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Radovljica

Čebelica (Little Bee)

Gorenjska cesta 18

Alternative name:

Loan Bank

Year of plan and completion:
1906

Designer:

Ciril Metod Koch

Investor:

Radovljica Loan Bank, a registered
co-operative with limited liability

Building type:

bank

Ciril Metod Koch (1867-1925), Ljubljana municipal architect, was a native of Gorenjska region. He probably obtained the commission for the loan bank in Radovljica through the good offices of the Ljubljana mayor, Ivan Hribar, a prominent banker, who spent his summer holidays in nearby Cerklje.

The building was given the name of "Čebelica" (Little Bee) because of the distinctive decoration on the façade. It stands by the northern inroad into the old centre of Radovljica. Close to the old centre are some older buildings: the town savings bank, the courts and the school. The road was constructed shortly after 1900 and formerly lined with a chestnut avenue, which further stressed its importance.

The loan bank in Radovljica is Koch's best architecture. Its main features follow the Wagnerian vein of Secession, while the naturalist decoration of the motif of a tree deviates from it. In this respect, Čebelica is reminiscent of Czech examples, such as the Havel House by Osvald Polivka in Prague (1900-1902). A further proof that this

motif was not restricted only to the Czech and Hungarian cultural environments is Fabiani's villa in Speising in Vienna from 1899, whose façade is similarly decorated with a stylised tree¹. In contrast with Fabiani and Polivka, who executed the tree motif in stucco, Koch's decoration is composed of polychrome tiles.

The architectural plan of the loan bank is traditional and repeats the pattern of the remaining buildings in its immediate vicinity. It is a detached, three-storey, symmetrical building. Its size and solid volume contribute to the town image. Čebelica differs from the neighbouring buildings mainly by its deep eaves. The eaves, together with the low-pitched roof and design details such as the profiled rafters and decorative panels with stylised flowers in geometrically decorated frames, directly repeat Wagner's patterns. We know that Wagner constructed his architectural vocabulary on cubic mass and Italian Renaissance proportions. "Florentine eaves" were particularly characteristic of him and his circle. Koch used such a motif several times, including Čebelica. The fact that relatively large areas of the façade are empty, without decoration, also points to the Vienna example. The decoration is centred mainly on the space around the windows, the frieze beneath the eaves and the courses of tiles between the windows of the ground floor. In addition to the tiles, the ironwork of Čebelica also belongs within modern Secession. Koch used it





with the wrought-iron balcony railings and in the elaborately designed metal pediments of the second floor windows.

The polychrome tile embellishment in the axis of the building is the main accent of the façade. Two trees sprout from tiles around the entrance. Their crowns enclose the central window on the first floor. There are white-yellow flowers in the crowns, which are composed of green and blue-green leaves, like a mosaic. Immediately above the entrance is a beehive. Bees are depicted around it, and further ones are embossed in metal in the

tree crowns. The decoration is so naturalistic that one could call it street art showing the flight of bees into the hive. From a distance, the visitor at first sees only a vividly decorated surface. The closer one approaches, the more recognisable are the features of the trees, flowers, hive and bees. Stepping right up to the entrance, one looks up at the plastically formed metal insects and they seem to be descending on to the viewer.

Literature:

Borut Rovšnik, *Stilni razvoj ornamenta na fasadah v Sloveniji od 1895 do prve svetovne vojne*, ZUZ, n. v., XVI, 1980, pp. 47-48.



¹ *Der Architect: Wiener Monatschrift für Banwesen und dekorative Kunst*, V, 1899, pp. 10.