

FRAN STIPLOVŠEK

The Jewish Tower, 1924, woodcut, 39.5 x 32.9 cm

The Old Town of Maribor, Jewish Synagogue, 1927, woodcut, 49.5 x 44.5 cm

Fran Stiplovšek (1898, Krk–1963, Brežice) attended secondary school in Trieste and Gorizia, where he studied painting from 1912 to 1914 with Anton Gvajc as his mentor. In 1917, he began working as a drawing teacher. Following the Italian occupation of Trieste, Stiplovšek left the town together with his family and worked as a teacher at a civic school (Bürgerschule) in Maribor from 1920 onwards. Together with Viktor Cotič, he founded the Maribor-based Ivan Grohar Art Club; in 1920, the club hosted the first-ever Slovenian art exhibition to take place in Maribor with Stiplovšek as one of the exhibitors. His success and the praise from Rudolf Maister, among other things, led to Stiplovšek's parents allowing him to study painting. Between 1921 and 1922, he studied at an arts and crafts school in Vienna, followed by the Zagreb Academy of Fine Arts. In the 1920s and 1930s, Stiplovšek went on several study trips to Florence and Munich. Later, he became the director of the Posavje Museum Brežice and laid the foundations of contemporary museum-related activities in Slovenia.

In 1923, Stiplovšek started focusing on woodcuts, his favoured form of artistic expression. He developed and perfected this technique quickly and consistently. He published the first print collection titled *The Old Town of Maribor* (twelve subjects) in 1924, followed by a second in 1927. His woodcut prints from the first print collection occupy a central place in his printmaking oeuvre. Stiplovšek's black-and-white narrative about abandoned, silent old town areas, where melancholic romantic sounds echo from every nook and cranny under the arches and amid uneven walls, is full of dramatic contrasts and with an extremely suggestive power and spiritual content. In 1924, Stiplovšek said farewell to Maribor. He showed how deeply attached he was to the town three years later – while already living in Krško – when he carved in wood a new cycle of hidden corners in the old town of Maribor, where the expressiveness of layered black-white contrasts was replaced by sharp drawing with a series of details.