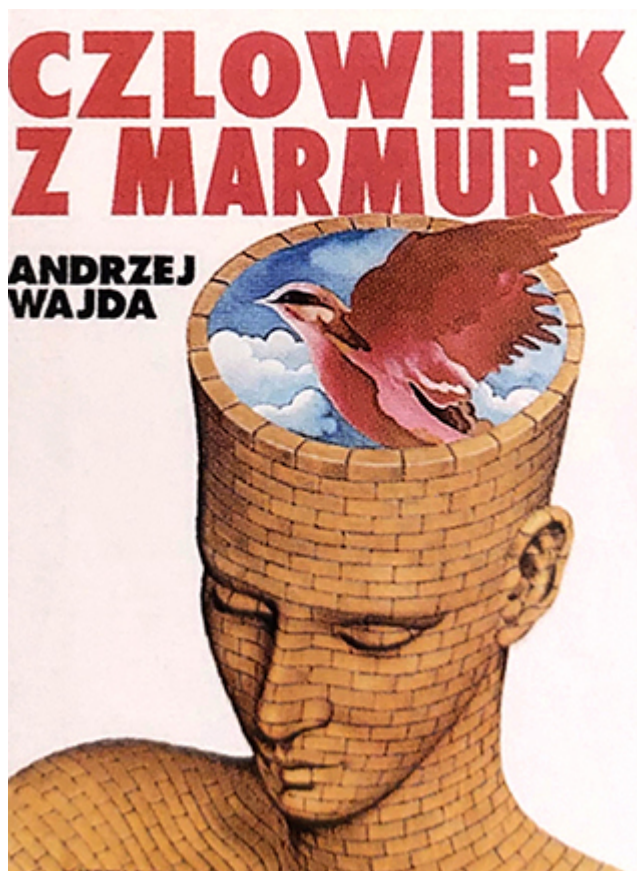


A Censored Work. The Extraordinary Story Behind the Poster for Andrzej Wajda's Film „Man of Marble”.

Joanna Sokołowska-Gwizdka

One of the Italian posters for Andrzej Wajda's *Man of Marble* conceals a story far larger than the history of the film itself. It begins with a painting by Franco Scepi depicting a man whose head is built like a brick wall, from

which a dove emerges together with the hammer and sickle. Then the symbols of communism disappear. Nearly twenty years later, in a handwritten letter to the artist, Andrzej Wajda would write: “I persuaded you at the time to change the concept and censored the work.” And the image, born in the 1970s, would begin an entirely new life as *Man of Peace* — a symbol associated with Mikhail Gorbachev and Nobel Peace Prize laureates.



*Franco Scepi, poster design for Andrzej Wajda's **Man of Marble**, 1978. In this version, the hammer and sickle have disappeared, while the bird emerging from the open brick-built head remains. Photo courtesy of Franco Scepi.*

When I approached the Italian artist **Franco Scepi** to ask

permission to display his poster for *Man of Marble* in an exhibition being prepared for the Austin Polish Film Festival, I expected a brief answer: yes or no.

Permission came. But with it, I received something I had not expected at all.

Franco Scepi sent photographs, documentation tracing the successive incarnations of his work, and a copy of a handwritten letter from Andrzej Wajda. He wrote that he wanted to share a story he considered very important and one that, in his view, is not widely known in Poland. He had created the poster at Andrzej Wajda's request in 1978.

The most remarkable item, however, was a one-page letter dated March 12, 1996, handwritten by Andrzej Wajda to Franco Scepi. It begins with the words: **"Dear Friend."**

Andrzej Wajda writes that he was immensely pleased that the first version of the poster for *Man of Marble* had been rediscovered. Then comes a sentence one would hardly expect: **"At the time, I persuaded you to change the concept and censored the work."**

The director does not shift responsibility onto some anonymous "censorship." He writes in the first person. He adds that his

decision was evidence not only of the pressure he was under at the time, but also — as he himself puts it — of his “smallness of heart.” He admits that he did not believe the communist system would ever collapse or that the hammer and sickle would cease to “haunt the world.”

It is an extraordinary testimony. Not because it reveals the existence of censorship in communist Poland — we know that all too well. What is extraordinary is that, nearly twenty years later, one of Poland’s most distinguished film directors returned to a single decision concerning a poster and described his own conduct without constructing an exculpatory narrative around it.

There is something profoundly human in this letter: the memory of fear, an awareness of compromise, and relief that the original version of the work survived.

12. III. 1996 Warszawa.

Drogi Przyjacielu

Sprawił mi Pan ogromną radość,
odnajdując przewoźcę wędzjącego plakat
(Stolnick z warszawy) - Fakt, że
namowienie Pana wtedy na zmianę
konceptu i ocenę wrota to było
fakt nie tylko dowodem pod jak
wielkim naciskiem znajdował się
wtedy, lecz i matosici serca...
Nie wierzyłem że ten system upadnie
a sierp i wiat przestanie straszyć
świat.
Popietułem wielki gdańsk i poza satysfak-
cję, że przewoźca wędzjącego odnalazła się
i będzie świadczyć prawdę o fałszywych
czasach, jestem oprawcą szczepienia,
że nie myśli Pan o mnie i moim postępie
złe, więcej stara niż go zrozumieć
i usprawiedliwić.

Z ogromną wdzięcznością
i serdecznie ścisnął Pan dłoń
i powstaje z przyjaźnią

Andrzej Wajda

Handwritten letter from Andrzej Wajda to Franco Scepi, Warsaw, March 12, 1996. In it, the director revisits the history of the first version of the poster for **Man of Marble** and writes about his decision to alter the concept of the work. Photo courtesy of Franco Scepi.

A Head Made of Brick

Franco Scepi's first painting is unsettling. A human head rises from the ground, built like a wall of bricks. The skull is open. Inside it, against a background of sky, are the **hammer and**

sickle, intertwined with the movement of a white bird.

Franco Scepi recalls that the painting was created in 1977 and that its inspiration was connected with Kraków and the then Archbishop of Kraków, Karol Wojtyła. Today, a monumental version of the work is housed at Museo MAGI '900.

In 1978, the artist created a design based on the same motif. A year later, he returned to it when preparing the Italian poster for Andrzej Wajda's *Man of Marble*. But something had changed. **The hammer and sickle had disappeared.**

On the *L'uomo di marmo* poster, the man built of bricks remains. His head is still open to the sky, but now only the bird emerges from within. **The hammer and sickle are gone.**

If we had only the two images, one might wonder whether this was an aesthetic decision, a change in composition, or an intervention by the Italian distributor. The 1996 letter removes that uncertainty. It was Andrzej Wajda who asked Franco Scepi to change the concept. And years later, Wajda himself described that intervention as censorship.

There is an extraordinary paradox in this story, because *Man of Marble* is itself one of the most important Polish films about the manipulation of truth by the communist system.

Aleksander Ścibor-Rylski's screenplay had been written many years earlier, but for a long time it could not be produced because of censorship. The film follows Agnieszka, a young film-school student who tries to reconstruct the fate of Mateusz Birkut — a model worker created by Stalinist propaganda and later erased from official memory.

A film about uncovering the truth beneath a propagandistic image therefore received a poster from which the director himself — under pressure from the political system — persuaded the artist to remove the system's most direct symbol.

It would be hard to imagine a more ironic commentary on the realities of communist Poland.



*Franco Scepi, Italian poster for Andrzej Wajda's **L'Uomo di Marmo (Man of Marble)**, 1979. The poster notes the critics' award presented to the film at the Cannes Film Festival in 1978. Photo courtesy of Franco Scepi.*

Birkut Built of Bricks

Franco Scepi's poster is also an exceptionally apt interpretation of the film. Mateusz Birkut is a bricklayer. Propaganda constructs him almost literally out of bricks: production records, newsreels, speeches, and a carefully staged image of the "new man." In Franco Scepi's work, the man **himself becomes a wall**.

There is no conventional portrait of the actor. The face no longer belongs only to Birkut. It is more universal, almost anonymous. The wall encloses the man, yet it is precisely in his head that a space opens through which one can escape. The dove flying upward can be read as freedom, thought, truth — something that cannot be completely walled in.

The first version, however, was more overtly political. The bird was not merely escaping confinement: it was carrying the hammer and sickle away with it.

In 1978, *Man of Marble* was shown at the Cannes Film Festival and received the FIPRESCI Prize, awarded unanimously by the International Federation of Film Critics. Franco Scepi's Italian poster belongs to this period.

The film began its international life. As it would turn out, Franco Scepi's image did as well.



*Franco Scepi, original version of **L'Uomo della Pace (Man of Peace)**, 1977. From the open brick-built head emerge a dove and the hammer and sickle. Photo courtesy of Franco Scepi.*

The First Version Returns

In 1996, the first, unused version of the work was rediscovered. For Andrzej Wajda, it must have been an encounter with his own past. In his letter to Franco Scepi, he writes that he is pleased not only that the painting has been found, but also that it will be able to **“bear witness to the truth about those times.”**

The words that follow are even more moving. Andrzej Wajda thanks the artist for not judging his conduct at the time solely as an act of cowardice, but for trying to understand it. The letter

ends warmly — with gratitude, a handshake, and an assurance of friendship.

At this point, the history of the poster ceases to be a simple story of “artist versus censor.” Andrzej Wajda himself was operating within the system: negotiating, yielding, and trying to get his films made. *Man of Marble*, after all, was a film he had waited many years to bring to the screen.

His letter reveals a mechanism far subtler than an official’s red stamp: **self-censorship born of an awareness of the boundaries whose violation could have jeopardized the entire undertaking**. It also reveals the psychological cost of such decisions, still remembered twenty years later.



*Presentation of Franco Scepi's **Man of Peace** statuette to Lech Wałęsa, 2001. Miniature versions of the work were presented to Nobel Peace Prize laureates and to individuals particularly engaged in efforts for peace. Photo courtesy of Franco Scepi.*

From *Man of Marble* to *Man of Peace*

The story could have ended there, but it did not. The motif of the man with a wall-like head reappeared in Franco Scepi's work under the name **L'Uomo della Pace - Man of Peace**.

In the 1990s, the work became associated with initiatives led by Mikhail Gorbachev and the World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates. In 1999, the image was signed in Rome by Nobel Peace Prize laureates, including **Mikhail Gorbachev, Lech**

Wałęsa, the 14th Dalai Lama, Rigoberta Menchú, José Ramos-Horta, Jody Williams, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, and Betty Williams, as well as representatives of organizations that had received the Nobel Peace Prize.

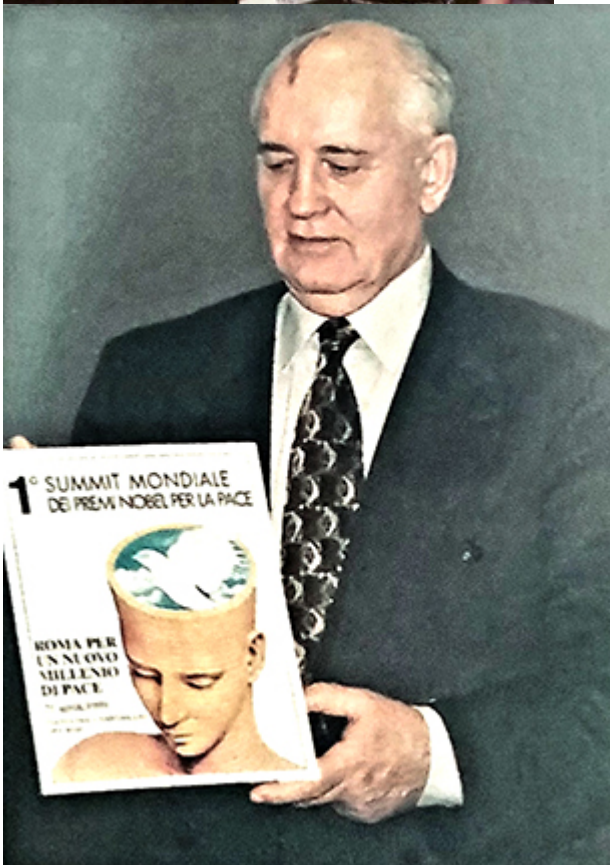
The signatures of these laureates appear beneath the work. Representatives of organizations awarded the Nobel Peace Prize also signed it, including the United Nations, Amnesty International, UNHCR, UNICEF, the International Labour Organization, and Médecins Sans Frontières.

The symbol whose communist meaning had been softened on the film poster in the 1970s thus returned, after the collapse of that system, in an entirely new context.

Monumental versions of *Man of Peace* were created. One of them is housed at Museo MAGI '900 in Pieve di Cento, where a separate section of the collection is devoted to the work. Its history leads from the 1977 painting, through the poster for Andrzej Wajda's film, to a symbol of peace associated with Mikhail Gorbachev.

According to Franco Scepi, this transformation is precisely what gives the work its particular significance: an image inspired by the experience of communism and by the dream of transcending political walls came, many years later, to function among people

who had taken part in the peaceful ending of the Cold War.



*

Monumental version of Franco Scepi's L'Uomo della Pace (Man of Peace) during an event associated with the World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates, Rome, 2002. Photo courtesy of Franco Scepi.

Mikhail Gorbachev with material devoted to the World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates, featuring the motif of Franco Scepi's L'Uomo della Pace (Man of Peace), 2004. Photo courtesy of Franco Scepi.

The Letter Matters Most

One can admire the later monuments. One can trace the signatures of Nobel laureates. One can tell the story of Gorbachev, Wojtyła, Andrzej Wajda, and the extraordinary journey of a single image through the final decades of the twentieth century. For me, however, the most valuable document remains a single sheet of paper: Andrzej Wajda's letter. It contains something far rarer than political declarations: **an artist's acknowledgment of his own compromise.**

Andrzej Wajda does not write from the perspective of someone who knew from the beginning that communism was bound to collapse. On the contrary. He admits that at the time he did not believe it would. That sentence changes the perspective.

It is easy to look back at the past knowing how it ended. It is far more difficult to remember what the future looked like to someone living within a system that seemed permanent.

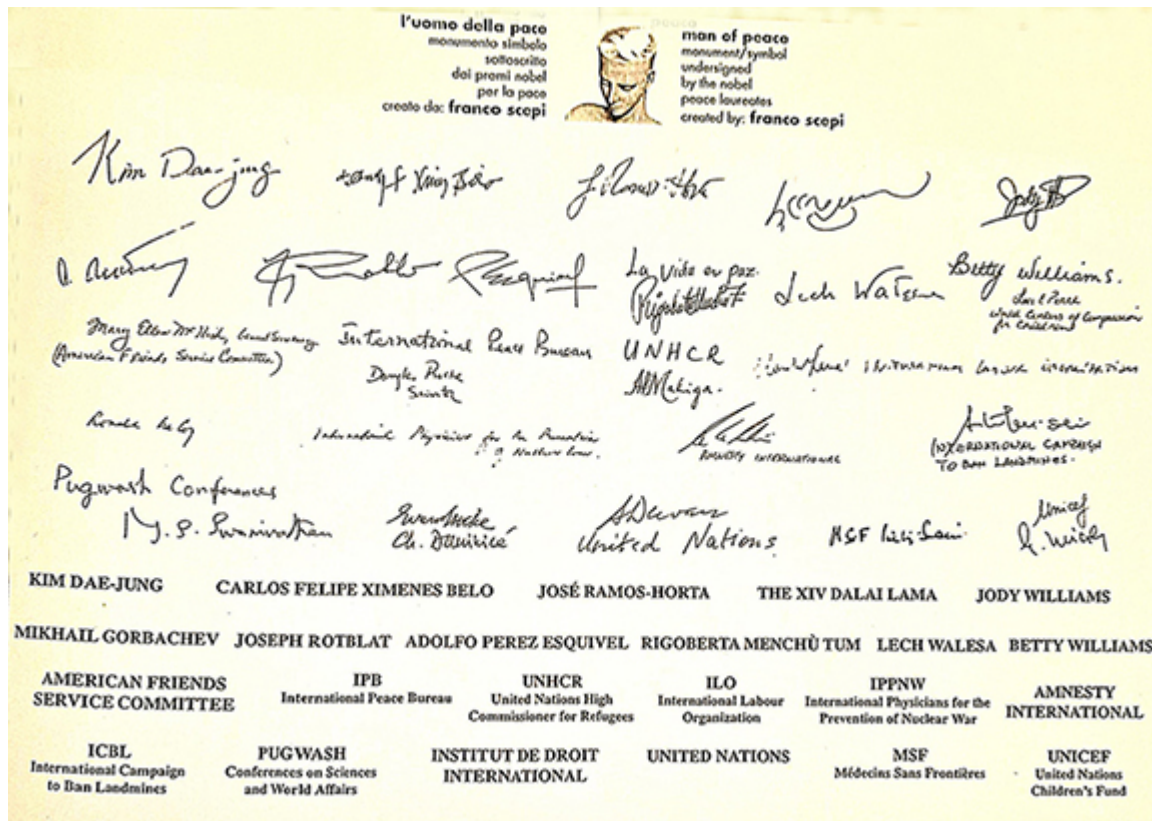
In 1978, the hammer and sickle disappear from the poster.

In 1989, the Berlin Wall falls.

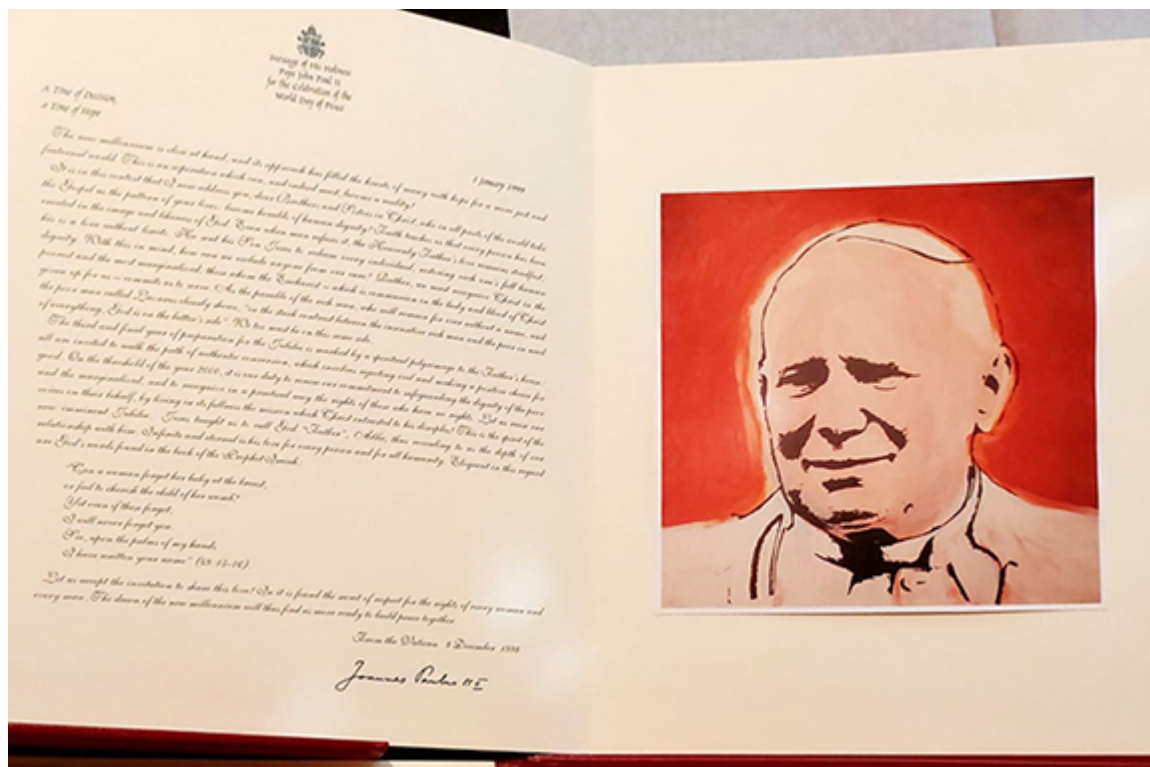
In 1996, Andrzej Wajda looks at the rediscovered original image and writes to Franco Scepi that he had never imagined the system would truly pass away. And the image of the man built of bricks lives on.

That is perhaps the most beautiful paradox of this story: **the version that once could not be shown ultimately survived as a witness to its time.** Exactly as Andrzej Wajda had hoped.

*



Card bearing the signatures of Nobel Peace Prize laureates and representatives of organizations honored with the prize beneath the symbol of Franco Scepi's **L'Uomo della Pace (Man of Peace)**, Rome, 1999. The signatures include, among others, Mikhail Gorbachev, Lech Wałęsa, the 14th Dalai Lama, Rigoberta Menchú, José Ramos-Horta, Jody Williams, and Betty Williams. Photo courtesy of Franco Scepi.



Message of Pope John Paul II for the 32nd World Day of Peace, January 1, 1999, featuring a portrait of the Pope. The document is entitled **"Respect for Human Rights: The Secret of True Peace."** Photo courtesy of Franco Scepi.

LA LUCE OLTRE IL MURO

Rivelata la storia vera
dell'opera d'arte

L'Uomo per la Pace di Franco Scepl

Ispirata a Cracovia
da Wojtyła nel 1977
anticipando la
fine della Guerra Fredda
ed il crollo
del muro di Berlino.
E' considerata
l'opera d'arte, storia e fede
che ha concluso il 900 .
Nel 2000 è stata
sottoscritta da Gorbaciov
e da tutti i Premi Nobel
per la Pace del mondo

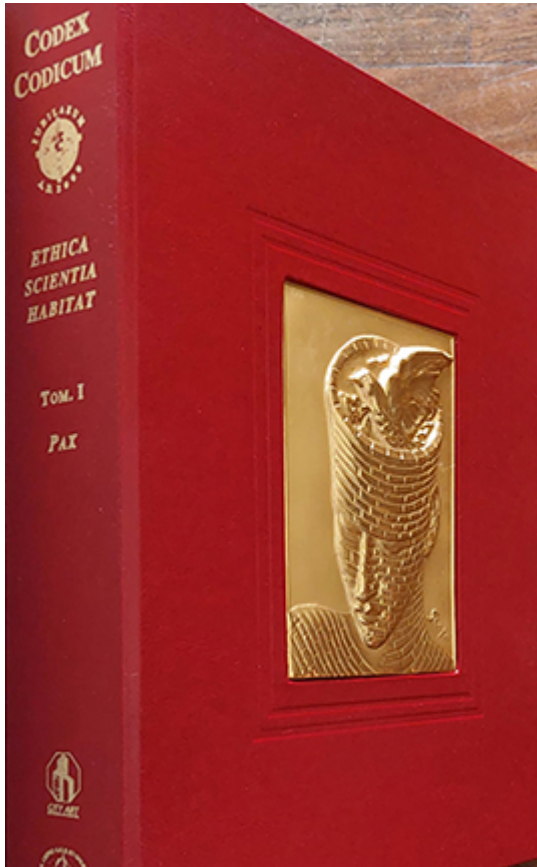
The background of the right half of the page features a large, detailed sculpture of a brick wall. The bricks are made of a light-colored material, possibly stone or concrete, and are arranged in a traditional running bond pattern. The top edge of the wall is jagged and uneven, suggesting it has been torn down or is still under construction. The overall color palette is warm, dominated by yellows, oranges, and browns.

L'Uomo per la Pace di Franco Scepi

ispirata a Cracovia
da Wojtyla nel 1977
anticipando la
fine della Guerra Fredda
ed il crollo
del muro di Berlino.
E' considerata
l'opera d'arte, storia e fede
che ha concluso il 900.
Nel 2000 è stata
sottoscritta da Gorbaciov
e da tutti i Premi Nobel
per la Pace del mondo

1. HALLING
 2. HALLING
 3. HALLING
 4. HALLING
 5. HALLING
 6. HALLING
 7. HALLING
 8. HALLING
 9. HALLING
 10. HALLING
 11. HALLING
 12. HALLING
 13. HALLING
 14. HALLING
 15. HALLING
 16. HALLING
 17. HALLING
 18. HALLING
 19. HALLING
 20. HALLING
 21. HALLING
 22. HALLING
 23. HALLING
 24. HALLING
 25. HALLING
 26. HALLING
 27. HALLING
 28. HALLING
 29. HALLING
 30. HALLING
 31. HALLING
 32. HALLING
 33. HALLING
 34. HALLING
 35. HALLING
 36. HALLING
 37. HALLING
 38. HALLING
 39. HALLING
 40. HALLING
 41. HALLING
 42. HALLING
 43. HALLING
 44. HALLING
 45. HALLING
 46. HALLING
 47. HALLING
 48. HALLING
 49. HALLING
 50. HALLING
 51. HALLING
 52. HALLING
 53. HALLING
 54. HALLING
 55. HALLING
 56. HALLING
 57. HALLING
 58. HALLING
 59. HALLING
 60. HALLING
 61. HALLING
 62. HALLING
 63. HALLING
 64. HALLING
 65. HALLING
 66. HALLING
 67. HALLING
 68. HALLING
 69. HALLING
 70. HALLING
 71. HALLING
 72. HALLING
 73. HALLING
 74. HALLING
 75. HALLING
 76. HALLING
 77. HALLING
 78. HALLING
 79. HALLING
 80. HALLING
 81. HALLING
 82. HALLING
 83. HALLING
 84. HALLING
 85. HALLING
 86. HALLING
 87. HALLING
 88. HALLING
 89. HALLING
 90. HALLING
 91. HALLING
 92. HALLING
 93. HALLING
 94. HALLING
 95. HALLING
 96. HALLING
 97. HALLING
 98. HALLING
 99. HALLING
 100. HALLING

*“La luce oltre il muro” (“The Light Beyond the Wall”) — material devoted to the history of Franco Scepi’s **L’Uomo per la Pace (Man of Peace)** and its connections with Karol Wojtyła, the end of the Cold War, and Nobel Peace Prize laureates, 2026. Photo courtesy of Franco Scepi.*



*Codex Codicum. Ethica Scientia Habita, Vol. I: Pax, 1999. The cover features the motif of Franco Scepi's **L'Uomo della Pace (Man of Peace)**. Photo courtesy of Franco Scepi.*



*Franco Scepi, **L'Uomo della Pace (Man of Peace)**, monumental double-sided version of the sculpture installed in front of the Abbey of San Colombano in Bobbio, 2017. The work was unveiled with the participation of Nobel Peace Prize laureate David Trimble. Photo courtesy of Franco Scepi.*



Monumental version of Franco Scepi's **L'Uomo della Pace (Man of Peace)**, 2003. The motif, originating in the 1977 painting and in the poster for Andrzej Wajda's **Man of Marble**, later took on an independent life as a symbol of peace. Photo courtesy of Franco Scepi.