

Impressum

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National Museum Zadar

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EXHIBITION

LITHUANIA OF JOY AND SORROW: Cross- Making Tradition



TOWN LODGE
PEOPLE'S SQUARE
ZADAR

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VELEPOSANSTVO
REPUBLIKE LITVE



National
Museum of
Lithuania

Lithuania of Joy and Sorrow: Cross-Making Tradition

Each state and each nation generate values that best reflect the country's uniqueness, its people, its customs, and its values professed and cherished. From ancient times, Lithuania has been famous for its cross-making tradition that was inscribed as a cultural and historical tradition of particular significance on the UNESCO Non-material and Verbal Heritage Masterpiece List in 2001.

The cross-making tradition emerged in Lithuania together with Christianity. When Lithuania accepted the cross as a symbol of its faith, it also acquired the name of the COUNTRY OF CROSSES since the number of crosses was so great that only several tens of metres actually separated them. Fields, waysides, crossroads, water bodies were marked with crosses. There wasn't a single village or a town square without a cross. Moreover, all of those crosses had their special purpose and meaning.

The tradition of cross-crafting gave rise to self-taught artists: cross-makers who through their talent and mastery enriched the tradition of cross-making with new cross forms; god-carvers whose sculptures of saints clearly demonstrated the meaning and the purpose of a monument; and artists smiths whose wrought cross tops highlighted the sacrality of crosses, their special purpose and significance.

Cross-makers decorated one-, two- or three-barred crosses with floral and celestial motifs, thus turning them into blooming constructions. The centre of a cross – where the cross bars intersect – is where the sculpture of the Crucifix is placed; therefore, cross-makers did their best to highlight it with various decorative elements. For example, to protect sculptures from adverse weather conditions, craftsmen covered them with small supported roofs, thus creating a new type of a cross – a roofed-pole; or they made a small "house" for a saint and placed it on a large stone or put it in a tree, thus giving rise to a wayside shrine. Whereas, by bringing a wayside shrine up on a pillar, cross-makers produced one more type of a cross – a chapel pillar. The cross-making tradition underwent destruction and hostility in Lithuania and yet it never ceased; during the ban years, crosses were erected in less visible locations, at nights.

Folk artists' works

When Lithuania regained its independence in 1990, a new stage in cross-crafting – the revival of cross-making – began. Actively engaged cross-makers have been making new and restoring old damaged crosses, while god-carvers have been carving sculptures of saints.

Just like the founding fathers of the cross-making tradition hundreds of years ago, they are of varying age, they have never studied carving, and their creativity draws merely on the innate need for beauty and faith. Continuing the tradition, they also make the saints worshipped by their ancestors, and yet they seek their own ways to express their worldview and the sense of beauty. Some turn to traditional sculpture in the round and emotionally sincere naïve depiction, others prefer monumental carving out of a solid log, while still others choose to work with sculptural groups. Thanks to them, cross-making in Lithuania has been acquiring new forms, more developed plots, and compositions.

The presentation of cross-crafting is like a special confession of the Lithuanian nation. It is in this particular branch of art that Lithuanians have placed more spiritual and creative powers than in any other sphere. We want visitors of this exhibition to feel that here, in this corner of the earth called LITHUANIA, people have always worked a lot, have engaged in creative activities, and have never stopped seeking goodness and beauty. Thank you for your interest in Lithuania.

