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metal sculptures ECHO OF SILENCE

ASCENDING RESURRECTION ILLUMINATION





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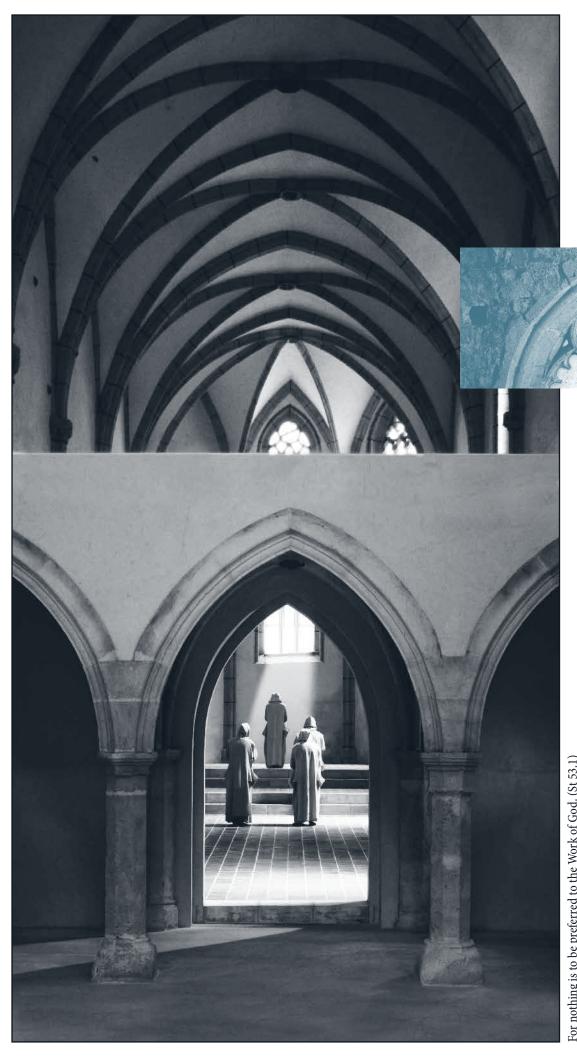
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For nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God. (St 53.1) A monk, therefore, provided he strives continually to cling to God, exemplifies within himself what is signified by the entire Liturgy. (St 41.4)

Brother Janez Hollenstein

ORA et LABORA¹



Because discipleship comes in many forms, different forms of Christian spirituality have been and continue to be created. One such form is the monastic spirituality to which also the Carthusian tradition belongs. The

essence of monastic spirituality lies in balancing liturgy, lectio divina (spiritual reading of the Bible that leads to prayer), and work. The first, liturgy, sets the rhythm for monastic life. Monks develop these core values either in groups (in monastic communities) or individually (as hermits or anchorites). Peculiar to the Carthusians is the link between both forms of life: we are a community of hermits, emphasising eremitism.

Such is the institutional framework in which the Carthusian lives, such is the skeleton to which each one, in complete freedom, has to add "meat." Our Statutes, which are true to St. Bruno and the first Carthusians, clearly lean on the monastic spirituality of the Christian East, albeit in the guise given to it by St. John Cassian and St. Benedict. This, however, does not preclude other spiritual methods, as long as they can be folded into the given framework. Each monk, thus, must walk his path alone and find a synthesis between his vocation and the structure that surrounds him. The great spiritual freedom which is the heritage of hermetic life is the key to Carthusian spirituality. Living in a Carthusian community, thus, means living among people who differ greatly in terms of origin, upbringing and interests. That is why our order has never been equated with just a single notable member's spirituality.

¹These passage are taken from texts that the author published in the book J. Hollenstein, T. Lauko, ZGOVORNA TIŠINA [Eloquent Silence], Pleterje Charterhouse 1986.

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A monastery, which strives to be the Church in miniature, must be a community of true worshipers of God and devoid of other interests. Liturgy, which is the highest form of worship because it represents the Easter mystery, shapes the community, the Church. Our Statutes say: "When we celebrate the divine worship in choir, or recite the Office in cell, it is the prayer of the Church which is being offered by our lips; for the prayer of Christ is one, and through the Sacred Liturgy, this one prayer is wholly present in each member. But among solitary monks, liturgical acts manifest in a special way the nature of the Church in which the human is directed and subjected to the divine, the visible to the invisible, action to contemplation."

The eremitic experience is relevant for anyone who believes: "Whoever reaches the depths of his self should be ready to confront his weakness and vulnerability, his impotence and limitedness. The desert experience is the essence of eremitism: God reveals that contact point on which he wishes to work creatively in an individual. Mercy enters the heart that is broken and contrite (Ps 51, 19). This entry requires a preliminary renting of the self, a painful beginning. In a parable, one would say that with that renting, the criteria of 'built-up places and 'cultivated earth' are broken, for now a man is no longer capable of bringing anything under his rule through planning and calculation. Eremitic spirituality is therefore a kind of 'ground zero spirituality' through which the believer descends into that ultimate nullification that Christ experienced."*

*M. Niggemeyer, Wüste — Landschaft und Lebensform.



To the praise of the glory of God, Christ, the Father's Word, has through the Holy Spirit, from the beginning chosen certain men, whom he willed to lead into solitude and unite to himself in intimate love. (St 1.1)

Our life clearly shows that something of the joys of heaven is present already here below; it prefigures our risen state and anticipates in a manner the final renewal of the world. (St 34.3)



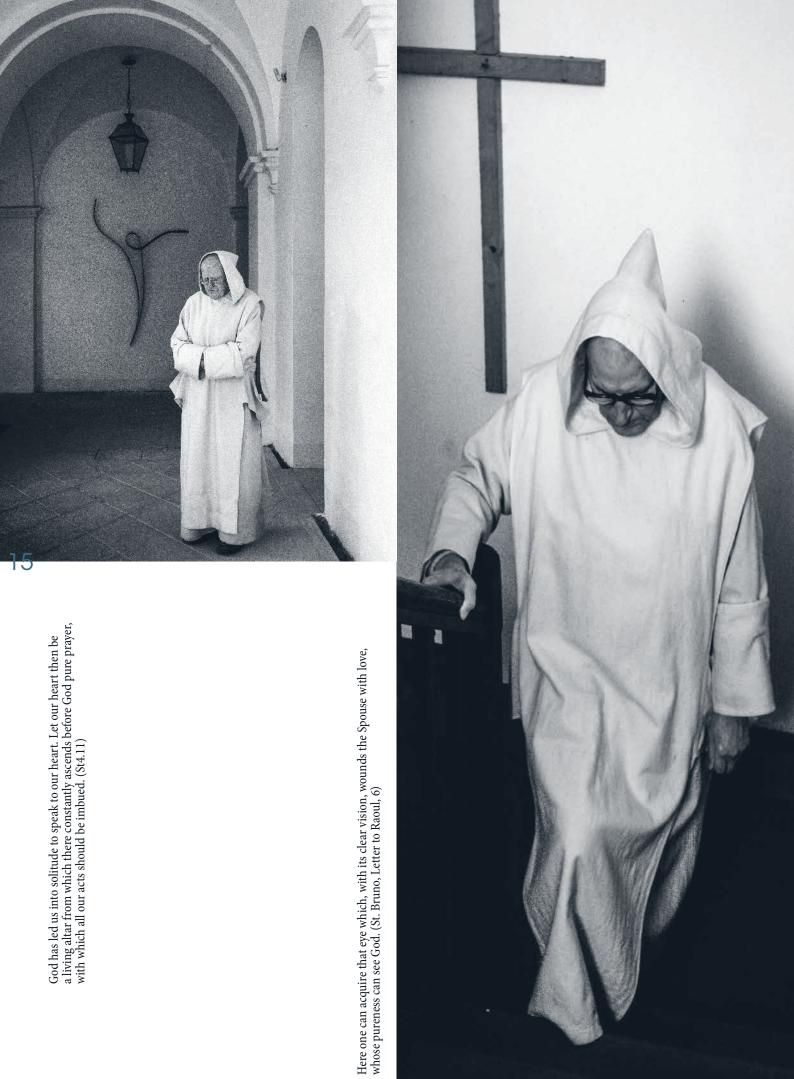


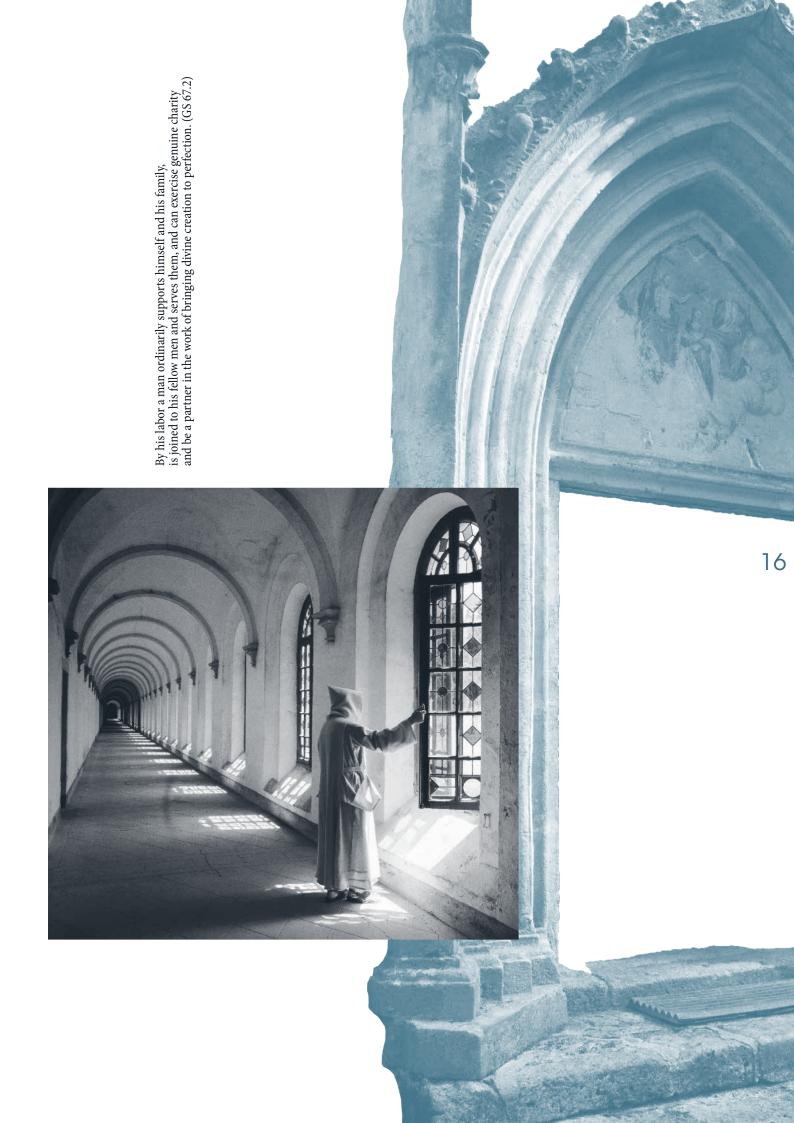
Tracing the history of especially our order's monasticism, we see a constant work-related tension. Even today, despite our updated Statutes, our order still does not have a satisfactory answer to this concern, at least as it pertains to the work of the monk in the cell. Whence the tension? The monk's dilemma has always been between alienation and spiritualization as a flight from a hard strugale for bread. Such are the temptations to which individuals and even entire groups have succumbed in the past. The great fathers of monasticism – Pachomius, Basil, Cassian, Benedict and the 11th-century reformers - did not strive to humanize work, since in those pre-assembly-line times that was not a concern. Instead, they wanted to spiritualize work as a religious act and humanize it thus. The monk seeks neither self-realization through creativity nor spiritual balance - though already Cassian recognized this possibility, even this need - but seeks some form of prayer. Work has become an integral part of the monk's contemplative life. This viewpoint does not rob work of its practical importance - i.e., income and achieving a balanced life within the community; rather, it weaves work into the monk's and the community's contemplative life, shielding monk and monastic community alike from the profit motive. Though monks will not solve today's work-related difficulties, they do try to live according to this principle: prayer, which is always personal and thus human, should regulate work. Our Statutes require that the monks not forsake their internal and external freedom on account of work. That being said, the same requirement is established by the old monastic statutes in connection with prayer; there, too, an excessive focus on results can arise.



Monastic rules warn that idleness is an "underestimating" of one's own powers that leads to weakness and laziness, such that the monk might even find himself unable to pray sincerely. Our relationship with God and society balances prayer and work. Close to idleness are dilettantism and distraction as a retreat into one's own imaginative world, a flight into "pure spirituality," or even the danger of working to suit one's fellow man: such temptations and delusions, which we monks encounter again and again, could even lead to spiritual exhaustion. In contrast, however, fatique and rest after exhausting work are necessary for maintaining resilience; testing our own boundaries is an opportunity for encountering God. When work overwhelms a person, such as when he has too much to do in too short a time, or when the work is drab and forced, stress ensues. If the work is imbued with prayer, however, there is no such danger. When you work prayerfully, you trust in God and the self is less important. Trusting in God unburdens you and leads to an easing, though not to irresponsibility. The Motives become clearer: monastic work implies service, not self-assertion. Our Statues explicitly warn against covetousness (today we would say careerism). In the monastic tradition, especially manual labour is a form of humility with which we accept the boundaries of work and our capacity to work. Ultimately, our Statutes see communal work, commanding and obedience from a religious perspective.

In the charterhouse, work must be a site of spiritual life. Our Statutes justify this standpoint, both practically and theologically: "At appointed times, the brothers apply themselves to the work of providing for the needs of the House, in order that, in union with Jesus, a workman's son, they may glorify God the Father and associate the entire man in the work of redemption. [...] Ancient monastic tradition assures us that such work contributes greatly to the practice of those virtues from which flows perfect love." Work is thus indelibly linked with serving God: "Wherefore, in praise of God — for which the hermit Order of Carthusians was founded in a special way — let us dedicate ourselves to the peace and silence of our cells and strive to offer him unceasing worship, so that, sanctified in truth, we may be those true worshippers whom the Father seeks."





Zvone Pelko

A PLAIT OF LINES AND THE LOOP OF REDEMPTION



The title ECHO OF SILENCE is derived from what is the prelude to revelation: God comes only to the soul ruled by Silence. For a monk, this is a great process.

Carthusian life is guided by the Word (Dt. 6:4). Liturgy and

psalm-singing in the church are followed by rest in an isolated cell, silent prayer, reading, contemplation, and manual labour under the watchfulness of God. Fire, the anvil under Brother Janez Hollenstein's hammer, along with his free mind and pure heart, reshape the discarded iron into curved lines that bespeak the swirling universe.

Because the sculptures have gone unnamed, the viewer can create his own symbolism and bring them to life. ASCENDING evokes snakes winding upwards from the ground. The quantum leap into a new life is reflected in RESUR-RECTION and its Easter images of Crucifixion. Altar candlesticks and worshipping hands conclude the passion chain in ILLUMINATION, with its creation hymn and redemptive message with the angel on the stone. THE DIVINE GARDENER resounds and extends into the natural and urban environment.

The metal sculptures rest on stones from both sides of Gorjanci, their patina determined by the time and space of our earthly existence. Though the body fades, the carved inscription in the stone and the iron remains as a powerful memory of all that could not be illuminated in the echo of Silence.

















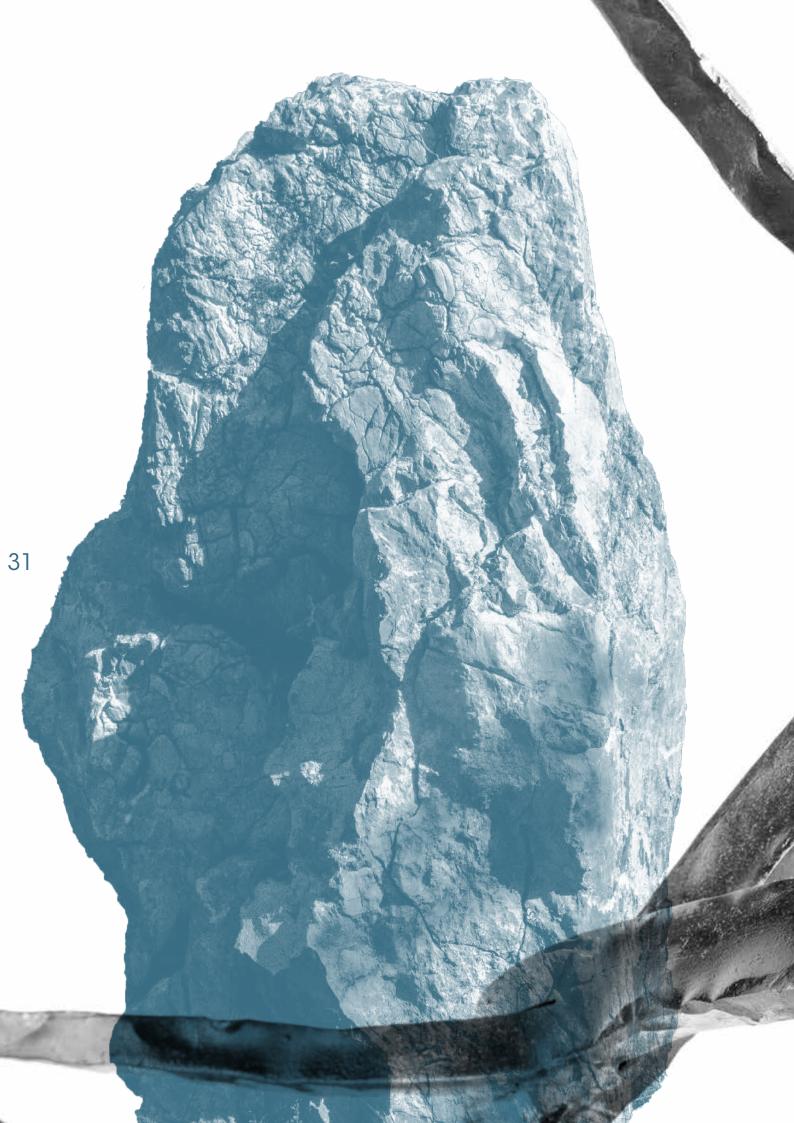


























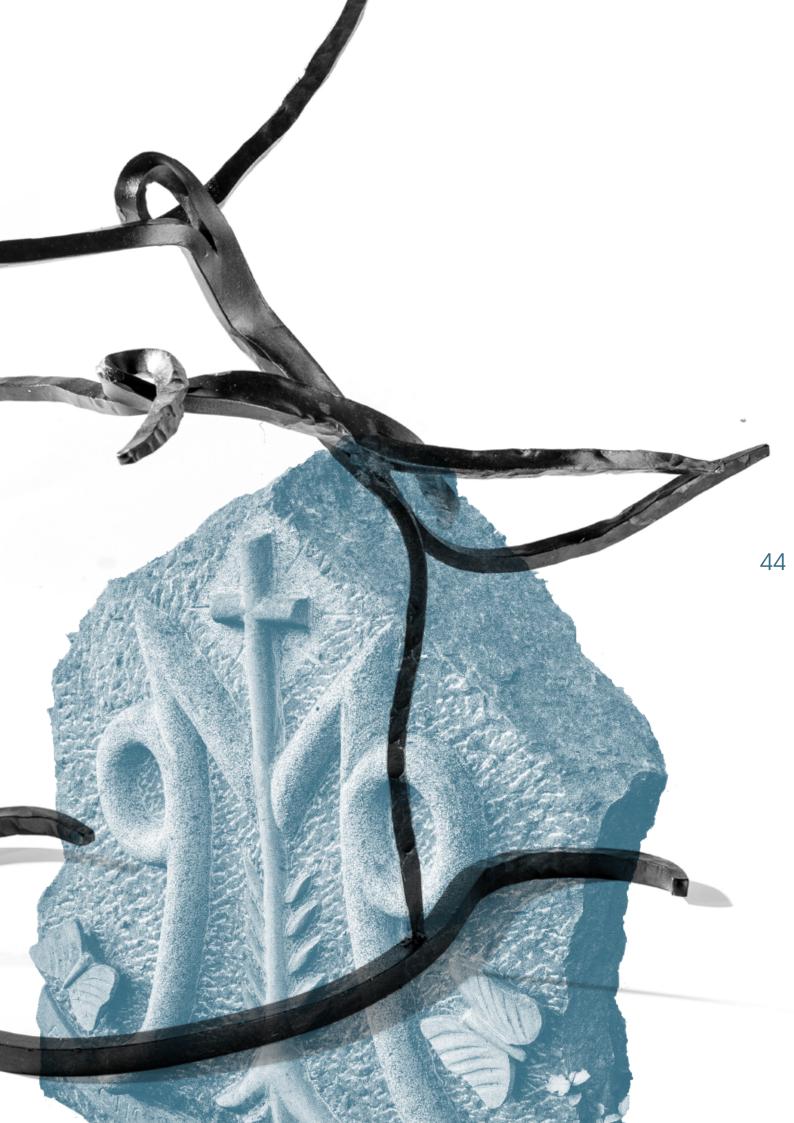


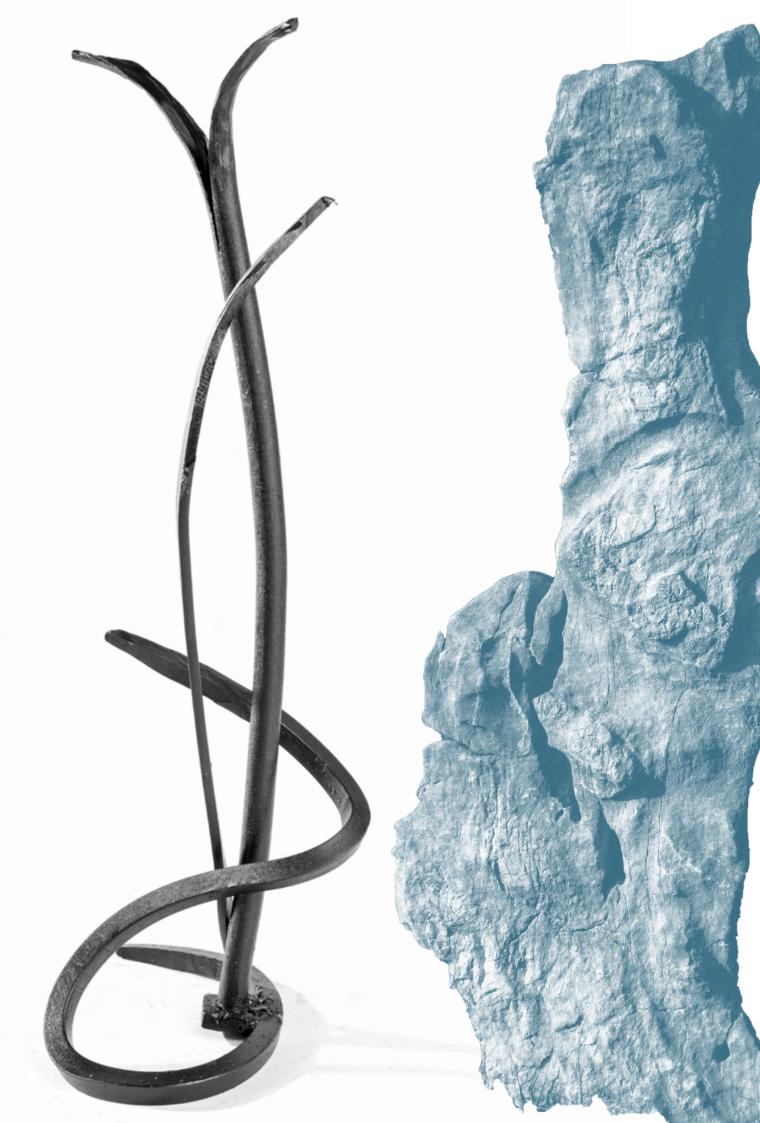


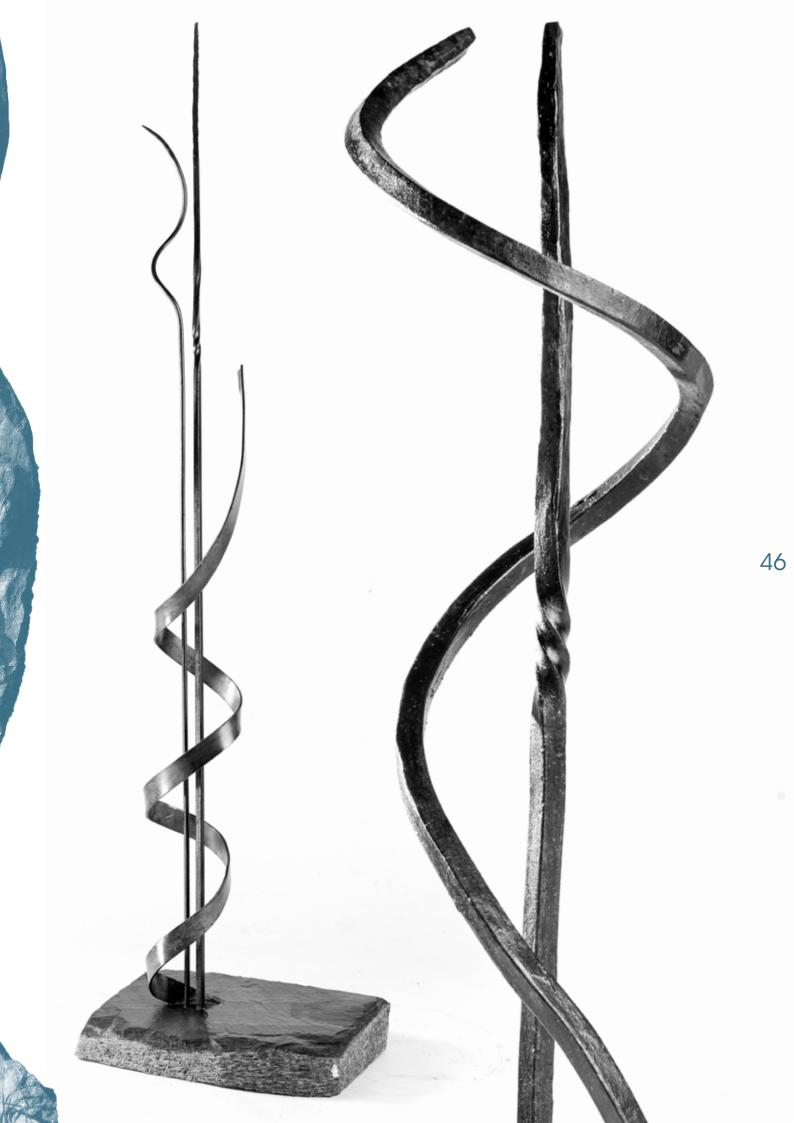






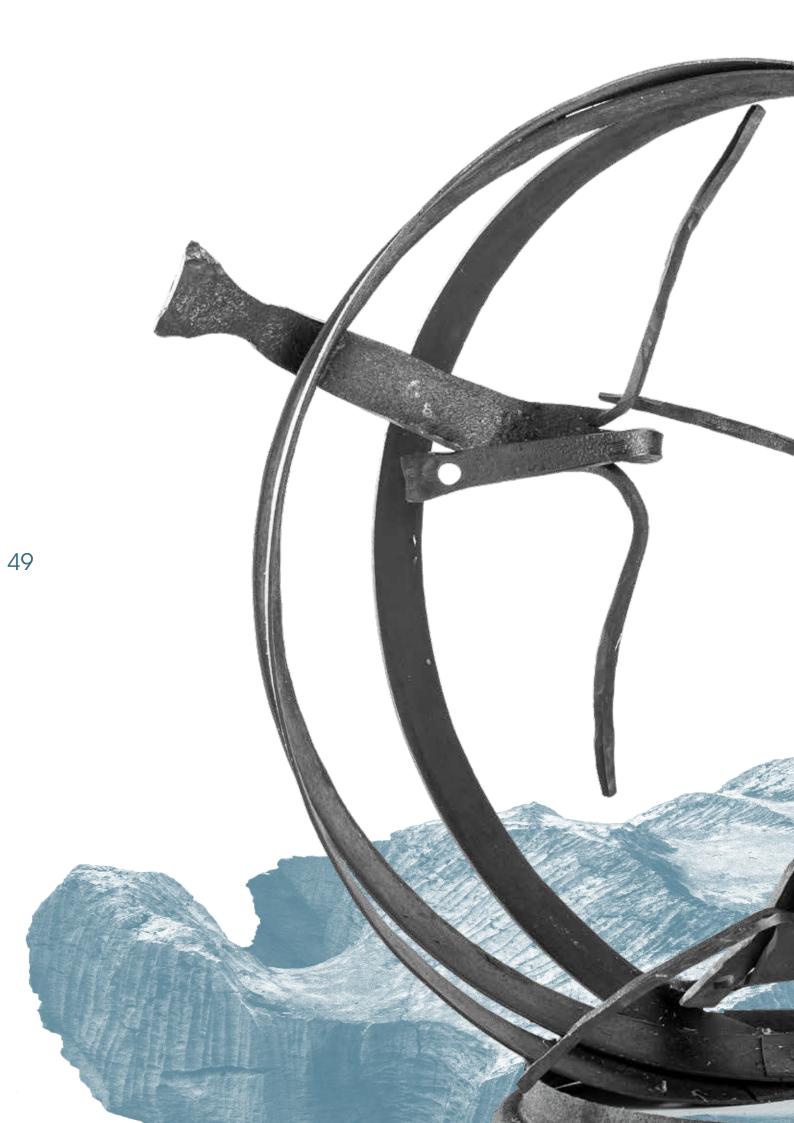




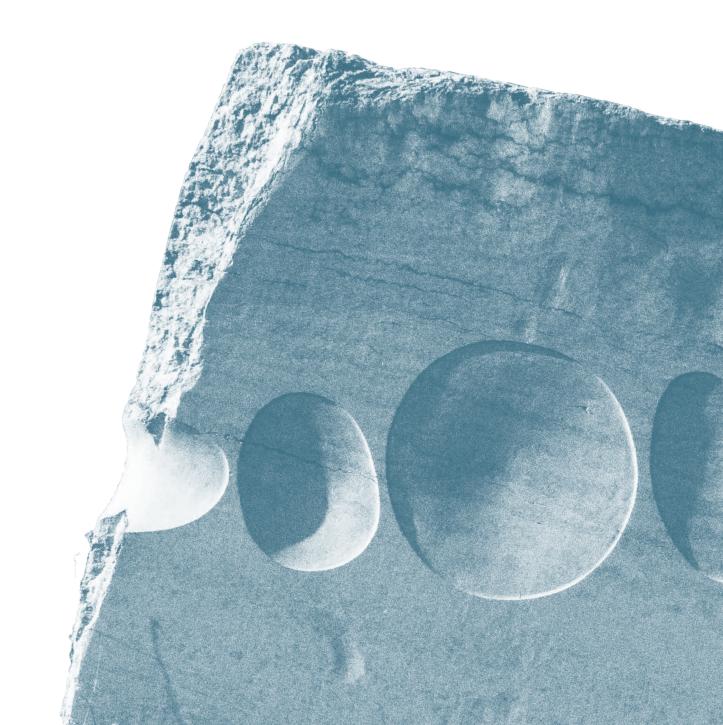


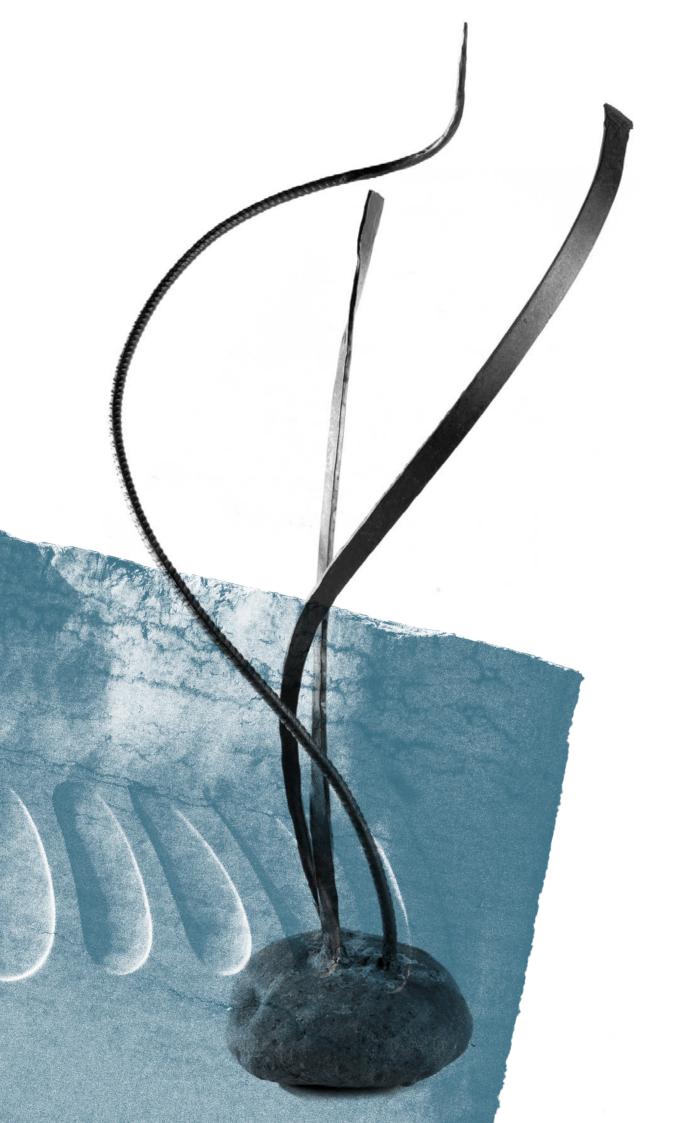














ECHO OF SILENCE

RESURRECTION



Man, risen, with his arms spread wide, stepped into the eternal gyre: into a wheel of fire, which quickens everlasting skies, spurred by the boundless and divine.





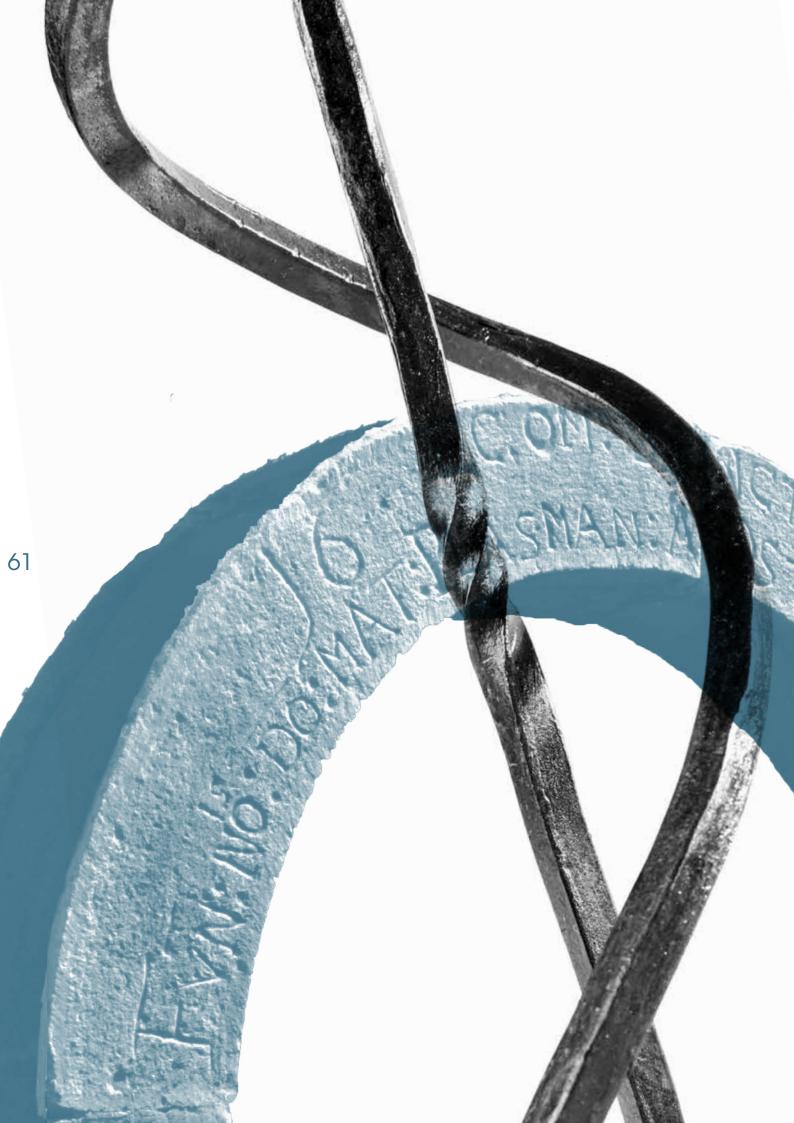
























ILLUMINATION



The spread arms face the fire of touch. The spirit soars from cross to life, to glimmer on the candle cup. Darting higher, it lights eternal fire, illumining the heights.













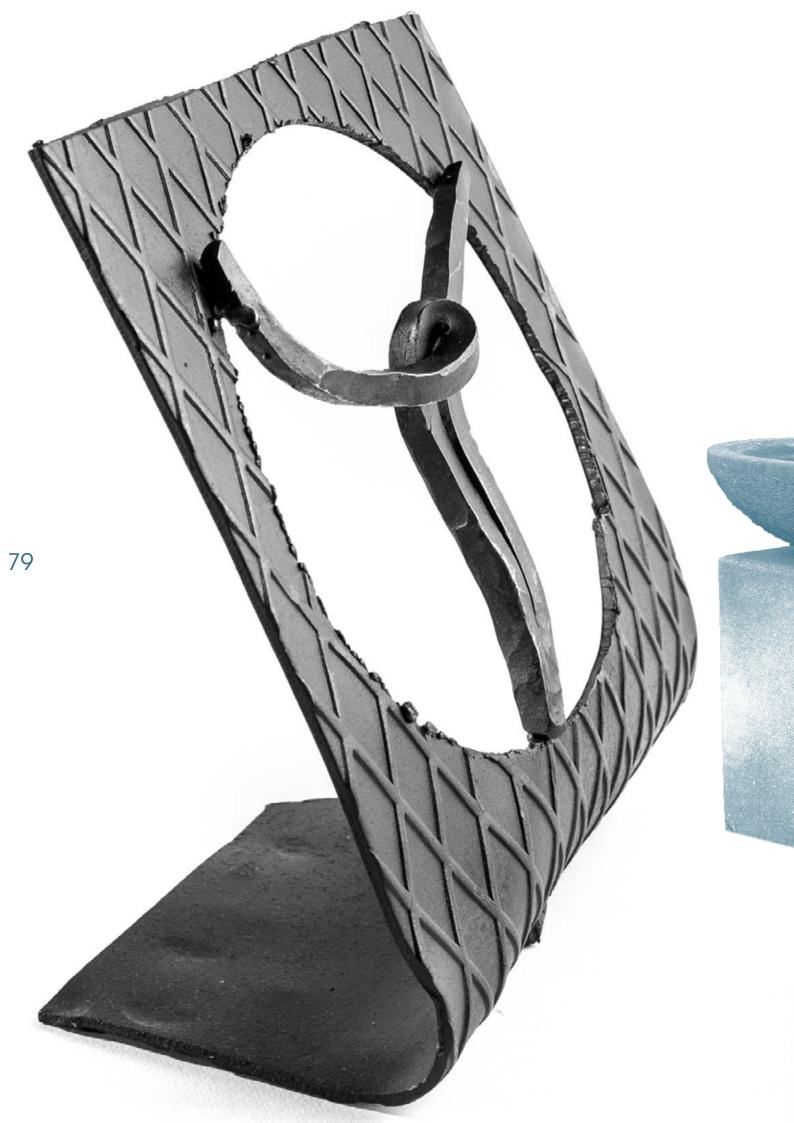




















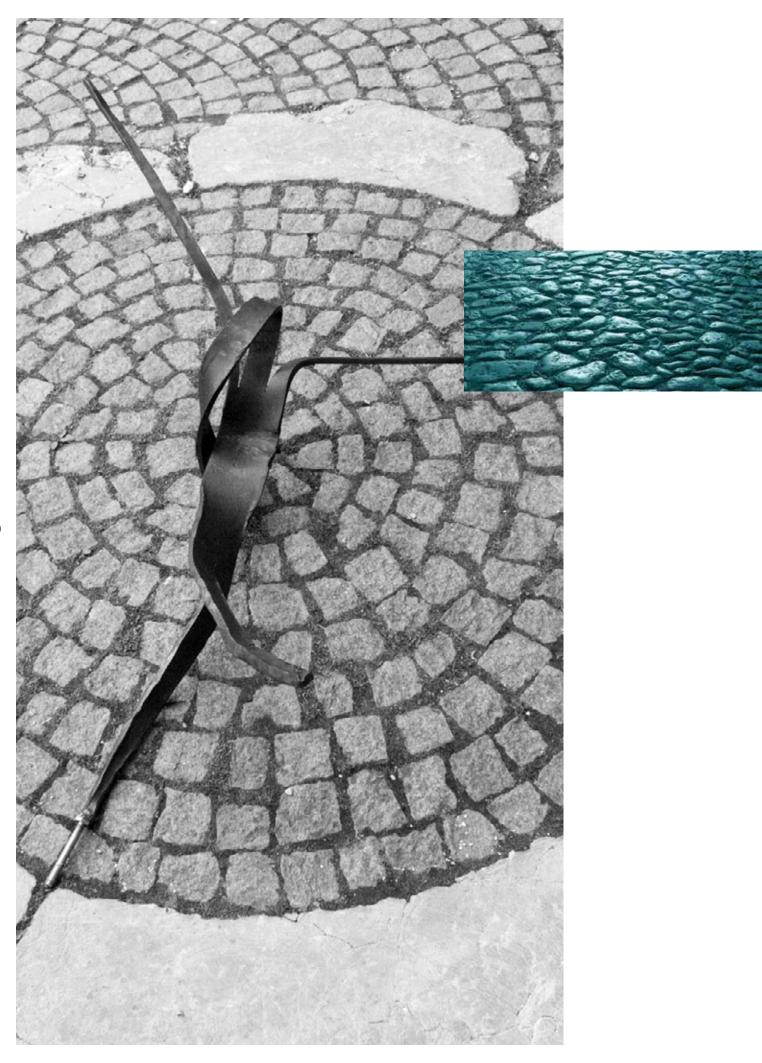












ECHO OF SILENCE

Milček Komelj

FORMS OF TRIUMPHANT LIFE BORN IN THE HEART OF FIRE



In the silence of the Pleterje Carthusian monastery, Brother Janez Hollenstein pours his prayerful meditation, which is aimed at contact with God, into his fine art. He redirects his material – namely, scrap metal, usually discarded fences,

barrel hoops and the like – towards spiritual horizons and, through his forging, recuperates and dematerializes it. He forges his absorption heavenwards by taming metal elements, like a true monastic smith of spiritual life. Hollenstein's training began already in primary school, where the emphasis was on crafts, and it continued at his arts-focused high school.

Hollenstein transforms iron into transparent form, into symbolic expression, an embodied idea, the essence of which is captured in an upward-rising, often undulating gentle dance. Here the turmoil of the spirit is equated with the principle of growth or with the flickering flames and fire-hardened metal strips which - framed into circular forms of perfection - embrace the inner space or open outwards. Under this monk's hammer, these round or flat, tendril-like bands willingly curl and form into organisms where everything is subordinate to a bursting or enthusiasm that is rounded off into allusive scenes or abstract signs. The wavy iron bands are like an author's handwriting, expressing the impetus of his religious longing and creative thought. That is why Hollenstein's metal sculptural drawings are constantly dynamic and willing; they are consistently elegant in their willingness, devoid of sharp edges, and harmonized, ascetic; yet at same time they possess the rhythmicality of a sprouting, of a spreading-out, in all directions, remaining expressly playful and easeful.

The vital, propelling ascent is captured like an original principle, like the natural growth and movement of living beings. In this spirit, the artist once told Zvone Pelko, the President of the Eloquent Silence Cultural Society, that the cleanest forms in nature are those of a blade of grass and of a snake. Already in his early works Hollenstein called forth the blade, which rises like a whetted spear from the iron base. The vibrant, winding snake, meanwhile, is simultaneously abstract and an allusion to a natural form; but also the snake, ascending like ritual dancers, rises from the earth and, in a rhythmically-coordinated dialogue, even assumes a heart-like form. For Hollenstein this is of course not the evil biblical snake, but more an archetypal, mythical being that hints at an almost sacred meaning, as in ancient oriental cultures or in the modern art of the painter Janez Bernik. Otherwise, all these snake-like forms are gently plaited, bending and protruding in soft knots, in a sign of enthusiasm or in a spiral that is in harmony with the artist's belief that the path to God is never straightforward. With his impetus towards the heavens, Hollenstein symbolizes the resurrection, or at least the direction and the enthusiasm of spiritual growth; shapes can also emerge from the circumferences; in the embrace of cosmic rings, they encounter their conjoining tendril projections like the expansive hands of acrobats on an invisible trapeze, they are interwoven into a symbolic image of the Crucifixion, or assume a circularity that hints at the Holy Trinity. Sometimes the circular forms evoke the rotating sun and its flaming rays; the bending, plaited dance of forms extends bodily into space, like a dance dialogue carried out by the legendary Pino and Pia Mlakar, artists who understood how to express the ascent of the spirit, how to capture it in bodily movements that seek to forgo gravity and break free of the earth. In one of the dance compositions, in harmony with its cultural origin, the artist unveiled a memory of the dance of the Rhinemaidens in the space between the celestial rings.





Hollenstein's sculptures are optically encompassed in a circular ascending, expressing the movement of life not in fragmentations of added or subtracted sculptural mass and material weight, but in soft folds. In harmony with his ideas, this artist bends the iron bands or rods as he, creatively and piously inspired, hammers at the glowing iron, thinking of God's presence and longing for God. Thus his smith's hands transform the material, however heavy, into a fluid weightlessness and relaxed easefulness that look as natural as sprouting plants. Even though his art is linear in construction, it is not sharp-edged, not squarely architectural or mechanically assembled. Rather, its uninterrupted flow is musical to the core, for its evoker is, to the core, devoted to a spiritual absorption.

It is evident that this dance of sculptural form is like a temple to its creator, if not like a veritable initiation rite. Hollenstein's frail yet determined lines have a spiritual air of dancing, moving, growing from a spiritual centre like extended leaves and plaits of agave, coming (or at least seeming to become) organically alive. There each fold preserves its inner meaning, harmonized with the whole or its idea; but in this complexity lies a cosmic harmony, not empty decoration and entreaty, for it is consecrated through the eyes of a genuine Carthusian monk who has devoted his life to God.



Indeed, we hold that through labor offered to God man is associated with the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, Who conferred an eminent dignity on labor when at Nazareth He worked with His own hands. (GS 67.2)

Hollenstein's clear art is pure, spiritual and symbolic in form, even when, as with his candlesticks, it is useful. But also here his art is consecrated to ritual, for it is suitable also for being placed on the base of a refectory altar. Among his more concrete forms are a sculpture of hands that are raised in prayer, with fingers that look like plant leaves, albeit not in the manner of Auguste Rodin's marble The Cathedral. In the case of Brother Hollenstein, however, even an antiphonary can be prayerfully held in one's hands.



Hollenstein's vibrant art is neither sweetly devotional nor conventional; rather, it is abstractly modernist, his point of departure being the transcendence and genuine purity found in medieval Carthusian architecture, the construction of which is dictated by a spiritual impetus. It captures sound and harmony, is completely devoted to the stimulation of the spiritual impulse, and therefore we can perceive in it the most natural way of the sculptor's pronouncement of his creative prayer. That is how the artist himself experiences it. Expressly explained in the lapidary Monk and the Work is that in a monk's life work time is just a "continuation of the prayerful posture, the continuation of the lituray." Eloquent Silence informs us that the Carthusian Statutes also try to "look at work as an extended liturgy and cult, where all relations must be imbued with respect" and, in keeping with the ora et labora credo, that work is "an integral part of the monk's contemplative life"; as homo faber "the monk does not search for self-realization through creativity, nor for spiritual balance - even though already Cassian had recognized this possibility, and even need, for the hermit." Hollenstein's sculptures became a form of prayer.

The Carthusian, for whom monastic work means "service, not self-assertion," glorifies the power of God through his work; in the strength with which he vividly bends his metal, we can, in the extra-Carthusian context of this exhibition, recognize the artist's human creativity, which we perceive as art.

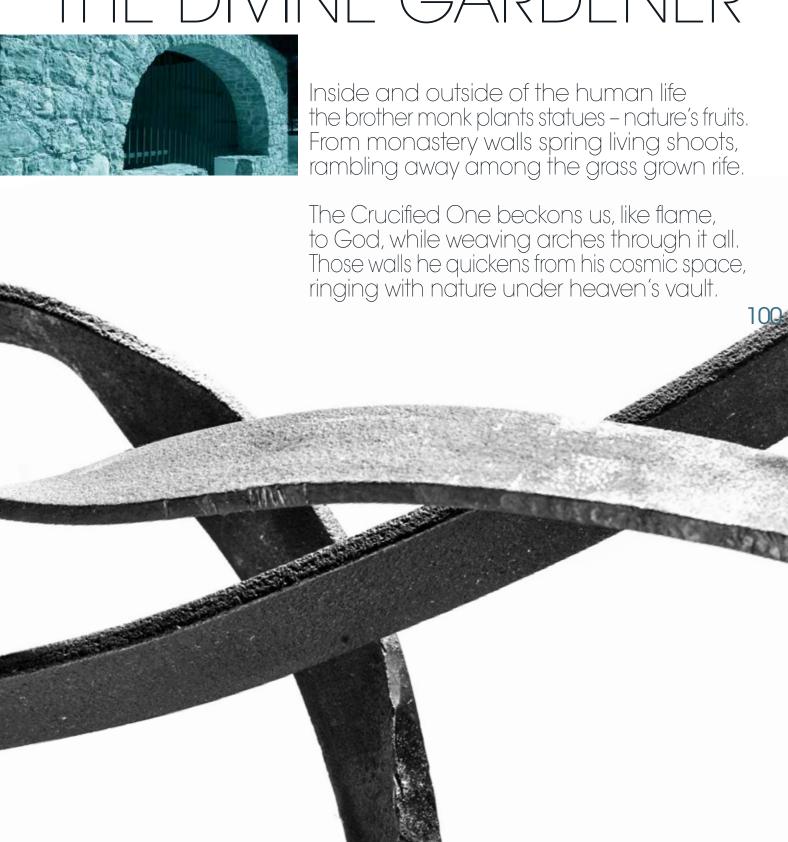
In his art, Father Janez Hollenstein, a former Pleterje Charterhouse prior, expresses his prayers and visions by means of the tirelessly rejuvenated sonorous metal lines onto which he has inscribed his heart's Te Deum.







THE DIVINE GARDENER

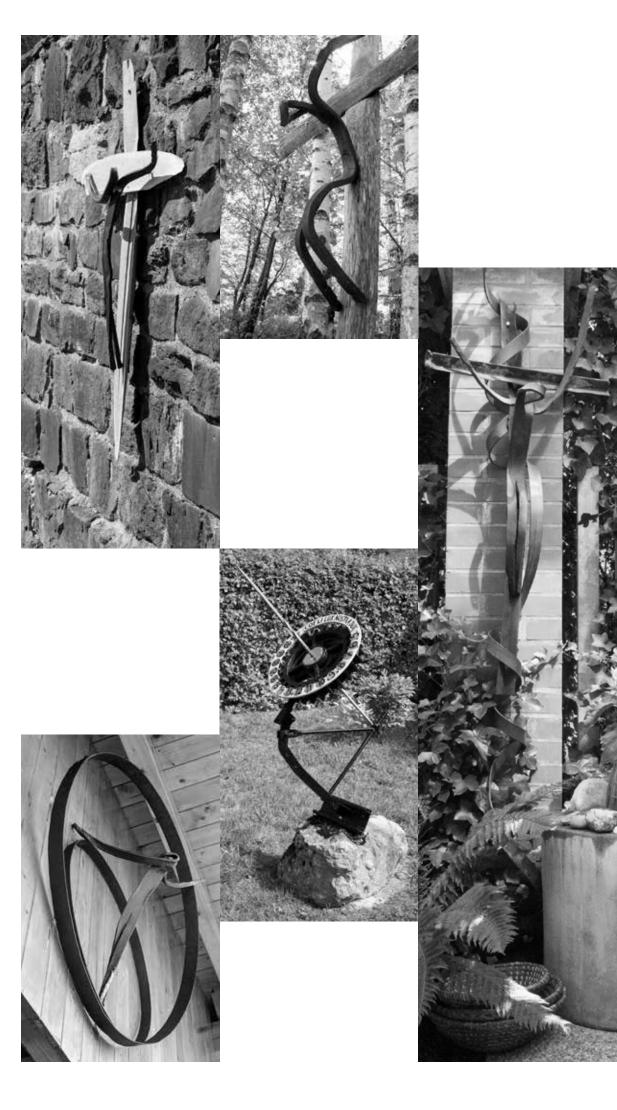


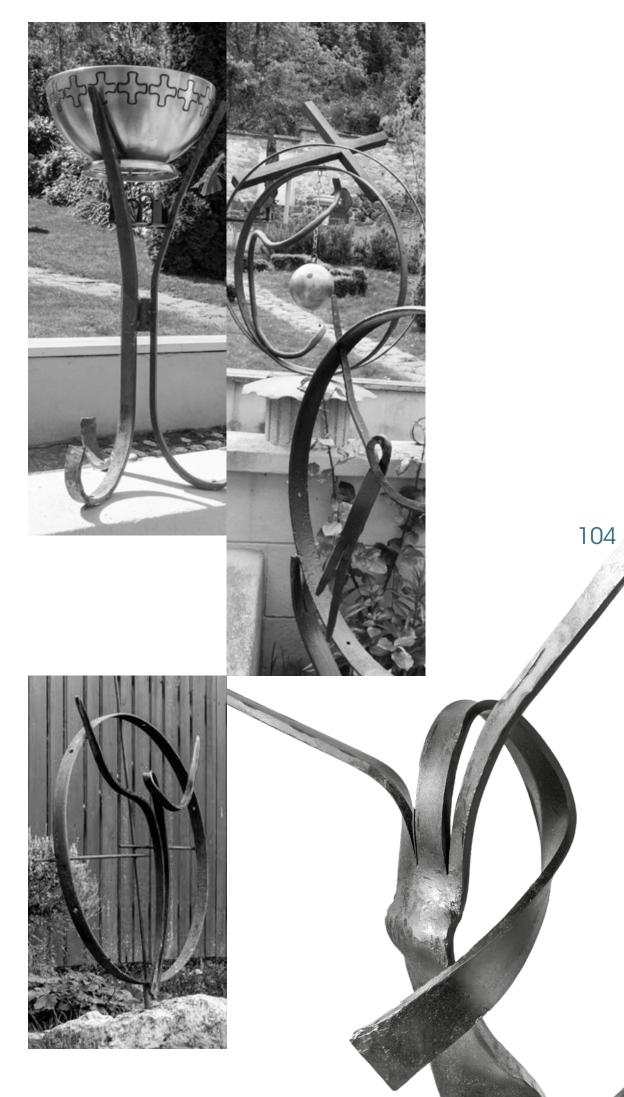




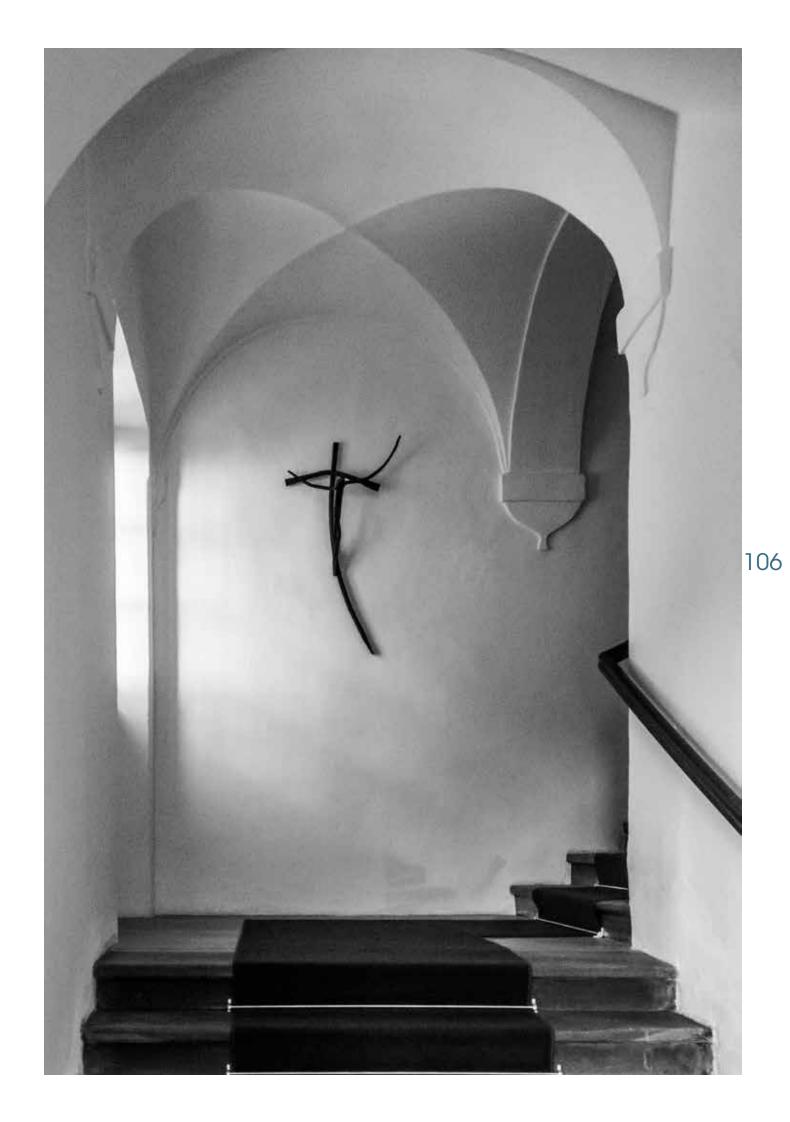


Prijateljska povezanost z Bogom pa srca ne utesnjuje. Nasprotno, širi ga in usposablja, da v Bogu prijazno sprejema skrbi in tegobe sveta ter važne zadeve Cerkve. (PK 6.6)











e x h i b i t i o n ECHO OF SILENCE

ASCENDING RESURRECTION ILLUMINATION

KRKA Gallery, Novo mesto

KUD Krka Curator: Mitja Pelko June, July, August 2017

Stane Kregar Gallery, Ljubljana

St. Stanislav's Institution Curator: Bernarda Podlipnik September, 2017

Primož Trubar Cultural Centre, Šentjernej

Šentjernej Municipality Curator: Elizabeta Kušljan Gegič April, 2018

OPENING PROGRAMMES

Zvone Pelko: Concept Milček Komelj: Reviews and introductory poems Katarina Šter and **insula memoriae** vocal ensemble Gregorian chant

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