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## The World of Childhood in Illustrations by Serbian Artists Ljubica Cuca Sokić and Bosiljka Bosa Kičevac<sup>1</sup>

*The Serbian fine artists Ljubica Cuca Sokić and Bosiljka Bosa Kičevac developed distinctive and recognizable illustration styles that are characterized by inventiveness and morphological unity, built on a spectrum of stylized forms, figures, objects and landscapes. Their artistic credo was based on the defense of artistic autonomy, to which they remained faithful to the end. Both artists belonged to the context of post-war Yugoslavia, where they lived and created numerous illustration projects that marked the growth of generations.*

Srbski likovni umetniki Ljubica Cuca Sokić in Bosiljka Bosa Kičevac sta razvili značilen in prepoznaven slog ilustracije, ki ga odlikujeta inventivnost in morfološka enotnost, temelji pa na množici stiliziranih oblik, figur, predmetov in pokrajin. Njun likovni kredo je temeljil na umetniški avtonomiji, ki sta ji bili zvesti do konca. Obe umetnici sta delovali v razmerah povojne Jugoslavije, kjer sta živeli in ustvarili množico ilustracij, ki so vplivale na številne generacije. shapes reading projects and what kind of censorship determines the accessibility of research materials in the field of science.

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**ključne besede:** Ljubica Cuca Sokić, Bosiljka Bosa Kičevac, ilustracija, otroci, knjiga

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## Introduction

Illustration for children is a specific artistic discipline that carries the stylistic features of the time and the artistic orientations of the environment in which it was created and developed. By definition and status, function and method of dissemination, *“illustration is a particular type of visual mediator”* (Lakićević Pavićević, 1994, 5). It influences the *“formation of visual culture from the earliest childhood, becoming one of the essential stations in the nuances of growing up, aided by magical, romantic, and fantastic layers of meaning.”* (Ćinkul, 2015, 13). One of its primary functions in the book is to accompany, clarify, and interpret specific parts of the text, to emphasize and accentuate different aspects of the prose work and poetic images. Working as a children’s book illustrator is a very delicate, responsible and complex task, which requires not only quality of the drawing, but also a subtle sense of the age and way of thinking of the audience the illustrator is addressing.

For one group of artists, the position of illustration is equal to the textual template, while for others, the text serves as a starting point for a deeper artistic experience. This poetic moment is more present in the artist’s intimacy, in the depth of the subconscious, and the sphere of the irrational, through phrases such as *“intimist lyricism”, “poetic vision”, “fantasy”, “magic”* and *“surrealism”* (Savčić, 1984, 5). In the complex task of *“making a book besides typography and design, illustration takes an important place, complementing the written word, enriching it with images to express what words cannot.”* (Kršić, 1994, 11). This leads to an encounter between two powerful languages, where from the *“interspace of ideas and colors, signs and emotions, emerges a domain where the struggle and resistance, contrast and harmony, tenderness and roughness, inevitably follow in the intimacy of the creative act.”* (Bajić Vajdić, 2007, 10). For this reason, in the interpretation of a literary work, three creative spirits are present: the writer, the illustrator, and finally – the reader, to whom everything is dedicated: writing the text and supplementing it with drawings. According to this interpretation, the position of the illustrator is in the so-called second layer of the literary work, while the decisive role belongs to the reader, whose judgment determines the success of the interaction and complementing of the two artistic spirits. At the moment *“when the illustration rose beyond the simple translation of words into drawing, it became an equal discipline in the world of visual arts.”* (Stojanović Sip, 1968, 27). Therefore, an illustrated work is not just a visual transposition of literary ideas but an equal partner to the poetic word. Although book illustration represents a special world, it could not remain unaffected by current trends in art; however, it managed to achieve some of its own directions that act with special originality.

The second half of the 20th century in visual art brought a *“diffusion of artistic movements and their unusually rapid changes.”* (Trifunović, 1982, 145). In line with these changes, the development of illustration was shaped by the stylistic orientations of individual authors in a realistic, expressive, and fantastic spirit. The most commonly used techniques included pencil, ink, linocut, watercolor, tempera and gouache. Artists, who engaged in illustration as a parallel or primary discipline, upheld the view that the profession of an illustrator requires comprehensive knowledge of the subject, passion and social responsibility. The development of illustration in Serbia was actively influenced by the professors of the Academy of Applied Arts – Mihailo

S. Petrov, Dragoslav Stojanović Sip, Živojin Kovačević, Miloš Ćirić, and Bogdan Kršić. Their program orientation guided illustrators towards contemporary graphic trends. Among the artists, who contributed to replacing the stylized illustrations of the previous period with contemporary artistic trends, were Dušan Ristić and other artists, dedicated to illustrating children's books. Subsequently, a younger generation with various authorial approaches emerged, contributing to the richness of contemporary Serbian illustration. Especially notable are the expressive drawings of Sava Nikolić, the vibrant color palette of Ida Ćirić, the witty stylization and grotesque notes of Marko Krsmanović, the free interpretation of Đorđe Milovanović, and the simplified stylization of Nikola Masniković. Only a small number of artists in Serbia consistently engaged in book illustration as a distinct artistic field. Two of these special artists are Ljubica Cuca Sokić and Bosiljka Bosa Kićevac.<sup>2</sup>

### The Painter Ljubica Cuca Sokić

Ljubica Cuca Sokić (1914–2009) is one of the significant figures in Serbian culture, who dedicated her entire creative life to art. She was highly respected as a university professor and as a member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Subotić, 2015). She was born during World War I in Bitola, into an old and prominent bourgeois family that nurtured love for art and culture.<sup>3</sup> She often pointed out that her happy and peaceful childhood in the heart of the pre-war Belgrade on Dorćol, in a building with a garden, where she spent long hours drawing and making her first attempts at painting, defined her attitude towards the world and art. She received lessons in painting at the Art School in Belgrade, where her professors were prominent Serbian artists – Nikola Bešević, Ivan Radović, and Ljubomir Ivanović. Her parents enabled her to continue her professional development in the art capital – Paris, from 1936 to 1939. There she associated with colleagues from the Association of Yugoslav Artists – Peđa Milosavljević, Jurica Ribar, Bogdan Šuput, Aleksa Čelebonović, Vasa Pomorišac, and Bora Baruh. She exhibited with them in Paris, at Galerie de Paris in 1937, and at Galerie Bernheim Jeune in 1939. In Paris she also encountered the works of modern artists, among whom she was most impressed by Paul Cézanne, Édouard Vuillard, and Pierre Bonnard. Upon returning to Belgrade in 1939 she exhibited at the Art Pavilion Cvijeta Zuzorić. During most of her long creative life she performed independently, except for a brief period in 1940, when she was one of the founders and a member of the group Desetorica (Group of Ten).<sup>4</sup>

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- 2 In the National Library of Serbia, the Legacies of Ljubica Cuca Sokić and Bosiljka Bosa Kićevac are preserved as gifts from their heirs, family Gatalović and family Popović. These legacies contain valuable materials for studying the lives and artistic works of both artists. They include personal libraries, original illustrations, drawings, personal correspondence, documentation, photographs, press clippings, and more.
  - 3 Her father, Manojlo Sokić, was a respected intellectual, a member of parliament, a democrat, a journalist and the owner of the influential daily newspaper *Pravda*, while her mother Ruža came from the well-known Belgrade family Kuzmanović.
  - 4 An art group of the youngest generation of painters before World War II, which first appeared in public in 1940 in Belgrade without a defined program and goals. Among the founders, in addition to Ljubica Sokić, were Danica Antić, Jurica Ribar, Aleksa Čelebonović, Nikola Graovac, Dušan Vlajić, Stojan Trumić, Borivoj Grujić, Milivoj Nikolajević, and Bogdan Šuput.

The war years brought a series of traumatic events when Ljubica Sokić's family lost their property, and in 1941, her father, who was of great support to her, suddenly passed away. During the difficult and uncertain war years she painted little but drew more, having considered drawing an equal element in the construction of a painting. The art of socialist realism was alien to her bourgeois upbringing and refined French culture that she acquired in Paris. In 1948 she and her family were evicted from their house on Topčider Hill, and she was left without space for painting (Subotić & Čelebonović, 2003). In the same year she was offered the job of a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts, where she began teaching drawing and painting. During 1956–1957 she created works that were considered a turning point in her artistic opus, starting a phase she called *purgatory*, when she moved away from figuration and embarked on the path of abstraction (Subotić, 1995). When she inherited her teacher Zora Petrović's art studio in 1960 Cuca Sokić finally became a painter in the true sense of the word – with her own work space for creation and continuous development of artistic expression.

### The World of Ljubica Cuca Sokić's illustrations

The painting of this artist has been the subject of numerous art monographs and catalogues, however, part of her work dedicated to illustrating books and magazines, primarily for children, has remained less known to the public. For her illustration work she received several important awards – Mlado pokolenje (The Young Generation award) in 1959, Zlatno pero Beograda (The Golden Pen of Belgrade) for the best color illustration – *Alisa u čarobnoj zemlji* (*Alice in Wonderland*) in 1962, and the Neven award in 1966 for the illustrations in the book *Neću ovim vozom* (*I Won't Take This Train*).

What did illustrating mean to Ljubica Sokić? Was it merely the side path she chose to secure a stable source of income during the difficult times after the occupation, or did she truly enjoy bringing characters from her imagination to life through drawing? By illustrating for children she could once again feel that state of inner warmth and happiness that marked her upbringing in a warm family environment, reviving memories of the shady gardens and courtyards of the pre-war Belgrade. Like most children she began drawing very early. She modestly described her first drawing experiences: “*Although I didn't draw better than the other children, I loved drawing a lot. And there was most time for that when I lay in bed, with paper and pencil in hand. When the paper ran out, the blank pages of large books were next.*” (Šta je saradniku ..., 1956, 1). She took her first steps as an illustrator in 1935 in the newspaper Pravda, which was owned by her father, Manojlo Sokić. There she illustrated comics that were published in sequels: *Avanture Jovice Glavonje i Perice Štrklje* (*The Adventures of Jovica Glavonja and Perica Štrklja*) and *Slavkov put u Ameriku* (*Slavko's Journey to America*) (Stevanović, 2019). On the other hand, we cannot ignore the fact that the existential factor was an important element and a significant trigger for her to start illustrating. The period after the end of the World War II, marked by her political convictions as a member of the pre-war bourgeoisie and an uncertain struggle for existence, influenced her turn towards the world of illustration (Gatalović, 2010).

Throughout her entire illustrative opus she remained consistent in interpreting her personal poetic expression, belonging to that group of artists, who remained faithful to their pre-war orientations. She briefly engaged in illustrating socialist realist publications, like in the poem *Titovi pioniri* (*Tito's Pioneers*) by the famous Serbian poet Aleksandar Vučo, which she illustrated in 1945. Here, the text and illustration are in an equal relationship, forming a joint visual flow, adapted to the format of this popular edition.

After 1950, there were new artistic directions, a different strategy of cultural policy, and the state “*apparatus for agitation and propaganda*” gradually faded (Dimić, 1988). In 1951, Ljubica Sokić illustrated the book *Izbor iz srpskih narodnih zagonetaka* (*Selection of Serbian Folk Riddles*) by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić. As the text is adapted to children, the illustrations correspond to their psychological development, so the drawings are simple and convincing. The contents are based on motifs familiar to a child's conceptual world: animals, the alphabet, people's occupations and four seasons.

The rich illustrations in *Zlatna potura* (*The Golden coin*) by Jovan Jovanović Zmaj from 1954 completely overshadow the text. The vivid images are in the spirit of Russian folk tales illustration. All the illustrations are on the right side, while Zmaj's text is on the left, giving the impression that the text follows the image. The coloured illustrations seem harmonious, dominated by blue and orange, red and green, while other colours highlight certain parts of the image.

Thanks to her excellent drawing skills Ljubica Sokić brought many poetry collections to life through her illustrations. Illustrating poetry books has always been a complex task for any illustrator, requiring a *translation* of poetic images, metaphors and symbols into the visual world of illustration. In the children's poetry collection *Ljuljaška na grani* (*The Swing on the Branch*), by Mira Alečković from 1954, the artist uses the experience of a skilled observer, who records typical children's movements and emotions in funny, joyful and sad scenes. As to her children's portraits, there is a desire to explore the inner life of a child without idealization. In the illustrations for the children's storybook *Čobanin pčela* (*The Shepherd of the Bees*) by Desanka Maksimović, published by Dečja knjiga (Children's Book) in Belgrade in 1956, Ljubica Sokić tirelessly draws portraits of children in various life situations, reminding us that childhood formed the core of her personality, from which she absorbed the most intense experiences.

Since the mid-1960s, publishing activities have continually advanced in terms of the number of publications, as well as the quality of contents and design. Specialized publishing houses like Dečja knjiga or Mladinska knjiga made sure for their programmes to include various types of publications, from picture books for the youngest to novels and popular science editions for youth. In addition to prose and poetry, Ljubica Sokić also illustrated texts like an English language textbook – *Priče u slikama* (*Stories in Pictures*), which was published in sequels starting in 1954. Each book, edited by Slavna Babić, contains two short stories, accompanied by comic-style illustrations, with the goal of developing an interest in learning English among children through pictures and easy, engaging texts. The combination of text and drawing as equal elements is meant to stimulate children's imagination and facilitate easier knowledge acquisition. In 1955, Ljubica Sokić illustrated a playful short picture book for children titled *Aplikacije* (*Applications*), in which

simple concepts (boat, horse, child, cat) are presented through dynamic drawings and vibrant colours.

One of the last books she illustrated, *Doživljaji zrikavca Mena (The Adventures of the Cricket Men)*, was published in 1973 by Nolit. Although the illustrations are black and white (except for the cover), they have a strong impact on a reader. Drawings of insects and animals dominate the entire book, and here, for the first time in her world of illustration, the absence of human figure is fully noticeable.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Alice in Wonderland and Pinocchio in the illustrations of Ljubica Sokić***

In addition to the published artistic contributions, an important place in understanding Ljubica Sokić's illustrative opus belongs to the group of illustrations that remained unpublished. Among them, the illustrations for the novel *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll from 1962 and *Pinokio (Pinocchio)* by Carlo Collodi from the same period, should be mentioned. Fairy tales have great psychological significance for children, allowing identification with certain heroes from fantasy world. Based on this understanding, the psychologist Carl Gustav Jung compared fairy tales to dreams, recognizing in the former archetypes as a reflection of the collective unconscious (Anastasova, 1989, 96-97). Each archetype contains a piece of human psychology and destiny, suffering and joy, which has been replayed countless times in the lives of our ancestors. Psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim went a step further, suggesting that fairy tales “enable a journey into the mysterious realms of the unconscious.” (Bettelheim, 1979, 39–40). In the characters and actions in the fairy tale, a child sees the release of his inner pressures and instincts. A decisive step in transforming the fairy tale into fantasy was made by Lewis Carroll with the novel *Alice in Wonderland*. In the artistic interpretation by Ljubica Sokić,



the character of Alice belongs neither to the real world above ground nor to the one below, where, chasing the White Rabbit, she suddenly finds herself. Ljubica Sokić illustrates specific moments of the novel where the impossible is realized through the possible. The key on the little table and the bottle labelled *drink me* indicate Alice's transformation as she changes her natural size depending on the situation she finds herself in. She also changes the direction

#### **Picture 1**

Ljubica Cuca Sokić, Unpublished illustration for the fantasy story *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, 1962.  
Tempera on cardboard, 50 x 34 cm  
Graphics Collection of the National Library of Serbia

5 The legacy of Ljubica Sokić in the National Library of Serbia preserves numerous drawings with animalistic motifs featuring insects, cats, horses, birds, as well as the world of wild animals. These studies and sketches serve as a basis for selecting the final designs for illustrations in children's books and magazines.

of her movement, from horizontal (when chasing the White Rabbit) to vertical, falling headfirst into the Wonderland. In the history of Serbian children's illustration, Ljubica Sokić's contribution is reflected in the introduction of abstract elements that she discreetly transfers from the realm of her painting world into the illustrations of Alice. (Picture 1).

The fantastic motif of an animated object is also embodied in Pinocchio, who, just like Alice, undergoes a metamorphosis – from a nose that grows to the final transformation that turns him into a human being. Subsequently, this line of thought continues with the story of the doll as the oldest double of the child and the initiator of a new body identity through play and movement. Pinocchio undergoes a final transformation into a child, representing the end of his utopian life (Gilles, 1993). In Ljubica Sokić's illustrative world, Pinocchio appears lonely, reminiscent of *mannequins* with bizarre bodies placed in a magical space in Giorgio De Chirico's paintings.<sup>6</sup> Further associations point to Oscar Schlemmer's *Triadic Ballet*, in which human body is viewed as a mechanism, capable of creating geometric angular forms instead of curved lines suggested by movement, uniting the Dionysian (emotional) and Apollonian (rational) aspects present in human motion.<sup>7</sup> Highlighting the dualistic aspect that in every individual determines physical and psychological components, rational and emotional aspects, Schlemmer saw humans as beings composed of emotions, reason, and many other dichotomies. For Ljubica Sokić, the invisible world reached through emotion exists parallel to the strictly rational universe, governed by relations of geometry and balance. At this crossroads of the emotional and rational she found the point where everything begins. In this context it is worth mentioning the unpublished illustration *Igračke (Toys)* from 1950, which combines different elements of Cuca's illustrative world – from the figure of a little girl turned away from the viewer, who could be Cuca Sokić herself, to plush animals, harlequins and dolls that seem to remain frozen in their own world of immobile childhood, and to castles that she would interpret multiple times in a series of illustrations. (Picture 2).



**Picture 2**  
Ljubica Cuca Sokić, Unpublished illustration *Toys*, around 1950.  
Tempera on cardboard, 25 x 45 cm  
Graphics Collection of the National Library of Serbia

6 Giorgio de Chirico was an Italian artist and writer who founded the *scuola metafisica* art movement, which profoundly influenced the surrealists. The appearance of the tailor's dummy is inspired by the *faceless man*, a character from the drama by De Chirico's brother, the writer and painter Alberto Savinio.

7 Oskar Schlemmer was a German painter, sculptor, costume designer, choreographer and a master at the Bauhaus school between the two world wars. His most famous work, *Triadic Ballet* performed in Stuttgart in 1922 marked avant-garde tendencies within European ballet.

## Illustrations in magazines – echoes of time

In addition to books, the illustrations of Ljubica Sokić left a significant mark on Yugoslav children's periodicals in the second half of the 20th century. In the post-war period, illustrated press for young people experienced a remarkable boom, reflecting the increased social concern for children and youth, the rise in the number of schools and students, as well as a rapid development of printing techniques and the improvement of press distribution (Lakićević Pavićević, 1994). The editorial policy of children's magazines and journals was directed towards educating children in the spirit of the prevailing ideology, while the press, along with radio and film, was the primary means of agitation and propaganda through which the Communist Party disseminated and popularized culture (Dimić, 1988). In those times, from 1945 onwards, Ljubica Sokić, by her own admission, began working alongside her friends and colleagues Ivan Tabaković, Ivo Kušanić, and Milo Milunović, as an employee with a steady income of 2,000 dinars, in the magazine *Pioniri*, and later in *Poletarac* (Božović, 2001).

*Pioniri*, published by the Centralni odbor USAOJ-a (Central Committee of the United Association of Pioneers of Yugoslavia) after the liberation in 1945, was the first printed magazine for the youngest in Yugoslavia (Lakićević Pavićević, 1994). Operating under the influence of Soviet propaganda, it was depicting the period of development in Serbian illustration art aimed towards socialist realism. It was launched during the war and in an expanded format with a larger number of contributors, continued to be published monthly from 1945 onwards. Writers and poets, whose books were illustrated by Ljubica Sokić, such as Gvido Tartalja, Mira Alečković, Desanka Maksimović, Vladimir Nazor and others, collaborated with *Pioniri*. Without adequate explanation, the famous writer and chief editor of the magazine, Branko Ćopić, ended the collaboration with Ljubica Sokić after only a year. The separation of Ljubica Sokić and Branko Ćopić and her departure from *Pioniri* probably resulted from the fact that her artistic and illustrative achievements were not in line with the party leadership's preferences.

Cuca also worked in the magazine *Poletarac*, which was published from 1947 to 1969 and was founded by the Centralno veće Narodne omladine Jugoslavije (Central Council of the People's Youth of Yugoslavia). The visual concept of the magazine was meant for the youngest readers, with images dominating over text. The colour scheme was cheerful and simple, and the programme was focused on education and strengthening the creative potential of children (Kisić, 1988). Ljubica Sokić actively worked for *Poletarac* from the 1950s, along with Ivan Radović, Slobodan Gavrilović, Dušan Ristić, Oto Logo, Aleksandar Grbić, Sava Nikolić and Marko Ristić.<sup>8</sup> While in painting she remained devoted to figurative themes, from a series of self-portraits and portraits of her friends, nurturing a lyrical, poetic, and later abstract interpretation of form, in the realm of illustration she tirelessly drew children and their movements, with restless expressions related to playing. She was also bringing animal world to life in her unique way, never having tired of depicting it in her illustrations. (Picture 3, Picture 4).

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8 Many of them collaborated in most of the post-war children's magazines, achieving the highest accomplishments in Serbian illustration of this period.



**Picture 3**

Ljubica Cuca Sokić, Illustration for the cover of the children's magazine *Poletarac* Belgrade, Central Committee of the People's Youth of Yugoslavia, 1958. Tempera on cardboard, 23 x 16 cm Graphics Collection of the National Library of Serbia



**Picture 4**

Ljubica Cuca Sokić, Illustration in the children's magazine *Poletarac* Belgrade, Central Committee of the People's Youth of Yugoslavia, 1960. Tempera on cardboard, 24 x 18 cm Graphics Collection of the National Library of Serbia

*Poletarac* was relaunched and revived in 1973, thanks to the efforts of Duško Radović, at the initiative of the Council for the Education and Care of Children of the SR Serbia. The publisher was NIP Borba, and the editorial members included Dragan Lukić, Dobrica Erić, and Ljubivoje Ršumović. Growing into a sort of anthology of domestic and world literature for children, *Poletarac* was simultaneously a gallery of brilliant visual solutions and a truly serious interactive publication. In the 1970s, the *urban city child* type, most commonly found on the pages of Radović's *Poletarac*, was born. In *Poletarac*, Ljubica Sokić illustrated Alice again, although she had little in common with the *Alice from Wonderland* she had illustrated in the early 1960s.<sup>9</sup> The difference, apart from the application of a different technique (the illustration was black and white, done in ink), was also highlighted by a different perception. In *Poletarac*, Alice, after having drunk the potion, transforms into a girl so tall that the space of the illustration is no longer sufficient for her, as if an invisible ceiling were pressing on her, making it seem for a moment that she will jump off the page and come to life ... perhaps in a world that belongs only to her.

The literary magazine *Zmaj* which was published for over thirty years, was one of the most read children's magazines, with a rich selection of contributions for the young. The first number was published in January 1954 by the Društvo prijatelja knjige i umetnosti za decu (Society of Friends of Books and Arts for Children). The founders and longtime editors were Mira Alečković, Branko Ćopić, Aleksandar Vučo, and Grigor Vitez. From the beginning, magazine featured the group work

9 Illustration of Alice in Lewis Carroll's story *How Alice Grew*, *Poletarac*, 1973.

of a large number of excellent illustrators, while simultaneously respecting their individuality. Unlike most previous magazines, the iconography in *Zmaj* was not taken from foreign publications but was completely original. In *Zmaj* the authors of the stories and the authors of the visual contributions were equally credited, which further confirms that the visual element was significant and by no means subordinate to the textual one. In the illustrations for the stories *Bronzani dečak* (*The Bronze Boy*) by Svetislav Božinović and *Cveće na stolu* (*Flowers on the Table*) by Zlata Kolarić-Kišur, both in *Zmaj* from 1960, elements of still life (a vase with leaves, a bucket ... ) are present, which is rare in the illustrative opus of Cuca Sokić. This thematic register, relying on models she kept in her studio, appears predominantly in countless variations in her paintings.

### **Bosiljka Kićevac – the life dedicated to art**

Bosiljka Kićevac is an artist of the younger generation whose work marked the development of Serbian illustration in the second half of the 20th century. Besides illustrating, she painted and designed unique carpets and textile projects. She was born in 1932 in Belgrade, like Cuca Sokić, into a well-situated and esteemed bourgeois family of intellectuals, where French language and culture, as well as love for music and painting, were cultivated. She was a shy girl, who found her world in drawing and copying pre-war comics (Kićevac, 2009). The years of growing up were interrupted by a family tragedy – the early death of her parents just before the start of World War II. The care for Bosiljka, her sister Pava and brother Pavle was taken over by their stepmother Milica Dedijer, who came from a different social milieu. A period of survival and struggle with poverty ensued, which affected other bourgeois families as well. Under the pressure of her stepmother, who envisioned a future for Bosiljka Kićevac in practical work and craft, she was, against her will, enrolled in a technical school. This was followed by employment at the Urbanistički zavod Beograda (Urban Planning Institute of Belgrade) as a construction technician. “*I had to fight on my own; there was no one to stand behind me and say: Go ahead, paint, and don’t worry about making a living!*” recalls the artist (Janković, 1999, 20). Although she loved painting above all, she chose architecture as a profession that was “*safer for a girl who supported herself.*” (Kićevac, 1999, 27). After finishing work at the Institute, she attended evening courses at School of Drawing on Šumatovačka Street, which at that time was the only place where one could receive initial lessons in painting. Recognizing her distinct talent for painting, professor Milan Četić, whom she perceived as a father figure, discreetly suggested she consider enrolling in the Academy of Fine Arts. An exhibition of “*delicate, lyrical, and full of atmosphere*” drawings by Ljubica Cuca Sokić, then already a prominent and established artist of the older generation, in 1951 left a deep impression on the young Bosiljka Kićevac. (Stevanović, 2024, 23). “*One thing I knew for sure: painting is a great effort, strain, and struggle*”, she wrote then (Kićevac, 2009, 167).

A pivotal moment followed – her enrollment in the painting department of the Academy of Applied Arts in Belgrade. She often described the following years as the most beautiful and the hardest in her life. The Academy was a kind of guidepost:

“There I learned not only to draw but to engage in fine arts ... to be surrounded by art all my life and to enjoy it even when I was hungry and thirsty,” she wrote in her memoirs (Kićevac, 2009, 191). This period was also marked by Bosiljka’s confrontation with “a new reality” and her bold departure from the Communist Party, which she called “clearing things up” (Stevanović, 2024, 25).

Reflecting on the beginnings of her illustration career and her resolve to achieve a compromise between career and family, she notes: “If someone wants to be an artist, he must sacrifice something. I sacrificed parties, gatherings, outings to cafes, and dressing up. What was important to me was a warm home, where nothing is fake, but living life.” (Uskoković, 1996, 17).

### Bosiljka Kićevac’s Illustrations in children’s books

In the field of illustration Bosiljka Kićevac achieved an impressive opus (1952–2016), ranging from simple, linear black-and-white drawings, to colour illustrations using tempera and collage techniques. The illustrations function here as visual conveyors of lessons and values of socialist society, promoting the ideas of community, family, social justice and solidarity, brotherhood and unity of the Yugoslav people, anti-fascism, and the National Liberation Struggle (NOB). In them, Bosiljka Kićevac consistently shapes the exemplary figure of a diligent, honest, and educated child, helpful in family and society alike. With the advent of popular culture and the simultaneous decline of NOB (People’s Liberation Struggle) themes, Bosiljka Kićevac’s illustrations reach their greatest artistic freedom in the drawings of folk tales (Stevanović, 2024, 36–38).

Illustration work on picture books offers greater artistic freedom. Using the visual language of collage in the picture book *Kaćin zoološki vrt (Kaca’s Zoo)* (1968) by Aleksandar Popović, Bosiljka Kićevac creates a playful and cheerful visual solution for the youngest audience. The cheerfulness and didactic nature of the easily readable text, as well as the variety of coloured illustrations, make this picture book the first reading material intended for the youngest readers (Popović-Vasić, 1996). In the next example, Bosiljka Kićevac approaches the text of Duško Radović in the book *Smešne reči (Funny Words)* (1976) with special inspiration. The poems, adapted for children through humour and play, are brought to life with playful drawings of figures turning upside down and backwards, as well as absurd situations with mice drinking from bottles, and forks leaning over the table. (Picture 5).



**Picture 5**

Bosiljka Bosa Kićevac, Illustration for the picture book *Funny Words* by Duško Radović  
Belgrade, Veselin Masleša, 1973.  
Tempera on cardboard, 22 x 39 cm  
Graphics Collection of the National Library of Serbia

In the artistic interpretation of the historical picture books *Užička republika* (*Užice Republic*) in 1974, *Igmanski marš* (*Igman March*) in 1989, and *Petrova Gora* (*Peter's Mountain*) in 1989 by authors Stevan Bulajić and Ahmet Hromadžić, the artist relies on the testimonies and memories of surviving wounded soldiers. In the illustrations of the *Igman March*, cold colours suggest an atmosphere of snow and hunger; in *Peter's Mountain* scenes of combat skirmishes are emphasized with a dark red colour palette, while the climax of the story consists of scenes of victory over the occupiers, bathed in warm yellow hues. "Children adore drawings of couriers and partisans. I think it comes from a need to admire brave people, so when I prepare illustrations, I primarily strive to make the drawing simple, understandable, and educational," observes the author herself (VI., 1975, 21).

In this context, it is important to mention Bosiljka Kićevac's presentation for the international BIB symposium titled *A Group of Boys as a Symbol of the Suffering of a Nation*.<sup>10</sup> This was the artist's response to the theme of The Child – Hero in Children's Picture Books as a visual interpretation of well-known literary heroes. Choosing the theme of national character regarding the tragically perished students of Kragujevac worked "like a punch in the gut" after presentations about *Pinokio* (*Pinocchio*), *Palčić* (*Tom Thumb*), and *Pepeljuga* (*Cinderella*) (Kićevac, 1987, 1). Explaining her artistic and personal inspiration for illustrating Desanka Maksimović's poem *Krvava bajka* (*A Bloody Fairy Tale*) the artist presented her personal view of the suffering that occurred at the very beginning of World War II. "I wanted to pay tribute as both a human and an artist to the spirits of the boys and that tragic event, which I personally indirectly experienced ... Therefore, I gladly and with a great sense of responsibility accepted the offer to illustrate a picture book about Kragujevac October 1941, based on the text by our great poet." (Kićevac, 1987, 1). As a child at that time she stayed with her family near Kragujevac, seeking refuge from the bombed Belgrade. Without romanticizing in her visual language she presented the tragic reality of this event. She described her approach and reasons for reviving this theme, relying on the memories of survivors and the families of the victims. From this position, her artistic work was poignant not only because of the historical context of wartime suffering but also because of the connection between the status of children and family life and traumatic life circumstances.

The period of artistic maturity for Bosiljka Kićevac arrived in the seventh decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with one of the most successful works from that time, the book *Devetaci*, for which she received an award at the Zlatno pero Beograda (Golden Pen of Belgrade) exhibition in 1976. The illustrations in the linocut technique complement the text of poet Branko V. Radicević. Writing thirty melancholic and didactic stories about people of various professions, Radicević records memories of his childhood. The stories captivate the reader's attention with the richness of language, using forgotten words as well as inventing new ones. (Picture 6).

With particular playfulness she also illustrated books in the *Lastavica* series from the publisher Veselin Masleša in Sarajevo, edited by Ahmed Hromadžić. The books *Patuljak vam priča* (*The Dwarf Tells You Stories*) and *Patuljak iz zaboravljene*

<sup>10</sup> The Biennial of Illustration (BIB) was initiated in 1967. in Bratislava. This event is still held today. Bosiljka Kićevac exhibited her works multiple times and stayed in Czechoslovakia as a member of the Association of Fine and Applied Artists of Serbia.



**Picture 6**

Bosiljka Bosa Kićevac  
Illustration for the cover of the short story book *Devetaci* by Branko V. Radicević  
Belgrade, Vuk Karadžić, 1976.  
Linocut, 32 x 54,5 cm  
Graphics Collection of the National Library of Serbia

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**Picture 7**

Bosiljka Bosa Kićevac  
Illustration for the book *A Dwarf Tells You Stories* by Ahmet Hromadžić  
Belgrade, Prosveta; Sarajevo, Veselin Masleša, 1984.  
Tempera on cardboard, 28 x 42 cm  
Graphics Collection of the National Library of Serbia

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*zemlje* (*The Dwarf from the Forgotten Land*) in 1984. emerge as “stories from the forest, by unknown and invisible narrators”, which Hromadžić remembered from his childhood (Hromadžić, 1986, 2). (Picture 7).

### Illustrations in children’s magazines - the upbringing of generations

In December of 1960 Bosiljka Kićevac published her first illustration in *Zmaj*, marking the beginning of her fruitful collaboration with this and other children’s magazines, including *Poletarac*, *Mali Kekec* (*Little Kekec*), *Mikijev zabavnik* (*Mickey’s Magazine*), *Tik Tak*, *Vesela sveska* (*Cheerful Notebook*), *Mali Neven* (*Little Marigold*), and *Zeka* (*The Rabbit*). Illustrations in *Zmaj* from the fifties and sixties show some similarity with the illustrations of Ljubica Cuca Sokić from the same period. The nostalgic experience of Belgrade, psychologically studied portraits of children reflecting the curiosity of their characters, and winter landscapes as the setting for events in the foreground of the illustration are some of the motifs found in the works of both illustrators on the pages of *Zmaj*. The synthesis of the rational and lyrical, as well as a precise graphic approach free of unnecessary details, represent the forms that the younger artist would further develop and adapt in her artistic practice.

The magazine *Vesela sveska* (*Cheerful Notebook*) was adapted for younger children as part of the socialist propaganda. Poems, stories, comics and posters with characters from cartoons, as well as photographs of Josip Broz Tito surrounded by pioneers, made it one of many similar post-war illustrated publications for

children. The main characters were typical children's figures – a boy in a yellow shirt and a girl in a red dress, often holding hands. Placed in numerous real and surreal situations (in the snow, flying, going to school), they became beloved cartoon characters with whom children could easily identify, recognizing in their adventures an intertwined play of reality and imagination.

Since 1984, Bosiljka Kićevac has been illustrating in the cult magazine *Politikin zabavnik* (*Politika's Funbook*), always approaching each individual topic with fresh energy and humour. Notable are her illustrations with mythological content, such as one with the god Poseidon reaching out from the depth of the sea to grab and sink ships, while spaceships are flying through the sky. In this, as well as in many other illustrations, different time and space coordinates intersect, with a touch of absurdity.

### As Long as There Are Heads, There Will Be Hats

In the field of applied graphics, Bosiljka Kićevac created a representative portfolio of linocuts, inspired by Serbian folk proverbs, titled *Dok je glave biće kapa* (*As Long as There Are Heads, There Will Be Hats*) in 1981.<sup>11</sup> Through a series of inventive graphic solutions she demonstrated how folk proverbs reflect various human characters. Words are present here as pictographic inscriptions and as an active part of the visual composition. A number of proverbs relate to the phenomenon of the family, which from early childhood influences the development of the individual. In patriarchal culture, the birth of a male child, who continues the lineage and inheritance, is of great significance, while a female child leaves the home to start a new family, as in the proverb *Miraz devojku udaje* (*A Dowry Marries Off the Girl*). An important component is the belief in fate, which reflects an individual's powerlessness in relation to natural and supernatural forces. This group includes

illustrations depicting the struggle with the devil, as well as a particularly humorous group of illustrations related to male-female relationships. With few graphic elements the narrative of the proverbs is brought to the forefront, while the background is treated flatly with minimal details, allowing the author to achieve satirical, grotesque, and symbolic interpretations. (Picture 8).



**Picture 8**

Bosiljka Bosa Kićevac, Illustration for the bibliophile edition *As Long as There's a Head, There Will Be a Hat* Belgrade, Vuk Karadžić, 1981.

Linocut, 50 x 35 cm

Graphics Collection of the National Library of Serbia

<sup>11</sup> The edition is printed in 1,000 numbered copies.

## Conclusion

Ljubica Sokić and Bosiljka Kićevac were connected by a relationship of respect and sincere friendship. Ljubica Sokić was an older and already established artist serving as a role model for the younger Bosiljka Kićevac.

From Ljubica Sokić's highly creative and diverse illustration opus one thing stands out in a very special and intimate way – children portraits. It is here where silent stability and artistic curiosity emerges, while trying to capture and embody the spiritual texture of the person on the portrait. On the other hand, the world of childhood as an initial domain is crucial for the personality development of Bosiljka Kićevac and the understanding of her art. The period of her upbringing, marked by the early loss of her parents and coloured by the hardships of war, is not merely an experience of reality but a profound mental process and relationship with life. By choosing to illustrate stories, poetry and novels, in which children are the main characters, the artist does not interpret their play, experiences, and restlessness as an artist close to the childlike sensibility, but rather takes the position of someone, who once was a child himself, reflecting on and remembering childhood in general.

The apotheosis of childhood as a happy period of life links the illustrations of both the artists. An artistic work is connected in a certain way to the subconscious of the creator, from which desires and fantasies break into the external world. Without political engagement in the times when the latter was imperative for success, they remained true to their beliefs as members of the generations of painters and graphic artists of integrity, whose works recognized poetic models of life and a sense of the world.

Although their artistic poetics are different, as well as their stylistic approaches – Sokić's being more painterly and Kićevac's almost naive and seemingly childlike – each of them, through their continuous work as illustrators, left an indelible mark on the development of contemporary Serbian children's illustration.

## Summary

This paper presents the world of illustrations of the painter and academic Ljubica Cuca Sokić (Bitolj, 1914 – Belgrade, 2009) and the artist Bosiljka Bosa Kićevac (Belgrade, 1932 – Belgrade, 2016). A stylistic analysis and interpretation of individual examples of their illustrations bring the work of both artists into a comparative framework, where Ljubica Cuca Sokić's work was primarily in the field of painting and pedagogical work at the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade, while Bosiljka Kićevac remained consistently dedicated to her vocation as a children's book illustrator, engaging in other visual disciplines. Drawing from her own experience of deconstructing memories from the period of life in the former Yugoslavia, Bosiljka Kićevac reexamines personal beliefs through the perspective of children in her illustrations, which function as visual transmitters of lessons and values of socialist society. Ljubica Sokić did not adopt the aesthetics of socialist realism between 1945 and 1950. Her retreat into the world of childhood led her to discover a magical and invisible world that exists parallel to the rational universe

of her painting, governed by the relationships of geometry and balance. Although their artistic poetics are different, as well as their stylistic approaches – Sokić's beinre painterly and Kićevac's almost naive and seemingly childlike – each of them, through their continuous work as illustrators, left an indelible mark on the development of contemporary Serbian children's illustration.

## Povzetek

Članek obravnava svet ilustracij akademske slikarke Ljubice Cuce Sokić (Bitolj 1914 – Beograd 2009) in likovne umetnice Bosiljke Bose Kićevac (Beograd 1932–2016). Slogovna analiza in interpretacija posameznih primerov njenih ilustracij obe umetnici postavlja v primerjalni okvir, znotraj katerega je Ljubica Cuca Sokić delovala predvsem na področju slikarstva in pedagoškega dela na Akademiji za likovno umetnost v Beogradu, Bosiljka Kićevac pa je ostajala zvesta svojemu poklicu ilustratorke otroške književnosti, čeprav se je ukvarjala tudi z drugimi likovnimi zvrstmi. Izhajajoč iz lastnih spominov na življenje v nekdanji Jugoslaviji Bosiljka Kićevac v svojih ilustracijah preverja osebna prepričanja skozi otroško perspektivo, kar deluje kot vizualni prenos lekcij in vrednot socialistične družbe. Ljubica Sokić ni sledila estetiki socialnega realizma, ki je vladala med leti 1945 in 1950. Umik v svet otroštva jo je vodil k odkrivanju čarobnega nevidnega sveta, ki je obstajal vzporedno z racionalnim univerzumom njenega slikarstva, temelječega na načelih geometrije in ravnotežja. Kljub razlikam v njuni umetniški poetiki in slogovnemu pristopu – Ljubica Sokić je bolj slikarska, Bosiljka Kićevac pa skoraj naivna in navidez otroška – sta obe vtisnili močan pečat sodobni srbski otroški ilustraciji.

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