

Belgrade – Moments in Architecture

From 19 July until 11 November 2011

- Concept:** Adolph Stiller
- Exhibition venue:** Exhibition Centre in the Ringturm
VIENNA INSURANCE GROUP
1010 Wien, Schottenring 30
- Opening hours:** Monday to Friday: 9 am to 6 pm, free admission
(closed on public holidays)
- Press tour:** Monday, 18 July 2011, 11.00 am
- Speakers:** Bojan Kovacevic, Adolph Stiller
- Official Opening:** Monday, 18 July 2011, 6.30 pm (by invitation only)
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Belgrade – Moments in Architecture

Belgrade, which like Vienna, lies on the river Danube, one of the most important trade routes in Europe due to its location at the mouth of the Sava waterways, was a significant major inter-regional transport hub. Belgrade has therefore always played an important economic role both for traffic traveling North to South and East to West. From the mid-19th Century, these factors had urban and architectural implications. After the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy and the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (known as Yugoslavia from 1929), Belgrade grew into its new role as a modern capital city. The exhibition of the "Architektur im Ringturm" series of the Vienna Insurance Group shows three great periods of time, defining those "Moments in Architecture" of Belgrade which give an insight into this centre of the region which is actually geographically close, but which appears to be so far away. This is also an increasingly hot topic due to the planned EU accession negotiations which might take place very soon.

The interwar period in the first independent state - decades of outstanding personalities

The most important roles in spreading the ideas of contemporary architecture in the 1920s and 1930s, were played by the "group of architects of modern direction" founded in 1928 by Branislav Kojic, Milan Zloković, Jan Dubovy and Dušan Babić. Some of the greatest people of this time were masters not only in the development of architecture in Belgrade since the 1930s, but also formative architects, academics and intellectuals who influenced many generations until the 1960s. These greats include Dobrović and especially Dragiša Brašovan (1887-1965; for building the Air Force building and printing building), Branislav Kojic (1899-1987; residential housing "Dr. Dragutina Durica," 1933) and Milan Zloković (1898-1965). In her first publication, "Modernism in Serbia", Ljiljana Blagojevic provides an extraordinary insight into this "heroic phase" of the architectural history of Belgrade.

Great masters of Serbian architecture

If we were to single out one person whose influence and work in urban architecture during the interwar period had the greatest impact, we would have to say that this person was clearly Milan Zloković. His resume speaks volumes for his calibre, mentioning his multi-lingual ability, amongst many other things. Born in Trieste into a Serbian family, he attended the local German school, then in 1915 went on to study architecture in Graz. After returning from the Austrian military service, he refused to return to the Italian Trieste and settled in Belgrade. There he completed his architectural studies and went to Paris on a scholarship from 1922 to 1923. Upon his return, he began working as an assistant at the Technical University, an academic career that would continue until he died. His buildings in Belgrade are among the exceptional "Moments in Architecture", which endure to the present day and still play an important role, such as; the children's hospital: draft 1933, version 1936-40; his own house, 1928 and the Belgrade FIAT Central.

Nikola Dobrović was a figure overarching two "periods" and became the most important architectural authority in Belgrade. He was born in Pécs, the son of a Serbian father and a German mother and owing to his education, culture and sense of travel, he was a true Central European. Nikola Dobrović frequented Belgrade a few times, then spent the last 25 years of his life there. He spoke Serbian with a strong Hungarian accent, something which always made him easily recognisable. After studying in Prague, he came to Belgrade for the first time in 1923. It was only after visits to Prague and Dubrovnik (where he left behind some outstanding buildings), that he settled there after the Second World War.

The Period after 1945

The period of the Balkan war is still visible and still painful for architecture enthusiasts owing to the General Staff Building that still stands damaged in the city centre. The building, which was constructed between 1954-63 and designed by Nikola Dobrović, is not only his only project in Belgrade, but also his most outstanding masterpiece. It is therefore hoped that, despite the massive damage, restoration will soon be undertaken; the experts unanimously agree that it is technically feasible.

Dobrović engaged with the topic of urban planning from 1944, after beginning in Prague (Villa Burliz, 1926), Dubrovnik (including Grand Hotel in Lopud) and finally settling in Belgrade. His only building achievement, however, is the destroyed General Staff building. His competition entry of 1929/30 along with 24 other international architects can still be described as the most successful contribution to the town planning issues of this city. Although his designs for the "Terasija" (Terraces) won the first prize, they were never carried out. The remaining drawings are witness to the high architectural quality of his urban development project and demonstrate his broad view of urban issues in a format of an active world citizen. It is clear that Nikola Dobrović's project, that was never carried out, was a masterpiece that has become his legacy. His approach to urban solutions could be classed as "architectural sculpture on an urban scale"; the General Staff Building, created three and a half decades later, is clear proof of that. A fusion of urban thinking and vivid imagination was always a priority for Dobrović's urban planning. He not only created functional plans – when drawing lines – but also developed the idea that architecture can be seen with an "urban sculptural dimension".

Inspiring architectural density

In particular, the architectural highlights of the decades following World War II represent, alongside the best examples of classical modernism of the interwar period, those 'moments in architecture' which, in their totality, constitute the impressive architectural density of this city today. This quality of the 1950s and 1960s came about, inter alia, as a result of the political situation; the State was the landowner, the client, the building authority, and even the planning authority all in one. Large Projects - including the development of the new district of New Belgrade on the left bank of the Sava, or modern buildings in the city, such as the Institute for Urbanism - could be carried out without official restrictions.

The influence of "Western" architectural activity in the structural and artistic production of Belgrade was thus kept in check. A number of buildings demonstrate independent architectural poetry: the Fontana Center of Uros Martinović, 1963; the National Library of Ivan Kurtović, 1970-73; the office and commercial building "Hempro" by Aleksei Brkić, 1953; the House of Press the Square of the Republic of Ratomir Bogojević, 1957 or the Faculty of Svetislav Licina, 1967.

Among the most important representatives of the "founding fathers of modernity" from the next generation of architects is 89-year-old Mihajlo Mitrovic (residential building in the city center, 1964; Genex Centre, 1970-80), Bogdan Bogdanovic, who lived for almost 20 years in Vienna and died in 2010, Alexei Brkić and Ivan Antić (Museum of Contemporary Art, 1965. This building has even made it onto the front cover of one of the rare architectural publications about the Balkans – "L'architettura nei paesi Balcanici modern"). Bogdanović made an unconventional, yet profound contribution to the architectural culture of Serbia with his design of the Sephardic Jewish cemetery in Belgrade, his monuments and drawings of his original "village school of architecture", Mali Popović, and also as mayor of "his" city. He was honored in 2010 with a monographic exhibition in Vienna.

The current situation

The main two generations of active architectural professionals today are in particular dominated by Branislav Mitrović, among others, who is also a university lecturer. The future young representatives from universities are seeking to find their own paths. They do not completely ignore the international scene. Thanks to these fantastic schools, a vibrant architectural scene and the sound buildings of the modernists, it is hoped that contemporary architects can build on the independent Serbian poetry of the great masters.

Two architects from Austria, Boris Podrecca (Museum of Science and Technology, 2007) and Wolfgang Tschapeller (Centre for Scientific research, 2010) recently presented their projects in Belgrade, which are to be realized in the next few years.

Exhibition

A total of 70 panels displaying numerous images and partly previously unpublished material (some photos were taken especially for the exhibition) portray the most important buildings of this era. Introductory texts present the socio-political background, i.e. country-specific circumstances which had an affect on the architecture. Town plans and panoramic shots in digital print on special paper on the walls provide background and keep Belgrade in view. Models of some more important buildings and original publications round off the presentation of the Belgrade architectural scene.

Film exhibition

A film produced especially for the exhibition provides an insight into the urban dimension of Belgrade. A film portraying everyday city life, an original soundtrack, panoramic shots of unusual urban areas and cinematic portraits of some of the most significant buildings where film experts from the Belgrade architecture scene, such as Mihajlo Mitrović, Bojan Kovačević und Boris Podrecca have the chance to express their feelings on the topic.

Film production: Robert Newald;
Photography: Robert Newald, Miroslav Vojinović
Editing: Miroslav Vojinović

Catalogue

Architecture in the Ringturm XXV. Belgrade – Moments in Architecture. Editor Adolph Stiller. approx. 130 pages with numerous images and contributions from Mihajlo Mitrović, Bojan Kovačević, Adolph Stiller, Vladimir Vukučić Vesna Vučinić. Publication from Müry&Salzmann, Salzburg 2011.

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25 Euros