



Exhibition credits:
Zornica (Rorate coeli)
Janez Jocif & Cappella Carniola, Agata Pavlovec, Andrej Perko, Tone Štamcar, Maja Šubic

27. 5.–6. 9. 2020
Ivan Grohar Gallery
Škofja Loka Museum, www.loski-muzej.si

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ZORNICA

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The *Zornica* exhibition project is founded on the concept of linking the rich local cultural heritage and the vibrant contemporary art production of the area. Both are well represented in Škofja Loka and its surroundings and form an inseparable image of the centuries-old and continuous art tradition here. The latter has shaped many a contemporary creator and has had an impact on their work. But a truly collective response in this regard took place last year. A group of (mostly local) creators sought inspiration in one of the most significant and most beautiful art monuments from the Middle Ages – not only in the Loka area but throughout Slovenia – in the Church of the Annunciation at Crngrob. It carried out the *Zornica* (or *Rorate coeli*) interactive and intermedia project *in-situ*. This was a unique event of a performative nature, which took place at an unusual time, at dawn. Through a ritual implementation of live music, dance performance and visual artistic intervention, the participants paid tribute to the heritage of Crngrob, while they also illuminated the significance of the cosmic forces of darkness on a symbolic level. The event accompanied night into day, highlighting the magic of the natural cycles that define our universe. Since only few people managed to see this interesting project, the idea sprung forth to present it to the general public in the form of an ambient exhibition in a gallery – but not as an re-enactment of the event, as its upgrade and expanded view of the influence of the Crngrob church on the art production of today. This is also the way in which the exhibition layout has been conceived since it seeks to create an atmosphere as experienced by the protagonists of the event at the time, while also conjuring up the atmosphere felt by artists when they come into contact with this church otherwise.

The exhibition in the gallery is conceived in two parts and seeks to follow the course of the event at Crngrob, which began in the dark of night inside and ended in the light of morning outside, in front of the church. The exhibition thus begins in the second, darker space, in the form of an audio-visual ambience. Presented here is the photographic oeuvre of **Andrej Perko** entitled *Hommage à August Berthold*. Even though the artist did not take part in the project at Crngrob, the church influenced his creative work. Perko was particularly inspired by the cosmic power of the sacral space and its architecture. He portrayed the latter through a distortion of its real, outward appearance in order to soften and vibrate its verticals. With the images of the interior, however, the artist drew from the photographs of the Slovenian photographer August Berthold. He attempted to capture the interior through a point of sight that was optically similar to the lens used by Berthold at around 1910. The light installation of the *Pharaonic Fish* is the work of **Maja Šubic**. She created it specifically for the

Crngrob project. A hanging object in the form of a cut-out in the darkness of the church – depicting the landscape as seen from the church facing east, from where the rising sun appears – sketched out a shadowy image of the Pharaonic fish on its walls. The Slovenian ancient mythological creature that calls the shots between life and death and personifies contradiction, illuminates in the project the importance of the cosmic forces and temporal dimensions that played a pivotal role during the course of the project in the church. *The Sound Ambience Zornica* that pervades the entire space is the work of **Janez Jocif** with co-performers, some of whom also participated in the event. The piece is the continuation of the original live music performance at the event. The music was performed live again in the Crngrob church especially for the project in the gallery, with the aim to transfer the artistic acoustics of the church space into a new context, so that the general public could also feel the spirit of that space and the music created in it.

The second part of the show takes place in the first, brighter space of the gallery and illustrates the transition to light and day. Here are the photographs and documentary video *Zornica* by photographer **Tone Štamcar**, which act as the connective link of the entire set-up in the gallery. He has captured the moments of this one-off event through his camera lens – not just the set-up of the works by the participating artists, but also the images of the musicians during their live performance. The cycle of paintings by **Agata Pavlovec**, *Stainfulness*, which deals with subject matters tied to human existential issues, was affixed by the artist as a hanging canvas under the arcades at Crngrob, in the shed at the entrance to the church. These are bedsheets onto which the artist notes one's inner states, or stains, which pile up within all of us. Their translucent expression came to the fore when the day began to dawn as the audience and all the participating artists moved to the front of the church to greet the day and the morning light shone through the works. The set-up in the light part of the gallery, combined with the stone wall, captures the final atmosphere of the Crngrob event, thus bringing the whole story of the exhibition full circle.

Janez Jocif

For the inhabitants of Sorško polje, the Loka people as well as other Slovenians, Crngrob is a powerful identification point in time and space. This is where the most valuable remnants were deposited over the centuries, like archaeological cultural layers of sorts, which the ancestors managed to gather and which they dedicated to their spiritual path towards the transcendental.

Unfortunately, most of the preserved messages in the pilgrimage church of the Virgin Mary remain hidden or at best obliterated to the present-day visitor. Difficulties arise already in reading and deciphering the material heritage, whereas the power of the spiritual dimensions of this space often remain unknown. The basic question for the creators inspired by the power of Crngrob was whether it was still possible for a person from the 21st century to step into this almost parallel world?

A quality of sacred spaces is that the powerful earthly energy is joined by man's spiritual potential. With this kind of cross-fertilisation, the *axis mundi* or the Earth's axis can be established, where transitions between different levels of experiencing reality are possible: from the material to the spiritual, from the conscious to the subconscious, from the rational to the intuitive. In Slovenian folk tradition, the two guardians of such spaces included, among others, Saint Christopher, who represents the connection between Heaven and Earth as he crosses the river with Christ on his shoulder, and the Pharaonic Fish, the mythical ancient power, swimming between Christopher's legs with the world on its back. In the Christian religion, the Virgin Mary, to whom the Church of Crngrob is also dedicated, assumes the role of mediator between the human and the divine, or between the physical and the spiritual. The somewhat mysterious depictions of the so-called Black Madonna, bear the memory of their pre-Christian forerunners, the goddesses of earth and fertility. Interestingly, various cults associated with dance are tied to the devotions dedicated to them. At Montserrat Mountain in Catalonia, members of the boys' singing school still perform ritual dances in front of the altar. Labyrinths also represent a form of sanctified movement with a spiritual goal (a kind of pilgrimage on a small scale). The most famous is the one on the floor of the Gothic cathedral in Chartres, also dedicated to the Black Madonna. The only autochthonous Slovenian folk dance tradition was the so-called Mary Dances, performed at the pilgrimage churches dedicated to the Virgin Mary. A type of dance known as *čindare* was performed as the songs of the Virgin Mary were sung. As the serpentine chain of dancers wound around like a snail and stopped, the Earth's axis was established. Naturally, an indispensable part of the identity of sacred spaces was made up of sound and music, a medium that directly transforms physical energy into spiritual energy. The visual decorations and fittings in the space served the imagination, which acted as an aid on the path to the transcendental. Ritualism in sacred spaces also took into account important astronomical-astrological changes, thus encouraging man's most natural and therefore closest cyclical mode of experiencing his own presence in nature and space.

Christian contemplative religious communities began every new day with a morning rite called *Zornica*, also known as *Rorate coeli*. The event, which we started in the dark of night on 1 September at 5 am in the church at Crngrob, has therefore been titled accordingly. Our goal was to use all the senses to feel the mysticism of the Crngrob ambience and the simultaneous passing of darkness into the light of morning through music, words, movement and visual language. The music part (European and Slovenian medieval songs of the Virgin Mary with sound improvisations) was performed by the members of the bands Cappella Carniola and Makalonca (musicians Marta Močnik Pirc, Kristina Martinc, Marjanca Jocif, Franci Krevh, Janez Jocif and dancer Barbara Kanc, who was also the reader on this occasion). Slovenian folk poems were read by Bojan Trampuž, whereas the visual interventions in the unique space of the Crngrob church were implemented by the painters Agata Pavlovec and Maja Šubic.

What about the response of the audience? At five o'clock in the morning, therefore almost halfway through a "normal" Sunday night? A good three dozen people gathered, surpassing expectations. It was a select, or rather, elect audience. It dotted the I's and crossed the T's with its focused presence. We were grateful for its presence and confidence. The Crngrob Zornica, of course, concluded to the amazement of all present with the dazzling show of the rising sun at 22 minutes past 6.