

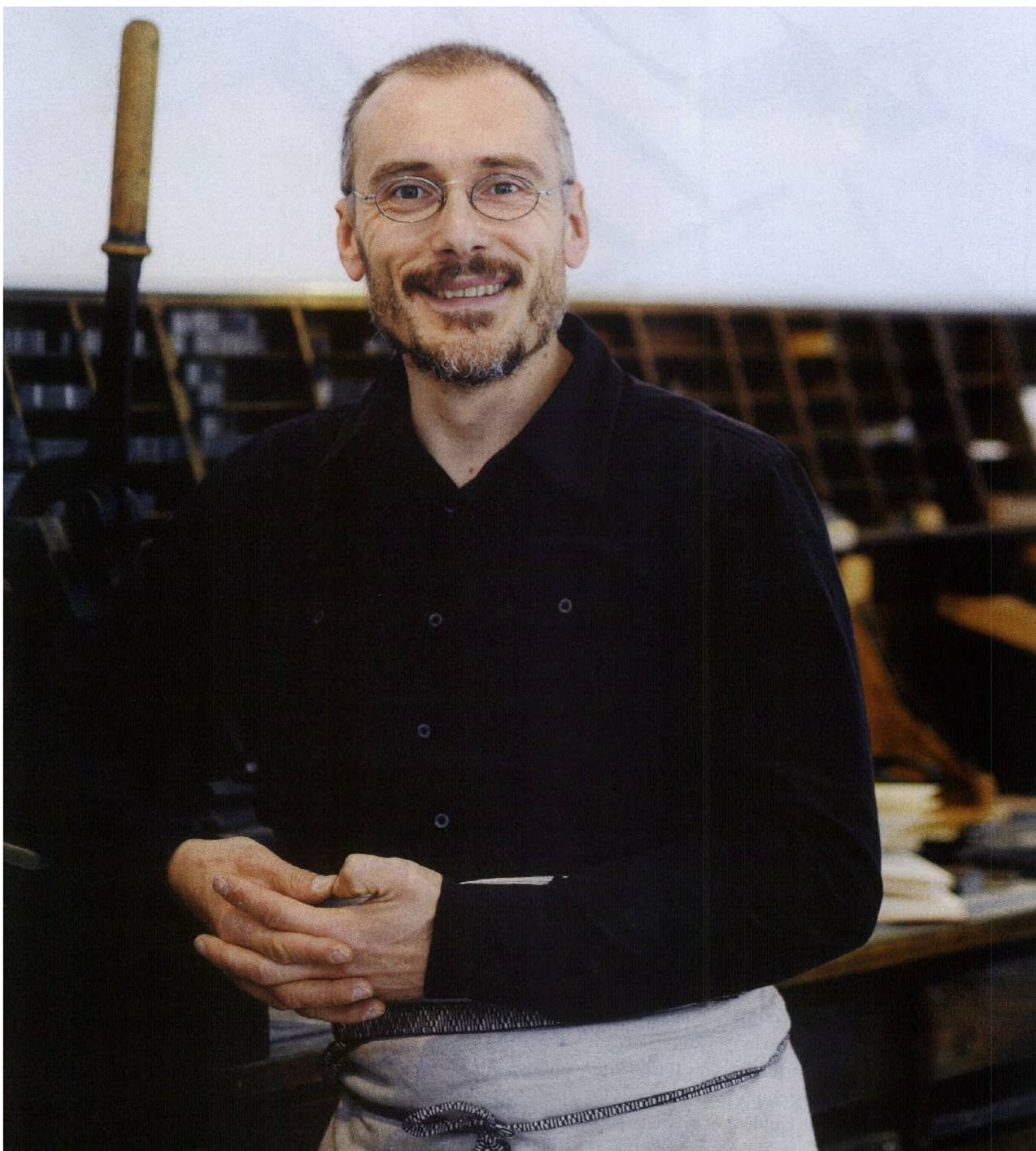


TIPORENESANSA

The magic of a craftsman's touch

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MARKO DRPIČ, CALLIGRAPHER AND DESIGNER, FOUNDER of a new age - a time when books still held the magic of 'a craftsman's touch'. In the centre of Ljubljana he has set up a reconstruction of a printing press of the kind used up until the seventies. >>





IN THIS WAY DRPIĆ IS PRESERVING THE PRINTER'S HERITAGE and the method of printing that was common in earlier times. He will share with you a range of anecdotes from the history of printing, and together with you he will don his apron and start typesetting. "A printing press is a living space where ideas are sparked and solutions sought for printing hand-set business cards or old-style postcards. At the same time the tiporenesansa printing press is part of the programme for Ljubljana – World Book Capital."

Passers-by at 1 Mačkova Street in the centre of Ljubljana have been able, since 24 April, to look through the display window and see an old printing press - exactly the kind that was used in the previous century. Lead and wood letters, cupboards, stands, the press, posters and more. "One time when I went to the printers to confirm the prints, I was quite fascinated to notice stands with lead letters and the old printing equipment, which the printer had kept by chance. For a long time I've been interested in how printing was done in the old way, while at the same time it seemed a shame that everything would just be forgotten, that the next generations would no longer know how and what work was done once in a printing press," says Marko Drpić, adding: "I started seriously collecting equipment and tools for letterpress printing, and the City of Ljubljana donated the space in the

centre of the city for three months. Along with the equipment, we are also losing the knowledge, and it is getting harder to find master printers who still have this knowledge. As part of the Wednesday meetings we have already presented the hand and machine compositor, book printer and reprographic master." In June there will be talks held at the press every Wednesday with other craftsmen. A process engraver will speak about preparing photographs for letterpress printing. As many as six steps were need to prepare zinc plates with a screened photograph, and this even put the operator's health at risk. Printed sections of books were finally taken over by the bookbinder. This craftsman will present the old artistic techniques of binding books and

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decorating the covers. Finally, a graphics school professor will recount the system of studying for the printing profession.

"In this way the old knowledge is being preserved in the best way. A major contribution also comes from visitors who have worked at printing presses, since they bring various tools and accessories, certificates and old documents. In this way the collection is being enhanced, but I would like to stress that I don't just want to make a museum collection, I want to set up a living printing press that promotes the letterpress technique through original designs. This technique is not comparable to the processes used today, since it achieves exceptional visual effects."

The printing press is also visited by children. Printing a personal card is a special experience for children, as they discover that the printing press has 2 tons of lead characters the wrong way around, and they can find out how the work is done, and see how it used to be a slow process. "The fact that the children operate the process themselves is fascinating for them, and not just for them, but also for academy students, who see that they can create a wide artistic range with lead and wooden characters."

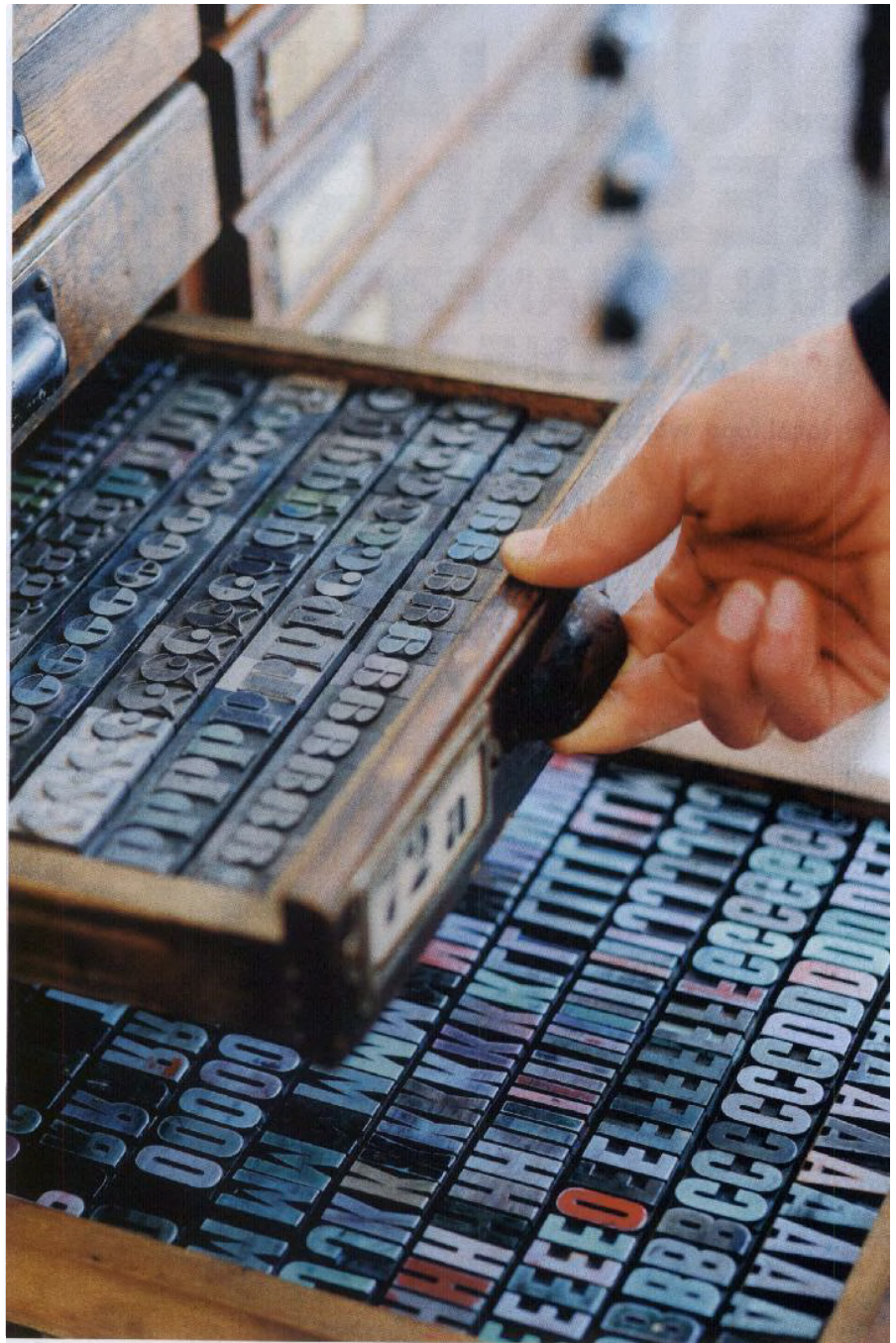
Plans? "We are hoping that the city authorities will allocate a space for us on Križevniška Street. There we would set up a design studio that will print its work using old printing equipment, and the space could become a centre for classical knowledge related to book printing. The lectures will feature designers and typographers, and in addition to knowledge of designing digital typefaces we will also even be teaching calligraphy and hand chiselling of letters into stone."

So why did the letterpress equipment fall into disrepair? A lot was destroyed back in the war, and later, in the seventies, with the transition to new printing techniques a lot of old things were thrown out, and in the last ten years the greed of managers meant that the majority of printing presses fell apart. Apart from a private collection in Bled, the collections of historical printing at the Technical Museum of Slovenia and the Partisan printing press at Vojsko, there are no major collections in Slovenia.

The highest number of old printing presses and studios in Europe are preserved in Germany.

Caption

The main part of the old printing press was the type case. The compositor selected a case with the right kind of font and he placed the mirror-image letters into the composing stick. With the letters he made a composition, adding where necessary a photograph set by the process engraver in a special process, and the result was a zinc plate with a screened photograph. The compositor made a galley proof and gave this to the corrector, who marked errors. If the typesetter missed a single word, correcting the mistake could take a whole hour, and sometimes something was lost in transit, and this meant 14 days of work wasted. Then the composed text went to the printer, who closed it into a form,



which had to be made very precisely, and the printer could then start printing. He had to achieve an exact print, which went to the bookbinder, where the processes were similar.

The printing press will be in Mačkova Street until 2 July, and on 8 July it will move to Kresija Gallery, where it will become part of the 1st Festival of Letters, which will last one month. At the festival, various workshops will show visitors how to hand-make paper, decorative initials or print their own business cards. There will also be lectures by graphic designers and typographers, and the one-week typographical workshop will even feature making up a digital font family intended for production in wood. The festival will close on 8 August, and the organisers will achieve their aim if the printing press grows into a design studio, and into a kind of educational centre for a rebirth of letters.