

Symbiosis of economy and art, the case of the international sculpture symposium Forma viva in Maribor from 1967 to 1986

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Abstract: Forma viva is an established name for sculpture symposia in Slovenia. The working sites were located in four locations, in Seča near Portorož (stone), in Kostanjevica na Krki (wood), in Ravne na Koroškem (iron) and lastly in 1967 in Maribor (concrete). I will discuss the Forma viva International Sculpture Symposium in Maribor from 1967 to 1986 from the perspective of the symbiosis of the cooperation between business and art. The caring city mayors of Maribor put an urbanistically interesting new approach of artistic creation in the raw concrete settlements at the youngest international sculptors' symposium Forma viva in Maribor. Selected national and international established sculptors are invited to place artworks alongside newly constructed concrete buildings in contemporary new-build dormitory working-class suburbs. And in concrete, at the initiative of the construction company Stavbar. The material posed the greatest challenge to all (co-)stakeholders in (co-)creating a great work of art in an open living environment. The symbiosis between business and art permanently marks the urban space with concrete sculptures by local and international artists. The research question of why there was collaboration between Maribor construction companies and artists, sculptors who realised artistic ideas in the then less known material concrete, will be explained. I used the method of fieldwork with observation of the sculptures created. I studied the literature and interviewed former employees of Stavbar who were involved in the realisation of the artworks. The results are presented with photographs from archives and the recorded memories of Stavbar employees and other stakeholders. In the discussion, I explain why cooperation between business and art is an important aspect of sustainability. Finally, I conclude the debate with suggestions for the care and preservation of the rich cultural heritage and future possibilities for cooperation between business and the arts.

Key-words: Art, Concrete, Economy, Sculpture, Symposium

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1 Introduction

Concrete gained importance in mass construction in the 20th century, beginning in the 1950s. It is particularly established in the years from 1960 to 1970 during the period of Brutalism, the mass construction of concrete housing [1] in the post-war period, as an aspect of class architecture. The class architecture of Brutalism is strongly established in the former Yugoslavia, Slovenia and in the industrially developing Maribor after

the Second World War. The concern of the city mayor's office placed an urbanistically interesting and logical approach of artistic creation in the neighbourhood of raw concrete at the youngest international symposium of sculptors Forma viva in Maribor between 1967 and 1986 [2]. Highly regarded local and foreign artists were invited to the enlarged working-class suburbs of Maribor's streets [3] (Radovanovič, 2015) to install artworks in the building material concrete in newly constructed urban formations (initiated by

the construction company Stavbar), characteristically influencing the transformation and quality of the interspaces of art [4]. It is the creation of artists' ideas in one of the most complex sculptural materials of the time, and which posed the greatest challenge to all (co-)working stakeholders in the (co-) creation and systemic approach [5] in achieving the outlined artistic ideas. I would like to draw attention to the vitality of these sculpture meetings, to their international character, which has followed them throughout Europe and at home. The responsibility for ensuring that the reputation does not dissipate too quickly, does not turn into a mere memory of something that "once was", lies with all of us. The citizens of Maribor are unfortunately not sufficiently aware of the unique enrichment of our environment, and not enough attention is paid to preserving and inspiring young generations of artists and how important it is to be. Cooperation between business and art is not a given, and there is an urgent need to explore this kind of phenomenon and preserve good practices of cooperation for future generations.

2 Purpose and goals

The aim is to present concrete as an artistic material, the role of concrete in the architectural period of Brutalism and to present the international symposium of sculptors Forma Viva in Maribor 1967-1986, the activities of renowned national and international sculptors who worked in concrete. The purpose of the study is to:

- to examine the link between concrete, Brutalism and the international sculpture symposium Forma viva Maribor from 196 to 1986,
- to establish the role and significance of the International Sculptors' Symposium Forma viva

Maribor from 1967 to 1986 in the narrower and wider artistic environment,

- to examine the socio-economic aspects at the time of the International Sculptors' Symposium Forma viva Maribor from 1967 to 1986

- to study the organisational aspects of the International Sculpture Symposium Forma viva Maribor from 1967 to 1986,

- to examine the role and importance of Maribor construction companies in the organisation of the International Sculptors' Symposium Forma viva Maribor 1967-1986,

- to examine the role and participation of key persons during the International Sculptors' Symposium Forma viva Maribor 1967-1986

- to study the sculptors who participated in the International Sculptors' Symposium Forma viva Maribor 1967-1986,

- to find out what is the attitude of the citizens of Maribor towards the rich cultural heritage of manufactured concrete sculptures by local and internationally renowned sculptors,

- to formulate a proposal for the preservation of concrete sculptures as an important cultural heritage of the city of Maribor.

The aim is to study the phenomenon of the international symposium of sculptors Forma viva 1967-1986 in Maribor and to identify the use of concrete as one of the most used materials in construction, but less known and used in the artistic pursuit of sculpture. Concrete as a building material has been strongly established and is particularly emphasised in architecture during the Brutalist period. The aim is also to demonstrate the importance and awareness that the main contemporary condition for a good life is the intelligent and balanced sustainable management of public urban space. In the construction of buildings, in accordance with the guidelines of modern sustainable construction,

developers should take into account and promote the opportunity to incorporate contemporary concrete sculptural works to improve the living environment.

3 Methods

The research concept stems from the choice of the topic of the research on the connection between concrete, Brutalism and the international sculpture symposium *Forma viva* 1967-1986 in Maribor. It is conceived with the formulation of the questions presented in the previous section. This is followed by data collection, which includes fieldwork through observation, photography, study of documentary material from various sources, as well as personal interviews with key stakeholders and interviews with random respondents. This is followed by data classification, analysis, interpretation and storage. The final approach includes construction and synthesis. We have used the following methods to familiarise myself with the content of the research area:

- studying the literature (books, journals, articles, newspapers, reports, standards, etc.);
- studying the content of professional and scientific articles (including the internet);
- study of documents and experiences of experts in the field of art history studies and research on art history and other fields of expertise in Maribor;
- study of documents of construction and other companies in Maribor, which are studies of construction and building projects in Maribor; studies of the companies that have participated in the *Forma Viva* project in Maribor;
- interviews and consultations with experts, artists and other experienced professionals individuals and connoisseurs;

- own experiences and insights are taken into account in the research;
- study of documents from various archives (Maribor Regional Archive, Maribor Cultural Heritage Institute Archive, Maribor Art Gallery Archive, private archives)
- study of documents reported in various media (newspaper, TV, etc.);
- fieldwork of visiting and photographing concrete sculptures and
- conducting 20 to 25 unstructured interviews of selected and random indirect and direct contemporaries of the international sculpture symposium *Forma Viva* in Maribor 1967-1986. Given the objectives and the concept of the research work, a quantitative study was also carried out. For the analysis of the questionnaire on a sample of 120 respondents, we used the descriptive statistical method of research. The main theses raised in the survey, which were not empirically investigated, were tested by means of the questionnaire.

Cooperation between art and business is not a process that is naturally present in the business of all organisations, and therefore, when exploring art-business cooperation in the past, it is necessary to highlight the importance of taking into account the difference between a purely for-profit entrepreneurial orientation and those that favour artistic (co)operation.

4 Results

Due to the size of the survey, we are only giving some partial results. A humanistic urban touch had to be introduced into the concrete masses of the dormitory settlements. The artists' sculptures were a unique opportunity. Art historian dr. Ciglencečki wrote "In the early spring of 1967, the management of the Stavbar construction

company initiated an initiative to support financially and technically a sculpture symposium in concrete in Maribor; the Maribor builders proposed to organise the symposium every three years, starting as early as 1967, and to furnish the housing estates built by Stavbar with concrete sculptures" [2]. Until then, the Maribor worksite had not yet been involved in the organisation of international sculpture symposia. As the chosen material for the symposium in Maribor was concrete, and Stavbar was the contractor of a large-scale housing development, Stavbar took the initiative to work together on the installation of the concrete sculptures as part of the construction projects in order to ensure that the artwork would have enough visitors. In May, the board of directors of Forma Viva made the decision to make Maribor the fourth sculpture workplace as an associate member [2]. Stavbar was the first Maribor construction company to support financially, technically and organisationally the creation of sculptures in concrete by national and international sculptors. At the same time, it supported and worked closely with the secretariat of Forma Viva in Ljubljana. A letter (Letter, 1967) from Branko Avsenak [6], President of the Association of Cultural Workers of Maribor, to Marjan Vidmar, Secretary of Forma Viva in Ljubljana, represented the first steps of a successful symposium in Maribor. The Social Agreement on the Organisation and Functioning of the International Sculptors' Symposium Forma viva, signed in 1974 (Social Agreement, 1974), set out in 30 articles the way in which the International Sculptors' Symposium Forma viva would be organised and function. Three sculptors were selected for the work of the first meeting in Maribor, Takeshi Kudó, Tone Lapajne and Lino Tiné. Mag. Ivan Lorenčič (former headmaster of

the Second Gymnasium from 1982 to 2021) recalls in an interview [7] that the art teacher Vlasta Zorko came to the class one autumn day and told them that they were going to the opening of Forma Viva near the Second Gymnasium. Of course, none of them had any idea what Forma Viva was, and her explanation helped them on their subsequent visit. Forma viva in Maribor was opened by a sculpture by Japanese artist Takeshi Kudo, which they found particularly significant. The sculpture was viewed with interest from all sides, but not much was imagined. Nevertheless, the inauguration has stuck with him to this day, as he said in an interview on 14 June 2024 [7].

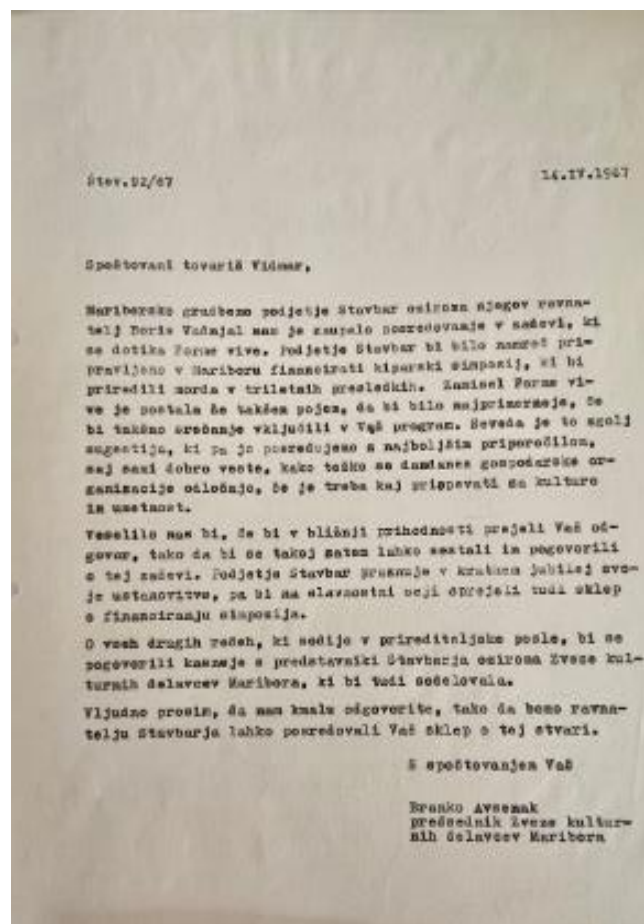


Figure 1: Letter from the Union of Cultural Workers of Maribor, 1967 [8].

Figure 2 shows a concrete sculpture, measuring 360 x 90 x 130 cm, by the Japanese artist Takeshi Kudo (1937-), entitled *Conversation with the Wall*, immediately after its installation in front of the Boomerang block in 7-9 Frankolovska Street. It was opened on 9 November 1967. It was the first concrete sculpture to be created as a result of the collaboration between the artist and the Stavbar company.



Figure 2: Takeshi Kudó: *Conversation with the Wall*, immediately after installation in front of the

Boomerang block in Frankolovska ulica 7-9, material concrete, dimensions 360 x 90 x 130 cm. [9].

Figures 3 and 4 show the sculpture photographed on 11/11/2012 and 22/7/2024. I observed and photographed the sculpture over a twelve-year period to study the preservation of both the sculpture and the embedded concrete. The damage is more evident in Figure 7 than in Figure 6, where weathering and other effects on the sculpture and concrete are more visible. The sculpture is heavily marked with graffiti, small cracks in the concrete are visible, and the identification plate does not reveal the artist, nor does it indicate that the Stavbar company was involved in the execution. Figure 8 shows the condition of the concrete sculpture on 22.7.2024, after restoration. Unfortunately, the restoration of the concrete base of the sculpture was neglected. Despite all this, it must be acknowledged that Stavbar's technologists have designed a concrete that is perfectly able to withstand the effects of the environment.



Figure 3: Forma Viva, Takeshi Kudó, 1967, Conversation with the Wall, Greenery in front of Frankolovska 7-9, November, 2012.



Figure 4: Forma Viva, Takeshi Kudó, 1967, as at 22.7.2024 after restoration, July, 2024.

On 2 February 1974, the newspaper *Večer* published an article entitled "At the Builder's - Ceschia" about the events related to the international symposium of sculptors Forma viva in Maribor. Figure 5 shows Luciano Ceschia (1925-1991) in Stavbar's workshops, where his large sculptures were made. Other sculptures were similarly prepared in the workshops. Figures 5 and 16 show the preparatory work of Maciej Szańkowski (1938-) together with the Stavbar workers.



Figure 5: Forma viva, Luciano Ceschia, 1973, [6], [9].

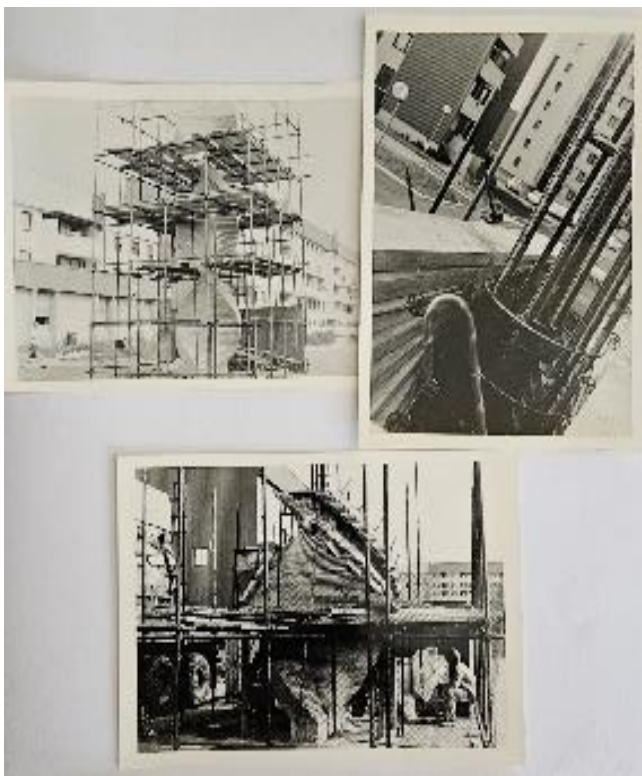


Figure 6: Harunori Fujimoto: preparatory work in 1983 and installation of the sculpture *Spiral* on the site of Staneta Severja Street, Nova vas, material concrete, dimensions 1200 x 180 x 180 cm [10].

Stavbar published a newsletter, which, among other things, presented the achievements of its employees and others in the field of artistic activity. The article emphasises the interconnectedness of business and art, which is a fundamental feature of the Maribor Sculptors' Symposium. Without such an interconnection, it would not have been possible to create concrete art sculptures. In the 1983 issue of the newsletter No. 9, the concrete sculpture entitled *Spiral* by the Japanese artist Harunori Fujimoto is presented in Nova vas, in Staneta Severja Street. It is stressed that Stavbar was the initiator of this manifestation and that it is important to work for culture. The sculpture in Nová vas was the subject of the largest amount of photographic documentary material preserved by Stavbar. In an interview (Gradič, interview 2024) on 5 July 2024, university civil engineer Zdenko Gradič, head of the laboratory at Stavbar in 1983, said: 'For the project of installing a sculpture called *Spiral* by the Japanese artist Harunori Fujimoto, I received a request from the university civil engineer Miroslav Temnik for liquid concrete that could be poured step by step into the formwork. Due to the complexity of the formwork, and in order to satisfy the author, attention was given to the gaps in the formwork, which had to be fully filled. Of course, with good strength and quality in the future lifetime. It was simply said that the concrete should be as flowing as possible. In this context, I designed the concrete recipe, which is given below (Table 1). The recipe takes into account the amount of surface-dry aggregate, so when the concrete is prepared, the moisture content must be subtracted from the total water" [10].

An online survey was also conducted Basic information about the survey on the 1ka.arnes.si website

(<https://1ka.arnes.si/admin/survey/index.php?anka=130269&a=reporti>) is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Final status of the survey 05.08.2024

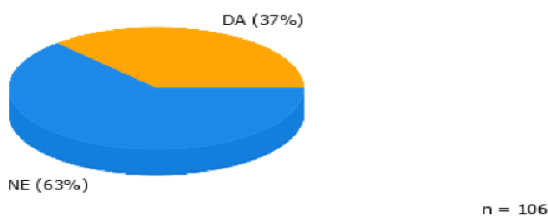
| Metrics | Frequency |
|---------------------------|------------|
| Completed survey (6) 105 | 105 |
| Partially completed (5) 6 | 6 |
| Total 111 | 111 |
| Click on survey (4) 14 | 14 |
| Click to address (3) 200 | 200 |
| Total inadequate 214 | 214 |
| Total surveyed 325 | 325 |
| | 325 |

Source: 2024 survey questionnaire.

Question 13 is an example. Descriptive statistics for question 13 (Graph 1 and Table 1): "Are you aware of the Forma viva sculpture symposium in Maribor?"

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Chart No.1 for question 13



Source: 2024 survey questionnaire.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for question 13

| Q13 | Are you aware of the Forma viva sculpture symposium in Maribor? | Responses | Frequency | Percentage | Valid | Cumulative |
|-------|---|-----------|-----------|------------|----------------|------------|
| 1 | (YES) | | 39 | 35% | 37% | 37% |
| 2 | (NO) | | 67 | 60% | 63% | 100% |
| Valid | Total | | 106 | 95% | 100% | |
| | | | Average | 1,6 | Std. deviation | 0,5 |

Source: 2024 survey questionnaire.

Although 82 respondents or 75% associated the term Forma viva with art and 57 respondents or 52% with sculpture, only 39 respondents or 35% were aware of the Forma viva sculpture symposium in Maribor. It is possible that they recognised Forma viva from the symposia of sculptors held in Seča, Kostanjevica or Ravne na Koroškem. Table 1 gives the frequency of all valid responses.

5 Discussion

The overall conclusion is that Forma Viva has established itself in the urban environment and has fully justified its reputation at home and internationally. The city fathers were aware of the need to place artistic sculptures in the enlarged working-class suburbs of Maribor, and they made sure that Forma Viva was invited to open a new worksite and, logically, to use the material that the employees of the STAVBAR construction company had proposed in 1967, namely concrete. The material, which has so far been the biggest challenge for everyone, proved to be a rewarding experience for all the stakeholders of the manifestation. The stimulus was welcomed with open arms. The main characteristic of the Maribor open-air worksite is that in the creative (co)operation in the realisation of the artist's idea, there is a close involvement between the artist and the performers: the concreters, the

technologists, the structural engineers learn from the sculptor, the adaptation is mutual and reciprocal. This kind of close collaboration is rarely present when the sculptor learns new technological processes from the construction experts, which leads in the end to the realisation of concrete forms that are even difficult to realise. Artists from all over the world, from all five continents, who have so far participated in the international sculpture symposia in Maribor, have proved that concrete, as one of the basic elements in construction, has become familiar to them and can be used for artistic achievements. Even at that time, they pointed out the lack of care in accessing basic information about the artist, title and year of the sculpture, as the placement of the appropriate markings is not timely or cost-effective. The care of cultural heritage is neglected and left to enthusiasts, which is still the case today.

6 Conclusion

From 1967 to 1986, Maribor enriched its urban space with concrete sculptures, the result of the strong construction industry in the former Yugoslavia and the idea of biennials, to which foreign and local sculptors were invited. A precious cultural treasure that the city of Maribor (from the worker to the intellectual, from the peasant to the bourgeois) does not show enough respect to. Sculptures by internationally renowned sculptors are losing their role and significance due to lack of attention, and are in some places unrecognisable and partly abandoned by residents and visitors. Symbolically, the story of Maribor's concrete sculptures is a personal account of Maribor's relationship to public sculpture, with an intertwining narrative of the past of growing industrial development and the mass construction of suburban concrete

dormitory estates, where creative collaborations between the construction industry and renowned national and international artists are taking place to soften the brutal encroachment on the environment. It was no coincidence that Maribor chose concrete, a material so important for the development of humanity, as one of the materials for the realisation of "living forms". The initiators of the promotion of concrete as a sculptural medium, which has been equally included in the Slovenian *Formo vivo*, were the workers of GP Stavbar in 1967. The encouragement was welcomed with open arms, certainly especially because it came directly from the united labour. Thus Stavbar, as the first Maribor construction company, supports financially, technically and organisationally the creation of national and international sculptors in concrete. In the grey concrete of the time. Grey, crude and unfriendly to man, yet internationally open in (co)creation and (co)action, and in the multi- and inter-professional realisation of the artistic ideas of many stakeholders. The artists' sculptures were a unique opportunity to demonstrate their engineering skills, especially in construction and other various areas of expertise. Stavbar went bankrupt in 2011. Its memory has been preserved by the many buildings constructed and, of particular note, the *Forma viva* concrete sculptures by local and internationally renowned sculptors. In order to preserve this rich cultural heritage, more resources will have to be devoted to the care and maintenance of the concrete sculptures in the future. Concrete is a living material that needs careful care and maintenance. Perhaps a custodian should be appointed within the Municipality of Maribor to watch over this precious concrete treasure for future generations.

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