

Slovak Architecture: Impulses and Reflection

30 October 2003 to 29 February 2004

Curators: Štefan Šlachta, Ján Bahna and Adolph Stiller

Press tour: Wednesday, 29 October 2003, 10.30 am

Opening: Wednesday, 29 October 2003, 7.00 pm

Exhibition venue

Wiener Städtische Allgemeine Versicherung AG

Ringturm Exhibition Centre

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Opening times

Monday to Friday: 9.00 am to 6.00 pm (closed 24 and 31 December and public holidays)

Thursday 9.00 am to 7.30 pm; admission free

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Photographic material is available upon request and can also be found at://www.wienerstaedtische.at

“Slovakian Architecture: Impulses and Reflection”, which runs from 30 October 2003 to 29 February 2004, is the latest in the *Architecture in the Ringturm* series of exhibitions. Taking its structure from the different periods in Slovakia’s political history, it presents a cross-section of 20th-century Slovak architecture.

Wiener Städtische presents this exhibition in collaboration with the Slovakian insurance company Kooperativa poisťovňa, a.s., which is part of the Wiener Städtische Group.

Slovak architecture within the context of European trends. Multi-ethnicity, a wealth of international contacts and a lack of training opportunities meant that the architectural life of Austria’s eastern neighbour was subject to a multiplicity of external influences. The last phase of historicism and the Secessionist (*Jugendstil*) style were imported primarily from the metropolises Vienna and Budapest around the turn of the 20th century. Prague also exerted a major influence, in particular the school of Ján Kotěra, who was a dominant figure in Czech Modernism. A small number of buildings also display a restrained use of Rondo-Cubist forms. Following a brief flowering of the romantic “Slovak National Style” under its champion Dušan Jurkovič (1868-1947); *“Rotunda” in the military cemetery, Galicia, 1916; Villa on the Rezek, 1900-01; Club House, Skalice, 1904-05*) the influence of historicism and Viennese and Budapest Secessionist style came to the fore during the first half of the 1920s (not least through the return of Slovak soldiers who had been working beyond national borders before the outbreak of the First World War).

“Czechoslovakian Modernism”. The best-known buildings of Czechoslovakian Modernism came into being during the Functionalist period of the 1920s and 1930s (the “golden age of architecture”). The trend was dominated by the International Style, which survived here until 1948. It took its cue predominantly from developments in France (particularly Paris), Holland and Germany and its most outstanding proponent and pioneer during this time was Fridrich (Bedřich) Weinwurm (1885-1942). After training in Dresden and Berlin during the years 1908 to 1914, he returned to his native country and helped the new architecture achieve a breakthrough. (*Villa “T”/Fridrich Weinwurm, Ignác Vécsei, Bratislava 1928; Bohuslav Fuchs Apartment Block /Fridrich Weinwurm, Ignác Vécsei, Bratislava, 1936.*)

In addition to Bohuslav Fuchs, Vladimír Karfík and Arnost Wiesner – known primarily for their work in Brno – the exhibition looks at other important architects and their work such as Emil Belluš, Milan Harminc and Klement Šilinger, who built office, administrative and residential buildings of the highest quality in Bratislava, in a number of economically dynamic provincial towns and in various resorts and spa towns. On display in the exhibition are the world-famous *Sanatoria in the High Tatras* by Jaromir Krejcar and Bohuslav Fuchs and others, the *Sliach Spa* (1931-38) by Rudolf Stockar, Emil Belluš’ *Colonnade Bridge and Bathing Facility*, dating from 1932, with its unique architectural setting, and the *“International”* sanatorium located nearby, for example.

The Bauhaus influence. The influence of the Bauhaus can also be understood in terms of architecture's new social orientation at the beginning of the 1930s. Weinwurm and Vécsei contributed to the ongoing discussion of the "small dwelling" (2nd CIAM conference held in Frankfurt in 1929: "The Subsistence-level Dwelling") with their *Unitas Pergola Buildings* complex in Bratislava (1930–31). Consisting of seven five-storey blocks containing simple (45 m²) apartments, this housing complex represents one of the most important contributions to finding a solution to the problem of social housing. Another of Weinwurm's projects, the "*Nova doba*" ("*New Time*") *Estate* (1932), is an excellent example of the new urban, technical and economic approach being taken to the solving of social housing problems. An unusual example of sacred architecture from this time is Peter Behrens' remarkable *Synagoge in Žilina* (1930).

Emil Belluš played an important role in the founding of the Slovak Technical College (1937) and the creation of the first independent architectural faculty in Slovakia (1947). His most important work is widely considered to be his complex of so-called "*Cooperative Houses*" ("*Družstevné domy*", 1934–37). A year later he designed the *Coburg Administrative and Residential Building* with Bedrich Weinwurm.

Vladimir Karfik's *Bata Building* in Bratislava (1931) – built for the well-known shoe manufacturer of the same name – provides a further example of this high-quality urban architecture.

The state-run socialist planning sector. The political imperatives of socialism gave rise in 1948 to a state-run socialist planning sector boasting what were probably the largest planning collectives anywhere in Europe at the time. At the beginning of the 1950s, *mass production* became the predominant building method and as a result of the prevailing harsh economic conditions, the post-war years witnessed an "economic vulgarisation" of Functionalism. The socialist buildings of the 1950s were often characterised by what has been called the "charm of the meagre". All citizens were to be offered minimum standards in terms of technical features and space. The need for a planning model based on scientific principles was propounded and special institutes attached to the Academy of Sciences were founded in which architectural planning based on data collected and standardised throughout the whole state was now conducted. Public architecture and large-scale urban development are two of the remarkable achievements of what were mostly large planning offices centred around a single architectural personality ("Social Realism" in the form of prefabricated buildings and housing schemes, see catalogue).

A new direction and the "Prague Spring". In the mid-1960s came liberalisation in the form of a new policy of moderation pursued by the communist leaders. This became known as the "Prague Spring" and was brought to an end by the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops in 1968.

Projects dating from this period stand out for their originality and high quality – and hold their own when measured against international criteria. Among the most remarkable buildings from this time are the *Monument to the Slovak Public Uprising of 1944* by Dušan Kuzma and Josef Jankovič in Banská Bystrica (erected in 1969), the *Crematorium in Bratislava* and a number of pioneering urban developments. Other important projects include the *Agricultural College in Nitra*, the “*New Bridge*” (“*nový most*”, Jozef Lacko, Ladislav Kunir, Ivan Slameň, Bratislava, 1972-72) and the *City Traffic Solution in Bratislava*.

A phase of rigid planned-economy construction followed, lasting from the late 1970s until the fall of the Iron Curtain (e.g. *Military Convalescent Home*, Dušan Bálent, Eduard Horváth, Ivan Kočan, 1977-79).

Opening up of the country in 1989. The “Velvet Revolution” and the opening up of the country brought new impetus to the region’s architecture. Since then, numerous important historical buildings have been restored in exemplary fashion, including the *Jugendstil Building housing the renowned Café Roland* in Bratislava, which belongs to Kooperativa poisťovňa, a.s. (Budapest Jugendstil, N. Körössi/1906; renovation, Karol Kallay/2000) and large contemporary building projects have been realised (*VUB Bank*, Ján Bahna and Partners, Bratislava, 1995-96; *Residential Building*, Ľubomír Závodný, 1992-97).

By organising international congresses (e.g. DOCOmomo, 1996), Slovakia has sought with some success to gain a foothold on the international scene and to contribute to the current architectural debate.

In 1991, the Slovakian Architectural Association – which also runs an architectural gallery – launched the “**Dušan Jurkovič Prize for Architecture**” for outstanding architectural achievement, whose winners are selected by an international jury. Two schools of architecture (the Academy and a faculty of the Technical University) have been created with the aim of raising the general standard of building in Slovakia to the highest level, and architectural journals now appear at regular intervals (PROJEKT, ARCH, Forum).

The exhibition contains original plans and sketches, photographs and more than 20 models.

Catalogue (German/Slovak): “Architektur Slovakei. Impulse und Reflexion” (Slovak Architecture. Impulses and Reflection), Architecture in the Ringturm XI, edited by Adolph Stiller/Štefan Šlachta, published by Verlag Anton Pustet, Salzburg and Munich 2003, approx. 200 pages with numerous illustrations. Essays by Alena Kubová, Dušan Kováč, Dana Bořutová, Henrieta Moravčíková, Matúš Dulla, Adolph Stiller, Marian Zervan. Price €39.

Press info and photographs relating to ARCHITECTURE IN THE RINGTURM can be found at <http://www.wienerstaedtische.at> in the »Arts & Culture« section.