

Breda Kolar Sluga

Preface

Ante Trstenjak's artistic career began in the impoverished surroundings of his home Prekmurje village, progressed through the cosmopolitan capitals of Europe of the time (Graz, Zagreb, Vienna, Prague, Paris), and concluded in Maribor during the artist's final creative period. One of these magnificent destinations holds a special place in Trstenjak's heart: the region of Lusatia in eastern present-day Germany, which he first visited in 1928. The elaborate and varied national costumes worn by the girls and wives of the time captivated him. Even three decades later, when he made the extended series of monotypes of *Sorbian Women*, this motif remained as his inspiration. Maribor Art Gallery now owns twenty of the monotypes.

The present joint exhibition project, which was produced in collaboration with the Sorbian Museum in Budyšin/Bautzen (Germany) and the National Museum in Prague, was founded on Trstenjak's substantial series of *Sorbian Women*. Through the mediation of Igor Pirc and Jurij Wuschansky, Maribor Art Gallery received the initiative for an exhibition of Trstenjak's works at the Sorbian Museum in 2014. The inaugural show *Colours from Afar. The Painter Ante Trstenjak and the Lusatian Sorbs* was held six years later at the Sorbian Museum in Bautzen. With the study by curator Andreja Borin and loans of artworks and documentary material, Maribor Art Gallery contributed to the exhibition and catalogue.

Since the participating institutions are very different in their character, it was agreed that the exhibitions at each location would be tailored to the museum's mission, collection, and relationship toward the local environment. Trstenjak's Lusatian series, a study of Lusatian national costumes, the link with Czech painter Ludvík Kuba, and Trstenjak's Prague period are all featured in the exhibition at the Maribor Art Gallery. These are the exhibition's central themes, which are the result of a two-year research and collaboration between Maribor Art Gallery, the Sorbian Museum in Germany, and the National Museum in Prague. In addition to this core, we believe it is equally vital to bring attention to the issue of national awakening among Slavic nations, which is why we invited Dr Jerneja Ferlež to participate. As a contemporary art institution, we also intend to upgrade the exhibition and develop a dialogue with the present. Tina Dobrajc (SI), Eric Schuett (DE), and Trine Søndergaard (DK) are three modern artists who each give distinct viewpoints on the issue of national costumes, thus widening the scope of the exhibition. They guide the exhibition into a field of varied reflections, inspirations, contemplations, and possibly even provocations, all from a historical and documentary perspective.

Maribor Art Gallery was honoured to be a part of this collaborative exhibition project on the painter Ante Trstenjak, which involved three institutions. Despite the fact that Trstenjak's Lusatian series was well-known in Slovenia, the study unearthed a wealth of new information and detail that would otherwise have stayed unknown. Contemporary art,

which generates new balances and numerous new dialogues, complements, and transforms the study's in-depth core in equal proportion.

My heartfelt gratitude to all the participants for their wonderful cooperation!