

Ivan I. Leonidov – Russian Constructivist Architect

March 19, 2010 until April 30, 2010

Curators: Prof. Maurizio Meriggi (Polytechnico di Milano),
Dr. Otakar Máčel (TU Delft), Dietrich W. Schmidt (IAG Stuttgart),
Jurij Paul Volchok (MARKhI – Moscow Institute of Architecture)
Preparation for Vienna: Adolph Stiller and Maurizio Meriggi

Exhibition venue: Exhibition Centre in the Ringturm
VIENNA INSURANCE GROUP
A-1010 Vienna, Schottenring 30

Opening hours: Monday to Friday: 9.00 am to 6.00 pm, free admission
(closed on public holidays and Good Friday)

Press tour: Thursday, March 18, 2010, 10.00 am

Speakers: Dr. Otakar Máčel
Prof. Maurizio Meriggi
Prof. Adolph Stiller
Jurij Paul Volchok

Official opening: Thursday, March 18, 2010, 6.30 pm (by invitation only!)

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The opening of the exhibition “100 Years of Leonidov” has led to increased interest in Ivan Leonidov and his life’s work, considered to be amongst the most advanced in the field of Russian constructivist architecture. The current exhibition in the series entitled “Architektur im Ringturm” is based primarily on the research project carried out by four universities (Moscow, Milan, Stuttgart and Delft) and entitled “A possible city. The architecture of Ivan Leonidov 1926 - 1934”. Following the Triennial in Milan (2007), the results of this project are now being presented in the form of numerous carefully prepared reconstruction models, plans, photos and elaborately produced computer reconstructions and video compilations, in the exhibition centre in the “Ringturm”, headquarters of the Vienna Insurance Group. Thus, with the help of scale models, the notional abstract position developed by Leonidov is made a reality for visitors to the exhibition.

Relevance of Leonidov and the Russian avant-garde

Russian constructivism, which fell from favour in the mid-1930s and was superseded as a consequence of Stalinist neo-classicism, is today attracting new attention internationally. This rejuvenation is partly due to the new generation of architects and their search for historical roots and has been a popular topic of discussion in Moscow’s architecture circles since the fall of the Soviet Union. In addition to this, the way it has been presented internationally in appropriate publications (in particular, that of Chan Magomedov in 1983 in German, most recently the book by Richard Pare entitled “The Lost Vanguard. Soviet Modernist Architecture 1922-1932” edited by Phyllis Lambert, 2007) and at exhibitions on constructivist architecture (starting with Paris-Moscow, 1980, in the Georges Pompidou Centre and continuing up to the “Moscow-Melnikov” in the Ringturm in 2006) has brought the architectural work of Melnikov, Ginsburg and their contemporaries into the broad public arena.

Russian Constructivism at the Ringturm

The exhibition and accompanying catalogue give us the opportunity to experience the views of the experts who took part in the research; reconstructed plans and computer reconstructions and video compilations show topographically where Leonidov’s projects would stand and what effect they would have in the context of the present day city.

The catalogue contains an essay by the New York-based lecturer and internationally renowned architectural historian, Jean Louis Cohen, which examines how Russian constructivism is received in current day architectural discourse.

A significant part of the exhibition and catalogue is composed of reprinted Leonidov plans from the “SA” magazine (**S**ovremennaja **A**rchitektura – present day architecture; with translations of the published texts), which represent the most important source of his work and which were created graphically by Leonidov himself. Reconstructed plans of his most important works can be seen on large panels.

Works in model form

The most famous pieces are probably the model of the **Lenin Institute** (1927) – a spherical construction that was never realised and which illustrated at an early stage Leonidov’s dream of the architectural neutralisation of gravity - , the design for a pyramid-shaped **Culture Palace** in the grounds of the former Simonov monastery in Moscow (1930) and the man-sized drawing of a **sky scraper on the Red Square** (1934).

Other pieces displayed are: the Ivestija newspaper printing house, the Centrosojus building, the competition for the new town of Magnitogorsk (designed by Leonidov as a “linear town”), shown as a large model 150x190 cm, workers’ clubs of various types, the new government seat in Alma Ata, as well a memorial to Christopher Columbus.

Ivan Iljitsch Leonidov – from painter’s apprentice to leading protagonist of constructivism

Ivan Iljitsch Leonidov was born in 1902 on the Vlassicha farmstead in Gouvernement Tver, as the son of a woodsman. He spent his childhood in the village and worked as apprentice to a painter of icons. In 1920, he entered the “Freien künstlerischen Werkstätten“ (independent art workshops) in Tver. In 1921, he went to the art faculty of Moscow’s WChUTEMAS (Higher State Artistic and Technical Institute). He later switched to Alexander Wesnin’s atelier in the faculty of architecture.

From 1925 to 1927, Leonidov took part in numerous competitions and submitted the following pieces: the residential housing in Ivanovo-Vosnessensk (3rd prize), the Belorussian university in Minsk (credit), clubs of the new social type for workers, accommodating 500 and 1,000 persons (credit). He attained publication of his diploma dissertation for the headquarters of *Izvestija*, the daily newspaper.

Whilst still a student, he decided to join the association of constructivists, the OSA group, and the “SA” newspaper (present day architecture). His diploma dissertation – the Lenin Institute and Library in 1927 – became a milestone in the development of constructivism. After his diploma, he worked at the WChUTEMAS, firstly as assistant in the Alexander Wesnin atelier. He was soon to be running his own atelier.

Leonidov carried out his most active and fruitful work between 1927 and 1930. He participated in the work of the OSA, appeared in discussions and worked on experimental and competition designs (many of which were in behalf of the OSA), such as the film factory in Moscow, workers’ clubs of the new social type (1928), government seat in Alma Ata (1928), the Central Association for Consumer Cooperatives building in UdSSR (Centrosojus) in Moscow (1928), House of Industry in Moscow (1929), the Columbus memorial in Santo Domingo (1929), socialist settlement methods in the Magnitogorsk combine (1930) and the Palace of Culture in Moscow (1930).

At the beginning of the 1930s, a campaign was introduced at the initiative of WOPRA (association of proletarian architects) concerning “Leonidovism”, in which Leonidov’s experimental projects were the target of subjective criticism. As a result, he was forced to give up his teaching activities.

In the first half of the thirties, he worked in various organisations on the planning and construction of the Siberian town of Igarka, on designs for Serpuchov Square in Moscow, for the reconstruction of Moscow, for the “Pravda” newspaper club and others. One of his best designs, for the People’s Commissariat for Heavy Industry (Narkomtjashprom) in Moscow, was produced in 1934.

In the second half of the thirties, Leonidov created designs for the “Kljutschiki” residential complex in Nishni Tagil in the central Urals, for the “Artek” Pioneer Camp and for the Ussolje settlement in the Urals.

In the post-war years, he managed to overcome the crisis that had inhibited his creative imagination for a number of years. There were a series of design studies that are testament to a new creative upturn: for the city of the future – the “Sun city”, designs for the UN building, for the Palace of the Soviets, for the World Exhibition in Moscow, for the Arts Forum and more.

Ivan Iljitsch Leonidov died on 6th November 1959 in Moscow.

(Biography: extract from S.O. Chan-Magomedov, Pioneers of Soviet Architecture, Vienna, Löcker Publishers, 1983)

Catalogue:

An accompanying catalogue „**Ivan I. Leonidov – a Russian Constructivist Architect**“ will be **published as** Volume XX of the *Architektur im Ringturm* series, edited by Adolph Stiller.

Contributions by Oleg I. Adamov, Guido Canella, Jean-Louis Cohen, Elena Nikulina, Otakar Mačel, Selim O. Khan-Magomedov, Maurizio Meriggi, Dietrich W. Schmidt, Jurij Volchok

Approximately 130 pages with numerous illustrations

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Students, school pupils, military and civil service personnel, pensioners (with valid identification): 15 Euros