

## Architecture of the 20th Century

The present book is a somewhat different overview of 20th century architecture in Slovenia. The selection of presented buildings is austere since it was dictated by the purpose of the book and its scope. The selected works are not only the outstanding buildings that came into existence in Slovenia in the last century. The authors of the book, architects and art historians, have selected typical creations of the past, characteristic evidence of progress in land development, theoretical thinking and architecture in our surroundings. The purpose of this selection is to encourage public debate and conservation evaluation, and to facilitate better and more professional protection of all the outstanding historical buildings of the 20th century, not only cultural monuments and the creations of famous authors, the mainstays of the development of fine arts. The artistic value was one of the principles of selection, since individual buildings and entities are to be considered as to their function, social value and historical relevance. We attempted to include as many architects as possible and all regions of Slovenia.

The chronological context of the book is defined as the period after the First World War, since the architecture created before 1920 has already been presented in another publication within The European Heritage Days Series. The final chronological limit of the selection was close to the year 2000, although it is usually preferred to conclude the period somewhat earlier and evaluate the artefacts from a more distant point in time. The chronological definition of the beginning was further conditioned by a new creative enthusiasm after the First World War and the establishment of the first university in Slovenia in Ljubljana with a department of architecture. The beginning of the university coincided with the return of Jože Plečnik, the greatest authority of Slovene architecture, to Ljubljana. It was history together with the school of architecture that emphasized the importance of the Slovene capital and the Ljubljana School of Architecture named after it.

The present selection of Slovene architecture is not the first to be made, since several theoreticians, art historians (mostly conservators) and architects were engaged in the analysis of individual architectural periods, particularly in theoretical magazines. The magazine of the inter-war period was *Architecture (Arhitektura)*, to be followed by *Architect (Arhitekt)*, *Synthesis (Sinteza)* and *AB – Architect's Bulletin (Arhitektov Bilten)*, the only one still existing at present. France Stele was the first to treat 20th century architects as at least equal to other artists working in the fine arts in his *Outline of the History of Fine Arts of the Slovenes (Oris Zgodovine Umetnosti pri Slovencih)* that was pub-

lished in serial form in the magazine *Home and the World* (*Dom in Svet*) in 1923. Conservator Stele did not shrink from the evaluation of contemporary architecture; he was aware that debate was vital for a better understanding of all historical buildings, for architectural creativity itself and conservation. The art historian Stele even wrote monographs on Plečnik, supervised his work and encouraged town planning. "Art as an expression of all-embracing national culture can only be based, in my opinion, on architectural art that subordinates all the energy to uniform formality and a qualitative trend."

The number of books on architecture in Slovenia increased after 1945 as well as the number of publications in magazines. Since the 1980s the number of publications is almost impossible to follow; some articles are published even in reputable foreign magazines. Nevertheless, books on architecture are still a rarity in Slovenia. A long pioneering study, without a strict selection yet with numerous valuable data, was the work of France Šijanec. Nace Šumi often wrote in-depth analyses and directed students towards the discussion of modern architecture. An indispensable basis of all the analyses of 20th century architecture was made by Stane Bernik in his catalogue to the 1945–78 exhibition that reached to the middle of the 1970s and linked the creativity of architects, photographers and designers. His evaluations were published in the *Views (Pogledi)* series. Architect Dušan Grabrijan presents a bridge between the moderate functionalism of the 1930s and the post-war creation, and the cosmopolitan Marjan Mušič next to him. The architects indispensable for Ljubljana are: Braco Mušič, Aleš Vodopivec, Marko Pozzeto and others. Various authors wrote monographs on Jože Plečnik, Maks Fabiani, Milan Mihelič, Ivan Vurnik, Vladimir Šubic, Edvard Ravnikar, Marko Mušič and Danilo Fürst and introduced their work to the general public. Individual books deal with regional characteristics or stylistic periods. There are few comprehensive analyses containing comparisons with the European context and no comprehensive overviews of all the layers of architectural creation. The history of the last century was dynamic in its search of new values and protection of the old ones. Let this book be an encouragement for the co-existence of architecture, both newly emerging and that recognized as our heritage by history and experts, yet as living heritage, the architecture of dignified functions of physical and spiritual existence.

Slovenia was not filled with new architecture after the First World War. With the exception of Ljubljana enriched with Secessionism [*Art Nouveau*], Historicism prevailed, a sterile search for a synthesis of the new inside the old framework. Jože Plečnik surpassed that boundary; he relied on the town planning principles of Maks Fabiani and rendered them a new significance in Ljubljana. He erected symbolic architecture that transformed the provincial city into a capital with a stadium, markets, accentuated bridges, a large library and a main cemetery. He creatively restored Roman town walls and carefully preserved an old bridge framed by new footbridges and balustrades of the Three Bridges (*Tromostovje*). He simultaneously worked in Prague and transposed the models from Hradčani Castle to his native city or used the regulations of Ljubljana as tests for his Czech solutions. Plečnik did not work in Ljubljana only; his personal

impression on the Prekmurje region in north-eastern Slovenia was the church in Bogojina and his tribute to the then capital of Yugoslavia was the great Church of St. Antony in Belgrade, a pendant to Avala by Ivan Meštrović.

The inter-war period was a break-through of new ideas and materials. Modernism, usually termed functionalism here, assumed various theoretical and practical principles in Slovenia and transformed the town planning theory, introducing garden towns, workers' communities (the so-called colonies), and the marking of zones and types



Stanko Bloudek: Ilirija Baths, Ljubljana 1929–1931

of buildings that did not exist before. The modern villa with a flat roof appeared, a residential tower block, industrial workshop, cinema auditorium, and various sports buildings. Functionalism and its variations became the leading style of Slovene architecture in the 1930s and prevailed until the 1960s. Socialist realism was only a variation of the basic functionalist trend with its forms and materials. The same holds true of conservation that developed with France Stele and Marjan Mušič into a coordinated, theoretically and practically open branch based on experiences of the renovation of the Gothic church on Ptujška Gora, the monastery of Friars Minor in Ptuj and individual castles. It began with the renovation of castles that were demolished and abandoned under the new regime in the economic and political sense and of discriminated churches.

In the Kingdom of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, and subsequent pre-war Yugoslavia, the structure of investors changed. The Catholic Church that used to assume a leading position enabling it to follow international trends and invite important European architects became a marginal investor under the new regime of religious plurality and often also the instigator of poor taste and models. Except for few commissions, primarily of religious orders to Jože Plečnik, the level of quality decreased. The quality was partly preserved by some students of Plečnik, who regrettably fell into decorativism in view of political pressure after the Second World War and lesser creativity. With the exception of the unique church ambience in Dravlje in

Ljubljana (by architect Marko Mušič) the once leading field was directed into forced transformations of former churches, in the construction of combined functions and gaudy accumulation of forms and materials.

Self-confident and rich citizens and artists sought their new dwellings in villas with gardens. Workers' colonies were constructed according to financial resources, the ambitions of individual factory owners and new living standards, from bathrooms to central heating. More economic floor plans were gradually introduced, as well as kitchen appliances. New trends were developed in parallel by various architects. Josip Costaperaria found his source of inspiration in worldly models by Maks Fabiani, France Tomšič developed from the core of Plečnik's school and the influence of Le Corbusier, Ivan Vurnik and his students rejected the ornamentation of Secessionism and followed the social housing of Vienna, Vladimir Šubic developed the Prague School and the social models of Vienna into Classicist Modernism realized in the cases of the Skyscraper (Nebotičnik) in Ljubljana, workers' huts and cinema auditoriums. Avgust Černigoj stimulated changes in his own way by provocative experiments and models, Jaroslav Černigoj, together with Aleksander Dev, planned a modern bank, and Ivo Spinčič spread the echo of Bauhaus. Emil Navšček created the floor plan of a school without corridors, and the Bata factory owner created the facade with a series of continuous windows of the modern department store. A special occurrence, often forgotten at present, was the architect and designer of the first Slovene automobiles and airplanes, Stanko Bloudek. He designed the Ilirija Baths in Ljubljana and, together with construction engineer Rožman, the ski jumps in Planica that have far exceeded the size and glory of the Skyscraper in the contemporary Europe. New functionalist buildings came into existence in the coastal region as a reflection of the official fascist state. Schools, railway stations and industrial buildings were constructed in Italy. Dobljar power plant, the blocks in Anhovo and individual villas have preserved their functionalism with a touch of fascist ideology that has rendered impossible any objective critical evaluation ever since.

After his arrival at the University of Ljubljana, Plečnik created the firm basis of the Ljubljana School of Architecture together with Vurnik as his partner and competitor. Painters and sculptors had to attend academies in Zagreb, Belgrade or even in Prague, while the young architects studied at home. Their influence and number can be traced in the field of culture to the present since they have become the leading town planners, civil servants, planners, professors, designers, writers, film directors and set designers. Few of them were educated in Vienna, some individuals even returned from there disappointed like Edvard Ravnikar. The separation from Italian schools was more prominent due to political circumstances, while French influences became so only after the Second World War. The quest for the Slovene, Slavic and Classical roots was the secret principle even in artistic forms, at least in decorative sculpture and architecture. The grief of the Slovenes cut away from the sea and the Karst region emanates from the red stones on the facades of the National and University Library in Ljubljana (НУК). Symbolic heads of the lares were

erected in the foyer of the Skyscraper, St. George on the block in Miklošičeva Ulica (Miklošič Street) killed the dragon, and the bronze Moses on the National and University Library led the chosen people into the future.

The Second World War created a smaller caesura in architecture than in other arts in Slovenia. The post-war heyday was based on knowledge, principles and even materials developed after 1941. The National and University Library and the Museum of Modern Art (Moderna Galerija) were the links with the past: both the buildings were restored and completed after 1945. Some methods of work were new, like the striking or sudden construction of roads and buildings in the new collectivized "social property". These "shock" works left traces in co-operative construction and the independently organized self-help of local citizens, in construction during weekends, even in the professionally very questionable voluntary restoration of cultural monuments. A system of numerous DIY magazines supported such building as well as standardised planning and replacement construction. Banal construction prevailed with the encouragement of illegal buildings and their legalization in the new state of Slovenia, without any consideration for the heritage or architecture or even areas not designated for building.

The self-confidence of the liberators in the Second World War introduced a new generation of architects – partisan winners. Edvard Ravnikar, a member of the Liberation Front and a student of Plečnik, assumed the leading position at the School of Architecture. Two former partisans played important roles as professors: Boris Kobe and Edo Mihevc, and several others among the students: Vlasto Kopač, Svetozar Križaj and others. The School developed and gradually became independent. The basic town planning principles of garden towns could be fulfilled with the help of politics. The town of Nova Gorica came into existence in an open field, the Litostroj industrial quarter on the periphery of Ljubljana and the students' quarter in Rožna Dolina. The mining town of Velenje followed, as well as the factories in Kidričevo, on the coast and elsewhere. Architects enjoyed some privileges derived from their pre-war reputation and their links with the regime. They could plan abstract forms of public monuments and buildings. Plečnik was marginalized, although decorated with awards (e.g. the national Prešeren Award). The old architect helped with the renovation of monuments damaged during the war: the bombed National and University Library and the churches in Stranje and Železniki. He created a summer theatre out of a mediaeval monastery of the Teutonic Knights in Križanke in Ljubljana. His method of work, knowledge of the materials, procedures and balanced proportions and his ability to create new entities out of known elements left a heritage of an independent field of renovation of monuments to his followers. Individual students took over the works to be renovated and influenced the service for the protection of cultural monuments until the late 1980s, apart from their prominent guidance of the school and search for new trends. The outstanding individuals were: Anton Bitenc, Boris Kobe, Marjan Mušič, Vlasto Kopač, Špelka Valentinčič, Staša Blažič and Nataša Šumi. Oton Jugovec was an exception with his idiosyncratic concepts. The most

prominent personality for years had been Marjan Mušič who lectured at the Faculty of Architecture and co-operated in the renovation of cultural monuments in the then Yugoslavia and in Egypt. So far he is the only conservator who has proved successful outside of Slovenia.

Other architects were among the outstanding creators in Yugoslavia with new daring works that are among the best architectural achievements of Slovenia and could be presented in an independent book. Individual architects who succeeded abroad mostly worked in non-aligned countries on account of their political and building industry connections rather than actual quality architecture. Nonetheless, some individuals, e.g. Edvard Ravnikar and Janez Kobe, imposed their style on individual buildings from Baghdad to Belarus.

Before their break-through abroad, architects had to prove themselves successful at home. The post-war boom with the construction of carefully landscaped roads, industrial complexes and large residential areas and schools was of great help to them. The construction of the Commercial Exhibition Centre (Gospodarsko Razstavišče) in the 1950s was backed by financial and political support so that concrete and glass could encourage new forms of the last echoes of Modernism. The construction was not only a Slovene denial of socialist and emotional realism since the architects led the way ahead and created the first large new square in the capital city of Ljubljana. The architect was Branko Simčič with assistants. A subtle attitude towards cultural heritage was simultaneously confirmed by the Church of Sts. Cyril and Methodius by Jože Plečnik. It was moved to a new location, which has remained a unique occurrence in Slovenia to the present.

The post-war period could be named, with some poetic licence, the era of Edvard Ravnikar. He and his school marked Slovene architecture of the second half of the 20th century. Ravnikar became prominent with tenders in the then Slovenia, Yugoslavia and abroad. His position was finally established after the completion of the monument complex on the isle of Rab in Croatia, the construction of the Regional People's Committee in Kranj and winning the tender for Trg Revolucije (Revolution Square) in Ljubljana. His charisma had emanated from the Ljubljana School of Architecture for long, so much so that it lost its prominence after he moved away. Successful architects mostly established their own bureaus and set new, very high architectural standards with their younger assistants.

The 1960s was the period of the most diverse creativity in architecture and probably the pinnacle of Slovene architecture of the second half of the 20th century. Artists wrenched out of the austere framework and began planning in stylistic variations and syntheses. The characteristics of the School became prominent again with the sensible structures by Savin Sever, with combinations of materials and careful facade coverings with masterly details by Stanko Kristl and others. Milan Mihelič was an idiosyncratic follower of the Ravnikar School. With the recognizable elements of his teacher and a careful structure, he came close to the minimalist surfaces of the painter Donald Judd with the facade of the department store in Osijek, Croatia. He further surpassed foreign and native models with the glass facade of the International Automatic Telephone Exchange in Ljubljana. Regionalism was among the prominent trends in

Slovenia; the inclusion of regional features in the construction of buildings that were carefully planned as far as their floor plans and functions. The Prisank Hotel by Lajovic in Kranjska Gora is an outstanding example, as well as the Šorli Cottage on Krim and the works by the Kras Group. The latter was guided by Vojteh Ravnikar through Postmodern forms to minimalism and towards new attempts of connecting landscape and architecture in individual villas, in the Teharje Monument and Srebrniče Cemetery.

Architects often faced the search of a synthesis of the new and the old. Andrej Kemr created a restaurant out of the abandoned walls of Laško Castle without any support from magazines. His further achievement was one of the most comprehensive galleries for sculpture by Boljka in Volčji Potok, created out of a former tool shed. The planning of Jurij Kobe was at the limits of the impossible when he designed a functional museum out of the Baroque Cekin Castle (Cekinov Grad) in Ljubljana and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs out of the Secessionist school for girls (Mladika).

Marko Mušič follows the challenges of the development of the archaeological network of the Roman city of Emona at the location of present-day Ljubljana, so dear to Edvard Ravnikar. Mušič attempts to join elements of Slovene culture by the National and University Library and thus connect the remnants of the past with the requirements of contemporary architecture.

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