

## Street Art In Post-War Bosnia And Croatia: Rememering, Reclaiming, Re-Imagining

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As a life-long “creative” I find inspiration everywhere. My mind toggles freely between visual images and words on the page or the screen. And when it comes time for me to synthesize thought, research, experience, and emotion into a cohesive narrative, I often feel compelled to choose *between* “words” and “images” to convey a compelling story. In recent times, though, I find myself leaning into a more natural inclination to combine the two. I love the freedom this choice affords me. Street art—in its infinite array of styles and content—is emblematic of this hybridized creative medium. I’m not surprised to find myself drawn to these works like a bee to pollen.

### Impetus

For over a decade my own work has focused on elevating the voices of women displaced by (the 1990s) wars in the former Yugoslavia. In published interviews with these women, the text is accompanied by images: rare photos of childhoods truncated by the trauma of war; photographs depicting family homes razed by enemy forces; snapshots capturing the smiles of loved ones—years or perhaps weeks or even days—before unspeakable horrors had been visited upon them.

### Bosnia and Herzegovina

The book launch for my 2021 novel [Nermina’s Chance](#), about the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), precipitated a country-wide tour the summer of 2022. In each of the cities and small villages I visited, remnants of war—in the form of crumbling and bullet-riddled buildings—served as reminders of the recent past, even as new schools, condos, and office towers had filled the landscape.

A second trip in 2024 to BiH and Croatia for research on a new book of historical fiction yielded an unexpected benefit. When I reviewed the photos of street art I’d taken over the course of both trips, I discovered an uncanny overlap in the themes I often explore in my prose and poetry.

Primarily, the images underscored my core belief in the universal human need to recount our stories to others, to find solace and agency in the sharing—even (and especially) in

the aftermath of trauma. These images compel us to examine the physical, emotional, and spiritual scars of war. In doing so, they help us to make meaning of unfathomable loss. They help us to heal, individually and communally, to imagine—as their creators have—a brighter future.

These works are statements of protest, commemoration, and activism, daring us to see *into* and *beyond* the images and words before us, to interpret the messaging as we choose. My guess is that, like me, viewers will find among these works, expressions of resilience and hope, playfulness, and irony. Art inspired by horror. Art inspired by beauty. Art wielded with the sole intention of inspiring joy.

Please note, I have tried whenever possible to include artist credits and contact information for the works.

### Rijeka, Croatia (corresponding photos: A, B, C)

I visited Rijeka in August 2024 after spending several days in Split. Though less of a tourist draw than the latter, this busy port city has its share of impressive Austro-Hungarian architecture. Most striking to me, however, was this commemorative mural to the 200 Croat and non-Serb civilians murdered in November 1991 by Serb forces, following a three-month siege on the city of Vukovar. For an exhaustive study of the atrocities carried out here and the decades-long efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice, read [BIRN’s 2020 report](#).

## Remembering Vukovar

Artist(s) Unknown



A



B



C



[MOSTAR, BiH]  
*I Love Mostar*  
 Artist: Bibbitto, 2014

1

**Mostar, Bosnia** (corresponding photo: 1)

Mostar is one of Bosnia's most picturesque cities, which makes it that much more gut-wrenching to know the magnificent *Stari Most* "Old Bridge" had been obliterated in the war. The reconstructed bridge is now "a symbol of reconciliation, international co-operation, and of the coexistence of diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious communities," according to [UNESCO](#).

I took this photo of Bibbito's *I Love Mostar* mural in 2022. I later learned that Mostar holds an annual street art festival. Founded by Marina Mimoza, the inaugural event launched in 2012. [SAFMO's](#) installations are concentrated on and around Alekse Šantića Street, the dividing line of the 1990s' war. To view the now extensive array of Mostar's street art treasures, visit [Kami's blog](#). To read about the impetus for and growth of the festival, read [The New Berlin of the Balkans](#). For more of Bibbito's work, view on [Instagram](#).

**Artist(s) Unknown**

2

**Mostar, Bosnia** (corresponding photo: 2)

This image caught my attention during my visit in 2022. The rose called to mind what are known as "Sarajevo roses," bullet holes in roads and sidewalks, running with the blood of the fallen. These images marked places where victims had been gunned down by Serb snipers, stationed in the hills surrounding the city during the 1,425-day siege of

Sarajevo. I scrutinized the composition of the photo I'd taken here in Mostar looking to identify the artist(s). Unfortunately, I came up short on my search. I was also completely wrong in my interpretation of the image.

I learned instead that the rose represents the soccer (football) fan club, "Red Army Mostar" (RA), founded in 1981 after FK Velež Mostar won its first Yugoslav World Cup. (The group's [Instagram](#) is relatively sparse.) Since the club is made up primarily of Bosniak (Bosnian Muslim) fans, it would be meaningful to know when the mural was created and if it was conceived as a form of protest against the war.

**[SPLIT, CROATIA]**

**After Matko Trebotić's painting: "Opsada Betulija" Artists: Ivan Svagusa Stripovi (SVAIGE) and Luka Duolančić (2024)**



3



**Split, Croatia**

(corresponding photo: 3)

I took photos of several murals by Ivan Svagusa Stripovi (SVAIGE) and Luka Duolančić in August 2024. The first, a mural depicting *Matko Trebotić's painting: Opsada Betulija (The Siege of Julia)*, stunned me in its scope and composition. And that was *before* I understood the importance of this work, the artists' equivalent of a play-within-a-play where each artist honors the origin of a former creation, even as they add another iteration and their own spin on the underlying subject.

The mural was created to commemorate the 500-year anniversary of Croatian poet, humanist, and scholar, Marko Marulić's, death. Perhaps his most famous, the religious epic poem "Judita," published in 1521, was inspired by the Old Testament and events of the Ottoman incursion into Croat lands. To view more works by SVAIGE, visit his [Instagram](#). To view more by Luka Duolančić visit his [Instagram](#)

***Mozda bi vam bolje bilo daniste tu***  
***Maybe it Would Be Better if You Weren't Here***  
**Artists: Ivan Svagusa Stripovi (SVAIGE) and**  
**Luka Duolančić (2022)**



4

**Split, Croatia** (corresponding photo: 4)

This mural, entitled "Maybe it Would be better if You Weren't Here" is based on the illustration by Alem Ćurin and was also used for the poster of the 48th [Split Summer](#) festival several years ago. The mural was inaugurated in 2022 during the 66th edition of the Split Summer festival. I love how equal measures of playfulness and irony remind viewers like me to find humor wherever and whenever possible.

**Artist: Ivan Svagusa Stripovi (SVAIGE)**

5

**Split, Croatia** (corresponding photo: 5)

I happened upon this mural in one of Split's residential neighborhoods. The subject matter and energy of this piece blend imperceptibly with the vibrancy of the city, juxtaposing the old and the new. I don't know its title, but have dubbed it "Happy Cell Phone Boy." For an extraordinary romp through Split's street art, visit [here](#).

**Commemoration for Croatian anti-fascist  
Palmina Piplović (1922-1944)  
Inset "Noc" for poet, Croatian Partisan, Ivan  
Goran Kovačić (1913 -1943)  
Artist: Andrea Resner**



6



7

**Split, Croatia (corresponding photos: 6 and 7)**

The cheerful cerulean blue background of Andrea Resner's mural drew me in immediately, the brilliance of the color belying the tragic end of its young subject. This piece commemorates the little known Croatian anti-fascist Palmina Piplović (1922-1944) who was executed by German officers during World War II. The mural resides in the heart of Split's Veli Varoš neighborhood where the Piplović family once lived. It is encouraging to see this memorial to a female Partisan (resistance fighter), even if only as an anomaly.

The poem "Noc" (transcribed on the window shutter) was penned in 1941 by poet and fellow Croatian Partisan, Ivan Goran Kovačić (1913-1943). For Croatian speakers, the poem appears [here](#). I was unable to find a proper English or Spanish translation.

**Commemoration for Dika Marjanovic Radica  
(1892-1984) Artist: Andrea Resner**



8

**Split, Croatia (corresponding photos: 8,9)**

Andrea Resner created this mural as a loving memorial to Dika Marjanović Radica (1892-1984). "Dika" is known as the woman who preserved the culinary traditions and folk heritage of Dalmatian cuisine and one of Croatia's most popular cooks. Again, for Croatian speakers, Resner's mural even includes a recipe for *Fritule Dalmantinske* (Dalmatian fritters).





9

[ZENICA, BIH]  
For Ulični Festival, Zenica  
Artist(s) Unknown



D

For Ulični Festival, Zenica  
Artist: Haris Turalić, 2017



10

*Nabolji Sistem je Eko Sistem*  
*The Best System is the Eco System*  
Artist: Nataša Konjević, 2019



11

Artist: Deni Božić, 2018



12

## Artist: Zorana Unković, 2017



13



14

**Zenica, Bosnia** (corresponding photos: D, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14)

I visited Zenica in 2022 and then again in 2024. Both times, I was impressed with examples of street art that seemed to appear around every corner. I only learned about the city's [Ulični Festival Zenica](#) when I began research for this photo-essay.

It was encouraging to learn how young people here envision their role as change-makers, prompting us to imagine a cleaner environment, better schools, a world honoring the values of inclusion, diversity, and the arts.

I found it especially interesting, and somewhat disturbing though, to learn that [Zorana Unković's 2017 mural](#) (13, 14) had been painted over for reasons I don't completely understand. This instance, however, speaks to the volatility of public art and the inherent tension between the artists, municipal governments, residents, and local business owners.

**Sarajevo, Bosnia** (corresponding photos: 15, 16)

I took a serendipitous trip to Mount Trebević, high above Sarajevo, and home to many events of the 1984 Winter Olympic Games. Without the insistence of a local friend, I would likely have missed this incredible spot. Aside from miles of trails and the natural beauty of this [reclaimed space](#), street artists have turned the former Olympic bobsled run into an epic work of communal art. This piece by [Nuno Costah](#) stood out to me in its poignant simplicity. Sadly, the message is one that continues to resonate from decade to decade and century to century. It seems, there will *always* be victims of war. For an exceptional collection of photos of the works here, visit [photographer Anna Kasperiewicz's site](#).

**Sarajevo, Bosnia** (corresponding photo: 17)

Out of the dozens of photos I took at Trebević, I just loved the goofy smile the artist depicts here. When I searched for the tag's owner, though, I hit a brick—or rather, concrete—wall.



[SARAJEVO, BOSNIA]

At Mount Trebević, 1984 Olympic bobsled run , Artist: Nuno Costah



15



16

At Trebević, 1984 Olympic bobsled run

Artist(s) Unknown



17

SARAJEVO, BOSNIA

For Sale: 8 Alipisina, Artist(s) Unknown



18

Sarajevo, Bosnia (corresponding photo: 18)

I named this graffiti "For Sale: 8 Alipisina." In August-September 2022, an apartment on this block served as home base for my stay in Bosnia. While graffiti can be off-putting—I imagine, *especially* so to residential and commercial real estate owners—it continues to be a ubiquitous form of artistic expression. In this case, I saw a perfectly articulated, head-to-head battle between the graffiti art and the (official) printed notice in the window.



***Per un Mondo Migliore (For a Better World)*  
(2015), Artist(s) Unknown**



19

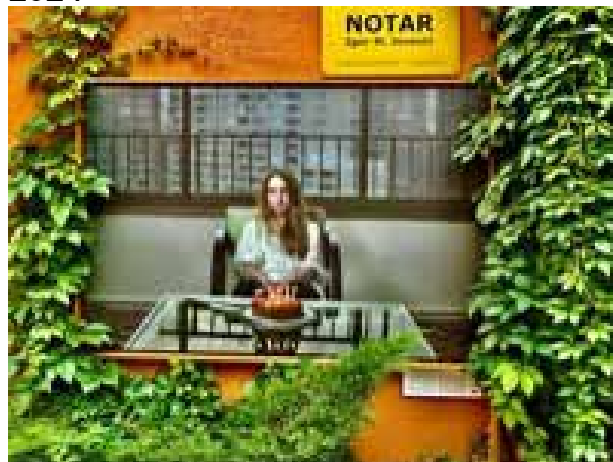
**Sarajevo, Bosnia** (corresponding photo: 19)

This whimsical piece appears at the entrance to a Sarajevo elementary school. I love the depiction of our world as a place of intercultural harmony. Bosnia—and Sarajevo in particular—was such a place before the war, and remains so today. However, the proliferation of revisionist history and drum beat of secession, stoked by Republika Srpska leader Milorad Dodik, threatens a peaceful and prosperous future for Bosnia's melting pot of ethnicities and religions.

**Sarajevo, Bosnia** (corresponding photo: 20)

Iranian photographer and photojournalist Newsha Tavakolian created this piece as part of her series: "And They Laughed at Me" for the 2024 WARM Festival. The festival is dedicated to documenting contemporary conflicts through art. Tavakolian's works appeared in fifteen locations throughout the city and at the Bosnian Cultural Center Sarajevo. When I first walked past this photograph I did a double take. The hyper-realism of the image caught me off-guard, so much so that I saw a young woman peering out a window rather than the solid exterior wall of a notary's office building.

***From the artist's series: And They Laughed at Me*, Photographer: Newsha Tavakolian, 2024**



20

**Brčko, Bosnia** (corresponding photo: 21)

Following years of negotiations, in 1999 the Brčko District was established as an autonomous and multi-ethnic region in Bosnia. Here, rather than funneling children into schools divided by ethnicity (Muslim, Croat, and Serb), education, along with all other civic engagement, is trained on the goal of inclusion. This mural embodies the sense of hope I find in the people of this city, some who have become close friends and colleagues.

**Zagreb, Croatia** (corresponding photo: 22)

I didn't get to spend nearly enough time in this beautiful city as I had hoped to. After 36 hours of a grueling travel nightmare enroute from the US to Croatia, this was the image that greeted me across from the hotel where I finally and happily crashed! It made me smile.

BRCKO, BOSNIA  
Artist(s) Unknown



21

ZAGREB, CROATIA  
Artist(s) Unknown



22

## LIZNAN (ISTRIA), CROATIA

## Artist(s) Unknown



23

**Ližnjan, Croatia** (corresponding photo: 23)

Finally, this simple expression of love appeared before me as I set out each morning from the lovely [Zvoni I Nari Cultural Center](#), where I served as writer in residence this August. The people of Istria share a warmth that is unique and irrepressible. Whoever created this image has summed up perfectly a world view we would all do well to emulate.

Dina Greenberg's trauma-informed writing and advocacy gives voice to survivors of war and displacement. Nominated for The Pushcart Prize, Best Small Fictions, and The Millions, her work appears in literary journals and media outlets in the U.S. and internationally. *Nermine's Chance*, (Atmosphere Press, 2021) her debut novel, begins in war-torn Bosnia circa 1992. Ms. Greenberg facilitates creative writing workshops in academic, community, and NGO settings. Her current projects include the interview series "Women of the Bosnian Diaspora;" research on the pre-World War II Jewish Community in Yugoslavia; and the young adult novel-in-progress *Ghosts are Falling*, narrated by two children—worlds apart—living in the shadow of war. She was a writer in residence at Zvona I Nari in August 2024. Find more here.



## Endnotes

1 - The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's (SFRY) was a federation made up of six socialist republics: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia (including the regions of Kosovo and Vojvodina), and Slovenia. Following the death of Yugoslavia's President Josip Broz Tito in 1980, leaders like Slobodan Milosevic rose to power and ignited a campaign of Serbian ultra-nationalism and calls for expansion of a "Greater Serbia." The Yugoslav Wars were a series of separate but related ethnic conflicts, wars of independence, and insurgencies fought in the former Yugoslavia from 1991 to 2001. On April 6, 1992 Serbian forces attacked the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo, setting off a three-year war marked by ethnic cleansing and genocide. The November 21, 1995 Dayton Peace Accords officially ended the war in Bosnia and Croatia. The agreement established Bosnia as a single state made up of two parts, the Bosniak-Croat federation and the Bosnian Serb Republic (Republika Srpska or RS) with a tri-partite presidency whose leaders represent each constituency.

2 - Ivan Goran Kovačić was born to a Croat father, Ivan Kovačić, and Transylvanian Jewish mother Ruža (née Klein). He volunteered for the Partisan forces and was killed by Serbian Chetnik troops in the east-Bosnian village of Vrbica near Foča on July 13, 1943. Kovačić's most famous poem is entitled [\*Jama\* \(The Pit\)](#).

3 - The Dayton Accords peace agreement reached on Nov. 21, 1995 by the presidents of Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia, ended the war in Bosnia and outlined a General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It preserved Bosnia as a single state made up of two parts, the Bosniak-Croat federation and the Bosnian Serb Republic, with Sarajevo remaining as the undivided capital city.

4 - The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's (SFRY) was a federation made up of six socialist republics: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia (including the regions of Kosovo and Vojvodina), and Slovenia. Following the death of Yugoslavia's President Josip Broz Tito in 1980, leaders like Slobodan Milosevic rose to power and ignited a campaign of Serbian ultra-nationalism and calls for expansion of a "Greater Serbia." The Yugoslav Wars were a series of separate but related ethnic conflicts, wars of independence, and insurgencies fought in the former Yugoslavia from 1991 to 2001. On April 6, 1992 Serbian forces attacked the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo, setting off a three-year war marked by ethnic cleansing and genocide. The November 21, 1995 Dayton Peace Accords officially ended the war in Bosnia and Croatia. The agreement established Bosnia as a single state made up of two parts, the Bosniak-Croat federation and the Bosnian Serb Republic (Republika Srpska or RS) with a tri-partite presidency whose leaders represent each constituency.