

BIOGRAPHY

Maja Šubic was born in Kranj in 1965. She studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana, where she graduated in 1990 under Prof. Emerik Bernard. After graduating, she began to focus more intensively on fresco painting. She uses this technique not only for painting on the walls of architectural buildings, but also applies fresh plaster to various portable surfaces – travertine or ceramics. Her great passion is nature and reading natural history and travel literature. For a long time, the main subject of her work was the Darwin family, in particular Charles Darwin's diary *The Voyage on the Beagle*, which she depicts in various painting techniques (fresco, acrylic, watercolor and, through watercolor illustration, animated film) in numerous projects. In his home town of Shrewsbury, the school Darwin attended celebrated the bicentenary of his birth by commissioning a mural from her.

Recently, Maja Šubic has been working on ancient and medieval natural history, which she interprets in the technique of frescoes on travertine rocks. She also deals with book illustration. She has illustrated several independent book editions, regularly publishes in Slovenian children's and youth magazines and also works as a screenwriter and illustrator on animated films. She has exhibited independently in Slovenia and other European countries, and her works can be found in many private and state collections. She lives and works in Škofja Loka and Poljane.

Maja Šubic
SO LONG, AND THANKS FOR ALL THE FISH*
18 October–16 November 2024

artKIT, Glavni trg 14, Maribor
Opening hours: Tuesday to Friday from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m., Saturday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Maja Šubic

SO LONG, AND THANKS FOR ALL THE FISH*

18 October–16 November 2024
artKIT

This exhibition presents one of the rare painters not only in Slovenia, but in the whole of Europe, who works in traditional fresco painting, a historical genre of mural painting that was particularly characteristic of art in and around Škofja Loka in the Middle Ages. Maja Šubic has perfected this ancient technique with an unmistakable artistic esthetic and applies it to the present day with exceptional artistic flair. Her murals adorn many a cultural and historical building in Poljane and Škofja Loka, where she lives and works. In the current exhibition in our gallery, she presents paintings on travertine, which was found as waste during the renovation of the congress center in Brdo near Kranj.

The fresco is a centuries-old technique. It has been used since antiquity, but it was most widespread during the Renaissance, when the most famous masterpieces of this art were created. The first to be mentioned is the famous *Scrovegni Chapel* (Ital: *Cappella degli Scrovegni*) by **Giotto*** in Padua, which was created around 1305. **Leonardo's*** *The Last Supper* (Ital: *Il Cenacolo ali L'Ultima Cena*), painted between 1495 and 1498, is one of the most famous paintings in the world and of central importance for the transition to the High Renaissance. The third is **Michelangelo's*** *Sistine Chapel* (Ital: *Cappella Sistina*) in the Vatican, which was originally known as *The Great Chapel* (Ital: *Cappella Magna*), but was then named after Pope Sixtus IV, who had it built between 1473 and 1481. It is not only considered one of the greatest works of art in the world, but also one of the greatest achievements of civilization due to its frescoes. **Michelangelo Buonarroti** (1475–1564) created it in two phases: first, he painted the breathtaking ceiling of the chapel between 1508 and 1512 and between 1535 and 1541 he painted *The Last Judgement*.

Probably the most famous fresco in Slovenia is the *Dance of Death* in the *Church of the Holy Trinity* in Hrastovlje, painted and completed in 1490 by Janez (John) of Kastav. In contrast to the Italian fresco masters, in Slovenia it was mostly traveling artists who painted frescoes moving from diocese to diocese and from church to church. The same motifs, albeit painted differently, and the same authors also appear in other churches.

In the 20th century, the painter, graphic artist and sculptor **Tone Kralj** (1900–1975) painted numerous old churches with contemporary motifs. Celebrated for his unique painterly style – an unmistakable kind of monumental realism – this great lover of his country masterfully incorporated resistance against fascism in the motifs of his paintings in the churches of the Slovene Littoral and in the border area in the Goriška region and the Karst, which earned him numerous invitations from patriotic priests. Like his paintings, his church frescoes, which were mainly created during the Second World War, depict the fascists as beasts and Mussolini as the devil. The most famous frescoes from this period are *Rapallo*, *The Flagellation of St. Vitus*, *Angel*

Mountain, and Archangel Michael, draped in the colors of the Slovenian flag and slaying a three-headed dragon with the symbols of Italy, Germany and Japan. (The historian **Egon Pelikan** has listed and documented the churches in which Kralj's frescoes can be found in his book *Tone Kralj in prostor meje*.)

Fresco (Ital: *affresco*) is an extremely sophisticated mural painting technique that is executed on freshly applied or wet lime plaster and does not allow for any corrections. Water is used to bind the dry pigment powder to the plaster. When the plaster dries, the painting becomes an integral part of the wall. The word *affresco* is derived from the Italian adjective *fresco*, meaning "fresh", and thus contrasts with the techniques of *fresco secco* or *secco* mural painting, which are applied to dried plaster to complement fresco painting. Frescoes are difficult to create due to the deadlines associated with drying plaster. Generally, a layer of plaster takes ten to twelve hours to dry. Ideally, an artist will start painting after one hour and continue working until two hours before the drying time, giving them seven to nine hours. Once the surface has dried, no further fresco painting can be carried out and the unpainted plaster must be removed with a tool before starting again the next day. If mistakes have been made, it may also be necessary to remove the entire surface for that area — or change it later, *a secco*. An indispensable part of this process is the carbonization of the lime, which fixes the paint in the plaster and ensures the durability of the fresco for future generations.

Although frescoes are a clearly defined technique from specific time periods, the pleasure of applying paint to walls and ceilings can be traced back to the beginnings of human civilization, culture and art – to the time before the invention of plaster, in the Paleolithic Age, when cave art emerged. The art found in the caves is sometimes referred to as *wall painting*, as remains of it have also been found on overhanging walls and rocks outside the caves. Most of these paintings have not survived. Cave art survived because the caves were often filled with earth and rubble and were thus protected from high humidity and temperature fluctuations. The earliest art of this kind in Europe dates from the Aurignacian period, around 40 thousand years ago, and was found in the *El Castillo* cave in Cantabria in Spain. Apparently, cave art is deeply rooted in the human genome.

Although Maja Šubic's works refer to the art of the Middle Ages, in particular to the *bestiary* she is studying as part of her doctoral thesis, her motifs are timeless, secular and (pseudo-)sacred, mythological and everyday, but above all animalistic and less so human. Taken out of context, the images take on a new meaning and begin to live a story of their own, as the artist places these transportable frescoes in a consistent spatial arrangement that can fill us with a sense of the sacred and transport us to the past, while at the same time the profanity of the images and the extraordinariness of the representation leave us in a certain in-between space. Not in purgatory, but open-mouthed. We live.

She uses the fresco technique in conjunction with contemporary painterly practices. She takes up themes from the natural sciences and relates them to current events. Her exhibitions are actually spatial installations, a special type of transportable fresco that she has developed. They function as independent, mobile objects with which she builds her unique and subtle installations, which she arranges in a refined and unified ambience, in a peculiar chamber outside of time that invites us on a journey. Intimately.

The artist's frescoes, her deliberately chosen motifs with virtuoso brushstrokes, radiate an elemental art, they glow in a characteristically luminous color palette and find their echo in a subtle brushwork that transitions from drawing to painting and vice versa – they literally bathe in their own inherent light and play with us through this clearly defined technique. The dance

of color and light. We are floating. This can evoke very deep memories in us, through which we walk with our eyes open until we realize that we are here and now. We are alive. Then we realize that Maja Šubic is an intergalactic master of space and time travel in the dimensions of our subconscious through the universe of the consciousness of the timelessness of art.

— Peter Tomaž Dobrila

* *The title is borrowed from the fourth part of The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams: So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish (Pivec Publishing House, 2015).*

* **Giotto di Bondone**, Italian painter and architect, from 1267 or 1276 (Vespignano, Italy) to 8 January 1337 (Florence, Italy).

* **Leonardo da Vinci**, Italian Renaissance architect, inventor, scientist, engineer, sculptor and painter, from 15 April 1452 (Vinci, Tuscany, Italy) to 2 May 1519 (Cloux, France).

* **Michelangelo** (full name **Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni**), Italian sculptor, architect, painter and poet, from 6 March 1475 (Caprese, Tuscany, Italy) to 18 February 1564 (Rome, Italy).