

Monument to Dr. France Prešeren

IRN5109

<i>Location</i>	Glavni Trg in Kranj
<i>Time of origin</i>	1952
<i>Time of restoration</i>	1998–1999
<i>Chief Conservator</i>	Renata Pamić

28 December 2002 will be the 50th anniversary of the official opening of the Prešeren monument in Glavni Trg (Main Square) between the parish church of St. Cantianus and the theatre in Kranj. On that day 50 years ago, people thronged there to pay their respects to the greatest Slovene poet, Dr. France Prešeren, who shared his life with the citizens of Kranj as well as with the poor in the period between the autumn of 1846 until his death in 1894. Prešeren was buried in the present Prešeren Grove, where a monument was erected by his veneratorators in 1852. A century later, on 28 December 1952, the main postal authority of Ljubljana granted the post office of Kranj the use of a special postmark and stamps to celebrate the centenary of the death of the poet. The prices of public transportation were reduced by half on that day, the houses of Kranj were decorated with flags and several cultural events took place in the town. The whole of Kranj was celebrating the anniversary.

A special committee was established in conjunction with the Kranj Town Council for the erection of the monument in 1952. The artistic work was entrusted to sculptor Frančišek Smerdu and his assistant Peter Loboda. The bronze cast of the 5 m-high statue was made by the Artists' Society (Umetniška Zadruga) from Ljubljana. The construction works were performed by the company Megrad. According to architect Nande Jocif, the sculptor approved the pedestal of dimensions of 1 x 2 x 1.35 m. It is discernible from the contract between the committee and the Artists' Society of 1952 that the committee was obliged to provide 10 graphite pots of 250 kg, 10 graphite pots of 200 kg, 20,000 kg of smelting coke and 4,000 kg of old bronze on receipt of the plaster cast. The Artists' Society was bound to make a perfect cast and erect the monument. The quality of the cast was judged by a committee consisting of four sculptors: the two authors as well as Stane Dremelj and Božo Pengov. The date planned for the opening was moved from 21 to 28 December so as to avoid the event coinciding with the birthday of Stalin. At that time, the facade of the theatre was regulated according to the plan by architect Jože Plečnik, and the park of poets, Prešeren Grove, according to the plan by architects Marjan Šorli and Urška Ogorevc, a year prior to that. The bronze statue of the poet was erected on a pedestal made of granite from Pohorje, in the vicinity of the facade of the theatre, so that they created a monument composition of great quality. Minister Boris Zihelr was requested to open the monument officially and Professor Anton Slodnjak was the official orator.

The statue has withstood the ravages of time with the acquired patina; however, several areas of damage in the stone and rifts in the

bronze have gradually been revealed. Consequently, the monument was structurally endangered and posed a threat to visitors. Kranj Town Council and the Institute for the Protection of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of Kranj renovated the monument completely in 1998 and 1999. Endoscopic and technoscopic tests revealed that the statue was standing merely on its legs without any additional support. The bronze was badly cracked in critical places. Water leaked between the base plate and the pedestal so that the juncture of the base plate, stone block and holdfast was loosened by water and ice. A detailed plan of the rifts



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was drawn and a chemical analysis of the bronze made.

The bronze monument was a structurally self-supporting monolith statue with a bronze base plate attached through the plate to the pedestal. The interior of the statue was hollow, and not additionally braced.

An analysis revealed that the sculpture was made of several casts that were welded together. Only the legs of the statue were filled with concrete, thigh-high. The bronze was severely cracked in those parts. The rift on the right thigh was particularly bad. The right leg thus functioned as the support for the vertical load or weight of the statue, but not for horizontal loads like a gust of wind or shock of an earthquake. The left leg, practically without any cracks, was the only part that afforded stability to the statue. Water was accumulating inside the statue due to the porosity of bronze, and deformations and rifts occurred in winter due to ice. There were further cracks on the top of the head, on the arms and in the lap of the statue. Complete insulation was practically impossible, therefore drainage was provided in the new base.

The statue was cleaned by microsanding, renovated and re-coated with patina. It was strengthened from the inside and braced to the bronze plate that was strengthened as well and fastened to the new granite pedestal. A weeping willow was planted behind the monument and three maple trees in the line of the theatre arcades. The vicinity of the monument, or rather the square, was fenced in with metal posts. The plan for the improvement of the monument and the horticultural landscaping was prepared by the Institute for the Protection of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of Kranj. The name of the poet and a verse from his poem "Zdravljica" were inscribed in gilded letters on the front of the pedestal.

RENATA PAMIĆ

Literature

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JOSIP ŽONTAR, *Zgodovina mesta Kranja*, Ljubljana, 1939.