



Maxime Delvaux: Žale cemetery, Jože Plečnik, 1930s

# MODERNIST IN SOME WAYS

## CIVIC ARCHITECTURE IN LJUBLJANA

We currently live in a period full of uncertainty with regards to authorship. After having discovered the collective projects of the Shakers and other Utopian Communes in North America, it is now time to explore the opposite case, namely the individual author designing both the buildings and the city all at once. In our understanding, architecture is positioned between these extremes. The ideal case study of a city defined by a single author is Ljubljana: a collection of large and small architectural fragments designed by the architect Jože Plečnik, who reorganised the idea of the city for decades, after returning to the Slovenian capital in 1921. In Ljubljana, Plečnik is omnipresent and oversees the city: his buildings, monuments, benches, lampposts, churches, bridges and stadiums, represent a series of civic architectures that have redefined the image of his hometown. In every project and stage of his career, Plečnik has operated as an architect tout court, pursuing an idea of total architecture and making each project a treasure of details and inventions, whether it be the National Library or the market along the Ljubljanica riverbank. During our excursion we will discover how these monuments and infrastructures are the result of a holistic vision of the city, where each element becomes part of a homogenous whole.

The journey will allow us to understand why Plečnik was considered an outsider and a solitary pioneer of the modern movement, who began operating in Slovenia immediately after a wave of change aimed at defining the nation's cultural image at the end of the nineteenth century. While being part of a broad modernist current that embraced radical tendencies, the architect adopted a tolerant attitude towards the use of historical forms and ornament. Although he was practising during the first half of the nineteenth century, Plečnik could never turn his back to the past; his modernism was always coupled with a deliberate debt to history. Despite being the individual author of Ljubljana's civic architectures, Plečnik based each gesture on a critical understanding of the historical forms inherited from the past, which constitute a body of knowledge that is public and shared. Throughout our journey we will learn how this knowledge can be used by the single author, even today, to produce architecture in its most collective form.

In Ljubljana we will witness Plečnik's legacy, and how it has been embraced by his successors, such as Edvard Ravnikar, who have continued to radically transform the city. Our excursion will begin with a short stay in Trieste, where we will familiarise with the North Adriatic territory, and later start our exploration of Plečnik's civic architecture in Ljubljana. Guided tours, visits to archives and meetings with experts will allow us to immerse ourselves in Plečnik's oeuvre, understanding the intelligence of his work that lies behind its beauty. We will discover Plečnik's hybrid, ambiguous and poetic architectural inventions; the result of his complex methodology, simultaneously modern and autonomous, but also vernacular and contextual. Furthermore, we will learn how the architect's approach to history, but also to craftsmanship, industrial processes and the reuse of fragments, is relevant to contemporary practices.

### TEAM

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### SEMINAR WEEK

17.03. – 23.03.2025  
Expense category  
C (501 – 750 CHF)  
12 – 21 participants  
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LINK

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