

napisale
written by



Barbara Predan



Špela Šubic

Niko Kralj, nepoznati poznati dizajner

Uvijek kad govorimo o industrijskom dizajnu, govorimo zapravo o našoj materijalnoj kulturi s kojom se svakodnevno susrećemo i možemo je u nizu slučajeva identificirati. Govorimo naime o onom najopipljivijem elementu materijalne kulture koji izgrađuje našu okolinu, a istovremeno ga, jer se prividno podrazumijeva, najčešće previdamo. Kada danas pomislimo na Nika Kralja, mislimo na njegovu najpoznatiju stolicu Rex. Pri tom previdamo da je to bio nadasve plodan autor i jedan od pionira industrijskog dizajna u Sloveniji. Arhitekt i industrijski dizajner Niko Kralj sudjelovao je u stvaranju naše materijalne kulture tijekom gotovo cijele druge polovine dvadesetog stoljeća. Za njegov je profesionalni put bila važna činjenica da

autor
author



Niko Kralj

fotografije photographs by

arhiva Muzeja arhitekture
i oblikovanja / Museum of
Architecture and Design archives,
Ljubljana, (MAO)
Domen Pal (MAODP)
Janez Kališnik (MAOJK)
ljubaznošću obitelji Kralj /
Courtesy of Kralj family

portret portrait

Niko Kralj, Unknown Famous Designer

Whenever we talk about industrial design we are actually talking about the material culture present in our everyday lives that can be identifiable in a series of cases. In other words about the most palpable element of material culture from which our culture is made and, at the same time, as it is seemingly taken for granted, most often we overlook it. Today when we think of Niko Kralj, we think about his best known Rex chair. While doing so we forget that he was a truly productive author and one of the pioneers of industrial design in Slovenia. Architect and industrial designer Niko Kralj participated in the creation of our material culture through almost the whole of the second half of the 20th century. A significant factor in his professional career was the fact that his father was a carpenter and he spent most of his childhood in a carpenter's workshop. During his study of architecture his professors were Edvard Ravnikar and Edo Mihevc, and the latter was also his mentor when he graduated in 1952 with his thesis on development design for sitting furniture. Even before he got his degree he was invited to take an apprenticeship at the Stol Kamnik factory and that collaboration soon turned into a full-time job. He established, and until 1960 ran, the first development design department in the former Yugoslavia. After 1960 he collaborated with the factory on a part-time basis and simultaneously worked as a lecturer in the recently



Posebna publikacija časopisa Möbel+Decoration, Konradin Verlag Robert Kohlhammer Stuttgart, svibanj 1960. Zapadnonjemački časopis MD izlazio je od 1900. do 1974. i bio je namijenjen osvrtu na internacionalna dostignuća u dizajnu namještaja. Reproducirani separat bio je u cijelosti posvećen predstavljanju dizajna novog namještaja Nike Kralja. Riječ je o izuzetnom dostignuću slovenskog dizajna i dizajnera iz tada nesvrstane Jugoslavije.

Special publication of Möbel+Decoration magazine, Konradin Verlag Robert Kohlhammer Stuttgart, May 1960. This West German Magazine was published from 1900 to 1974 and its main aim was to review international accomplishments in furniture design. The whole reproduced offprint was dedicated to promotion of Niko Kralj's new furniture. It was an extraordinary accomplishment of Slovenian design and designers from then non-aligned Yugoslavia.

(MAO)



(MAO)

▲ Sustav Futura, 1973., fotografija iz promotivnog prospekta

▲ Futura modular system furniture, 1973, promotional brochure photography



▲ Sustav Javor-Postojna, Lesna industrija Pivka, 1977., fotografija iz promotivnog prospekta

▲ Javor-Postojna modular system furniture, Lesna Industrija Pivka, 1977, promotional brochure photography

je njegov otac bio stolar te da je veliki dio djetinjstva proveo u stolarskoj radionici. Na studiju arhitekture su mu profesori bili Edvard Ravnikar i Edo Mihevc, kod kojeg je 1952. godine i diplomirao s temom razvoja namještaja za sjedenje. Još prije diplome bio je pozvan na praksu u tvornicu Stol Kamnik, a ubrzo se ta suradnja pretvorila u redovni radni odnos. U tvor-

established a course department at the Faculty of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodetics in Ljubljana. In 1966 he became president of the Institute for Industrial Design. He worked as a professor, investigator and designer related to the wood industry. Kralj participated in various exhibitions in which he frequently won prizes. Let's just mention the most important ones: silver

▶ Prototip naslonjača s križnim nogama i elastičnim trakama, Stol Kamnik, 1952.–1960.

▶ Armchair prototype with crossed legs and elastic ribbon, Stol Kamnik, 1952-1960

(MAO)



▶ Igračke za sastavljanje Mirna, Mirna; Pohorje pri Mirni, 1980.

▶ Mirna construction toys, Mirna; Pohorje pri Mirni, 1980

(MAODP)



medal at the 11th Milan Triennial Exhibition of Decorative Arts and Modern Architecture, then gold medal at the same triennial in 1973, three prizes at the Selective Exhibition and International Competition of Furniture 57 in Cantù, and four medals – in 1960 and 1961 – at the exhibition of innovations in Brussels. He spent several months on professional training in Sweden and USA and worked as a professional UN adviser in Israel and Sierra Leone. His opus unites design and theory. Niko Kralj wrote a lot about industrial design. His published theoretical work is important to observe together with his practice. In Kralj's design they create a whole and simultaneously reveal



▲ Preoblikovanje sklopive stolice s Kraljevim maticama, 1977.

▲ Transformation of folding chair with Kralj's nuts, 1977

nici je osnovao i do 1960. godine vodio prvi razvojni odjel za dizajn u nekadašnjoj Jugoslaviji. Nakon 1960. surađivao je honorarno s tvornicom, a istovremeno je bio postavljen za predavača na novoosnovanom studijskom smjeru B Fakulteta arhitekture, građevinarstva i geodezije u Ljubljani. Godine 1966. je na fakultetu postao predstojnik Instituta za industrijsko oblikovanje. Tu se bavio nastavom, istraživanjem i projektiranjem vezanim uz drvnu industriju. Sudjelovao je na brojnim međunarodnim natječajima na kojima je redovno dobivao najviše nagrade. Spomenimo samo najvažnije: srebrna medalja na natječaju za XI Triennale internazionale d'arte decorativa moderna dell'architettura e della modellazione industriale u Milanu te zlatna medalja na istom natječaju 1973. godine, tri glavne nagrade na natječaju Mostra Seltiva e Concorso Internazionale del Mobile 57 u Cantù i četiri medalje 1960. i 1961. godine na natječajima inovacije u Bruxellesu. Po više mjeseci boravio je zbog usavršavanja u Švedskoj i SAD, a kao stručni savjetnik UN-a djelovao je u Izraelu i Sierra Leoneu. Njegov opus sadrži projektantski i teorijski dio. Niko Kralj bio je iznimno plodan pisac u području industrijskog oblikovanja. Važno je promatrati njegov publicistički rad u odnosu s praksom. Naime, zajedno tvore cjelovitost Kraljeva dizajna te nam istovremeno otkrivaju manje poznate aspekte njegovih promišljanja. Unutar njegova djelovanja treba istaknuti dva ključna područja – evoluciju i mutaciju u dizajnu te predviđanja. Kod prve teme riječ je o terminima s područja biologije prenesenima na područje materijalne kulture, dizajna. Kako



▲ Čajni stol sa stolicama Lupina, Stol Kamnik, 1955.–1959. Stolica Lupina bila je vrlo jednostavno koncipirana – dvije jednake šperploče s dva ukrivljena ugla, koji omogućavaju spajanje ploča sa po tri vijka. Na taj je način stvorenu osnovnu 'školjku' bilo moguće tapecirati, a mogla je biti učvršćena na različite vrste nogu. Najraširenija inačica imala je četiri metalne noge. Jedna je od trajnijih stolica, a neizmijenjena je još uvijek u uporabi u javnim prostorijama širom bivše zajedničke države.

▲ Tea table with Lupina chairs, Stol Kamnik, 1955-1958 The Lupina chair was designed on a simple principle – two identical pieces of plywood with two curved angles that enabled connecting panels with three bolts. The basic 'shell' created this way could be upholstered and fixed on different types of legs. The most popular version had four metal legs. The Lupina chair has a long durability and is still in use in public spaces all around the former Yugoslavia.

(MAO)

less known details of his thought. Two significant spheres of interest have to be stressed – design evolution and mutation, as well as predictions. In the first he transmits terms from the field of biology to the field of material culture, i.e. design. Following Sullivan's principles of natural order, Kralj points out that evolution is a form that is more extended; even today most of the products in our environment are based on several-thousand-year-old archetypes. The second is diametrically opposed – mutations, ruptures, leaps, inventions. It's not possible to foresee all those ruptures but once they happen they influence further development and cause social changes. Both are aspects of design. The only difference is that mutations, real innovations, aren't as frequent as we like to think. However, evolutionary design in spite of that isn't inferior at all, as long as we know what we are improving, resolving, and we oppose novelty just for the sake of novelty, design just for the sake of design. A large part of Kralj's writing is about predictions. He was very conscious of the fact that



(MAODP) ▲ Replika stolice Mosquito, Impakta, 2011, privatno vlasništvo (prvi prototip stolice izrađen je 1953., ali nikada nije došlo do redovite proizvodnje)

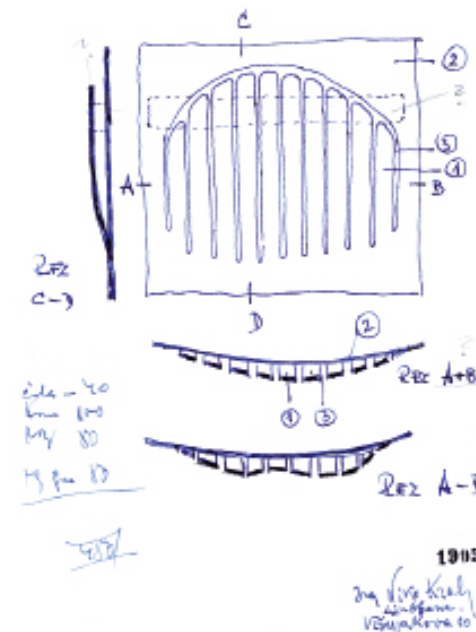
▲ Replica of Mosquito chair, Impakta 2011, private property (the first prototype was made in 1953 but it never went into regular production)



▲ Stolica 4455, Stol Kamnik, 1955.

▲ Chair 4455, Stol Kamnik, 1955

(MAODP)



(MAO) ▲ Kraljev prostoručni crtež opruge uz kombinaciju rezane šperploče i gume, uz nju naslonjač Rex 120, Stol Kamnik, 1953.

▲ Kralj's sketch of spring with cut ply wood and rubber, next to it Rex Chair, Stol Kamnik, 1953



▲ Naslonjač Rex 120, Stol Kamnik, 1953.

▲ Rex Chair 120, Table Kamnik, 1953

(MAODP)

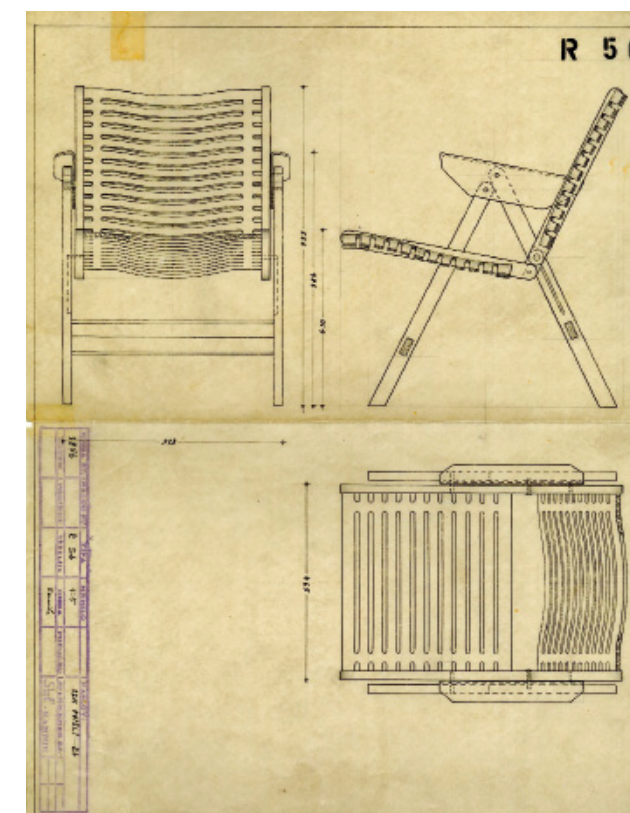
▼ Nacrt sklopivog naslonjača Rex

▼ Plan of folding Rex chair

Kralj ističe, oslanjajući se na Sullivanovu maksimu prirodnog zakona, evolucija je rašireniji oblik, naime i danas se još uvijek većina proizvoda oko nas temelji na arhitektonskim oblicima od prije više tisuća godina. Druga teza je upravo dijametralno suprotna – mutacija, lomovi, preskoci, invencije. Sve te lomove

as a designer he had to look into the future as much as the past. By looking back we become conscious that we stand on the shoulders of the past. At same time we shouldn't overlook the fact that design is a profession that works today for tomorrow. In this sense Kralj in many of his texts lucidly

nije moguće predviđati unaprijed, ali kad se jednom dogode, utječu na daljnji razvoj i prouzrokuju društvene promjene. I jedno i drugo su aspekti dizajna. Samo što su mutacije, dakle prave inovacije, daleko rjeđe nego što smo skloni priznati. Međutim evolucijski dizajn unatoč tome nije nimalo lošiji tako dugo dok znamo što poboljšavamo, rješavamo, a opiremo se novom zbog novoga, dizajnu samo zbog dizajna. Veliki sklop Kraljeve publicistike bavi se predviđanjima. Bio je naime vrlo svjestan činjenice da kao dizajner mora gledati isto tako unazad kao i unaprijed. Gledanjem unazad postajemo svjesni kako stojimo na ramenima prošlosti. Istovremeno ne smijemo previdjeti da je dizajn struka koja danas radi za sutra. U tom smislu Kralj u brojnim tekstovima lucidno razmišlja o razvoju i načinima stanovanja koja će društvo karakterizirati za 10 ili 15 godina. Već je od svoga prvog zaposlenja u tvornici Stol Kralj neprestano gledao prema budućnosti. Baš pri svakom pojedinom oblikovanju vidio je pred sobom korisnika kojem je tijekom razvoja htio ponuditi kvalitetno dizajnirane proizvode po povoljnoj cijeni. Pri tom je bio prvi industrijski dizajner u Jugoslaviji koji je u jednoj tvornici uspostavio razvojni odjel za dizajn, a istovremeno je već u prvoj godini svog djelovanja zacrtao put svojoj najpoznatijoj stolici, danas najčuvenijoj slovenskoj dizajnerskoj ikoni – stolici Rex. No, važno je istaknuti i stolicu Lupina, jednu od najviše upotrebljivanih



(MAODP)



▶ Osnovna škola Stražišče, školska stolica i stol, Stol Kamnik, 1955.

▶ Stražišče Primary School, school chair and table, Stol Kamnik, 1955

(MAOJK)



Sklopiva stolica Rex iz 1956. godine, imala je više prethodnika. Prva je stolica pod tim imenom i perforiranim prostorno zakrivljenim pločama plohe za sjedenje i naslona bila nesklopiva, ali s mogućnošću slaganja jedne na drugu. Stolica Rex 120 bila je u serijskoj proizvodnji već 1953. godine. Njena je najveća odlika bio upravo sklad tehnologije, ergonomije i vizualnog dizajna. Kada je Kralj stolici dodao mogućnost sklopivosti po principu nepravilnog pantografa, dao joj je notu praktičnosti i ekonomičnosti.

The well-known folding Rex chair from 1956, had several precursors. The first chair made under this name with perforated spatially curved panels for sitting and backrest was not foldable but could be stacked and by 1953 had entered into mass production. Its best characteristics were harmony of technology, ergonomics and visual design. After Kralj enabled it to be folded by the principle of an irregular pantograph the chair became practical and economical as well.

(MAO)

stolica velike trajnosti, koja se još i danas koristi u različitim javnim prostorima. Slično kao što je s Kraljevim stolicama i brojnim varijantama uredskog namještaja, u našem je sjećanju ostao i namještaj iz sedamdesetih godina. Nailazili smo na tu opremu takoreći u svakom domu. Sustava namještaja Savinja, Javor, Dota i druge smo u toj mjeri podrazumijevali da nismo ni razmišljali o sustavima koji su bili razvijani uz naročitu brižljivost posebno svaki za sebe. Nedvojbeno je činjenica da je u Sloveniji Niko Kralj zbog stolica Rex jedan od rijetkih opće prepoznatljivih dizajnera, a istovremeno je autor mnoštva 'anonimnih' kvalitetnih proizvoda koje svakodnevno koristimo (ili smo ih koristili), a da nikada nismo znali tko je njihov autor. Sada imamo priliku da ime i proizvod povežemo u cjelinu.

contemplates the development and types of housing which would characterize society 10 or 15 years ahead. From his first employment in the Stol factory Kralj concentrated on the future. As he worked on every separate object he was thinking about the customer to whom he wanted to offer quality design products at an affordable price. He was the first industrial designer in Yugoslavia who established a development design department and defined his most famous chair after his first year of work, today Slovenia's most celebrated design icon – the Rex chair. It is also important to mention the Lupina chair, a chair of great durability and utilization that is even today in use in many public spaces. Other furniture from the 1970s remains in our memory in a similar way as Kralj's chairs. These furniture sets could be found in practically every home. We considered the Savinja, Javor, Dota and other sets, which were designed separately and with great care, so normal that we didn't even think about them. It's an indisputable fact that with the Rex chair Niko Kralj was one of Slovenia's rare recognizable designers and at the same time the author of many 'anonymous' quality products that we use (or used to use) in everyday life, without knowing their author's identity. Now we have a chance to connect the name and product into a whole.

