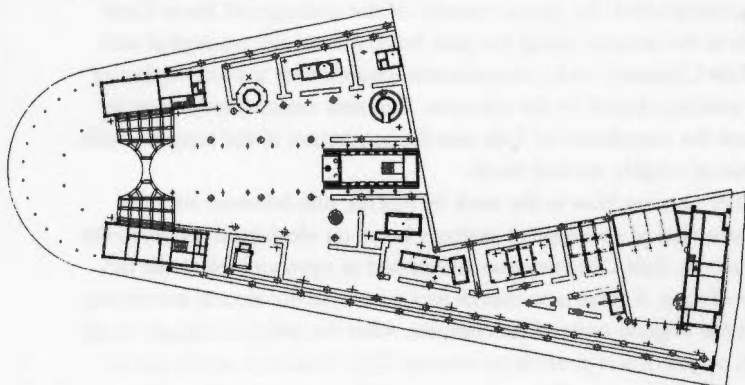


Žale Cemetery

IRN 384

<i>Location</i>	Ljubljana
<i>Address</i>	Žale
<i>Planning and completion</i>	1937–1940; 1938–1940, fittings and installations by 1944
<i>Architect</i>	Jože Plečnik
<i>Investor</i>	City Funeral Parlour (Mestni Pogrebni Zavod)
<i>Contractor</i>	Matko Curk and Emil Tomažič
<i>Building type</i>	Cemetery architecture (funeral parlour)

Žale Cemetery by Plečnik, for which he insisted on the name The Garden of All Hallows, is a unique combination of a mortuary, workshops and the office of the Funeral Parlour. In contrast to the traditional type of mortuary he knew from Vienna and Prague, Plečnik endeavoured to create a more reverential form for the funeral service, which would also correspond to the character and habits of the Slovenes. Instead of a single building he planned several separate chapels named after the patrons of the parishes of Ljubljana, by means of which he attempted to preserve the traditional manner of the funeral service from the province. The entire complex was planned as a huge park with benches, chapels, a fountain and a magnificent triumphal arch at the entrance. He planned another exit portal facing the Cemetery at the opposite end of the area. Since there was no money for it, he decorated more richly the exterior of the adjacent workshop building. In order to avoid the disturbing atmosphere of mortuaries typical of large cities, he used white on the facades and surrounded the chapels with greenery. Numerous chandeliers and the interiors formed according to the model of Pompeii had a similarly soothing effect. Plečnik emphasized the function of the complex discreetly, by means of vases reminiscent of the ones used for embalming in Egypt. They were located as balustrades in the windows of the central sacred building, thus avoiding modern glass surfaces. Although Plečnik utilized references to folk tradition, the composition in no way copied folk architecture, but rather followed the model of the Acropolis from Athens as to the arrangement of individual buildings. Žale Cemetery presented an opportunity for Plečnik to create ideal architecture, the symbolic value of which considerably surpassed its mere practicality.



▲ Ground plan (scale: 0.6mm = 1m)

The construction of the complex was a demanding financial task for the Ljubljana Town Council. The fate of Žale Cemetery was therefore uncertain to the very end. The architect was forced to reach some compromises, which, in turn, he was able to exploit skilfully and turn to his advantage. Since it was impossible to acquire the entire anticipated area, he planned some double chapels and erected a catafalque with a baldachin in front of the so-called prayer hall. In the typological sense, the complex presented a conglomerate of various models from Antiquity and the Renaissance on which Plečnik had histori-



Magnificent triumphal arch at the entrance ... "In the typological sense, the complex presented a conglomerate of various models from Antiquity and the Renaissance on which Plečnik had historically based his architecture."

.....
cally based his architecture.

The simplest chapel of St. Achatius, originally overgrown with grass and designed as an Etruscan tumulus, expresses the secret belief of the architect that the original inhabitants of the Apennine Peninsula were the Slavs. During the Second World War, Plečnik planned the so-called Soldiers' Cemetery, but it has never been executed. Two of his further ideas have likewise remained unaccomplished: the partial transfer of the endangered Navje Cemetery to the location along the path leading from the triumphal arch to Žale Cemetery, and a monumental church with a dome replacing the existing church by the entrance. The only major intervention to follow the completion of Žale was the renovation of the tumulus with a coat of roughly worked stone.

The severest blow to the work by Plečnik was delivered with the construction of new funeral parlours based on ideological motifs in the late 1970s. Žale Cemetery was abandoned in 1979 and left to the ravages of time. A large new church was erected in the vicinity interfering with the original unity of the complex. After the political changes in the early 1990s, it was possible to renovate Žale Cemetery and to restore its original function. The work was carefully directed by Vlasto Kopač, who had helped Plečnik in drawing plans as a student. The only mis-

understanding took place in the case of the entrance propylaea where the original crystalline structure of the plasterwork was covered with whitewash, which damaged the expressive value of the monument. New copper surrounds leave ugly green traces on it. The original creeper used by Plečnik to colour the walls of the chapels was uprooted for fear of maintenance costs. In the case of such a delicate artistic monument as Žale Cemetery, the present inappropriate candle stands should be replaced and the wreath stands made of plexiglas installed by the management of the Cemetery removed.



"He planned another exit portal towards the Cemetery at the opposite end. Since there was no money for it, he decorated more richly the exterior of the adjacent workshop building."

DAMJAN PRELOVŠEK

Literature

- BASSIN, ALEKSANDER, BRANKO CVETKOVIČ, ASJA KREČIČ, PETER KREČIČ, *Ljubljanske tržnice arhitekta Jožeta Plečnika*, Ljubljana, 1996.
- Enciklopedija Slovenije*, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana, 1994.
- GOODING, MEL, "National and University Library, Ljubljana, Jože Plečnik", *Architecture in detail*, Phaidon, London, 1997.
- HRAUSKY, ANDREJ, JANEZ KOŽELJ, DAMJAN PRELOVŠEK, *Plečnikova Ljubljana, Vodnik po arhitekturi*, Ljubljana, 1996.
- HRAUSKY, ANDREJ, JANEZ KOŽELJ, DAMJAN PRELOVŠEK, *Plečnikova Slovenija*, Ljubljana, 1997.
- KOBILICA, STUDEN, *Volja do dela je bogastvo*, Ljubljana, 1999.
- KREČIČ, PETER, *Jože Plečnik*, Ljubljana, 1992.
- KURENT, PODRECCA, *Plečnik, Seminar in Laibach*, TU, Munich, 1980.
- PLEČNIK, JOŽE, "Frančiškansko mostovje", *Dom in svet* XLII, Ljubljana, 1929.
- PLEČNIK, JOŽE, *Projekt univerzitetne biblioteke ljubljanske*, Ljubljana, 1933.
- PRELOVŠEK, DAMJAN, STAŠA BLAŽIČ GJURA, BETA BENKO MACHTIG, *Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica Jožeta Plečnika, prenova vhodnih vrat*, Ljubljana Institute for the protection of the Natural and Cultural Heritage, Restoration Centre of Slovenia, Ljubljana, 1997.
- PRELOVŠEK, DAMJAN, "Notte sulla costruzione del lungofiume. Dalla sistemazione austriaca agli interventi di Plečnik", *Lotus international* 59, 1989.
- PRELOVŠEK, DAMJAN, *Josef Plečnik*, Salzburg, Vienna, 1992.
- STELE, FRANCE, *Architectura perennis*, Ljubljana, 1941.