

STANE KREGAR – LIFE AND WORK

Stane Kregar was born in Zapuže pri Dravljah in 1905 and died in Ljubljana in 1973. From 1917 to 1925, he attended the Diocesan Classical Gymnasium at St. Stanislav's Institution in Šentvid. After the matriculation examination, he decided to become a priest and entered the Faculty of Theology in Ljubljana. He was ordained priest in 1929. The Bishop of Ljubljana Gregorij Rožman named him as successor to the late professor of drawing Gašper Porenta at the Diocesan Classical Gymnasium, and Kregar chose to study at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague where he studied under Professor Max Švabinski between 1930 and 1935. Upon completing his studies, he returned to Ljubljana in 1935 and taught at the Diocesan Classical Gymnasium until the German occupation in 1941. After being forced to leave the building, the school was run in Baraga's seminary in Bežigrad until 1945. After the war, Kregar gave up teaching and worked as a freelancer until his death.

Kregar is one of the most important Slovenian painters of the 20th century. His extensive and high-quality secular and sacral works include about 600 paintings, decor for about 100 churches across Slovenia, and numerous book illustrations. He used various art techniques on paper (pencil, charcoal, tempera, gouache) and canvas (oil painting), monumental painting techniques (fresco, mosaic, sgraffito, stained glass windows) and designed handicrafts (tapestry, embroidery and inlay). None of his contemporaries could boast such extensive technical knowledge and mastery of various painting techniques. His first large-scale survey exhibition was held in the Modern Gallery in Ljubljana in 1950 and it was in the same gallery where he had a big retrospective exhibition from 1971 to 1972. Kregar was given the Prešeren Award for Life Work in 1971.

Kregar was a master of four styles that feature the development of fine arts in Slovenia and abroad: surrealism, poetic colour realism, abstract painting, and new figuration. In the mid-1930s, he was a pioneer of surrealism in Slovenia. From the end of the 1930s to the 1950s, his paintings featured poetic realistic style (with an accentuated symbolist character) that he gradually started to change in the early 1950s until he reached abstraction in 1953 and became a trailblazer of this style in Slovenia. He displayed his abstract works in the Modern Gallery in Ljubljana in 1953 for the first time and experienced strong opposition, above all from politicians. However, he did not give up and thus became the founder of a new era of high modernism in Slovenian painting. In the mid-1960s, he started to paint in the style of new figuration, showing great social engagement and depicting current socio-political affairs that nowadays belong to history. At first sight, the stylistic phases of Kregar's art are distinct;

however, their common theme is lyricism, poetic instinct, and humanistic perception of the world. He remained a great colourist throughout his career.

Stane Kregar left an indelible mark on the Slovenian fine art and ranked among the greatest Slovenian painters. In addition, he was also an art authority and involved in public life. He joined various painting movements upon returning from his studies; he was one of the founding members of the group called *Neodvisni* in 1937 (Eng. *Independents*) and later also its president. Even after his death, he was remained in our memory, in galleries, churches, art history as well as in the books about him and in the books that he illustrated. His artwork is housed in various collections in Slovenia and abroad, the biggest of which is in the Kregar Gallery at St. Stanislav's Institution. The Kregar Gallery was founded in 1993 and houses the artwork donated to the Institution by the painter's heirs: his sisters Cilka Kregar and Marija Šenk, and his brother Ivan Kregar. The authors of the first installation (set up in 1993) were Anica Cevc, a long-time headmistress of the National Gallery, and academician Emilijan Cevc, who also prepared a catalogue (1996). The author of the renewed installation (2014) and the accompanying text is art historian Andrej Doblehar.