

Ružica Barišić, Željka Markov. *Mato Kaić*
– *Photography under the Bosnian Sky* by
the Franciscan Museum and Gallery Gorica
– Livno, Ethnographic Museum Zagreb, 14th
June – 4th September 2022

The exhibition *Mato Kaić – Photography under the Bosnian Sky* was on display at the Ethnographic Museum Zagreb from 14 June until 4 September 2022. The exhibition setup was created by the employees of the Franciscan Museum and Gallery Gorica – Livno and authors of the texts in the accompanying catalogue, Ružica Barišić, senior librarian and head of the library, and Željka Markov, museum advisor and collection curator. This exhibition is the result of a successful collaboration of the Ethnographic Museum Zagreb with the Franciscan Museum and Gallery Gorica – Livno, which was initiated with the guest exhibition *Children's Toys from the Croatian Heritage*, organised in Livno in 2015.

The exhibition in Zagreb showcased 106 photographs taken by Mate Kaić, a camera and accompanying equipment, several original plates, a copy of *Lechner Mitteilungen* (the magazine from which he learned about photography and photographic craft), as well as two traditional folk costumes from the Livno region. The exhibition was held under the auspices of the Central State Office for Croats Abroad, and its realization was made possible by the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia, the City Office for Culture of the City of Zagreb, and the Livno Community Zagreb.

The exhibition displayed the photographs of Mate Kaić, the first Livno amateur photographer from the start of the 20th century, born in 1885 to the distinguished family of Livno merchant Ante Kaić. After completing his education, he went to Vienna in 1901, where he bought a photographic camera and German photography magazines, thus initiating his photographic education, which was later the basis for his artistic production. His talent and passion for this artform are discernible in every preserved photograph, and according to the exhibition authors, “Kaić’s photographs reveal his keen sense for the choice of motifs and the present moment, as well as his extraordinary eye for composition. His photographic recording of his immediate surroundings and photographic impressions from his travels that ‘turn reality into a sort of metaphor – po-



Picture 1. Author of the exhibition Ružica Barišić at the opening of the exhibition in the Ethnographic Museum, 14th July 2022, Photo by Nina Koydl

etry', are coated with the patina of the past." The authors conclude that almost all of his photographs are imbued with an emotional charge that evokes memories of past times, and underline that Mato Kaić was a master of "atmospheric" photography.

His first preserved photograph dates to 1902 and depicts the family of Mato's uncle Stipe, while, according to his daughter Voja, he took the last photograph, *Bean Harvest*, on his own property in 1938. This valuable material has been preserved and processed thanks to Vojislava – Voja, who donated 327 negatives, positives and 33 glass slides un colour, a camera, photographic equipment and several photography manuals in German, to the Franciscan Museum and Gallery Gorica – Livno in 2007. The exhibition was first realized in the year 2015/16, however, due to the great interest of the public, it was subsequently set up in several cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Dubrovnik, and finally in Zagreb in 2022.

Mato Kaić was a true artist with a refined sense of beauty, who stopped pursuing photography owing to unfortunate circumstances in his life. After his father's death, he took over the management of the family estate, a large sawmill that he advanced, and was also engaged in fruit



Picture 2. Display of the exhibition, Ethnographic Museum, Zagreb, Photo by Nina Koydl

and vegetable production using modern irrigation techniques employed in developed European countries at the time. He was a prominent resident of Livno, respected in society, innovative, communicative, sociable, and nurtured many friendships, including the famous Croatian painter from Livno, Gabriel Jurkić, his friend since childhood, with whom he shared love of art. Mato Kaić died in 1967, leaving behind an exceptional opus of photographs that hold memories of a bygone time.

Exhibition authors Ružica Barišić and Željka Markov organised the photographs of Mato Kaić into several thematic units: scenes from everyday life – *Ploughing with Horses and Oxen, Sheep Grazing, Sower, Diggers at Tribanj, Harvesting Beans at Matin pod* and many others; photographs of fellow residents, relatives and friends, and some events, such as the arrival of the first car in Livno. Several cityscapes have also been preserved, such as *Old Livno Rooftops, Old Bridge at Duman, The Upper Town* or *View from the Southwest to Kaić House*. Kaić also loved to travel, taking photographs during those trips, of people, their lives and customs, such as in the Dalmatian Hinterland and on the Adriatic coast, recorded in the photographs *Bačvice, Jumping from the Cliffs, A Scene from Fruit Square, Unloading in Mokošica, A Scene from the Split City Harbour, Laundresses near Dubrovnik*. Several photographs of animals have also been preserved, such as *A Cockfight, Feathered Rhapsody in the Yard, Playful Cat and Its Owner*. Fascinated by nature, he captured vistas along the rivers Žabljak and Sturba, villages in the Livno Field, sandbanks, the play of shadows on the river and similar scenes.



Picture 3. Display of the exhibition, Ethnographic Museum, Zagreb, Photo by Nina Koydl

In the exhibition catalogue, the authors described Mato Kaić as an exceptional and talented individual “who was able to take advantage, in the circumstances of his time and space, of any resources available to further his education, and who, thanks to his initial hobby, captured and left an invaluable documentary and artistic rendering of a portion of history of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. Mate Kaić photographic legacy, created out of love and the simple need to capture the beauty of his native land, is significant not only for the history of Livno, but also because it provides a better insight into thus far insufficiently researched Bosnian-Herzegovinian amateur photography that undoubtedly contributed to the development of artistic photography in that area.”

The director of the Franciscan Museum and Gallery Gorica – Livno, Dražena Džeko, in her speech at the exhibition opening in Zagreb, highlighted that Mato Kaić bequeathed us valuable documentary, as well as an artistic heritage which the artist created for almost four decades. He chose his motifs skilfully and masterfully. She emphasized that it is impossible to disregard his closeness and love for the subjects he photographs – be it portraits, cityscapes, landscapes, petit genre or animals.

With this valuable and engaging exhibition of photographs by Mate Kaić, the Ethnographic Museum has enriched the cultural life of Zagreb, continued its successful cooperation with colleagues from the Franciscan Museum and Gallery Gorica – Livno, and presented valuable heritage that created a lasting impression on the visitors.