

## New Permanent Exhibition “Wooden Age” in the Virovitica City Museum, 2019.

### Permanent Exhibition Review

The location of the museum in Virovitica, when it was founded in 1953 within a protected cultural monument from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, resulted in indivisible programme, interconnected and interdependent. Namely, the programmes towards the community, the presence and visibility to the public, the Virovitica City Museum relied on the conditions of the Baroque-Classical building, which often did not allow the full development of imagined contents. The Castle as a cultural monument and as the central point of the city has long resisted the weather conditions and habits of its many tenants. The maintenance of the monumental building has become difficult for the city, which owns the Castle. Fortunately, the potential of the Castle and the museum in it was recognized in the project made by the chief designer Milko Puncer from company Urbos Ltd., Osijek, Natalija Bajcs, museologist and Javier Luri, architect from company Krear, Zagreb. Professional assistance and expertise was led by Mihaela Kulej, art historian and director of the Virovitica City Museum and employees of the Museum.

The renovated Castle and its conversion in all parts (basement, ground floor, first floor and attic) for museum activities were presented to the public at the end of 2019, just a few months before the general lockdown due to the global pandemic. As part of the European project, aptly named “5 to 12 for the Castle”, the renovation of the building, revitalization of the surrounding park with accompanying facilities and the opening of a new permanent exhibition of the Virovitica City Museum were reported. This gave the museum a unique opportunity to present its exhibition on all floors of the newly renovated building. Visual solutions for the layout, signalization and spatial graphics were offered by graphic designers Dora Bilić and Tina Müller from Studio Bilić Müller. New technological possibilities have enabled, in addition to viewing museum objects, the use of multimedia as a supplement to the content and thematic story. The presence of digital kiosks and separate interactives is enough for the visitor to move through the display and understand the story even without these contents, but with them the objects and the whole story certainly get a different dimension. Digital content offers the possibility of deepening, research, but also relaxed learning of new content.

One of the prominent features of the new permanent exhibition “Wooden Age” is the interdisciplinarity that follows the basic story of wood as the basic material of human activity in this area. Wanting to make a step forward in the presentation of the historical, cultural and natural heritage of the Virovitica region, a thematically designed exhibition was approached. It is a different, almost innovative approach for a museum of the native type from those approaches used in our environment. The exhibition “Wooden Age” is divided into three main sections: 1. At the same table, 2. The hands of the master and 3. To knock on wood... hopefully the evil will not hear!

and each of them relies on the theme of wood. In the western part of the first floor, the first section deals with the relationship between man and wood, and the objects follow the story of building and furnishing a home, distinguishing two social classes. The exhibition begins with the presentation of the forest as a natural source of material in which the local forest guards and pig animal keepers have their prominent place. The display from the oldest stone tools to iron axes and metal saws is accompanied by deforestation and renting, one of the main economic branches, important for the existence of the local population of Mikeš. The part dedicated to speech peculiarities of Mikeš is followed through audio materials, selected items, but also through interactive kiosks with designed educational content such as a crossword puzzle with Mikeš words. This is followed by the use of timber in the construction of traditional single-storey houses, thatched, and then in the manufacture of bricks, mudbrick, as well as the development of the brick industry in Virovitica. The link between construction and artistic expression is the work of wood: Wunderschön by Igor Ruf, an academic sculptor and local. Wooden, richly made interior, furniture and decoration of the civic room are observed in parallel with the small space of the village room, which contains several functions in one room. This is how the space that unites the kitchen, living room, bedroom, playroom and study is shown. A museographically interesting solution, observing this staged life of a rural family, for visitors takes place through small wooden openings that provide different angles and views of the interior, and thus the experience of the exhibits. The two social classes also differ in the next room, which shows the dining room or table with civic and rustic dishes. The connection between these two worlds is made by written messages from the kitchen walls that are present in both the city and the village. The unobtrusive free-standing interactive provides additional possibilities for researching numerous exposed pottery in the pantry, as well as recipes from the *Mikeški jestvenik* project or educational games that encourage research into museum names, shapes and purposes of museum bowls. From the aforementioned sub-section on nutrition, the story "At the same table" leads to the most intimate space of the home: the bedroom. It is dominated by a handmade double bed with bedside tables, a dressing table, a chair and a three-part wardrobe, all from the Virovitica master workshop Hakenberg from the 1930s. The space is enriched with works of art that depict the character of a woman in various social roles (wife, mother, daughter, caregiver, artist, worker, friend, etc.), but also with traditional jewelry that indicates non-verbal speech towards the social community of women, from girls until later years, indicated their status and role. This unit ends with a presentation of women's traditional combing and a video "Magic of Hair" and a partition interactive wall of women's hairstyles from the Virovitica region. This corner for a break from the first section offers, in addition to photography with selected traditional hairstyles, various museum publications.

The eastern part of the first floor shows the second section of the exhibition called "Hands of the Master". This section presents wood as a craft object by which man secures his existence. The introduction to the unit is a presentation of wooden aids in the production of threads for weaving and then cloth, which was used as a means of payment. The entrance is dominated by aesthetically designed horseshoes, spin-

ning wheels that show the skill of self-taught craftsmen in designing and processing wooden tools. Craftsmen and guilds of Virovitica are strongly represented by richly made drawers, chests from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Along with the display of blacksmith work, rope wheel, shoemaker's sewing machine as well as items for belts, gingerbreads and barrels, the space of the carpentry workshop and the office of the Virovitica carpenter Franjo Bendak is added. Numerous craft tools and aids that make up the scenography of the former Virovitica carpentry workshop are presented through the special phases of manual wood processing. A video of three generations of carpenters in the 20<sup>th</sup> century introduces visitors to a room dedicated to office furniture and factory production at TVIN. The display of a former frieze 90 meters long in the canteen of the Virovitica factory, which shows the work process in the sawmill, is impressive. Below the replica of the wall painting are descriptions of reproductions of the sawmill period, the momentum of the industry and ultimately the creation of the name of the Virovitica factory. The office furniture room indicates the importance and influence of the Croatian architect and industrial designer Bernardo Bernardi and his work in Virovitica. The shaping of this subunit was contributed by Ph.D. Iva Ceraj, curator of the Croatian Museum of Architecture, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The combination of the second section and the two rooms of the Gallery exhibition makes up a smaller space with a view of the design of the wooden bridges that bridge the moat around the castle. The exhibited works are the works of design students of the Faculty of Architecture, University of Zagreb.

The last section is presented in the attic in the western part, and its thematic backbone is social life and spirituality. The unit begins with a demonstration of dancing in a circle. Dolls in folk costumes of the Virovitica region are placed on an imaginary circle to experience the dance expression. Around the dolls that are in transparent tubes one can circle and observe the details on the costumes from all sides. A depiction of the custom of raising May tree is presented alongside dolls with a stylized May tree. Specific traditional musical instruments of Podravina Slavonia (cymbal, *dude*, tamburitza, hand accordion) are added, followed by the musical expression of civil Virovitica at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Singing societies that co-created the socio-cultural life of the city are shown. In addition to the private cases of prominent individuals, there are numerous documents, records and written traces as evidence of the development of social life in the city. Spirituality is shown by objects and beliefs retained in the villages of the Virovitica area under the title Layers of the Past. Part of the Proto-Slavic beliefs is explained by the description of the tree of the world, folklore practices and processions for St. George's Day and St. John's Day, where a lilac branch lit on a St. John's bonfire fit as an object. The highlight of the third section is a separate space filled with restored wooden sculptures of the sacral interior of the picturesque wooden chapel of St. Cross in Sedlarica not far from Virovitica. It is a former single-nave building built between 1716 and 1733. It was built in the same way as traditional houses, stables and cellars- of wood, walls filled with wicker, smeared with yellow soil and whitewashed with lime. The roof and the bell tower on the west façade were covered with wooden planks, shingles. The interior is filled with painted wall surfaces with floral motifs. The space is complemented by audio materials of folk devotion with recognizable female a cappella performances.

Leaving the exhibition, an open storage room is offered, which in protected, specialized cabinets offers the experience of objects in the storage room, the way they are stored and taken care of. Through guided tours and a visitor tours, greater interest in this part was noticed, which offers visitors a mostly hidden part of the museum work.

All of the above is part of the story offered by the museologists of the Virovitica City Museum and who are persistently working under the slogan *#malivelikimuzej* (*#litlebigmuseum*) with the aim of raising the quality of life in the local community. With its entire project and work, the museum wants to become a meeting place for all generations, as well as visitors of different interests.

For the end of this presentation, it should be noted that the Virovitica City Museum is the winner of the annual award of the Croatian Museum Society in 2019 for the realized permanent exhibition "Wooden Age". Also, in 2021, the Virovitica City Museum is a candidate for nomination for European Museum of the Year. It is an award of the European Museum Forum for the best innovative practices of the museum sector.

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