

MAKSIM GASPARI (1883-1980) is a unique phenomenon in Slovenian art. According to Marjan Marinšek, a Slovenian art critic, Maksim Gaspari “preserved the rural culture of past times and during his long life, he remained faithful to his principle of “From Nation to Nation” which he already established while studying at the Academy in Vienna at the beginning of the twentieth century.” In his numerous paintings, postcards and literary illustrations, he developed his own style and established his favorite motifs. Using oil and watercolor he was able to capture the idealized rural world which was even then disappearing in front of his very eyes: the world of the “cheerful Slovenian man from winter to spring and from morning till night.” He came back to these motifs again and again during his life.



*Maksim Gaspari (1883-1980)
Slovenian Man*

Even though his paintings were purchased by intellectuals, he became “one with the Slovenian people” in large part due to the literary illustrations and postcards which reached out to all people. We in the United States would compare Gaspari to our Norman Rockwell.

Gaspari illustrated at least 57 books, especially children’s books, created 33 cover pages for books and magazines, published his works in at least 41 newspapers and

magazines, produced numerous advertising posters, caricatures and a plethora of honorary documents, diplomas, and pamphlets. He published a litany of primary school textbooks that were published from 1912-1940’s.

Marjan Marinšek pointed out that his postcards or greeting cards represent a special chapter in his work as they reached every Slovenian household like “tiny artistic swallows while contributing to the artistic transformation of people in the countryside and in the city.” Marinšek goes on to point out that “everyone could afford a postcard for a small price - this small work of art, which praised the home, depicted rural chores, national costumes and national songs, day in, day out, wished merry Christmas and Easter holidays and spoke a comprehensive language to all.”

Today Slovenia boasts a rather well developed network of cultural institutions, organizations and cultural associations comparable to the most developed European countries. There is a rich cultural life not only in the country’s major towns but in virtually every corner of Slovenia. The National Library and Ljubljana’s Cankarjev Dom are the prominent institutions for the protection of Slovenia’s cultural heritage.

Sources:

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~Williams, Carol, “Slovenia Abuzz Over Its Unique Beehive Art: Efforts to preserve the paintings get the government stirred up over nationalism”, *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 1994.



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SLOVENIA

THE ARTS: A BACK DROP OF SLOVENIAN CULTURE



*Maksim Gaspari (1883-1980)
Mati Slovenija - Mother Slovenia*

Seated on the throne, she is surrounded by Slovenian children and farmers and some of the great figures of Slovenian culture. bishop and poet Slomšek, poets Anton Aškerc (with beard) and Simon Gregorčič and at right, the writer and Gaspari's good friend, Ivan Cankar, painter Ivan Grohar and writer Ivan Tavčar. Slovenia's foremost poet, Dr. France Prešeren is immersed in reading poetry.

Art and culture hold a special place in Slovenian history. For centuries the area of what is now Slovenia lacked a national political and governmental identity. The arts helped compensate for the lack of a Slovenian identity. Therefore, the development of certain areas of culture began to illustrate and convey national and political ambitions - especially literature, theatre and folk art. In fact the visual arts have contributed to the unique character of Slovenia. What could be perceived as a “National” painting art form developed slowly and became recognizable as such only after the Romantic Period of the 19th century.

Painting with a high artistic value only began to blossom in the beginning of the 20th century and was linked to Impressionism of such notable artists such as Ivan Grohar and Rihard Jakopič. One art critic, Sonja Vadnjak called Slovenian Impressionism the “first consciously organized expression of the Slovenian character in art.” Four artists: Rihard Jakopič, Matija Jama, Ivan Grohar and Matej Sternen contributed to the shaping of the country’s maturing nationalistic aspirations. Jakopič’s leadership led to an exhibition pavilion - Slovenian Art Gallery. It was a first in Ljubljana and Slovenia.

Slovenian geography with its rolling hills and mountains has served as a backdrop for Slovenia’s visual arts as well as their folk art. In addition to traditional churches and castles built at the tops of hills, the true icon of the Slovenian landscape is the hayrack - “kozolec”. Their picturesque appearance gives a special stamp to Slovenia’s cultural landscape. It was the impressionistic Slovenian painter, Ivan Grohar who painted the hayrack as the defining image of the Slovenian countryside.



Another form of the visual arts is folk art. Slovenia alone has developed a unique kind of art - painting of Beehive Fronts. Ida Gnilsak, curator of the apicultural museum in Radovljica, Slovenia said “you don’t find these anywhere else in the world. They may

be the only thing that is truly Slovenian, as our culture has always been influenced by those who ruled us”. The oldest example of these painted beehive ‘doors’ dates back to 1758 and depicts Madonna and Child. In fact Biblical scenes were prevalent during the first decades of the short lived art with most boards from the late 18th century recounting stories of Adam and Eve, Last Supper, and lives of Saints. Later, in the golden age of apiary art (1820-1880) humor and folk tales dominated.



Toward the end of the 19th century, morality became a prominent theme for the front boards. Women were often depicted hauling their husbands out of bars by the hair or upbraiding their laziness as the men lay asleep in the fields. The art of decorating beehives died abruptly after WWI, when Slovenia became part of Yugoslavia and lost its role as imperial honey producer. Today it is difficult to get hold of an original beehive panel but still possible to buy replicas. They remain an ‘indispensable’ part of Slovenian folk art.

The craft of Bobbin Lace-Making (Kleklanje) is a unique art form in Slovenia. The beginning dates back to the 16th century with the oldest written source revealing the existence of this craft in 1696. The heart of the lace making craft is the mining town of Idrija.



Idrijan lace is noted for quality, prestige and an established reputation and is regarded as representative of Slovenian heritage and creativity in the field of handicrafts and as an art product that has traveled the many parts of the world for some 300 years.

Historically the lace making craft was introduced to Carniola (Slovenia) by wives of miners and mining experts from German and Czech lands who came to work in the Idrija mine. Knowledge of bobbin lace making was passed from generation to generation until a lace making school was opened in Ljubljana in 1764. In 1876 the school was re-established in



Idrija and has continued to operate to this day. Annual competitions, exhibitions and festivals produce numerous technically and artistically accomplished pieces by the many outstanding practitioners of the handicraft. The lace (idrijska čipka) is a product of thick flax thread and was intended mainly for the domestic market, for various church dignitaries and also for the wealthier peasantry. In 2006 gloves and a handkerchief were given to Princess Sayako of Japan for her wedding and a lace baby bedding was given for the cradle of Prince George of England in 2013.