

Desanka Maksimovic HONORED AT Serbian Cultural Garden

by Milos Rastovic

CLEVELAND, OH – On July 11, 2021, a bust of famous Serbian poet Desanka Maksimovic was unveiled at the Serbian Cultural Garden, part of Rockefeller Park. The event was hosted by Alex Machaskee, founder of the Serbian Cultural Garden and Honorary Consul of the Republic of Serbia.

Desanka Maksimovic (1898 – 1993) was a Serbian poet, professor of literature, and member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. She published around fifty books of poetry, poems for children, prose, romantic, and travel writings. She was born in the village of Rabrovica near Valjevo in the south of Serbia. She finished high school in Valjevo and graduated from the Philosophy Faculty at the University of Belgrade. After graduation, she worked as a teacher in high schools for girls in Belgrade until 1941 when the Germans dismissed her. After the war, resumed teaching until her retirement in 1953. She received many awards, including the Vuk Karadzic Award for lifetime achievement from the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Statues of her were installed in Valjevo in 1990 and Belgrade in 2007.

Her most famous poem is “Krvava bajka (‘A Bloody Fairy Tale’), dedicated to Serbian students and teachers from a local gymnasium who were killed in one day by Nazi Germany in Kragujevac in 1941. Her works include “Tražim pomilovanje” (“I Seek Clemency”); “Girl’s Poem,” “Gracanica,” “Happiness,” “Joy,” “Migratory Birds,” “Spring Poem,” “Warning,” and “Your Every Word.” The author Christopher Deliso describes Maksimovic as “the most beloved Serbian poet of the twentieth century.” Celia Hawkesworth, Professor of Serbian and Croatian Studies at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, emphasized that, “[Desanka Maksimovic] was the first female Serbian poet to gain widespread acceptance from her predominantly male colleagues within the Yugoslav literary milieu, as well as the first Serbian female poet to attract a significant following among the general public.”

After the clergy officiated at the dedication of the bust, Mr. Machaskee warmly welcomed them along with the Kosovo Serbian Men’s Choir of Cleveland and all guests. “We installed ten statues, and are planning the next one to be a bust of Ivo Andric. There are around 40 gardens (here) and they all live together in harmony with the theme ‘Peace through Understanding,’” he said.

Wael Khoury, MD, President of the Cleveland Cultural Gardens Federation, stressed that Alex Machaskee is an exemplary leader in this project: “The Serbian Cultural Garden is one of the most viable gardens with many statues and monuments to remind the community about its notable Serbia. We are very proud of that. Mr. Machaskee is a leader not only of the Serbian Cultural Garden but very supportive of all the gardens. The Gardens are unique, and we would like to expand them. We en-

courage your friends to participate.”

The Serbian Cultural Garden includes terraces with great busts of famous Serbian people throughout history. In the center of the Garden is a bronze icon of St. Sava, Serbian Enlightener, Prince, and first Archbishop of the autocephaly of the Serbian Orthodox Church. It is a reproduction of mosaics from Hilandar, the Patriarchate of Pec, and Zica Monasteries. Also included are busts of Nikola Tesla, Serbian-American Scientist, and Inventor; Mileva Maric, Serbian Scientist and Wife of Albert Einstein; Mihajlo I. Pupin, Serbian-American Scientist and Inventor; King Peter I, Liberator of Serbia; Petar Petrovic Njegos, Serbian Poet, an Orthodox Prince-Bishop and Ruler of Montenegro; Stevan Stojanovic Mokranjac, Serbian Composer; Vuk Stefanovic Karadzic, Founder of the Serbian Grammar; Milutin Milankovic, Serbian Scientist; Nadezda Petrovic, Serbian Painter of Twentieth Century; and now Desanka Maksimovic.

Visiting the Serbian Cultural Garden is encouraged to learn more about Serbian history and our legacy. To support the Serbian Cultural Garden projects, its preservation, and renovation, please get in touch with Serbian Cultural Garden, P.O. Box 91896, Cleveland, OH 44101. The Serbian Cultural Garden is a part of the Balkan Heritage Preservation Foundation.

Gracanica

By Desanka Maksimovic

If only you were not made of stone, Gracanica,
if only you could ascend to the sky like
the Virgins of Mileseva and Sopocani,
then crows might not walk about your narthex
and alien hands weed the grass nearby.

Or if your bells, Gracanica, did not beat
like our forefathers’ hearts,
if only the saints on your iconostasis
did not have our builders’ arms and feet
or your angels Simonida’s face.

If only you were not sunk so deep
in that soil and in our very selves
if you were not to us
a name to swear by
if only you were
not made of stone,
Gracanica,
if only you could
be lifted up high.

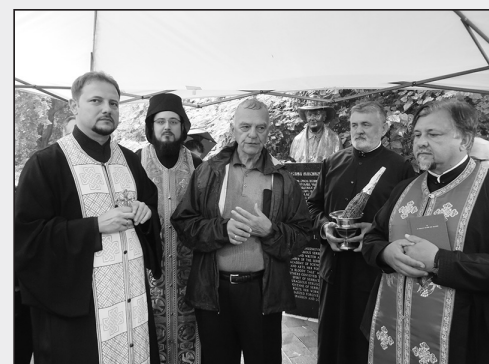
If only you were an
apple, Gracanica,
that we might put
you in our bosom
and warm you,
cold with age as
you are,
if only our long-
gone forefathers’
bones

were not scattered about you near and far.

If only we could lift you on to Mount Tara
or move you to the churchyard of Kalenic, or try
to forget the faces painted on your altar,
if only you were not made of stone, Gracanica,
if only you could ascend to the sky.



The rain didn't wait on Sunday, July 11th, but it still didn't dampen the spirit of the ceremony blessing the latest installation in the Serbian Cultural Garden



Alex Machaskee, center, thanks the clergy and speaks about the Serbian Cultural Garden

¹ Deliso, Christopher (2009). *Culture and Customs of Serbia and Montenegro*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group.

² Hawkesworth, Celia (2000). *Voices in the Shadows: Women and Verbal Art in Serbia and Bosnia*. Budapest, Hungary: Central European University Press. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desanka_Maksimovic