HIS & HER PERSPECTIVE

photographic journey
through prison life

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Ana Batrićević

Title:

His and Her Perspective: Photographic Journey Through Prison Life

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INTRODUCTION

The mere thought of the loss of freedom, regardless of its cause, and all the suffering that follows, leaves us speechless.

Struck by the tribulations of the life behind the bars, our need to share our scientific notions and emotional insights found its expression in photography. The photographs lending a voice to a thousand words become more than the documented fragments of reality, emerging as visualizations of the unspoken, hinted, possible. They become the windows providing insight into the world that is isolated, intimidating and for the majority unfamiliar. Yet, a world nearby.

The lack of knowledge about this world commonly gives birth to prejudice and fear, making us forget that there is life happening on the other side of the wall. The lives of people with all their virtues and flaws, successes and failures, rises and falls, lights and shadows. The images of these lives are heavy with the atmosphere of constraints, but occasionally enlightened by trickles of hope. Each photograph invites us to read a passage from a person's life story without condemnation and resentment, encouraging understanding and empathy.

This photographic journey contains the photographs taken throughout the years of field research work in Correctional Institutions in Serbia, with the consent of the Administration for the Enforcement of Criminal Sanctions of the Republic of Serbia, conducted by Nikola Drndarević and Ana Batrićević, researchers from the Institute for Criminological and Sociological Research.

Containing six chapters, the photobook depicts various aspects of prison life, from the cold prison walls to heartwarming interactions, showing that life continues and that meaning can be found despite one's past experience and present difficulties.

01

THE PRISON WALLS

Prison walls have a clear purpose: to keep people inside and the outside world at a distance.

They give physical form to imprisonment, separating those deprived of their liberty from the everyday life of society.

Inside, movement is restricted, routines are regulated, and contact with the outside world takes place under institutional rules. For those living within them, walls become part of the ordinary landscape of prison life, but also a constant reminder of what lies beyond their reach.

Outside the walls, everyday life goes on. Inside, it follows a different set of rules.



↑ → Women’s Correctional Institution in Požarevac, 2024

Author: Nikola Drndarević

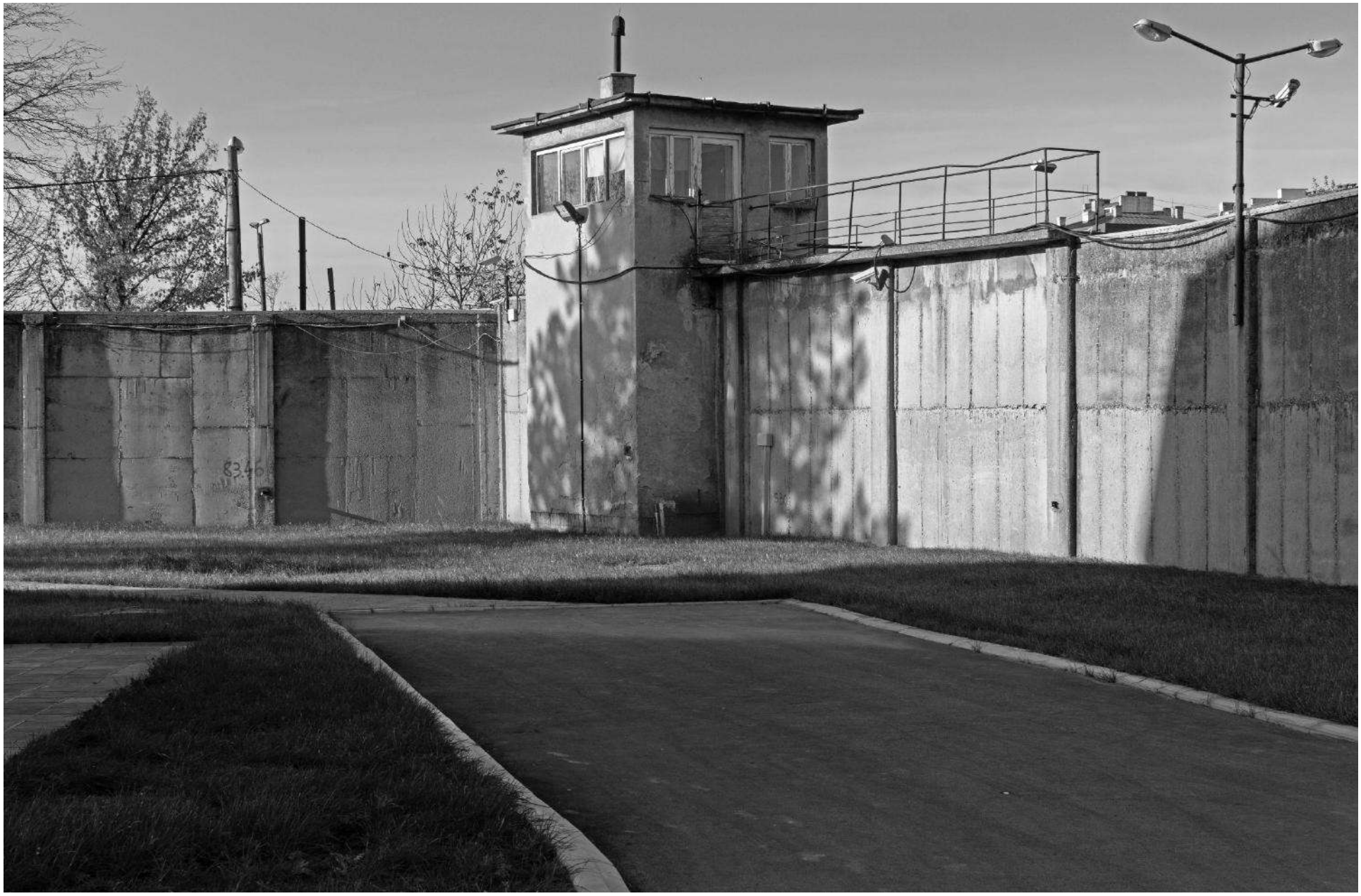



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↑ Women’s Correctional Institution in Požarevac, 2024

Author: Nikola Drndarević



↑ Women's Correctional Institution in Požarevac, 2019

Author: Ana Batrićević



District Prison in Belgrade, 2023,

Authors: Ana Batrićević ↑ ↗ and Nikola Drndarević ↘


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↑ District Prison in Belgrade, 2023

Author: Ana Batrićević



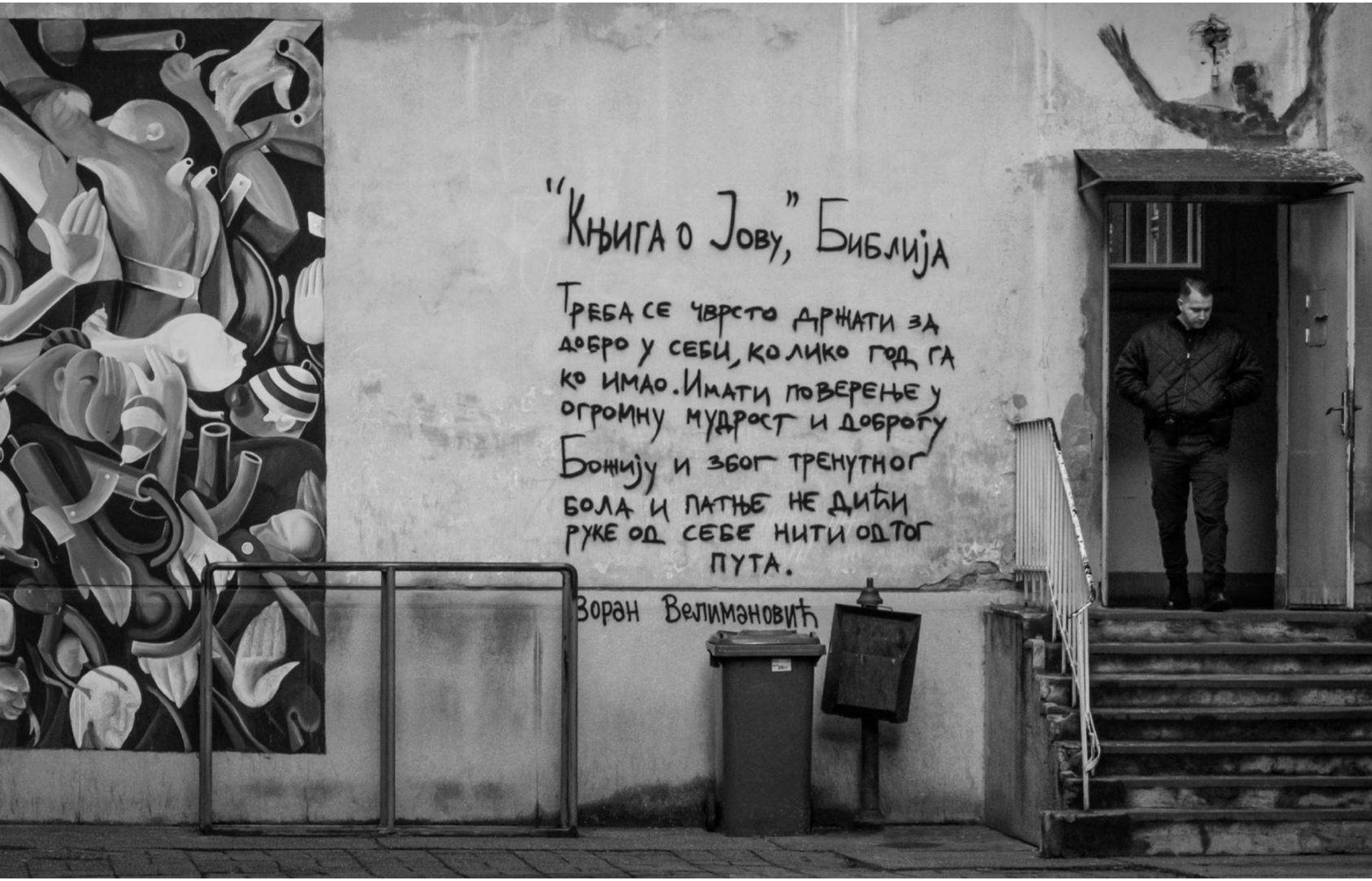
↑ District Prison in Belgrade, 2023

Author: Ana Batrićević



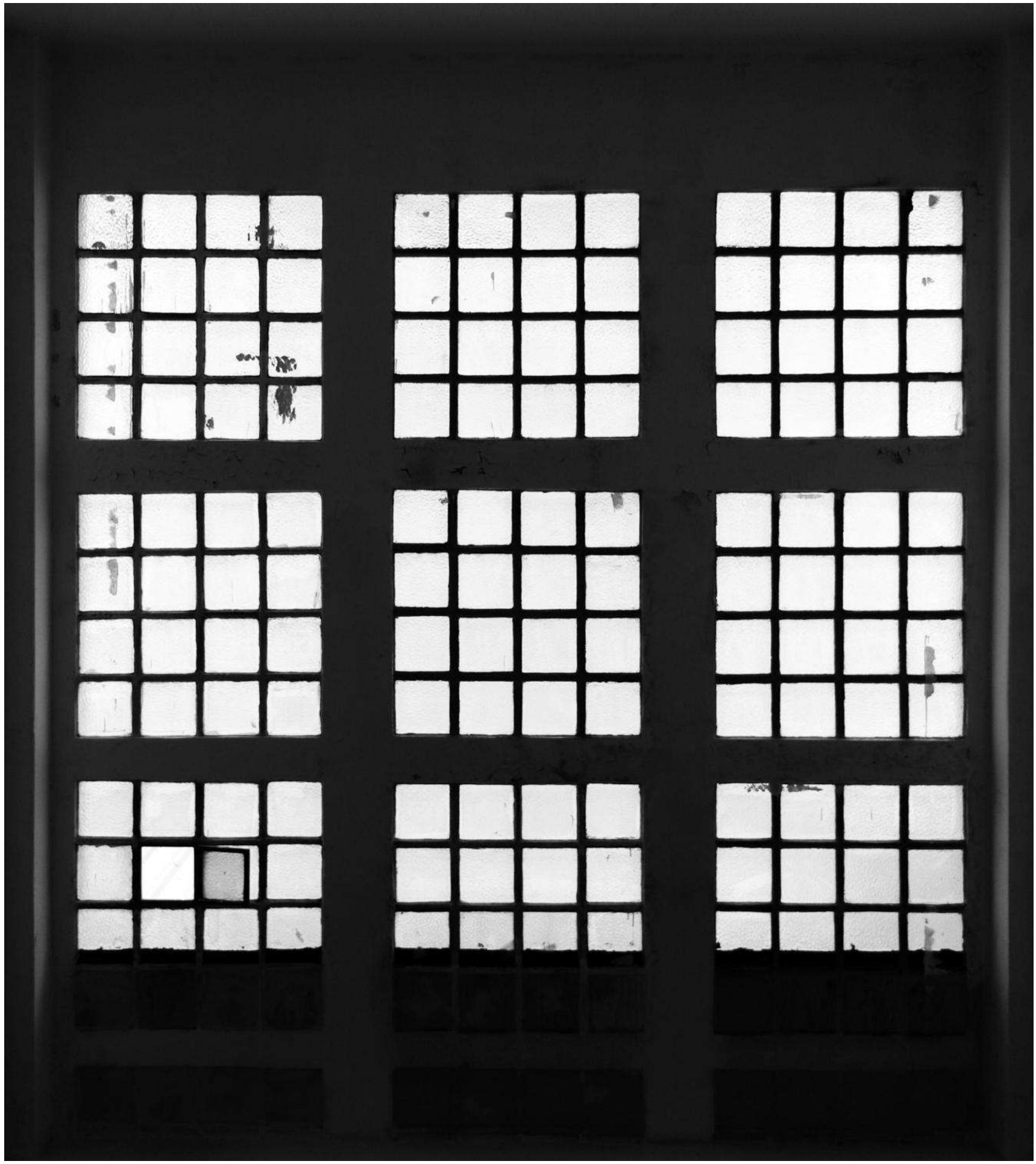
District Prison in Belgrade, 2023

Authors: Nikola Drndarević ↑ and Ana Batrićević →



District Prison in Belgrade, 2023 →

Author: Nikola Drndarević





02

CONTACTS INSIDE & OUTSIDE

Prison limits freedom of movement, but it does not remove the need for human connection.

Contact with family and loved ones continues through telephone calls and visits, while relationships inside develop through everyday encounters, conversations, gestures, and shared activities. These connections are shaped by the rules and routines of prison life, but they remain an important part of it.

For those living inside, even brief exchanges can offer a sense of closeness, belonging, or simply a break from the daily routine.

Even behind prison walls, people continue to seek, maintain, and build relationships





← Women’s Correctional Institution in Požarevac, 2024

Author: Nikola Drndarević





← District Prison in Belgrade, 2023

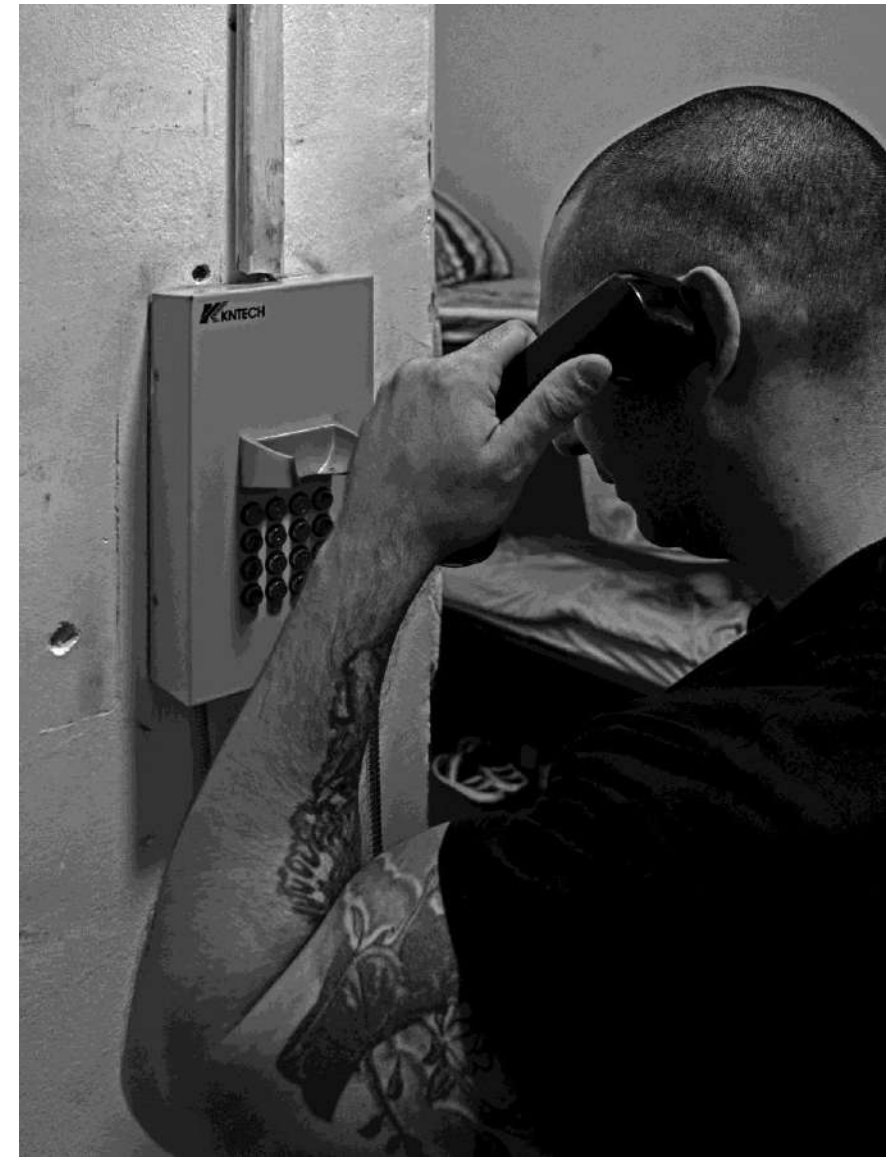
Author: Ana Batrićević



↑ → District Prison in Belgrade, 2023

Author: Nikola Drndarević


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↑ → Women’s Correctional Institution in Požarevac, 2024

Author: Nikola Drndarević





District Prison in Belgrade, 2023

Authors: Ana Batrićević ↑and Nikola Drndarević →


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03

WHERE CONCRETE MEETS NATURE

Prisons are environments shaped by walls, concrete, and spaces designed for security and control. However, even within these boundaries, nature can be given a place.

Prison greening initiatives introduce trees and other vegetation into spaces where contact with nature is often limited. Beyond changing the physical environment, such efforts aim to support psychological well-being by offering opportunities for calm, reflection, and relief from everyday stress.

The photographs in this chapter document one such initiative, showing how greenery is gradually introduced into prison grounds and becomes part of the everyday surroundings of those who live and work there.



↑ → Correctional Institution in Sremska Mitrovica, 2019

Author: Ana Batrićević









← Women's Correctional Institution in Požarevac, 2019 (before the rennovation)

↑ Correctional Institution in Požarevac–Zabela, 2019

Author: Ana Batrićević




БЕЗБЕДНО
МЕСТО



← Women's Correctional Institution in Požarevac, 2019 (before the rennovation

↑ Correctional Institution in Požarevac–Zabela, 2019

Author: Ana Batrićević







← District Prison in Belgrade, 2023.

Author: Nikola Drndarević

↑ Correctional Institution in Niš, 2019 (right)

Author: Ana Batrićević

04

FAITHFUL COMPANIONS

Animals can be a part of prison life in different ways.

In some prisons, rehabilitation programmes involving dogs and horses give incarcerated people the opportunity to care for, train, and work alongside animals. These programmes aim to encourage empathy, responsibility, emotional regulation, and a sense of purpose, while also providing care and, in some cases, a chance at a better life for the animals involved.

Beyond these organised activities, other animals become part of prison life in less structured ways. Cats wandering freely through prison grounds are a familiar presence, moving through spaces where human movement is strictly controlled.

Whether through rehabilitation programmes or everyday encounters, animals bring companionship and moments of warmth into prison life.

4.1. DOGS

A dog-assisted rehabilitation programme has been running at Sremska Mitrovica Correctional Institution since 2018.

Initially introduced in the semi-open ward, it was later extended to the maximum-security section. The programme brings prisoners into daily contact with abandoned dogs housed in a shelter within the prison complex, where they care for, train, and prepare them for adoption.

The work is intended to foster empathy, responsibility, self-confidence, and social skills. Prisoners also learn basic dog-training techniques that may prove useful after release.

For the dogs, regular care and socialisation improve their chances of finding a home. The programme brings together two practical needs: providing abandoned animals with care and giving prisoners meaningful work, skills, and responsibility. Some of these relationships have continued outside prison, with prisoners arranging for family members to adopt dogs they had cared for.

Some of the quotes from the interviews with the convicted persons working with the dogs:

"It's good. I like it. In the first place, the fact that these animals are taken care of. That's what I like. Nobody will kick them in the street or hurt them or kill them or something like that… In our hands they are completely safe and protected. They feel good. And so do we. That's it." (Batrićević 2019: 146-147)

"This first morning encounter. When I come to take him out. He is the only one in the entire prison who is delighted to see me. Neither the commander nor the convict will be glad to see me. Only that dog." (Batrićević 2021: 154).

All photographs in this section were taken by Ana Batrićević at Sremska Mitrovica Correctional Institution in 2019.


















ЗОНА
УПОТРЕБЕ
ВАТРЕНОГ
ОРУЖЈА

















4.2. HORSES

At Sremska Mitrovica Correctional Facility, prisoners take part in a rehabilitation programme involving the care and handling of horses.

The programme combines practical work with training in horse care and farriery, allowing participants to acquire skills they may use after release. Some of the horses are former racehorses or animals whose previous owners could no longer care for them.

Working with horses requires patience, attention, and an understanding of an animal's behaviour.

Daily contact also brings a change from the usual prison routine. Participants have described the stables as a place where they feel calmer, away from the tensions of everyday prison life.

The programme provides opportunities to learn a trade, take responsibility, and build confidence through practical work. For some, the time spent with horses becomes one of the more meaningful parts of their day.

Some of the quotes from the interviews with convicted persons:

"I think it (the impact of animals on humans) is a positive thing. It is an element of mutual care, love, what they give to each other. It's good to receive feedback. It is a great achievement for a person to connect with an animal." (Batrićević, 2020: 62)

"It's nice here. Inside the prison, we are a bit disconnected. That is the reason why spending time with animals is a good way for us to relax and share our true selves that, as tough people, we otherwise would not expose in this place. You know that they (horses) won't harm you but only do you good." (Batrićević, 2020: 62)

All photographs in this section were taken by Ana Batrićević at Sremska Mitrovica Correctional Institution in 2019.
























НЕЗАПОСЛЕНИМ



4.3. CATS

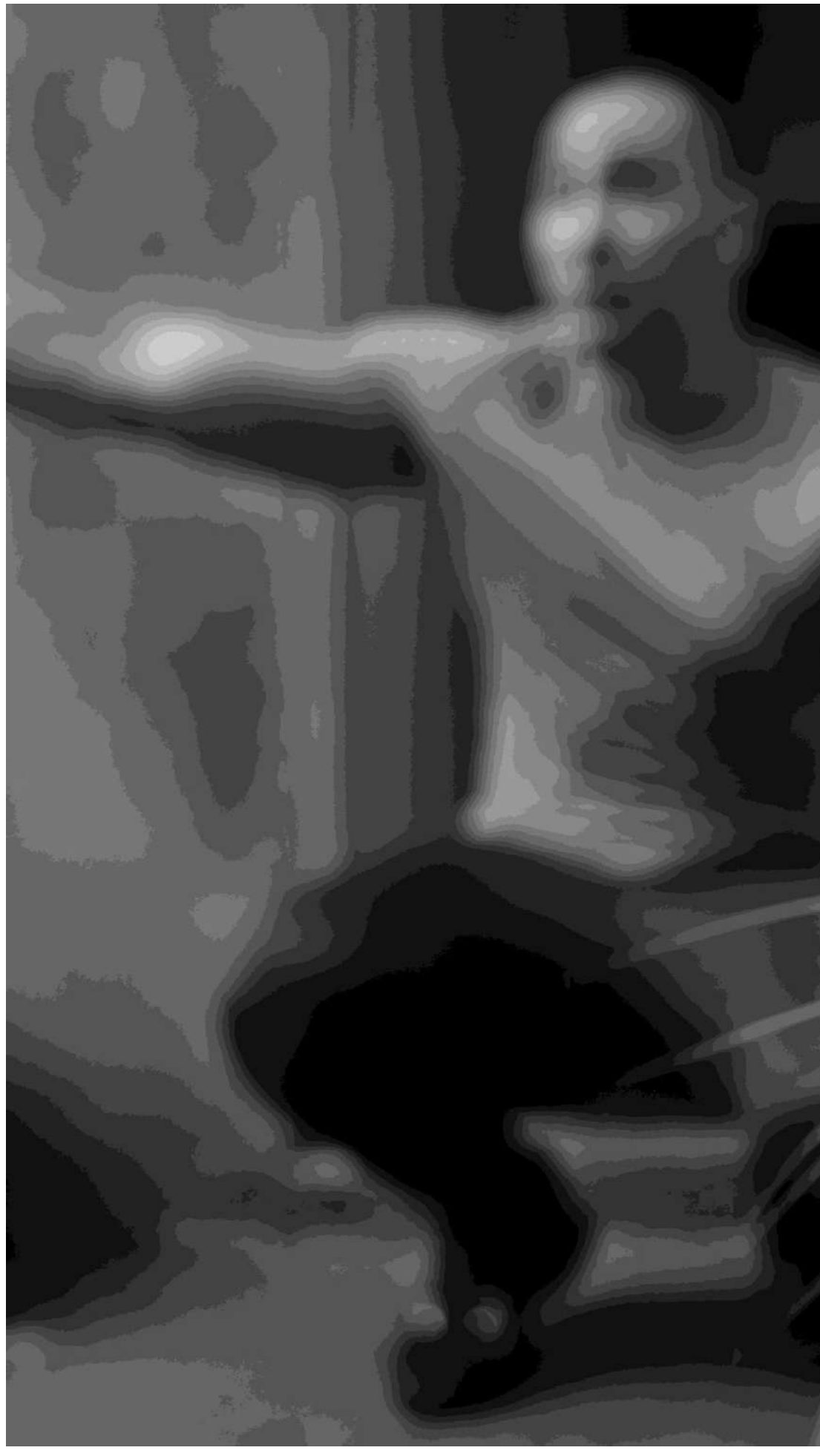
Unlike dogs and horses involved in organised rehabilitation programmes, cats often find their own way into prison life.

They appear in courtyards, wander between buildings, and settle wherever they find a quiet place.

Some keep their distance, while others approach prisoners or correctional officers, occasionally stopping for food, attention, or a moment of company.

Their presence is informal and largely unpredictable. In a setting where movement, routines, and encounters are closely regulated, cats move around with a freedom that stands in sharp contrast to the lives of those around them.

These everyday encounters are rarely planned or recorded as part of prison activities. They are simply small, ordinary moments of contact between people and animals.







↑ Women’s Correctional Institution in Požarevac, 2019 (before the rennovation)

→ → District Prison in Belgrade, 2023.

Author: Ana Batrićević







05

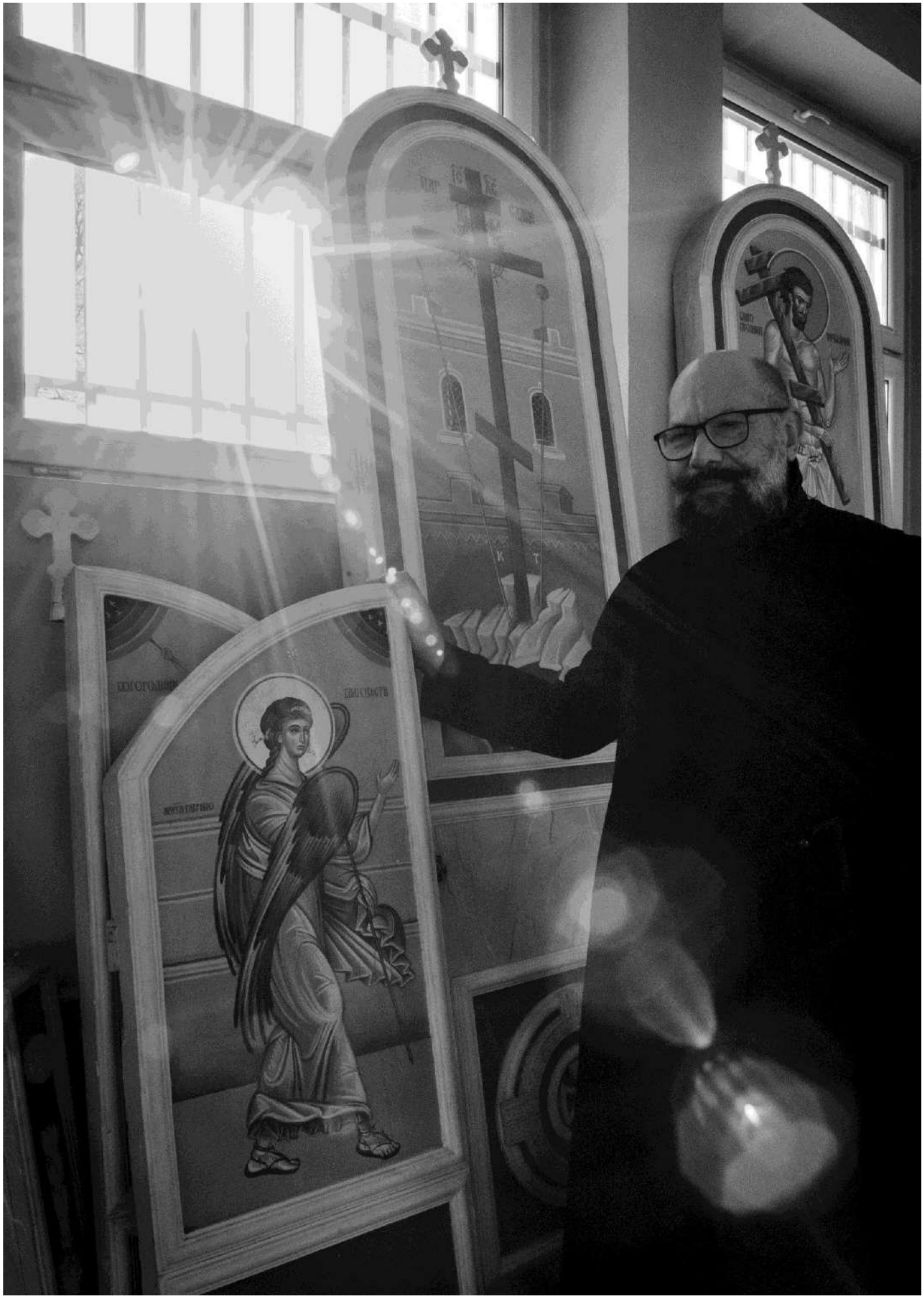
FINDING SPIRITUAL SANCTUARY

Prison life leaves limited room for privacy, silence, and personal reflection.

For some, religion offers a way to find these moments, as well as a source of comfort, hope, and meaning during imprisonment.

Prison churches and chaplains provide spaces for prayer, religious practice, and conversations about guilt, forgiveness, and personal change. Such encounters also offer an opportunity to reflect on the past and consider a different future.

Faith does not remove the realities of confinement, nor does it hold the same meaning for everyone. For those who turn to it, faith can offer something that is often difficult to find in prison: a sense of inner peace.



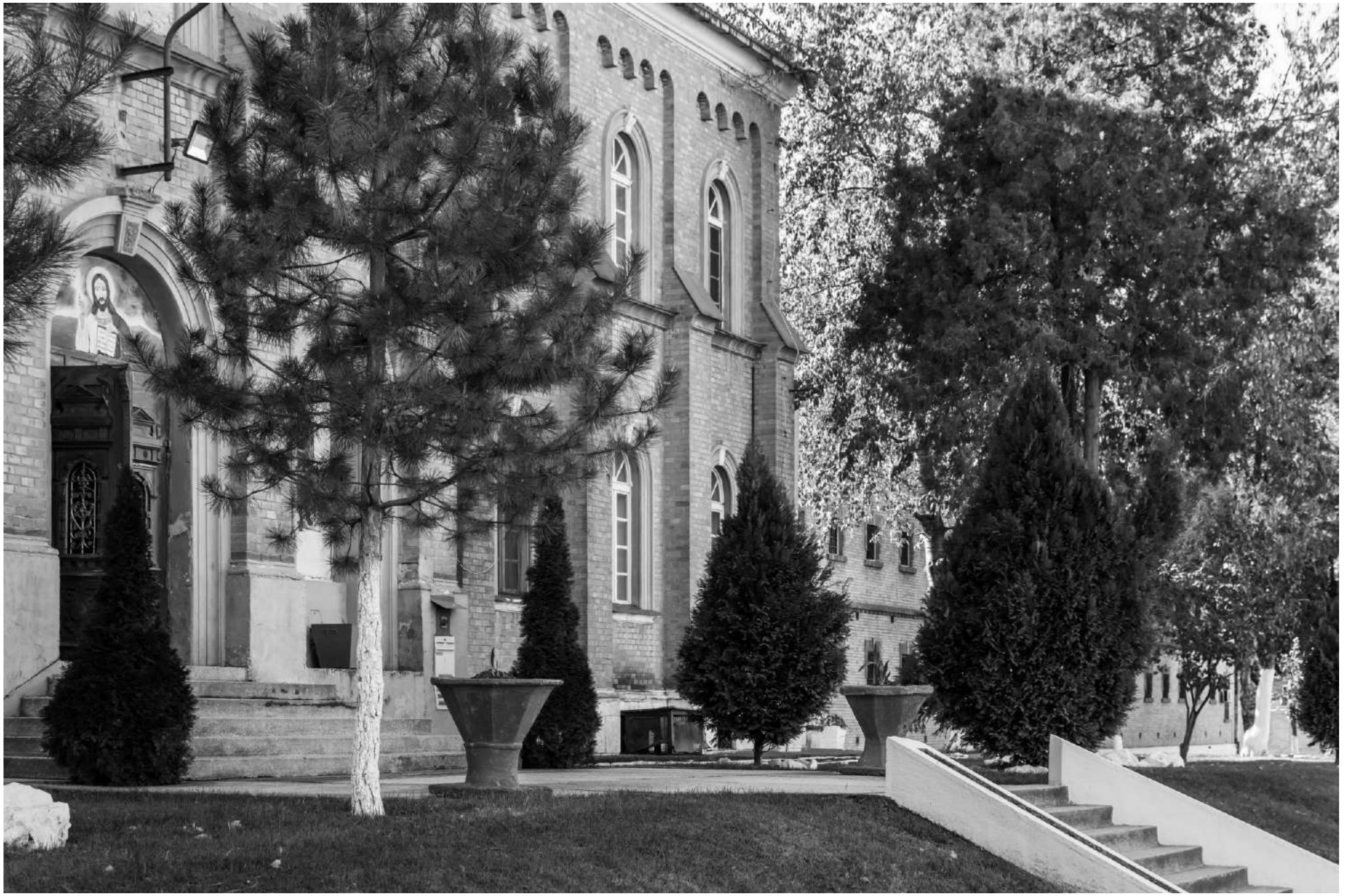






← ↑ District Prison in Belgrade, 2023

Author: Ana Batrićević



↑ Correctional Institution in Sremska Mitrovica, 2019

Author: Ana Batrićević



↑ District Prison in Belgrade, 2023
Author: Ana Batrićević



↑ Correctional Institution in Niš, 2019
Author: Ana Batrićević



↑ → Correctional Institution in Niš, 2019

Author: Ana Batrićević


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06

MAKING TIME COUNT INSTEAD OF COUNTING THE TIME

Time acquires a particular weight in prison.

Days follow institutional routines, while sentences are measured in months and years. Much of everyday life is spent within the same spaces, following familiar schedules, with limited control over how the day unfolds.

Exercise, reading, art, and work provide ways to occupy this time and give some structure to life inside. The objects people make, the skills they practise, and the activities they return to become part of their daily existence.

Some offer a sense of achievement, others simply make the hours easier to bear. Each, in its own way, leaves a mark on time spent in confinement.

6.1. SPORT

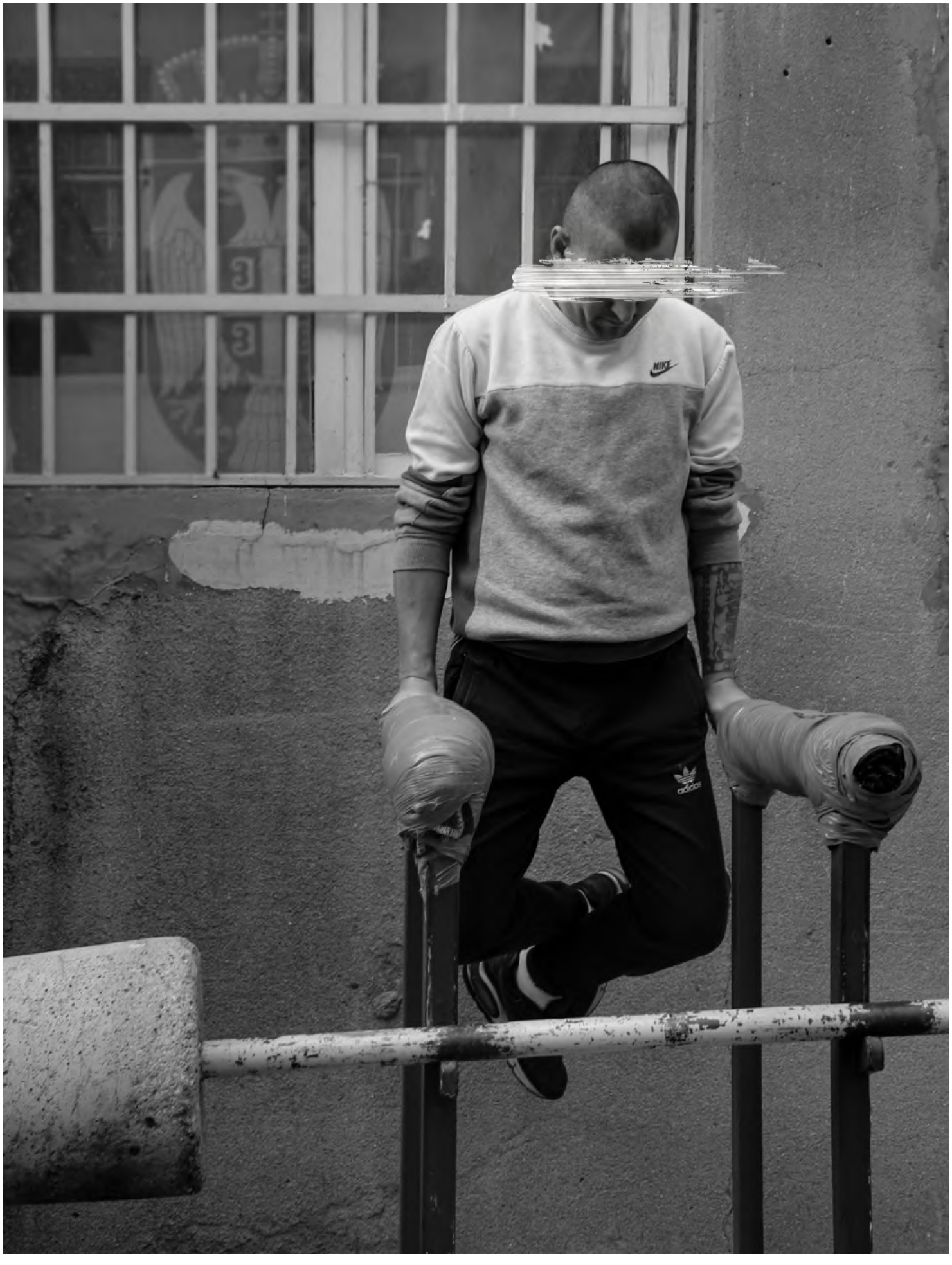
Physical exercise is one of the ways prisoners spend their time within the routines of prison life.

Outdoor gyms and sports grounds provide opportunities to stay physically active, release tension, and break the monotony of daily life. Football, table tennis, and other sports are also played, sometimes through organised competitions between prisoners from different correctional facilities.

For some, exercise becomes a regular part of the day, bringing structure, discipline, and a sense of progress. It also provides opportunities for social interaction, cooperation, and competition.






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District Prison in Belgrade, 2023

Authors: Nikola Drndarević ← and Ana Batrićević ↑



↑ → Women’s Correctional Institution in Požarevac, 2024

Author: Nikola Drndarević


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District Prison in Belgrade, 2023

Authors: Ana Batrićević ←↑ and Nikola Drndarević →



→ Women’s Correctional Institution in Požarevac, 2024

Author: Nikola Drndarević





6.2. ART

Art and creative activities have a place in the everyday life of many prisons.

Drawing is among the most common forms of expression, alongside sewing, working with clay, and making objects by hand. These activities require time, concentration, and patience, offering a change from the repetitive routines of imprisonment.

For some prisoners, creating something provides a way to express thoughts and feelings that may be difficult to put into words.

For others, it is a practical skill, a personal interest, or simply a way to spend the day. The resulting drawings and handmade objects reflect individual interests, choices, and abilities within an environment where much of everyday life is regulated.



Women’s Correctional Institution in Požarevac, 2024 →

Author: Nikola Drndarević





District Prison in Belgrade, 2023

Author: Nikola Drndarević ↑



Women’s Correctional Institution in Požarevac, 2024 ↑ →

Author: Nikola Drndarević







District Prison in Belgrade, 2023

Authors: Ana Batrićević ↑ and Nikola Drndarević →



6.3. WORK

Work is an important part of everyday life in many prisons.

Prisoners may be involved in food preparation, sewing, maintenance, agriculture, construction, and various forms of production. These activities contribute to the functioning of the institution while providing opportunities to develop practical skills and work habits.

Having a job can also bring structure to the day, a sense of responsibility, and the satisfaction of completing something useful.

Research on prison work suggests that prisoners often value the opportunity to stay occupied, feel productive, and maintain a sense of purpose.

Working alongside others also creates room for conversation, cooperation, and ordinary moments of humour. For some, the skills and experience gained may prove useful after release.

All photographs in this section were taken by Nikola Drndarević: those depicting male prisoners at the District Prison in Belgrade in 2023, and those depicting female prisoners at the Women's Correctional Institution in Požarevac in 2024.













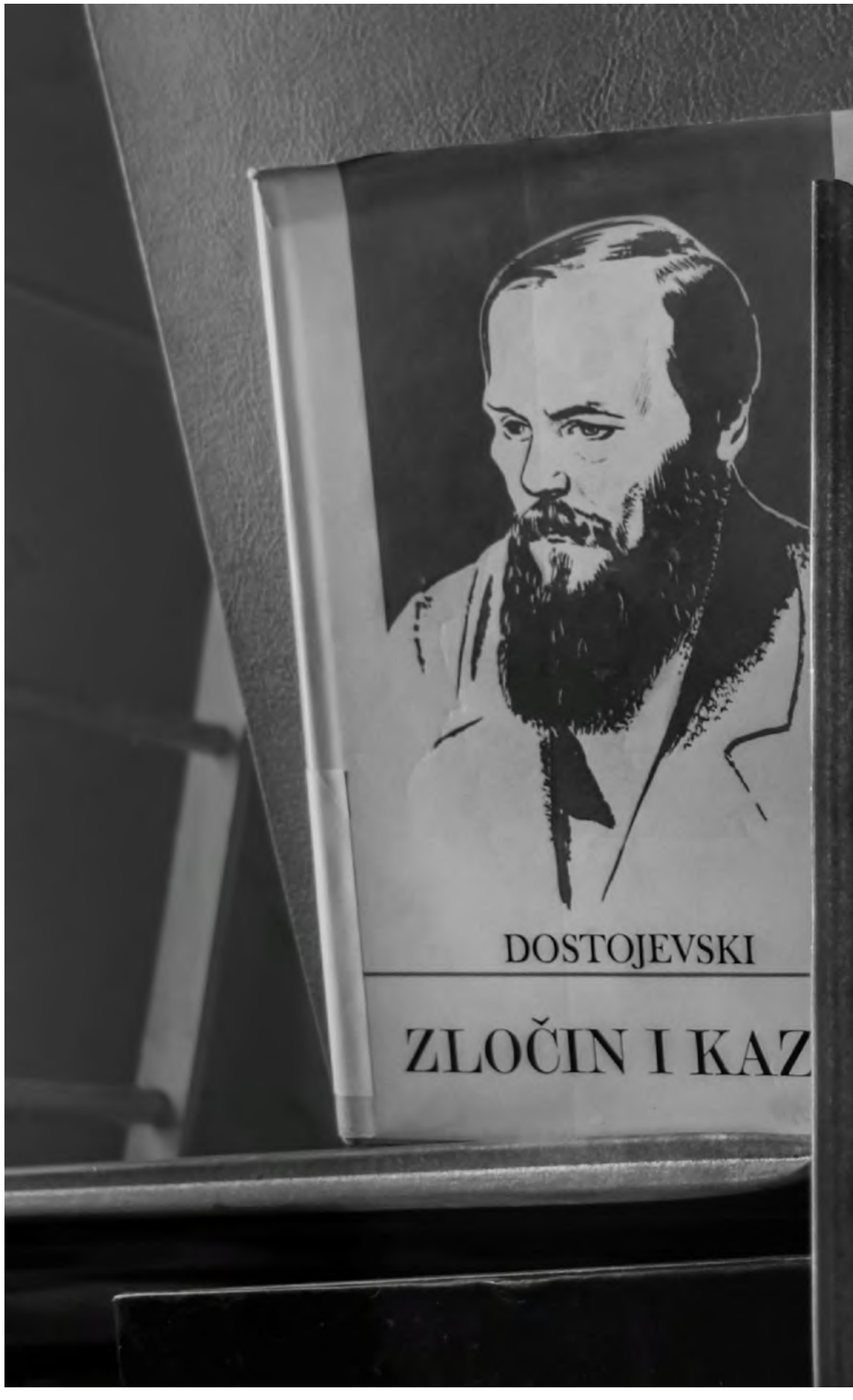
6.4. BOOKS

Reading has a particular place in prison, where time is often experienced through repetition, waiting, and fixed routines.

Books offer a way to occupy the hours, follow a story, or learn something new. Prison libraries provide access to literature and educational materials, although the range of available books and opportunities to read varies between institutions.

For some prisoners, reading becomes a regular habit, offering privacy and a break from their immediate surroundings. Literature can also encourage reflection on personal experiences, relationships, and the lives of others.

Whether chosen for entertainment, education, or personal interest, books allow people to engage with ideas and experiences that are otherwise difficult to access in confinement.




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District Prison in Belgrade, 2023

Authors: ← Nikola Drndarević and Ana Batrićević ↑



Women’s Correctional Institution in Požarevac, 2024

Authors: Nikola Drndarević ↑

6.5. OBJECTS TELLING THE STORY

Prison life can also be seen through the objects and small details that people leave behind.

Some are made by prisoners, others belong to the daily routines of the institution. Personal belongings, handmade decorations, drawings on walls, and ordinary objects offer glimpses of lives that are rarely visible from the outside.

In an environment where personal space and possessions are limited, such details can carry particular meaning.

They may reflect someone's interests, relationships, memories, or attempts to make a place feel more familiar. Others simply show how the institution functions and how everyday life unfolds within it. Some tell personal stories. Others reveal the ordinary details of a place where people live, work, and spend years of their lives.

The photographs in this section were taken by Ana Batrićević (photograph 1) and Nikola Drndarević (photographs 2–7). Photographs 1–5 were taken at the District Prison in Belgrade in 2023, and photographs 6–7 at the Women's Correctional Institution in Požarevac in 2024.






2016



Назив слике:
„Прохујало са Јухором" (Доручак ЦЗ)

Аутори слике: Киза и Стрја

2019


ВАСПИТАЧИ


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About the author

Nikola Drndarević

Nikola Drndarević is a psychologist, psychotherapist, and researcher at the Institute for Criminological and Sociological Research in Belgrade, Serbia. His academic interests focus on personality, psychological disorders, and the distinction between internalising and externalising forms of psychopathology.

His interest in prison photography emerged from a desire to better understand life inside correctional institutions, beyond what can be learned through research findings, official reports, and interviews. Visiting different prisons and speaking with incarcerated people offered an opportunity to observe the everyday realities of imprisonment, including aspects of life that often receive little attention in scientific research.

For Nikola, photography became a way of documenting these encounters and paying closer attention to the people, spaces, and ordinary details of prison life. Together with Ana Batrićević, he participated in the PrisonLIFE photography project, which resulted in a joint exhibition in 2024. His & Her Perspective continues this exploration, bringing together photographs taken during their visits to Serbian correctional institutions.



About the author

Ana Batrićević



Ana Batrićević is a researcher and photographer born in Belgrade, Serbia on 26.12.1985. As a Principal Research Fellow at the Institute for Criminological and Sociological Research in Belgrade, she includes documentary photography it in her scientific and field research work related to ecology, environment protection, resocialization of prisoners, juvenile delinquency and human rights. Ana is a member of Serbian Photo Association (FA1 FSS) and Belgrade Photo Club and a C Master of Light Distinction Holder.

Her first photography exhibition “Belgrade Waste” was presented within the international festival of green culture “Green Fest” in Belgrade in 2017, and within Climate Caravan, a project implemented by the French Institute in several cities across Serbia in 2018. Ana has had 9 solo exhibitions: “Second Chance” (2018); "Freedom inside the Circle” (2019); "Takeaway Happiness" (2021); "Closeness of Freedom" (2021); "Escapes from Reality" (2022); “The eyes of Buildings” (2023); “PrisonLIFE” (2024) with Nikola Drndarević; "Quiet Presence" (2026); Everything that Grows".

Her photographs have been awarded and presented in several national and international photography competitions and festivals and many of them have been published in both – on-line and printed photographic magazines, including Grain Magazine, Fotobook Monthly and Docu Magazine and online and printed media.

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