

## EXHIBITION REVIEW

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**Hans Poelzig, 1869-1936. Architekt, Lehrer, Künstler**

Curators: Wolfgang Pehnt, Matthias Schirren

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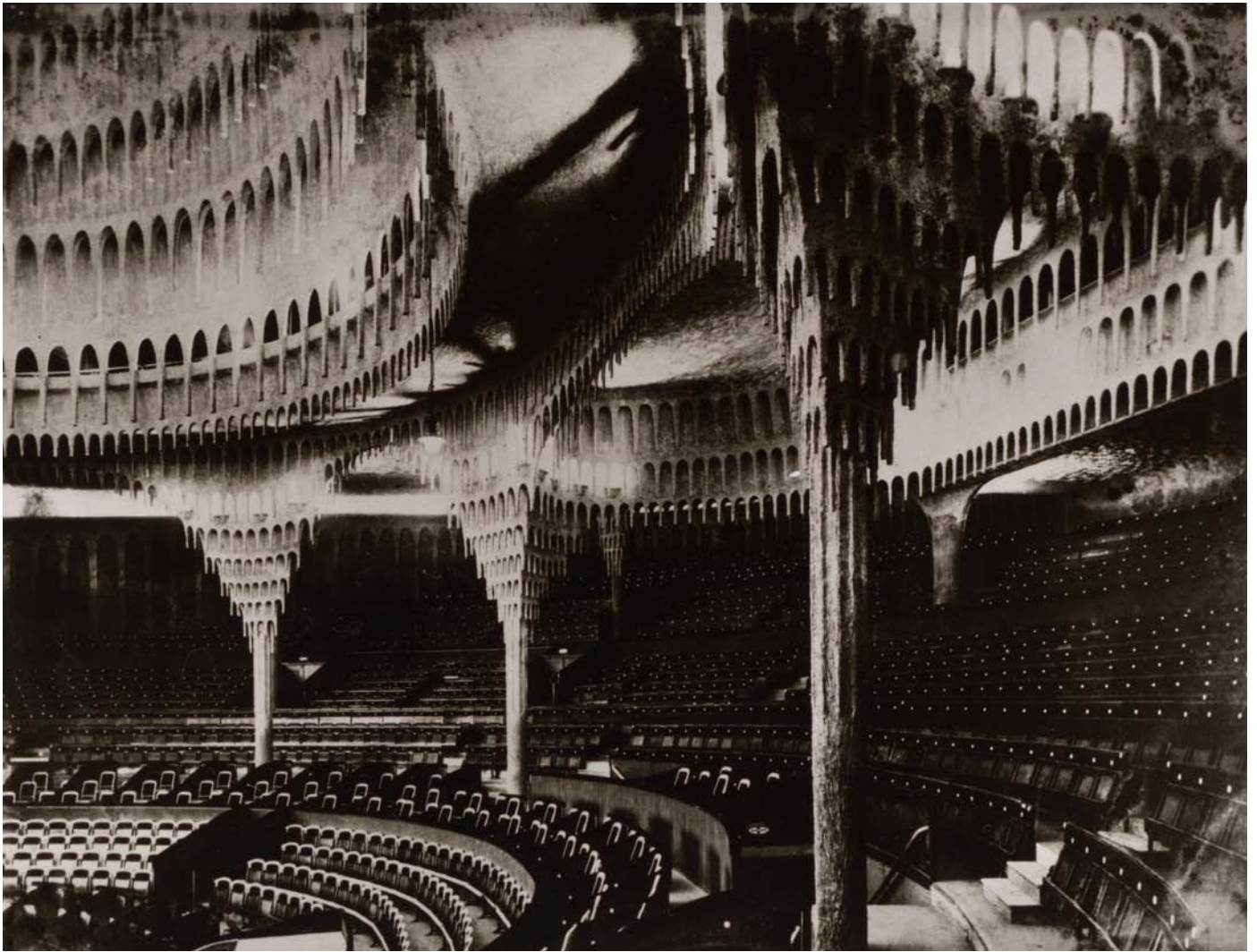
Deutsches Architekturmuseum, Frankfurt am Main

1 March to 18 May 2008

After its first stop in the Berlin Academy of Arts, the travelling exhibition *Hans Poelzig, 1869-1936. Architekt, Lehrer, Künstler* (*Hans Poelzig, 1869-1936. Architect, Teacher, Artist*) was shown in the Deutsches Architekturmuseum in Frankfurt. Curated by Wolfgang Pehnt and Matthias Schirren, the presentation focused not only on Poelzig's architectural production, but also emphasized his work as a set decorator, film designer, painter and teacher.

Indeed, Poelzig's oeuvre cannot be classified easily by stylistic catchwords. Educated at the TH Charlottenburg in Berlin in the 1890s, he later emerged as one of the leading figures of the architectural renewal before the First World War. The chemical factory in Luban and the water tower in Posen (Poznan, both 1910-11) represent an elementary, but emblematic architecture similar to the industrial buildings of Behrens and Gropius. After the war, Poelzig adopted an Expressionist course that found its manifestation in the theater projects for Max Reinhardt. In the polarized German architectural debate of the 1920s, he pursued a moderate, monumental modernity as a "third way" between the opposing blocs: although Poelzig was closely linked with the Berlin avant-garde architects of the "Arbeitsrat für Kunst" (1919) and the "Ring" (1924-29), his work was well received by traditionalists such as Bonatz or Schmitthenner too. Despite his differing architectural modes over the years, Poelzig's interest in the "symbolic form" --i.e. the importance for the artist's design to inspire a building beyond a mere fulfillment of functions-- remained a constant issue.

The monographic exhibition featured outstanding material mainly originating from Poelzig's bequest in the Architekturmuseum of the TU Berlin.



Hans Poelzig, Grosses Schauspielhaus,  
Berlin-Mitte, 1919

Photograph: © Architekturmuseum  
der TU Berlin

Arranged on two floors, the presentation --covering the architectural production of four decades-- excelled with its almost encyclopedic ambition. Arranged more or less chronologically, the work was subsumed in twelve chapters named, for example, “modern utilitarian buildings” or “expression of technique.” The main means of presentation were large-scale charcoal, ink and wax crayon drawings as well as photographs. Numerous model reconstructions gave a three-dimensional impression of the buildings.

The exhibition started on the ground floor with a portrait gallery illustrating Poelzig’s changing appearance over the years. Among the projects shown, the category “collective festivity” stood out amidst the designs of the years 1900-1922: the Grosses Schauspielhaus in Berlin (1919) was illustrated by photographs, sketches of the stalactite piers and a great illuminated model of the domed interior; the designs for the terraced House of Friendship in Istanbul (1916) and the Festspielhaus in Salzburg (1920-1922) were also clarified in drawings and models.

The upper floor was dominated by projects of the 1920s and 1930s. Under the title “Großstadtarchitektur,” designs such as the Friedrichstrasse high-rise competition entry (1922), the Hamburg trade fair complex (1925) or the Cologne bridge-head tower (1925) were shown--all of them marked by stone facades structured with narrow pilasters. Besides the executed buildings--such as the Frankfurt IG Farben offices (1928-31) or the Berlin broadcasting house (1928-31)--Poelzig’s unexecuted projects for the Soviet Palace in Moscow (1931) or for the Berlin Reichsbank (1933) were of particular interest. In addition to these office buildings, the residential houses for the Weissenhof Siedlung in Stuttgart (1927) and for the Fischtalgrund Siedlung in Berlin (1928) demonstrated Poelzig’s ability to create modest designs.

Hans Poelzig, IG Farben office building,  
Frankfurt am Main, 1928-1931. The building  
serves today as the main building of the Johann  
Wolfgang Goethe Universität, Frankfurt.  
Photograph: Sabrina Dohle / @ Lehrgebiet  
Geschichte und Theorie der Architektur, TU  
Kaiserslautern



View of the exhibition *Hans Poelzig, 1869-1936.*  
*Architekt, Lehrer, Künstler* in the Deutsches  
Architekturmuseum  
Photograph: Uwe Dettmer / DAM



On each floor, the non-architectural production of the artist was presented: here, Poelzig's work as a teacher was illustrated by a list showing the names of his Berlin students like Egon Eiermann, Rudolf Schwarz or Konrad Wachsmann. Excerpts from the films *Der Golem* (1920) and *Zur Chronik von Grieshuus* (1923/24) demonstrated the artist's work as a film designer and set decorator. And finally, the painter Poelzig was introduced by six expressively colored paintings--some large-scale--dating from 1916 to 1932.

Throughout, the curators succeeded in arranging the vast oeuvre convincingly, creating a substantial, comprehensible and pleasing presentation. The exhibition and the well-illustrated catalogue, with essays treating different aspects of Poelzig's work, are further noteworthy steps in the research on Poelzig, presenting him as a universalist "master of many arts" (Pehnt / Schirren).

Publication related to the exhibition:

Wolfgang Pehnt and Matthias Schirren, eds., *Hans Poelzig. 1869-1936. Architekt, Lehrer, Künstler*. Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2007, 272 pp., approximately 90 color and 260 b/w illus., € 29.90, ISBN: 978-3-421-03623-0.

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