

SELECTED MONUMENT PROFILES



Monument to Serbian and Albanian Partisans (Bogdan Bogdanović, 1973)

Kosovska Mitrovica, Kosovo

This monument towers above the divided city of Kosovska Mitrovica in northern Kosovo, where ethnic Serbs and Albanians have held a tenuous cease-fire since the Kosovo War in 1999. The city of Kosovska Mitrovica is divided by the Ibar River. To the south of the river, ethnic Albanians live with Kosovar passports and participate in the government of independent Kosovo; to the north, ethnic Serbs reject Kosovar independence, carrying Serbian passports and boycotting Kosovo's elections. During the war, this city was the site of some of the most vicious fighting during the entire Kosovo War, with over half of residential buildings damaged by sniper fire. But during Yugoslavia, this working-class industrial city also enjoyed some of the highest rates of intermarriage between Albanians and Serbs in the former Yugoslavia.

During World War II, the region of Kosovo was placed under joint German-Italian occupation and the Trepča Mines above Kosovska Mitrovica were seized for military use. These mines are the largest mines in Europe for the extraction of zinc, lead, and silver ore. Throughout the Second World War, Serbs and Albanians were forced to work 16-hour shifts in the mines while being starved of rations for the war effort and refused pay by their fascist overseers. In 1941, Albanian and Serbian miners together organized a massive socialist uprising against the German Nazis stationed at the site. These rebels used explosives to effectively seal the entrances to the mine, rendering further extraction of resources for the Nazi war machine all but impossible. Many of these rebels went on to form the Miners' Brigade in the Yugoslav Partisan Resistance to Nazi occupation, launching guerilla attacks on German and Italian targets throughout the Balkans.

The monument is constructed with two pillars supporting an ore cart, representing the two nations joining together to liberate the mine and uphold the promise of freedom.



Monument to the Ilinden Uprising (Jordan Grabuloski and Iskra Grabuloska, 1974)

Kruševo, North Macedonia

In 1903, the Ottoman Empire still controlled most of the Balkan Peninsula – including the entirety of North Macedonia – but its power was clearly waning. Dubbed ‘the Sick Man of Europe’ by Western European cartoonists, much of Europe seemed to be holding its breath waiting for the empire’s collapse. But if the Ottoman Empire were to collapse, what would become of the region of Macedonia? This question, dubbed ‘the Macedonian Question’ by contemporary academics, was so controversial because Ottoman-ruled Macedonia was extremely religiously and ethnically diverse, with Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians in the south, Bulgarian-speaking Orthodox Christians in the northeast, Albanian-speaking Muslims in the northwest, and significant minorities of Albanian Catholics, Jews, Romani, and Turkish Muslims. At the time, most European nationalists didn’t think that a multi-ethnic, multi-religious nation-state could survive, leaving division of Macedonia between its neighbors as the most likely outcome.

Kruševo native Nikola Karev saw a different answer to the Macedonian Question. He envisioned a future in which all Balkan peoples living under Ottoman rule could rise up against the Ottoman Empire together and establish a multi-ethnic, multi-religious Balkan Federation. Gathering together a group of leftist revolutionaries and academics from throughout the Ottoman Balkans, Karev launched an attack on his hometown of Kruševo on August 3rd 1903, surprising the Ottoman garrison and expelling them from the city. His guerilla troops then launched attacks on Ottoman forces around Macedonia, while his academic friends stayed behind to declare independence as the Republic of Kruševo, the first constitutional republic established in the Balkans.

Karev’s rebellion, dubbed the Ilinden Uprising for taking place on the day of Elijah (Ilinden in old Bulgarian), ended up being rather short-lived. While the rebels met explosive success in their initial surprise attacks on Ottoman forces, they were quickly beaten back. The Kruševo Republic fell into disarray just 13 days after its inception, on August 16th 1903. This monument, unveiled on the uprising’s 71st anniversary, commemorates Karev’s dream of a united, diverse Balkan state, which many Yugoslav leaders would later invoke in their creation of multi-ethnic Yugoslavia. The monument is thought to invoke a firing brain neuron, conceiving the idea of a Balkan peninsula united by history and geography rather than divided by religion. The nine windows represent the nine Yugoslav national regions: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Vojvodina, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia.



Kadinjača Monument (Miodrag Živković and Aleksandar Đokić, 1979)

Kadinjača, Serbia

Kadinjača today is a tiny, peaceful village tucked away in the wooded hills above the Serbian city of Užice. But in 1941, this tapestry of family farms, ridges, and forest glens was the site of one of the bloodiest battles in Balkan history. After Nazi Germany's initial invasion of Yugoslavia in 1940, the Yugoslav Royal Family quickly surrendered to German rule in exchange for the ability to keep their lives and titles. Many Serbs, however, decided to continue resisting German rule, founding the Užice Republic as a rebel-held sanctuary for Serbs surrounded by German occupied territories. As occupying Nazi forces and Croatian fascist Ustaša forces began a concentrated campaign of ethnic cleansing against Serbs in Bosnia and Serbia, thousands of Serbs fled to the city of Užice for protection. Meanwhile, Hitler decided that he could no longer tolerate the Užice Republic as a thorn in his side, ordering its eradication and signing off on the internment of any Serbian man, women, or child captured.

On November 26th 1941, Nazi troops surged south from Belgrade towards Užice. The Serbian troops holding the city began preparations to evacuate civilians but quickly determined that they needed more time. As a temporary solution, a garrison of several hundred Serbian men and women volunteered to stand against the Nazi army (which outnumbered them ten to one). These volunteers knew that they faced certain death, but hoped to hold off the German attack for long enough to evacuate Užice. Atop Kadinjača, they held off the German advance for three days – far longer than anyone expected possible – preventing thousands of civilian deaths.

The architects of the Kadinjača monument envisioned a long series of concrete sculptural installations stretching along the ridgeline, appearing as two waves colliding. It is the largest monument park by surface area in the former Yugoslavia.



Jasenovac Concentration Camp Memorial (Bogdan Bogdanović, 1959)

Jasenovac, Croatia

In April 1941, Axis troops from Italy and Germany invaded the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, quickly deposed the government, and rewrote Balkan borders along lines benefitting themselves and their fascist allies. Large chunks of Yugoslavia were awarded to fascist allies, much of Serbia was placed under direct German command, Montenegro was established as a fascist Italian protectorate, and the newly established Independent State of Croatia (NDH) was awarded remaining lands in exchange for its unwavering subservience to Italian and German fascist direction. Occupying most of present-day Croatia, the entirety of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and parts of Serbia's Vojvodina region, the NDH's fascist Ustaša government quickly worked to build a cult of nationalist authority based on Croatian Catholic symbols, elevating their 'race' above that of their compatriots. Under the direction of this government, the NDH established concentration camps throughout their territory with the express purpose of 'reeducating treasonous dissidents.' In reality, these concentration camps were used to imprison not only left-wing political opponents but also undesirable ethnic groups: Serbs, Bosnian Muslims, Jews, and Romani people. Jasenovac, perched on a quiet section of the Una River today forming the boundary between Croatia and Bosnia, was the largest of these camps. At Jasenovac, men, women, and children were initially forced to produce bricks, leather, and timber products. However, as early as November 1941, the camp shifted into a new role as a death camp. It aimed not to utilize the slave labor of its prisoners but rather to eliminate them entirely.

In 1945, Croatian fascists burned the concentration camp to the ground in an attempt to erase evidence of their crimes. For this reason, estimates of the total death toll at Jasenovac Concentration Camp remain unreliable, ranging from around 80,000 to as many as 500,000 over the course of World War II. In the late 1950s, Yugoslav dictator Josip Broz Tito commissioned architect Bogdan Bogdanović to construct a memorial to these victims – one of the first brutalist war memorials built in the former Yugoslavia. Bogdanović's design consists of a massive flower with six petals, its roots spread to reveal a subterranean museum. The floral design is inspired by the tradition of laying flowers upon graves, while the six petals represent the six major groups victimized by Ustaša fascism: communists, chetniks (anti-Ustaša royalists who sought the reconstruction of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), Serbs, Bosnian Muslims, Jews, and Romani people. The flower, opening to the sky, also symbolizes rebirth and reconstruction.



Memorial to the Fallen (Ljubomir Vojvodić, 1987)

Nikšić, Montenegro

Tucked away in a lonely corner of Montenegro's second-largest city, the Memorial to the Fallen commemorates the execution of thirty-two partisan fighters executed by occupying Italian forces on May 9th, 1942.

During the second world war, Montenegro was established as an independent Italian puppet state, with Italian government officials ruling by appointment and Italian military troops enforcing martial law in Montenegrin cities. Communist partisan fighters and royalist chetnik rebels hid in the scrubland of Montenegro's Dinaric Alps while launching joint attacks on the Italian occupying forces throughout 1941, achieving some moderate successes at wresting control from the Italians. However, by 1942, the leftist partisans and right-wing chetniks had begun fighting with one another as much as the Italians. Sensing a potential opportunity to quash Montenegro's communist movement, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini channeled arms directly to Montenegro's chetnik rebels in the hopes that they could eliminate the partisans. In early May 1942, Montenegrin chetniks captured 32 partisan communists and traded the lives of their countrymen to occupying Italian troops in exchange for further supplies. One of these prisoners of war was an Argentinian-Montenegrin dual-citizen, twenty-eight-year-old Ljubo Čupić. Moments before his execution in Nikšić, an American war photographer took a photo of Čupić smiling while handcuffed and awaiting his sentence. [The photograph of the 'grinning guerilla'](#) was heavily printed in the United States, Britain, and Latin America and helped rally Allied support for the Yugoslav partisan movement.

Architect Ljubomir Vojvodić constructed the monument as two gears – one vertical, one horizontal, joined by a massive concrete lever. These industrial motifs represent the spinning 'gears of war' that churn up the lives of average civilians.



Monument to the Fallen Soldiers of the Kosmaj Detachment (Vojin Stojić and Gradimir Medaković, 1971)

Kosmaj, Serbia

Kosmaj Mountain is a heavily wooded massif rising from the rolling plains south of Belgrade in Central Serbia. On July 2nd, 1941, the communist party of Yugoslavia gathered among the forests of Kosmaj to plot a military offensive against the German forces occupying Serbia – and the former Yugoslavia more broadly. Among these shaded glens, Josip Broz Tito established individual detachments of their larger partisan army and established their tactical approach for guerilla attacks launched from mountain hideouts throughout the region. The Kosmaj Detachment, one of the largest and most storied regiments of Tito's partisan forces, was headed by surrealist artist Koča Popović and comprised predominantly of young socialists from Belgrade's pre-war art scene. The closest regiment to Nazi occupied Belgrade, the Kosmaj Detachment launched hundreds of small-scale attacks on German military and industrial targets throughout the region before helping to participate in the liberation of Belgrade in October 1944. Throughout this time, the detachment evaded capture despite being surrounded and massively outnumbered by Nazi troops.

Rising above the surrounding treetops, the brutalist monument on Kosmaj Mountain is constructed to form a five-pointed Yugoslav star, a feature of the socialist nation's flag, when viewed from above. From a distance, the 'star' structure appears a single structure; only upon approaching the monument does it reveal that each fin is detached and self-supporting. The structure also resembles sparks shooting from a bursting fuse, representing the meeting of communist leaders at Kosmaj that provided the spark for concerted military resistance against the Axis powers.



Monument to the Fighters Fallen in the Peoples' Liberation Struggle (Janez Linassi and Živa Baraga, 1965)

Ilirska Bistrica, Slovenia

Ilirska Bistrica is a small city in southern Slovenia, situated in an alpine valley at the northern edge of the Dinaric Alps. On a hill overlooking the town, this brutalist memorial stands proudly atop an ossuary crypt interring the bones of 284 Slovenian partisan fighters killed during World War II.

During World War II, Slovenia was divided between direct German occupation and direct Italian occupation, with Ilirska Bistrica falling under Italian control. While Slovenes were not systematically persecuted like other Slavic minorities during the second world war, Germans and Italians did not recognize Slovenes as a unique people, believing instead (completely baselessly) that they were actually Aryans who had only recently adopted Slavic language and customs. In both German Slovenia and Italian Slovenia, the Slovene language was banned and children were forced to attend reeducation programs reconfirming their national identity as either German or Italian. Despite the relative safety in compliance with this brainwashing campaign, Slovene citizens joined the partisan movement at rates higher than in any other Yugoslav region, standing up against the Axis occupiers and demanding liberation. Guerilla attacks were launched on both Italian and German occupying troops throughout the war, many from the hills around Ilirska Bistrica where partisans hid among karst caverns formed by underground rivers.

Following Slovenia's liberation in May 1945 and inclusion in Josip Broz Tito's socialist Yugoslavia, the bones of numerous Slovenian partisans killed during the conflict were gathered here, at the site of one of the last cities successfully captured by the Yugoslavian Army brigade. The monument evokes the karst landscape of the Dinaric Alps, with stalactites and stalagmites forming a chamber reminiscent of those used by partisan guerillas to evade capture. Since caves have also been used by Balkan peoples as crypts since prehistoric times, the cavernous structure also advertises its purpose as a final resting place.



Tjentište War Memorial (Milodrag Živković and Ranko Radović, 1971)

Sutjeska National Park, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina's Sutjeska National Park contains one of the last patches of primeval wilderness forest in Europe, with massive three-hundred-year-old endemic pine trees and numerous species of endangered fauna. Rising from the valley floor amidst this natural splendor, the dramatic Tjentište War Memorial frames the summit of Mount Maglić, Bosnia's highest peak. The setting of the monument, today frequented by picnicking backpackers and school trips, feels impossibly idyllic – and yet, in 1943, these gorgeous old-growth forests were the site of the largest military clash between the Axis Powers and Josip Broz Tito's Yugoslav partisan rebels.

During World War II, Bosnia and Herzegovina was held under the control of the Independent State of Croatia's (NDH) fascist, Nazi-allied Ustaša government. However, deep in the Dinaric Alps of southern Bosnia, a dysfunctional Croatian military presence allowed Tito and his communist forces enough room to mobilize and launch guerilla attacks on surrounding Axis targets. In need of a victory to boost morale and seeking to eliminate Tito as a perpetual thorn in their side, Nazi Germany deployed over 120,000 men to surround Tito's brigade of partisans in May 1943, capture their charismatic leader, and quash Yugoslav communism for good. This operation, codenamed Case Black, did not go as planned. Surrounded in the mountains of Sutjeska, Tito's motley crew of 22,000 largely untrained revolutionaries broke through the German flanks and led the German troops on a wild goose chase across the harsh surrounding landscape. Over the following months, while nearly two-thirds of the Yugoslav partisans were killed or wounded, German morale stalled leading to mass defections and the eventual abandonment of the campaign – a humiliating loss for an army five times larger and massively better-equipped than their adversary.

The Tjentište War Memorial commemorates the partisans' improbable survival in the face of their fascist adversary. Drawing inspiration from the famed ancient Greek statue '[Winged Victory of Samothrace](#),' the monument captures the 'break' Yugoslav partisans were able to carve out of German lines to evade capture.



Monument to the Revolution (Dušan Džamonja, 1972)

Kozara National Park, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Kozara National Park preserves a large ridge in northern Bosnia, swathed in evergreen forests and crowned by the towering Monument to the Revolution. This imposing 110-foot-tall sculpture is dedicated to the 2,500 partisan fighters and 68,500 predominantly Serb civilians killed by Ustaša and Nazi troops during the Kozara Offensive in summer 1942. A crucial part of Yugoslav post-war mythology, the Kozara Offensive was the single largest tactical defeat suffered by Josip Broz Tito's communist partisans during World War II. Heavily outnumbered and out-armed, the partisan forces tasked with defending the mountain never really had a chance against the well-trained Axis troops surrounding them. But their refusal to surrender until the last man had been captured or killed remains a powerful motif in Yugoslav war memory – an act of self-martyrdom for Tito's socialist dream.

The monument consists of twenty vertical fins with interspersed bulge sections capped by textured steel plates. Children (though not often adults) can actually slip through the cracks between these fins and enter a circular inner chamber. This cylindrical inner chamber is meant to invoke the allied forces bearing down around the martyrs of Kozara. But the fins themselves, arranged in a perfect circle, are thought by art historians to reference the traditional [kolo folk dance](#) popular in the region.

Kozara's Monument to the Revolution today has become a site for celebration more than somber commemoration. Field trips and hikers climb around the massive concrete structures surrounding the central tower, vacationing families crowd the nearby restaurant, and concerts play rock music in the open-air amphitheater. This, too, is by design – Tito himself emphasized when commissioning the monument that the greatest way to honor the sacrifices of those fallen at Kozara was to create a space for joy, recreation, and celebration. An encapsulation of the utopian Yugoslav society set atop the graves of its forebearers.