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The Rose in a Storm, Zlatko Ugljen

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“O rose, pure contradiction...”, Rilke

Zlatko Ugljen, a professor, threefold academic, master artist in our modern times, and creator of unfaltering architecture is turning eighty. Zlatko was born in the city of Mostar, to which he donated his most beautiful buildings, artistic pious endowments now leveled to the ground. Today oblivion is flourishing in our devastated cities, and its ugly, giant, concrete, aluminum and glass flowers bear witness to the spiritual decay of our days.

In poetical scribble I have told of how Ugljen's misfortune is much like the destiny of the three Heraclitean stones, with which the wicked children are playing and under which his works are being obscured. But something once built cannot be destroyed; it remains forever in the vaults of spiritual creativity. In Ugljen's rich creative work prevail public buildings such as cultural and economic institutions, human dwellings, sport arenas, and sacral structures. Besides the Hotel Rose in Mostar, Ogljen built Hotel Bregava in Stolac, Hotel Kalin in Bugojno, and Hotel Vučko in Jahorina, reduced as well by the “liberator” to rubble and ashes. In tempestuous and icy times roses are the first to be harmed.

Two edifices by Ugljen that garnered the highest architectural awards and recognitions are the People's Theater in Zenica and the White Mosque in Visoko. The residence of the President of former Yugoslavia Gorica by Bugojno, the Presidency of SR Bosnia-Herzegovina (today Libya's consulate), the residence of the Executive Committee of the SR Bosnia-Herzegovina in Tjentište, and the residence of the Rijaset of the Islamic Community in Bosnia-Herzegovina are all thought to be architectural diamonds. Out of everyday beauty and harmony glitter the Post Office in Visoko and several individual dwellings (B. Mikulić, V. Jarak, V. Cerović) as well as a pair of mountaineering homes and resort structures (Stojčevac near Sarajevo).

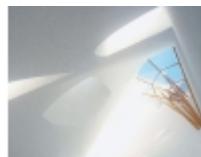






Zeleni Grad, arhitekt: Mihajlo Radivojević







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It is less well known that Ugljen is also the creator of a suite of monuments (Sarajevo's Menorah, the sculpture of the Ten Commands of God in the Jewish Museum in Sarajevo, the monument in Pržići by

Vareš, and the hallmark monument to the fallen defenders of Tuzla) as well as numerous famous interiors. Besides hotels and residences, the key examples of Ugljen's opus are Islamic and Catholic sanctuaries. Among the hallowed mosques in Visoko, Tuzla, and Stolac, the most famous is Sherefudin's White Mosque in Visoko, built in 1969, which was celebrated with the International Award Aga Khan for Architecture and featured in virtually every encyclopedia on contemporary architecture. The mosque was chosen by Hungarian architects to be the most poignant modern house of worship in Europe. Last year, in Germany, Rudolf Stegers published an atlas on modern sacral architecture titled *Sacralbau* [Sacred Buildings] where Ugljen was noted among the most important creators of sacral structures on the face of the earth.

It is interesting that for several decades this architect has been building for the Province of Bosnian Franciscans Bosnia Argentina (Bosna Srebrena). In this monastic community, Ugljen found his spiritual and artistic "asylum" much like Ivo Andrić and Gabrijel Jurkić. In our chaotic conditions, it serves as a testimony to historical remembrance because Bosnian Franciscans have been committed to preserving what is most important in a culture. Catholic sacral and residential projects were inaugurated with the Cathedral in Mostar (1972) and during the next four decades Ugljen completed a string of pearls ending with the church in Pleahn, where last summer I together with the architect visited the building-site. On that occasion, I wrote:

While the rhinoceroses of hate were demolishing the Roman portals of Plehan, Ugljen during the war days in Zagreb was creating a new church form. Today has been built already the main body of the church witnessing with its beauty the triumph of spirit over barbarity, but also inviting people to return. Its artistic and spiritual significance reaches from there to the river Sava and even farther to the Slavonia's plain. Out to the very edge of the world! In front of the church we were welcomed by the Guardian fra Mirko Filipović. Immediately as we enter the church space, ceiling light dropped its rays upon us. An embracing Niagara of radiance! Ugljen's whiteness and imagination create an impression of spiritual elevation, and the symmetry of lines awakens in us the deepest esthetic sense rendering us in resemblance to God. The architect was giving instructions to the builders on how to arraign a cross in the chancel. The mosaic cross was fashioned until his last breath by painter Ljubo Ivančić especially for this church. In Zlatko's artistic vision, the cross in the sacral space will curve like the cursive italics of a cosmic ode to human sacrifice, to the very core of our survival and existence.

Ugljen is a poet among our architects. His works remind one of King Midas known in ancient times for his ability to turn everything he touched into gold. Walking near the rebuilt Mostar bridge in the summer of 2004, I remembered the words found in Ecclesiastes on there being a time to tear down and a time to build up (Eccl 3:3). A time to build up has again showed itself to be superior in that game, and so it is with Sinan's disciple Hajrudin whose architectural work is preserved in time.

Having fallen into a reverie above the ruins of Hotel Rose in Mostar, I wrote a letter to Ugljen previously published in a book of verses:

Looking at our destroyed country
 Many time You flash across my mind; no reason
 for a grief, because You know that the Creator's hand always
 is one move ahead of the destroyer's hand
 Otherwise our world would be impossible.

Yet your grief is endless.

Because in Your drafts and structures
 Is living a spirit of transfiguration frugal in

Abundance (ah, such is our pretty home!)
 Wonder of transubstantiation, triumph of creativity
 In Your white stone facets
 Spirit of pomegranate, vine, and eternity of olive.

Yet your grief is endless.

Directed by the logos of ancestors, smith,
 Through slim Turkish, Venetian apses
 Eye knew what once was built
 Eternally is living and can't be ruined
 When barbarians on marked ground-plan
 Erect blockhouse tethering horses on capital of column.

Yet your grief is endless.

Because You have donated beauty to those
 Whom was not destined
 Sang where song was unknown.
 In Your heavenly temples
 (Illuminated by divine radiance, is it?)
 Echoing intense chords, plough chiming
 Returning to the earth shine of Cartagena.

(Letter to Zlatko Ugljen, from the book Supper without Politics, Zagreb 2005).

I associated our miserable lives with Cartagena, a country that by its spiritual achievements surpassed, seriously surpassed her neighbors and therefore, possibly, had to be swept away. Bosnia and Herzegovina gave the world two Nobel Prize Winners, but the country renounced her most significant spirits and geniuses. In every moment there is something holy and something damned. Dr Sabahudin Musabegović hints that Ugljen's esthetics "belongs to architectural modern times which elevated constructive principle up to the universal method of architectural creativity..., but at the same time it never neglected the local and regional meanings upon which the new tradition is being built." The architect himself narrates how for the shaping of his architectonic cosmos he was inspired by principles from a disciple of Le Corbusier his own teacher, Juraj Neidhart, by whom he was nurtured like a child.

If Goethe's notion that architecture is petrified music is accurate, the deeds of Zlatko Ugljen could be represented with a symphony of light, with the harmony of the Orient and the Mediterranean, of classic inheritance, and of the peculiar character of a green river and joyful seagull's flight.

Following up the path to our ancestors' ancient huts and lasting stone marble, Ugljen achieved a resolute architecture. In the already cited words of the Slovenian art historian Stane Bernik, these achievements represent an artistic opus not to be found in modern European architecture. Looking through a monograph of Ugljen's works compiled by Bernik, an architect from Vienna said to me, if the Rose Mosque had been built in Vienna, rivers of architectural pilgrims would pilgrimage to that structure from all over the world.

Whoever, believer or agnostic, stands before the St. Paul Chapel in Sarajevo or inside the White Mosque in Visoko conceives the existence of a greater and brighter life than this one in Cain's Valley of Tears within which we are compelled to live. One comprehends the existence of a people we are not worthy of, but to whom is donated in this lifetime the greatest gifts. Therefore I wrote that their

grief is great - because they were endowing beauty to those to whom it is not to be inherited.

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