

Architecture in Bucharest 1920 – 1945

15th September 2004 to 12th November 2004

Curators: Ana Gabriela Castello Branco dos Santos and Horia Georgescu

Press tour: Tuesday, 14th September 2004, 10.30 am

Opening: Tuesday, 14th September 2004, 6.30 pm

Exhibition site

Wiener Städtische Allgemeine Versicherung AG

Ringturm Exhibition Centre

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Opening hours:

Monday to Friday 9.00 am – 6.00 pm; admission free

Thursday 9.00 am – 7.30 pm

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**Photographic material is available on our website
www.wienerstaedtische.at and on request!**

Between 15th September and 12th November 2004, the ARCHITECTURE IN THE RINGTURM series will be presenting an exhibition focusing on the varied and little-known modern architecture of Bucharest during the years 1920 – 1945, a period when the city was known as the “Paris of the East”. The exhibition will present an astonishing wealth of modern buildings that still contribute to the essential character of the city to this day. Over 50 buildings will be on show from all areas of architectural activity – from residential buildings, factories and administrative buildings to sanatoria, cinemas and banks.

A wealth of first-class modern buildings was erected throughout the whole of Romania, but particularly in Bucharest, between 1920 and the end of the Second World War. It is important from a preservation point of view that these buildings are researched and documented as they are seriously endangered (as a result, among other things, of unrepaired earthquake damage).

Romania’s modern architecture was the expression of a desire to rebuild the city in an international, forward-looking style. This “gentle” modernism received the approval of a wide section of the population as it took people’s needs and cultural peculiarities into account from the very beginning.

In particular, new building was stimulated as early as the 1930s by the democratic process of a market-orientated society. In contrast to the situation in Germany, Austria or England, for example, residential building was the preserve of private enterprise. This has enabled whole streets from this “golden age of architecture” to retain their period character.

Initially the French Beaux-Arts tradition was dominant. From around 1930, this began to be superseded by the formal language of Central European modernism. In tandem with the rise of political nationalism, elements of monumental classicism began to play an increasing role here.

Modern Romanian architecture from 1920 to 1945. Up to the end of the First World War, the neo-Romanian tendency held sway, influenced by ideas of national art, local patriotism and regional traditions. This existed alongside the final expression of European academicism and eclecticism.

After the First World War, Romania was reorganised into a unified nation-state. Urban development was urgently needed as a result of a large increase in population. The economy recovered and led to the development of communications centres, urban infrastructure and appropriate industrial, administrative, cultural and hospital buildings. The introduction of new building techniques – in particular the use of reinforced concrete – allowed for the creation of skeleton structures incorporating flexible space concepts and thus the development of a new style.

Romanian architecture of the inter-war period asserted itself in a balanced, sometimes cautious stylistic renewal and a restrained language of forms – albeit characterised by great expressivity. Many Romanian architects studied in France, where they came into contact with the various strands of European modernism.

Developments after 1933 reflected the phenomena of nationalism and centralisation that spread successively through the whole of Europe, manifesting themselves not least in the heavy “official” architecture of the day. Symmetry, severity and control were the main features of this autocratic architecture that ended with the chaos of the Second World War and thus the demise of modernism.

The pioneers of modernist Romanian architecture. Although achieving fame as a painter and as a member of the artistic avant-garde and Zurich-based Dadaist fraternity, little attention has been paid to date to the architectural work of *Marcel Iancu*.

Iancu turned to architecture after returning from Switzerland. His work centred on urban residential buildings in Bucharest. Iancu opposed the decorative. For him, modern architecture was based on a geometry that strove for ever-greater simplification and whose wisdom lay in restraint and the expressivity of the material. Façades, for him, were of subordinate functional significance.

In 1926 his father commissioned Iancu to build a house for him. This became the first modern building in Romania. His designs for Villa Juster (1931) reveal clear traces of his early avant-garde sculptures. By the outbreak of the Second World War, Iancu – who sought to establish a connection in his architectural work with art and who saw modern architecture as an expression of democracy – had realised 40 buildings.

His design for the luxurious *Villa Florica Reich* (1936) was based on a variation of the cubist forms that are apparent in all his buildings. It has two hierarchical staircases: one for the servants, starting in the cellar and connecting every floor; the other a showpiece living room staircase that simply leads to the upper floor. A special colour scheme links the villa's walls and furnishings.

Apart from the *Bazaltin Building*, his *Residential Building* (1935) is the highest building designed by Iancu. The development was designed on a double "three apartment per floor" plan – with an additional service staircase in the air well for the two largest apartments. Iancu incorporates the curvature of the site in the building's southern façade, thus responding to the urban context.

Horia Creangă is regarded as the actual founder of the modernist movement of the 1930s. Creangă became the leading exponent of an architecture that was in harmony with the ideas of European modernism but sought its own mode of expression. He claimed to be combining the formal language of modern architecture with Romania's rural architectural tradition and folk art as well as with a simple geometric style. For him, utilitarian, constructive and social thinking lay at the heart of architecture. His ARO Building (1926) was a mixture of functionality and expressive use of forms that had not previously been known in Bucharest.

In terms of industrial architecture, Creangă enjoys a similar importance in Romania to Peter Behrens in Germany. A lengthy collaboration with Nicolae Malaxa, regarded as the Krupp of Romania, saw the realisation a succession of outstanding functional buildings. Among the most important contributions to the development of Romania's modern industrial architecture are the buildings of the *Malaxa Works* (1930 to 1939). In its day, this industrial pipe factory was the leading and most modern of its type in Europe.

Up to this point, Creangă's most up to date residential building was the *Villa of Engineer A. Bunescu* (1932), whose façades correspond to its internal room division. The house is entered via a terrace. The short hall leads to a two-storey living room. The building's roof terrace with swimming pool and solarium caused a sensation at the time.

The *Villa Miclescu* (1930) is also located in the city's northern residential district. Featuring severely geometrical, unadorned façades – at least these are thought to be by Creangă – the house stands out strongly from its surroundings.

From the work of Iancu and Creangă this look at Bucharest turns one's attention to a variety of other buildings and plans – from a modern boulevard with cinemas and banks to the curved administrative building of Mendelsohn pupil Rudolf Fraenkel.

Romanian architect *Duiliu Marcu* shows his most modern side in his *Magistraților Building* (1935 to 1937) on one of Bucharest's main boulevards. This multifunctional structure incorporates shops, offices, an assembly room, a hotel and apartments. The building's front and long sides are strongly contrasting: continuous balustrading lends the west façade an emphatically horizontal character while the north façade is vertically articulated by means of concrete ribs.

Marcu also designed two luxurious residential buildings (1935 to 1936) in the city centre. The ensemble's prominent curve at Stirbei Voda 18-20 stems on the one hand from the peculiarities of the site and on the other serves as a hinge between the two sides of the building. This cylindrical shape is continued on the inside, determining the radical form of the walls in a rigorous and consistent fashion. Common to all the ground plans is the reduction of hallways to a bare minimum and the joining of several rooms by means of sliding and folding doors.

The exhibition. Although numerous modern buildings were constructed throughout the whole of Romania, the exhibition concentrates on the capital, showcasing the most important of the surviving buildings from the relevant period. The visitor is given a good overview of Bucharest modernism. In addition to the main architectural works of the movement's most important exponents - Marcel Iancu, Horia Creangă und Duiliu Marcu – the unbelievable density of high-quality buildings from the period is further demonstrated by the inclusion of no less important buildings from a number of other architects, too.

Around 60 photographs by Luxembourg photographic designer Pierre Levy show the different buildings as they are today. In addition to photographs, plans and explanations combine to form a representative cross-section of the period's architects and their buildings.

Catalogue (in English and German): Moderne in Bukarest. Ein Architektführer. / Modernism in Bucharest. An Architectural Guide. Dos Santos/Georgescu/Levy, published by Verlag Anton Pustet, 2001 Salzburg, 128 pages, Price: €25.90.

Press releases and photographs relating to the ARCHITECTURE IN THE RINGTURM series of exhibitions can be found at <http://www.wienerstaedtische.at> in the "Art & Culture" section.