

The Photographer Borut Hribar

As an amateur photographer, Borut Hribar mostly focused on documentary photography. He most likely began taking images while mountaineering in the 1930s,¹ following the policies of the mountaineering photography section,² which was entrusted with documenting natural beauty. Photographers drew on the pictorialist tradition of painting (particularly impressionism) to express images of nature using light and atmospheric effects (rain, fog, snow). Winter shots of Pohorje, particularly in the region of the mountain lodge Ribniška koča, are among Hribar's most numerous mountain photographs. There are also a few documentary images of Maribor and its surroundings from the 1950s and 1960s (the liberation of Maribor, post-World War II labour actions, and a panorama of Maribor in the 1950s). As a photographer for the company Tehnogradnje in the 1960s and 1970s, he documented the construction of the Maribor Tito Bridge, the dam and canals in Melje, and the engine house at the Zlatoličje hydroelectric power station.

In addition to the documentary images, Hribar's bequest contains approximately twenty completely different photographs. These are close-ups or enlargements of the plant world that call attention to details such as flowers, fine hairs, seeds, pores, the vascular system of leaves, and so on, in order to highlight the beauty of the microcosm. Janko Skerlep, a photographer and enthusiastic mountaineer like Borut Hribar, published similar plant images (enlargements of mistletoe and sunflower) in the magazine *Ilustracija* in 1931. Skerlep was probably inspired to take this style of photograph by mountain photography, according to Lara Štrumej, who also points out the peculiar similarities to images in Albert Renger-Patzsch's 1928 book *Die Welt ist schön* [The World is Beautiful].³ Borut Hribar's macro photography is likely from the same time period (the first half of the 1930s), and he too employs the photogram process. This process does not involve the use of a camera: The subject is placed directly on the photographic paper, and the exposure serves to make the unexposed sections of the paper black and the concealed parts of the paper white. In the 1930s, such approaches were part of the modernist movement. Various avant-garde and artistic movements, such as the New Vision (Neues Sehen) and the New Objectivity (Neue Sachlichkeit), used unusual framing, fresh themes, bird's-eye perspectives, and the like to express themselves artistically. Unfortunately, Hribar's negatives have not survived, thus it is impossible to determine whether he pursued other artistic endeavors.

¹ He joined the Mountaineering Society in 1925.

² Mountaineering societies had photography sections before photographic clubs were formed, thus they were essential for the beginnings of active photography. The *Fotoklub Ljubljana* was established in 1931, and the *Fotoklub Maribor* in 1936.

³ LARA ŠTRUMEJ, "From Pictorialism to Modernism in Slovenian Photography", catalogue *On the Brink: The Visual Arts in The Kingdom of Yugoslavia*, Moderna galerija / Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana 2019, p. 369.