

Zdenko Sila and His Monument at Matić Poljana in Croatia

Emil Jurcan

Emil Jurcan, PhD, Institute of Art History, Ulica grada Vukovara 68, 10000 Zagreb,
ejurcan@ipu.hr, ORCID ID: 0009-0002-3137-4227

Abstract

Zdenko Sila and His Monument at Matić Poljana in Croatia

1.01 Original scientific article

This article examines the monument at Matić Poljana (the Matić Meadow) in Gorski Kotar, Croatia, designed by the architect Zdenko Sila and dedicated in 1969 as one of socialist Yugoslavia's most distinctive examples of memorial culture. Tracing Sila's formal development from early collaborations with Zdenko Kolacio through decades of work with raw, minimally worked stone, and situating it within the traditions of the Slovenian *znamenje*, a postwar self-built memorial practice theorized by Marjan Tepina and Edvard Ravnikar, and the broader European trajectory, this article argues that Sila's key contribution was the replacement of monumental centrality with a memorial flow. By setting the visitor in motion through a sequence of nearly identical objects, and by having the protected zone defined in 1976 as the full three kilometres of trail rather than the monument alone, Sila transformed walking itself into an act of commemoration, advancing the thesis that movement is the essential human act in the experience of space.

Key words: Zdenko Sila, People's Revolution Monument, Matić Poljana, menhir, Katica Brusić

Izveček

Zdenko Sila in njegov spomenik na Matić poljani na Hrvaškem

1.01 Izvirni znanstveni članek

V članku je obravnavan spomenik na Matić poljani (Matičev travnik) v Gorskem kotarju na Hrvaškem, ki ga je zasnoval arhitekt Zdenko Sila in je bil leta 1969 odkrit kot eden najizrazitejših primerov spominske kulture socialistične Jugoslavije. V članku je predstavljen Silov formalni razvoj od začetkov sodelovanja z Zdenkom Kolaciem do več desetletij trajajočega ustvarjanja s surovim, minimalno obdelanim kamnom. Njegovo delo avtor umešča v tradicijo slovenskega obpotebnega znamenja, povojno samograditeljsko spominsko prakso, ki sta jo teoretsko obravnavala Marjan Tepina in Edvard Ravnikar, in širše evropske razvojne tokove. Pri tem zagovarja tezo, da je bil Silov ključni prispevek nadomestitev monumentalnega osrednjega elementa s spominskim tokom. S tem, da je Sila obiskovalca spodbudil h gibanju v smeri skoraj identičnih zaporedno postavljenih objektov in da je zavarovano območje leta 1976 opredelil tako, da je poleg spomenika obsegalo celotne tri kilometre poti, ne le spomenika samega, je hojo samo spremenil v dejanje spominjanja in s tem uveljavil idejo, da je gibanje temeljna človeška aktivnost pri doživljanju prostora.

Ključne besede: Zdenko Sila, spomenik narodni revoluciji, Matić poljana, menhir, Katica Brusić

Introduction

According to the historian Heika Karge, the Fourth Congress of the League of Veterans of Yugoslavia in 1961 was a turning point after which care for the wartime generation and its losses shifted toward concern for future generations: for those that were to inherit and carry forward the achievements of the People's Revolution. As a result, "from the 1960s onward, the League of Veterans attempted to implement various measures directed primarily at younger generations, measures intended to transform the official contents of war memory into a truly collective – that is, cultural – memory."¹ Prompted by this paradigm shift just a year later, a group of mountaineers, in cooperation with the League of Veterans, held an event that was perhaps one of the most extreme examples of memory evocation in Yugoslavia: a memorial winter march approximately 30 kilometres long across Matić Poljana (the Matić Meadow) in Gorski Kotar, Croatia, staged in commemoration of members of the Partisans' 13th Primorje–Gorski Kotar Division that, on the stormy night of 19 February 1944, froze to death "in their own world of hallucinatory visions."² To inscribe this memory into the bodies of new generations as compellingly as possible, the event did not merely replicate the march along a demanding mountain trail. It also took place at the same time of year, in February, when Gorski Kotar lies under snow. Given the nature of this memorial culture event, only around twenty participants attended in the early years because the extreme march "took place in conditions of deep snow, low temperatures, and snowfall, when all participants are required to be in good physical condition, technically prepared, and equipped with adequate gear."³

However, this annual ritual of a group of mountaineers marching along a historic Partisan trail through the mountains soon gave rise to the idea of creating a monument along that route. Prompted by this initiative, Neda Andrić (1927–2010), the president of the assembly of the Rijeka district, brought the architect Zdenko (Zdeněk) Sila (1915–1997) to Matić Poljana in October 1966. Sila was the director of the Rijeka Urban Planning Institute, by then an already renowned creator of various monuments to the People's Revolution, and – no less importantly – a passionate mountaineer that had gained experience building in inaccessible mountain terrain as early as the beginning of the 1950s, when he designed mountain lodges on Snježnik and Platak above Rijeka, carrying the building materials up on his own shoulders together with members of the mountaineering society.⁴

"Matić Poljana was bathed in autumn sunlight and smelled of fir forest," Sila begins his diary entry of this encounter with the mountain.

¹ Karge, *Sećanje u kamenu*, 32.

² Brusić, "Matić poljana ledeni put." "Among the exhausted, starving, tired, and frozen fighters, hallucinations were a frequent occurrence. This unforeseen situation completely confused the weary fighters because they did not know how to apply the necessary treatment." This statement was recorded by Katica Brusić from a participant in the march, Slavko Pleše; see Državni arhiv u Rijeci (HR DARI), fond Katica Brusić HR-DARI-1300-5-6-5-13. For the organization of the event, see Židan, "Memorijalni skijaški pohod."

³ Škerl, "Tragom boraca II brigade."

⁴ Smokvina, "Dom na 1.111 metara." See also "Planinarski dom na Snježniku;" "Planinarski dom na Plaku." Zdeněk Sila was born in Prague in 1927 in the family of a Slovenian father and a Czech mother, with whom he moved to Maribor under the Nazi invasion, where he attended high school. He studied architecture in Ljubljana under Jože Plečnik, and in 1941 moved to Rijeka and began his long professional career. Then he changed his name to Zdenko, and after World War II he established himself in creating urban plans for the wider area of Rijeka, Istria, and the Kvarner Gulf. In 1990, he received the Vladimir Nazor award from the Croatian Ministry of Culture for his life's work.

A perfect silence reigned over the entire expanse of the pasture. We were accompanied by several comrades, former fighters and participants in the tragic event. The living survivors evoked the events on the very spot to such a degree that I was able to immerse myself in the movement of the column of exhausted and frozen fighters through ice and blizzard. In that moment I was confronted with the task of how to transform the vision of a column of fighters from the imagination into a lasting message expressed in matter. In the next instant, naive as a child, the idea came to me to turn the imagined column of fighters into a real column – a column composed of natural stones from the mountain, resembling the menhirs of the distant past.⁵

A year later, during the summer, Sila returned to Matić Poljana, this time with a group of forest rangers and workers from the local forestry service.⁶ There, on a clearing 1,033 metres above sea level, he arranged twenty-six people into a long column, adjusting their positions and the distances between them until he had achieved the desired spatial relationship between the elongated meadow on its gentle slope, the contour of the dense and impenetrable forest, and the open mountain sky. “Instead of producing the customary project documentation in the domain of landscape architecture, I approached the creation of the column in space directly, by placing living people into a real and lifelike column that we could plastically model and observe in actual space,”⁷ Sila wrote, describing this unusual event. Once the positioned human bodies had achieved the desired effect, each person carefully marked his or her position, whereupon at those spots they themselves erected previously selected unworked pieces of rock face brought to the clearing from Žilavi Dolci on Mount Bitoraj. Through this act, the imagined human column was petrified in space, and the result of this collective action was dedicated the following summer, on 27 July 1969, the Day of the People’s Uprising in Croatia. Thus Sila, together with his comrades from the Mrkopalj Forestry Service, completed his vision in which “the menhirs at Matić Poljana, united with the mountain, recognizable as an abstraction of human figures, wander forever through the murmurs of summer and through the silences of snow.”⁸

⁵ Sila, “Kako je stvoren spomenik.”

⁶ HR DARI, HR-DARI-1300-5-6-4-3. The engineer Stjepan Varga of the Mrkopalj Forestry Service described the location during a field inspection on 14 July 1976: “The area is typically karst in character, with many small sinkholes, largely filled with material from the surrounding mountains. The sinkholes frequently renew themselves or new ones form, into which rainwater drains. There has never been a watercourse, nor is there one today, despite the large catchment area. The geological substrate is sedimentary limestone. The pasture itself is covered by a shallower or deeper layer of sand, clay, and loam.”

⁷ Sila, “Kako je stvoren spomenik.”

⁸ Sila, “Kako je stvoren spomenik.” According to the same article, the first on-site meeting related to the placement of the monument took place on 8 October 1966; on 1 July 1967 the selection, extraction, and transport of the stone pieces, organized by the Mrkopalj Forestry Service, began; on 12 August 1967 the living column was staged in the pasture and the locations for the placement of the stones were marked; the actual placement took place from the end of September until 20 November 1968, when the monument was completed. Given the harsh mountain conditions, the dedication did not take place until the following summer.

Menhirs and wandering

The very elements of the composition – twenty-six stone verticals – are not, strictly speaking, menhirs. To express their morphological resemblance to human figures, Sila approached the resolution of form by assembling each one from two pieces of stone joined together by a metal rod, thereby achieving slender silhouettes standing between 2.0 and 2.3 m tall, with a base diameter of 80 to 100 cm tapering toward the top by 10 to 20 cm.⁹ He then placed the stone figures at unequal intervals along the meadow, creating a rhythmic line that traces a gentle curve almost 300 m long. In this way, raw and unworked stone matter detached from the mountain was used to produce an abstract geometric form that is unmistakably a human creation, “both the work of the blind force of nature and the fruit of the logic of thoughtful experience”,¹⁰ in the words of the art historian Vanda Ekl (1920–1993), who astutely observes that this monument has neither beginning nor end, its extension capable of continuing indefinitely. The conservator Katica Brusić (1934–2016) described the same operation some years later, while compiling documentation for the inscription of this site in the register of cultural monuments: “The stone elements are strung rhythmically along a gentle curve. We experience them as the slow trudge of frozen human figures. Their creator, Sila, succeeded with these verticals, which have merged into the Gorski Kotar landscape, in uniting man and nature.”¹¹ Through this multiplication of solitary stones into a rhythmic series, Sila created a singular monument that, as Luka Skansi observes, has no centre but “just a ‘memorial flow’: we experience the monument spatially through time, walking from stone to stone, discovering step by step the diversity of the single upright stones, their spatial relationships, and learning about invisible incidents through time (crossing a ditch, hiding behind a tree), until the column takes us out into the woods, where it disappears.”¹²

By placing a hypothetically infinite monument that has no centre but simply extends along the path into the memorial flow described above, the winter marches through Gorski Kotar gained not only a symbolic superstructure but also legitimization. Sila’s work at Matić Poljana was literally created as a monument to human walking – that primary act that anthropomorphized wild nature. It is therefore unsurprising that he made use of elements resembling menhirs, given that their very appearance was closely bound up with the primary actions of humankind. According to the interpretation of the architect Francesco Careri:

*[W]e can view the menhir as the first inorganic sculpture, a symbolic, non-mimetic form that carries inside it the home and the image of God, the column that was to give rise to architecture, and the statue that was to give rise to sculpture. But the menhir is also the first symbolic construction of the Earth’s surface that transforms the landscape from a natural to an artificial state. Therefore, the menhir contains architecture, sculpture, and landscape.*¹³

⁹ HR DARI, HR-DARI-1300-5-6-4-3. “The base of the stone plinth measures 110 cm, tapering toward the top to 1 m, with a height of 90 cm. Each individual marble slab is 140 cm wide.” Alongside the stone column, Sila placed at the very crossroads a three-sided stone prism made of marble slabs, set on a concrete base clad in unworked stone, on which texts are inscribed. In early autumn 1968, pupils at the primary school in Mrkopalj were assigned the task of writing a composition on the subject of the events, and from the works submitted the texts of Gordana Rupa and Jadranka Matković, two seventh-year pupils, and Dubravko Došen, a fifth-year pupil, were selected.

¹⁰ Ekl, “Memorijal dvadeset šest,” 30.

¹¹ HR DARI, HR-DARI-1300-5-6-5-13.

¹² Skansi, “Space, Magic and Remembrance,” 148.

¹³ Careri, *Walkscapes*, 134–36.



1. Bogdan Bogdanović:
Slobodište Memorial
Complex on Bagdala
Hill in Kruševac, Serbia,
1960–1965 (source: Bajić,
Jugoslavija, 202; photo:
Miodrag Đorđević)

One of the earliest examples of modern aptness in the application of menhirs in landscape design was the monumental ensemble by the sculptor Constantin Brâncuși (1878–1957) in Târgu Jiu in 1937, and in local contexts this expression is certainly most closely associated with the Belgrade architect Bogdan Bogdanović (1922–2010) and his monuments to the revolution in socialist Yugoslavia (fig. 1).¹⁴

Beyond its temporal ubiquity that reaches back to the Neolithic, the menhir was also well suited to establishing unifying relational bonds on account of its ambiguous, or rather multi-evocative, symbolic meaning. It could represent the human figure, as in the case of Sila's monument; it could mark the place where certain heroes had died; but it could equally be employed in the service of a fertility cult, of the Earth Goddess, or of the Sun God. Chthonic energy could likewise be attributed to it, just as it was used to mark the location of a source of fresh water or the boundaries of a given territory. To all of these interpretations, Careri adds a semantic one, in which the menhir takes on certain properties of a medium – more precisely, of a record:

This reference to writing can, in fact, explain at least three different uses of the monoliths: surfaces on which to inscribe symbolic figures, elements with which to write on the territory, and signals with which to describe the territory. The first interpretation of the term littera-das simply refers to the fact that on the main face of some of the stones different symbols

¹⁴ For a phenomenological reading of Bogdanović's monuments, see Shear, "Martin Heidegger."

are placed, as on the Egyptian obelisks. The second indicates that these stones were used to architecturally construct the landscape as a sort of geometry – seen in the etymological sense of “measurement of the earth” – with which to design abstract figures to oppose natural chaos: the point (the isolated menhir); the line (the rhythmical alignment of multiple stones); the surface (the cromlech, or the portion of space enclosed by menhirs placed in a circle). The third interpretation indicates that the stones, beyond geometry, also revealed the geography of the place, serving to describe its physical structure and its productive and/or mystical-religious utilization. In other words, they were signals placed along the major routes of crossing.¹⁵

Careri emphasizes precisely this last significance of menhirs – especially those arranged in a series, along the wandering paths of former Palaeolithic nomads – where they serve as waymarkers, indicating the direction of movement, the crossing of multiple routes, and as orientation points of a primary human geography. This interpretation, as shall be seen later, can also be applied to the example of the line of menhirs placed at Matić Poljana. However, before that, it is necessary to establish more precisely the formal path that Sila took in arriving at the menhir as an object.

Zdenko Kolacio's path to the menhirs

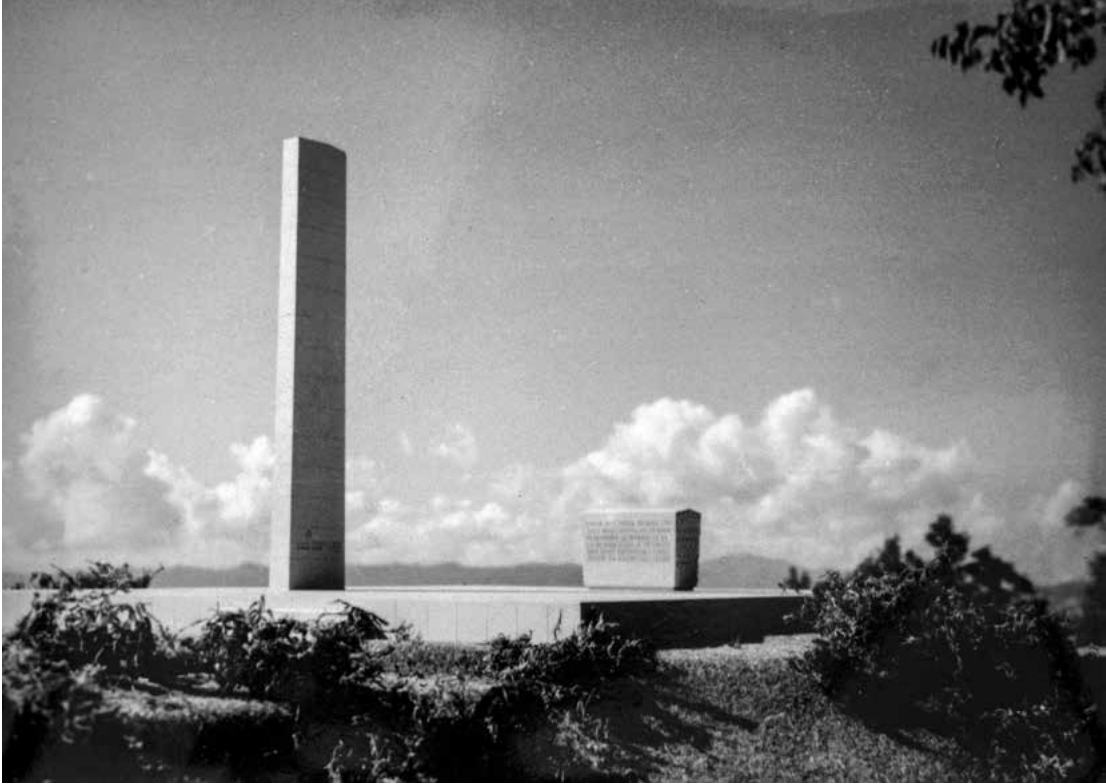
Sila made his first monuments to the People's Revolution in the early 1950s in collaboration with architect Zdenko Kolacio (1912–1987). Already in their first joint work – Vladimir Gortan's tomb below the village of Beram in Istria, built in 1953 – the feature of a geometrically rigid hexagonal obelisk clad in stone slabs is present, placed alongside a horizontal *stećak* (a medieval tombstone present in the central part of the former Yugoslavia) on a shared raised plinth (fig. 2). After the conclusion of their fruitful collaboration in the second half of the 1950s, Kolacio continued to engage with the question of memorial sculpture design far more intensively than his colleague Sila. Yet, in almost all of his later works, one can trace the formal echo of that first, shared Istrian piece, with its applied composition of a freestanding vertical and horizontal object in space. This compositional principle, according to the art historian Darko Venturini, is the one “with which Kolacio's first great and undeniable success in monument construction is associated – a success that (one could hardly doubt it) largely predestined and mapped out his path. From it, as from a compositional base, the majority of his other compositional routes branch out.”¹⁶ Although Venturini attributes this point of origin exclusively to Kolacio, omitting his co-author Sila, an analysis of Kolacio's subsequent monumental works makes it possible to more clearly perceive the similarities and differences that Sila developed in this area during his later phase.

The first significant work that Kolacio carried out independently in monument design was a memorial at the site of the founding Congress of the Communist Party of Croatia, built in 1959 in Anindol near Samobor. As with Vladimir Gortan's tomb, here the vertical and horizontal elements of the composition are placed on a shared shallow plinth but not as separate objects. Rather, they are tectonically joined as a cubic vertical pier supporting a horizontal rounded beam.¹⁷ A year later,

¹⁵ Careri, *Walkscapes*, 51–52.

¹⁶ Venturini, “Memorijalni opus arhitekta,” 41.

¹⁷ Kolacio, “Spomen blok u Samoboru.”



2. Photo of the model of Vladimir Gortan's tomb, sent in Sila's letter to Plečnik, 1952
(© Muzej in galerija mesta Ljubljane, Plečnikova zbirka)

Kolacio participated in the conception and creation of a series of monuments across Slavonia, when he was entrusted – together with the architect Grozdan Knežević (1928–2008) and the landscape architect Silvana Seissel (1912–2010) – with marking sites in Komletinci near Vinkovci, Vrbik near Vukovar, Soboština, and Kamenski Vučjak near Slavonska Požega. In addition, Kolacio was charged with designing monuments at the Bulgarian cemetery not far from Ilok and at cemeteries in Ilok and Šarengrad.¹⁸ This entire series of monuments was conceived in geometrically abstract terms, once again by means of vertical and horizontal stone elements that mutually explore the relationships of dynamic equilibrium and tectonic principles of division into load-bearing and supported parts. In Vrbik, Kolacio placed a freestanding obelisk with a raised horizontal block before it; at the Bulgarian cemetery, he placed a horizontal beam on a vertical pier; and at the cemetery in Šarengrad he created a tall pier carrying a broken horizontal architrave. Within this formal play, Kolacio repeated a minimalist, cold, and rigid object reduced to a sign. However, the purpose of these formal operations was precisely to shift the focus away from the monument itself toward the landscape in which it is positioned. Its height determines distance; the horizontal and vertical establish the coordinate system of the ground. The apparatus thus conceived appropriates the surrounding space, marks it, and directs viewers to participate in the experience of space in a collective sensory and kinetic engagement.

¹⁸ Kolacio, "Spomenici narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi."

Such an approach led Kolacio ever deeper into the exploration of spatial relationships in the environment, imagining monuments that erase the boundaries between architecture, sculpture, and landscape – three media that in the years to come were moving ever more rapidly toward a common synthesis. After completing the Slavonian monument series, in 1961, together with the architect Knežević, Kolacio installed a memorial in Zagreb's Vrapče neighbourhood, repeating the pattern of the horizontal on the vertical with the addition of a further separate vertical; and the following year he independently created a memorial in Ferdinandovac near Đurđevac, where the formal sequence of joined horizontal and vertical reached its culmination. As with all the monuments enumerated above, Kolacio here too took his departure from the environment. "The chosen site, surrounded by tall old trees, influenced both the dimensions and the conception of the monument. A massive stone base grows from the earth and supports an elongated block with an incised inscription."¹⁹ The element of the stone vertical growing directly from the earth had already been applied at Komletinci, which for Venturini represents a specific solution within Kolacio's oeuvre because it is realized by means of a single monolithic stone element that, contrary to expectation, is shaped in sharp and geometricized planes. "Among all the menhirs designed, that is the only one conceived as a smoothly dressed stone. Not by chance, of course, for in the broad Slavonian plain there was no other way. In the Slavonian mud, an undressed stone monolith rising from a completely flat surface would appear not only artificial and unnatural but also out of place. On the contrary, with its dressed planes, the monument is deliberately estranged from the landscape and appears as a decidedly artificial, geometrically condensed, and Euclidean form amid the indifference and near-amorphousness of that landscape."²⁰

While independently creating all the monuments enumerated above, Kolacio was simultaneously participating in the design of several significant works with the sculptor Kosta Angeli Radovani (1916–2002), who was himself at that time engaged in carrying out a series of formal operations by which he had gradually moved from the human figure to the shape of the menhir. Although Radovani and Kolacio were given the opportunity to build a joint synthesis in 1961 in Šibenik, their other collaborative works from that period were nonetheless never realized. Specifically, at the same time as Šubićevac Memorial Park in Šibenik was being constructed, Radovani and Kolacio participated in the competition for a monument to commemorate the establishment of workers' self-management at the Zenica ironworks, where they won first prize. Alongside a clear and comprehensive urban planning solution for the entrance to that largest Yugoslav factory, in the authors' own words the central sculpture was to be placed vertically in a shallow basin "like an upright palm before the eyes of those approaching."²¹ This monument was conceived as a concrete block seven metres wide, three metres thick, and nearly ten metres tall, cast in a single piece, into the front face of which ten reliefs produced in a stainless alloy would be impressed, bearing images from the life of the working collective. Although not designed in stone, for Venturini this concrete monolith with its metal reliefs represented a continuation of the exploration of the menhir theme, one that here "constitutes an abandonment of the geometric, strict, and Euclidean artificial expression and an acceptance of the

¹⁹ "Spomenik u Ferdinandovcu." That base reminded Nikolaus Pevsner "of the gift offered by the fingers of a hand;" see Pevsner, "Kolacio Memorials," 222.

²⁰ Venturini, "Memorijalni opus arhitekta," 40.

²¹ Radovani and Kolacio, "Spomenik u čast radničkog," 25.

opposing, organically conceived approach.”²² In other words, in the Zenica monument one can observe a formal withdrawal from the sphere of the geometrically abstract obelisk toward the organic qualities of Neolithic menhirs. A similar gesture was repeated in 1963 in their competition entry for a monument in Podgarić, consisting of an atrium enclosed by recessed walls, outside which stands a cubic vertical bearing a shaped relief and text, intertwined in such a way as to form an organic surface of the monument.

A step further in such treatment of mass was taken by Radovani and Kolacio in the same year, in their proposal for a vertical element in the monument to the victims of the Podhum massacre at Grobničko Polje above Rijeka, which the architect Igor Emili (1927–1987) had already begun to make earlier. According to his idea, two tall rounded walls were created at that location, assembled in the traditional manner of dry-stone walling, enclosing the site of the atrocity.²³ These two walls form a near-circular shape in the landscape of the field, but they do not meet. Instead, their offset creates narrow passages through which the monument is approached. Within this zone, one larger and one smaller field of orthogonal stone grave markers are arranged in a square grid. Although Emili designed his work as horizontal and absorbed into the broad expanse of Grobničko Polje, the need arose for the placement of a vertical element within the given complex, and so Kolacio and Radovani proposed the insertion of a spatial accent to be sculpturally shaped as a monumental menhir. Here the sculpture abandons any analogy both with geometric and architectural bodies and with figurative human ones, and passes into an autonomous reference to a freestanding stone mass in space – such as any piece of rock. The sculptural mass, in this phase of Radovani and Kolacio’s formal inquiry, became an artificial menhir.²⁴

Slovenian wayside shrines

Although Sila and Kolacio began their activity in the design of monuments to the People’s Revolution together, and they retained a certain shared sensibility toward the environment in their works thereafter, Sila’s path to the menhir differs in essential respects from that of Kolacio. Whereas Kolacio was engaged in the reduction of the formal elements of Vladimir Gortan’s tomb and their geometric rearrangement with the aim of achieving a minimal and singular sign of spatial presence, Sila set out from the same tomb along his own path of inquiry into the presence of the sheer materiality of a given spatial element – a theme inseparable from his Ljubljana education under Jože Plečnik (1872–1957) between 1934 and 1941. The Slovenian context, with which Sila remained connected throughout his entire life, offered an interesting phenomenon immediately after the end of the Second World War in the form of the large-scale erection of memorials at sites of specific wartime events, carried out by the protagonists themselves – former Partisans and local inhabitants. In the opinion of Edvard Ravnikar (1907–1993), this phenomenon resulted in Slovenia having more monuments erected than probably all other parts of Yugoslavia combined. “This particularity undoubtedly stems from typical

²² Venturini, “Memorijalni opus arhitekta,” 40.

²³ Kolacio, “Spomen - groblje u Podhumu.”

²⁴ Pauletto and Maroević, *Kosta Angeli Radovani*, 76–77.

Slovenian conditions. Especially with regard to numbers, we must take into account the very broad response of the people to the organized impulse for their construction,”²⁵ Ravnikar stated.

Sculptors, architects, and visual artists were not in a position to produce such a quantity of memorials and were often not even consulted by local inhabitants, and so the architect Marjan Tepina (1913–2004), also a student of Plečnik and a school contemporary of Sila that had gained experience working with Le Corbusier and Ravnikar, decided to influence the shaping of monuments through a series of professional guidelines addressed to local communities, published in several articles in the Slovenian journal of the League of Veterans. Tepina thus advised builders to “find a strong rock in a beautiful natural setting that can itself become a monument after minimal working, perhaps even with nothing more than the carving of an inscription plaque.”²⁶ Such a monument should be made from a single piece of stone, worked as little as possible, and retained in a simple form; all the more important, then, to select as large a piece of rock as possible, one whose very appearance would give the impression of a monument. In addition to this self-build formula, Tepina offered the same advice with an eye to the difficult accessibility of the sites of the People’s Revolution, as well as to the harsh climatic conditions prevailing in those predominantly mountain locations:

*One must take into account that our natural stones – the semi-marbles and limestones most commonly used – do not weather our harsh climate well, and that small monument forms and their details are not durable, and sculptural works made from such stone even less so. / . . . / The durability of a monument is secured above all by a construction technique that uses individual pieces of material that are as large as possible. There is no doubt that a large monolith – that is, a single large standing stone – worked into a regular geometric form, in terms of durability as well as beauty and grandeur, and finally – which is often decisive – in terms of cost, is the most suitable and most accessible form of monument to the National Liberation Struggle.*²⁷

Although it is unknown how far Tepina’s advice influenced the erection of standing stones in the Slovenian mountains, or how many such markers exist in total, there are known examples of monuments by various architects that were inspired by such local practices, among which those of Marjan Šorli (1915–1975) stand out in particular (fig. 3).²⁸

In this mass phenomenon of the self-initiated erection of monuments across Slovenia, Ravnikar sought the possibility of establishing a genesis of formal development. “The first thing that came to our people’s minds was the wayside shrine (*znamenje*) – as a landscape marker that, in the broader region where Slovenians also live, had for centuries and millennia been the principal form of commemorating fateful events. Perhaps we are not far from the truth in thinking that this is a general regional archetype.”²⁹ The wayside shrine had in fact been used in his own monuments by Plečnik himself, and, according to the art historian Peter Krečič, the teacher transmitted this approach to his

²⁵ Ravnikar, “Če se ozremo nazaj,” 31.

²⁶ Tepina, “O arhitekturi spomenikov,” 103.

²⁷ Tepina, “O trajnosti spomenikov,” 86.

²⁸ For Šorli’s monument below Storžič, see Šorli, “Spomeniki NOB na prizoriščih.”

²⁹ Ravnikar, “Če se ozremo nazaj,” 31.



3. Marjan Šorli: *The monument to the People's Liberation War below Mount Storžič*, 1952 (source: *Arhitekt 16* (1955): 18).

students as well.³⁰ Although such traditional shrines across Slovenia differ in size, dimensions, form, stylistic character, and in the purpose for which they were erected, what they share in common – argues the art historian and conservator Marijan Zadnikar (1921–2005) – is an objecthood situated somewhere between architecture and sculpture, as well as their pronounced connectedness with the landscape in which they are placed. In his description, wayside shrines are “religious objects, standing freely in nature, picturesquely connected with groups of trees or with mountain landscapes, which may also stand in the middle of urban areas or at the centre of rural settlements. In their design they imitate architectural elements – aediculas or columns – and therefore do not enclose their own interior volume in the manner of an aedicula, but merely condense the exterior, infinite space around them, similarly to trees in a landscape or to public monuments, obelisks, triumphal arches, fountains, and so on in urban areas.”³¹ Among all the possible settings for wayside shrines described above, those that seem to Zadnikar the most interesting are the ones not bound to any particular urban or rural space but standing amid a natural landscape with which they achieve close connection. “In the middle of fields and meadows they stand as a reliable waymarker for the

³⁰ Krečić, *Spomeniki NOB Jožeta Plečnika*. For a more detailed analysis of Plečnik’s monuments, see Prelovšek, “Monuments by the Architect.” See also Hrausky, “Plečnik’s Monuments.”

³¹ Zadnikar, “Slovenska znamenja,” 39.

traveller, and in the middle of a forest they surprise the hiker where two paths fork and only one is the right one; elsewhere they follow mountain passes between two valleys or preserve the memory of abandoned trails that people today have avoided in choosing the flatter road. Very often, wayside shrines have chosen trees for their companions, especially when they stand in an isolated spot or on a dominant hill from which they offer a view of the surroundings.”³²

However, the art historian Christian Fuhrmeister argues that what Ravnikar imagines as a general regional archetype in fact has a very clearly identifiable point of origin in German war memorials of the nineteenth century, when glacial erratic boulders began to symbolize a heroic national past. At that time, the German national cult was being transferred into what Fuhrmeister calls the nationalization of material – that is, the naturalization of the political concept of the nation in the geological and natural characteristics of the land. “By the end of the First World War, the meaning of erratic boulders was firmly established. They had become a standard element in the national-conservative cult of the dead and were understood as signs of Germanic tradition, of German pride. Their use for war memorials signified war as a *natural* catastrophe.”³³ This approach, according to Fuhrmeister, was further radicalized after the First World War during the National Socialist terror, when the boulders were interpreted as relics of a high culture that allegedly proved the early superiority of the German race. In the 1930s, this approach led to the phenomenon of the *Findlingsseuche* – the “boulder plague” – when the Third Reich was inundated with war memorials making use of glacial rock.³⁴ Yet, despite this, what Fuhrmeister finds interesting about the use of standing stones for memorial and artistic purposes is that it did not cease with the defeat of Nazism but continued after the Second World War as well.

*Since the 1950s, erratic boulders have been employed for monuments of virtually all kinds, dedicated to the memory of individuals and groups. / . . . / As a result of this strange inflation, the relationship between the material and the message – the signifier and the signified – rarely manifests the closeness that governed the use of boulders in the public sphere before 1945.*³⁵

Fuhrmeister thus draws attention to the sculptor Bernhardt Bylandt-Rheydt (1905–1998), who likewise connects the use of monoliths in his work to prehistoric times, but also to the contemporary sculpture of biomorphic abstraction by Hans Arp, Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore, and others. One might add here the Austrian sculptor Karl Prantl (1923–2010), initiator of the international sculpture symposium in the Burgenland quarry of Sankt Margarethen in 1959, whose aim was to bring together sculptors from western and eastern Europe in the era of Cold War division. This initiative attracted the Slovenian sculptor Janez Lenassi (1927–2008), as did Jakob Savinšek (1922–1961) a year later, prompting them in 1961 to launch a similar symposium in Seča near Portorož for sculpture

³² Zadnikar, “Znamenja – spomeniki,” 7.

³³ Fuhrmeister, “The Advantages of Abstract Art,” 114.

³⁴ According to the design of the landscape architect Wilhelm Hübotter (1895–1976), in 1934 some 4,500 monoliths were collected at Verden near Bremen to commemorate 4,500 Saxons that had supposedly been beheaded by Charlemagne because they had refused to convert to Christianity. In Hösseringen, two years later, an arrangement of menhirs similar to that of Carnac was installed for use in newly established “celebrations of the summer and winter solstice in the tradition of blood and soil.” See Fuhrmeister, “The Advantages of Abstract Art,” 114–16.

³⁵ Fuhrmeister, “The Advantages of Abstract Art,” 110.

in stone, and in Kostanjevica na Krki for ones in wood, under the name *Forma Viva*.³⁶ Thus the reworked types of nationalized matter gradually crossed the Alps – first through local self-initiative, then through the progressive and popular activity of Slovenian architects, and then through the international activity of sculptors – eventually reaching the Kvarner Gulf in the work of Sila.

Zdenko Sila's monuments

The use of found and unworked stone matter was not foreign to Sila from the very beginning of his creative activity. As early as the early 1950s he placed a piece of raw rock in Pula that he used for a fountain in a park designed in collaboration with Kolacio.³⁷ However, returning to their first monumental work – Vladimir Gortan's tomb below Beram – it can be seen how, unlike Kolacio, who continued from that experience to move in geometric compositions of materially homogeneous signs, Sila chose a different path. Although both were responsible for conceiving the abstract composition of this monument, Sila was far more involved in the actual construction of the work, in which the three geometric elements mentioned above were carefully created such that each element is made from stone of a different origin and with a different finish – from the broken elements of the horizontal plinth, through the hand-tooled slabs of the obelisk, to the smoothly polished surfaces of the monolithic *stećak*.³⁸

Sila retained this relationship to the tactile effect of the monument and further developed it in his independent works, in a manner similar to his Slovenian colleagues. Thus in 1954 he erected a monument in Orehovica near Rijeka using two minimally worked massive stone slabs pressed close together. The slabs are likewise placed on a raised plinth, as in Vladimir Gortan's tomb; their visible faces are minimally finished by grinding, and the lateral edges are roughly broken. A year later, on Mount Platak, beside the mountain lodge he had previously designed, he assembled a monument from five roughly hewn stone blocks arranged in an asymmetric vertical. The same treatment was applied in the wall at the cemetery in Bakar in 1957, where a memorial plaque was placed to the victims of the sunken ship *Ljubljana*. Unlike the monument on Mount Platak, which develops vertically, here the rough tectonics are emphasized by a horizontal composition of projecting rectangular stone blocks – a formal detail that Kolacio and Kosta Angeli Radovani repeated and accentuated in Šubićevac Memorial Park in Šibenik five years later.

However, beyond the refined sensibility for texture through which matter speaks in his monumental works, Sila also frequently returned in his pieces to the composition of Vladimir Gortan's tomb, repeating its structure of three autonomous elements. Thus, at Viškovo Cemetery in 1959 he placed three roughly hewn vertical stone monoliths for the graves of the Cetina brothers, along with a further one for the grave of Vitomir Širola (nom de guerre Pajo; fig. 4). Each vertical is individualized by its own geometric form, while simultaneously unified into a spatial composition by a shared material and texture. A year earlier, at Banderovo in Rijeka, he had placed three inverted trapezoidal stone slabs that he had not even roughly worked but retained with the sawn surfaces

³⁶ See Čopič, "Forma viva." For a contemporary approach to the topic, see Ciglencečki, "Forma viva Maribor."

³⁷ Arhiv Odsjeka graditeljskog nasljeđa Pula (GNP), folder 7: Zdenko Sila; Zdenko Kolacio, Design for a Park between Yugoslav Army Street and A. Gramsci Street in Pula, Scale 1:200, 1950.

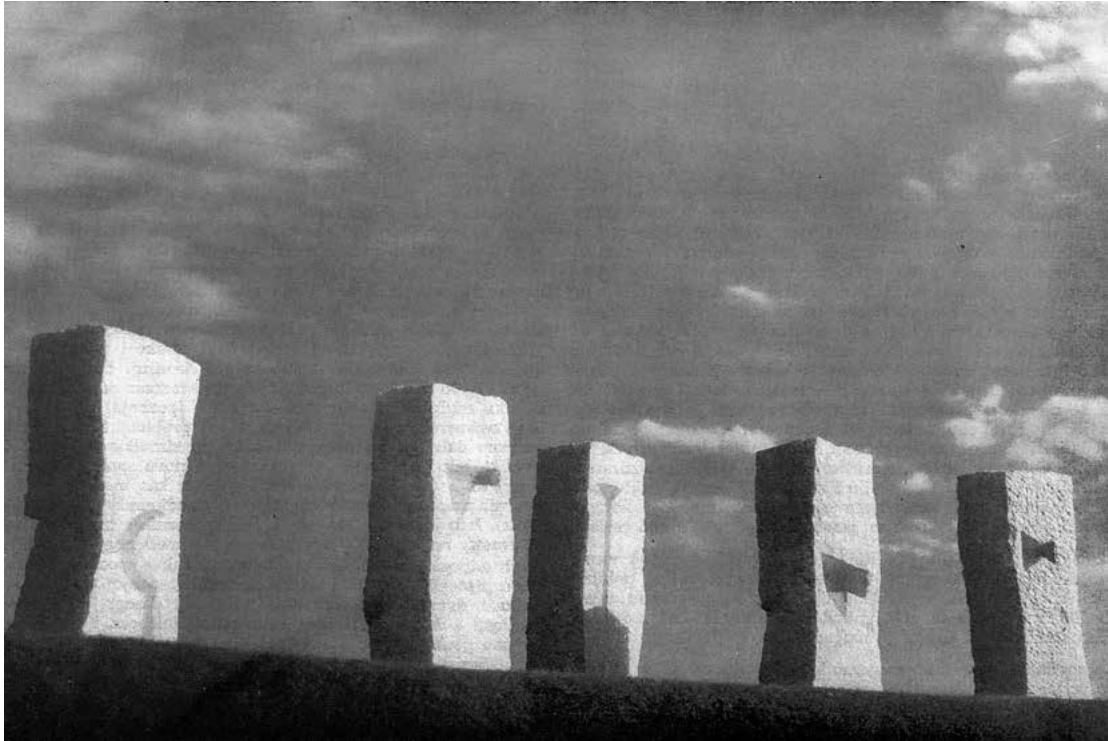
³⁸ Jurcan, "Spomenik Vladimirju Gortanu."



4. Graves of Vitomir Širola and the Cetina brothers at Viškovo Cemetery. (HR-DARI 1300-5-6-8-7-48-1; photo: Vinko Malinarić, 1972)



5. Monument at Tićan in Istria (personal archive of Danilo Vadanjel; photo: Danilo Vadanjel, 1966)



6. Model of the monument on the island of Ist (source: *Arhitektura* 19, no. 155 (1975): 11)

as they came from the quarry, leaning them together only at their upper points to form a porous inverted pyramid. Here Sila had already approached the aesthetics of the ready-made object, further reducing the degree of working applied to the stone surface.

Through the multiplication of elements in composition, Sila explored their interrelationship – the space between objects that on one hand creates a defined open space, and on the other encourages visitors to move through and interact with the artefact itself. A further step forward in this approach was taken in 1965 in Istria near the village of Tićan, where he placed seven monolithic stone blocks at a crossroads – also roughly hewn, as at Platak and Viškovo Cemetery – into which he carved his familiar images of peasant tools, just as at Vladimir Gortan's tomb (fig. 5). This monument too is conceived without a centre, in a free disposition of vertical elements in space, through whose arrangement the composition inevitably changes with movement, and the relationships between elements shift depending on one's position. "When we look at the monument from a distance, we see that the seven standing blocks are perfectly arranged (as a collective, in a kind of almost military formation, facing the Nazis). However, as we approach them, we realize that they are far from being geometrically disposed: walking toward them, they begin to move, to change their mutual relationship,"³⁹ as Luka Skansi describes the experience, concluding that it is precisely movement that determines the different levels of memory the monument evokes – from the general and abstract at a distance to the intimate and concrete up close; in other words, from the optical level of perception to the haptic one.

³⁹ Skansi, "Space, Magic and Remembrance," 153. The same principle was applied by Sila in his competition entry for the monument on the island of Ist (fig. 6). See Kolacio, "O prostorima, spomenicima," 11.

It is certainly impossible to approach the theme of movement and interaction with the space of a monument without reference to the memorial cemeteries of Ravnikar – the originator of the idea of urban monuments in Yugoslavia – for whose project in the village of Kampo on the island of Rab William J. R. Curtis asserted that “movement is central to the concept and the project is masterly in the way that it draws the visitor from one point to the next, establishing an ever-changing dialogue between natural and artificial worlds.”⁴⁰ Skansi therefore rightly connects the work of Sila with that of Ravnikar, and in particular with Draga Cemetery, completed in 1953. Beyond their shared formation within the Ljubljana milieu, as well as their personal acquaintance, Ravnikar and Sila shared a special sensibility toward the natural environment, its organicism, and capacity for growth and development. Yet one essential difference between Ravnikar’s memorial cemeteries and Sila’s monuments is that the cemetery is a finite landscape with clear boundaries – so that, in both the Kampo and Draga examples, the walls that delimit the space and control movement within it are a compositional element equally important as the objects within the field that stimulate movement. Sila, in contrast, operated in mountains and open, potentially limitless landscapes, without artificial boundaries. Within these circumstances, the placement of a group of homogeneous elements in a found space approaches the experience of landscape park design – or even the shaping of larger territorial expanses – which Sila was most deeply devoted to in his work.⁴¹

After his first works, in which he planned and created urban parks in Rijeka and Pula together with Kolacio as one of the strategies for the immediate humanization and rehabilitation of cities devastated by war, in 1955 Sila was one of the initiators and founders of the Horticultural Association of Croatia, and two years earlier he had participated in the so-called horticultural excursion along the eastern Adriatic, from Pula to Ulcinj – the first of its kind in Yugoslavia – where he observed the inexhaustible possibilities offered by the nature of the Mediterranean belt, both in terms of the application of indigenous plants for new plantings and in terms of the design of new parks. Sila’s desire was to replace existing horticultural park solutions with ones that drew inspiration from such non-artificial plantings “shaped by nature through the grouping of healthy, freely developed trees, their undergrowth and shrubs, or created by a skilful human hand as close to nature as possible”.⁴² The theme of vital and free growth and development of landscape spaces as natural as possible was the core of his approach to landscape design both in the functional sense of more practical greenery maintenance and in the symbolic sense of imagining human existence under socialism. The green surfaces in his parks thus became progressively less bounded. He removed fences, hedges, flower beds, and even kerbs, as well as geometricized tree avenues, while grouping new tree plantings in free non-orthogonal compositions.⁴³

The space of the monument near Tićan was shaped in a similar manner. The stone monoliths are placed like trees, freely grouped, and the absence of any base or plinth suggests these rocks are growing directly from the soil. Although their mutual relationship does indeed encourage visitor movement, no specific path is laid out along which visitors are meant to move, nor is the space itself bounded by any clear perimeter. The site of the monument is part of a broader landscape where

⁴⁰ Curtis, “Abstraction and Representation,” 23.

⁴¹ Petar Matković mentions “over eighty-seven architectural-urbanistic and garden-design works” by Sila. See Matković, *Parkovi i nasadi u Rijeci*, 26.

⁴² Sila, “Suvremeni način obrađivanja.”

⁴³ For some examples, see Kolacio and Sila, “Novi parkovi u Rijeci.”

meadows and arable fields alternate with groups of oak groves, forming a continuous and uninterrupted space. The group of cubic menhirs is placed within it just as Sila grouped his saplings of holm oak – his favourite species to use – healthy and free, in his own words. He experienced both trees and menhirs animistically, as personifications of equally free human figures.

The human path as cultural artefact

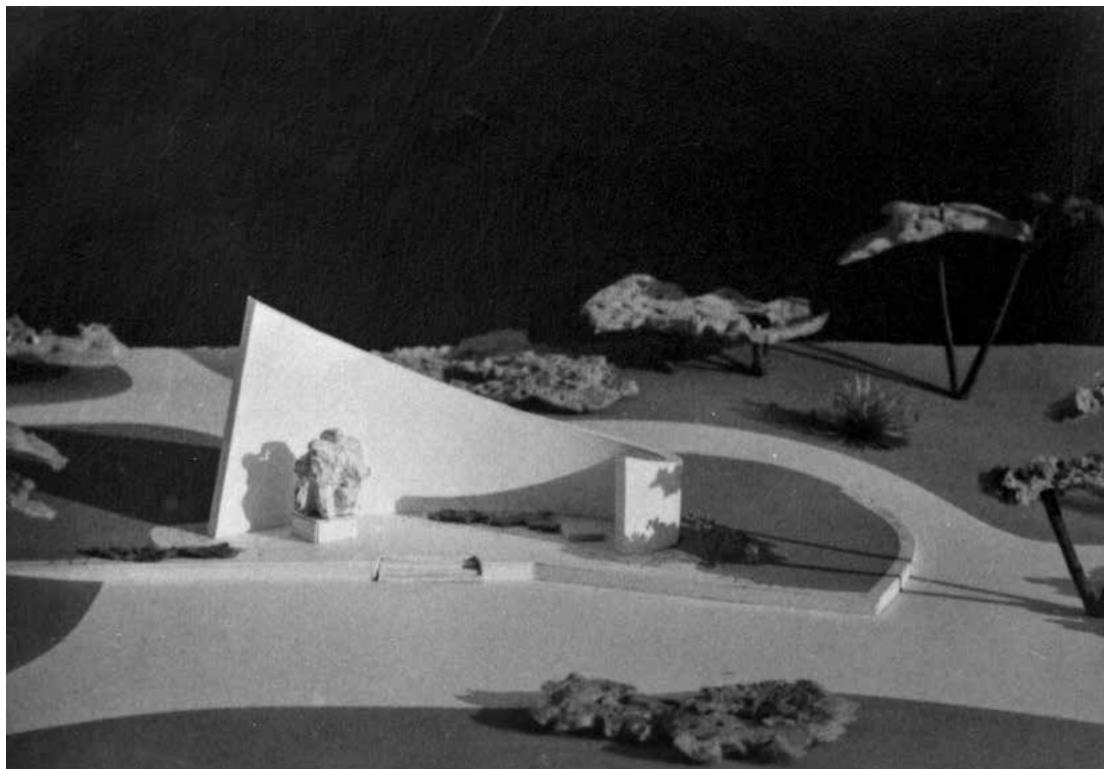
Ravnikar began his genealogy of the development of monuments to the People's Revolution with the first freestanding memorials placed at naturally prominent sites. The next step in his account was the placement of memorials in designed landscape settings, followed by a more complex plastic intervention extending into the natural environment, with the culmination reached in a monumental project as an integral part of the landscape.⁴⁴ The architect Sila moves along this path, all the way to the culmination of his own synthesis in the monument at Matić Poljana (fig. 7). It is here that – intuitively, as he himself claims – the rational mind of the regional planner that understands the broader geographic territory was united with the sensibility of an experienced landscape architect; an expert command of the material qualities of stone structures with the wandering spirit of a mountaineer.

The minimal gesture of twenty-six two-metre verticals in a clearing more than three kilometres long, bounded by mountain peaks several hundred metres high, could not have achieved its effect without an impressive reading of the existing givens and context: both the natural and spatial, and the cultural and historical. Sila carried out this reading with great precision and in layers. At the



7. Monument at Matić Poljana in snow (Arhiv fotokluba Rijeka; photo: Zdenko Sila, 1974)

⁴⁴ Ravnikar, "Če se ozremo nazaj," 33. For the specific relationship between People's Revolution monuments and the landscape in Slovenia, see Šumi, *Pogledi na slovensko umetnost*, 177–83.



8. Photo of the model of the memorial ossuary at Trsat, sent in Sila's letter to Plečnik, 1952
(© Muzej in galerija mesta Ljubljane, Plečnikova zbirka)

first level, the landscape itself was read – its natural boundaries, contours, directions of extension, enclosure, and opening. Thus the mountain pasture was experienced as extending east to west across the aforementioned length of three kilometres, bounded to the north by the beech forest of the Samari Ridge and to the south by Maj Peak (Maj vrh) with its forest of fir and spruce. This linear space gradually widens from east to west, up to the point where the path forks toward Mrkopalj and the village of Begovo Razdolje, where the width reaches 300 m. Further to the west, beyond this junction, the meadow narrows again, this time abruptly and over a short distance. Reflecting on this disposition, Sila decided to place the menhirs precisely in the section where the clearing is widest, but not at its centre – rather closer to the northern Samari rocks, so that the verticals would be visible from as great a distance as possible.

However, beyond its spatial and visual composition, this location is also distinctive for the most powerful blasts of the bora wind, which proved fatal on that night in 1944, when “a strong north wind was blowing with snow and finished off those exhausted fighters completely.”⁴⁵ Placing the monument in such a location was not merely the straightforward marking of the site where the event took place. The intention behind this decision was to affect visitors to Matić Poljana by making use of the specific climatic conditions to create a feeling of exposure and discomfort that might conjure up the event itself. This reading of the topographic and climatic situation and its use to create a specific human experience is a hallmark of Sila's creative work from the very beginning of his career, both

⁴⁵ HR DARI, HR-DARI-1300-5-6-4-3.



9. Photo of the monument at Matić Poljana with double exposure (Arhiv fotokluba Rijeka; photo: Zdenko Sila, 1974)

in the design of monuments and in the practice of landscape architecture. Just as in his earlier work – the memorial ossuary at Trsat in Rijeka, designed together with Kolacio in 1957 (fig. 8), where he had placed a tall stone wall to shelter visitors from the onrush of wind, creating a place of gathering by means of a windbreak – here at Matić Poljana he consciously exposed passers-by to the buffeting of the wind to make them aware of the danger and inhospitality of the mountain terrain.

Beyond the topographic, landscape, and climatic reading of the site, Sila also applied a geological one to the project, understanding the importance of stone in shaping the mountain environment. The menhirs were therefore obtained on the spot, from the mountain itself. “The idea and conception of this memorial is simple, wrested from the mountain – that immense, primordial source of form,”⁴⁶ wrote Vanda Ekl, recognizing the explicit reading of a matter as part of a larger human environment in shaping the monument at Matić Poljana. For such an experience of belonging to something far greater than ourselves to be as powerful as possible, it was necessary to intervene as little as possible in the stone found at the site. Thus, Sila completed his decades-long search for a degree-zero of form-making – the search for a skilful human hand that, in his own words, shapes as close to nature as possible.

However, it was the next layer of reading – the cultural and social one – that completed the synthesis of this memorial landscape. At the outset it was described how the erection of the monument was preceded by memorial marches along a thirty-kilometre trail through Gorski Kotar, of which Matić Poljana was only a tenth. Sila was aware of the fact that memorial practices preceded the

⁴⁶ Ekl, “Memorijal dvadeset šest,” 30.

memorial itself, and he not only respected this order of things but imagined a spatial composition that would further underscore it. The monument was therefore placed along the path, in a column that can potentially extend indefinitely – just as Sila himself evoked this in his multiple-exposure photo of the monument at Matić Poljana, in which the verticals of the menhirs multiply along the entire length of the meadow (fig. 9). This intervention is therefore equally a monument to the handful of enthusiasts that once a year traversed this icy trail as it is to the original event of the People's Revolution. The monument at Matić Poljana is a monument to human walking – vertical, upright, and free.

Such was the thinking of the art historian and Rijeka conservator Katica Brusić, who, seven years after the dedication of Sila's menhirs, initiated the procedure for adding Matić Poljana to the register of cultural monuments. During a site visit in the summer of 1976, Brusić walked and documented the entire trail that the Partisans had moved along from Drežnica to Mrkopalj, accompanied by a group of conservators, foresters, geographers, and photographers:⁴⁷

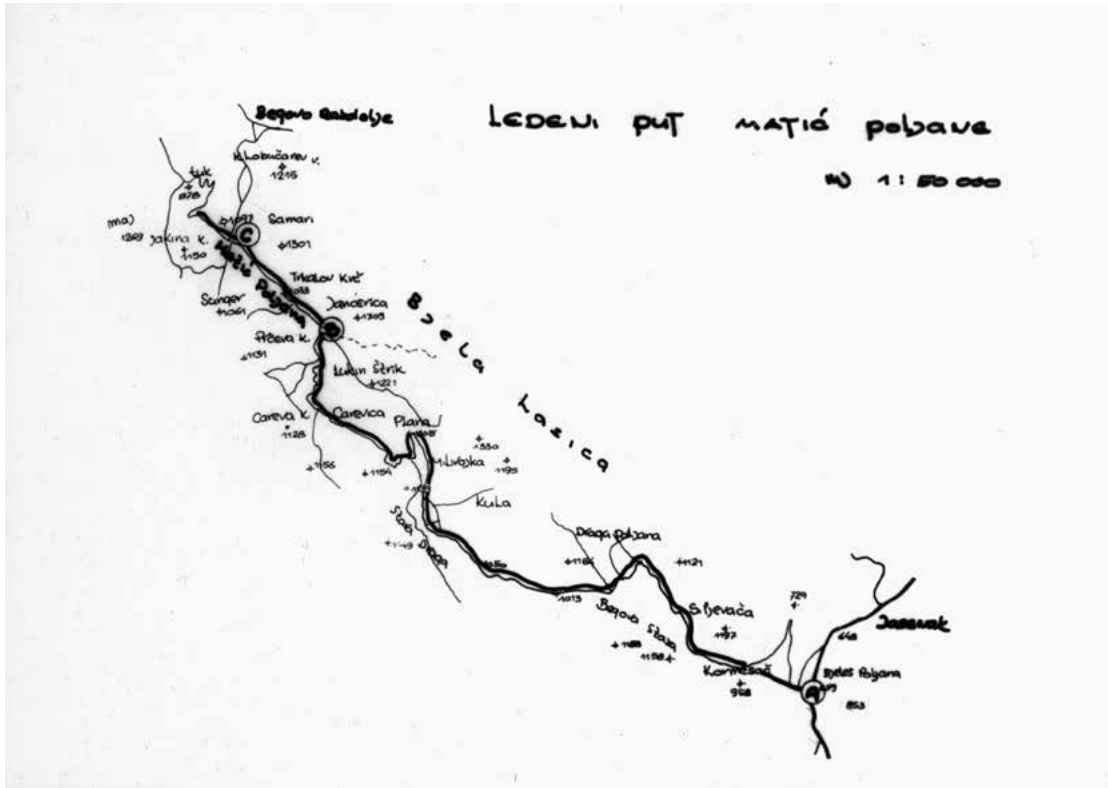
*When presenting the events that took place at Matić Poljana, the sites along the walking trail from Drežnica to Jasenak, and then from Jasenak to Mrkopalj via Matić Poljana, must be presented. On the trail from Jasenak to Matić Poljana, as the fighters were hungry, tired, and exhausted from the cold, the drama gradually unfolded, reaching its culmination when the completely exhausted fighters arrived at Matić Poljana, where the cold north wind with snow finished them off.*⁴⁸

The document thus proposes the marking and protection of the entire thirty-kilometre route along which ten significant locations were identified, three of which lie on the section of the trail passing through Matić Poljana (fig. 10). Nonetheless, after a detailed analysis of the complete trail, it was decided that the proposal for addition to the register of cultural monuments should cover neither the full thirty kilometres nor the three hundred metres of the section with the menhirs, but rather the three-kilometre stretch of path running along the entire length of Matić Poljana (fig. 11). This memorial flow – initiated by the rituals of the winter marches and amplified by the placement of Sila's monument – was added to the register of cultural monuments on 2 December 1976.⁴⁹

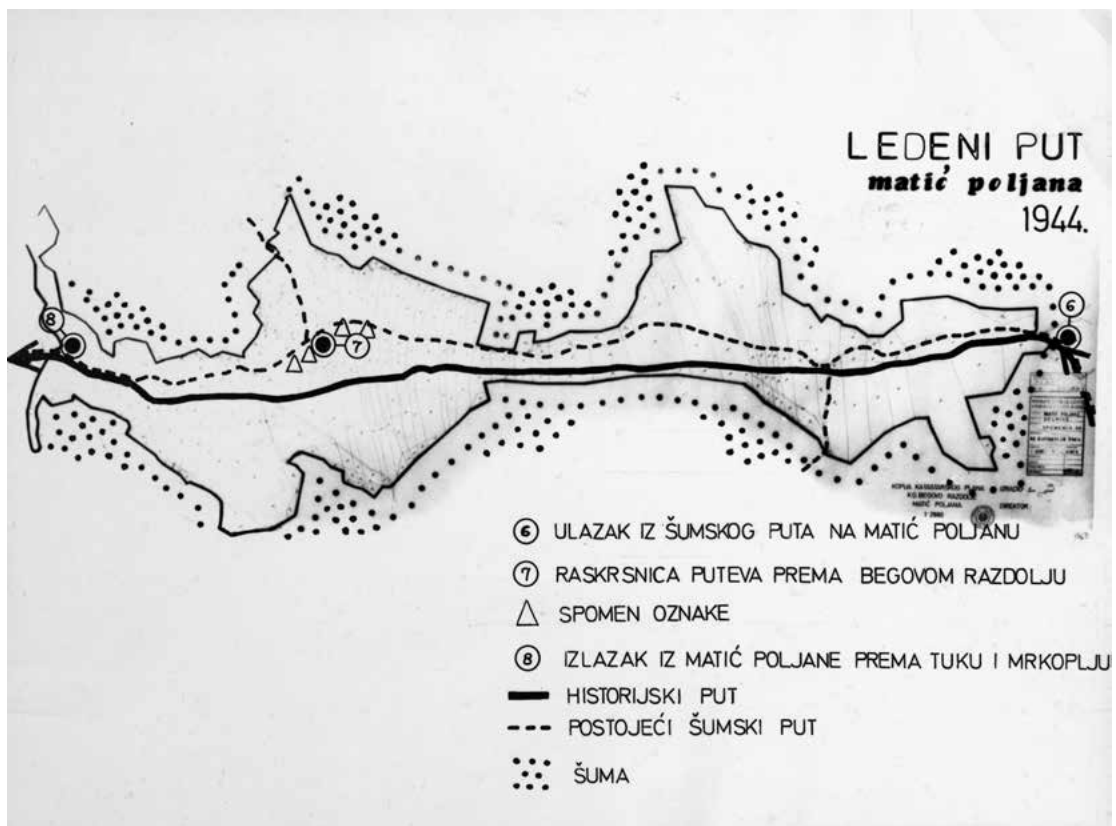
⁴⁷ Alongside Katica Brusić, the terrain from Jasenak to Mrkopalj was surveyed on 14 July 1976 by Slavko Pleše, the topographer Simo Vujović, the secretary of the Delnice municipal war veterans' organization Ivan Majnarić, the photographer Joža Mažić, the Mrkopalj Forestry Service warden Slavko Vujnović, the driver Nikola Damjanić, and the engineer Stjepan Varga from the Mrkopalj Forestry Service, "who together with comrade Simo Vujović identified the meadow zone on the cadastral map and described the configuration of the terrain of Matić Poljana." HR DARI, HR-DARI-1300-5-6-4-3.

⁴⁸ HR DARI, HR-DARI-1300-5-6-4-3. Several years later, Katica Brusić further extended the idea of marking this path from three to five stages, bringing the total length of the route to 60 km: "From Škalić to Drežnica, from Drežnica to Bjeleš Poljana, location 1 where the road junction for Drežnica, Jasenak, and Mrkopalj is situated, then from Bjeleš Poljana to the entrance of Matić Poljana, where the 'ice path' passed beneath the mountain area of Bjelolasica with marked locations 1 to 6, followed by the Matić Poljana area itself with marked locations 6, 7, and 8, and from Matić Poljana to the villages of Tuk and Mrkopalj. During the preparation of the conservation documentation for justifying the registration of Matić Poljana, which was declared a cultural monument, the stretch of the 'path' from Bjeleš Poljana to the end of Matić Poljana was recorded, and at the most significant landscape situations the configuration of the terrain with plant communities was described;" HR DARI, HR-DARI-1300-5-6-5-13.

⁴⁹ HR DARI, HR-DARI-1300-5-6-4-3.



10. Ice Path map by Katica Brusić, 1976 (HR-DARI 1300-5-6-4-3-18-1)



11. Matić Poljana map by Katica Brusić, 1976 (HR-DARI 1300-5-6-4-3-18-2)

12. Illustration for the memorial ski tour In the Footsteps of the 26 Frozen Partisans, Jasenak-Tuk, 1970 (source: *Naše planine* 5-6 (1970): 177)



13. Monument at Matić Poljana (cover of the magazine *Arhitektura* 19, no. 155 (1975)).



With the proclamation of the path as a cultural artefact, it gained further popularity, and by the late 1970s the number of visitors to the memorial marches through Gorski Kotar had grown to several hundred (fig. 12). This sequence of events developed the thesis of the aforementioned memorial flow – a trail created by the physical act of human walking that had acquired the status of a cultural monument primarily on account of its historical significance, but also thanks to its artistic interpretation in Sila's work (fig. 13). Human walking thus, as in the first activity of nomadic wandering, gave rise to the need for the symbolic construction of the landscape by means of paths. "The only architecture in the Palaeolithic world was the path, the first anthropic sign capable of imposing an artificial order on the territories of natural chaos,"⁵⁰ Francesco Careri argues, and the experience of the monument at Matić Poljana is driven by exactly the same impulse.

It is therefore evident that the particular innovation Sila introduced to designing objects dedicated to the People's Revolution is precisely that the classic definition of a monument – as a symbolically charged object of pronounced centrality – is replaced by sequences composed of nearly identical objects whose mutual relationships encourage visitor movement, setting the visitor in a nomadic state. In his desire to redirect the contemplation of singular monuments toward a more general experience of nature and the human environment, Sila approached the act of walking as a gesture within which the element of the path itself begins to be experienced as a monumental work. Matić Poljana therefore advances the thesis that walking is the essential human act in the experience of space, and it is for that very reason the point of origin of its design.

The research data underlying this article will be shared on reasonable request by the corresponding author.

Bibliography

- Bajić Miloš, ed. *Jugoslavija: Spomenici revolucije*. Beograd: SUBNOR Jugoslavije, 1968.
- Brusić, Katica. "Matić poljana ledeni put." *List organizacionog odbora memorijala "26 smrznutih partizana"* 1, no. 1 (1982): 5.
- Careri, Francesco. *Walkscapes: Walking as an aesthetic practice*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gilli, 2003.
- Ciglencečki, Marjeta. "Forma viva Maribor 1967–1986: Delovišče Maribor." *Acta historiae artis Slovenica* 22 (2017): 11–26.
- Curtis, William J. R. "Abstraction and Representation: The Memorial Complex at Kampor, on the Island of Rab (1952–3) by Edvard Ravnikar." In *Architect Edvard Ravnikar, Memorial Complex on the Island of Rab, 1953*, edited by Miha Dešman, 17–35. Ljubljana: DESSA, 2004.
- Čopič, Špelca. "Forma viva: Mednarodni simpozij kiparjev." *Sinteza: Revija za likovno kulturo* 1, no. 2 (1965): 1–10.
- Ekl, Vanda. "Memorijal dvadeset šest smrznutih partizana u Matić poljani." *Arhitektura: Časopis za arhitekturu, urbanizam i primijenjenu umjetnost* 19, no. 155 (1975): 30–31.
- Fuhrmeister, Christian. "The advantages of abstract art: Monoliths and erratic boulders as monuments and (public) sculptures." In *Figuration/Abstraction: Strategies for Public Sculpture in Europe 1945–1968*, edited by Charlotte Benton, 107–26. London-New York: Routledge, 2017.

⁵⁰ Careri, *Walkscapes*, 49.

- Hrausky, Andrej. "Plečnik's Monuments to People's Liberation Struggle." *Arhitektov bilten* 51, no. 224–227 (2020): 63–69.
- Jurcan, Emil. "Spomenik Vladimiru Gortanu v Beramu." *Outsider: Revija, ki presega meje* 10, no. 38 (2024): 124–25.
- Karge, Heike. *Sečanje u kamenu - okamenjeno sečanje?*. Beograd: Biblioteka XX. vek, 2014.
- Kolacio, Zdenko. "Spomen - groblje u Podhumu." *Čovjek i prostor* 6, no. 90 (1959): 1.
- Kolacio, Zdenko. "Spomen blok u Samoboru." *Arhitektura: Časopis za arhitekturu, urbanizam i primijenjenu umjetnost* 15, no. 1–2 (1961): 10.
- Kolacio, Zdenko. "Spomenici narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi u Sloveniji." *Arhitektura: Časopis za arhitekturu, urbanizam i primijenjenu umjetnost* 15, no. 1–2 (1961): 15–19.
- Kolacio, Zdenko. "O prostorima, spomenicima, izvorima umjetnosti." *Arhitektura: Časopis za arhitekturu, urbanizam i primijenjenu umjetnost* 19, no. 155 (1975): 8–11.
- Kolacio, Zdenko, and Zdenko Sila. "Novi parkovi u Rijeci." *Arhitektura: Časopis za arhitekturu, urbanizam i primijenjenu umjetnost* 6, no. 3 (1952): 40–44.
- Krečić, Peter. *Spomeniki NOB Jožeta Plečnika in njegove šole*. Ljubljana: Arhitekturni muzej, 1975.
- Matković, Petar, ed. *Parkovi i nasadi u Rijeci: Dvadeset peta godišnjica organizacije vrtlarskog udruženog rada*. Rijeka: OUR Parkovi i nasadi, 1977.
- Pauletto, Giancarlo, and Tonko Maroević. *Kosta Angeli Radovani*. Pordenone: Centro Iniziative Culturali, 1989.
- Pevsner, Nikolaus. "Kolacio Memorials." *The Architectural Review* 140, no. 835 (1966): 221–22.
- "Planinarski dom na Snježniku." *Naše planine* 3, no. 11–12 (1951): 354.
- "Planinarski dom na Platku." *Naše planine* 3, no. 1–2 (1952): 44–45.
- Prelovšek, Damjan. "Monuments by the Architect Jože Plečnik." *Acta historiae artis Slovenica* 18, no. 2 (2013): 11–26.
- Radovani, Kosta Angeli, and Zdenko Kolacio. "Spomenik u čast radničkog samoupravljanja željezare Zenica." *Arhitektura: Časopis za arhitekturu, urbanizam i primijenjenu umjetnost* 16, no. 3–4 (1962): 23–26.
- Ravnikar, Edvard. "Če se ozremo nazaj." *Sinteza: Revija za likovno kulturo* 7 (1967): 31–34.
- Shear, Alan J. "Martin Heidegger: Place and memory in sculpture; A Heideggerian interpretation of the memorial sculptures of Bogdan Bogdanović." PhD diss., University of Ljubljana, 2018.
- Sila, Zdenko. "Suvremeniji način obrađivanja parkova." *Riječki list*, 14 March, 1954: 2.
- Sila, Zdenko. "Kako je stvoren spomenik na Matić Poljani." *List organizacionog odbora memorijala "26 smrznutih partizana"* 1, no. 1 (1982): 16.
- Skansi, Luka. "Space, Magic and Remembrance: Genealogy of an Initiation to Contemplation." *Vesper: Rivista di architettura, arti e teoria* 6 (2022): 142–57.
- Smokvina, Abdon. "Dom na 1.111 metara." *Riječki list*, 19 October, 1951: 3.
- "Spomenik u Ferdinandovcu." *Arhitektura: Časopis za arhitekturu, urbanizam i primijenjenu umjetnost* 15, no. 3–4 (1961): 49.
- Škerl, Božidar. "Tragom boraca II brigade." *List organizacionog odbora memorijala "26 smrznutih partizana"* 1, no. 1 (1982): 9.
- Šorli, Marjan. "Spomeniki NOB na prizoriščih dogodkov." *Arhitekt* 16 (1955): 18–19.
- Šumi, Nace. *Pogledi na slovensko umetnost*. Ljubljana: Partizanska knjiga, 1975.
- Tepina, Marjan. "O arhitekturi spomenikov padlim borcem." *Borec* 4, no. 4 (1952): 100–03.
- Tepina, Marjan. "O trajnosti spomenikov, posvećenih narodnoosvobodilni borbi." *Borec* 8, no. 2 (1956): 85–87.

- Venturini, Darko. "Memorijalni opus arhitekta Zdenka Kolacija." *Arhitektura: Časopis za arhitekturo, urbanizam i primijenjenu umjetnost* 19, no. 155 (1975): 36–48.
- Zadnikar, Marijan. "Slovenska znamenja." *Sinteza: Revija za likovno kulturo* 1, no. 2 (1965): 39–41.
- Zadnikar, Marijan. "Znamenja – spomeniki v urbanističnih, ruralnih in naravnih prostorih." *Sinteza: Revija za likovno kulturo* 2, no. 7 (1967): 5–7.
- Židan, Fred. "Memorijalni skijaški pohod 'Tragom 26 smrznutih partizana.'" *Naše planine* 22, no. 5–6 (1970): 177.

Zdenko Sila in njegov spomenik na Matić poljani na Hrvaškem

Povzetek

Spomenik na Matičevi poljani v Gorskem kotarju, ki ga je zasnoval arhitekt Zdenko Sila in je bil odkrit leta 1969, je eden najznačilnejših primerov spominske kulture v socialistični Jugoslaviji. Njegovi začetki segajo v vsakoletne zimske pohode v spomin na borce 13. partizanske divizije Primorje-Gorski kotar, ki so v noči z 19. na 20. februar 1944 med pohodom zmrznili. Pohodi, od leta 1962 naprej organizirani v sodelovanju z Zvezo veteranov, so potekali po prvotni tridesetkilometrski poti v snegu in vetru, spomin na dogodek se je tako »vtisnil« v telesa udeležencev.

Ko je bila sprejeta odločitev o postavitvi trajnega spomenika, je Sila – strasten gornik, izkušen krajinski arhitekt in učenec Jožeta Plečnika – našel rešitev, ki jo odlikuje redka formalna in konceptualna skladnost. Namesto običajnega osrednjega spomenika je na najširšem delu travnika v nežni krivulji, dolgi skoraj 300 metrov, razporedil 26 navpično postavljenih visokih kosov surovega kamna. Kamni, prineseni z bližnjega Bitoraja in minimalno obdelani, niso bili razporejeni po vnaprej pripravljenem narisanim načrtu, temveč tako, da so na travnik postavili žive ljudi in označili mesta, na katerih so stali.

Spomenik črpa iz več tradicij: iz slovenskih obpotlin znamenj in samostojnih spominskih kamnov, ki so jih v povojni Sloveniji postavili ljudje sami, o čemer sta razmišljala arhitekta Tepina in Ravnikar, iz formalnega raziskovanja menhirja kot zreduciranega znaka v krajini, kar je izvajal Silov sodelavec Zdenko Kolacio, ter iz širših evropskih tokov, ki jih je spremljal Christian Fuhrmeister, od nacionaliziranih ledeniških balvanov na nemških vojnih spomenikih do biomorfne abstrakcije Moora, Hepworthove in simpozijev Forma Viva. Silova lastna pot do menhirja je potekala več desetletij, ko je delal z neobdelanim oziroma minimalno obdelanim kamnom: od Gortanove grobnice v Beramu do spomenikov v Orehovici, na Plataku, v Bakru, Viškovu in Tičanu, vodila pa ga je filozofija krajine, ki je dajala prednost svobodnim, organskim, neomejenim kompozicijam pred geometriziranimi oblikami.

Spomenik na Matičevi poljani nenazadnje odlikuje nadomestitev tradicionalne osrednjosti spomenika s spominskim tokom: zaporedjem skoraj identičnih objektov, ki obiskovalca spodbudi h gibanju in samo hojo spremeni v dejanje spominjanja. Ko je konservatorica Katica Brusić leta 1976 sprožila postopek vpisa v register kulturnih spomenikov, so bili kot zaščiteno območje opredeljeni celotni trije kilometri poti, ki prečka Matičevo poljano – s priznanjem, da je spomenik pot, ne pa objekt. Kot je razumel Sila, so ti navpični menhirji spomenik človekovi hoji – pokončni in svobodni.

