

EXHIBITION REVIEW

Architektur. Slowenien. Meister & Szene

Curators: Luka Skansi, Adolph Stiller

Ausstellungszentrum der Wiener Städtische Versicherung AG (Ringturm), Wien
15 April to 30 May 2008

Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, the former Habsburg capital Vienna has succeeded in reanimating its historic role as a bridge from western to eastern Europe and to the Balkans. As the successor states of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire are linked by cultural and historical bonds, the interest in the common “historic space” (*Geschichtsraum*) has increased in the last years-- a development best demonstrated by the vast number of cross-border cultural cooperations.

For some years, the exhibition series “Architektur im Ringturm”--curated by the Viennese architectural historian Adolph Stiller-- has drawn attention to the architecture of Austria’s neighboring states in central and southeast Europe. Following the presentations on Slovakia, Romania, Croatia and Bulgaria, Slovenia is the fifth country to be portrayed in a monographic exhibition. An interesting choice, bearing in mind that this year’s Mies van der Rohe Award in the category “emerging architecture” was given to the young Ljubljana-based office Bevk-Perović. Exciting also, since the ancestors of Slovenian modernity --Max Fabiani and Jože Plečnik --were trained in Vienna before World War I.

Curated by Luka Skansi and Adolph Stiller, *Architektur. Slowenien. Meister & Szene* (*Slovenia. Architecture. The Masters & The Scene*) showed seventy buildings designed by Slovenian architects. They were subdivided into three sections representing the periods 1918-1940 (Yugoslavian kingdom), 1945-1991 (socialist republic of Yugoslavia) and 1991-2008 (independent state). Arranged like islands in the vast room of the former banking hall of the Ringturm - an insurance building erected in 1953-1955 by Erich Boltensstern as a modernist “exclamation point” on the edge of Vienna’s historical center - each section was presented in a circular array of

Jože Plečnik, National and
University Library, Ljubljana,
1936–41
Photograph: © Damjan Prelovsek



Edvard Ravnikar, Square of the
Republic, Ljubljana, 1960–82
Photograph: © Miran Kambič



partition walls carrying the project sheets. The buildings were vividly displayed by large-scale photographs, drawings and texts.

The first two periods are --due to the influence of important masters -- marked by similarities. Here, Jože Plečnik (1872-1957) must be mentioned first and foremost. After having worked in Vienna and Prague he became professor at the newly founded Faculty of Architecture in Ljubljana in 1922. Plečnik's traditionalist, emblematic modernity was the fundamental element in Slovenian architecture before World War II. After 1945, Edvard Ravnikar (1907-1993) took over the role of the precursor combining influences of his teachers Plečnik and Le Corbusier to form a regional architectural language. Quite differently, recent architecture since 1991 reflects contemporary international developments.

A substantial presentation of the work of Edvard Ravnikar - curated by Rok Žnidaršič, Majda Kregar and Miha Kerin - was shown as an "exhibition in the exhibition." Here, eighteen projects illustrated by drawings, photographs, texts and, to some extent, models, demonstrated Ravnikar's considerable work as a city planner (Nova Gorica) and architect (hotels, office buildings, memorials) between 1939 and 1975. It is remarkable that some of his designs feature accurately detailed, textile-like facades reminiscent of Frank Lloyd Wright's buildings. Furthermore, Ravnikar's outstanding qualities as a designer were demonstrated by four wooden chairs exhibited together with their construction drawings.

After recent monographic exhibitions on contemporary Slovenian architecture and on Jože Plečnik (1967 in Vienna and 1987 in Munich), this exhibition provided



Zadavec arhitekti, secondary school,
Ptuj, 1999–2000
Photograph: © Miran Kambič

an interesting overview “of the extraordinarily rich architectural heritage” (Stiller) of the region. In combination with the presentation of Ravnikar’s work, the show assisted in adjusting the traditionally one-sided image of postwar architecture-- an image whose emphasis on internationalism often disregards the specific developments in many countries. Ravnikar himself provided a stimulating impulse for further research on the topic with his provocative remark: “only in underdeveloped countries can architecture still be found.”

Publication related to the exhibition:

A well-illustrated catalogue with texts by Friedrich Achleitner, Feliks J. Bilster, Friedrich Kurrent, Luka Skansi, Aleš Vodopivec and Bogo Zupančič in German and English:

Adolph Stiller, ed., *Architektur. Slowenien_Meister & Szene | Slovenia. Architecture_The Masters & The Scene* (Architektur im Ringturm XVII). Salzburg: Verlag Anton Pustet, 2008, 156 pp., € 20, ISBN: 978-3-7025-0590-5.

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Bevk-Perović arhitekti,
student apartments, Ljubljana, 2004–06
Photograph: © Miran Kambič