

## SLOVENE FOLK ART EXHIBITION

*Ethnographic Museum of Slovenia is featuring a large exhibition entitled Folk Art in Slovenia — Plastic Art on Farms.*

*The author of this exhibition and its catalogue is Gorazd Makarovič who is the principal researcher of folk art in Slovenia besides Ivan Sedej. Therefore we will use their viewpoints and researches to describe the exhibit.*

*Up to the latest decades art has been treated as isolated from the society. But in the middle of the 20th century it has become clear that neglecting social structures within a historical research brings about scientific insufficiency. When general review of Slovene history is evaluated within the frame of art history it becomes necessary to refer to two kinds of peasant art which is inconsistent with the previous conception stating that folk art was something entirely special regarding its artistic value and meaning.*



The painted front-boards of beehives (Museum, Škofja Loka)



The term "folk art" denotes art which is structurally connected with lower social classes (inhabitants of small market-towns, peasants, workers, etc.). Consequently this term denotes a different kind of art in different periods of history. Special features which would be characteristic for folk art alone do not exist at all. Folk art has, of course, lower qualifications, its dimensions are smaller and its realization cheaper, all of which is a result of disadvantageous social status of lower social classes. This is true for the whole domain of culture.

Although apparently autonomous, folk art is fatally linked to the so-called "great" art. In this antagonism social polarization is transferred to the level of plastic art. Folk art is therefore a form of simultaneous rusticated art style, but with a certain delay.

We are in favour of a historical evaluation of folk art, but at the same time we do take into account the influence of folk art today. Certain interpretations (especially those which ascertain a seemingly undefinable plastic quality) are therefore conditioned by contemporary manners of form reception. Folk art did not receive its due esteem until the 20th century, although people often connect it with a provincial ideal of prosperity, elitism and distinction which also include possession and interest for peasant art and folklore of the 19th century.

Folk art played an important role in the Slovene past. Until the second half of the 19th century it was mainly rustic. Its principal object was architecture. From then on we can speak about worker's art and especially about "mass art". Objects which are labelled "kitsch" belong here as well.

If we want to describe Slovene art in the past we must point out its lack of quality or at least a low standard of quality when certain social classes are concerned. Artistic design did not exist at all in the rustic environment until the 16th century with the sole exception of religious art. In greater numbers it appeared on farms in the 17th century and had elements of Gothic style. The late 17th century and the first half of the 18th century brought about elements of Renaissance. Elements of baroque appeared in the 18th century and in the first half of the 19th century; after that the influence of historicizing styles becomes predominant. Such temporal characterization is rough and only approximate. Until the second half of the 18th century artistically designed objects were very scarce. They were made by poorly qualified artisans who also worked for other country clients. They simplified temporally and stylistically conditioned design schemes a great deal. This kind of art had a low craft grade of design at the beginning. When the number of artistically designed objects increased in the second half of the 18th century according to the demands of the clients, the self-taught village craftsmen started to yield to the new demands. These craftsmen descended from the village proletariat without any land. They earned their money for living with artistic craftsmanship. Since they did not know and understand the elements of styles then being which were reflected in "great" art, these self-willed designing produced a number of local style variations which were unknown to the art of higher social classes. This tradition gave birth to simple folk art on farms, first in economically progressive areas. Only with the beginning of industrial production of lithographs, plaster statues and such in the late 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century did plastic art become a regular part of equipment on farms and in homes of village proletariat. This was the lowest degree of art culture. But it is true that in the second half of the 18th century and especially in the 19th century the art of village professional and semi-professional craftsmen progressed to original and structural-although chiefly decorative and symbolic-plastic designs.

Village art is of great value for Slovenes because it reveals a great awareness of artistic values, possibilities and latent creative powers of country people which formed a majority of Slovenes in the past. When their numbers decreased between the World War I and II and especially after the World War II, the historical value of village art started to decline as well. Therefore the oldest exhibited articles date from this time. The oldest interests date back to 1821 when a museum was founded after the suggestion of A. Gruber.

It can be said that the aesthetic design which is mostly connected to objects for every day use is that which is exceptional in our folk art.

Where folk art is concerned, Slovenia certainly represents Europe in the miniature for it comprises almost all folk art varieties which can be found in other European countries as well, whereas some of them are specific only for Slovenia. The exhibition entitled "Folk Art in Slovenia" clearly illustrates this with 500 articles (museum collections comprise more than 5000 of them). Ethnographic Museum of Slovenia organized a series of exhibitions which showed particular domains of folk art. Consequently it tried to prepare a large representative exhibition which could throw light on the past in whole. The material was contributed by the Ethnographic Museum of Slovenia, other Slovene municipal and regional museums and private owners. The exhibition was designed according to wider "areas" from which the objects of artistic value originated: artistic design on exteriors and interiors, artistic design for festive and special occasions or for personal use, artistic design on tools and various working devices and artistic design originating on farms.

The catalogue with a preface contains a list and a description of the exhibited articles, literature about folk art and photographic plates. It is available in English, German and Italian language.