

OP.1 : HOMO FABER

KARMINA ŠILEC / IZIDOR LEITINGER



concept / music: Izidor Leitinger

concept / staging: Karmina Šilec

texts: Karmina Šilec, Aurelius Clemens Prudentius, Erasmus Darwin, Virginia Woolf, John Milton, Bible, Slovenian traditional sayings

sound designer: Danilo Ženko

artistic collaborator: Dorian Šilec Petek

light designer: Gregor Dvornik (LGM)

production: CARMINA SLOVENICA, 2023



Op. 1: homo faber blurs the traditional boundaries between craft / craftsmanship and contemporary art. The work understands the various elements (sound, movement, image) that arise in craftsmanship as inspirations for the development of an inclusive composition. It includes unusual combinations of sound elements, juxtapositions of fragments of human activities from the past and present, and creates visual and sonic interactions through dialogues of music and words, analogue and digital sounds, historical and contemporary elements. The project is guided by the idea of linking seemingly unrelated media: music and sounds generated by work and tasks intertwine, layer and create a complex sonic event.

Op. 1: homo faber is a hybrid work, a musical-visual project that breaks down the boundaries between disciplines and aims to create a space for opening up thoughts, perceptions, experiences. The performance combines different forms of expression: the performance of various jobs and tasks, singing, words, images; their changing fusion creates different levels of meaning.





CROSS-DISCIPLINARY OPERA

A PE

PERFORMERS

Boštjan Gombač, multiinstrumentalist, voice
Izidor Leitinger, electronics, voice
Fantje na vasi, vocal group
Karmina Šilec, conductor

waver: Marta Gregorc
shoemaker: Saša Kovačev
stonemason: Alojz Urnaut
clogmaker: Martin Muml
seamstress: Vesna Novitović
music instruments repairman: Andrej Robnik
carpenters: Branko Čelofiga, Ivan Belca

various carftworks: Tone Žuraj, Primož Šušteršič, Marko Perger, Miran Mustafa, Miran Kosi, Darko Trantura, Pavel Brlič

INTIMATE CONNECTION

Op. 1: homo faber focuses on the intimate connection between hand and head. Their subtle relationship takes place in seemingly different areas, such as woodworking and playing the bass clarinet. This relationship calls the performer to himself through the action of the body, through a series of specialised movements and along a path of often mathematically precise thoughts. At the same time, it challenges the mind (the mental part) to be still and not still at the same time, to give itself completely to the task and to accept itself in the process.

The aim of the craft is to give outwards in order to receive inwards. It is a bridge between action and contemplation and a way of working in which we feel alive.

REPETITIVENESS

Like music, handcrafts are characterised by the repetitive nature of rhythms. In this research work, the authors analyse the sound elements that are created when sharpening a scythe, working wood and metal, carving stone, hulling, kneading dough, weaving and other actions. They synthesise these sound cells (the noise produced during manual work) into a musical work and combine them with live performances on musical instruments, with singing, with words, with objects and with placement in space.

PRACTISING OWN PROFESSIONS

The method for the creation of Op. 1: homo faber is the discovery and exploration of types and forms of labour. We approached craftsmen and craftswomen, visited their workshops, interviewed them, filmed them, wrote according to their dictation, followed their ideas, identified the processes and techniques characteristic of their profession. This research has shown that much of the knowledge that craftspeople possess (that tacit knowledge when people know how to do something but cannot put into words what they know) remains indescribable, inexpressible. We have transformed this lack into music, which is the sound of their hands and their minds. Craftsmanship is a realm of skill and knowledge that transcends human verbal explanatory possibilities, and here a fundamental human limitation becomes apparent again and again: language is not a suitable mirror tool to describe the physical movement of the human body. This is why Op. 1: homo faber (like a photographic camera) captured the 'key moments' of the craftsmen in the objects and things of craft are the by-products of a way of working.

HEROIC STRUGGLE

In ancient times, the craftsmanship of the gods was glorified as a weapon in the eternal struggle to achieve mastery. In Hesiod's poem *Works and Days* and in Virgil's *Georgics*, human labour reflects part of this divine glory, and labour itself is seen as a heroic struggle. In modern times, for example in Nazi or Soviet art, the warriors of labour reappear, now as titans of the forge and the plough. Later, attempts were made to break this militant spell of labour. Diderot compares the pleasures of craftsmanship to sex in a marriage rather than the intoxication of a passionate love affair; and the serenity seen on the faces of Diderot's glassblowers and papermakers betrays a quiet, measured contentment with material things: with things well thought out and well executed.

Craftsmanship is often still imagined as a medieval workshop, where master and apprentice were closely linked. In the Renaissance, however, the separation of art and craft transformed this social relationship; the workshop changed, as the skills previously practised in it now became unique practices and the master the sole bearer of knowledge. The social space of the workshop fragmented due to the importance of the authority of the individual (master and artist). This individualisation within the workshop soon led to a dependence of the craftsman or artist on society as a whole. A long sweep of change followed, and the transfer of skills and technologies became increasingly difficult. However, the basic idea of craftsmanship has survived to this day: the belief in excellence and collaboration with materials.

Nowadays, craftsmanship is often seen as a form of activity that is supposedly dying out with the advent of industrial society. However, this is not the case. At the beginning of the 20th century, Walter Benjamin drew attention to the metaphorical power of old crafts such as weaving and pottery, all of which were threatened by industrialisation. But Benjamin did not stop at the level of nostalgia. He found a way out in the idea of the object, like Duchamp in his readymade artworks, which are the product of an unfettered mind. Since the mid-1990s, craftsmanship has been making a comeback (although it has never completely disappeared), especially despite mass production.

GOOD FOR ITS OWN SAKE

The work of the hands represents a permanent, fundamental human impulse: the desire to do a job well – for the sake of the work itself. The masterful work of the hands serves the computer programmer, the doctor and the artist alike. In all these areas, the craftsmanly focuses on objective standards, on the thing itself. Craftsmanship rewards the individual with a sense of pride in the work accomplished, but this reward is not easy, as the practitioner is often faced with conflicting objective standards of excellence and, above all, the desire to do something well for its own sake (where he or she may be weakened by competitive pressure, frustration or even their own obsessiveness). The craftsperson must combine technique and expression in order to be able to act intuitively. This is only possible if they have a deep, implicit knowledge of their work. Rather than acting on empirical information alone, the craftsman's final act is a unique expression that can only be achieved through a good mastery of certain skills. In this context, intuition is also crucial. A committed craftsman is a dedicated craftsman and creates authentically. His sincerity is communicated through his work and this contains an inherent, eternal truth. So in a way, the craftsman represents all of us and our desire to do something well, concretely and for reasons other than material gain.





WHERE WE FEEL ALIVE

In the past, craftsmanship, the way things were made and the use of materials reflected a life in harmony with nature, and the skills acquired in practice ensured quality and sustainable production. The key was to understand the material and the process, or at least to be honest about it.

We cannot go back to the craft, to the guilds, to the rituals and indulge in any of the forms of a half-past life that tempt us through our sentimentality or even our dissatisfaction with the new times. We want something, we need something, and when we look at the fragments of culture that have disappeared, we sometimes imagine that we understand what all previous generations had and what our lives lack.

But what we watch with modern eyes and what we see are just different results of different approaches to life, different attitudes. Constant action eats us up, eats our lives. Homo faber seems to have forgotten that all work must also be half rest. In work, there is movement and standstill, be it when swinging an axe, turning a potter's spindle, thinking or feeling. Without both, work today seems wild and misguided, the movement tense and unrhythmic, the sensations eccentric and the mind wandering from one conclusion to another. Our common social goal, the relationship between people and the connection within the community have their origin in this law of the movement of inhaling and exhaling. This movement offers us craft/craftsmanship as a skillful means of living. Craft is a way of acting and working where we feel alive.

MISSING FRAGMENTS OF CULTURES

Craftsmanship is an innate ability of almost all humans, and nature has generally endowed humans with the intelligence for things well done (craftsmanship skills). It is this knowledge of the profound social constructs of craftsmanship that enables us to envision how we as humanity and as individuals are able to re-engage meaningfully with the world and with each other. Craftsmanship as philosophy is therefore a carrier of peace, a creator of civilisation.

Why is the idea of crafting relevant at this moment? Because it is about shaping our future, and because a committed craftsman brings the full force of humanity to his work. The craftsman's hand is guided by his eye, it is guided by his creative spirit, and his productivity is an echo of his unique creativity. He has the desire to create useful things for the world. For all craftsmen, in one way or another, it is serving others that makes their work a different framework for their lives.

Understanding how something is made, why it is made the way it is made, is more important to modern life than ever. Craft is the language of material, origin and production. It means learning about the value of objects and things. Aristotle already said that "a handcrafted product, if well designed and made, is not only useful but also has elements such as balance, proportion and harmony". Craftsmanship usually involves the use of hands and tools to create something useful. The ancient Greeks had a special term for this, *techne*, which combines knowledge, experience and applied skill in doing what is required.



LEARNING TO BE

All this says that the craft is good for us. It feels good, it looks good and the practice itself is good. The only problem is that most of us do not know how to do anything anymore. Often we do not even know where to start. That is why it is important to raise awareness of the importance of craftsmanship and to help preserve it.

Can craft teach us how to be? The laws of craft and learning a true craft go hand in hand with developing the ability to be human. Therefore, it is no longer necessary to reject the beauty of mass/industrially produced objects just to justify the making of objects by hand – as many craftspeople do. Craft is not just the object made. Craft is me and how I am when I make something (and ultimately how I am the rest of the time, as a result of what has changed in me through crafting). The objects and things of craft are the by-products of a way of working.

COLLECTED PEACEFULNESS

Op. 1: homo faber is inspired by people engaged in sometimes seemingly monotonous, sometimes dangerous or complex work; what they all have in common is a facial expression that tends towards a collected peacefulness. It is a sense of calm and serenity that emanates from orderly, disciplined work carried out with a calm and contented mind.

Such images appealed to the authors of Op. 1: homo faber to move into a realm where one is content with ordinary things, with things well done.

Op. 1: homo faber seeks to change the way we look at something, or rather support the survival of something that may no longer have a reason to exist today.











TRAILER

in cooperation with: The Puppet theatre Maribor, Cultural Quarter Minoriti, Newmusic theatre CHOREGIE
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... a multi-layered, artistically compelling but anything but a light work ... (Večer)

... loaded with multiple synonyms, anthropological, psychological, sociological, and even philosophical questioning of utilitarian production and its various aspects, concepts, and contexts. And also about workers' resistance, sabotage, and destruction of tools and machines (it is no coincidence that the English term Luddite is derived from the Latin ludus), which replaced direct manual labor in the industrial age. Now robotics is displacing it even more, and artificial intelligence is encroaching on the sphere of mental (including artistic) creativity and freedom, giving added urgency to fears of dehumanization ... (Večer)

... From music, or better, staged music projects by Karmina Šilec we can expect a lot, but certainly not conventionality. In terms of innovativeness and unconventionality, as well as artistic conviction, the transdisciplinary opera Op. 1: homo faber - in front of an auditorium filled to the last seat - met these expectations ... (Večer)



Photos: Dorian Šilec Petek, Rudi Uran