

## WELCOME SPEECH

Dear distinguished guests, dear professors, dear colleagues and students, welcome to the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, and welcome to the international symposium “Works of art on parchment and paper”!

The Roman poet Horace said that pictures are like poems without words; we can all enjoy them, but it takes a person of knowledge, an artistic soul, to preserve, restore, and interpret them.

These wordless poems, these historical monuments, these works of art are part of our cultural heritage. They are the basis of who we are, the core of our identity, and a cultural reference that shapes our everyday lives. Without the knowledge of how to preserve works of art – not only on parchment and paper, which is the focus of this international gathering – but art in general, part of our history and our humanity is lost forever. Just think of the desperate elderly lady Cecilia Giménez from Spain – a few years ago she was the joke of the summer on social media. She was upset at the worsening state of the image of Jesus in her local church, so she took it upon herself to restore the artwork from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to its former glory, but with devastating results: The “Ecce Homo”, a depiction of Christ crowned with thorns, now looks more like an ape than a man. She became an overnight sensation, but for all the wrong reasons. However, what is even more devastating is the

deliberate destruction of our cultural heritage and works of art by radical paramilitary groups, such as the Islamic State, because of political and religious reasons.

The only way to resist these horrific processes and to tear down the walls between cultures and people that the Trumps of today are trying to build is by knowledge and by remembering the past in order to understand the present and the future. It is for these reasons that I am delighted that the international symposium “Works of art on parchment and paper” is taking place at the Faculty of Arts, which is the central educational institution in Slovenia for the humanities and social sciences. The role of the humanities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not only in preserving cultural heritage and providing the foundation for knowledge about the past; their role is also in discovering, unveiling, clarifying and connecting with the worlds that are foreign, different, perhaps frightening ... We cannot live our lives to the fullest if we are not familiar with the stories of foreign people and foreign cultures.

This is also one of the most important messages of the European Year of Cultural Heritage. It aims at encouraging “more people to discover and engage with cultural heritage and, to reinforce a sense of belonging, to enable people to become closer to and more involved with their cultural heritage”, which “is not only found in literature, art and objects, but also in the crafts

we learn from our ancestors, the stories we tell our children, the food we enjoy in company and the films we watch and recognize ourselves in.”<sup>1</sup>

I would like to welcome you to the Faculty of Arts during this special year, in which we are celebrating our centennial – 100 years of the University of Ljubljana as well as the Faculty of Arts as one of its founding members. In fact, the history and the story of the University of Ljubljana started with the first lecture in the Slovenian language at this very faculty, the Faculty of Arts, on December 3, 1919.

Our program of celebrating the centennial is quite ambitious. We have decided to organize 100 events to celebrate our anniversary. I know – perhaps we have gone a bit too far, but we will reach our goal, and I am pleased that this international gathering will be a significant contribution to this goal. I would like to express my gratitude to my colleagues for organizing this important symposium, and particularly to Professor Nataša Golob – without her striking energy, patience, and determination, this symposium would not have been possible. I would also like to thank the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia for their excellent collaboration and for co-organizing this event. I wish you all a thought-provoking conference and a pleasant visit to the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana. Thank you very much.

Prof. Roman Kuhar, Dean  
Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana

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<sup>1</sup> See: The European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, [https://europa.eu/cultural-heritage/about\\_en](https://europa.eu/cultural-heritage/about_en) (June 1, 2019).