

ARCHITECTURE IN THE RINGTURM

Baba, the Werkbund housing estate in Prague 1932

The exhibition of an exhibition

15 March – 12 May 2000

Press viewing: Tuesday, 14 March 2000, 10.30

Opening: Tuesday, 14 March 2000, 18.30

Exhibition site

Wiener Städtische Allgemeine Versicherung AG

Exhibition centre in the Ringturm

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Curator: Stephan Templ, publicist in Vienna and Prague

Opening hours

Monday to Friday: 9.00 to 18.00; entrance free of charge

Enquires

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Photographic material available on request

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In its latest event in the ARCHITECTURE IN THE RINGTURM series, Wiener Städtische will be presenting an exhibition featuring the Werkbund's BABA housing estate, which will run from 15 March to 12 May. The estate, built in Prague in 1932, is the last in a series of "model estates" constructed by the Werkbund in central Europe.

The Werkbund: The German Werkbund was founded in 1907 in Munich. It marked the birth of industrial design. Artists, architects, intellectuals and industrialists were among its founding members, which included Peter Behrens, Theodor Fischer, Josef Hoffmann, Henry van de Velde and Hermann Muthesius. They joined forces to "enhance industrial production through the interaction of art, industry and crafts"

1912 saw the constituting meeting of the Austrian Werkbund in Vienna. One year later, in the winter of 1913/14, the Czech Werkbund was founded in Prague. The artists, architects and others involved in the world of culture put their signature to a constitution which stated: "We want our contribution to achieve not only a harmony between industrial production and art, but also to create a foundation for the production of art in order to cultivate and heighten the public's taste in this direction."

The "model housing estates" by the Werkbund in the twenties and thirties could be seen as the mouthpiece for New Building in Europe.

The Werkbund's Baba housing estate: Prague was the last Werkbund building exhibition, mounted in September 1932. It attracted 12,000 visitors who viewed the 32 flat-roofed dwellings set on a hill high above the city.

Unlike the other Werkbund housing estates Baba was privately funded. This was typical for Prague: New Building in Czechoslovakia stood in stark contrast to the movement in its neighbouring countries - marked by an absence of the revolutionary aspect. It was characteristic of a young, dynamic state in which even the civic representatives promoted the Modern movement. Theatre directors, diplomats, writers, university professors, ministerial advisors and artists were very much involved. Figures such as František Munk (economist), Václav Řezáč (writer), Cyril Bouda (painter), Václav Poláček (publisher), Julius Glücklich (historian), Ladislav Sutnar (graphics and design), Karel Balling (composer), Pavel Janák (architect),

were the clients of the Baba estate and maintained the traditional client-architect dialogue.

This may account for the architectural diversity encompassed by the estate: Pavel Janák, who was responsible for urban planning and organisation, selected architects from three generations. Each generation exerted their own influence, which explains why the estate contains elements inspired by late Cubism alongside the vocabulary of a language of sweeping forms that anticipates the style of the forties.

The range of spaces takes individual requirements into consideration. It spans everything from the minimalistic dwelling for a childless married couple to a large one-family villa with flat for a housekeeper, from multi-family dwellings to collective housing. An interesting example of economy of space is offered by the relatively small two-storey houses, which have a large multi-purpose room on the ground floor and sleeping areas on the upper floor.

The architects: Josef Gočár, Pavel Janák, Mart Stam Oldřich Starý, Ladislav Žák were some of the architects involved in the construction of the Baba housing estate in Prague.

All the buildings in Baba estate have survived and escaped any bomb damage. It was therefore never necessary to demolish and redevelop the site, as it was, for example, at the Werkbund estate in Vienna. However, in 1939, the first occupants on the estate were evicted from their homes. For the communist regime (1948 to 1989) Baba was an intellectual bourgeois experiment of the Masaryk republic (1918 to 1935). Even the Czech Werkbund archives were destroyed.

Source material gathered from all over the world enabled the first book on Baba to be put together, as well as the "Exhibition of an exhibition".

The exhibition: The highly regarded architecture of the twenties and thirties is documented on the basis of original plans and original photographs.

All 32 dwellings are represented by means of numerous plans, photographs and models.

Original publications, some of which were written by the original inhabitants of the estate, round off the exhibition. Also available for viewing is additional literature by František Munk, Václav Řezáč, Cyril Bouda, Václav

Poláček, Julius Glücklich and Ladislav Sutnar. The relation to the Werkbund housing estate in Vienna is also demonstrated by means of original documents.

Vienna is the second stop for the exhibition, which was first shown in Zurich in spring 1999. Its next venue will be Paris.

The catalogue: Baba - The Werkbund Housing Estate in Prague by Stephan Templ. 144 pages, which document each individual project, illustrated with numerous plans and photographs. Published by Birkhäuser, Basle, Boston, Berlin 1999, text in German and English, ATS 424.

Lenders:

Prague Museum of Technology, architecture collection

Private collections

Model: Liberec College of Technology (faculty of architecture)