of the condition of these mosaics. The mosaic inventory records the following attributes for each mosaic: authorship, mosaicist, title, year of creation, dimensions, mosaic material, mosaic and building type, architect, building name and address, building register number, type and protection status of the heritage (if any), information on previous treatment and conservation-restoration, condition and risk assessment, sources, and literature. For several mosaics, individual data are still missing and are gradually being added. It is expected that the number of registered mosaics will increase significantly in the future because the number of mosaics from religious and private commissions is still poorly studied, and eastern Slovenia is particularly neglected.

## Attribution

Of the twenty-three artists listed, only Đorđe Andrejević and Aleksandar Rukavina were not Slovenian, and only one – Helena (Kottler) Vurnik, who was of Austrian origin – was a woman. The authorship of mosaics is most often attributed to Ivan Seljak Čopič (ten mosaics), Stane Kregar (five), Ive Šubic (four), Rafael Nemec (four), Marij Pregelj (three), Jože Ciuha (three), and Karel Pečko (three). All seven artists together designed half (thirty-two) of the total mosaics. At least twenty-three mosaic units come from the workshop of the mosaicist Alfio Tambosso. All mosaics designed by one artist and executed by one mosaic workshop in a particular building are counted as a single mosaic unit; for example, in the Flower Pavilion at Villa Bled there are four mosaics, based on artistic designs by Andrejević and created by the Tambosso workshop,<sup>16</sup> but for the sake of simplicity they are only counted as one mosaic unit in this study. In 1959, the sculptor and mosaicist Slavko Krajnc completed a mosaic by Lojze Spacal in the Venetian House (*Benečanka*) in Piran. For the painter Jože Ciuha, the mosaicist Luciano Petris<sup>17</sup> created two mosaics in Ljubljana in the 1980s. At least nine mosaics were made by the artists themselves (Helena Vurnik, the brothers Ivan and Bogdan Čobal, Tomaž Kržišnik, and Jože Spacal), and no information is yet available about the rest of the mosaics.





Figure 4. Pages from *Znidarčič*, "Kamenček pri kamenčku."

## Materials and techniques

In the case of the fifty-four mosaics, the material composition of the mosaic pieces could be determined: twenty-six are made of smalto, twenty-one of natural stone, five of a combination of both (in these cases, stone predominates), and two of ceramic. It is possible that brick was used instead of stone for some of the reddish tesserae, as might be the case with the mosaics in the Flower Pavilion at Villa Bled, but a more detailed investigation would be needed to confirm this. In an interview in 1958<sup>18</sup> [Figure 4], Alfio Tambosso, who opened a mosaic workshop in Ljubljana shortly after the Second World War, explained his traditional method of making mosaics, from the painter's sketch to the final gluing of the mosaic to the wall with a cement binder. He mentioned that he preferred to use tesserae from pebbles collected along the Sava River because they have a great variety of colours. The analysis shows that after 1960 Tambosso was much more likely to use smalto, a coloured glass material, for tesserae. He had already used smalto to create Lojze Spacal's mosaic *Alegorija podeželja* (Allegory of the Countryside) in Ljubljana in 1955 and Pregelj's large mosaic at the Workers' Home in Trbovlje in 1957. The relief



mosaics by Rafael Nemec have a distinctive artistic expression, in which the mosaic background stands out from the plain ground surface of the dancing figures (on the façade of Kanal Primary School, 1962) or the mosaic outlines of the figures stand out from the ground surface (on the façade of Dobrovo Primary School, 1966). His more conventional mosaic depiction of Our Lady of Consolation on the portal of the church in Kromberk from 1970 also has an interesting relief shift between the figure and the background. *Mozaik slovensko-hrvaškega prijateljstva* (Mosaic of Slovenian–Croatian Friendship), or *Mozaik Tito* (Tito Mosaic), in Log pri Brezovici is similar in relief to Nemec’s mosaics on school façades, but it is more colourful and made of a combination of pebbles and crushed stone on a concrete foundation [Figure 5]. The ceramic mosaics by Tomaž Kržišnik from the 1980s are also quite unique from a material and technical point of view. In the case of the Emerik Bernard mosaic, in addition to smalto and stone, pieces of utilitarian objects were also used, sometimes simply glued to smalto [Figure 6].

## Date and place

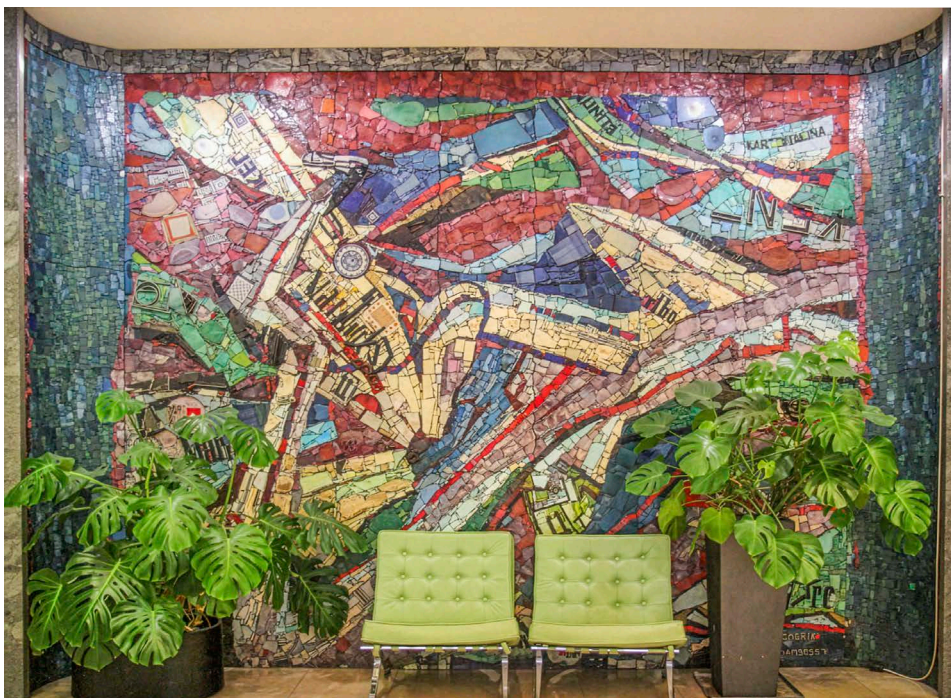
Close to a third of the mosaics (twenty-two) were made in the 1960s, and eleven of them are from the 1950s, whereas six to nine mosaics date from other decades. Ten mosaics have an unknown year of creation. The period from 1956 to 1966 was apparently the most stimulating for mosaic production because at least twenty-six mosaics were made then. The great majority of mosaics, namely twenty-four, are found in Ljubljana, four in Bled, and three each in Idrija, Nova Gorica, and Slovenj Gradec. Up to two mosaic sites are in Brezje, Kranj, Radovljica, and Zagorje ob Savi, and one each at Brdo Castle near Kranj and in Dobrovo, Dražgoše, Ilirska Bistrica, Kanal ob Soči, Kostanjevica na Krki, Kromberk, Krško, Lipica, Log pri Brezovici, Maribor, Mislinja, Novo mesto, Piran, Renče, Trbovlje, Velenje, and Vodice Pasture (*Vodiška planina*) near Kropa.

## Types of buildings and mosaics

Most of the mosaics are on the walls of buildings, with only two examples of floor mosaics in Bled and Nova Gorica. At least forty-nine buildings are public: the parliament, municipal buildings, other state institutions, state protocol buildings, buildings of public companies, cultural centres, schools, and so on. A recently listed mosaic by an unknown artist (the “HOKEJ 66” sign is based on a design by the Bosnian artist Dževad Hozo) is located in the Hala Tivoli sports complex in Ljubljana<sup>19</sup> [Figure 7]. Only



*Figure 5. Unknown artist, Mozaik slovensko-hrvaškega prijateljstva (Mosaic of Slovenian–Croatian Friendship), also known as Mozaik Tito (Tito Mosaic), mosaic, date unknown, Log pri Brezovici. The mosaic was restored in 2010; in recent years, it has been partially obscured by a lamppost. Photo: Blaž Šeme, 2023.*



*Figure 6. Emerik Bernard, mosaic in the entrance lobby of Petrol's headquarters, Ljubljana. Photo: Blaž Šeme, 2022.*



Figure 7. Unknown artist, mosaic, ca. 1964, Tivoli Hall, Ljubljana. The photograph shows the left half of the mosaic in the entrance lobby, including the sign for the 1966 Ice Hockey World Championship. Photo: Blaž Šeme, 2025.



three are in private locations, and eight are in religious buildings. In addition, eight mosaics are part of outdoor memorials. Otherwise, twenty-two mosaics are commemorative in content or function. Sixteen mosaics have a socialist theme, and eleven have a religious character.

## Legal protection

Of the fifty-six sites with mosaics, only twenty-four are listed in the state Register of Immovable Cultural Heritage: sixteen buildings, six memorials and places, and two settlements and their parts. As far as monument protection status is concerned, two mosaics are found at monuments of national importance (at Brdo Castle near Kranj and in Dražgoše), twelve at monuments of local importance, and ten at registered cultural heritage sites. According to the definition of the Act on the Protection of Cultural Heritage, registered heritage is heritage that is listed in the register but is not considered a monument.

## Past interventions and destruction

The mosaics at the Petrol station on Trieste Street (*Tržaška cesta*) in Ljubljana and by Karel Pečko in the Ljubljana bank building in Slovenj Gradec are known to have certainly been destroyed, although the mosaic at the Petrol



*Figure 8. Karel Pečko, mosaic formerly installed in the Bellevue restaurant, Legen, date unknown. Removed from the wall and covered with a protective sheet, it awaits reinstallation near the swimming pool complex in Slovenj Gradec.  
Photo: Blaž Šeme, 2023.*

station was recreated around 1990, using ceramic tiles on which an imitation of mosaic tiles is painted. During the renovation of the unstable load-bearing Ljubljana bank wall, more than fifty thousand colourful pieces of an 18 m<sup>2</sup> mosaic by Pečko were thrown away, without the knowledge of the artist.<sup>20</sup> A few years ago, his mosaic in the Bellevue restaurant in Legen was taken off the wall, and now it is waiting to be presented near the swimming pool complex in Slovenj Gradec [Figure 8]. It is not known whether Debenjak's mosaic *Morsko dno* (Sea Bottom) from 1957 in the former Tavčarjev Hram restaurant in Ljubljana has been destroyed or simply covered over. The existence of mosaics by Maksim Sedej at an unknown location and by Ivan Seljak in Lipica has yet to be verified. A major loss occurred to a mosaic in the Ljubljana City Savings Bank. Originally, the mosaic covered three walls of the branch, but, when the premises were renovated in the 1980s, the mosaic decoration on the wall around the bank windows was destroyed. In 2017, the owner again planned a major remodelling of the premises, demolishing

the remaining two walls with mosaic. To reconcile the owner's wish to remodel the branch according to contemporary needs with the conservation authority's preference to retain the artworks in situ, a compromise was reached: at least half of the mosaic would be preserved and transferred to the new walls of the branch. Our Department of Restoration at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design took on the challenging task of removing the 20 m<sup>2</sup> mosaic, transferring it to a new movable support, and installing it on the new walls<sup>21</sup> [Figure 9]. We also removed and stored the sections that were not transferred to the new walls so that the mosaic from the two walls might one day be reassembled and presented as a whole.

In the last fifteen years, conservation-restoration has been carried out on at least four other mosaics: in Dražgoše (a monument), in Idrija (the façade of a primary school), in Log pri Brezovici (a roadside inscription), and in Kostanjevica na Krki (the façade of a primary school). Probably in 2000, the mosaic on the façade of the Workers' Home in Trbovlje was also conserved/restored. In all five cases, the mosaics are exposed to the open air, suggesting that outdoor exposure increases their vulnerability. More detailed information on treatments would need to be verified



Figure 9. Unknown artist, mosaic, ca. 1962, Ljubljana City Savings Bank, Ljubljana. Protection of the mosaic surface before detachment during the 2018 conservation-restoration treatment. Photo: Blaž Šeme, 2018.



in the conservation archives. It seems that only the conservation-restoration work in Kostanjevica<sup>22</sup> was presented to the Slovenian professional community.<sup>23</sup> This mosaic is the largest mosaic in the country (measuring 184 m<sup>2</sup>, 800 cm × 2,300 cm) and one of the most exposed to weather conditions because only four years after the intervention it was noticed that many new pieces had fallen off.

### Physical condition and risk assessment

Of the sixty-four mosaics in the inventory, a more detailed risk assessment analysis was carried out for fifty-five because data of sufficient quality are not available for the others. On a scale of 1 to 5, thirty-three mosaics were assessed as 5 (very well preserved) [Figure 10], fifteen as 4 (fairly well preserved), and three as 3 (less well preserved) and in need of conservation-restoration mainly due to mosaic pieces falling off. The last group includes Seljak Čopič's mosaics on the monument in Mislinja [Figure 11] and in the Zagorje ob Savi Cultural Centre, and Bernard's mosaic at Petrol's headquarters in Ljubljana [Figure 12]. An intervention on Seljak's mosaic in Zagorje ob Savi is urgently needed because part of the mosaic around the air vent has already fallen off [Figure 13].

The mosaic at the Ljubljana City Savings Bank is rated as 2 (severely damaged) because, despite the recent successful relocation and presentation

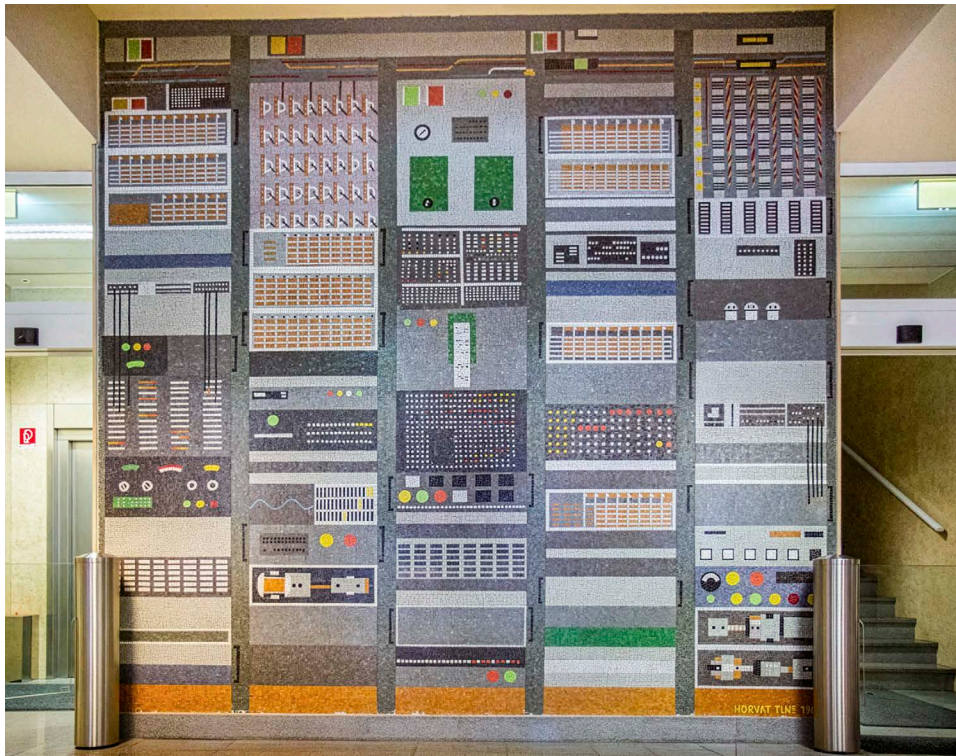


Figure 10. Tine Horvat, mosaic, 1964, entrance lobby of the Telekom Slovenije headquarters, Ljubljana. The mosaic is very well preserved (condition rating 5). Photo: Blaž Šeme, 2022.

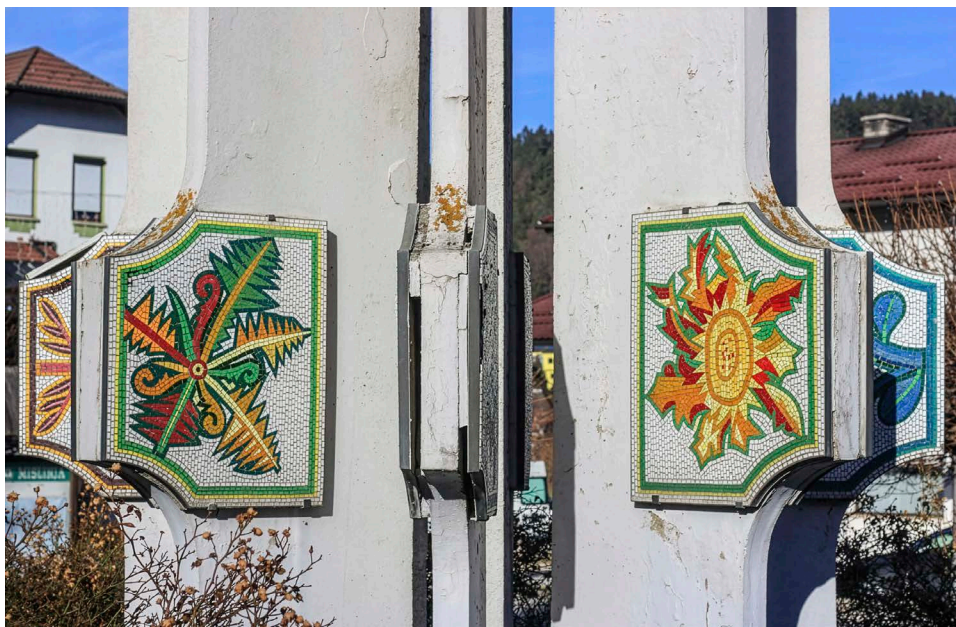


Figure 11. Ivan Seljak Čopič, mosaic panels on the monument to the National Liberation Struggle, Mislinja. The monument shows signs of neglect. Photo: Blaž Šeme, 2023.



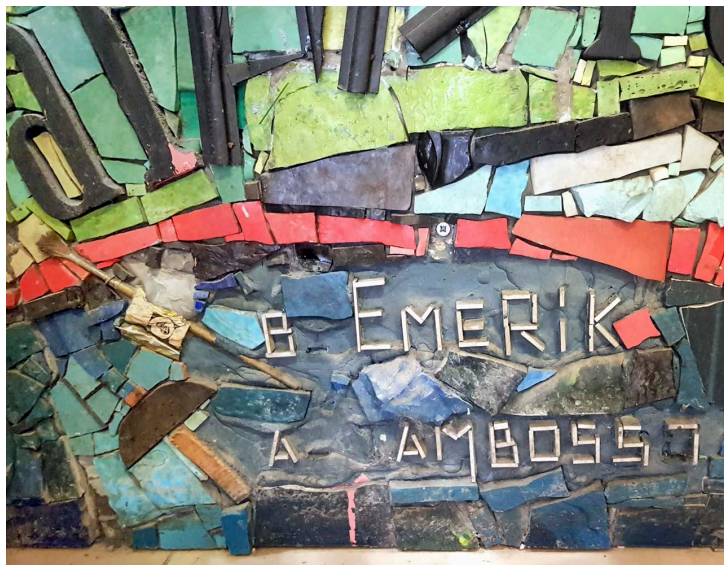


Figure 12. Emerik Bernard, mosaic in the entrance lobby of Petrol's headquarters, Ljubljana. Detail showing missing tesserae around the artists' names. Photo: Blaž Šeme, 2022.

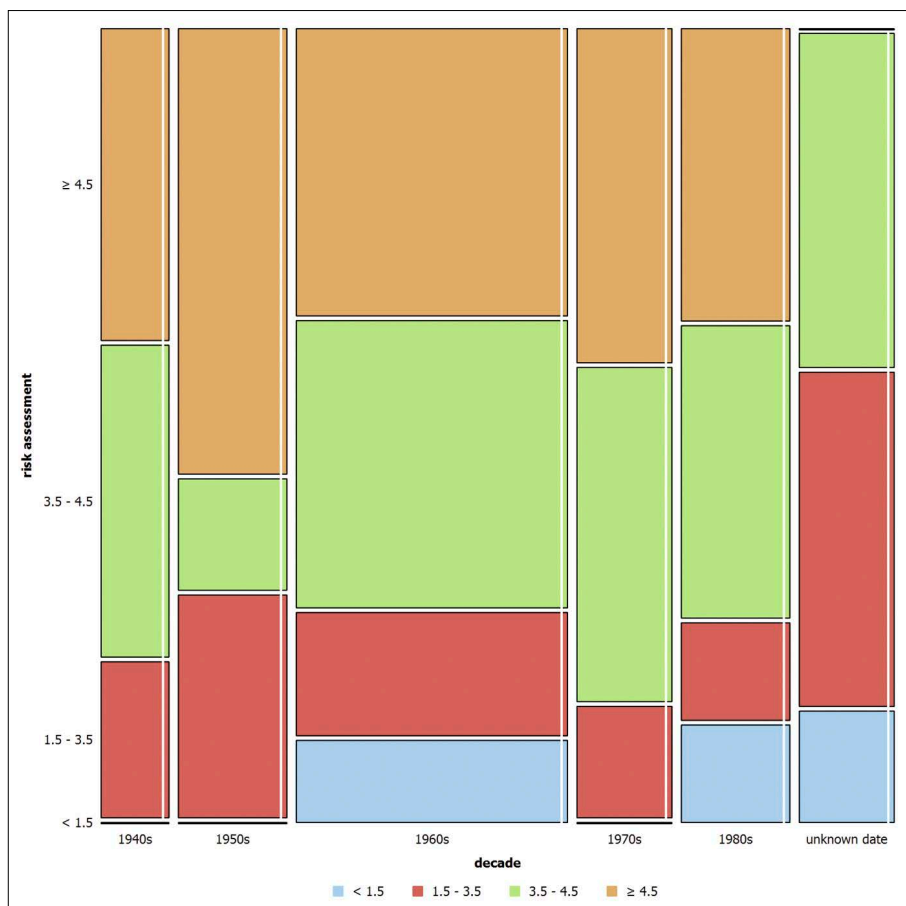


Figure 13. Ivan Seljak Čopič, *Protest rudarjev* (Miners' Protest), mosaic, 1961, Cultural Centre, Zagorje ob Savi. Detail. The mosaic is particularly at risk around the air vent, where part of it has already detached. Photo: Blaž Šeme, 2023.

of part of the mosaic, much of the remaining mosaic is either destroyed or awaiting further conservation-restoration in the studio of UL ALUO. The condition of the largely destroyed mosaics at the Petrol station on Trieste Street (*Tržaška cesta*) in Ljubljana and of Pečko's mosaic in the Bank in Slovenj Gradec was rated as 1 (destroyed). Otherwise, in the risk assessment, eleven mosaics are assessed as being at higher risk, mainly because they are exposed outdoors, two of them are indoors but in a location where they are likely to be physically damaged, and two are floor mosaics subject to permanent foot traffic. Some of the mosaics have presentation problems because they are partly covered or less visible due to furniture, storage of various objects, changes in use, alterations, and so on. The analysis shows that, among the mosaics created in the 1950s, there is a higher proportion of very well-preserved mosaics (rated 5) than among those from other decades, but at the same time there is also a slightly higher proportion of poorly preserved mosaics (rated 2) [Figure 14].

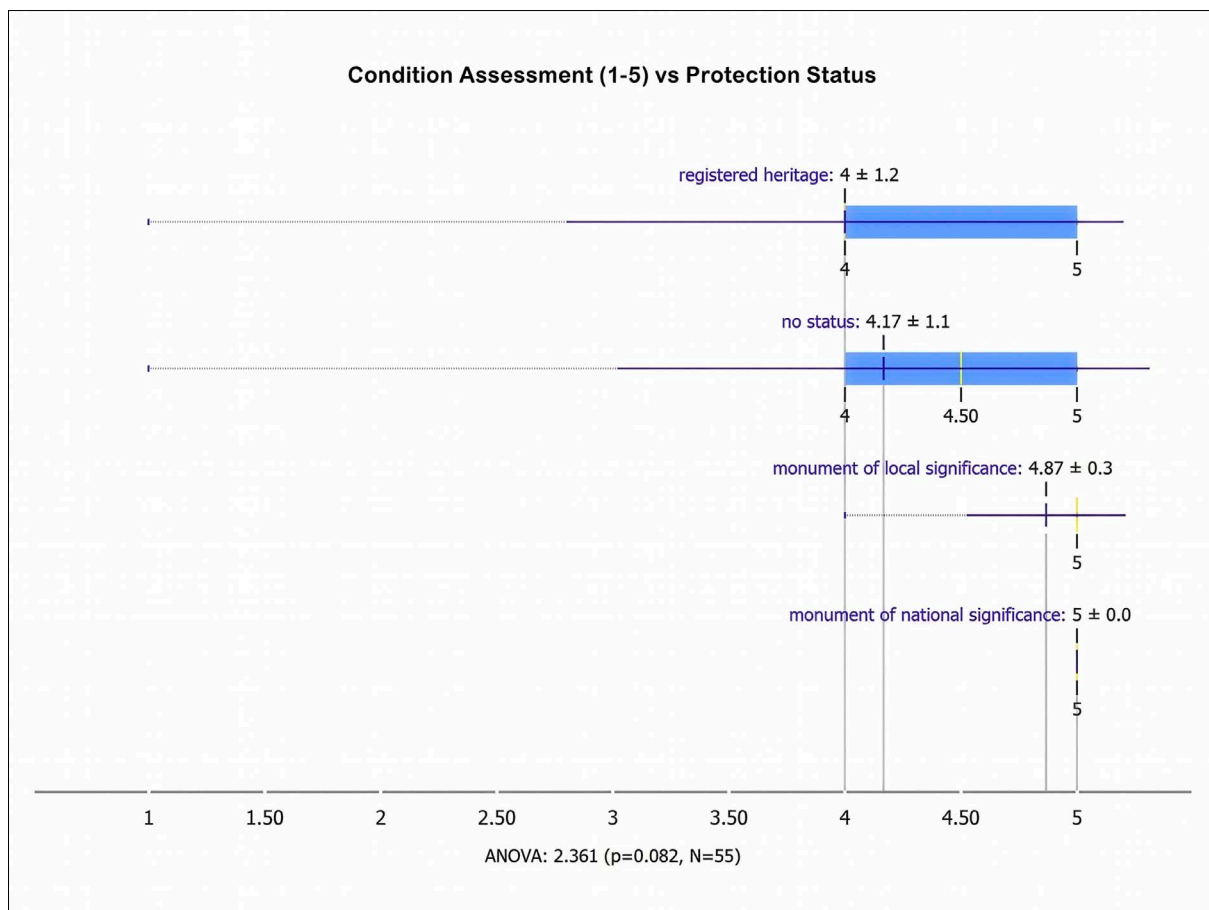
We further analysed the condition of the mosaics (rated from 1 to 5) in relation to the following characteristics: material composition (stone/smalto), type (floor/wall), location (indoor/outdoor), period of creation (by decade), content (socialist vs. non-socialist), and type of monument and

Figure 14. Condition ratings of the mosaics (1 = destroyed; 5 = very well preserved), grouped by decade of creation. Chart: Blaž Šeme, created using Orange Data Mining (University of Ljubljana).



protection status by analysis of variance (ANOVA). When considering the influence of age in correlation with condition assessment, the mosaics from different decades are in different condition, with mean values from 4.25 (1950s) and 4.30 (1960s) to 4.71 (1970s) and 4.75 (1980s). From a material point of view, the smalto mosaics are on average as well preserved (mean value 4.44) as those made of natural stone (mean value 4.28). There is also no significant difference in preservation between mosaics with and without socialist themes (mean values 4.50 and 4.28). The analysis of the collected data confirms that mosaics are better preserved in interiors (mean value 4.37) than on exteriors (mean value 4.29), and wall mosaics (mean value 4.41) are better preserved than floor mosaics (mean value 4.00), but in both cases the differences in preservation are not as significant as might be expected. The mosaics on Second World War monuments (mean value 4.00) are worse preserved than on churches (mean value 4.67) and other buildings (mean value 4.41), and mosaics at registered heritage sites (mean value 4.00) and sites without protection





*Figure 15. Condition ratings of the fifty-five analysed mosaics (1 = destroyed; 5 = very well preserved) by heritage-protection status, analysed using ANOVA (p = p-value; n = sample size). Chart: Blaž Šeme, created using Orange Data Mining (University of Ljubljana).*

status (mean value 4.17) are significantly less well preserved than those at cultural monuments of local (mean value 4.87) or national importance (mean value 5.00) [Figure 15]. Accordingly, mosaics at registered heritage sites are considered to be at a similarly high risk to those at sites without protection status.

## Discussion

Several factors influence the condition of the socialist-era mosaics to varying degrees. These factors include age, material and production technique, content or theme, exposure to weather and vandalism, neglect, building renovation, building function, and monument protection status. The influence of some factors is easier to assess than others. A detailed analysis of the impact of each factor on the condition of mosaics is important because it also provides a more credible risk assessment. Analysis of the fifty-five mosaic units shows that the older mosaics are on average in slightly worse condition than the newer ones. Surprisingly, the outdoor mosaics are not in much worse condition, probably because of conservation-restoration work in recent years.

Based on previous experience with condition analyses of other artworks, we had assumed that mosaics were mostly threatened by exposure to weather, modifications and poor maintenance of buildings, insufficient legal protection, and, to some extent, ideological reasons, but there is no evidence that the socialist-themed mosaics are less well preserved or more endangered. The analysis shows that a building's status as registered heritage does not generally provide more protection for mosaics. However, designating a site as a monument of local or national significance notably helps reduce the threat to the mosaics.

The study also reveals that mosaics are particularly at risk in commercial buildings, in restaurants, banks, and shops, because all known instances of destruction (or possible covering over) occurred in such buildings: the Tavčarjev Hram restaurant in Ljubljana, the NLB bank branches in Ljubljana and Slovenj Gradec, and the Petrol station in Ljubljana. Although the mosaics are generally well maintained, the presence of more noticeable damage highlights the need for conservation-restoration on the mosaics of the monument in Mislinja, the Zagorje ob Savi Cultural Centre, and the Petrol office building in Ljubljana.

A review of the literature suggests that lower awareness of the artistic significance and value of these mosaics, as an additional risk factor, may be due to a lack of studies on the mosaics and their promotion.

## Conclusion

Between 1945 and 1990, numerous mosaics, wall paintings, sgraffiti, reliefs, and sculptures were created in Slovenia, especially on public buildings and in squares and parks. Over the years, the research work of documenting and monitoring the condition of artworks in Slovenia has gradually led to the creation of a digital database of artworks with pho-

tographic and written documentation on techniques, technology, conservation, endangerment, and past interventions. The main purpose of collecting such data is to create a basis for broader heritage studies, the practical purpose of which is to improve approaches to the conservation and restoration of art heritage. All this effort makes sense when some value is recognised in these works of art.

This study presents the results of an analysis of the state of art heritage of the socialist era, which is currently limited to mosaics. Many of the earliest mosaics are in the socialist realist style and show figurative depictions of the Second World War and the development of the working and peasant classes in the postwar period. In the 1950s, more abstract representations also began to appear. The most typical and monumental mosaics of the socialist era can be found at Villa Bled, the Workers' Home in Trbovlje, the National Assembly building in Ljubljana, the Dražgoše monument, and the primary school in Kostanjevica na Krki, which is the largest mosaic in Slovenia. The mosaics were mostly designed by Slovenian artists and created by the Italian mosaicist Alfio Tambosso, usually with natural stone and smalto tesserae. Through research, it was possible to compile a list of sixty-four mosaics and to analyse the condition and endangerment of fifty-five mosaics. The mosaics are generally in good condition and regularly maintained, and some have recently been conserved/restored. The older mosaics are on average in slightly worse condition than newer ones. There is no evidence that socialist-themed mosaics are less well preserved or more at risk. The analysis of the collected data confirms that mosaics on buildings of national and local significance are better preserved. Surprisingly, mosaics on buildings with registered heritage status are significantly worse preserved compared to mosaics on buildings of local or national significance and therefore at greater risk. Moreover, mosaics dating from the socialist era are clearly more at risk in buildings with commercial activity.

## **Funding**

Field research conducted between 2022 and 2025 was partially funded by the Institutional Funding Pillar (Institucionalni steber financiranja, ISF) for research.

## Endnotes

- 1 In the last ten years, the UL ALUO Department of Restoration carried out conservation-restoration on several publicly accessible works of art from the socialist era mostly in Ljubljana, for which often no or minimal initial documentation about the creation date, authorship, technique, technology, and previous interventions could be found. These conserved/restored artworks were the following: two murals created at the end of the 1940s by Maksim Sedej at the Secondary Hairdressing School (intervention in 2016) and at the adjacent Technical Secondary School (intervention in 2024), which was formerly part of the Litostroj industrial complex in the Šiška neighbourhood, the stone sculpture *Drvar/Sekač* (Woodcutter) by the sculptor Jakob Savinšek from 1949 to 1950 in front of the Forestry Institute in the *Rožna Dolina* neighbourhood (intervention in 2024), Slavko Pengov's mural from 1950 to 1951 in the lobby of the University of Ljubljana's Faculty of Natural Sciences and Engineering on Aškerc Street (*Aškerčeva cesta*; partial intervention in 2022), a mosaic in the Ljubljana City Savings Bank on Čop Street (*Čopova ulica*), created in around 1962 by an unknown artist (intervention in 2018), six murals on the central staircase of Jože Plečnik High School on Šubic Street (*Šubičeva ulica*) painted by Vasko Pregelj in 1967 (intervention in 2020 and 2021), student forma viva stone sculptures from the 1970s in the park of the student campus in the Rožna Dolina neighbourhood (interventions from 2018 onward), and a mural of unknown date by Jaka Torkar in the hallway of Jesenice Secondary School (intervention in 2025–2026).
- 2 Blaž Šeme and Urška Šeme, "The Ljubljana Sgraffiti: A Diversity of Architectures, Techniques of Executions, and Degrees of Preservation," in *Sgraffito in Change: Original Realisation vs. Secondary Interventions*, ed. Jan Vojtěchovský (Litomyšl: University of Pardubice, 2022), 84–101.
- 3 Blaž Šeme, "Conservation of Socialist Era Mosaics in Slovenia," in *Conserving Mosaics in a Changing Environment: Challenges and Opportunities: The 14th Conference of the International Committee for Conservation of Mosaics* (Florence: Edifir Edizioni Firenze, 2025), 199–212.
- 4 For example, in her art video *Beacons of Resistance* (2023), the Slovenian artist Jasmina Cibic included clips showing Slavko Pengov's mosaic in the Belvedere at Villa Bled. The video was acquired by the Irish Museum of Modern Art in 2023.
- 5 For example, Donovan Pavlinec, "Slovenski inženirji človeških duš: monumentalne stenske poslikave socialističnega realizma," *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, n. s., 44 (2008): 134.
- 6 This relationship is reciprocal because the things we value reinforce our internal belief systems, and our internal belief systems determine which things are worth pursuing and preserving.
- 7 Jonathan Ashley-Smith, *Risk Assessment for Object Conservation* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2011), 10–11.
- 8 Randall Mason, "Assessing Values in Conservation Planning: Methodological Issues and Choices," in *Assessing the Values of Cultural Heritage: Research Report*, ed. Marta de la Torre (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2002), 7, [https://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications\\_resources/pdf\\_publications/pdf/assessing.pdf](https://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/pdf_publications/pdf/assessing.pdf).
- 9 Maja Kač, "Vsakega namiga bomo veseli.' Iščejo se umetnine, ki so med 1945 in 1991 nastale za javne ustanove," *MMC RTV Slovenija*, 2 May 2025, <https://www.rtvlo.si/kultura/dediscina/vsakega-namiga-bomo-veseli-iscejo-se-umetnine-ki-so-med-1945-in-1991-nastale-za-javne-ustanove/744210>.
- 10 Pavlinec, "Slovenski inženirji človeških duš."
- 11 Pavlinec, "Slovenski inženirji človeških duš," 118.
- 12 Jure Mikuž, *Slovensko moderno slikarstvo in zahodna umetnost: od preloma s socialističnim realizmom do konceptualizma* (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija, 1995), 118–173.
- 13 Pavlinec, "Slovenski inženirji človeških duš," 114–130.



- 14 Katarina Mohar, *Vila Bled*, Umetnine v žepu, vol. 13 (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2016); Katarina Mohar, "Art Representing the State: The Villa Bled Official Residence," in *Art and Politics in the Modern Period*, ed. Dragan Damjanović (Zagreb: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, FF Press, 2019), 83–91.
- 15 Pavlinec, "Slovenski inženirji človeških duš," 117–118, and Milček Komelj, *Kronika Marjana Pogačnika o zaljubljenih v umetnost*, Elektronska knjižna zbirka, e-55 (Ljubljana: KUD Logos, 2005), 337–338, [https://kud-logos.si/knjige/e\\_55\\_Kronika\\_MP.pdf](https://kud-logos.si/knjige/e_55_Kronika_MP.pdf).
- 16 Mohar, "Art Representing the State," 86–88.
- 17 Luciano Petris, who mainly works with glass tesserae (Venetian smalto), continued to create mosaics for Jože Ciuha also after 1990 – a total of about thirty works in Slovenia, Italy, and perhaps elsewhere as well; see "Luciano Petris," Homo Faber, accessed May 8, 2025, <https://www.homofaber.com/en/discover/luciano-petris-mosaic-making-italy>.
- 18 Asta Znidarčič, "Kamenček pri kamenčku," *Tovariš*, 26 October 1958, 1138–1139.
- 19 "I. nagrada 300.000 gre v Bihać," *Polet*, 13 July 1964, 12.
- 20 Andrej Makuc, "Med Orlico in Uršljo se je zgodil ves svet," in *Karel Pečko*, ed. Janez Komljanec (Slovenj Gradec: Fundacija akademskega slikarja Karla Pečka; Cerdonis, 2006), 85.
- 21 Blaž Šeme, *Mozaik v poslovalnici Mestne hranilnice ljubljanske na Čopovi 3 v Ljubljani: poročilo o konservatorsko-restavratorskem posegu* (Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, Akademija za likovno umetnost in oblikovanje, 2018).
- 22 Tadeja Kajzar Trajkovski and Alja Fir, "Konserviranje-restavriranje mozaika Bitka na Krškem polju v Kostanjevici na Krki," in *Konservator-restavrador (20 let): Povzetki mednarodnega strokovnega srečanja 2020*, ed. Nataša Nemeček (Ljubljana: Društvo restavradorjev Slovenije and Skupnost muzejev Slovenije, 2020), 186.
- 23 That is, not counting our presentation on the conservation-restoration of mosaics at the Ljubljana City Savings Bank to an international audience of experts at the ICCM conference in Plovdiv in 2022 and the SEE Mosaics conference in Budapest in 2024.

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## Ocena stanja in ogroženosti mozaikov iz obdobja socialistične Slovenije

### Povzetek

V prispevku so predstavljeni rezultati analize stanja na področju mozaične umetnosti iz obdobja socializma v Sloveniji. S kabinetnim delom in raziskavo na terenu smo ustvarili evidenco več kot 60 mozaikov ter proučili njihovo materialno sestavo, tehnike in pretekle posege, pa tudi njihovo stanje in ogroženost.

V obdobju med letoma 1945 in 1990 so v Sloveniji nastali številni mozaiki, stenske poslikave, sgraffiti, reliefi in kipi, ki se nahajajo zlasti na javnih stavbah, v parkih in na trgih. Dolgoletno raziskovalno delo, posvečeno dokumentiranju in spremljanju stanja teh umetniških del, ki poteka na Raziskovalnem inštitutu Akademije za likovno umetnost in oblikovanje v Ljubljani, je postopoma privedlo do vzpostavitve digitalne podatkovne baze umetnin, ki vključuje fotografsko in pisno dokumentacijo o tehnikah in tehnologijah izvedbe, konserviranju, ogroženosti ter preteklih posegih. Glavni namen zbiranja teh podatkov je vzpostaviti podlago za širše raziskave dediščine, katerih praktični cilj je izboljšati pristope h konserviranju in restavriranju umetnostne dediščine. Vsa ta prizadevanja pa dobijo smisel, ko je tem umetninam priznana določena vrednost – zgodovinska, estetska, simbolna, spominska ali druga.

V študiji so predstavljeni rezultati analize stanja umetnostne dediščine iz obdobja socializma, ki je za zdaj omejena na mozaično umetnost. Številni najzgodnejši mozaiki so nastali v slogu socialističnega realizma in prikazujejo figuralne prizore narodnoosvobodilnega boja ter razvoja delavskega in kmečkega razreda v povojnem obdobju. V petdesetih letih 20. stoletja so se začele pojavljati tudi bolj abstraktne upodobitve. Najznačilnejše in najmonumentalnejše mozaike iz obdobja socializma najdemo v Vili Bled, Delavskem domu Trbovlje, stavbi Ljudske skupščine v Ljubljani, na spomeniku v Dražgošah in na osnovni šoli v Kostanjevici na Krki, kjer je tudi največji mozaik v Sloveniji. Mozaike so večinoma zasnovali slovenski umetniki, izvedel pa jih je italijanski mozaicist Alfio Tambosso. V okviru raziskave smo evidentirali 64 mozaikov, pri 55 pa smo analizirali njihovo stanje in ogroženost.

Mozaiki so večinoma sestavljeni iz kamnitih in steklenih (smaltnih) ploščic (*tesserae*), pri čemer se je izbira materialov skozi desetletja nekoliko

spreminjala. Na splošno so mozaiki dobro ohranjeni in večinoma redno vzdrževani, nekateri pa so bili v zadnjem času tudi konservirani-restavrirani. V zadnjih letih so bili konservatorsko-restavratorski posegi izvedeni predvsem na mozaikih na prostem. Ugotovili smo, da so mozaiki v notranjščinah bolje ohranjeni od tistih na zunanjščinah in da so stenski mozaiki bolje ohranjeni od talnih, vendar razlike v ohranjenosti v nobenem od obeh primerov niso statistično pomembne.

Starejši mozaiki so v povprečju nekoliko slabše ohranjeni od novejših. Mozaiki iz steklenih ploščic, ki so bili pogostejši v poznejših obdobjih, so v povprečju enako dobro ohranjeni kot mozaiki iz naravnega kamna. Za trditev, da bi bili mozaiki s socialistično tematiko slabše ohranjeni ali bolj ogroženi od mozaikov z drugačno motiviko, ni dokazov. Analiza zbranih podatkov kaže tudi, da so mozaiki na stavbah, ki so bile razglašene za spomenike lokalnega ali državnega pomena, bolje ohranjeni. Mozaiki na stavbah, ki so zgolj vpisane v register kulturne dediščine, pa so podobno kot mozaiki na objektih brez kakršnega koli varstvenega statusa bistveno slabše ohranjeni in zato bolj ogroženi. Posebej ogroženi so mozaiki v zgradbah s komercialno dejavnostjo, kot so restavracije, banke in trgovine.



# A CULTURA BURGUESA MORRERÁ!





## PROMETHEUS'S TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF HERITAGE CHALLENGES POSED BY MURALS FROM THE TIME OF PORTUGAL'S *ESTADO NOVO* DICTATORSHIP (1933–1974)

### Mid-20th century murals in Portugal: a dissonant heritage

Between the 1930s and the 1950s, the mass communication potential of mural painting prompted a rush of commissions by public institutions and private organisations across Europe.<sup>1</sup> In Portugal, at the time under the *Estado Novo* (New State) dictatorship (1933–1974), well-established and lesser-known artists were hired to decorate administrative buildings, hospitals, and universities. In the private sector, too, corporations enhanced their headquarters with murals celebrating industry and trade, while commercial establishments, less constrained by political and institutional considerations, gave artists freer creative rein to animate spaces of social life such as cinemas, cafés, and shops. For artists, this opened up attractive professional opportunities in a country with an otherwise very limited art market. By the 1960s, however, this form of art – large-scale decorative panels commissioned for indoor spaces – was losing its appeal in Portugal, as in Europe generally,<sup>2</sup> and what had once been a common element of the built fabric of society gradually faded from visual culture. Over the following decades, changes in ownership or use of the buildings that once housed murals resulted in the destruction of many of these works while rendering others no longer visible to the public. Still, a substantial number of murals have survived to this day, often as objects of contested significance to today's society. Their association with a dictatorial past, even when they were not necessarily vehicles of state propaganda, tends to generate discomfort, leading to either a certain resistance to engage with these objects, or a knee-jerk dismissal of them. However, the nature of these objects makes them an intrinsic part of buildings we still use; the murals are instances of dissonant heritage<sup>3</sup> that are hard to ignore within the urban landscape that we inhabit. Fixed objects in a rapidly changing world, they are increasingly contested by societal interpretations grounded on evolving political, ethical, and cultural factors. Their non-neutral presence, and their state of conservation several decades on, press all stakeholders to engage in discussions regarding possible forms of intervention on them.<sup>4</sup> The case study presented here addresses one such mural and the heritage challenges it raises today.

*The Myth of Prometheus* [Figure 1], a mural created by Dordio Gomes (1890–1976) in 1954 for ESBAP, the Porto Higher School of Fine Arts (today FBAUP, Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Porto), provides a fitting case study for the issues at stake. It is one of a body of six frescoes located in various institutions and establishments in the city, all by Dordio Gomes, that are currently the object of study of the exploratory project *Mural in Motion*.<sup>5</sup> The project studies this body of works from an art history, public history, and heritage perspective while exploring the possibilities and limitations of digital strategies to tell their story and engage the community in necessary discussions regarding their conservation. To this end, the project has digitised the six murals, using photogrammetry, for the purposes of registration, preservation, study, and dissemination, and will make these high-resolution digital images available online but also use them to “exhibit” the murals, by projecting them at real-life scale in an exhibition venue.<sup>6</sup> Through this exhibition the project aims to bring the murals out of the relative obscurity they currently find themselves in, in places with limited public access, and encourage public viewing and discussion.

Dordio Gomes, a professor at ESBAP and a renowned figure in Portugal's mid-twentieth-century art scene, was commissioned by the school to produce this mural as an example of the integration of the arts and a masterclass in fresco painting. The mural stands today with all the marks of its passage through time: deep scratches, particularly in its lower section, and the inscription in blue, “*A cultura burguesa morrerá*” (“Bourgeois culture will die”), across the top right section, as well as other details added in the same paint in the bottom right section. What little is known on the exact circumstances surrounding this inscription and the details in blue, all presumably from the same time, points to it having been added in 1974, at the time of the Carnation Revolution that, after a forty-year right-wing dictatorship, would give way to a democratic regime. In the wake of this revolution, the mid-1970s were a time of great political and social upheaval, a time of strong, vocal rejection of the old regime, and of anyone and anything that was perceived as having associated with it. This fresco was not a state commission, and it presented none of the historical and nationalist tropes favoured in that type of work. Its author had been painting murals for various patrons since the 1940s – for a café, a bookshop, and two churches – and would subsequently produce two further mural sets for state institutions.<sup>7</sup> Presumably by association, this fresco must have been seen as part of the Estado Novo regime that it was now imperative to overcome. At some point in 1974, therefore, members of the school community voiced that sentiment by adding, in blue paint,

Figure 1. Dordio Gomes, *The Myth of Prometheus*, fresco, 1954, 3.61 × 2.89 m, Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Porto, Porto. Image: Leticia Crespillo, *Mural in Motion*.



the inscription, plus what appears to be a dove, a penis on one of the figures, and colouring in the hats of this and another figure.

After that episode, and until recently, the mural was largely ignored. Over the last twenty years, however, the school has made major efforts to safeguard its own heritage, encompassing its modernist buildings and the various works of art that were created for them. This includes the mural, whose condition calls for some form of restoration. This has raised a major point of debate among the school community on whether a potential clean-up of this fresco should include the removal of the 1974 inscription or leave it in.

There are those who view the inscription as a political intervention, one that tells the story of the 1974 democratic revolution, something that has become an intrinsic part of the mural's history and as such should



be preserved. On the other hand, there are those who argue that any restoration of the mural should bring it as close as possible to its original appearance, including the removal of the 1974 inscription and other details, so as to honour the legacy of a well-loved professor at the school,<sup>8</sup> who pioneered the teaching of fresco in Portugal at the time, and trained many of the artists who would receive public and private commissions in Portugal over the following decades,<sup>9</sup> well into the democratic period. The debate has been ongoing since at least 2021<sup>10</sup> and it is hoped that the exploratory project can now contribute to it by generating and communicating knowledge on the mural that might help stakeholders – the school’s student body, its teaching and administrative staff, and public heritage agencies, among others – make informed decisions on any restoration intervention. With research still ongoing at the time of writing, what follows are preliminary findings on the circumstances surrounding the mural’s creation and its reception over time, as well as a formal and iconographic analysis, that should eventually help ascertain the extent of the mural’s artistic, historical, or other societal significance and contribute to decision-making processes on its conservation.

### ***The Myth of Prometheus – analysing a mural equation***

A blank wall presents an artist with a complex challenge, one that calls for a creative response capable of reconciling the artist’s own voice and aesthetic enquiries with a variety of external expectations, limitations, and demands: the commission, which to a lesser or greater extent determines the overall theme and terms of production; the specific location of the work, its dialogue with the surrounding architectural elements, the function of the space, and the circulation within it; and the work’s mode of reception, the visibility and legibility of the mural’s forms taking into account the wall’s dimensions, lighting, and angles of vision, as well as the socio-political context that may inform its interpretation by the target audience. Thus, if a canvas can already constitute a complex pictorial problem for an artist, a mural, with this multiplicity of site-specific factors at play, becomes something closer to an equation.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, Dordio Gomes’s writings, as those of renowned twentieth century artists who worked on mural commissions, express an understanding of the mural as a practice that cannot be addressed by merely transposing to the wall, at a larger scale, the pictorial solutions of an easel work.<sup>12</sup> From an art historical perspective, therefore, the formal and iconographic analysis of a mural must go beyond the boundaries of the

*Figure 2. General view of the vestibule to the Architecture Pavilion, with Dordio Gomes's *The Myth of Prometheus* on the wall to the left, pictured at the time of its inauguration in 1954. Source: Fundação Manuel Leão, Fundo Fotográfico Teófilo Rego, inv. no.: PT-FML-TR-COM-70-134 (as reproduced in Nunes, *Vistas de exposição*).*



painted surface; it must examine the choices made by the artist as strategies to resolve the complex fit between their own creative wishes and the requirements of the commission, the presumed expectations of the target audience, and the formal, functional, and symbolic specificities of the mural's spatial setting. It must consider, in other words, how the artist went about trying to resolve that particular mural equation.

From the early 1950s ESBAP had been reformulating its curricular plan with the specific purpose of promoting an integrated approach to artistic production that could bring together architects, painters, and sculptors in collaborative work.<sup>13</sup> From a career development perspective, and in the context of a restricted art market where work on commission could be a much-needed source of income for artists, this training was meant to enable students to undertake work for public and private entities. Against this background, *The Myth of Prometheus* was commissioned as a mural for the school's newly built Architecture Pavilion [Figure 2], which also incorporated sculptural works, as an example of what Carlos Ramos (1897–1969), the school's director at the time, would term the “pact of the three major arts”.<sup>14</sup>

No documentary evidence has so far surfaced to provide details on the actual commission process or the people involved in deciding the exact location for this mural, its theme, and the way it was to be represented.

The Promethean myth, at any rate, would have been a suitable choice for a university. In an in-depth study of the ancient story of the titan and its depictions over the centuries, Carol Dougherty stresses the richness and complexity of this myth, and the wealth of interpretive possibilities it has offered artists and writers.<sup>15</sup> This variety notwithstanding, a central element of the myth is the idea of fire stolen by Prometheus from the gods as a gift to mankind, symbolising “the spirit of technology, forbidden knowledge, the conscious intellect, political power, and artistic inspiration.”<sup>16</sup> Given this association with knowledge and the arts, therefore, it is not surprising to find renditions of the myth, in different pictorial languages, in a number of university settings: from the neoclassicist cycle devoted to this story in the vestibule of the University of Copenhagen by Constantin Hansen, dated c. 1845,<sup>17</sup> to the bold dramatism of José Clemente Orozco’s 1930 fresco for Pomona College, California,<sup>18</sup> or the geometrised 1957 interpretation by Rufino Tamayo for the University of Puerto Rico.<sup>19</sup>

Dordio Gomes had a profound knowledge of classical culture<sup>20</sup> and was likely well acquainted with this myth and its pertinence to a place of learning and the arts such as ESBAP. His take on the narrative focuses less on the often-depicted episodes of the theft of the fire by Prometheus, and his subsequent punishment by Zeus for his defiance, to bring instead to the fore the aspects of the story more directly related with creativity and the arts. Thus, with the theft and the punishment respectively conveyed in small vignettes at the top left and top right corners of the mural [Figure 3], the bulk of the composition is devoted instead to the portrayal of Prometheus as the creator of mankind, and to the various arts developed by the latter after receiving, through fire, the gift of knowledge and technological advancement. At the centre of the composition, a larger-than-life Prometheus moulds the first humans from clay [Figure 1]. At his feet, a group of roughly sketched figures seems to represent early humankind in a still primeval state [Figure 4], before the enlightenment that would come as a gift from the titan in the form of fire. With that knowledge in their possession, humans develop various forms of art and technology: just below and to the right of the group of early humans, two figures play and listen to music while another paints a vase while, to the left of Prometheus, three figures draw geometric shapes on the floor as another two are busy building a structure [Figure 5]. In addition to music, therefore, the depiction encompasses the three arts of the school’s “pact” – architecture, painting, and sculpture, the latter represented by Prometheus himself in moulding humanity from clay.



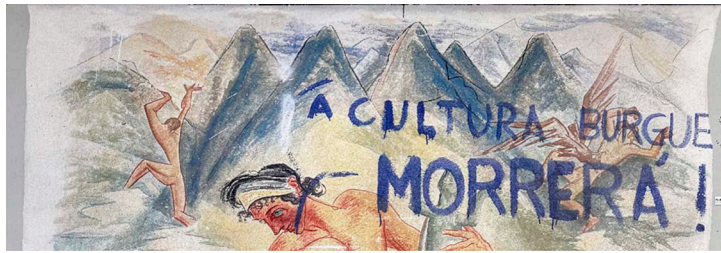


Figure 3. Detail of The Myth of Prometheus, the theft of fire (left) and the punishment (right) under the 1970s inscription. Image: Leticia Crespillo, Mural in Motion.



Figure 4. Detail of The Myth of Prometheus, early humankind in a primeval state, plus figures playing music and painting a vase. Image: Leticia Crespillo, Mural in Motion.

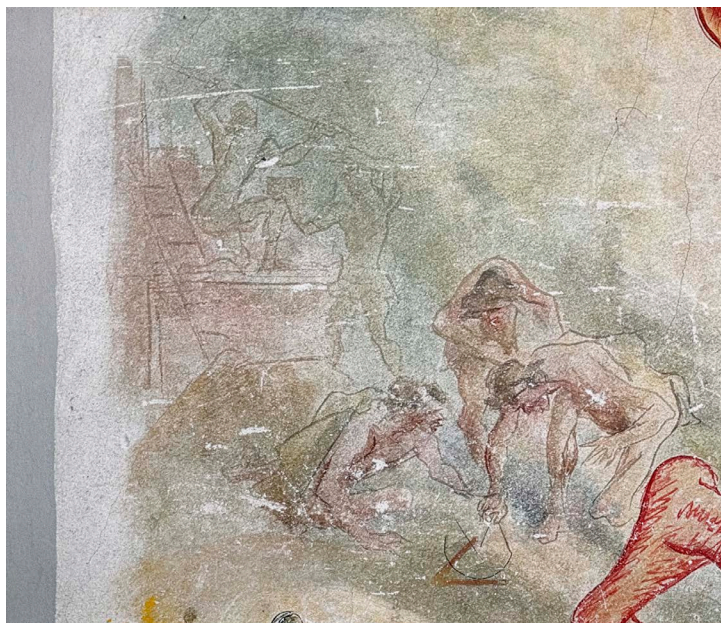


Figure 5. Detail of The Myth of Prometheus, figures designing and building structures. Image: Leticia Crespillo, Mural in Motion.

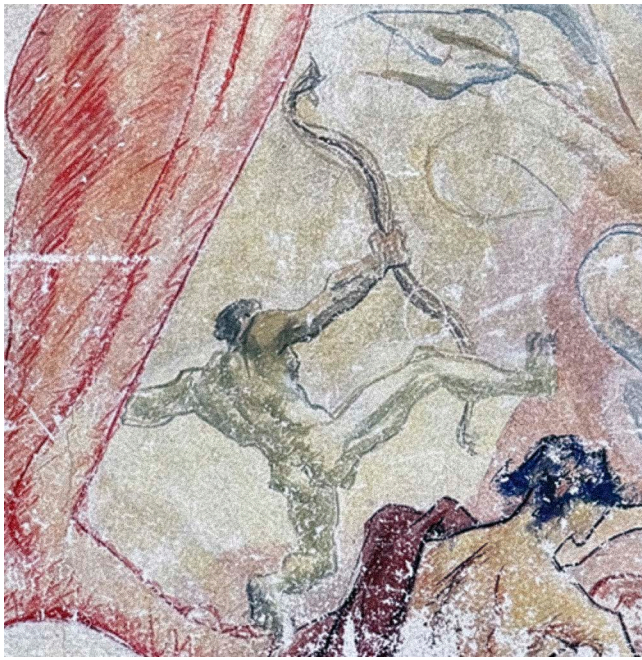


Figure 6. Detail of  
The Myth of Prometheus,  
possibly Deucalion and  
Pyrrha. Image: Leticia  
Crespillo, Mural in  
Motion.



Two larger figures – one male, one female – in the left bottom corner [Figure 6] leave more room for interpretation. In team discussions within the *Mural in Motion* project, their dynamic stance has led some to posit they could represent the art of dance. The mural's poor state of conservation hampers these figures' legibility, but their relative position to Prometheus, with whom they seem to establish a direct line of gaze, sets them apart from all other figures and suggests they could be actual characters from the story. Given that these figures seem to be running away from the scene, rather than joining in on the creative endeavours of early humanity, perhaps they are meant to represent Deucalion and Pyrrha<sup>21</sup> being warned by Prometheus about the flood that Zeus, angry at all this defiance, is planning to send to rid the earth of troublesome humankind. By including this episode in his interpretation of the myth, Dordio Gomes would thus be incorporating the theme of suffering that came with enlightenment.

Finally, by Prometheus's left foot, a muscular male figure holds a shooting bow [Figure 7]. It is Heracles who, in a lull between his twelve labours, kills the eagle to liberate Prometheus from his punishment. The inclusion of this episode is perhaps significant when considered in the context of the dictatorial regime ESBAP had to operate under. While the school had to comply with national directives for higher education in the fine arts, it was known as a more open establishment that offered greater pedagogical and ideological freedom than its Lisbon counterpart,<sup>22</sup> from which



*Figure 7. Detail of The Myth of Prometheus, Heracles shooting the eagle. Image: Leticia Crespillo, Mural in Motion.*

students often requested to be transferred to Porto.<sup>23</sup> Within the limitations imposed by the close scrutiny of a dictatorial regime, the school's director, Carlos Ramos, and its head professors of painting and sculpture, Dordio Gomes and Salvador Barata Feyo (1899–1990) respectively, managed to cultivate an open and stimulating creative environment that was and remains fondly remembered by former students.<sup>24</sup> Among them, Júlio Resende, who would go on to become a professor at the school, described Dordio Gomes as a “revolutionary within the Academy”, for his openness to international artistic currents and the creative freedom he granted his students.<sup>25</sup> Against this back-

ground, Prometheus's liberation from the suffering imposed by a tyrannical Zeus, discreetly conveyed in the form of a small arrow-shooting Heracles, might perhaps be interpreted as a subtle but deliberate allusion to freedom from authoritarianism.

The many variations and subplots that exist on the myth of Prometheus involve a great deal more characters and episodes than could realistically be depicted in one mural panel. Key characters in the myth that Dordio Gomes chose to leave out are Zeus, the all-powerful tyrant who punishes Prometheus for his gift to humankind, Athena, who breathes life to the first humans moulded from clay by the hero, and Pandora, sent by Zeus with her jar of ills to harm humanity in revenge for his defiance. However central to the story, these characters were excluded from Dordio Gomes's interpretation. In contrast, he included Heracles, a character that only makes a brief appearance in certain versions of the myth, yet whose liberation of the hero reinforces the theme of freedom. The Heracles episode of the myth gained particular traction in the Romantic period,<sup>26</sup> not least through Percy Bysshe Shelley's (1792–1822) highly influential interpretation of the story in *Prometheus Unbound* (1820). Dougherty sees in Shelley's take on the myth a symbolism that “operates at a level beyond politics as well, invoking the image of Prometheus's liberation from [Zeus's] chains to represent the forces in man's soul that combine to release his creative power and restore his imaginative freedom.”<sup>27</sup> While the extent of Dordio Gomes's acquaintance with post-classical interpretations of the



Figure 8. General view of the Architecture Pavilion entrance hall with The Myth of Prometheus mural. Photo: Begoña Farré Torras.



myth, including Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, remains undetermined at the time of writing, his inclusion of Heracles in the mural might perhaps be read, beyond any ideological implications, as a deliberate symbolic reference to creative freedom, echoing his own and the school's stance towards its students.

For their part, the aesthetic solutions proposed by Dordio Gomes in this fresco also reinforce its integration with its setting from a formal and functional standpoint. The photograph in Figure 2 gives a broad view of the entrance hall, shortly after its opening, with the mural towards the left of the space, close to double doors leading towards facilities on the ground floor of the building. The fresco's decentralised location in this hall, bathed in sunlight from ample glass panels, and its composition around a larger-than-life figure, ensure the visibility of the protagonist who welcomes viewers into the space without taking it over. In turn, the floor-to-ceiling placement of the mural makes the action depicted in it readily accessible to passers-by, with particular visibility being given, just below eye level, to all the characters and episodes related to human creativity, the implications of enlightenment, and the discreet yet significant presence of the hero's liberator. Chromatically, the mural presents the characteristic palette of fresco painting, dominated by earthen greens, ochres, and browns that create a subtle warm contrast with the light grey of the walls immediately surrounding it, while the modelling of the central figure, achieved through unexpected reddish highlights, picks up the strong burgundy hue of the wall further to the right [Figure 8].

The pictorial strategies adopted by Dordio Gomes in this fresco signal a degree of formal experimentation that sets this work somewhat apart from his mural production. In the absence of documentation that might shed light on the brief he received for the fresco, it seems reasonable to posit that, as a senior figure at a school of fine arts that nurtured artistic autonomy, he found himself in a position of having considerable creative leeway. His innovative approach to this particular mural project is most visible in two aspects: the rapid, illustration-like style of figuration, without precedents in his own mural production or that of other artists at the time; and the uneven boundaries between the frescoed area and the remaining wall, which he had only used once before in a commission immediately preceding this one.<sup>28</sup> These features lend the Promethean mural an unconventional look that speaks to the school's spirit of creative exploration and generate a striking, almost organic counterpoint to the rationalist lines of the building's modernist architecture.

The mural's placement within the entrance hall made it unmissable for anyone accessing the building's ground floor facilities through the double doors next to it. Realistically, however, this location would have elicited little contemplation by students and staff walking by on their way to and from lessons. The hall, however, included a long stone bench, located directly across from the mural [Figure 9] from which they would have been able to enjoy an unrushed view of the entire space and perhaps ponder on the aesthetic effect of the mural in dialogue with its architectural surroundings.

### **Evolving communities, evolving needs, evolving reception**

As an example of the integration of the arts and a practical lesson in fresco painting, the mural was warmly celebrated and appreciated by the school's community at the time of its inauguration in 1954.<sup>29</sup>

However, from a functional point of view, its integration with architecture began to present difficulties from the moment the hall's use changed. What was originally conceived as an entrance vestibule, and therefore a place mostly of passage and waiting, began to be used also as a display area for the end-of-year student exhibitions. Whenever any such exhibition was in place, the colouring and dynamic figuration of the mural must have created visual interferences with the student works on show. Photographs from the 1960s show the mural covered every time the entrance hall doubled as an exhibition space [Figure 9]. While these were always temporary measures and the mural went back on view as soon as each





*Figure 9. View of the Architecture Pavilion entrance hall being used for the 1963 end-of-year student exhibition, with the mural covered. Source: Fundação Manuel Leão, Fundo Teófilo Rego, inv. no.: PT-FML-TR-COM-70-111 (as reproduced in Nunes, Vistas de exposição).*

exhibition finished, they appear to signal a gradual change in the mural's significance over time, perhaps accentuated following the end of Dordio Gomes's tenure at ESBAP in 1960.

A decade later, as already described, the 1974 Carnation Revolution and the social agitation that ensued generated a feeling of rejection towards the mural that was expressed in the inscription and other details added in blue paint. The precise circumstances surrounding this episode are still largely unknown. Further research is needed to establish, among other aspects, the extent to which this intervention expressed a generalised feeling at the time within the broader school community or was representative of certain members within it. Following this episode, and until recently, the mural appears to have been more or less ignored. At some point in its history, also yet to be determined, new functional requirements again dictated the mural's fortune when the wall space was turned over to lockers or some other form of furniture that left deep horizontal scratches on the pigmented layer of lime mortar. The story of how this mural came to be, of the classical myth it represents, and of the work's reception over time are all relevant to the debate the school community is conducting

on its future. The project will seek to develop these narrative lines, among others, through digital means of display, as part of the exhibition.

### Photogrammetry and its applications

An in-depth study of an artwork requires access to good quality images that, in the case of murals, are notoriously difficult to obtain. A mural's placement and dimensions, often monumental, generally thwart attempts at photographing it from a central point to obtain a fully frontal view of its entirety. These limitations can be circumvented through digitisation, whether by means of laser scanning or photogrammetry. The *Mural in Motion* project has opted for the latter to digitise the corpus of murals under study, including *The Myth of Prometheus*. Photogrammetry involves taking a very large number of partial photographs of an object, with a conventional reflex camera or even just a mobile phone, which are then computationally processed into a composite 3D model of the original. In the case of murals, the three-dimensional capture of the object is of particular interest, for instance, for those panels that are painted on curved surfaces. Even for those on flat walls, photogrammetry makes it possible to capture fine details of the surface texture, including wall irregularities and, of particular interest in the case of fresco murals, the "seams" between *giornate*. The 3D models thus obtained are then also rendered as high-resolution 2D images that can be used for communication purposes in various degrees of resolution. In this chapter, for example, the image of *The Myth of Prometheus* presented in Figure 1 is not a photograph of the mural but actually the medium-resolution version of the high-resolution 2D render of the 3D model, obtained from hundreds of photographs through the process of photogrammetry.

The project contemplates various communication applications for the 3D models and 2D renders, both online and in an in-person setting. These include, as already mentioned, the use of the high-resolution 2D images to project the murals at real scale in a public exhibition. As this is planned to take place at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Porto, former ESBAP, this form of projection will not be used for the specific case of *The Myth of Prometheus*, as visitors – from the school and broader community – will be able to view the actual mural in the building next to the exhibition hall. The 2D images of the fresco will, in any case, be used as part of the project's critical examination of animation as a curatorial strategy. Animation is increasingly being used as a mediation device to bring art to broad audiences in both commercial and museum settings. Often, especially in

commercial venues, this takes the form of self-styled “immersive” exhibitions that magnify, replicate, and animate the works of art in all-enveloping projections. In its search for visual novelty, this form of mediation can profoundly alter the perception of the work of art it purports to present, while showing it at a speed that undermines its contemplation. From a critical stance towards these modes of spectacularisation of the work of art, the project aims instead at exploring the potential of animation for meaningful, engaging, and thought-provoking knowledge communication.<sup>30</sup> With regard to *The Myth of Prometheus*, the project contemplates the possibility of using short animation films, to be shown on monitors at the exhibition, with two purposes: on the one hand, bringing to life the story of the titan as portrayed in Dordio Gomes’s rendition; on the other, tracing the mural’s fortunes from its creation in 1954 to today or, conversely, virtually reconstructing its hypothesised original appearance.

The first application intends to use animated storytelling to help exhibition visitors make sense of the classical myth with which contemporary audiences are perhaps less familiar than was the case at the time the mural was first shown to the school community. The second application has evident implications for the debate on conservation measures to be taken with regard to the mural. Given that the fresco has been digitised in its current condition, should the school community decide to restore it as closely as possible to its original appearance, there now exists a high-resolution record of it that would digitally preserve the 1974 intervention. Conversely, should the school community resolve to leave the 1974 inscription in place, it will still be possible to create a digital reconstruction showing a hypothetical rendition of the mural in its original state.

Over the decades since Dordio Gomes conceived and painted *The Myth of Prometheus* at ESBAP, the school’s evolving circumstances have given rise to profound shifts in its community’s perception of, and engagement with, the mural. What was an object of appreciation with pedagogical significance in the 1950s had become somewhat of a visual interference by the 1960s, when the space housing it took on different functions. For its part, the revolutionary context of the 1970s turned this artwork into an embodiment of a dictatorial past to be contested. The mural survived from the 1980s onwards, largely neglected, damaged by the furniture placed against it in yet another change of function for that space. Today, given its poor state of conservation, its restoration is discussed as part of broader efforts to preserve the school’s heritage for current and future generations of art students. This places the school community at the centre of the debate on the mural’s significance as heritage, be it artistic,

historic, or even just affective. In conjunction with the preservation, study, and communication possibilities opened up by digitisation, it is hoped that the preliminary findings presented here, and further research to be carried out in the upcoming months, will make a meaningful contribution to a discussion involving the expression of artistic and ideological disagreement, the significance of objects with associations to a dictatorial past, the safeguarding of the school's facilities and material heritage, and the preservation of its institutional memory.

## **Funding**

This research is funded by Portuguese national funds through FCT – Foundation for Science and Technology, I.P., as part of project 2023.11110.PEX, <https://doi.org/10.54499/2023.11110.PEX>.



## Endnotes

- 1 Romy Golan, *Muralnomad: The Paradox of Wall Painting, Europe 1927–1957* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 1–5.
- 2 Golan, *Muralnomad*, 1–5.
- 3 Understood here as heritage of contested, conflictive, or generally non-consensual significance, as theorised by J. E. Tunbridge and G. J. Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict* (Chichester and New York: J. Wiley, 1996).
- 4 Ana Galán-Pérez, Stefano Magnolo and Eduarda Vieira, “The Berlin Wall. A Theoretical Approach to the Conservation of a Dissonant Heritage in Continuous Resignification, and Its Socio-Legal Implications” (paper presented at the *EPoCH 2025: Emerging Perspectives on Conservation and Heritage – Communication and Participation conference*, Universidade Católica, Porto, 27 March 2025).
- 5 *Mural in Motion*, short title for *Lime, Pigments, and Pixels - Bringing Modern Mural Heritage Back to Public Life: A Critical Approach to Digital Curatorship for Art History* (2023.11110.PEX, <https://doi.org/10.54499/2023.11110.PEX>) running from January 2025 to June 2026. This chapter was submitted at an early stage of the project. The project website is available at <http://www.muralinmotion.fcsh.unl.pt>.
- 6 The exhibition resulting from the project is scheduled to take place in spring 2026 at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Porto.
- 7 Following this work, Dordio Gomes would take on commissions to paint four panels at Porto City Hall (1956–1957) and another two at the city’s Palace of Justice (1957–1961), all of them with marked nationalist themes.
- 8 As attested, among others, by the documentary that a group of his former students produced on his career and its impact on the school community, in *Carta a Mestre Dordio Gomes*, documentary directed by Manuel Guimarães, 1971, 35 mm, 24 fps, colour, sound, 00:17:59, Cinemateca Portuguesa, accessed March 19, 2026, <http://www.cinemateca.pt/Cinemateca-Digital/Ficha.aspx?obraid=4353&type=Video>.
- 9 Laura Castro, “Abertura,” in *A pintura a fresco: Os materiais, a técnica, a sua aplicação*, by Simão César Dordio Gomes (Porto: Câmara Municipal do Porto, 2000).
- 10 The debate was briefly mentioned in the most recent monograph on the artist: Laura Castro, ed., *Dordio Gomes (1890–1976)* (Arraiolos: Câmara Municipal de Arraiolos, 2021), 177.
- 11 The notion of the “mural equation” comes from conversations with Josep Minguell Cardenyès, muralist, researcher at *Mural in Motion*, and member of the Reial Acadèmia Catalana de Belles Arts de Sant Jordi, who uses it to describe his own experience as a painter of frescoes.
- 12 Such as Fernand Léger (1881–1955), Joan Miró (1893–1983), David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974), or Joaquín Torres-García (1874–1949). Fernand Léger, “Mural Painting and Easel Painting,” in *Functions of Painting*, ed. Edward F. Fry (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 160–164; Letters from Joan Miró to Josep Lluís Sert (14 October 1947; 19 November 1947; 15 May 1948) in Patricia Juncosa Vecchierini, ed., *Miró Sert: Segons ells mateixos - En sus propias palabras - In their own words: correspondència 1937–1980* (Murcia: CENDEAC; Palma de Mallorca: Fundació Pilar i Joan Miró, 2008); David Alfaro Siqueiros, “Los vehículos de la pintura dialéctico-subversiva,” 1932, Biblioteca Nacional de Montevideo, Luis Eduardo Pombo Archive, accessed March 16, 2026, <https://icaa.mfah.org/s/es/item/1238676>; Joaquín Torres-García, “Esbós autobiogràfic del pintor Torres-García,” *D’ací i d’allà*, no. 98 (February 1926), 438–439.
- 13 Luís Pinto Nunes, *Vistas de exposição: Exposições magnas da ESBAP (1952–1968)* (master’s thesis, Porto: Universidade do Porto, 2022), 77–78.
- 14 Nunes, *Vistas de exposição*, 77. The Architecture Pavilion was designed by Manuel Lima Fernandes de Sá (1903–1980) and built between 1951 and 1954. In addition to Dordio Gomes’s fresco, it featured sculptural works by Professor Salvador Barata Foyo. Nunes, *Vistas de exposição*, 52.

- 15 According to this author, even more so than other Greek myths, the Promethean one is “infinitely flexible”. Carol Dougherty, *Prometheus* (London: Routledge, 2006), 8.
- 16 Dougherty, *Prometheus*, 3.
- 17 Images available at “File:Prometheus and Apollo (Hansen).jpg,” Wikimedia Commons, accessed March 19, 2026, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prometheus\\_and\\_Apollo\\_\(Hansen\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prometheus_and_Apollo_(Hansen).jpg).
- 18 Images available at “José Clemente Orozco’s Prometheus,” Benton Museum of Art Pomona College, accessed March 19, 2026, <https://www.pomona.edu/museum/collections/jos%C3%A9-clemente-orozcos-prometheus>.
- 19 Images available at “Prometeo, magistral obra del maestro mexicano Rufino Tamayo en Puerto Rico,” Puerto Rico Art News, accessed March 19, 2026, <https://www.puertoricoartnews.com/2019/07/prometeo-magistral-obra-del-maestro.html>.
- 20 Laura Castro, “Sentido do fresco na obra de Dordio Gomes (um manifesto clássico),” in *Dordio Gomes: frescos*, ed. Câmara Municipal de Matosinhos (Matosinhos: Museu da Quinta de Santiago, 1997), n. p.
- 21 The interpretive hypothesis is indebted to André Ferreira, researcher and communicator on Greek and Roman mythology.
- 22 Lúcia Almeida Matos, *Escultura em Portugal no século XX (1910–1969): Academias, modernismo e vanguardas* (PhD diss., Porto: Universidade do Porto, 2003), 276–282.
- 23 Nunes, *Vistas de exposição*, 47.
- 24 Júlio Resende, “Um tempo para viver, e o infinito para permanecer,” in *Homenagem da Escola Superior de Belas Artes do Porto / 2a secção ao Mestre Dordio Gomes*, ed. ESBAP (Porto: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1978), n. p.; Jorge Pinheiro, interview by Laura Castro and Paulo Dordio Gomes, Arquivo de Memória, November 2021, accessed March 19, 2026, [https://arquivodememoria.pt/pessoas\\_entrevista.aspx?lang=PO&taM=0&ide=3852&ida=5469](https://arquivodememoria.pt/pessoas_entrevista.aspx?lang=PO&taM=0&ide=3852&ida=5469).
- 25 Júlio Resende, “Dordio Gomes, o mestre,” in *Dordio Gomes: frescos*, ed. Câmara Municipal de Matosinhos (Matosinhos: Museu da Quinta de Santiago, 1997), n. p.
- 26 Dougherty, *Prometheus*, 22.
- 27 Dougherty, *Prometheus*, 100.
- 28 Previous to this commission, Dordio Gomes had produced frescoes for a café (1944), a bookstore (1949), and two churches (1947 and 1953). The latter, at the Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, shows Dordio Gomes’s first attempt at this type of irregular edging.
- 29 Nunes, *Vistas de exposição*, 77–78.
- 30 For an in-depth discussion of the project’s critical adoption of digital technologies for curatorial purposes, see Begoña Farré Torras, Leticia Crespillo Marí and Marta Soares, “Post Wow, Is Less More? A Critical Approach to Animated Mapped Projection for Art Historical Knowledge Sharing: The Twentieth-Century Mural as a Case Study,” *Magazén: International Journal for Digital and Public Humanities* 5, no. 1 (2024): 149–172, <https://doi.org/10.30687/mag/2724-3923/2024/01/006>.

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## Prometejeve preizkušnje in tegobe: študija primera izzivov dediščinskega varstva, ki jih odpirajo stenske poslikave iz obdobja portugalske diktature *Estado Novo* (1933–1974)

### Povzetek

V poglavju so obravnavani dediščinski izzivi, ki jih odpirajo stenske poslikave, naročene na Portugalskem v času diktature *Estado Novo* (1933–1974). Izhodišče je freska slikarja Dordia Gomesa (1890–1976) z naslovom *Mit o Prometeju*, ki je leta 1954 nastala za Višjo šolo za likovno umetnost v Portu (ESBAP, danes FBAUP). Tudi kadar takšna dela nimajo neposredne propagandne vsebine, lahko zaradi povezanosti z avtoritarno preteklostjo postanejo problematična dediščina. Več kot pet desetletij po t. i. revoluciji nageljnov, ki je aprila 1974 na Portugalskem vzpostavila demokracijo, se v akademskem in širšem družbenem prostoru krepi zavest o nujnosti soočenja s to zapuščino. Ker so ta dela še vedno prisotna v javnih prostorih in pogosto v slabem stanju, se postavlja vprašanje, kako z njimi ravnati: jih restavrirati, premestiti, kontekstualizirati ali nanje odgovoriti z novimi ustvarjalnimi posegi, ki bi jih lahko smiselno vključili v današnji družbeni prostor?

*Mit o Prometeju* je v poglavju obravnavan kot primer »disonantne dediščine«: kot kulturni objekt, katerega pomen se zaradi sprememb političnih, etičnih in družbenih vrednot skozi čas spreminja in sproža polemike. Freska je bila sprva razumljena kot izjemen dosežek freskantstva in kot uresničitev pedagoškega ideala ESBAP, ki je zagovarjal sintezo arhitekture, slikarstva in kiparstva. Kasneje se je njena recepcija izrazito spreminjala. Približno desetletje po nastanku, v času, ko se je njen avtor že upokojil, so nove študijske usmeritve šole in spremenjena raba stavbe zmanjšale simbolni pomen in prepoznavnost poslikave. Desetletje kasneje, po revoluciji leta 1974, je bila freska dodatno zaznamovana s političnim napisom »Buržoazna kultura bo umrla« in z drugimi intervencijami, ki so izražale zavračanje dela zaradi njegove domnevne povezave z diktatorsko preteklostjo.

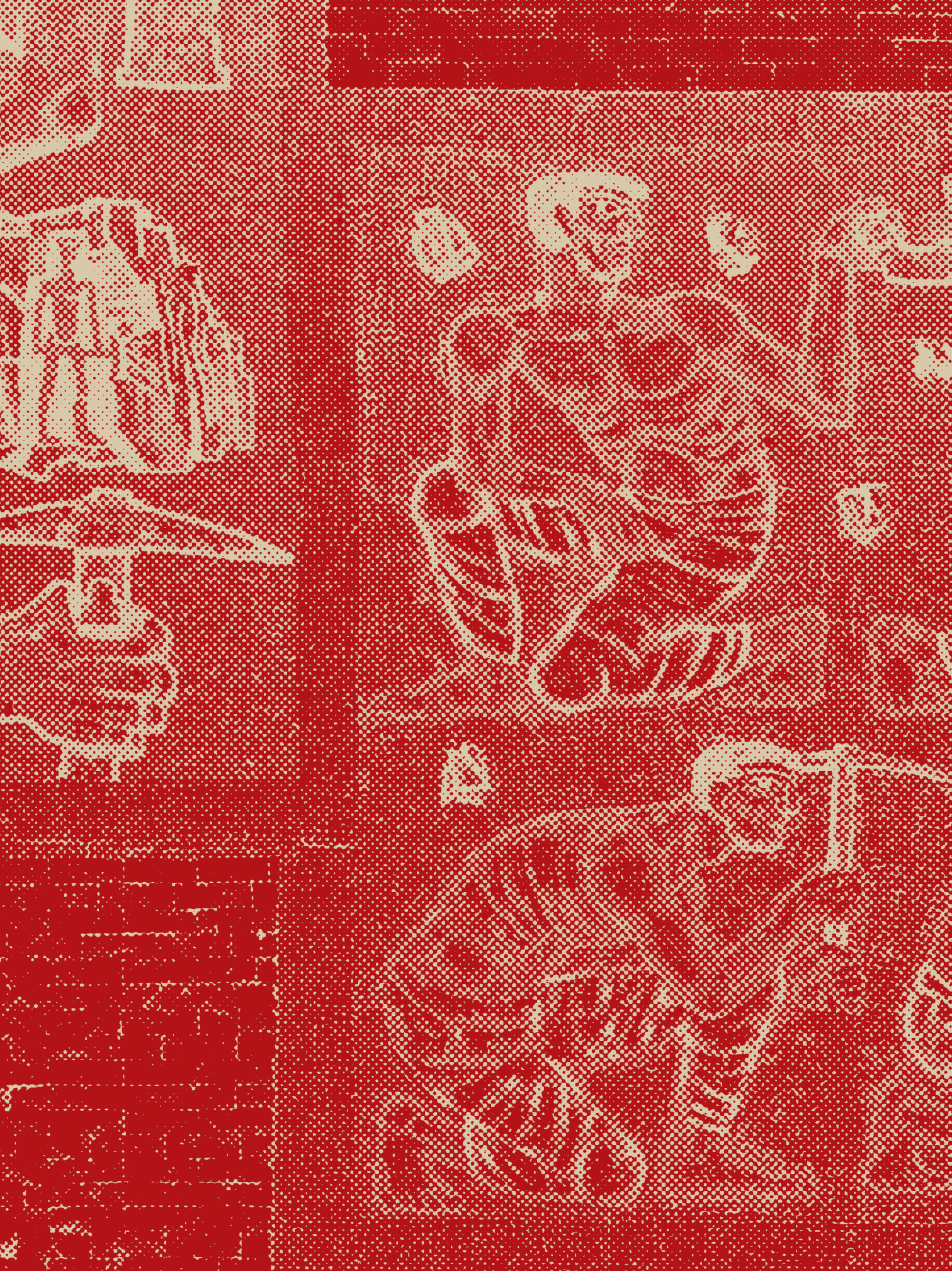
V naslednjih letih je bila freska zanemarjena in podvržena precejšnjim poškodbam. Nedavna prizadevanja šole za ohranitev modernistične arhitekturne in umetnostne dediščine so razpravo o njeni konservatorsko-restavratorski obravnavi znova postavila v ospredje. Ključno vprašanje je, ali naj se v procesu restavriranja dela odstrani napis iz leta 1974 in delo približa prvotni zamisli avtorja ali pa naj se napis ohrani kot zgodovinska plast, ki priča o političnem protestu in institucionalnem spominu.



Poleg zgodovine nastanka in recepcije freske prinaša poglavje tudi formalno in ikonografsko analizo Gomeseve interpretacije mita o Prometeju. Pokaže, da osredotočenje na ustvarjalne vidike mita in vključitev Herakleja, ki Prometeja osvobodi Zevsove kazni, ne pomenita le slavljenja umetnosti, temveč ju lahko razumemo tudi kot subtilen namig na ustvarjalno svobodo. V tem smislu lahko fresko razumemo v kontekstu razmeroma odprtega intelektualnega ozračja šole v času diktature.

V poglavju je freska obravnavana tudi v kontekstu projekta *Mural in Motion*, širše raziskovalne pobude, ki povezuje umetnostno zgodovino, javno zgodovino, dediščinske študije in digitalne tehnologije ter v okviru katere proučujejo šest stenskih poslikav Dordia Gomesa. Korpus je bil digitaliziran s fotogrametrijo, kar omogoča izdelavo natančnih 3D modelov in visokoločljivih 2D podob, namenjenih dokumentiranju, raziskovanju in posredovanju gradiva, tudi v okviru inovativnih razstavnih strategij. Digitalizacija je zato predstavljena kot orodje, ki lahko spodbudi in informira razpravo med različnimi deležniki. V poglavju izhajamo iz stališča, da je za odločanje o prihodnosti sporne umetnosti (*contested art*), kot je *Mit o Prometeju*, nujno razumeti njeno večplastno zgodovino: od nastanka in ideoloških konfliktov do zanemarjanja in ponovnega interesa. S povezovanjem raziskovalnega dela in digitalnega posredovanja projekt pomembno prispeva k razpravam o konserviranju, spominu in upravljanju dediščine, povezane z avtoritarno preteklostjo.













Opera Instituti Artis Historiae

**Art for Community**

**Artworks Commissioned for Public Institutions, 1945–1989**

Edited by Katarina Mohar and Gregor Dražil

English proofreading: Ana Čavić, Donald Francis Reindl

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Reviewers: Marjeta Ciglencečki, Jessica Jenkins

Design, layout and photo editing: Andrej Furlan

Issued by ZRC SAZU, France Stele Institute of Art History

Represented by Mija Oter Gorenčič

Publisher: Založba ZRC

Represented by Oto Luthar

Založba ZRC general manager and editor-in-chief: Aleš Pogačnik

Print: Present, d. o. o., Ljubljana

350 copies

First edition, first print run / First e-edition

Ljubljana 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/9789610511748>



The book is a result of the research programme Art in Slovenia at a Cultural Crossroads (P6-0061) and research project Art for Community: Registration and Assessment of Artworks Commissioned for Public Institutions in Slovenia, 1945–1991 (J6-50206), both funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency.



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Cover image: Ivo Šubic, unrealised sketch for the mosaic in the building of the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia.  
Photo: Andreja Rakovec, ZRC SAZU.

Katalogni zapis o publikaciji (CIP) pripravili  
v Narodni in univerzitetni knjižnici v Ljubljani

ISBN 978-961-05-1173-1  
COBISS.SI-ID 291089155

ISBN 978-961-05-1174-8 (PDF)  
COBISS.SI-ID 291189251

A substantial body of postwar art created for institutional environments remains hidden in plain sight: in schools, hospitals, municipal offices, factories, hotels, shops, and other spaces of everyday life. Some works remain intact, others survive in altered interiors or as partial material remains, and still others are known only through scattered archival records, photographs, and uncertain

memories. Many have been covered, relocated, destroyed or forgotten, even though they formed an important part of postwar public space and visual culture.

This volume contributes to the transnational study of art

commissioned for public institutions, a field that remains unevenly researched across national contexts. The chapters show how institutions used art to shape their environments and how later changes in use or ownership affected the works' meanings and prospects for preservation.

