

# Sinfo

September-October

The Best from Slovenia



## IN FOCUS

Slovenian writers  
the strong voice of the nation

I FEEL  
SLOVENIA



**I FEEL  
SLOVENIA**

# Sinfo

SLOVENIAN INFORMATION

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## SLOVENIAN WRITERS ON THE GREAT ISSUES OF LIFE

The world is out of joint, but that does not stop writers from writing. Do they actually believe that the written word still has the power to change and improve our lives? Is the world really more out of kilter today than it ever has been? Or is this impression the result of the dictatorship of social networks, the absolutism of instantaneity and reality show lifestyles? Perhaps writers write simply because they feel they need to. Sometimes, as if by miracle, their words touch people, stir and open up something inside them, something conscious or subconscious. Awakening people from different types of stupor, immediate as it may be, is the greatest achievement of literature. "I have no illusions that I can change the world," says writer Goran Vojnovič in his joint interview with Boštjan Videmšek.

What has happened over the last two decades that has shifted the overall social focus towards a negativity that sees nothing but apocalypse, crisis of values, and the demise of humanity? Are we still capable of true art criticism and reflection?

As we move further into the 21st century, the number of living witnesses to the horrors of the 20th century declines. One of the few left is Boris Pahor, a 103-year-old Slovenian writer who spent 14 months as a political prisoner in various Nazi concentration camps. He says that today he is filled with a sense of optimism and faith in love: "As a centenarian, and a survivor of many concentration camps, I tell you that nothing matters, no economy, no political party, left or right, nothing except love. Love for our planet is also important: if the 20th century was about fighting totalitarianism, the 21st century has to fight against climate change."

"I am often criticised for not writing 'typical' Slovenian literature. Supposedly, my books are overly positive, and I too Americanised because I still believe that we can influence things and change them. I won't apologise for that," says writer Miha Mazzini. Lojze Kovačič, arguably the most exciting author of 20th century Slovenian literature, focused on three things throughout his writing career: man, life and the world. It is pointless wondering whether any other topic could excite him as much. Kovačič was on a perpetual quest for answers, which he sought in all his writings about death, God, love in all its might, and, not lastly, creation, which was for him "the only excuse for living".

This issue was made in cooperation with the Slovenian Book Agency.

Vesna Žarkovič, Executive Editor

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vesna Žarkovič".

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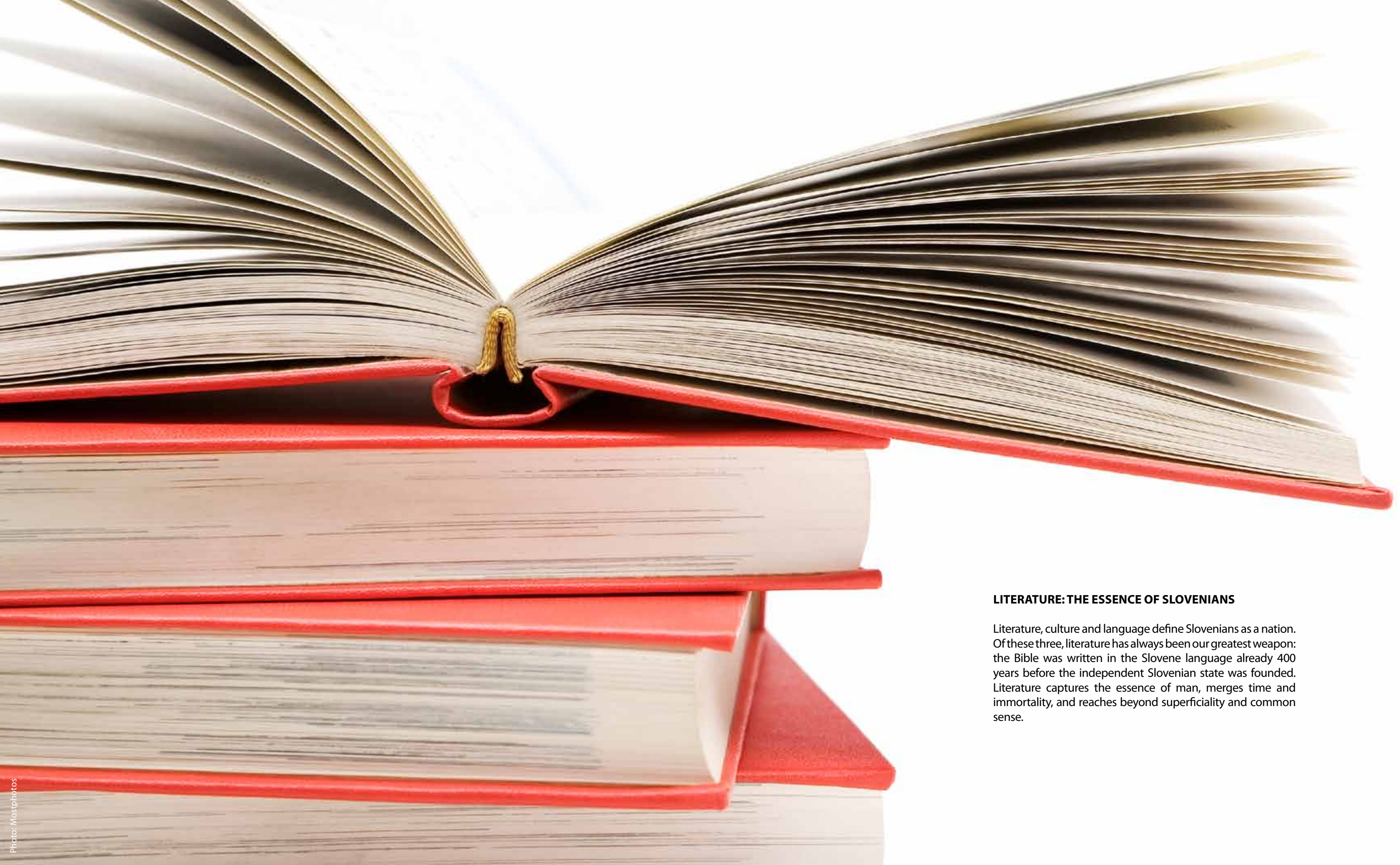
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### **LITERATURE: THE ESSENCE OF SLOVENIANS**

Literature, culture and language define Slovenians as a nation. Of these three, literature has always been our greatest weapon: the Bible was written in the Slovene language already 400 years before the independent Slovenian state was founded. Literature captures the essence of man, merges time and immortality, and reaches beyond superficiality and common sense.

## SMALL COUNTRY: BIG LITERATURE

# Excellent opportunities abroad

RENATA ZAMIDA



Small Country - Big Literature is the name a German radio gave to a recent programme on new translations of Slovenian literature into German. The world is connected as never before, so lesser used languages are no longer disadvantaged. Slovenian authors and Slovenian literature now have excellent opportunities to find readers across the globe.

Before 1991, it was very rare for a book of a Slovenian author to be released abroad, especially in the West, and every publication represented a significant milestone (i.e. 1965, Srečko Kosovel, in French; 1981, Florjan Lipuš, in German; 1988, Tomaž Šalamun, in English etc.). Slovenia's domestic cultural audience was thrilled each time, and local media seized upon the news. However, in the past twenty years, translation into different languages and by various publishers became a permanent feature in the Slovenian literary life. Ever since Slovenia became an independent state in 1991, each year around 70 books written by Slovenian fiction authors are issued in various languages and published by numerous publishers abroad, while many works are also written by Slovenian humanists and science writers, among whom one should mention philosophers Slavoj Žižek, Mladen Dolar, Alenka Zupančič and Renata Salecl. The selection of works written by Slovenian authors and published abroad is further complemented by those written by authors of children's literature, including Lila Prap, a well-known international writer.

**According to currently available data, the number of translations of Slovenian literature is far above the global and European average with regard to the number of speakers the language has.**

However, the export of Slovenian literature is mostly limited to what Americans call quality literature.

### SLOVENIA – A LAND OF POETS

Even though this is quite unusual in view of the current global situation, the most widely read Slovenian authors include poets, which is also reflected in exported Slovenian literature; in the past twenty years, almost twice as many poetry collections (more than 500)

have been translated in comparison to novels, which are otherwise the most commonly translated genre. The poets also prevail with regard to the number of target languages which their works have been translated into – poetry of Tomaž Šalamun has been translated into more than 20 languages. However, it is the frequently awarded novelist and playwright Drago Jančar, who is one of the most translated contemporary Slovenian writers.

### Nevertheless, Slovenia remains the land of poets.

Historically speaking, the Slovenian language had never been recognised as an official language on this territory before the declaration of independence, even though the first known records written in the Slovenian language date back to 1000. At the intersection of the Austro-Hungarian and Balkan heritage, Slovenia was always subject to strong external influences (including linguistic), but has nevertheless managed to preserve its identity. Slovenians are a nation of writers and poets, and only a few European states have as many literary artists as this two-million state covering around 24,000 km<sup>2</sup> of territory. Moreover, according to data on the number of published books per million inhabitants, Slovenia ranks second, immediately after the United Kingdom (source: The Economist).

The literary part of this magazine offers an insight into the Slovenian literature and a treasury of Slovenian books that are well worth reading as well as authors that are worth knowing about. In the future, the Slovenian literature will frequently be in the spotlight again since Slovenia is a candidate for the Guest of Honour at the 2021 Frankfurt Book Fair. Our objective is to prepare a comprehensive presentation of Slovenia, which will, besides Slovenian literature and culture, also highlight tourism prospects and creative potential in other areas, and represent an opportunity for Slovenian authors to present themselves to readers on a global level.



Photo: Matej Pušnik

**Aleš Novak, director of the Slovenian Book Agency, on Slovenia's ambition to hold the Guest of Honour title at the Frankfurt Book Fair**

"The project will allow Slovenian authors to present themselves to Europe and the world, especially through reputable foreign publishing houses with a well-diversified distribution and adequate book promotion. I consider it as one of the best opportunities for the Slovenian literary creativity, culture and Slovenia itself to get established in the international environment. With a successful implementation of the planned activities we will improve the recognisability of Slovenia and encourage international cooperation and participation in many areas since the positive effects of the project will not be limited only to the field of culture. The preparations are going well, which fills us with hope and optimism."



Photo: Katja Stergar



Photo: Personal archives

**Anton Peršak, Minister of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia**

The Slovenian language has always been of key importance for the existence of Slovenians. While other nations fought for their existence by force, Slovenians chose a different path, gaining recognition through the language and language-based culture. It is therefore not surprising that the earliest preserved records written in Slovenian, i.e. the Freising Manuscripts, date back to the 9th century, and that Slovenians were one of the first nations to have the Bible translated as early as the 16th century. It is even more astonishing that the Slovenian language survived given the fact that it was encircled by three major European cultures and languages, i.e. German, Slavic and Romance. This clearly demonstrates the strength of relationship between the Slovenians and their language, both written and spoken. In Slovenia, books are and will always be considered a special national advantage. Slovenian writers were the first to prepare a draft of the Slovenian constitution 25 years ago.

According to the International Publishers Association data, Slovenia is second in the world by the number of books published per million inhabitants, with at least one member per family visiting a public library. Besides, Slovenia is also one of the top EU states in terms of book borrowing. For a state with two million citizens, these numbers are without a doubt excellent. Slovenians can be proud of such astonishing statistics; however, it must be said that it is difficult for literature written in a language spoken by a little more than two million to be acknowledged as an exciting, top-level literature worth both reading and translating, not only in Slovenia but also globally. Nevertheless, Slovenia is home to many authors whose quality of work resounds beyond the national borders. Boris Pahor, Drago Jančar, Tomaž Šalamun and Slavoj Žižek are only a few Slovenian authors whose works have been translated into numerous languages and who have each received several international literary awards.

As Slovenians are aware that their writers, poets and other people of letters create high-quality works that deserve to be placed next to those of the world-renowned authors, efforts are put in an especially intensive global promotion of the Slovenian literature. One thing that could contribute to this goal is a more exposed role of Slovenia at the largest and the most prominent book fair held in Frankfurt. In 2021, Slovenia, which will then be celebrating its 30th anniversary of independence, would like to participate at the Frankfurt Book Fair as a major guest nation. For Slovenia, such a gesture from the organisers of said fair would certainly have a symbolic value.

## 10 SLOVENE AUTHORS YOU SHOULD KNOW

# Introducing some of our literary stars

MANCA G. RENKO  
PHOTO: STA



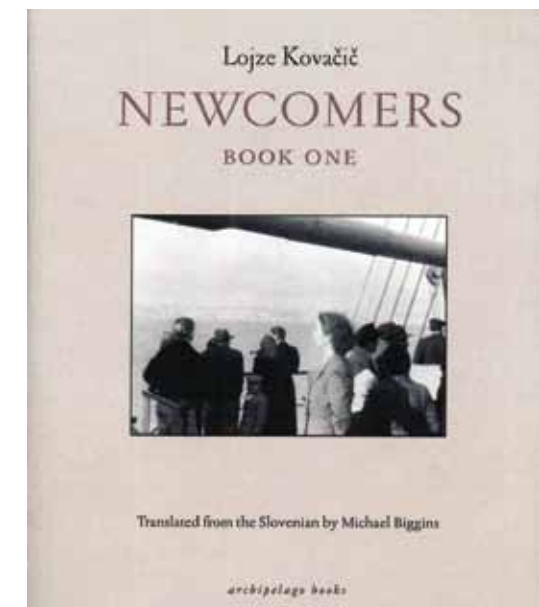
Have you ever thought of reading something written by a Slovene? It's always hard to choose, but here are some of the most interesting Slovene authors and their works. They demonstrate the variety of the Slovene literary landscape, in which everyone, from teenagers to professional readers, is able to find an exceptional work for themselves. The selection is not limited to canonical works by Slovene classics; you will not find in it the greatest Slovene romantic poet (France Prešeren), the greatest modernist writer/playwright (Ivan Cankar) or the best-known philosopher (Slavoj Žižek). Nevertheless, those we selected are not inferior, and even surpass the ones mentioned in some respects. Moreover, we present only authors whose works have been translated into English.

### LOJZE KOVAČIČ

**"A man lives a double life: the one he actually lives and the one he aspires to or ought to live. Therefore, everyone is divided internally to begin with."**

The novel *The Newcomers* by Lojze Kovačič is considered a masterpiece of the Slovenian prose and one of the best Slovenian novels according to many contemporary authors. It is a canonical text, an extensive and difficult autobiographical work, a chronicle about the moving of the author and his family from Basel, Switzerland, to Ljubljana. The work (in three books) was published in Slovenian in the 1980s and has been considered a literary masterpiece of the 20th century since then. It was also characterised as such in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* daily newspaper. This year, the translation of Book One was published in English. An extensive essay about the work was published in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* where *The Newcomers* was described as a "Great Slovenian Novel." It is occasionally compared to the most popular modern authors, such as Elena Ferrante and Karl Ove Knausgaard, as well as classic authors, among them Nabokov and Tolstoy. If you are a demanding reader and would like to read only one Slovenian novel, read this one.

*The Newcomers: Book One*. Translated by: Michael Biggins, Archipelago, 2016

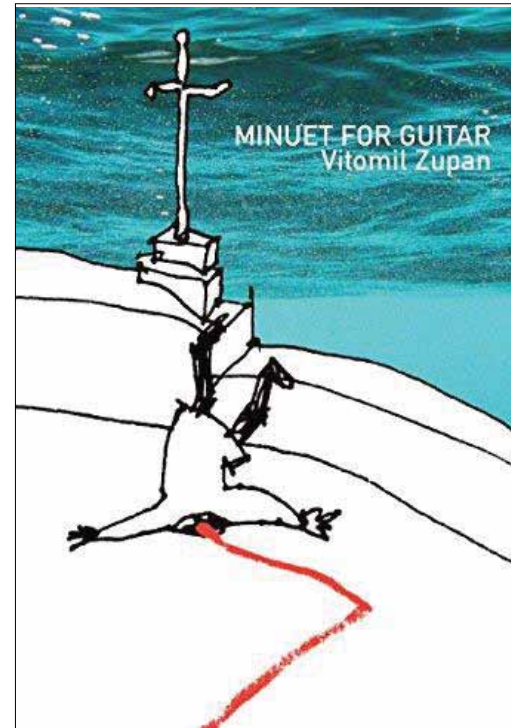


## VITOMIL ZUPAN

**“Everything is just so fraught with tendentious bullshit.”**

Imagine Ernest Hemingway being even more bold, brave and eccentric. Imagine an Ernest Hemingway who would not only imbibe boxing, bullfighting and absinthe, but fight against occupying forces as a partisan, fearlessly conquer Slovenian forests and women, and after the war, in a new socialist country, be sent to prison, despite being a national hero, due to the perversion of his writing. Such was the life of Vitomil Zupan, perhaps the only writer who, in high school readers, gains the attention of teenage boys who regularly prefer action movies over books. The novel *Minuet for Guitar* is considered a literary classic that the reader is unable to put down before it ends, a book filled with “true sentences,” about which many people sigh: “This is better than Hemingway!” Check it out for yourself.

*Minuet for Guitar (in twenty-five shots)*. Translated by: Harry Leeming, Dalkey Archive Press, 2011

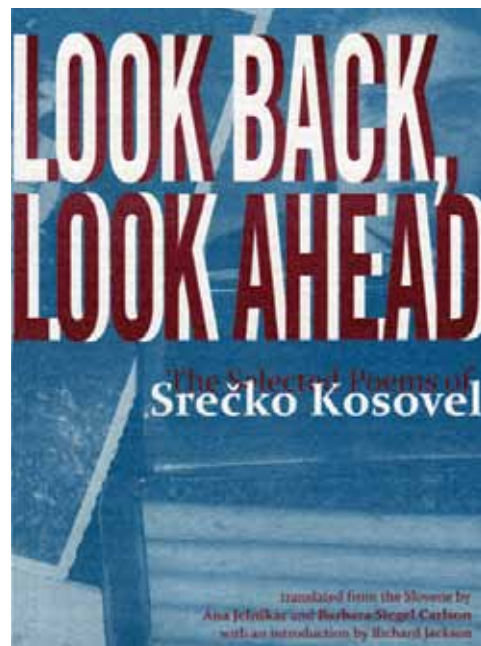
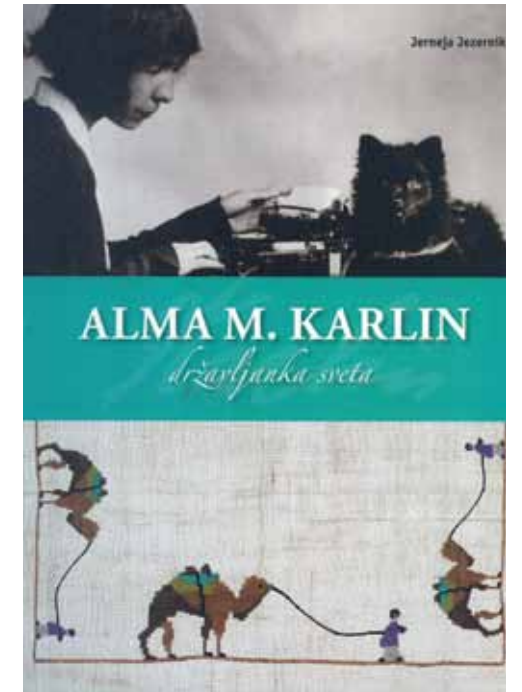


## ALMA KARLIN

**“Alone and abandoned walks through life he who thinks only of himself; but he who knows how to lovingly adapt and turn everything for the better, who always knows where to offer a helping hand and gives himself to others, his life is a blossoming meadow, and traces of his work remain, even after he is gone.”**

She was born in 1889, in times in which women had no equal rights to men: they were not allowed to enter bars alone, their access to education was limited and their breathing was restricted by corsets. Alma Karlin, born in Celje, nevertheless, became a worldwide traveller. The first woman to (with a typewriter) travel the globe, visit cannibals and, in order to earn some money during her travels, found work as a translator at the Suez Channel. She spent her later years near Celje, together with a painter Thea Schreiber Gamelin. She was brave, clever and assertive; she reported about the world for newspapers around the globe and she wrote extremely popular feuilletons.

Her literary works have been printed in English and German since the 1930s and we can hope that her biography (it also exists in the form of a comic book), richer than any fiction, will soon be available in any foreign language.

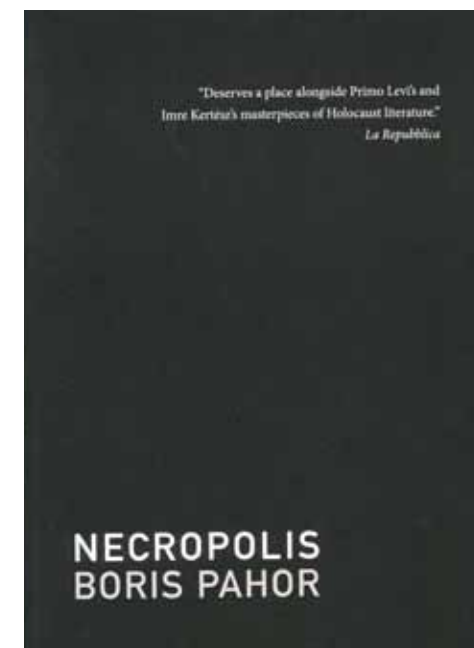


## SREČKO KOSOVEL

**“The death of Europe will be beautiful, beautiful, like a luxuriant queen dressed in gold.”**

It is usually difficult for poets to gain the same popularity as novelists. Srečko Kosovel is an exception: a mythical figure of Slovenian history to whom everybody – from teenagers to university professors – attribute prophetic powers. He understood the politics and social injustices that perturbed Yugoslavia and Europe after World War I, while he also possessed a refined artistic sense. He seemed to understand too much, which led to him dying a martyr's death, starved and ill, at 22 years of age. He left behind poetry; on receipts, napkins, pieces of cardboard. All of this was gathered and assembled long after his death, when time was ripe and people understood the avant-garde. Today you can find his work in the most beautiful collections of poems decorating coffee tables as well as in cheap pocket books carried around by rebellious teenagers.

*Look Back, Look Ahead. The selected poems of Srečko Kosovel*. Translated by Barbara Siegel Carlson, Ana Jelenc, Ugly Duckling Press, 2010



## BORIS PAHOR

**“This moment I would like to say something to my former comrades, but I have a feeling that everything in my mind that I tell them will be insincere. I am alive, therefore even my most authentic feelings are somehow impure.”**

Boris Pahor witnessed war atrocities. The Slovenian Primo Levi, who in his work, particularly in his book *Necropolis*, remembers everyday life in a concentration camp during World War II. In 2008, *Necropolis* was proclaimed book of the year in Italy and was awarded best book in a foreign language. Today, at 103 years of age, Boris Pahor is among the rare living witnesses of life in concentration camps.

*Necropolis*. Translated by Michael Biggins, Dalkey Archives Press, 2010



#### MIHA MAZZINI

**“Everybody needs something unattainable.”**

Miha Mazzini, this year’s recipient of the most prestigious literary award in Slovenia, gained great popularity among readers thanks to his first novel, *Crumbs*, which became one of the greatest bestsellers in Slovenia and is still considered by many as the best modern and generational Slovenian novel that reads intently like genre literature, reminding us of the *Catcher in the Rye* of the Yugoslav periphery in the late 1980s. It is advisable for impatient readers and lovers of action.

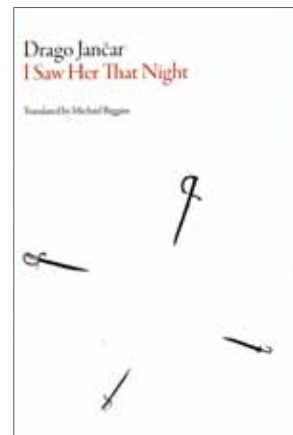
*Crumbs*. Translated by Maja Limon, Freight Books, 2014

#### DRAGO JANČAR

**“Those who dream of someone every night, love every night.”**

Drago Jančar is considered one of the most esteemed contemporary Slovenian authors and one of few living writers that have already made their way into school readers. His penultimate novel *I Saw Her That Night* was very well received by readers as well as critics at home and abroad. It thematizes Slovenian recent history, post-war killings and the trauma that has dragged on from World War II until the present.

*I Saw Her That Night*. Translated by Michael Biggins, Dalkey Archives Press, 2016

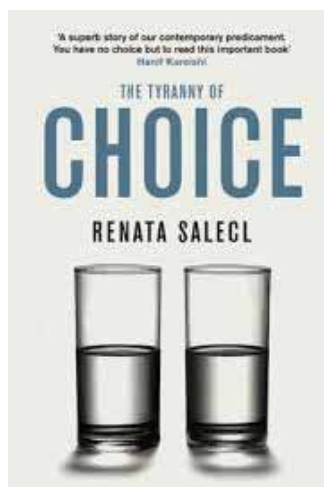


#### RENATA SALECL

**“By working so hard at self-improvement we lose the energy and ability to participate in any form of social change.”**

Our list is not meant to be limited only to literary works: modern Slovenian humanities also deserve attention. Such an example is *The Tyranny of Choice* by philosopher, sociologist and legal theorist Renata Salecl, who writes about consumer society, with its countless possibilities of choice, and how this society causes people anxiety and the desire for change. Although *The Tyranny of Choice* is not a self-help book, it might help you feel at least a little better about your imperfections.

*The Tyranny of Choice*. Profile Books, 2011

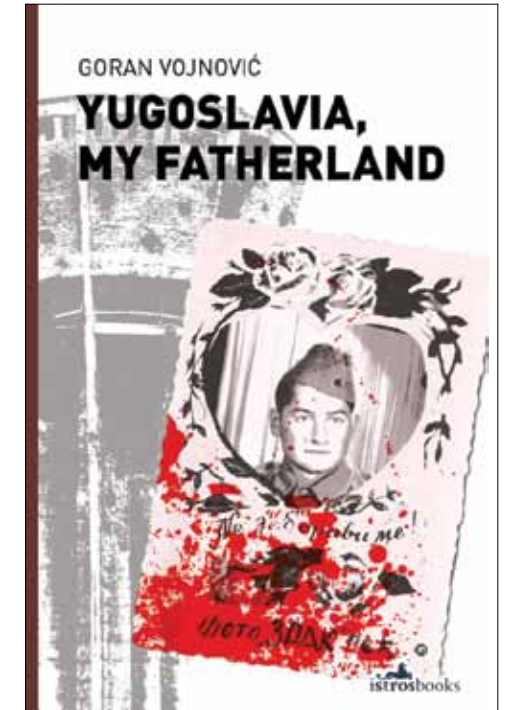


#### GORAN VOJNOVIĆ

**“It was easier for me to accept the idea that Nedeljko Borojević was dehumanised overnight, transposed into a mechanical machine and, as such, was no longer my father. /.../ In that moment everything was easier for me to accept than the thought that people were dying while he was thinking of Duša and me.”**

Goran Vojnović appeared on the Slovenian scene as a literary wunderkind. His first novel *Čefurji raus* was the best-selling novel of recent years. He was particularly well accepted by the generation that grew up in the transition period. The protagonist in his novel, immigrant Marko, was described in Sweden as “Zlatan Ibrahimović, if he hadn’t succeeded in soccer.” The Vojnović’s second novel, *Yugoslavia, My Fatherland*, is a deep insight into the wars in the Balkans, which, among other things, marked an entire generation, despite them not having experienced the wars directly.

*Yugoslavia, My Fatherland*. Translated by Noah Charney, Istros Books, 2015

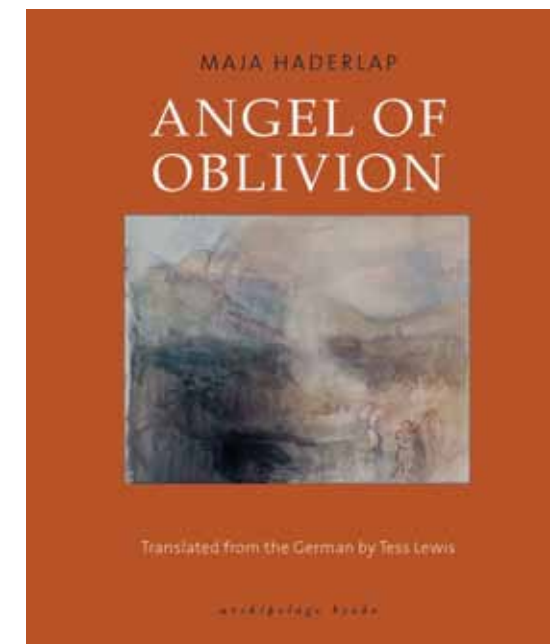


#### MAJA HADERLAP

**“The country that doesn’t want us; yet, we are the ones who enabled its existence as a state...”**

In the Slovenian public, Maja Haderlap was known primarily as a poet. As a novelist, she got her breakthrough with her novel *Angel of Oblivion*, written in German. She received the most important Austrian literary award, the Ingeborg Bachmann Preis for the novel. The work, issued in several editions in Germany, highlights how Slovenian resistance against Nazism served the Austrians as a foundation for the establishment of their own state after World War II, while at the same time they despised and mocked former partisans and tried to erase their memory from public life. The work is written as a family chronicle, an intimate analysis of a family deeply marked by World War II, but even more deeply by post-war deception.

*Angel of Oblivion*. Translated from German by Tess Lewis, Archipelago Books, 2016



LOJZE KOVAČIČ (1928-2004)

## The most exciting author of 20<sup>th</sup> century Slovenian literature

“...what you do not say has never happened. Or will keep happening.”

MATEJA KOMEL SNOJ  
PHOTO: JOCO ŽNIDARŠIČ



The biggest literary jury in Slovenia to date, comprising 18 literary historians and critics of several generations, gathered on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Slovenia's independence and the silver jubilee of the prestigious national Kresnik Novel of the Year Award. It declared *Kristalni čas* (*Crystal Time*) by Lojze Kovačič as the best Slovenian novel of the last 25 years.

The novel, which won the Kresnik in 1991 when the award was first bestowed, was described by the jury as “a true literary masterpiece by the greatest Slovenian writer of the 20th century”. The central position which Kovačič's works occupy in Slovenian literature is well-deserved. His literary oeuvre is impressive, both in terms of the themes discussed and the writer's unique narrative approach. In his four-decade writing career, Kovačič kept exploring his past and present life, demonstrating through literary efforts that his individual story is part of a vast and all-embracing history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its breaking moments – a sort of pattern for all its tragicalness.

### CREATION, “THE ONLY EXCUSE FOR LIVING”

Kovačič wrote *Crystal Time* during the Slovenian Spring, when disease pushed him to the brink “between the illusion of death and the illusion of life”. Bed-ridden, Kovačič would note down his emotions daily, and, as the scope of these notes grew, they evolved into the writer's confrontation with himself, a recapitulation of his experiences, and an insightful self-reflection. In this autobiographical novel, written in the form of journal entries, Kovačič returns to the past that he captured in his earlier works through the eyes of a boy and a young man, this time viewing it from the palimpsestic perspective of a grown-up, wise man on his way out.

**In *Crystal Time* Kovačič reopens a number of themes that he explores in almost all of his writings: death, God, love in all its dimensions, and, finally, creation as “the only excuse for living”.**

### THE MOST AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL OEUVRE

The literary oeuvre of Lojze Kovačič – his novels, short stories, memoirs, diary entries, essays, and children's stories – spans hundreds of pages. Whether we start exploring it from his first or last novel, or any other work, it does not take long to realise that throughout his writing career Kovačič was only interested in three things: man, life, and the world. It is pointless to wonder whether any other topic could excite him as much. When readers become immersed in the enchanting melodies of his stories, closing in like a dark fugue or inspiring like light and airy sonatas, they can no longer break free. Kovačič writes in the first-person narrative, since his aim is to write the “story of only one life”, the story of “a human being from the cradle to the grave”. He persistently uses one protagonist, himself, and through studied modifications veil after veil covering his life is lifted to reveal a single destiny, his own. The writer is the subject and the object of his writings, his own hero, and the focal point of his stories. All other characters who appear next to him in different periods and circumstances of life only play supporting roles, although without them the main story – broken down into modest tales within his oeuvre – would not be as vibrant and persuasive as it is.

**Among Slovenian writers, Kovačič has left us with the most autobiographical oeuvre, a true love affair of life and literature.**

### “IT'S ALL IN THE LANGUAGE”

The works of Lojze Kovačič describe in detail all the stations of his life. He was born in 1928 in Basel, Switzerland, as the son of a Slo-



venian emigrant and a German mother. He had two older sisters, Claire and Margrit. His niece Gisela, Claire's illegitimate daughter, also lived in the family home. Kovačič's parents ran a fairly successful tailor and furrier's shop in Basel. When his father refused Swiss citizenship, the family was deported to Slovenia in 1938. In Ljubljana the family lived in poverty, as unwelcome strangers in a city where people spoke a language most of the family did not understand. In 1944 Kovačič's father died of tuberculosis, and his mother, sister and niece were deported to a Carinthian refugee camp immediately after the war. Kovačič was only allowed to stay in Slovenia after the cultural establishment had intervened on his behalf. By 1948, when he was drafted into the army, he had been homeless for some time and worked briefly as a journalist. During his military service, he was unjustly sentenced to half a year in the penal battalion. Finally back in Ljubljana, he graduated in German and Slovene but, being "morally and politically corrupt," he could not get a job. He worked as a freelance writer until 1963, and then took up the position of a puppet theatre and literature teacher. In 1997 he was appointed extraordinary member of the Slovenian Academy of Science and Art. He died in Ljubljana in 2004.

These biographical details make up the frame of the tragic fate that befall Kovačič and his family, as told in the novels *Deček in smrt* (*The Boy and Death*; 1968, revised by the author in 1999), *Sporočila v spanju/Resničnost* (*Messages in the Sleep/Reality* 1972), *Pet fragmentov* (*Five Fragments*; 1981), *Prišleki* (*Newcomers*, 1984–1985), *Basel: tretji fragment* (*Basel: Third Fragment*; 1989) and *Kristalni čas* (*Crystal Time*; 1990), to name the most important ones.

Basel and Ljubljana are the literary topoi of the author's process of recollection.

**Basel is "the lost place of childhood," and Ljubljana "the found place" of premature adulthood, maturity, and old age.**

Although upon arrival in his father's land, the boy's/writer's world shatters into thousands of pieces (which the writer struggles to put back together almost until his death), Ljubljana is also the place where his new life, the life of a writer, begins. For Kovačič, writing becomes a way of making a modest living. Literature also unlocks a space of true freedom and, not least importantly, the meaning of life.

The experience of being a foreigner left an indelible mark on Kovačič ("If you are a foreigner, newcomer, an expatriate ... you are only at home in your memory, in your head. Everything else is a foreign land."), and his literary pursuits are filled with signs of the linguistic duality of a man who was born into one language and taught another at a later age. When asked to describe what "homeland" was, Kovačič replied: "It's all in the language. [...] The language is the homeland and the homeland is where we speak this language."

**More surprisingly, Kovačič never thought of himself as a Slovenian writer. He said he was just someone "writing in Slovene".**

**A CHRONICLE OF THE RECENT PAST**

Lojze Kovačič did not go to great lengths to promote his work, which might be one of the reasons why his novels are only becoming available to foreign readers years after his death. *Basel* can now be read in German, *Kristalni čas* in Czech, and *Resničnost* in Hungarian. *Prišleki* (*Newcomers*), Kovačič's central work on the vortex of World War II and the post-war period, all the political, ideological,

and social conflicts of the 20th century, a tragic chronicle of the recent past, has been translated into German, Italian, French, Spanish and Dutch. Recently the English translation of the first volume (by American translator Michael Biggins) was published (Archipelago Books, 2016), with the second and third part scheduled for publication in 2017.

To tingle your literary taste buds, here is a short extract from the beginning of the novel: *It's hot out there, I thought smugly, but in here there's a breeze. All up and down the shady corridor the drapes kept battering against the windows and doors ... God had chosen a totally ordinary, totally stupid day like this to send me on this train trip ... far, far away to a country where Vati had lived as a child and then later as a slightly older boy. Up ahead, beyond the buildings and trees that were flying back into Basel like drizzle ... on the far side of the clouds and the arrogant mountain that kept retreating ahead of us, no matter how much the train tried to reach it ... on the far side of some mountain slope I was going to encounter all kinds of things that were appropriate for my age ... whether those were toys or buildings, animals or people, cars or airplanes. At night nothing like it would ever have occurred to me ... and I had never even dreamed about Vati's country, let alone imagined anything like it during the day ...*



## THE FAMOUS PHILOSOPHER COUPLE

# Facts and gossip about the Žižek

MANCA G. RENKO  
PHOTO: SLOVENIAN BOOK AGENCY

A problem of small nations is that people of bigger nations cannot quite think of anything to associate with us – and Slovenians are no exception. We have no pyramids or mausoleums, impressive antique monuments and not even an invincible football team. Thus, when we are asked what is Slovenian, we may well reply with the name Slavoj Žižek, a man described by foreign media as the “Elvis of cultural theory”, “a thought machine”, and “the most dangerous philosopher in the West”.

### THE BANALITY OF ALL THINGS DOMESTIC

Žižek probably doesn't really pride himself on this, as he doesn't seem to be the type of person to be moved by national sentiment. He rarely participates in talks in his native country and almost never comments on events happening in it. However, this doesn't make him any less Slovenian. His home city of Ljubljana is interwoven with myths about him, some perhaps based on fact, and it is these myths that make Ljubljana Žižek's city. The truth is that it doesn't so much matter where someone was born or where they died.

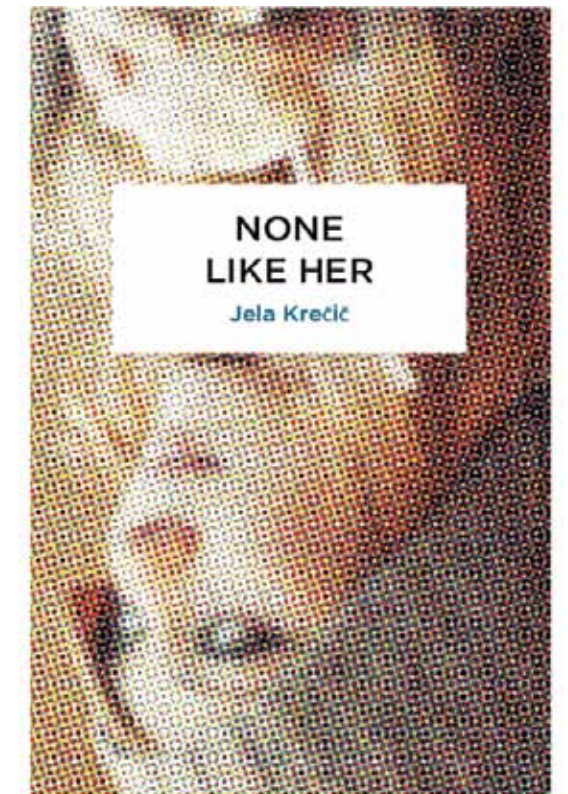
**What matters for the inhabitants is the imprint left by that person on the mental map of their environment. In this sense, Žižek is the greatest of Slovenians, as well as the greatest among the people of Ljubljana.**

If you spend some time around town, you can casually find out who his hairdresser is and what they think about him (he talks a lot, causing his head to move during the haircut, which can be a problem) where he goes to get pizza, where he occasionally drinks beer in the evening (well, his wife, the philosopher, journalist and writer Jela Krečič is the one who drinks it, he merely accompanies her) and which is his dry-cleaner of choice. Ljubljana is a small city and nothing remains secret in it for long, not even the rumour that Žižek occasionally buys tabloids. The home environment is always filled with banalities, rumours, gossip and myths and these are the key components of what we call 'home'. The more at home we feel, the bigger the banalities we have to face. This might be the main reason that success in a home environment is the most difficult to achieve, and this was also true for Žižek.

**He became a true star in his home country only after he had been recognised abroad.**

### WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

All those enticed by rumours will agree that rumours concerned with dissecting relationships, especially loving ones, are those of the highest quality. Žižek's relationships are no different. The more philosophical among the gossipmongers will tell you that Analia, his ex-wife from Argentina, had a sister called Oralia. Rumour has it that both names were chosen by their father, a psychoanalyst and a keen admirer of Freud. Gossipmongers of a more trivial nature, however, will happily point out that his wife, Jela Krečič Žižek, a journalist specialising in culture for the biggest Slovenian newspaper Delo, is hated by all sworn recreation enthusiasts and fans of a



healthy lifestyle. This is due to a blog she wrote a few years back, in which she argued that joggers did not belong in the city centre, since their jogging, sports apparel and sweat bothered her while she was trying to relax and enjoy a beer and a cigarette. It could be said that the wedding of the journalist and the philosopher two years ago caused quite a stir in the Slovenian public sphere and remained a favoured subject of discussion for the whole summer.

#### NONE LIKE HER

Last year, Jela Krečič showed that she is not only a journalist and a doctor of philosophy who knows a great deal about films, but also a promising writer. Her first novel titled *None Like Her* was published before the start of the summer by the publisher Beletrina. It is a novel about a young man who, after a break up, wants to find a replacement for his long-term partner, to distract himself and get over her. The novel was one of the most popular beach books among Slovenian readers last summer. When the book was published, Slavoj Žižek said that he hoped the novel would become a “critical image of an entire generation” and stressed that the literary work with its apparent lightness, silliness and plots tries to emulate romantic comedies from Hollywood’s golden era in the 1930’s. Incidentally, Jela Krečič is a great connoisseur of Ernst Lubitsch, and her novel, which in a way is an homage to the great director, was released not long after the film *She’s Funny That Way* (dir. Peter Bogdanovich) was released. The said film was dedicated to the same director and it impressed many viewers who had not previously heard of Ernst Lubitsch. Good films and books (as well as art in general) have a common law, namely, in the words of Slavoj Žižek “The best definition of art is not adding something to a kitschy story, any idiot could do that. ... A real artist doesn’t add, but takes. It’s what you leave out that’s important.”

#### SLAVOJ MAKES TEA FOR JELA

**The myth of Slavoj Žižek consists of a mixture of philosophy and pop culture, consecration and denigration, inaccessibility and vulgarity.**

He proved this when Jela Krečič’s novel came out: on the one hand he talked about the definition of art, whilst on the other he remarked that the novel should be titled *Slavoj Makes Tea*, as his wife’s writing process meant that he had to be extra supportive, squeezing orange juice for her and making her tea. The longer the novel became, the more tea Slavoj Žižek had to make, which took away valuable time that could have been spent on philosophy. ...It might be because so much of his time in Ljubljana is spent making tea that he has to write his books on a plane. Surely you’ve heard the rumour that Slavoj Žižek wrote his most extensive work *Less than Nothing*, a book on Hegel – of over a thousand pages – on a plane? What if it’s all true?

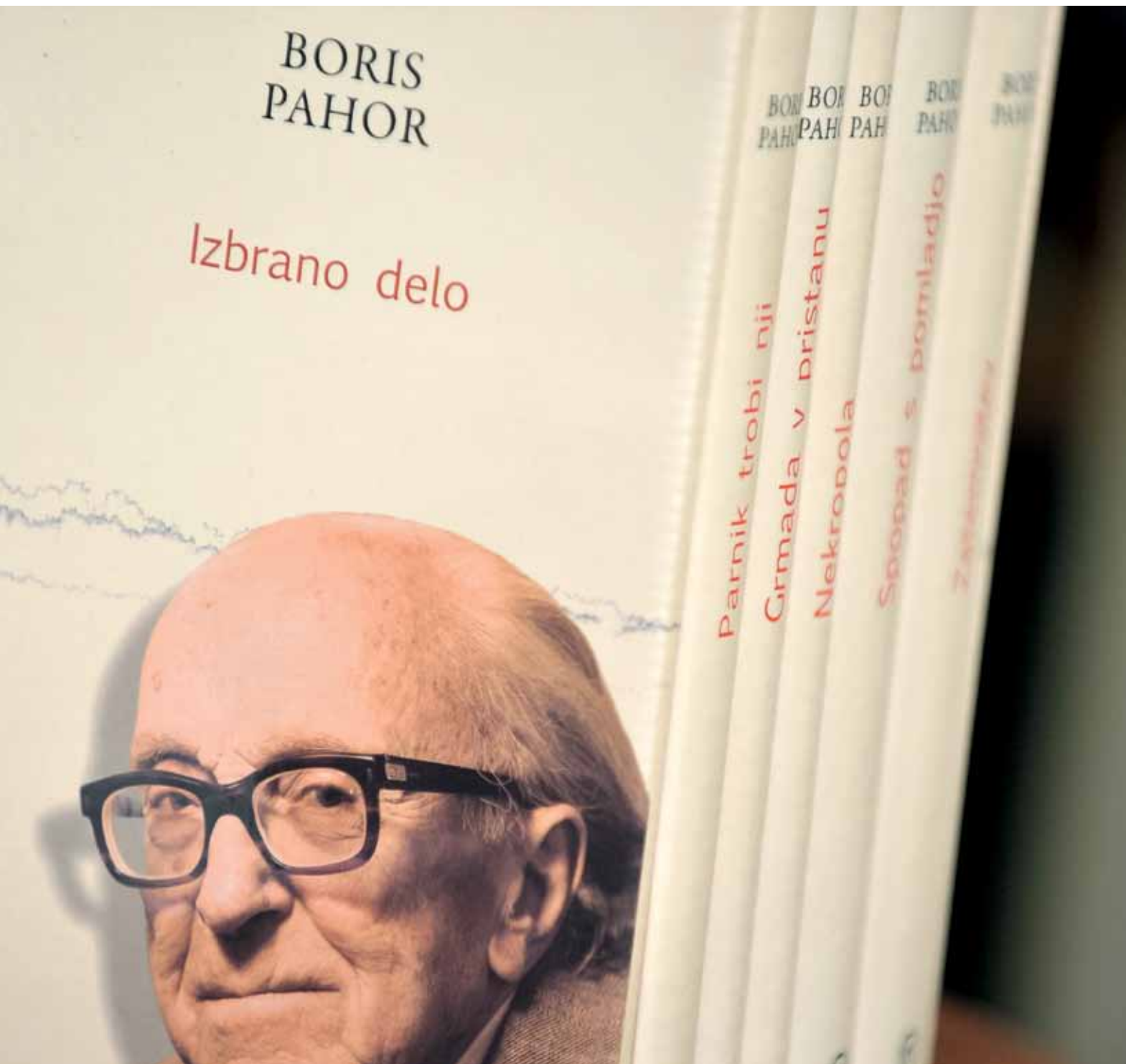
*\* The novel None Like Her is to be published in November by the British publisher Istros Books (Peter Owen Publishers). For this occasion, the Žižeks will appear in London’s Conway Hall on the 1st of November, with additional novel presentations following in mid-November in Washington and New York.*



BORIS PAHOR

## The life optimist who survived concentration camps

MANCA G. RENKO  
PHOTO: STA



The further we move into the twenty-first century, the fewer people who witnessed the horrors of the twentieth are still alive. One of those few is the Slovenian writer Boris Pahor, aged 103, who spent fourteen months as a political prisoner in Nazi labour camps of Dachau, Dora, Harzungen and Bergen-Belsen. He devoted most of his literary oeuvre to the camp life and the systematic dehumanisation and humiliation applied by the Nazis. But his work extends beyond the literary sphere.

In Slovenia and in the wider European area, he advocates anti-fascist views in an upright and determined manner, comments on polemical issues and warns that the horrors of the twentieth century could happen again in the twenty-first unless we strive for tolerance, understanding and dialogue.

### HUNGER AND FASCISM

Boris Pahor was born in 1913 in Trieste, which was still a port of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the time. Those inclined to romanticise might think that this is the year when as many as three giants of world literature could be seen drinking cappuccino in this city on the same day, namely James Joyce, Robert Musil and Franz Kafka. But the “summer of the century”, as some call this year, which was the last before mankind came to know a world war, predicted nothing romantic for Boris Pahor.

### As he recounts today, his life was marked by hunger.

Due to World War I, he spent his early childhood in poverty which continued throughout his youthful years in the politically and economically unstable post-war 1920s and 1930s. But the peak of the hunger came about during World War II. First, he suffered scarcity as an Italian soldier in Libya (after World War I, the ethnically mixed Trieste became part of Italy, which is why Pahor was called up into the Italian army). His hardships continued after the capitulation of Italy, when he was a member of the anti-fascist national liberation army (which he joined himself), and later on as a political prisoner in Nazi labour camps. As he describes in *Necropolis*, his best known

work about his life in the camp, he beat his way through the day in the camp with a piece of bread and a runny yellow soup with a piece of potato if you were really lucky.

### SLOVENIAN NATIONAL HALL – A MONUMENT TO CULTURE

But the fascist politics, which influenced the work of Boris Pahor the most, was no less cruel than the hunger. After World War I, the western edge of the Slovenian territory was assigned to the Kingdom of Italy with the Treaty of Rapallo, even though the majority of the population was Slovenian. The same was true for Trieste, the largest Slovenian city (in which there lived more Slovenians than in Ljubljana) in the nineteenth century. Here, the inhabitants were the first to experience fascism. In 1920, the Fascists burned down the Slovenian National Hall in Trieste. The National Hall had a symbolic significance: Built in 1904, according to the plan drawn up by Max Fabiani, an architect from the Karst region (who was a friend of the successor to the throne Franz Ferdinand, and who also designed the plan for Palace Urania in Vienna).

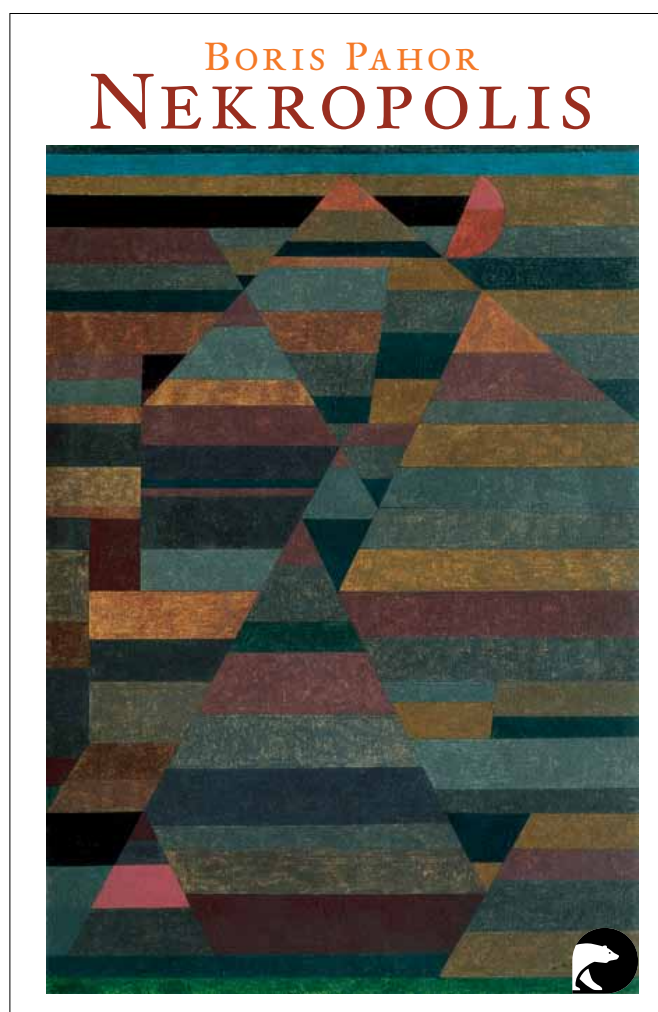
### The National Hall in Trieste was home to various Slovenian (mainly cultural) societies, as well as a café and a hotel.

When it was built it was said that other nations boast with palaces, castles, churches and skyscrapers, but the Slovenians built a clean modernistic building, a monument to culture. Its burning meant that Slovenians were not welcome in the city centre. This act marked almost all Slovenian authors in this city, and everyone was writing about the burning of the National Hall as a prediction of the

terrors that would follow. Pahor delved into the subject of the Hall arson in his work entitled *Trg Oberdan* (English: Oberdan Square), naming the book after the square where the National Hall stands.

#### ASSIMILATION POLICY

It did not take long before the predicted terror reached Trieste (and the surrounding area). In 1922, Mussolini's Fascist Party assumed power. They started executing their fascist assimilation policy right in the ethnically mixed area of the Slovenian territory's western



edge. They prohibited the use of the Slovenian language and prevented public life to all those who were not Italians. They did this by all means available, with torture and killings becoming increasingly common with each passing year. As early as 1923, the "Gentile" education reform came into force, which allowed classes only in the Italian language. Boris Pahor, ten years old at the time, has thus never been educated in his mother tongue and, in the end, completed his studies at the University of Padua.

#### The Slovenian language was a form of resistance that could cost one one's life.

At the beginning of the 1930s, just as the world was becoming aware of the danger of fascism, the Slovenians living along the border area have already been experiencing it for an entire decade. As a member of the resistance movement, Boris Pahor was arrested and brought to the German camps in 1944, at the end of the war. For the greater part of Europe the war continued into the fifth year, but Pahor already had as many as twenty years of persecution behind him. Pahor and his fellow camp prisoners had a red triangle pinned to their chests, which marked them as political prisoners (in 2015, the Italian publishing house Bompiani published his account on political prisoners, *Triangoli rossi*). Like all surviving witnesses, Boris Pahor was faced with the question of guilt, especially in *Nekropolis*: By what logic did he survive the torture of the camp, but millions of others did not? Does his life mean that someone else had to die in his stead? Are all those who saw the end of the war responsible for the deaths of their fellow prisoners? What means are allowed when one is struggling for one's own survival?

Many, among which the most famous example is that of Primo Levi, could not bear this kind of introspection and took their life. But Boris Pahor is different. He says that he is pervaded with optimism and faith in love: "As a centenarian, and a man who survived a concentration camp, I say that no economy and no party, left or right, can help, the only true thing is love." The love towards our planet is also important – if the twentieth century fought against

The new German edition by Berlin Verlag, 2016

totalitarianism, the twenty-first century must fight against global warming, he says.

#### ETERNAL RESISTANCE FIGHTER

Boris Pahor, still a committed activist, was very engaged already during the fascist regime and after the war.

#### He was critical towards socialist Yugoslavia, the establishment of which was possible precisely due to resistance fighters like himself.

He was one of the editors of the Trieste magazine entitled *Zaliv* (English: Gulf), which strived for a democratic organization of society and sovereignty of nations. The magazine was in conflict with the Yugoslav authorities (it was not possible to buy it in Yugoslavia, it was only accessible abroad), which culminated in 1975 in the "aféra Zaliv" (English: the Gulf Affair). At that time, the magazine was published together with a brochure dedicated to Edvard Kocbek, a Christian socialist, who was prohibited to act publicly after the war in Yugoslavia. He was the first to publicly recall, in an interview, the post-war killings of about eleven thousand members of the Home Guard (Slovenian soldiers who collaborated with the Nazi Germany), who tried to run over to Austria, but the English returned them to Slovenia, where they were killed and buried in a hidden mass grave. For this reason, Pahor was banned from entering Yugoslavia, and only visited it again in 1981 to attend Kocbek's funeral.

Today, Boris Pahor is one of the most translated Slovenian authors as well as one of the most important European observers, who still writes on a typewriter. He does not want to leave this part of the twentieth century behind him. Another such part is the custom which dictated that townspeople should greet each other on the street. Boris Pahor is vivaciously greeting his fellow townspeople on the streets of Trieste. This is one of the many reasons his sister calls him a "life optimist".



# VIDEMŠEK & VOJNOVIĆ

## A hard-hitting duo

AGATA TOMAŽIČ  
PHOTO: MATEJ PUŠNIK

Good writers of fiction or facts are often socially critical, and that is something that neither of my interviewees lacks.

**Boštjan Videmšek** (1975) has been reporting as a journalist for more than a decade from crisis zones around the globe which most people in developed countries would prefer not to be reminded of. He has published three books based on his journalistic writings: *21st Century Conflicts: Remnants of War(s)*, *Revolt: Arab Spring and European Fall* (with an introduction by Slavoj Žižek), and *On the Run*. The latter, recently translated into German and published by KLAKE Verlag, is a collection of heart-breaking stories of refugees on the Balkan route.



**Goran Vojnović** (1980), a novelist and film director, offers his readers make-believe (yet highly credible) stories on subjects that make many people uncomfortable. His literary debut *Čefurji raus!* (*Southern Scum Go Home!*) about the life of children of immigrants from the former Yugoslavia (pejoratively called *čefurji*) received notification of a criminal charge, as well as two of the most important national literary awards. Since his first novel, Vojnović has authored another two books, both focusing on individuals struggling to make peace with the recent history of the former Yugoslavia and wars in the Balkans (*Yugoslavia, My Fatherland*, also available in German, and the recently published *Figa*), and the feature film *Piran, Pirano*.



**Boštjan and Goran have something else in common: These authors' works aim to open the eyes of readers and, at least temporarily, break their stereotypes, while their lifestyles contradict the common image of typical representatives of their profession or calling.**

Neither fits the image of a cynical and bitter individual with a drink problem, as is the stereotype of Slovenian writers or war correspondents in general. Boštjan has celebrated his love of running (ultra-distance runs included) in another book, *Ultrablues*, while Goran expresses his love of sports, mainly basketball, in occasional newspaper columns. These are their musings on the state of the world and society.

**The world is practically out of joint, whilst you both write. Do you indeed believe that the written word still has the power to change and improve?**

**Videmšek:** Has it ever had that? Is the world really more out of joint today than it ever has been? Or is this impression the result of the dictatorship of social networks as the absolutum of instantaneity, and reality show lifestyles? Today a firecracker may sound like an atomic bomb, while silent mass killings caused by chemical weapons go unnoticed and unpunished. We feel less, watch more, see nothing: who can be bothered to read? When I am on a plane, train, beach or in a café, I watch people to see how much, and what, they read. Little and cheap. It is deeply disturbing since such practice shrinks the brain, dissolves ethics, and scatters the remnants of hope.

**Not the wars or great tragedies that are a constant feature of human history, no, this is what is throwing our world out of joint. Global retardation.**

**Vojnović:** I write because I feel the need to write. Sometimes, as if by miracle, my words touch people, stir and open up something inside them, something conscious or subconscious. A few days ago an elderly lady, a poetess, called me and thanked me because my book had made her cry for the first time since her husband's death. I believe that awakening people from different types of stupor, instantaneous as it may be, is the greatest achievement of literature. I have no illusions that I can change the world.

**What has happened over the last two decades that has shifted the overall social focus from seeing positive signs and a bright future in everything, including Slovenia's independence, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the spread of democracy and freedom across the former Eastern bloc, to the current overwhelming negativity that sees nothing but an apocalypse, crisis of values, and the demise of humanity..**

**Vojnović:** I am afraid our supplies of future have run out. Few places and periods in history held the promise of so much future as Eastern Europe in the early 1990s. Life in Poland, Hungary or Slovenia at the time was no doubt worse than it is today but people were hopeful for what tomorrow might bring. Today there is no future. Nobody talks about it; nobody can, or dares, to envision it. Our reality is full of stories about Islamisation, and about being taken over by the Chinese... According to a popular theory, Islamic terrorism is largely the consequence of the failed integration of European Muslims. Actually, Muslim integration was equally unsuccessful twenty years ago, yet at that time people were not drawn to religious fanaticism but to the life of MTV celebrities and movie villains.

**People began to turn to religion when Europe became overwhelmed by the growing sense of insecurity.**

**Videmšek:** If this were true, our society would be reasonably realistic, but it is not. Instead of reflection, it is governed by reflexes. Truthfully, I detest negativity as a consequence of the es-

sential state of the body and mind less than I condemn positivity, good-and-evil clichés, black-and-whiteness, fake metaphysics, the escapism of the "buy now" personal growth, and the faked friendliness of someone living above Josef Fritzl's basement. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, we were, in my recollection, not immersed in freedom and democracy but wars and blood...

**Both of you (for the time being) are connected with print media: Boštjan as a journalist, Goran as a columnist. How do you see their - well, not dying, but more a transition and skin-shedding into a new and different reality?**

**Vojnović:** Personally, I am disappointed to see media change into something that I do not like, not in the least; and to see that what I like has become unprofitable and therefore unstable. It is dispiriting to realise that our society has no answer to this issue, we are simply not aware that in a two-million-people market, high-quality media need to be deliberately preserved and deserve the same protection as world-class art. I feel alone in my thinking, and this is particularly disappointing.

**Videmšek:** The media are the microcosmos of society. The greatest mistake is that editors and owners make compromises to please the more obtuse part of the public instead of focusing on the more enlightened groups. One compromise like this is enough to irreversibly open the valve that releases newsmongering to the public. Besides, we live in a time when the expanse of information technologies has made people believe that they know everything and can say it publicly, which makes them reporters. For quite some time I have been advocat-



ing introduction of a licence for the right to speak publicly.

**The freedom of (public) speech should be limited on grounds of knowledge, information, awareness, responsibility, and self-reflection.**

**Has either of you ever thought that it might have been better to have been born a few decades earlier (Boštjan could have become the Slovenian Hemingway, and the market for Goran's books was much larger in the happy times of Yugoslavian symbiosis) or in another country, where one of the world languages are spoken rather than the baffling and insignificant Slovene?**

**Vojnović:** Knowing how it all ends, I would prefer to have been born a decade later so the collapse of Yugoslavia would not have affected me as profoundly as it did. In this sense I have always envied younger generations more than the older ones. As regards the latter, of course I would have enjoyed growing up in the new wave and punk era but I think their hangover was even more painful than mine.

**I really would not want to abandon my linguistic and cultural obscurity, though; I would be nothing without it, it runs in my blood and my genes, and I have learned to love it and relish my own insignificance.**

It is liberating, in a way. The hardest thing for me to come to terms with was the fact that my national football team will never win the World Cup.

**Videmšek:** Of course not. Growing up in this specific time and space, I still managed to learn at least one foreign language well enough to be able to write and publish in it. I grew up in an analogue world, and I express myself in a digital one. I have lived in two

states and two political systems. Because of the 'timing' of events, I was a very political and thinking individual even in my early teenage years. This was a privilege. And, to tell you the truth, lower critical mass meant less competition. In reply to what Goran said – we may never become world champions, but we got the chance to play in the national team at a very young age, and we used it well, making it in the big world.

**Nationality, religion, national sentiment, rootedness – what are your personal views on these in the time when one side of the world is being shattered by wars and an exodus of refugees while the other feels more connected through Pokemon than any citizenship?**

**Vojnović:** We feel a bond with our language, culture, and space, each in our own way. We are part of a tradition. This is not a problem until our national or religious sentiments develop into an ideology and become exclusive and aggressive, like in the 1990s. Today people are returning to their roots – home, region, nation – mainly because they feel frightened by the unstable globalised world where major global powers seem to be chasing their own 'pokemons'.

**In a world where many feel lost and insecure, a return to tradition is logical.**

In this respect, politicians shouting "Let's close the borders and turn back time!" seem understandably appealing. Still, this is a short-lived solution; no one has yet managed to escape time. Pokemons, refugees, gay marriages – sooner or later, they will all find their way to the farthest pulpit.

**Videmšek:** There is certain consistency here. Ad hoc focus = death of ethics. The space which has forgotten its own pain and manipulates its own historic memory is creating a "natural" gap between *us* and *them*. Empathy is not a gift; it is hard earned.

**Boštjan, which of Goran's books would you have translated**

**into Arabic to be read by people who have rescued from Syria nothing else but bare life? Goran, which of the crisis spots would you report from instead of Boštjan?**

**Vojnović:** Truthfully, I would stay as far as possible from the zones where Boštjan delivers his reports, and I am really worried because he keeps getting closer and closer to the action. There is another reason, though, why I could never be a war correspondent. So far I have not asked anybody how they felt during the siege of Sarajevo, or the during the war in general. Not even my friends or family. If they talked about it, it was because they wanted to. I think it takes a special kind of person to make people talk about the greatest horror they have ever been through. Boštjan has that ability, and I do not. But I often think about what is it like now in Syria, which I visited six years ago. I think about the wonderful world that used to exist but is no more today.

**Videmšek:** It would have to be *Jugoslavija, moja dežela* (*Yugoslavia, My Fatherland*). A universal story in a regional style. Syria was seen as the "wonderful world" only by tourists to the Orient; similarly to, or much more than, Yugoslavia. Beneath these polished floors lurked the dark truth of regime torture chambers, mass no-trial executions, hatred among sects, and stained colonial legacy which blew up as soon as suitable conditions emerged – for Yugoslavia, that happened in 1991. Rafik Schami and Yassin Haj Saleh write about this in painful and disturbing detail. The grand illusion. Hundreds of thousands of deaths.





MIHA MAZZINI, WRITER

“There is no democracy  
without proper structure”

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ

Miha Mazzini is a man of many talents. He has written 20 published works in nine languages, and as a computer expert he is author of nine manuals. He has won numerous awards, including the American Pushcart Prize, and his works have appeared in several anthologies. He has acted as screenwriter of two award-winning feature films and director of five short films. His “autobiographic novel from made-up stories”, *Otroštvo* (Childhood) has received the annual Kresnik Prize for the best novel of this year. Mazzini holds an MA in Creative Writing for Film and Television from the University of Sheffield, UK, and a PhD in Anthropology of Everyday Life from Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis, Ljubljana. He is a voting member of the European Film Academy.

**You have three professions – you are a computer expert, a writer, and a screenwriter. Which do you like best?**

All three. All my professions teach me something. In computer science I mostly learn structure and order. If you’re only a writer, your mind will soon start to wander, but if you also work as a software programmer, you must be down-to-earth. It’s much the same with film; the script is mainly about structure.

**We are all a mix of structure and intuition, with forms and meanings determined by our local culture.**

**Such as?**

Well, it’s really interesting to compare literary performances in different countries. In the USA, these are stand-up events which include little reading but a lot of questions from the audience, and short and funny answers. It’s all about entertainment. Americans love entertainment more than anything. In England, literary events include readings by distinguished authors, well-read intellectuals, while in France the primary aim of a literary performance is to deliver a moral verdict in the style of Zola’s *J’accuse*. In France, literature readings have a strong tradition and are considered moral pillars of society. Questions like *What do you think about the current war?* are at the top of the list of commonly asked questions.

A nation will always come up with an archetype for a certain profession. The Slovenian stereotype of a writer is one of a fool, or a court jester, with an occasional drink problem. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were two prominent writers in the Slovenian

territory, Ivan Tavčar, a boy from a province who grew up poor, went to Ljubljana, made a political career there and got rich, and Ivan Cankar, who took to drinking. So, we have two examples. The second one teaches us to be passive, to wait for others to take the responsibility, and to blame someone or something for whatever happens. We thought it appropriate to adopt this example.

**Where did you learn to be a writer?**

I’ve thought a lot about how a writer is made, and come to a conclusion that a certain genetic predisposition is required. Then other factors come into play. Curiosity, for example.

**It also helps if you are really bored as a child. Because when there’s no fun to be found in the outside world, you turn inside.**

If you are constantly taken from one activity to another, you will have no reason to start exploring this inner world. Actually, most of us writers were brought up by grandparents. They had little time for us and this forced us to look inside. Another excellent practice for becoming a writer is to read as much as possible.

My last book, *Childhood*, describes the first five years of my life. When I was getting ready to write the book, I had no idea how to do it. Finally, I took the events I remembered and turned them into stand-alone fictitious stories and used them as building bricks of an autobiographical novel about growing-up. Readers have to put the pieces together in their head.

**Was this a sort of a personal cleansing?**

In a way, perhaps, although I don't believe in the therapeutic effects of literature. However, there are times in life when we need to go back to go forward...

**..... forward to another film you will direct and have written the script for?**

Yes, that's true. I'm delighted that we will start filming a feature movie about the "the Erased" in October. My long-time wish to direct and make this film is finally coming true. We're in the middle of preparations now.

**I'm really interested in hidden injustice. If there's a theme that I really relate to, this is it.**

It's not just about "the Erased"; after all, *Childhood* is also a novel about an injustice. There were things that I couldn't say as a five-year-old, so I told them now, in this book.

**You are best known among Slovenes for your brutally blunt and honest columns in which you expose the flaws of the nation.**

These columns have made me a kind of celebrity. They are very widely read and popular. This part of my life is now over, though, because I don't want to turn into a moralising preacher to whom people come seeking atonement for their sins. It's like I'm making allowances for people and they count on me to rescue them. It doesn't work for me anymore. Also, I'm not a big fan of routine and that's why I've changed so many professions in my life.

**The secret of a creative life is constantly taking on new challenges. For me, this is now film and literature, which is growing on me.**

Luckily, I have a permanent source of income and I don't need to write to qualify for a grant, status, or points; I can create freely. In my columns, I addressed the quirks and oddities of our society, from Slovenian mentality to other contemporary social issues. By nature, Slovenians are serfs and career rebels always going against something. This fact alone gives plenty of food for thought and writing. Such attitude and traits are not surprising; they are typical of nations who were under foreign rule. Constant rebelling against authority or, more precisely, the structure and order that this authority imposes. Clearly, this is not very productive for the society or the individual. The question is – how to reach beyond? In principle, implementation of the rule of law would help. But what does it really mean? That the punishment is instantaneous and now, no negotiations, no leeway!

**A democracy of responsibility and order, then.**

Absolutely. Scots, for example, needed a few centuries of practice before they established real democracy. Science claims that it takes three generations to lose what has been transmitted through epigenetic inheritance. The Bible agrees, stating that three genera-

tions will suffer the consequences of sins. In short, no democracy can exist without responsibility.

**Paradoxically, if you want to have democracy, you will need to perfect the order and responsibility first.****Your columns also reflect extensive knowledge and understanding of the human psyche.**

That's true. I've always been interested in that. I've studied the topic a lot and even written my PhD about it.

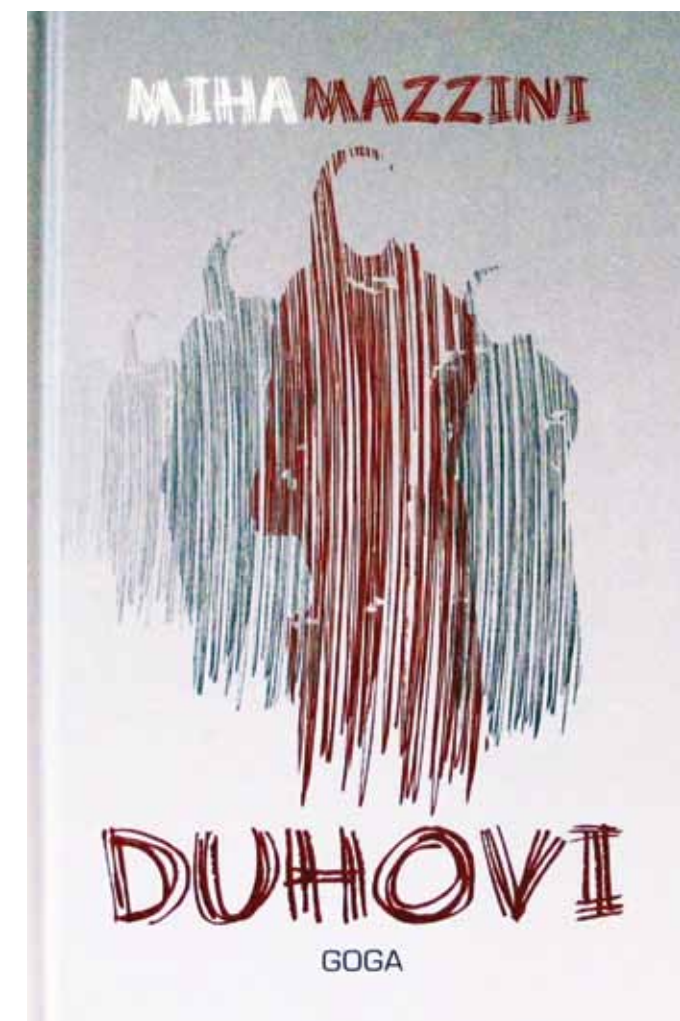
**Miha Mazzini as a writer abroad.**

In Slovenia books are published in small editions; 400 copies is quite a high number. *Childhood* has already sold in more than 1200 copies, which is a high number for the Slovenian market. Only about 3% of all books published in the United States are works in translation, while in the UK this figure is 4%. My books are published abroad, but with minor publishers and in small editions. Nevertheless, writers in Slovenia actually live better than their colleagues in the States, probably because the countries operate completely different systems again reflecting the respective national mentalities. In the US, the system runs like a lottery: a low 1% of writers earn a lot of money, while others work mainly for free, or for really low fees. The middle class (and medium wages) is rapidly disappearing from the western world. In music, a total of 16 artists earn 70% of all the money. Everyone else is left to fight for the leftovers. On the other hand, Slovenia is an egalitarian society, which means that everyone will get a share, through small. In our system, I would receive the same payment as a novice writer because this practice is rooted in our mentality. That makes Slovenia much safer for writers; we all get something and no one is left out. Personally, I think the system is not very motivational, but it is safe for all the parties involved, in particular for those not on the hardworking side.

Creative industries fall under the Ministry of Culture in Slovenia, which makes no sense. They are economic activities. Let's take a look at Germany. I think it is wrong to treat culture like an orchid in a buttonhole, a relic that has nothing in common with ordinary life.

**For me, culture is an important part of the economy. Creative industries account for 30% of Berlin's GDP, which is great. I'd like to see this happen also in Slovenia.****What themes are most popular with international publishers?**

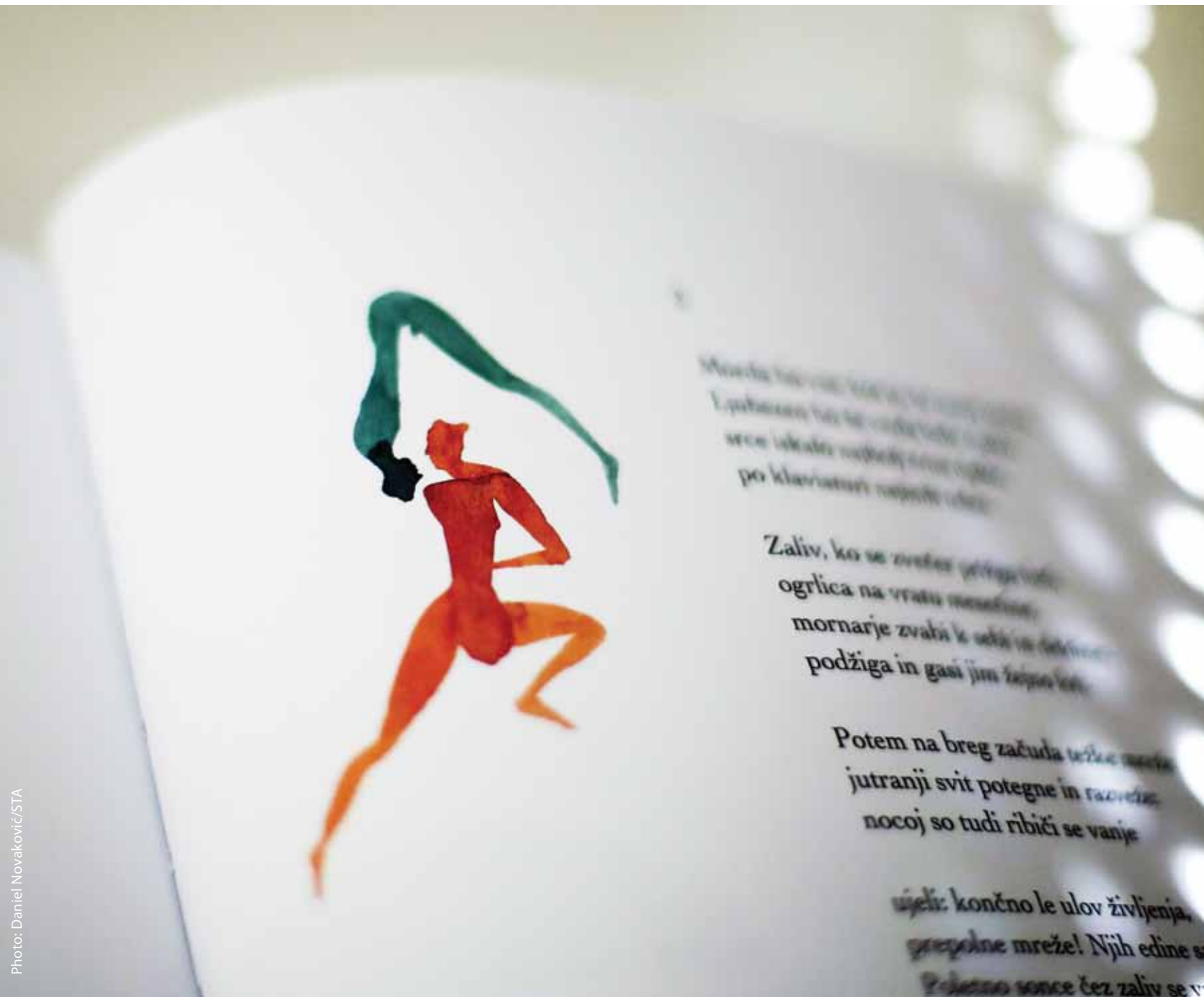
They are interested in all wars across the globe, and immigration. A Slovenian writer wishing to stir international attention would have to combine two topics: the wars in the former Yugoslavia and the immigration into newly formed states in this territory. The two topics are on the top of the list for Americans. On the other hand, Slovenian readers prefer books with tragic content, books which enhance the feeling of passivity and helplessness. I am often criticised for not writing 'typical' Slovenian literature. Supposedly, my books are overly positive, and I too Americanised because I still believe that we can influence things and change them. I won't apologise for that. Here, I'm totally on the side of Ivan Tavčar as an active protagonist.



## FOUR POETESSES

## Strong voices of Slovene poetry

RENATA ZAMIDA



The poetesses presented are powerful contemporary voices of Slovene poetry. All of them are acclaimed at home but also more and more abroad, and they all promise more to come ...

## ANJA GOLOB



Photo: Jošt Franko

**Anja Golob** (1976) is a poet, writer and translator. After studying Philosophy and Comparative Literature at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana, she worked as a professional theatre critic. Occasionally she still works as a dramaturg for contemporary art and dance performances. In 2013 she co-founded a small publishing house called VigeVageKnjige. She has published four books of poetry so far, three in Slovene, one in German translation, which was very well received by international critics. For her second poetry collection (*Vesa v zgibi*, 2013) she was awarded the main Slovene poetry prize (the Jenko Prize) in 2014. She lives between Ljubljana and Brussels. More under: [www.anjagolob.org](http://www.anjagolob.org).

**The Body is Resting**

© Anja Golob, translated by Andrej Pleterski

the body is resting  
 a body full of sand  
 a body without organs without limbs without thoughts without  
 a body sackcloth stuffed with  
 what others have said  
 a body a membrane  
 a boundless yet intangible border  
 an outline lacking every value  
 assigning meanings and sense to everything beyond itself  
 a place everything distinguishes from  
 yet only insofar as it exists as a place though empty  
 a sketch of a form letting water through  
 neither itself nor the stars nor chapters nor the soil  
 a body an elastic means of wittily knotted bones  
 a tarpaulin of passion an insect in the machinery  
 a dog licking itself  
 entirely automatically  
 the body is resting  
 and there is no force persistent enough to make it move  
 no water mighty enough  
 no enough watery air  
 a body a sharp note in the constellation of time  
 the only one to crackle the sound on its own  
 rip the air undulate the water cut the force  
 the point setting into motion all others while staying perfectly still itself  
 like a proto-atom in the Democritus' box  
 this beautiful place of pure nothingness  
 only pretending to mean something

*"Anja Golob has written one of many perfect poems of simplistic magnificence that deserve to be included in the anthology of world poetry. Moreover, it is poems like this one that could help Slovene, a language often overseen amidst other European languages, to make a lasting impression, reminding "world languages" of their overly expressed self-importance."* (From a review by Jürgen Brôcan at [fixpoetry.com](http://fixpoetry.com) on 26th May 2015).

## MILJANA CUNTA



Photo: Žiga Koritnik

**Miljana Cunta** (1976) completed her MA in English Victorian Poetry at the University of Ljubljana. Both her poetry collections, *Za pol neba* (By Half the Sky; 2010) and *Pesmi dneva* (Poems of the Day; 2014), were shortlisted for the most important national literary awards. She translates English and Italian poetry into Slovene. In 2013 her debut collection was published in Italian translation by Miha Obit (Thauma Edizioni). Miljana Cunta regularly appears at literary festivals in Slovenia and abroad. She lives with her family in Ljubljana.

**Tulips**

© Miljana Cunta, translated by Giovanna Riccioi

Some  
discover tulips  
growing in their bellies,  
marvel each morning at their shades and hues,  
notice sun beams on stems  
and eavesdrop on neighborhood chatter  
seeking names to fit.  
Late at night they consider  
sourcing heat-resistant bulbs.

Whenever darkness overtakes the sky  
and we others pause to wonder  
if again it will rain  
frogs and locusts  
with eyes half-closed, they sense the garden  
knowing that this too will pass.

Whenever we others  
lift hopeful eyes  
to catch a glimpse of beauty  
they simply outstretch a hand.

Whenever we others  
step out on a journey  
they loosen laces  
and barefoot step  
into vibrant flowerbeds.

In time, like all things  
tulip season fades  
they rest in withered flowerbeds  
and wait,  
knowing that like all things  
waiting too will pass.

When like all things  
all things too have passed  
their eyes half-closed  
tulips appear.

*"Miljana Cunta's feminine poetry is like a submerged world that can be touched and used as a foothold to swim up towards the light... Her revelations about the world are articulated in a highly poetic manner; Cunta is a poetess for attentive and thoughtful readers."* (Poetry and fiction writer Jurij Hudolin on Miljana Cunta's poetry)

## ANA PEPELNIK



Photo: Wolfgang Kuehn

**Ana Peplnik** (1979) published her first book of poetry, *Ena od variant, kako ravnati s skrivnostjo* (One of the Ways How to Treat a Secret), almost ten years ago. The book was followed by *Utrip oranžnih luči na semaforjih* (The Orange Pulse of Traffic Lights, 2009) and *Cela večnost* (A Whole Eternity, 2013). Recently, Ana Peplnik has issued her most comprehensive volume, *Pod vtisom* (Under an Impression). In this unique artistic experiment, poems are a collage of verses crafted by the poets that have affected Peplnik most profoundly. When she does not write poetry, she translates from English - her most recent translated authors include Joshua Beckman and Jennifer Clement. She finds it easier to write when she is miserable than when she is happy. She still believes that poetry can change the world and that all poems are in fact love songs.

**Above the stars**

© Ana Peplnik, translated by Jasmin B. Frelih

Time is motionless. Somehow  
stopped. The air is filled to its edge  
with cicadas and as we go lower  
the ocean recedes.

Above your head the steep cliffs  
are dangling all the time. In the end  
I just stared at the stars in the ocean

and left my thoughts behind. There was  
nothing else for me to do. The beat of the ocean.  
Everything is now left to revolve around space.

Because it is everywhere. In every poem touch  
above every sky. And that is why the ocean  
now keeps the beat. I suddenly think of you.

How would you hold out beside me sitting  
in this darkness and looking at the night in the ocean.  
Looking at how all the stars will fall into it.  
Maybe without a problem. Quiet and happy.

*"The poems of Ana Peplnik are consistently executed exercises in style, playfully juggling what is grasped in the hand or glance through linguistic frolics, varied formal structure, and indifference to grammar rules."* (Literary critic and translator Tanja Petrič on Ana Peplnik's poetry)

## LUCIJA STUPICA



Photo: Jože Suhadolnik

**Lucija Stupica** (1971) is a poet and an interior designer. Her first book of poetry *Čelo na soncu* [Forhead in the Sun], published in 2000, was awarded two national prizes. Since then she has published two critically acclaimed books of poetry, *Vetrolov* (Windcatcher; 2004) and *Otok, mesto in drugi* (The Island, the City and the Others; 2008), leading up to her being awarded the prestigious 2010 German Hubert Burda Prize for young Eastern European poets. She currently resides in Sweden, where she was awarded the 2014 Klas de Vylder scholarship for best writer born outside of Sweden. Her poetry has been translated into more than fifteen languages worldwide.

**The Bed**

© Lucija Stupica, translated by Andrej Pleterški

We are standing in front of a painting.  
Wrinkled bedding,  
two pillows left behind,  
the silhouettes of an invisible body—  
the traces of everything remaining  
after loving, in isolation,  
after youth, in aging,  
after leaving, in waiting.  
The articulation of a possible story,  
about someone sleeping alone,  
about not being able to sleep,  
about looking for someone else.  
We attempt to enter the picture, the space,  
then to withdraw and hear, feel the difference,  
read the anatomy of an absent body.  
Our attempts bring us to the unspeakable.  
We end up in a white shirt, alongside  
the bed, which is still awaiting its time.  
A few moments ago:  
We are sneaking in a ring of streets,  
lying parallel, less accessible,  
to hide in a world belonging to ourselves only,  
as always, not at all commonplace.  
Yet our ways eventually lead up to the Piazza.  
"This is the painter I was telling you about, remember?" I say  
as we run down the stairs of the museum hand-in-hand,  
all fired up in the fresh promise of love,  
oblivious of the expiration date marked somewhere.

*"Lucija Stupica's poetry shows that understanding is not just utopia, but also a potential reality. This possibility is reflected in sharply drawn images as well as in the sound of the voice."* (From a review by Jenny Tunedal in *Literatura* No. 270/2013).



Photo: Daniel Novakovič/STA

## GROWING UP WITH A BOOK

# Encouraging young people to read

DANILO GOLOB



Primary school students at the book-giving event last year.  
Photo: Marko Bezenšek/Public Library of Slovenske Konjice

For several years, the Slovenian Book Agency has been leading a project to make young readers more aware of the best Slovenian authors, improve their access to good literature and show them how to make the most of public libraries.

The national project Growing up with a book was initiated in 2006 by the Ministry of Culture in cooperation with partners, and has been run and developed by the Slovenian Book Agency (SBA) since 2009. Project partners work with general public libraries, Slovenian primary and secondary schools, primary schools with an adapted programme, educational establishments for children and young people with special needs, and primary and secondary bilingual schools in neighbouring countries (Austria, Hungary, Italy). The Agency also co-operates with teachers of Slovenian at the so-called Saturday schools (USA, Australia), at supplementary Slovenian classes abroad (Belgium, BiH, Serbia, Croatia, France, etc.) and at European schools (e.g. Brussels, Luxembourg, Frankfurt).

**The project aims to improve accessibility of high-quality original Slovenian literature for young readers, promote acclaimed Slovenian authors among primary and secondary school students, and help young readers learn about the operation of the public library system.**

Moreover, the project strives to encourage publishers to include more contemporary Slovenian authors in their publishing programmes for young adults and, in so doing, increase the share of original Slovenian young adult books.

### FRUITFUL CO-OPERATION

Every year the SBA and other participating organisations select two works of young adult literature by Slovenian authors – one for seventh-grade primary school and one for first-year secondary school students. Schools and public libraries receive regular updates on the project, and promotional material and presentation films for both books are prepared in co-operation with the publishers and authors.

**This reading promotion campaign for young people is also supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (MESS) and the Ministry of Culture (MC).**

The MESS stresses the importance of partnerships between schools and general libraries which enable experts from various fields to interact with children and young adults and, consequently, improve reading literacy as one of the Ministry's high-priority tasks. The MC also acknowledges the important role of the campaign in opening the door to the world of books. The books which young readers receive as gifts become welcome additions to their home libraries. Upon a visit to a public library, young readers learn about numerous other reading promotion projects and activities.

### CHEERING FOR READING

Throughout the school year, several supporting activities are held in co-operation with schools, libraries and other cultural organisations. In addition, the SBA organises project promotions at various fairs (Leipzig, Frankfurt, Bologna and the Slovenian Book Fair).

In the framework of the Slovenian Reading Badge project, selected books are read as part of intergenerational literacy programmes.

During EuroBasket 2013 in Slovenia, a campaign entitled No Game Without Drama was carried out in co-operation with the Basketball Federation of Slovenia with an aim to connect books and sport. During, before, and after the championship, several events related to basketball and books took place in bookstores and other interesting venues. The aim of the campaign was to connect culture and sport, use the immense potential of public attention on the basketball championship, integrate social responsibility and culture in the event, and increase the role of books in the Slovenian society.



The SBA and the Basketball Federation of Slovenia continue to promote reading culture. The promotion campaign is now in its fifth consecutive year. In 2016, over 600 books have already been donated to young basketball players.

**CURRENT SCHOOL YEAR**

**In the school year 2016/2017 the project Growing up with a book is organised for the eleventh time for seventh-grade primary school students and for the seventh time for first-year secondary school students.**

Vinko Möderndorfer's *Kit na plaži* (*Whale on the Beach*; 22,000 copies) was selected for primary schools, and Marjana Moškrič's *Sanje o belem štrpedu* (*Dreams of a White Strpedo*, 22,000 copies) for secondary-school readers.

The project opens officially on 8th September, the International Literacy Day. On that day, selected books are delivered to public libraries across the country where they wait to be received by young readers.

At the secondary school level, the number of participating schools totalled 152, or 97%. The total number of first-year secondary school students involved in the project was 16743, or 84% of the total fist-year secondary school population.

Photo: Mostphotos



Books are a favourite pastime for Slovenian basketball players. Photo: The Basketball Federation of Slovenia in co-operation with the Slovenian Book Agency.



## LIBRARY UNDER THE TREETOPS

# Free books to read under the shade of a tree

DANILO GOLOB  
PHOTO: MATEJ PERKO

An outdoor library was born twelve years ago out of the simple idea of reading under trees. Named “Library under the Treetops”, it enabled people to sit down in public spaces and read books offered for free. The idea enchanted Ljubljana and became a permanent feature, and today we can read, browse and enjoy books “under the treetops” in thirteen places around Slovenia.

And when was this idea born? During the organisation of a music festival in Tivoli Park, Tina Popovič, a concept creator who leads the project carried out by the Divja misel (Wild Thought) Institute, contemplated something that would make visitors to the park stop and stay for a while. Besides music, she wanted to offer them something more – a quality programme that would be easy to carry out and suitable to take place outdoors. “The first installation was rather improvised – a few shelves, chairs and pillows and a small but good selection of books. People applauded, reading in the park took hold and the Ljubljana Tourism took note and invited us to set up the library that summer along the bank of the Ljubljanica River,” Tina recalls the beginnings of the project. And so, in 2004, the first Library under the Treetops operated all summer long at Trnovski pristan. At the right moment, the needs of the city of Ljubljana which, at that time, was beginning to renovate and revive its public areas, met the simple idea of reading outdoors, which addresses passionate readers as well as those who are beginning to discover the world of books – the youngest, families and the eldest.

Since the very beginning, the organisers have cooperated with numerous domestic publishers who donate their newest issues every year. The publishers consider the cooperation a good opportunity for the promotion of books, while the organisers see it as an excellent way of spreading the culture of reading among very different age groups. In recent years, as more than twenty units of the Library under the Treetops operate across Slovenia, books are also being purchased.

### **GREAT VARIETY OFFERED AT VARIOUS LOCATIONS**

The Library under the Treetops provides to its visitors free outdoor reading of books, comic books, magazines and newspapers in various languages. Dur-

ing the years of the library's operation, the organisers upgraded their idea and now also organise side events (debates with authors, workshops, live reader-friendly music) that enrich visitors' free time. In the lively capital, with a wider spectrum of literary events, these extra events are less common, while in other places that lack such events, they are organised on a more regular basis. E-books are also available at some locations.

In the first years of its operation, the library in Ljubljana was expanded to include some other carefully selected sites. "We tried to strategically revive certain city corners by adding a reading area (the Tabor Park), while other locations were lively to begin with and are frequented by many domestic and foreign visitors (the Ljubljana Castle courtyard, the Star Park). On such locations, our task is primarily to provide good content and sitting equipment. Domestic as well as foreign visitors are absolutely thrilled with the

*This year, as Ljubljana is holding the title of European Green Capital 2016, a green corner offering special green topics is also available at one of the idyllic locations in the Ljubljana Castle courtyard beside the traditional reading corner under the treetops.*

set-up. "What a simple idea, why don't we have this in my country?" is a question frequently asked," says the project leader.

The green library is becoming increasingly mobile every year and is expanding to new locations around Slovenia. We can find a Library under the Treetops on the seaside, in the mountains, in smaller local communities and in many cities. Ljubljana, Ribnica, Novo mesto, Polhov Gradec, Kanal ob Soči, Kranj, Bled, Mala planina, Zagorje ob Savi, Nova Gorica, Polšnik, Ptuj and Vrhnika are some of the locations where we can take some time for browsing through books

in the Library under the Treetops. "They also noticed us in other Slovenian cities, where the project is now carried out in cooperation with local partners and numerous municipalities enabling implementation of the project at the local level. Every year, a new city or two join us, while we select new locations according to their suitability as well as the production and financial capabilities of our partners," says Tina. We can visit Library under the Treetops at various locations around Slovenia until December 2016.

#### LIBRARY ON DEMAND

The Divja misel Institute also installs the Library under the Treetops on demand. In 2010, such a green library was set up in the atrium of the European Commission Representation. For this purpose, the atrium was filled with greenery, equipment was provided and the shelves were filled with European authors and selected topics. "Our spatial adaptability and ability to adapt to various contexts with the selection of specific topics and books is our great advantage. As a consequence, besides its permanent locations, Library under the Treetops travels a lot (literary festivals, music festivals, sport events, events for children, temporary road closures, etc.)," explains Tina.

In 2015 Library under the Treetops also took over the management of the Vodnik Homestead – the birthplace of Valentin Vodnik, the author of the first Slovenian language grammar book, a poet, priest and publicist. The homestead was transformed into a House of reading, writing and storytelling. "Part of this new lively literary centre, in which many events take place, is our first permanent, sheltered location, which shows that the project is also doing well in covered public areas. Soft artificial grass, pillows scattered on the ground and chairs – people simply get to love such places and take them as their own," says the project leader.

From a simple idea, the library developed into a well-recognised and successful project that connects readers of all generations through the written word. They will further develop and deliver inspiring content that will contribute to spreading the culture of reading and developing socially useful content.



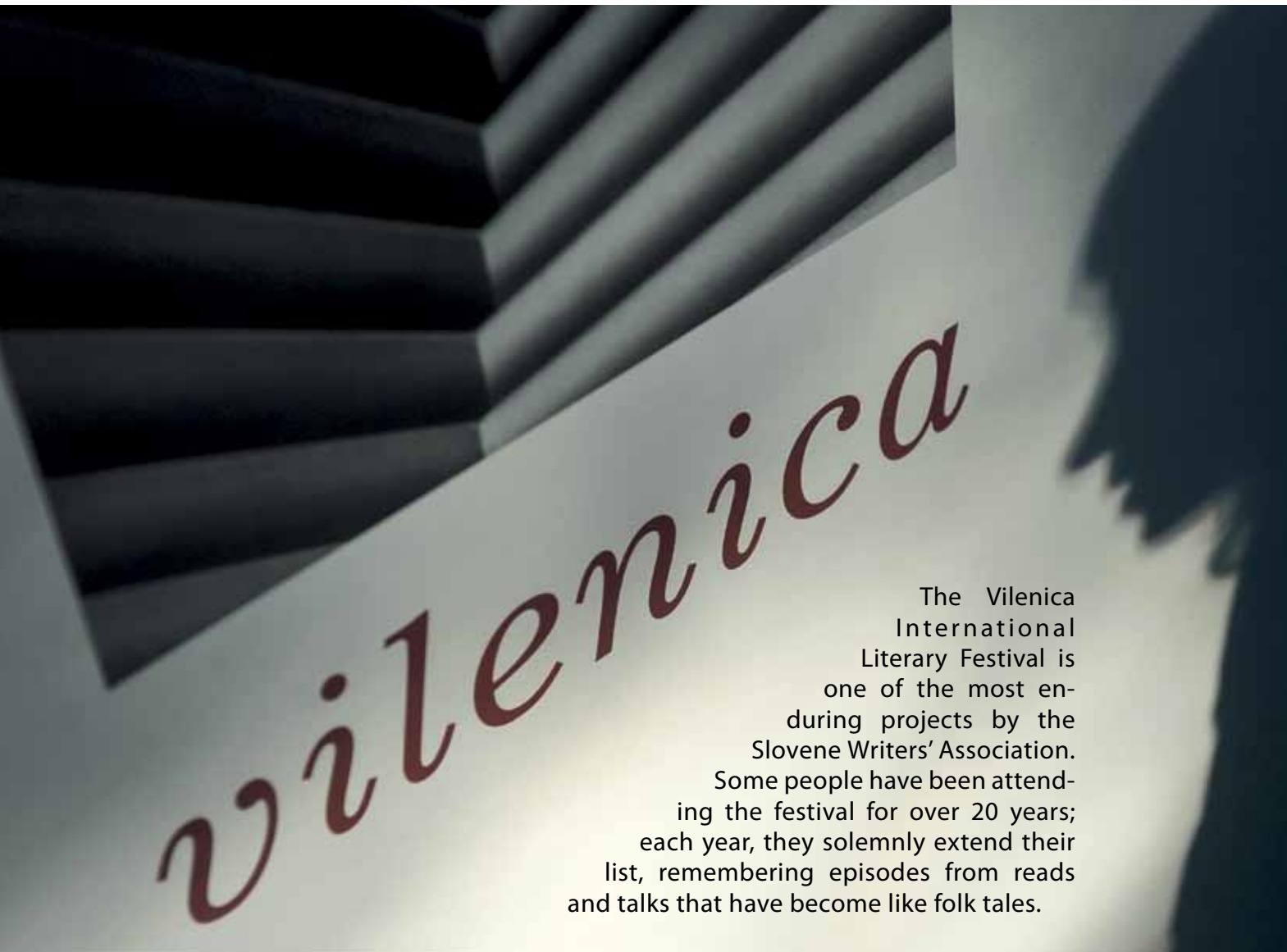
From the initial reading island twelve years ago at Trnovski pristan in Ljubljana, a simple idea developed into a popular green library that can now be found at thirteen locations around Slovenia.  
Photo: Matej Perko

*For the Library under the Treetops project, Andraž Tarman, then student at the Academy of Fine Art and Design, designed mobile equipment that enables diverse installations in various public areas and provides comfortable reading for various age groups. Žiga Testen is the creator of the library's corporate graphic design, while the text writer Igor Medjugorac provides appropriate words inviting people to read in nature. The Library under the Treetops cooperates with a network of students and volunteers, who set up the libraries on a daily basis, maintain their tidiness and provide a friendly atmosphere.*

## 31<sup>ST</sup> VILENICA INTERNATIONAL LITERARY FESTIVAL

# Between nostalgia and reflection about the present

ALENKA VESENJAK, STA  
PHOTO: STA



The Vilenica International Literary Festival is one of the most enduring projects by the Slovene Writers' Association. Some people have been attending the festival for over 20 years; each year, they solemnly extend their list, remembering episodes from reads and talks that have become like folk tales.

### A FESTIVAL WITH WEIGHT

Vilenica can take pride in more than three decades of tradition and award winning literary figures "whom it was a privilege to have known," as this year's laureate, Croatian writer Dubravka Ugrešić, pointed out several times. At the initiative of poet Veno Taufer, the festival was conceptualised to emphasise Central European literature. Among others, it has awarded Fulvio Tomizza, Peter Esterhazy, Milan Kundera, Josip Osti, Ana Blandiana, Claudio Magris, Ilma Rakusa, Dževad Karahasan and Olga Tokarczuk.

Over the years, Vilenica has succeeded to preserve its Central European orientation. Consequently, interpretations of works can be heard in an array of languages that are, as a result of globalisation, often pushed aside. The regular feature of the festival throughout its 31 years of existence is an Austrian publisher, translator and poet, essayist and literary agent Ludwig Hartinger, whose love for Kras and Srečko Kosovel was so great that he learnt Slovenian. The word "tolmun" (river pool), which fascinated him the most, initially, was later followed by others. Hartinger speaks Slovenian so well that most people find it hard to believe it is not his mother tongue. As a writer, editor and long-standing collaborator of the festival Andrej Blatnik pointed out at one of the events, he often uses words hardly known to even the most well-read Slovenian readers. Hartinger also always initiates dancing at the picnic near the entrance to the Vilenica cave after the award ceremony. This year, one could hear: "Here he goes, Ludwig is on the dance floor, let's join in!"

### SEARCHING FOR WRITERS IN THE NIGHT KARST LANDSCAPE

Vilenica is renowned for devoting a great amount of attention not only to literary readings and discussions, but also to socialising among the guests, as these are the occasions where the closest bonds are often created. The clinking of glasses has regularly resulted in making it difficult for organisers to get participants back to the hotel. It has happened many times that more than a few writers have found themselves wondering the night Karst landscape looking for their colleagues, the reunion being one more reason to have another toast later in the hotel. All's well that ends well. But the following day, it's time for another reading, which, as a rule, is attended by everyone – keenly interested in how a colleague is writing or thinking. If the question "How do they do it?" arises, the answer is always more or less the same – they will rest later, at home.

### CRYSTAL AND KNOCKING DOWN OF THE BERLIN WALL

**This year, the most attention was attracted by the Vilenica award winner Dubravka Ugrešić, who is an exquisite interlocutor and who values what has become, in her words, rather old fashioned nowadays – conversation.**

Her arsenal of knowledge is astounding. She easily switches between themes, presenting books, quotations, films, scientific findings, examples from high and popular culture. She begins with Lipizzaners and asks who is currently claiming them, she continues with animal migrations, particularly the geese from the east, then she steers the conversation to the Iron Curtain and the year 1989 when she received the Crystal Vilenica award for the best work presented in the Vilenica Almanac. It was the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall, "perhaps it was triggered by my Crystal; you know, the butterfly effect," laughs Ugrešić, and switches to a new theme, this time a concerning one – the general decrease in the level of knowledge, superficiality of perception and understanding, editorial (non)culture and increasingly ignorant readers, if they still exist at all in the true sense of the word.

### LITERATURE AND ETHICS

Organisers of the festival make sure that the focus of discussions is not too dispersed. This year's topic "Literature and Ethics" pointed to endless interpretations of literature, ethics, responsibility, aesthetics before ethics and vice versa, whether aesthetics is ethics or not at all, all the way to the debunking of the myth that literary artists like nothing more than sitting in their den and writing. For instance, at a round-table discussion, French writer Alexandre Bergamini constantly insisted that he writes because he must, that it makes no difference to him whether anyone reads his books or not, and that it is a matter of luck and coincidence if his book finds a publisher and a reader. Dubravka Ugrešić quickly brought him back to reality: "If it all really didn't matter to you, you wouldn't be here today, discussing your book. You are here because you are interested in discussion, our thoughts about the given theme, the exchange of opinions," she told him. This thought perfectly sums up the essence of the Vilenica festival, and in the end, Bergamini admitted that he may have exaggerated a little with his unsociable framing why he writes.

# SLOVENIA'S READING BADGE FOR CHILDREN

## A mass reading scheme unique in the world

DANILO GOLOB



Awarding Reading Badges to Prebold kindergarten children at the municipality library of Prebold. Photo: Darko Naraglav

The Reading Badge programme, which promotes voluntary reading during children's free time, was initially adopted by elementary schools throughout Slovenia. In the last two decades, it has also been thrilling children who read at home with their parents and can win a pre-school Reading Badge.

The initiators of the Reading Badge programme (first known as Prežih's Badge) were professor Stanko Kotnik and writer Leopold Suhodolčan. Half a century ago, the first Badges were awarded to 119 keen young readers. Since then, this youth reading movement has expanded all over Slovenia, and now includes Slovenian school children across the national border and children of Slovenians all over the world. Such mass reading, particularly by elementary school children, cannot be found anywhere else in the world.

### LIFETIME READERS

**In 2002, the Reading Badge was organised as an independent Slovenian Reading Badge Society; its programme became part of the national programme of the Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth.**

Since the very beginning, the movement has been professionally guided by mentors in schools (since the 1990s also mentors in kindergartens and libraries) and their work with children is the foundation of the Reading Badge. The Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth organises seminars and prepares educational material for the mentors. It also assists in the organisation of visits of youth literature authors to kindergartens, elementary and secondary schools as well as libraries.

The Reading Badge is developing as a supplement to the teaching of Slovenian language and literature as well as an additional activity in school libraries; at the same time, as an extracurricular/optional compulsory activity, it can be less constricting and closer to children and adolescents. In this way, it can be more successful in bringing books closer to readers in a friendly and interesting

manner, thus shaping lifetime readers who come to love reading. The Slovenian Reading Badge Society (SRBS) obtains funds in various ways in order to implement programmes and projects at the national level. It applies for calls for proposals put out by the Public Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Book and the Office of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Slovenians Abroad. It also cooperates with the National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, which carries out activities for the promotion of reading through study groups for librarians and teachers of Slovenian. Milena Kerndl from the National Education Institute of the Republic of Slovenia is certain that "in schools, the Reading Badge certainly adds value in the pursuit of the common goal – motivation of pupils to read literature."

Also, donors and sponsors are of great support to the movement. In the long history of the Reading Badge, numerous Slovenian companies have supported individual projects.

### INTO THE WORLD WITH A BOOK

Reading Badge activities are most extensive at elementary schools in Slovenia. 40 per cent of elementary school pupils engage in reading for the Reading Badge throughout elementary school, while 72 per cent of all pupils participate in the programme. While mentors propose a variety of high-quality books to pupils, they can also read books of their choosing if so mutually agreed.

**Reading takes place for almost the entire school year. Young readers meet with mentors, discuss books and recommend them to one another.**



# BRALNA ZNAČKA

*Društvo Bralna značka Slovenije – ZPMS*

*Zveza Prijateljev  
Mladine Slovenije*

In the last two decades, the pre-school Reading Badge has promoted family reading and is spreading through Slovenian kindergartens and general libraries. In this way, the youngest readers learn at a very early age that reading means discovering new horizons and, among other things, gives them an opportunity to express what they read through drawing, singing and playing.

In secondary schools, the Reading Badge is usually carried out through reading clubs. Reading for the Reading Badge is also practiced by Slovenian children in regions settled by Slovenians across national borders, while in Slovenia, it is practiced by children of ethnic minorities, immigrants and migrants.

Every year, over 140,000 children participate in reading Slovenian books in all programmes; they are guided by more than 6,400 mentors (school teachers, preschool teachers and librarians).

#### **STIMULATION FOR THE READERS**

Years ago, readers were awarded badges, while nowadays readers of all sizes receive recognition awards and various other prizes –

badges, bookmarks, T-shirts, etc. Of course, a book is the most wonderful prize. In recent years, the Society donates special books to all “golden readers” – i.e. pupils who have read for the Reading Badge throughout elementary school, while first-graders are invited to read picture books (the Golden Reader collection). Also, children very much appreciate meeting authors of books, visiting cinemas and theatres or being taken on readers’ field trips.

At the end of a reading year, kindergartens, schools and libraries usually organise a Reading Badge closing ceremony and give recognition awards and commendations to the readers. At this opportunity, they usually invite a writer, a poet, an illustrator or a theatre artist to speak to the children.

Creators of the Reading Badge programme, authors of interesting stories and those who have supported the project by awarding books to the most faithful readers for an extended period of time – all of them are well aware of the importance of reading. Parents can also contribute greatly to developing their children’s love for reading. The Reading Badge promotes joy and love for reading among children and adults, connecting families and generations.





## TOURISM AND LITERATURE

## Poetry of nature, nature of poetry

MANCA G. RENKO

A passage from the beginning of the poem:

*Alone  
through the village.  
The vineyard trellises  
howl in the darkness,  
the burja  
scales the walls, butts  
the window: 'Who?'*

*The window  
lightens the darkness.*

*At the end of the village  
the pine-trees rustle,  
tremble  
when they recognise me.*

© Translation: Bert Pribac & David Brooks

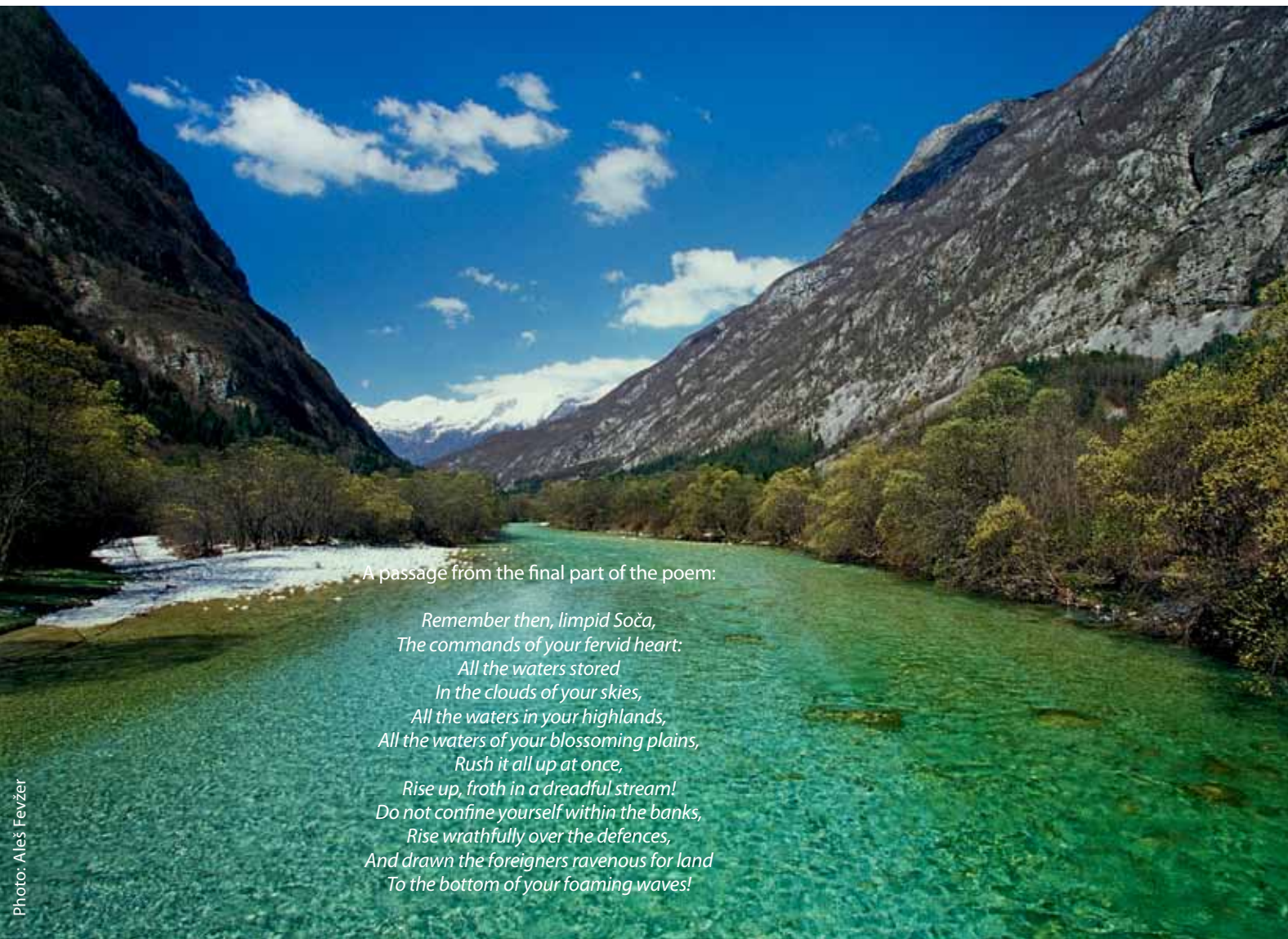
No tourist guide can do as well as literature in capturing the essence of a city, landscape or neighbourhood; it is able to merge the spirit of time with immortality and it sees beyond the superficial and self-evident. If we really want to understand the places we visit, we must let literature tell of their heritage. And, of course, vice versa: in order to allow literature to breathe, it should best be read at places that have inspired its authors. So we are presenting four Slovenian poems describing Slovenia's peculiarities. Their verses reveal more than any map, description or photograph.

**Srečko Kosovel (1904-1926): *Kraška vas/Karst Village***

Kras is a rocky plateau where the impact of water on limestone resulted in the formation of various karst phenomena, including caves and other distinctive landscape features. It stretches between the Bay of Trieste and the Vipava Valley and offers a view of one of the most unique landscapes in Slovenia and the world. This landscape has also inspired poems; perhaps the most well-known example is that of Rilke, who, during a walk around Nabrežina, near Devin, where the cliffs of the Kras Plateau meet the Adriatic Sea, wrote the first verse of the famous Duino Elegies, which starts as follows: "Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the Angelic Orders?" When the sound of the Bora wind (burja) meets the roar of the sea, no cry is loud enough to be heard. The same sentiments for Kras were also felt by Srečko Kosovel, Slovenian avant-gardist who, when he wanted to take a break from the strains of society, retreated to Kras, as he believed in its health-restoring powers. While in Kras, he always felt young and healthy, full of energy for resistance. In Srečko Kosovel's poetry, Kras is not only an oasis of peace but also an area threatened by Fascism, in which resistance must develop in order to help preserve humanity.

### Simon Gregorčič (1844-1906): *Soči/To the Soča River*

To the Soča River is a poem that must be learnt by heart by all school children in Slovenia; the same was required from their parents as well. In the poem, written in 1879, poet Simon Gregorčič praises the beauty of the emerald Slovenian river. However, behind the description of its magical beauty (the Chronicles of Narnia were filmed along the river, which testifies to it being truly magical) looms something sombre: a dark premonition that some day, the crystal-clear river will turn into a river of blood. Today, this is seen by many as a prophetic announcement of World War I, which was given more than three decades before it erupted. Namely, the Isonzo Front, the scene of the largest series of mountain battles in the history of humankind, ran through the Soča River basin. Spending time along the Soča River is as multi-layered as Gregorčič's poem. On one hand, it offers unspoiled nature, which is a true pleasure to explore, while on the other, it reminds us that mankind is able to turn even the most magnificent place in the world into hell. (The Kobarid Museum of World War I organises guided tours along the Isonzo Front trails, which greatly present the impact of world history on the local environment: it's a few hours' walk from the Italian Charnel House, which was opened by Benito Mussolini in 1938, to the Napoleon Bridge, which received its name when Napoleon troops marched across it in 1750. During the walk, visitors can enjoy beautiful natural scenic views.)



A passage from the final part of the poem:

*Remember then, limpid Soča,  
The commands of your fervid heart:  
All the waters stored  
In the clouds of your skies,  
All the waters in your highlands,  
All the waters of your blossoming plains,  
Rush it all up at once,  
Rise up, froth in a dreadful stream!  
Do not confine yourself within the banks,  
Rise wrathfully over the defences,  
And draw the foreigners ravenous for land  
To the bottom of your foaming waves!*

### France Prešeren (1800-1849): *Povodni mož/The Water Man*

The greatest Slovenian poet, author of the Slovenian national anthem and a strong representative of Romanticism, wrote *The Water Man* in 1830, in his youthful period. It is a ballad about a conceited woman, Urška, who arrogantly rejects all young men inviting her to dance. Immediately before the dance ends, she finally decides to dance with a handsome young stranger – who, as it turns out, is a dangerous Water Man, who takes her with him to the bottom of a river. After that, the woman is never seen again.

Although the poem has a tragic ending, it accurately depicts the liveliness of evenings along the Ljubljana River: live music, blooming linden trees, boisterous dancers. The atmosphere along the Ljubljana River is no different nowadays. On its banks, you can find everything from the botanical garden to the most beautiful square with a view of the Castle Hill, from a market with locally produced food to a flea market, from boisterous youth enjoying Friday night to placid pensioners seeking the silence of a Monday morning.



A passage from the final part of the poem:

*"Fear not, fairest Urška, just keep well in step!  
Fear not," he declares, "if the thunder resounds,  
Fear not that the water so noisily pounds  
Fear not the strong winds with their whistling sounds;  
Just speedily, speedily make your feet haste,  
Just speedily, quickly, there's no time to waste."*

*"I must have a rest now, I'm quite out of breath!  
Let's stop for a little, kind dancer, my dear!"  
"The white land of Turkey is not at all near,  
Where Danube is met by the Sava so clear,  
The deafening waters are waiting to greet  
You, Urška! so quickly keep moving your feet!"*

*He spoke, and they danced on more rapidly yet,  
Away from the dance floor and further they whirled,  
Beside the Ljubljanica thrice round they swirled,  
Still dancing, they 'neath the loud waters were hurled.  
A whirlpool was seen from their boats by some men,  
But nobody ever saw Urška again.*

Translation: Henry Cooper



**Edvard Kocbek (1904-1981): *Lipicanci/The Lippizaner***

Lipizzaners are white horses that are born black. They became famous as the breed of the Habsburg nobility, trained at the Spanish Riding School, which still gives performances in Hofburg in Vienna. Edvard Kocbek devoted a poem to them, in which he says they are "white and black buffoons, the court fools of its Majesty, Slovenian history." But Lipizzaners, which you can visit in their natural environment on the Kras plateau in Lipica, surpass Slovenian history. When you touch a Lipizzaner, as the saying goes, you touch world history. They were present at the most important weddings and funerals, Habsburg Emperors wrote decrees about them (23 directives for the breeders of horses belonging to Emperor Leopold I of Habsburg, 1658), they were given to conquerors (Napoleon, 1799), they were ridden by winners (general Georgy Zhukov at Red Square in Moscow after the end of World War II) and presented as precious gifts (Tito presented black mare, Stana, to British Queen Elizabeth and one of his stallions each to Naser and Nehru). In his poem about Lipizzaners, Edvard Kocbek shows that a horse is a synthesis of nature and world history.

A passage from the beginning of the poem:

*A newspaper reports:  
the Lippizaners collaborated  
on a historical film.*

*A radio explains:  
a millionaire had bought the Lippizaners,  
the noble animals were quiet  
throughout the journey over the Atlantic.*

*And a text book teaches:  
the Lippizaners are graceful riding horses,  
their origin is in the Karst, they are of supple hoof,  
conceited trot, intelligent nature,  
and obstinate fidelity.*

*But I have to add, my son,  
that it isn't possible to fit these  
restless animals into any set pattern:  
it is good, when the day shines,  
the Lippizaners are black foals.  
And it is good, when the night reigns,  
the Lippizaners are white mares,  
but the best is,  
when the day comes out of the night,  
then the Lippizaners are the white and black buffoons,  
the court fools of its Majesty,  
Slovenian history.*

© Translation: 1977, Sonja Kravanja

## SCHEDULE OF LITERATURE EVENTS

# Graphic novels in Vienna; Pahor in Berlin; Slovene writers in Pula

### EXHIBITION AND PRESENTATION OF TWO SLOVENIAN GRAPHIC NOVELS 28 October–16 November 2016, Vienna Literaturhaus

The vibrant Slovenian comic books scene will feature in Vienna at an event organised by the Slovenian Book Agency and the Slovenian Culture Centre in Vienna. *World traveller meest Mexican* exhibition combines the presentation of two comic books, namely the *Meksikajnarji* series (which was published in five books and is the longest Slovenian comic book) by Zoran Smiljanič and Marijan Pušavec, and the comic book by Jakob Klemenčič (screenplay by Marijan Pušavec) entitled *Alma M. Karlin. A cosmopolitan from the province*. Both comic books are connected to the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. The comic on Alma Karlin presents the real life of the writer Alma Karlin from Celje, who was born in 1889 and died in Yugoslavia in 1950, who wrote in the German language and achieved great popularity among her German readers at the turn of the century. The most known is her travel novel from when she travelled the world alone for several years in the 1920s. The *Meksikajnarji* series by Smiljanič tells the story about an unfortunate episode experienced by Emperor Maximilian I, who tried to conquer Mexico for the Habsburg Empire in a battle against Benito Juárez. The comic book is a first-person narrative of a Slovenian who fought as a volunteer for the Emperor in Mexico – as many as 6,000 volunteer fighters were recruited from the Monarchy and headed towards the New World in the 1860s. Most of them never came back.

At the opening night, on October 28 at 7 p.m., a talk with the comic book creators will take place, introduced by a speech by the Slovenian Minister of Culture Anton Peršak.

### BORIS PAHOR: NECROPOLIS 19 November 2016, Berlin

In collaboration with the Slovenian Book Agency, the Slovenian Culture Centre in Berlin and the Berlin Stadt-Land-Buch literature festival, the 103-year-old Slovenian writer Boris Pahor, who is also considered as the Slovenian Nobel Prize candidate, will make an appearance in Berlin on 19 November 2016. The occasion is the republishing of the German translation of the writer's internationally best-known novel *Necropolis*. The German publisher Berlin Verlag plans to mark the 60th anniversary of the first edition of the original novel, which was published in Slovenia in 1957. Boris Pahor will appear together with the German philologist Thomas Poiss who co-translated the first German edition of the novel together with the translator Mirella Merku in 2001.

### BOOK FAIR IN ISTRIA FOCUSES ON SLOVENE WRITERS 1–10 December 2016, Pula

The city of Ljubljana is this year's regional focus at the Book Fair in the Croatian city of Pula on the Istrian coast. In collaboration with the City of Ljubljana and the Slovenian Book Agency, ten Slovenian writers will be presented in Pula between 1 and 10 December. The official opening of the programme will take place on 3 December, the birthday of the greatest Slovenian romantic poet France Prešeren, with an exhibition and a musical performance by the internationally renowned Slovenian group *Laibach* in the Church of the Sacred Heart in Pula. The programme will end on 10 December with a chanson performance by the famous Slovenian poet *Svetlana Makarovič* entitled *Kdor gleda ljudi skozi mačje oči* (Those who see people through cat's eyes). The programme will also include exhibitions of painter Metka Krašovec and book illustrators Alenka Sottler and Hana Stupica.

### FRANKFURT BOOK FAIR 19–23 October 2016

Slovenia will traditionally present itself with a national stand at the largest book fair in the world in Frankfurt, located in the 5.0 hall at the C 116 venue. The Slovenian Book Agency invited more than 30 Slovenian publishers to participate at the fair presentation which is also supported by the Slovenian Tourist Board. This year, the Slovenian Minister of Culture Anton Peršak will visit the fair and also attend the national reception at the Slovenian stand on Wednesday, 19 October at 3 pm. It is known that Slovenia is a candidate for the title of the honorary guest at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2021, and last year, the Slovenian delegation presented the management body of the fair with the Slovenian candidature bid book. Slovenia sees the project entitled "Slovenia, guest of honour" as an opportunity to promote, establish and successfully market Slovenia as a brand, and especially to successfully promote Slovenian literature and authors on a wider international scale.

### SLOVENIAN BOOK FAIR 23–27 November 2016

The 32nd Slovenian book fair will traditionally be organised in Ljubljana. It is the largest annual Slovenian book fair and festival presenting various literary novelties and bestowing 10 different book, publishing and literary awards. Italy will be at the international focus of the fair, which is why this year's guests include Antonio Scurati, Paolo Rumiz, Susanna Tamaro, Elisabetta Sgarbi, Christina Battocletti and Franco Berardi. The fair will also host exclusive literary events, round tables, film projections and an exclusive event with French journalist and author Florence Hartmann.

The 33rd edition of the book fair in 2017 will place special focus on the German-speaking states Austria, Switzerland and Germany.

ALEKSANDER ČEFERIN

## New UEFA president

TEXT AND PHOTO: STA



Aleksander Čeferin, the head of the Slovenian Football Association, has become the new president of UEFA, the governing body of European football. He defeated Dutchman Michael van Praag in a secret ballot at the UEFA congress in Athens, Greece, by 42 votes to 13.

**In his first press conference following his election for the new president of UEFA, Aleksander Čeferin said that he would strive for transparency by introducing term limits for the main UEFA officials, and he would establish a compliance committee to take care of the association's governance.**

The head of the Slovenian Football Association told the press in Athens that only active members in national associations should be members of UEFA governing bodies, including the executive committee.

Asked about his first steps after being elected president of the governing body of European football, Čeferin said that he would "go to Nyon and shake hands with everybody, to present myself," referring to the UEFA headquarters.

Discussing the support from large nations and not only small and medium sized countries, he said that "big associations actually were asking the same thing, they believed in me and my programme, and they also wanted to see some changes."

Asked what he had done "behind the scenes" to accomplish the sweeping 42-13 victory against Dutchman Michael van Praag, Čeferin said that "I was never behind the scenes." "People trust me and nobody behind the scenes can have 42 votes."

He does not think about re-election in two years as it is "too early to think about [that]" and will try to do as many things as possible from his programme.

One of his priorities will also be making changes to the UEFA Champions League, as he will try to make sure UEFA not to get bullied by big clubs.

**"We should show that we are the ones who is the governing body, we need to have dialogue with clubs and I think that the situation can be solved."**

Asked about the biggest problems in European football, Čeferin listed match fixing, racism, security and safety. "Financial fair play should be enforced more strongly, and we have a lot of work to do".

For the end, he delivered a message to Slovenians, saying that small nations were also capable of playing major roles in many aspects of life. "I will make sure that people know where Slovenia is on the map".



## RIO 2016 OLYMPICS

## Medals for the Slovenian Team

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ, DANILA GOLOB



Peter Kauzer

The Slovenian Olympic Team won four medals at the Rio 2016 Olympics, bringing the total it was won in Summer Olympics since independence to 10. Gold went to judoka Tina Trstenjak, silver to sailor Vasilij Žbogar, another silver to kayak slalomist Peter Kauzer and bronze to judoka Ana Velenšek. Successful were also Slovenian air rifle shooters from Slovenian Paralympic Team. Veselka Pevec won gold and Franček Gorazd Tiršek won silver.

"My coach, Marjan Fabjan, prepared me for the competition both physically and mentally. I was determined to achieve my goal without any pressure. I did not let anything surprise me since I knew from the very beginning how to move on the mat and handle the fight... I wanted to follow through and was saving my emotions until the very end. Now a rest is ahead, then I will start planning for the future," said Trstenjak who was awarded €20,000 by the National Olympic Committee (NOC) for winning a gold medal.

"I knew I was prepared to win the medal. I was unsuccessful in my attempt to do so at the previous Games, even though I was one of the favourites. I had everything under control in Rio, I was careful enough to avoid the traps of the gates and finally stepped onto the podium. It was not the winner's podium but I do not mind," explained Kauzer before receiving a cheque for €17,500 from the NOC in recognition.

A cheque for €17,500 was also awarded to Žbogar. "I said that these would be my last Olympic Games and I really wanted the medal. I knew I was going to have to give my best. Four years ago, I ended up in sixth place at the London Olympics. Although I had a nice welcome home reception, I was determined, even then, to give my best and stand on the winner's podium in Rio. I believe that I am a unique sailor, and I proved this in Rio. It was strenuous for two days, the wind was strong and the waves were four to five metres high, something that those of us from the Adriatic coast are not used to. There were times when I could not even walk, but I had a great team that had prepared me for the competitions ahead. If this had not happened, my head would not have been clear because my body would have been tired and thus the mistakes more frequent. Obviously, others also made mistakes, even more than I did," said Žbogar, who went on to say that he could continue sailing for a hundred years if his body permitted. "Sport is great and I plan to continue one year at a time and see how it goes," concluded Žbogar, explaining that he has not finished his career quite yet.



Tina Trstenjak

Photo: Taminno Petelinšek/STA



Ana Velenšek

“Without the team we had in Rio, we would not have been successful. In addition to the athletes, I would like to thank the coaches, doctors, physiotherapists and other members of the team,” said the team head, Iztok Čop, following the performance of the second most successful national team at the Summer Olympics, and the third most successful at both the Summer and the Winter Olympics.

#### ATHLETES – SYMBOL OF PATRIOTISM

“Congratulations on the exceptional effort invested in order to achieve extraordinary international success. I was only a child when my father won a gold medal in gymnastics at the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico and I remember wanting him to return home most of all. However, even then I was overwhelmed by feelings at the magnificent welcome home reception at Brnik airport. I am, by far, more aware of that now.

**You, the athletes, are a symbol of patriotism, values in sport and an inspiration to young people and every Slovenian...**

I would also like to thank the coaches, companions, heads of the team and the press for broadcasting the events from Rio. As I wished you, the athletes, the best of luck before your journey to Rio, now I wish to express the same to our Paralympic Team who will be competing for medals next month. I wish you strength and courage,” said Slovenia’s Prime Minister, Miro Cerar, at a government reception for the Slovenian athletes.

“You created a Slovenian family in Rio and I was happy to be a part of it. You have made Slovenia known

to the world. You overcame challenges and continued, despite difficulties, and always with support from your coaches and families. There were many challenges and a lot of stress. Sometimes the coach’s voice echoed in the gym. However, your bravery was a recipe for success that enthralled everyone in Slovenia. Thank you for being able to make it to the Olympics. The Ministry will continue to support the junior team, your successors at the next Olympic Games,” said Slovenia’s Minister for Education, Science and Sport, Maja Brenčič, and invited everybody to the next Olympic Games in four years in Tokyo.

Miroslav Cerar, the greatest Slovenian athlete so far with a total of 30 medals at big competitions, thanked Slovenian Telekom which gathered 10,000 tweets on a communication platform based on sport and the values that stem from it, and donated €10,000 to the Foundation for Socially Deprived Athletes.

In Rio, Slovenia won its 20th medal as an independent country, its 10th at the Summer Olympics. Since 1991, Slovenia has won 38 Olympic medals; 23 at the Summer Olympics and 15 at the Winter Olympics.



Vasilij Zbogar

### PARALYMPICS IN RIO – DOUBLE WIN FOR SLOVENIAN SHOOTERS

The Rio 2016 Paralympics, a major global event for best disabled athletes, was also attended by eight Slovenian representatives. By overcoming obstacles that life put before them, world-class sports results were once again achieved by exceptional athletes, including Veselka Pevec and Franček Gorazd Tiršek, who further backed the success of the Slovenian national team by winning gold and silver medals.

Both Slovenian air rifle shooters were very successful in the qualifications in which Veselka Pevec set a new paralympic record of 634.9 points and defeated Tiršek, who won a silver medal, by just 0.4 points. "I have never even dreamed that this would happen. We often practise together and I lagged behind him many times, but I managed to defeat him today, on the most important day. I set a new paralympic record, which brought me to the finale. And here I am – a gold medallist. I looked at the scoreboard during the competition and tried to remain focused. And I did it. I still do not know how. All the effort I put



Photo: Vid Ponikvar/Sportida

Veselka Pevec



Franček Gorazd Tiršek

Photo: Vid Ponikvar/Sportida

into this has been rewarded. I sometimes spent eight hours at the shooting range. It did not go well but I did not want to disappoint at the Paralympics," said Veselka Pevec.

"This proves that luck plays an important role in sports. Today, I did everything I could but luck was not on my side. Things turned out the way they did. If someone had offered me a silver medal before the competition, I would have taken it, but now I am disappointed.

The shot was fired at a bad time. You can be the best, but if luck is not on your side, you cannot win," said silver medallist Tiršek.

While this was his second paralympic medal after the 2012 London Olympics, where he also won a silver medal in the same discipline, it was the first time for Veselka Pevec to win a medal in such a major competition for athletes with disabilities.

## BLED STRATEGIC FORUM TACKLES SECURITY ISSUES

### More participants than ever

UROŠ MAHKOVEC  
PHOTO: STA



# Bled Strategic Forum

With more than 31 separate events, 136 moderators and speakers, as well as around 1000 participants (including BSF, Business BSF and Young BSF), the 11th Bled Strategic Forum was the biggest and most successful event in its history.

The majority of the participants on this year's event came from the region, but there were also officials from overseas and senior representatives of international organizations. Lamberto Zannier, Secretary General of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and Michael Moller, Director General of the United Nations Office in Geneva, were among the guests.

The majority of the debates focused on security issues in light of the growing threats to security in Europe and the world driven by terrorist attacks, the migration crisis, and Brexit.

#### ORDINARY RADICAL

The first day concluded with a debate termed Ordinary Radical(s): In Search of a Meaningful Response, which centered on preventive action and feature individuals personally involved in preventing radicalization.

**Participants addressed the reasons for the increasing radicalization of young people and reflected on opportunities for education, employment and inclusion.**

The second day opened with a debate on the future of the EU and continued with panels dedicated to energy geopolitics, water risks, European security, terrorism and the media.

Another mainstay of the event, a debate on the Western Balkans, featured Bosnian Foreign Minister Igor Crnadak, Serbia's Ivica Dačić, Kosovo's Enver Hoxhaj, Macedonia's Nikola Poposki and Hungary's Peter Szijjarto in the company of analysts and a senior member of the US State Department. The EU remains a pull factor for the Western Balkan countries, but it risks losing its attraction if it leaves the candidate countries in the waiting room for too long, was one of the closing headlines of this panel.

#### BUSINESS BSF

**Included panels dedicated to the digital transformation of governments and businesses, smart cities, the future of mobility, and security in tourism.**

The panels featured officials as well as business representatives from the likes of Microsoft, Hitachi and Uber.



The tourism panel, meanwhile, featured Slovenian Minister for Economic Development and Technology Zdravko Počivalšek and a keynote address by Taleb Rifai, secretary-general of the World Tourism Organization, for whom this was the first visit to Slovenia. Tourism creates a better world, but with the rise of tourism come more responsibilities, Rifai, told a panel. Zdravko Počivalšek, Minister of Economic Development and Technology of the Republic of Slovenia, called for sustainable development. "There can be no security without sustainability and no sustainability without security," he said.

#### YOUNG BSF

The youth part of the event, Young BSF, which starts before official event opening touched on similar issues and featured workshops, case studies and panels dedicated to mobility, smart cities and intergenerational cooperation.

As usual the forum was also typically an opportunity for networking fostering the exchange of opinions between politicians, businesses and NGOs, and for bilateral meetings.

**There were also a special meeting hosted by the Ministry of Public Administration featuring Western Balkan ministers in charge of digital technologies and directors of chambers of commerce from the region.**

They agreed to forge closer ties in accelerating the digitization of industry and government services as two agreements were reached at the close of the ministerial meeting Digital Transformation in the Region of Western Balkans.

Minister of Foreign Affairs and official host of Event Karl Erjavec held numerous bilateral talks with visiting counterparts and other high ranking officials.

Several high-profile guests attended this year's event, among them Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović and Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, who also paid an official visit to Slovenia. They both participated in the leaders' panel on first day's event dedicated to growing instability, one of the highlights of the whole event, which also featured Slovenian President Borut Pahor and Speaker of the Senate of Canada George Furey.

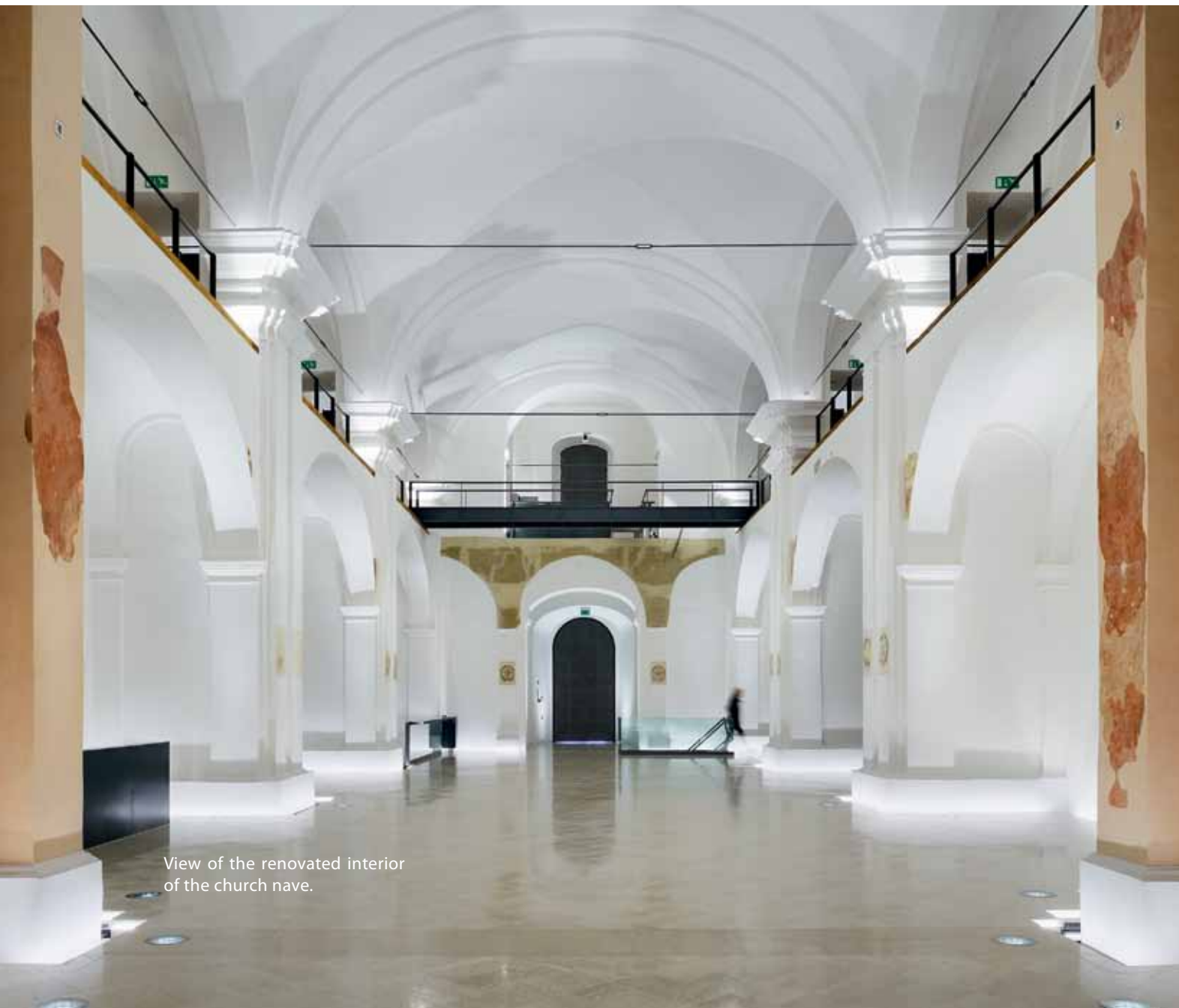
Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu was also listed as a panellist but he was unable to attend the panel. On the second day of BSF Mr. Cavusoglu had a special press event widely covered by international press.



## RENOVATION OF THE MINORITE CHURCH IN MARIBOR

# The oldest church becomes a modern, multi-purpose event venue

ANDREJ MAGDIČ, INSTITUTE FOR THE PROTECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE OF SLOVENIA  
PHOTO: MIRAN KAMBIČ



View of the renovated interior of the church nave.

With the renovation of the Minorite Monastery and Church, the city of Maribor has gained a modern event complex in a setting which will eventually become a modern cultural centre in the most historically important section of the mediaeval city. The Municipality of Maribor, along with the owners of nearby historically important buildings, plan to develop this part of the historic city for tourism. The mediaeval river port district of Lent on the banks of the Drava River is to become a high-quality public space for visitors keen to explore the city's cultural heritage or for those looking for quiet relaxation.

Maribor is the largest city in the eastern part of Slovenia. In its mediaeval city centre, situated between the Slovenske gorice hills and the Drava River, many cultural-historical treasures can be found.

**One of the oldest and most important is the building complex of the mediaeval Minorite Monastery with the Church of St. Mary's Assumption.**

The Church of St. Mary's Assumption in Maribor, better known to the public as the Minorite Church, is the constituent part of the former Minorite Monastery, founded in the 13th century. The monastery complex is located in the district of Lent. In the immediate vicinity of the monastery stood the mediaeval bridge across the Drava River, attracting travellers from near and far. Archaeological research revealed that this location, convenient for crossing the wide river, was settled as early as in prehistoric and Roman times. The first church stood immediately by the port, on the location of the later monastery, which was built in the 12th century. Beside the church, a square soon developed that represented the economic base of the developing town of Maribor. The Minorite Monastery was rebuilt and expanded several times until 1784, when it was nationalised during the Josephine reforms, after which it was used as a military storage facility. After the military moved out in 1927, monastery buildings were refitted for

housing purposes. Since then, they have slowly but inevitably deteriorated due to poor maintenance.

### RENOVATION OF THE MONASTERY COMPLEX AND DISCOVERING OF ITS PAST

As part of the renovation of buildings, archaeological surveys were carried out in order to ascertain how the monastery was built and rebuilt over the course of time. The surveys revealed that a noblemen's mansion, the oldest known mediaeval building in Maribor, originally stood at the site of the present-day monastery in the 11th century. Its purpose was probably to oversee the river port and river crossing on the route that led from Trieste and the northern Adriatic via Maribor toward Graz and Vienna.

**According to the surveys, the church was constructed in the Romanesque style as far back as in the 12th century, before the Minorite order settled in this area.**

Due to the convenient location along a popular route and the presence of a church, which served as the religious centre for the population of the wider area, a market town developed there. After a fire that severely damaged the church in the 13th century, the parish

seat was relocated to the present-day parish church in Slomšek Square.

After the fire, the church was extensively rebuilt in the Gothic style, with a long choir and a majestic main portal in the north wall, almost 6 metres high and 3.5 metres wide. After a comprehensive renovation, the archaeological remains of the choir and the portal are now presented to the public.

The church, which is depicted in the Gothic style on Vischer's copperplate engraving from 1681, was again thoroughly rebuilt in the beginning of the 18th century – this time in the Baroque style, which remains the predominant characteristic of the building's appearance to date. During the Baroque-style renovation, the long Gothic choir was taken down and a new presbytery was built in the western part of the church. At that time, a tall bell tower was erected and the entire building was given a Baroque appearance with painted pilasters on the façade and new vaulted ceilings in the interior. Around 1770, under the leadership of Maribor Baroque architect Janez Nepomuk Fuchs, the church was further decorated with a pilastered, late-Baroque main façade as well as stuccowork and paintings in the presbytery, which were contributed by painter Joseph M. Göbler.

#### RUINS DISCOVERED DURING THE EXCAVATION

During the renovation, the great cultural-historical importance of the Minorite Church for the city was taken into account. Therefore, it was decided that all the construction phases of the church through its history would be presented to the public.

Presentation of historical construction remains in the interior of the church that were excavated up to 3 metres below present-day ground level represented a great challenge. For this purpose, a new basement level was built, containing archaeological remains presented in the original location of their discovery. Apart from the in

situ presentation of archaeological remains, the basement area is intended for the exhibition of cultural-historical development of the church and the monastery as one of the most important historical building complexes of mediaeval Maribor.

**Due to the desire for balanced presentation of archaeological remains in the basement area, only selected discovered remains, assessed as the most expressive ones, were presented *in situ*.**

In setting-up the underground area, we wished to demonstrate that every historical renovation inevitably led to at least partial destruction of elements of the church in every given period. Therefore, all discovered archaeological remains are presented as "non-reconstructed," i.e. they remain ruins, which evoke visitors' awareness of the transience of human creations through the process of their decomposition. This perception, gained in the gently illuminated underground area with the ruins of a crypt, becomes particularly intense in contrast with the brilliant whiteness of the renovated Baroque nave interior that represents the central event venue of the building.

Besides the crypts from the Gothic and Baroque phases of the church, stone foundations of a wooden structure erected in the church during its military occupation are also presented in the underground area. The act of desacralisation of the church carried out by the military is presented through the remains of the ruined crypt in the middle of which the soldiers built the foundations for a profane military storage facility.

The oldest feature in the history of the church construction is represented by four round foundations that once supported matroneum pillars in the initial, Romanesque phase of the church.



Ceiling painting of the Baroque presbytery.

Renovation of the Minorite Church was carried out under the professional supervision and guidance of the following conservationists from the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia: Alenka Zupan, Gorazd Gerlič, Vlasta Čobal Sedmak and Andrej Magdič. The renovation project was designed by architecture bureau ATELIERarhitekti d.o.o. under the leadership of Jurij Kobe and archaeological research was conducted by the company PJP d.o.o., while restoration work was carried out by the Restoration Centre of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia. Construction was carried out by VG5 d.o.o.. The renovation was funded by the City Municipality of Maribor and co-financed by European Funds.

CULT BAND LAIBACH PLAYS WITH RTV SLOVENIA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

## First performance of a piece based on Prešeren's poem *The baptism on the Savica*

POLONA PREŠEREN  
PHOTO: LJUBLJANA FESTIVAL ARCHIVES

At this summer's Ljubljana Festival was a performance by Slovenian cult band Laibach accompanied by the RTV Slovenia Symphony Orchestra at the Križanke open air theatre.

Over 30 years of artistic activity, Laibach has raised a lot of dust. A year ago, the band became the first Western rock band to perform in North Korea. During the concert in Pyongyang, they played some of their old songs and cover songs from *The Sound of Music* film.

**This year's concert in Ljubljana, however, was a deviation from the band's typical militant style as the RTV Slovenia Symphony Orchestra at the background tuned down the provocative tone.**

The concert was similar to the one the two bands held in Brussels in February, when Ljubljana was awarded the European Green Capital title. During this year's two-part concert, the Ljubljana audience was given an exceptional opportunity to witness the première performance of a piece based on the poem *The baptism on the Savica* (Slovenian: *Krst pri Savici*) written by the great Slovenian poet France Prešeren.

The composition is interwoven with Laibach's interpretation of an excerpt from the unfinished Edvard Grieg's opera *Olaf Trygvasson*. The performance coincided with the 30th anniversary of *Baptism under Triglav* (Slovene: *Krst pod Triglavom*) retro-avant-garde event by the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre, to which Laibach contributed the sheet music. Laibach's performance of this epic poem, which depicts Slovenian history, was accompanied by stunning film projections. It was exceptional due to the intertwined voices of the two singers, one a masculine bass and the other a gentle female voice, who interpreted the dialogue between Črtomir and Bogomila, the main protagonists in the poem.

**Striking visual effects play an important role in all Laibach's concerts, and this performance was no exception.**

On the transparent display, which separated the band from the RTV Slovenia Symphony Orchestra, falling swords, crosses and Prešeren's manuscript of *Baptism on the Savica* were projected in a blood-red colour. Although the band performed numerous old songs, such as *Whistleblower*, *Eurovision* and *Now you will pay*, the audience was most impressed by their cover of the song *Life is life* by The Beatles, for which Laibach received a standing ovation.

Kri po Kranyi, Koratani,  
Prelita nap olnila bi' peser  
Kri po Kranyi, Koratani



# LJUBLJANA PUPPET THEATRE

## On Paths with No End

UROŠ KORENČAN



The Ljubljana Puppet Theatre builds on a tradition of Slovenian puppetry going back for a century, but it constantly renews itself with new dimensions of imagination, innovation and creativity. "On paths with no end" is thus the slogan for the 2016/2017 season of performances.

The Ljubljana Puppet Theatre (LPT) is the main Slovenian puppet theatre staging puppet and drama performances for children, youngsters and adults. Established as a public institution in 1948, it is also the caretaker of a precious theatrical heritage displayed at the Museum of Puppetry in Ljubljana Castle.

The theatre manages five regular and several smaller, occasional venues. At these venues, which offer seating for approximately a thousand people, it produces fifteen premieres a year and is visited by around 110,000 spectators.

### VARIETY OF VISUAL EXPRESSIONS

**Its programme presents a fusion of both traditional puppetry knowledge and bold exploration, enabled by the development of modern technologies and new materials.**

Its performances offer a variety of visual expressions, re-examine the proven puppet practices and confirm the endless and unimagined possibilities of puppet expression. Staged in our theatre are popular stories from national and international literary treasure trove and also some less known original stories, conceived by Slovenian and foreign theatre makers and their collaborators with their very own performative expressions. In recent seasons the theatre's programme has also been co-created by some acknowledged foreign top creators, such as Fabrizio Montecchi (Gioco Vita) and Chiara Guidi (Societas Raffaello Sanzio) from Italy, Jiří Havelka from Czech Republic, Brazilian artist Duda Paiva, Ulrike Quade from the Netherlands and Anja Suša from Serbia...)

Regularly preserved within our programme are also some 35 repeat performances from previous seasons. Doctor Faustus is a marionette miniature from 1938, conceived by Milan Klemenčič – the pioneer of Slovenian puppet theatre –, whereas the classical marionette performance Žogica Marogica (Spotty the Ball) by Jan Malik, directed by the founder of modern Slovenian puppet theatre Jože Pengov, remains continuously on our repertoire since its premiere in 1951.

**The Ljubljana Puppet Theatre also pays special attention to cultural and artistic education in all its dimensions and at the national level cooperates in the endeavours to strengthen the standards and systematically place quality cultural content in the programmes of educational institutions.**

Every two years, it therefore joins forces with the Slovenian Theatre Institute and Cankarjev dom in organizing the Golden Stick Festival, a national festival providing an overview of theatre performances for children and youth.

### LUTKE INTERNATIONAL PUPPET FESTIVAL

The second festival organized by the LPT, which takes place every even-numbered year, is the LUTKE International Puppet Festival. This festival brings to Slovenia the best foreign puppet productions and promotes all kinds of contemporary interdisciplinary and genre developments.

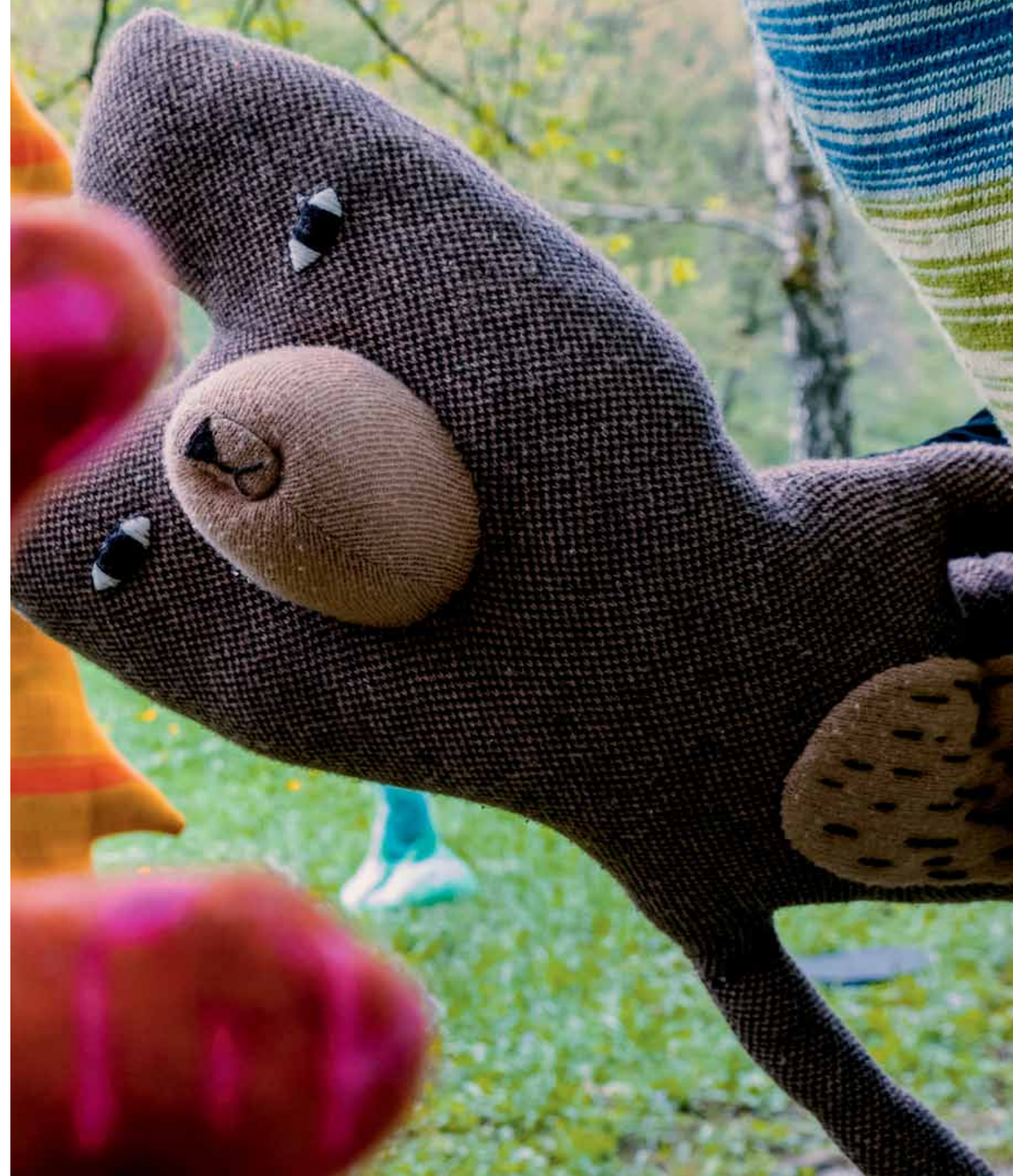


**In addition to its regular programme, the LPT has in recent years developed a special programme profile for emerging artists and forms named BiTeater.**

This programme includes experimental productions that enrich the medium of puppet theatre with other artistic registers. BiTeater traces the limits of LPT's performative variety, which ranges from cultivating the marionette tradition to contemporary problem plays for youth.

The LPT is a member of the International Puppetry Association UNIMA, ASSITEJ – International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People, the Slovenian Puppetry Artists Institution, Small Size, an international association focused on productions for early years (under six years of age), and one of the founding members of NEECPA, a network of puppet centers joining primarily the key players from Scandinavia, the Baltic region and Russia.

Activities of LPT are representing complexity and richness and will be enriched with a few new breakthrough productions of the 2016/17 season. This is why we suggest that you follow us on our path – you will not regret it.



m i h a m a z z i n i

ALOJZ REBUJA

LA DANZA DELLE OMBRE



Гранто Пирети  
ГРИНИ БЕД ПИТАНОВ

Sinä yönä näin hänet

♦ Drago Jančar

Ales Debeljak KRIJUMČARI

Evald Flisar

MIJN VADERS DROMEN



MARKO SOSIĆ

Tito, amor miyo

MARKO SOSIĆ

BALLERINA, BALLERINA



Evald Flisar

Der Zauberlehrling

Apkinear

Drago Jančar Te noči sam je video



Gesammelte Stücke Band 1

Evald Flisar

RA3PRAVE FF