

# EKO ART MARIBOR

## GROUP EXHIBITION

**19 August–10 September 2016**

**KiBela, space for art  
MMC KIBLA, Maribor, Slovenia**

### EKO ART MAR-I-BOR

When politician and poet Lovro Toman wrote the poem Mar i bor in the second half of the 19th century, he certainly didn't know he was about to attribute a new meaning, not only to the designation, but to the city itself – a meaning that has since become traditional: the sense of the word 'mar' implies caring about something, and 'bor' (derivative of the German 'Burg', from the historical German name Marburg) implies fighting for something, hence the town motto "I care, and fight for the city".

The city motto is fitting, indeed, and the sense it implies has stuck with the town of Maribor constantly – as well as its inhabitants. The river Drava used to be considered (this, however, is most certainly not the case today) as the main potential and driving force of the city's development; in the early 20th century, up until the Second World War,

Maribor was the most rapidly evolving city, as well as one of the largest economic centers in the country. After declaring independence and the breakdown of the Yugoslav market, Maribor was struck by severe unemployment. This caused the once proliferating industrial town on the banks of the river Drava to slowly slide into a state of underdevelopment, and become virtually peripheral.

But the river endures. And the people persevere in this place. Close to 120.000 inhabitants, among them over a

hundred artists, passionately and persistently devoted to their work, as they help to co-create this local cultural and artistic space. They care, we can safely say, in the words of Lovro Toman.

Hence, the group exhibition by eleven artists, who are presented with artworks in different media, from traditional paintings, oil or acrylic on canvas, through sculptures, installations, photographs, a video, and even an opening-event multivision, all combined into an integral artistic set-up – a spatial installation, the exhibition titled EKO ART Maribor. Each of the artists renders the theme of Ecology and art in the city by the river Drava in their own way. The invited artists were not chosen randomly, the selection was based on the idea of involving different generation artists, which are also – in some way or another – representing the local Maribor area:

both older and younger generation artists are involved, all of whom are in some way related to Maribor; the "naturalized" or local ones, as well as those who do not live here, but their works have been showcased in this area before.

**Jože Šubic** and **Stojan Grauf** are two of the most highly versed local artists. Especially to the latter, the river Drava has been a constant source of creativity. Grauf's *Rise from Slavery* is painted in what is virtually a full-scale format, and symbolically depicts a stubborn tree attached with roots to the bank of the river. The symbolism, of course, refers to the entrapment of our own selves; yet not suggesting helplessness, but rather a sense of numbness, immobility, and thereby a lack of creativity. All a tree can do is to grow, but people must move forward. With his sculpture and painting titled *Who is holding the water here? (KTDV)* Jože Šubic reminds us that every place or land has its own local particularities, just like every historical period has its ideals. The exhibit is a sculpture of a woman's head with an open mouth, submerged into the Drava water. It is a reminder of a past era, when the Drava embankment (Lent) still hosted a brothel, where ladies of pleasure would offer their services. Šubic skillfully alludes to the ideas of truth and commitment to a historical memory: words, though spoken under water, still carry the truth. The problem (or an excellent excuse for that matter) is that the words are inaudible. What really holds the water, then, is the sense of what has been said – and that sense is submerged into muteness.

**Milan Ketiš** is the youngest out of all participating artists. His work deals with the relations that people establish with nature, and explores the relationship between nature and culture. The starting point behind the artist's contemplation and his creative process is his own perception: the mind, the body, the sensibilities it provides and the space in which it is located, in relation to social circumstances. Ketiš uses a raw material, and intuitively lets the material guide him, through a variety of media and material means, towards a manifestation of an artwork in different spaces. He even does this in a way that allows the material to become implemented inside established "routines" of a particular location, through which the presented artwork forms a relation of encountering – either other works of art, or visitors at the gallery.

Video and intermedia artist **Ana Pečar** is another local artist, who is always on the go. Ana has been focusing for some time now on the central theme of water as the symbolic carrier of information between the earth and the sky. Her last project is a video titled *Serene Chorus*, in which she discusses the relationship between water and religion. Water is an essential component of every world religion ritual system; on this occasion, Ana linked the water element to baptisteries, which represent water reservoirs caught inside architecture.

The exhibit also features **Robert Jurak's** recycled boat sculptures, made of waste iron metal and wood. With an ample dose of esthetics, Jurak's spatial installation calls attention to the environmental problem of waste, and at the same time symbolically acts as a vision of an eco-ship, which could be made exclusively from recycled materials.

Maribor-based visual artist **Lucija Stramec** employs a linear painting technique by stringing extra thin, hair-like and short white diagonal lines (two-layer parallels, in wood color) with a size 0 liner brush against a monochromatic background. Through the process of "thickening" and "thinning out" the wood-color strokes of the brush, strung over the canvas surface, she exposes fragments of "reflected" light. By means of layering or modulation of the white wood-color, the image painted in such a manner gradually becomes optically dominant, standing out before the darker monochromatic background, and thus creates an illusion of three-dimensional space.

**Maša Gala** is an artist working halfway between Maribor and Ljubljana. Maša focuses on construction sites in Maribor; we are listing here only two of the closest: the unfinished car park, the fate of which is yet to be settled, and the near-by vacant (former) SDK building, which became famous even before it got occupied. The artist, thus, is an outside observer of the local Maribor scene, which gives her the necessary distance needed to recognize the unused local potentials. On this occasion, she addresses the DEM Hydropower Plants with her work *Disturbance (Human Factor)*. According to Gala, the river Drava is a particularity and a genuine local sight; it demonstrates enormous power, which is underexploited. Thus, the idea of making use of the forces of nature is spun inside the circuit of raw human-inflicted abuse, by way of which we follow the policy of global exploitation, yet at the same time make decisions about reducing the impact of environmental changes.

**Gregor Pratneker** is an up-and-coming Maribor artist, who stays true to classical painting and the traditional oil-on-canvas technique. He is presented with two large-format paintings depicting idyllic landscapes, one of the river Drava, and the other of a mountain landscape. From the esthetic point of view, the works round up the exhibition, and thematically belong to contemporary visual techniques. The views they unfold invite the visitor to an open space, as seen through a make-believe window.

**Eva Petrič** previous engagements in Maribor saw her searching for globalization tumors, and the far-reaching effects of their shadows; in collaboration with photographer Maja Šivec they moved the exhibition from the gallery space through billboard ads into the public space, whereby Petrič's topics address current taboos, repressive situations, or denied emotions that ramify beneath the city skin. On this occasion, Eva is presented with a selfie titled Homeless, which points to her true nomadic nature. She has adapted to this particular lifestyle, and sees it as a challenge: real-life nomads always think of their migrations as a new and positive opportunity. And indeed, the exhibited photograph shows how she blends with nature, just like Alice in wonderland. Here, 'homeless' does not imply Alice having no home, but rather that she is liberated from having a single home – because her home is everywhere.

The idea for the entire project was conceived by **Maja Šivec**. It is an upgrade of the Eko Drava project, which has been realized for five years in a row in Lent: with the support of the Maribor Diving Club, they have been "rescuing" the river Drava, and creating artworks in the meanwhile. Maja's contribution to the exhibition is a photograph – a female nude, the portrait of a woman in the role of a housewife, cleaning the riverside with a dish washing cloth. Undoubtedly, plenty of helpers would be around, if she was to take on environmental cleaning so scrupulously... Maja emphasizes the bizarreness of the theme: in spite of the esthetic value, and the attempts of exceeding the traditional approach to cleaning, the isolation of the depicted nude is in fact very distinct. Beauty lies in the eye of the beholder, and – as Maja says – it is where it's going to stay.

A comprehensive epilogue to the artworks is the opening ceremony multivision titled E-KOsovel ART, performed by artist and musician **Lado Jakša**, which thematically rounds up the EKO ART exhibition through the artful layer of photographic visions, accompanied by a live, original music performance with typographically inscribed texts by visionary poet Srečko Kosovel, lyricist Karl Hmeljak, musical pedagogue and improviser Stephen Nachmanovitch, and painter Jože Slak, and which addresses issues of "intellectual" ecology, a committed social and societal critique on artistic thought and creation.

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The strategies of approaching the theme of ecology and art are, apparently, quite different. Some artists use natural, ecological materials, others address the problem through critical photography, or find inspiration in recycling procedures, still others in natural blending. The belief behind EKO ART as a concept is that nature is perfect by itself, i. e., exactly the way it is, and humans are rather an exception found in nature, because they manipulate it and aggressively alter its appearance, purpose, and function. The vision, and thereby the substance of the project is to use naturally acquired materials, which have not yet been modified by men and employ them to create useful and artful products; along with recognizing such materials as something that gains the function withdrawn from nature only through human interference. And that's what artistic creation is: ecologically irreproachable.

Exhibition curator: Nina Jeza

Opening on Friday, 19 August 2016, 8 p. m.  
The exhibition will be showing until 10 September 2016.  
KiBela/MMC KIBLA, Maribor, Slovenia

KiBela, space for art, is open on weekdays between 9 a. m. and 10 p. m.,  
and Saturdays between 4 p. m. and 10 p. m.