

The Sculptor Borut Hribar

Borut Hribar was a self-taught sculptor who also engaged in arts and crafts, ceramics, and photography. Soon after World War I, the family relocated to Maribor. His first art training came from sculptor France Ravnikar (1886–1948), a professional drawing teacher at the Maribor grammar school.¹ Hribar passed the master's examination in engraving in 1933. He displayed ceramics in 1938, received a monetary prize for a stylised coat of arms of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia the same year, and exhibited with the Brazda Artists' Club in 1939. Following World War II, he attended art courses with painters Maks Kavčič (1909–1973) and Jože Žagar (1884–1957). He began his career as an industrial plant manager at Mariborska tiskarna printing house, then moved on to the daily *Vestnik* (the precursor of *Večer*) and finally to the graphic industry company Mepa. He was known for his exceptional hand dexterity and inventiveness.² He was one of the first radio amateurs as early as 1929.³ He joined the Association of Slovenian Figurative Artists in 1946 and exhibited regularly with them until 1955. He assisted sculptor Zdenko Kalin with his work on the victims' memorial in Urh near Ljubljana (1948–1951)⁴. He worked in wood, clay, and even marble to create sculptures, and his talent was acknowledged by (local) critics at the time.⁵ The surviving sculptural material is dominated by portraits, female nudes, and masks. His creative influences vary: he loved the work of Croatian sculptor Ivan Meštrović (1883–1962)⁶ at first, and his postwar works occasionally reflect more restrained French models or those akin to socialist realism⁷. Masks are a rather exotic addition to his sculptural repertoire; two of his works are inspired by masks of the Japanese *Noh* theatre. After 1955, he abandoned sculpture and focused on the production of decorative wood and ceramic items.

His best portraits were created in the mid-1950s and rank alongside academic sculptors. Hribar captures the sculptural volume and accomplishes the likeness of the sitter as well as the psychological description of the figure in them. Despite his clear aptitude in sculpture, he did not persevere long enough to develop his own expression, which would have allowed him to bring greater attention to himself.

¹ "I felt a love for sculpture early on, and I was already modeling diligently in grammar school. However, there was no money to attend the academy. You needed to make a living," recalls Borut Hribar of his education. (*Ljudska pravica*, no. 91, 20 April 1947, p. 3)

² According to his obituary in *Večer* newspaper, "...he trained a remote typewriter for *Vestnik* and took care of the wireless reception of agency messages, which was an innovation for this newspaper. He subsequently went to work at the Mepa graphics firm, where he designed a two-colour aniline machine that was produced in their own mechanical workshop. He worked there until he retired." (*Večer*, no. 32, 9 February 1983, p. 9)

³ "I was also interested in electromechanics. I was a pioneer among amateur radio operators. I made my own radio, which was the seventeenth in Maribor; I still remember it." (*Ljudska pravica*, no. 91, 20 April 1947, p. 3)

⁴ *Likovno življenje v Mariboru 1945–1955*, Maribor Art Gallery, 1988, p. 85

⁵ "The sculptures of Borut Hribar, a previously unknown sculptor, are surprisingly mature and sophisticated. It is difficult to think he is self-taught. [...] Hribar is one of the few sculptors who can capture an exact likeness of the sitter." (Dušan Mrevlja, *Vestnik*, no. 95, 31 December 1945, p. 9) "Borut Hribar displayed seven works. They have been created by a gifted sculptor. In his figures, whether in wood or clay, he demonstrates not only knowledge but also a sense of form and inner expression. His best works are clearly comprehended and psychologically fully rounded [...]." (Lojze Bizjak, *Vestnik*, no. 95, 30 December 1945, p. 9)

⁶ Hribar's copy in wood of Meštrović's relief of the *Woman with Harp* (c. 1932) has been preserved. Meštrović's marble relief of this motif is at the Meštrović Gallery in Split, while the bronze relief is part of the Centre Georges-Pompidou collection.

⁷ Examples of socialist realism: the portrait of *Josip Broz Tito* (1947), the sculpture *Miner* (after 1945) and the *Portrait of Marija Cizej* (1951).