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Istrian Museum and Gallery Team Visiting the Capital of Culture

Since in 2003 Graz was nominated the European Capital of Culture, the employees of Istrian museums and galleries tried to find a way to visit it and take part in some of the numerous events. The Society of the Museum and Gallery Staff of Istria took an excellently organized three-day trip to Graz and its surroundings. A group of ethnologists of Istria also used this opportunity to visit the new permanent exhibition of the *Volkskundemuseum* (Folklore Museum), reopened after seventeen years, as well as the Open Air Museum in Stübing, 15 km away from Graz. However, this is not to mean that we missed to have a look at the Kunsthaus, the Eggenberg castle, take a walk on Schlossberg and visit the *Mythos Pferd* exhibition in the nearby Piber.

But let's take one step at a time! The first stop on our journey was the *Mythos Pferd* (The Myth of the Horse) exhibition at Piber, a little town 5 km away from Graz, where Lipizzaner horses are bred for the Spanish Riding School in Vienna. The exhibition, a result of multidisciplinary cooperation of experts in various fields, introduces the visitor first to the origins and development of the horse and then deals with the meaning attributed to the horse in various periods and cultures, from prehistory to the Greek, Roman, Etruscan, Turk, Tibetan and other cultures.

As ethnologists, we found the part dealing with folk medicine, patron saints and similar topics particularly interesting. It was also interesting to see the dental device used for polishing horse teeth, especially before the horse was offered for sale: its teeth had to be polished and fixed up as good as possible to make it look younger and sell better! The exhibition is also interactive, giving the visitor the chance to ride a mechanical horse, pose for a photograph in an armour replica of or as a character of the Wild West cartoon movies, write a national proverb regarding horses etc.

On our way back to Graz, we visited the St. Barbara church in Bärnbach, designed by the architect Hundertwasser.

At the *Volkskundemuseum* we were welcomed by Mrs. Roswitha Orac-Stippperger, who was our guide through the new permanent exhibition. The museum is housed in a former monastery, the reconstruction of which required extensive works done by four architects hidden behind the initial B. The permanent exhibition consists of three parts. The first deals with housing, the second with clothing and the third with beliefs and magic. Other subjects, which are not presented at this museum due to lack of material, are exhibited at another museum. Even though the themes may seem quite traditional, detachment from the "past" and reference to the present are evident in every part of the exhibition. Housing, for instance, is museologically presented on the example of a farm, before and now. A model of the farm shows the redistribution of certain functions, which used to be concentrated in one room (cooking, eating, daily activities, sleeping). The same farm now has a new dwelling with a completely modern room distribution, where the functions formerly centred in one room are distributed to several rooms. Another interesting modernization of the traditional presentation of this theme was the use of advertisements to illustrate how "traditional" housing elements are exploited for marketing purposes.

Clothing is presented in two parts. The first part shows the way of exhibiting traditional apparel from the year 1930, while the second part presents the transformation, or rather formation of the "national" style in Graz in the mid-twentieth century. This part is very interesting as it also deals with a contemporary phenomenon in clothing, which is still present in the Alpine countries (Austria, Switzerland). A contemporary video tape of people returning from the Sunday church service shows their modern clothing with very prominent elements of this "national" style (in Austria, there are still many clothing stores established at the time when this style emerged).

The theme dealing with belief and magic, though it requires more detailed explanations from the curator, offers insights into various forms of belief, ranging from divination and gifts to newborns to votives and pilgrimages.

On the second day we took an official guided tour through the city centre and then drove by bus to the botanical garden, which was very impressive to all of us, not only because of its "cosmic" architecture, but also because of special climate conditions maintained in each of the three rooms. After the cold weather accompanying us all the way, for a brief moment we could feel a breath from warmer areas.

Then we toured the Eggenberg castle, where the curator took us through the castle halls, presented the history of the family and the meaning of the frescoes in each of the rooms.

The Island on the Mur is a true attraction, crowded with visitors even in queue at the café that has been opened on the Island.

We took the elevator installed in the mountain interior to the top of Schlossberg and went downhill by external stairs. On Schlossberg we visited the architectural remains, including former military lodgings, which were interestingly transformed into loggias surrounding an open air stage, thus creating a space for public events.

The Kunsthaus, the main attraction of Graz, housed at that time the very well-attended exhibition "Einbildung" (Perceptions of Art). The *friendly alien*, as the new building is lovingly nicknamed, is truly attractive. 500 free tickets were distributed each hour. Although one had to queue up to enter, the crowds would soon disperse in the building, enjoying both the architecture and the exhibits. We were also very interested in modern Japanese photography and enjoyed the exhibition very much.

On the last day of our excursion, we toured Stübing, 15 km away from Graz, and its large open-air museum called "Austria in Miniature". The Austrian Open-Air Museum stretches along a 3 km path. It displays farm housing and management buildings typical for various regions of Austria, giving the visitor a chance to experience traditional Austrian architecture on one spot. An exhibition of various segments of traditional life is housed in two buildings.

This open-air museum is an interesting venue for both experts and those who want to go for an educative outing, especially during the summer months (the museum is closed to visitors in winter). After Stübing, we went back to warmer regions, to Istria.

Graz has certainly capitalized on its status of Europe's Capital of Culture by attracting new visitors. In view of ongoing cultural events, good marketing, interesting architectural solutions and the growing attractiveness of cultural tourism, it is not surprising that Graz and its museums are crowded with visitors.

Translated by Sanja Novak