

Folk Art and Beekeeping in Slovenia

by Andreja Kriz

In the 18th and 19th centuries, apiculture was one of the most important economic branches in Slovenia. Acknowledged apiarists and apiculture teachers operated during that period, among which Anton Janša from Breznica in Upper Carniola (1734 - 1773), a painter and the first apiculture teacher in Vienna, has a special place in the history of Slovenian apiculture.

Painting on frontage panels of the "kranji?" beehives (Carniolan beehives) used to be a distinctive feature of the Slovenian alpine region. The practice emerged in the 18th century during the heyday of baroque arts in Slovenia. The painting of frontages was done for the protection of the apiarist as well as for the bees as it indicated the financial standing of the apiarist and helped the apiarist to remember, with the help of their images, what was happening with each individual beehive. Natural pigments and linseed oil, which made the colours more durable, were used for the painting of panels on beehive frontages.

Beehive panels were painted in such a manner that they gave the impression of a multicoloured rectangle when viewed from a distance while, when seen from close up, each told a story of its own. Older motifs feature a religious content; before the end of the 19th century, secular motifs appear. Numerous older ones have motifs featuring pious content which most often depicted saints and patrons. Among those most often depicted is Mary as the universal protector, who is painted on the oldest known beehive panel (1758); the patron saint of firefighters, Saint Florian; and Jobe, who was hailed as the protector of apiarists in Slovenian lands. The secular group of motifs is made up of fantastic scenes such as animals playing human roles, making fun of craftsmen and human errors and a group of motifs that draw on the real world: military, pub and hunting scenes, apiculture and historical themes. There are around 600 different motifs that are known today. Beehive panels were painted by late baroque painters, semiskilled farmer painters, entirely selftaught people and occasional painters, among which we can include the odd apiarists, who painted their own beehives.

The painting of beehive panels, which reached its peak in the decades between 1820 and 1880, began dying out at the turn of the 19th century together with the "kranji?" beehives. Beehive panels represent an indispensable part of Slovenian folk art. Today, it is difficult to get hold of an original beehive panel, but it is possible to buy replicas, which are attractive nonetheless, and with which we can decorate our homes and thus make them more cosy and warm.

From an article published in Glasilo Magazine and at <http://www.theslovenian.com/articles/kriz.htm>



Collecting a bee swarm



A fox shaving a hunter



St. Mary



The suffering of Job