

Cooperative Bank

0 km
127 C2
D4

Miklošičeva 8

Alternative name:

Agencija za plačilni promet

Year of plan and completion:

1921-1922

Designer:

Ivan Vurnik

Contractors:

Miroslav Kasal, Ivan Ogrin

Investor:

Cooperative Bank

Building type:

bank, apartment house

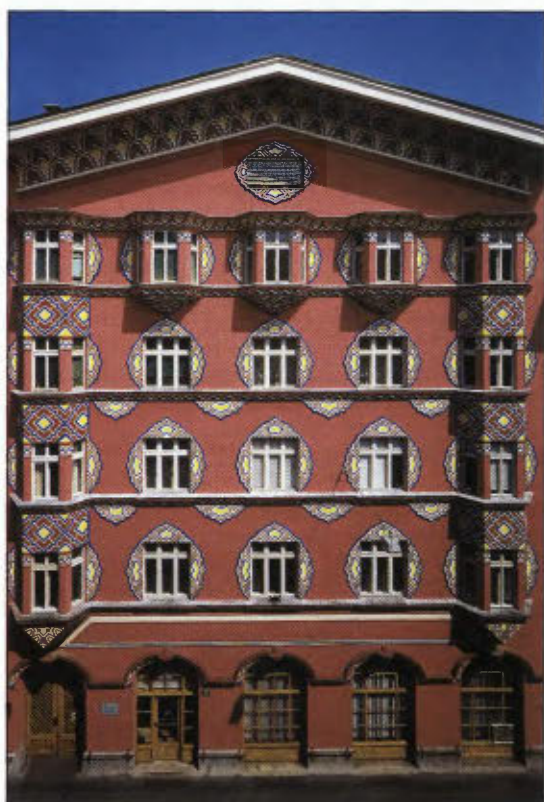
Source:

ZAL, Reg IV, f. 2420

The Cooperative Bank on Miklošičeva is undoubtedly one of the most remarkable Ljubljana buildings. Its sumptuously decorated and vividly coloured façade stands out from its urban context, despite being built in the heart of the Secession quarter of the city, which was already in general fairly colourful. It is one of the finest examples of architecture in the so-called national style, to which Vurnik was committed not only in his architectural work, but also in his interior designs and craft products.¹ In 1934, Maks Fabiani judged Vurnik's efforts to create an authentic Slovene architectural language to have been a worthy

attempt, but beyond the power of one individual: "An artist is like a flower, which gives its best and most beautiful in its natural, individual flowering. However, we cannot expect of him to create things that can only be born of the cooperation of the whole nation's power. Such a cooperation, in which the poetry of the entire nation is revealed, naturally presupposes untentious, ideal work from each individual. This and the completion of everything good that the past has left us, finally produces the *Genius loci*, which reflects the spirit of the people and the place".² Vurnik's efforts were a reflection of events which can be traced from the end of the nineteenth century on in the art, so to speak, of all the national states newly emerging from the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. In Bohemia, national tendencies developed into the so-called cubist trend; in Hungary such efforts, headed by Ödön Lechner, obtained an explicitly folkloristic character, the Slovaks, with Dušan Jurkovič, reawakened Slovak vernacular architecture. In Slovene art, too, national aspirations were already appearing at the turn of the century, in architecture as well as in other fine arts. The first example to have applied the Slovene national style in architecture was the National Coffee-House at Dvorni trg; shortly before the end of the century the architect Janez Jager decorated it with motifs from Slovene folk art. Thus it even predates the work of the members of the Vesna group, who strove for authentic Slovene art, and immediately after the Group's foundation in 1903 fell into step with the then fashionable Secession, and later continued in the direction of a national romanticism (e.g., Maksim Gaspari).

Vurnik had a very special attitude to the building of the Cooperative Bank. On the one hand, he himself characterised it as "unrequited and unheard love",³ but on the other hand, he often left it out of presentations of his work.⁴ The building clearly represented a double problem to Vurnik: he suspected that the building showed no way forward in the search for a





Slovene national style with the aid of decorative motifs taken from folk art, and, on the other hand, he was also aware that it suggested no development in the direction of modern functionalism. In fact, the building was designed as a purely classical business-residential house, such as had been built in the new city quarters of Ljubljana from the end of the nineteenth century onwards.

The roadside and courtyard wings are connected by a hall-like wing, two storeys high, intended for business with clients. The hall takes up the whole ground-floor of the roadside and courtyard wings. Pillars divide the unitary space longitudinally into three sections, the central one for clients, and the side ones for staff. The roadside part of the hall is separated from the courtyard part by arches designed in Moorish style, supported by two pillars. The entire roadside part of the hall, including the pillars and the spandrels and also the rear wall of the hall are covered with painted decoration. The hall receives light through a glass roof made up of small blue glass squares, including a decorative belt of glass particles of different colours. Stained glass windows with geometric motifs also decorate the stair landings on the first and second floors. The painted decorations in the hall and on the façade are the work of the architect's wife, Helena Vurnik, an excellent decorative artist. Although Viennese by birth, she had accustomed herself perfectly to the Slovene environment and also cooperated in Vurnik's research into and creation of characteristic

Slovene architecture. Geometric decoration in red, white and blue is combined with motifs from the rich Slovene iconography: stylised Slovene landscapes of pine woods and wheat fields, and vineyards, amidst which are inserted figures of women in national costume.

The façade of the building is designed in the manner of contemporary trading or business-residential premises. The ground-floor, intended for the public, is articulated with five apertures with round arches at the top, of which the left is the passage for vehicles, leading through the roadside part of the building to the courtyard. Strongly profiled mouldings divide the façade in horizontal direction, and a triangular attic crowns its entire width. Two oriel link the façade on either side from the first to the fourth floors; also the three central windows on the fourth floor protrude from the wall to form a small oriel each. Decorative motifs in contrasting Slovene colours (explained by some as stylised carnations, taken from Slovene embroidery, while others seek the model elsewhere, including Slovak folk ornaments⁵), surround the window apertures, the façade planes of the oriel and the strongly protruding cornice.⁶ Old photographs provide evidence that the northern firewall next to the unbuilt neighbouring garden was also painted in its original state. The Cooperative Bank is the most important work of Vurnik's early output, which cannot hide its distant Secession models, although created at least fifteen years later than the most important works of Secession architecture. This early



period has been characterised as national romanticism by Slovene scholars, and some see also the influence of contemporary German⁷ or Czech⁸ Expressionist architecture in the façade of the Cooperative Bank.

Literature:

Marko Ivančič: *Arhitekt Ivan Vurnik*, FAGG, 1963

(typescript);

Ivan Vurnik - slovenski arhitekt (1884-1971), AB, 119-124, 1994.

¹ E.g., the murals of the church in Stari trg by Lož or in the sanctuary of the church of St. Catherine by Medvode (1919-1920) and even the liturgical vestments of Bishop Jeglič (1918-1923).

² M. Fabiani, Ljubljana: Slika mesta in moji vtisi iz leta 1934, *Kronika*, 1935, 1, pp. 4-6.

³ N. Šumi, Ivan Vurnik med pionirji moderne arhitekture, *Ivan Vurnik: slovenski arhitekt 1884-1971*, AB, 1994.

⁴ I. Vurnik, Vurnikova šola za arhitekturo, *Dom in svet*, 1927, 1, pp. 291-293.

⁵ N. Šumi, Ivan Vurnik med pionirji moderne arhitekture, *Ivan Vurnik: slovenski arhitekt 1884-1971*, AB, 1994.

⁶ Similar decorative motifs and ways of decorating the façade can also be read from the plans of the façade of Narodni dom in Kranj, of 1922.

⁷ S. Bernik, Ekspresionistične tendence v slovenski arhitekturi, *Ekspresionizem in nova stvarnost na Slovenskem 1920-30*, Ljubljana, 1986.

⁸ D. Prelovšek, O dekorativnosti zgodnje Vurnikove arhitekture, *Ivan Vurnik: slovenski arhitekt 1884-1971*, AB, 1994.