

# **Nové muzeum architektury v Polsku. Západní versus regionální trendy /**

New Museum Architecture in Poland. Western versus local trends

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It has been possible to observe the global museum building boom for several years, especially in Europe, the United States, as well as in Asian and Arabian countries. However, its nature in Central Europe is peculiar. Whereas in other countries the constructed museums supplement the landscape of already existing museum facilities, in this region the new museums only start to form this landscape as far as contemporary art is concerned. Poland is not alone in this trend. The situation is similar in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, as well as Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was particularly benignant for Polish museology. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, construction of new museum buildings was a rarity. Before 1989, practically no museums and centres that dealt with modern and contemporary art were established. The construction revival commenced with the erection of the Warsaw Rising Museum in 2004 in an adapted tram power station, whose building, similarly to the exhibition, was genuinely popular. From this moment, Poland has started to make up for the time lost with respect to establishing new museums and exhibition premises that would befit the new century. It is possible to distinguish two trends in the investment boom: the first, more visible and widely represented, is oriented towards contemporary art institutions and the second, being a national and historical trend.

### **Landscape of Modern Art institutions in the Communist Era**

1989 was a breakthrough year not only in politics and economy, but in all areas of life. The lifting of borders and the physical and spiritual opening towards the West revealed not only the backwardness of the eastern part of Europe, but also huge shortages in cultural infrastructure. The greatest negligence, which has still been impossible to overcome, was shown to museums of contemporary art.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, contemporary art was collected in Poland within the framework of national museums and regional museums. After WWII, a network of galleries under the common name of "offices of artistic exhibitions" (*Biura Wystaw Artystycznych*) were established to represent this art. In 1949, the Central Office of Artistic Exhibitions (*Centralne Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych – CBWA*) was established with its seat in Warsaw, reporting directly to the Ministry of Culture and Art. It organised a number of important exhibitions of Polish and foreign artists and established a network of regional branches in all province capitals. The process of establishing them was conducted gradually from 1950. They were supposed to activate and stimulate artistic life in the region.

One cannot forget about the National Gallery of Art "Zachęta", whose history goes back to 1860. At that time, the Association for Encouragement of Fine Arts (*Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych*) was established with the goal of organising exhibitions and compiling a collection. After the war, the Central Office of Artistic Exhibitions functioned in the Association's building (the collections were transferred to the National Museum). In 1989, the institution was transformed into State Art Gallery "Zachęta."

In the 1930's, the first museum of contemporary art in Central and Eastern Europe opened in Poland. In 1929, the International Collection of Modern Art of the "a. r." group was established in Łódź, which laid the foundations for the Museum of Art – the second European museum of contemporary art. Today, it has the largest and the best collection of the 20<sup>th</sup> century art in Poland. It commenced its operation in 1930 in the Municipal Museum of History and Art in Łódź. After WWII, the museum was transferred to an independent building – a palace built at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where it has been functioning up this day (in November 2008, the museum acquired a new building).

Also before the political transformation, in 1985, the Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle was established, which, for over twenty years, has been a substitute for the museum of contemporary art in Warsaw. The Centre, located in a rebuilt late-Baroque castle, collects international and Polish contemporary art and organises exhibitions, for which the collection provides a background and a point of reference.

### **Reaching for models**

As can be seen, Poland has a relatively respectable tradition of contemporary art institutions, yet its cultural landscape is devoid of modern museums and centers which would comply with the demands of contemporary art and new tendencies in museology. The fall of communism brought new possibilities in this respect. At the beginning of the new century, Warsaw and other large cities started to voice the need for establishing new museums. As a result of the absence of a local tradition of erecting modern museum buildings (Poland started a discussion on the shape of a Polish museum institution only at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, passing over the complex evolution which took place in other countries in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), it was necessary to reach for the relevant models abroad. A question only remains as to whether Polish ideas constitute a faithful transplantation of such solutions, or their creative interpretation in Central European conditions?

Museum projects and implementations can be divided into two categories (not necessarily mutually exclusive): adaptations of industrial buildings for museum purposes (often as an element of the revitalisation of districts and city quarters) and buildings with a symbolic character erected for the purpose of improving the city's image.

### **Adaptations**

Adapting a building that originally performed different functions into a museum or a gallery was not a new phenomenon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Palaces and castles were transformed into museums (e. g. the Louvre was a museum opened for the public in 1793). However, works of art were an inseparable attribute of royal, ducal and noble residences. A 20<sup>th</sup> century novelty was the introduction of works of art to completely new premises – railway stations, factories, power plants. Not only was the context of a building changed by receiving a completely new function and becoming a package for art, but also the works introduced into an industrial space acquired a new dimension.

A milestone for museum adaptations was the transformation of a Parisian railway station into the Musée d'Orsay opened in 1989. Another railway station location is the Museum for Contemporary Art (Museum für Gegenwart) in Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin opened in 1996. The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles also commenced its activity in a commercial spirit under the name of Temporary Contemporary in 1983. During the time when the proper building was under construction, the museum functioned in its provisional seat – in a building from 1940, which was initially a hardware store and later a municipal warehouse and a police garage. After the opening of the proper building in 1986, Temporary Contemporary (today as The Geffen Contemporary)

functions as the museum's 2000. The modern art museum was built on the southern bank of the Thames in an old brick building of a municipal power station constructed between 1947 and 1963, which the Swiss architectural team Herzog & de Meuron adapted for the needs of the museum.

These four examples only settle the issue of postindustrial buildings adopted for museum purposes. Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century this trend has been widely represented in Poland. Depending on the character of regions and types of buildings available in cities various structures are transformed into art centres, exhibition halls and museums: heat and power stations, factories, mills, coal mine.

Since the moment of its establishment the Museum of Art in Łódź has been grappling with housing problems. In 2005, the investor of a shopping mall and entertainment centre, Manufaktura (at the moment of its opening in 2006, it was the largest centre in Central Europe), came to the rescue. One of the historical post-factory textile buildings of the complex was donated to the museum in order to be transformed into a contemporary art museum. The post-industrial brick architecture, located within the area of 270.000 m<sup>2</sup>, derives from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A modern commercial centre was erected within the historical façades. Due to the fact that Łódź does not have a market square in the traditional meaning of this term, Manufaktura took over the functions of organising city life. Apart from shops, there are also cafés, pubs, restaurants, a disco, a bowling alley, a cinema, a museum of the place and a public space with a fountain, benches and lanterns. The presence of a such an institution of high culture in the area immersed in commerce and popular culture was a prestigious coup for Manufaktura, whereas such a location for the museum means easier access for the potential recipient and the first Polish attempt at coping with the direct vicinity of a post-modernist temple. The inauguration of activity and the opening of the permanent exhibition in the Museum of Art branch, called ms<sup>2</sup>, took place in November 2008. The building offers over 3.000 m<sup>2</sup> for permanent and temporary exhibitions; it features a conference room, a bookshop and a café. It adjoins the shopping mall, yet the façade with the main entrance to the museum has its back to it. The ramp leads the visitors from the street level directly to the first floor. Exhibition walls, painted white and adorned by pillars and divided by partition walls, are a far cry from the external red brick walls.

Other examples of adaptations from the area of Poland are still in the phase of architectural designs. In 2007, three architectural competitions were settled, and the selected projects are awaiting implementation.

In 2004 serious discussions on the issue of establishing the Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow were commenced. After years of disputes regarding localisation, in 2007, a decision was made that the museum would be established in the former "Emalia" Factory of Oscar Schindler in the Zabłocie district; the museum would share its location with a museum devoted to war-time Krakow. It will be located in seven post-industrial buildings, and its main part built from scratch will be hidden underground. The architectural competition announced by the authorities of Krakow in February 2007 was won by a workshop from Florence – Claudio Nardi, Leonardo Maria Proli and Annalis Tronci. Their minimalist design does not interfere with the original architecture. Establishment of the museum will be one of the elements of revitalisation of the neglected Zabłocie district, located on the opposite bank of the Vistula River with respect to the Main Market Square, yet in close vicinity to the centre. Cultural investments are aimed at changing its image and function. In one of the buildings of the "Emalia" factory, the Faculty of Architecture and Fine Arts of the Krakow private university has been functioning for a couple of years. Also the architectural form of the Tadeusz Kantor Museum has been known since 2006; the museum was designed in an historical power plant building, which will enrich the Vistula museum landscape.

In 2005 far away from the major exhibition routes, the Mazovian Centre of Modern Art "Elektrownia" (Mazowieckie Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej "Elektrownia") was established in Radom. Its initiator and benefactor is the famous film director Andrzej Wajda. The design of the new building combines the brick structure of the old

municipal power plant with modern architecture. Currently, prior to the commencement of construction work (scheduled for 2010), the centre organises temporary exhibitions.

The Silesian Museum in Katowice, where modern art is an important, yet not exclusive component, has not had much luck with respect to a new building. Between 1941 and 1944, the Nazis disassembled the seven-storey building intended as the museum's seat. Since the 1980's, the museum has been operating in a building of a former hotel. In 2006 an architectural contest was settled for the New Silesian Museum and it will be built according to the design of Riegler Riewe Architecten from Graz in the area of the former Hard Coal Mine "Katowice", located in the very heart of the city. The design forecasts maintenance of the historical mine buildings and location of the exhibition halls underground in a brand new building where light will be provided inside with the use of glassy luminous towers, rising above the surface.

### Icons

The majority of large cities are identified by their iconic buildings – cathedrals, palaces and castles. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a non-conventional museum building became a city icon. In 1959, the structure of the Guggenheim Museum, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, became one of the symbols of New York, and since 1977, the museum showcase of modern Paris has been the Pompidou Centre, designed by Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers, whereas in the year 2000, London acquired a new symbol – Tate Modern. Unquestionable museum icon of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao by Frank Gehry opened in 1997 which initiated the worldwide "Bilbao effect". The gigantic, undulating and imaginatively curved structure which changes its colours with the angle at which sunrays fall on it, became a breakthrough project in the history of museology and architecture.

One could get an impression that Poland is hungry for icons. Warsaw, as the capital of the largest country in Central Europe, would like to get out of the shadow of the huge socialist Palace of Culture and Science (230 m) and create a symbol relevant for modern times. The layout of the capital centre is going to be changed by the Museum of Modern Art located between the Palace and one of the main communication thoroughfares with the shopping malls. In the Rules and Regulations of the architectural competition, it was emphasised that: "*The Museum will be a living place, where contemporary art pervades city life. Architecturally, the building of the Museum should be a formal and significant counterpoint to the Palace of Culture and its structure – a recognisable, new symbol of Warsaw. The Museum, along with the adjoining square and park, will become the most important public place in the revitalised centre of Warsaw*". When the results of the competition were announced, it turned out that the new symbol would be the design of Christian Kerez, a Swiss architect, which is lost in the space of Warsaw. A bright structure in the shape of the letter "L" is a minimalist container for works of art. A glazed ground-floor functions as an exhibition window resembling shop windows on the opposite side of the street. The structure is decorated by an undulating roof, which, however, will not be visible from street level. The issue of the museum has been on the front pages of newspapers since the year 2005. The architectural competition and controversies related with it caused a general social debate; a number of open meetings with people involved in the competition were held, presentations in the media were made and articles appeared in every-day and specialist press. The temperature of the discussion is related with the investment's significance: location in a strict city centre in the immediate vicinity of the Palace of Culture and Science and the pressing need for establishing such an institution in Poland (plans for establishing a museum go back to the year 1945). Despite disputes and controversies, city authorities accepted the cubist structure of the building. At present until the opening scheduled for 2014 the museum operates in a temporary location.

Whilst the social debate on establishing the first post-war museum of art was focused on Warsaw, the first such museum was established in the middle of 2008, far away from the spotlight: the Centre of Contemporary Art "Signs of the Time" (Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej "Znaki Czasu") in Toruń. Its history goes back to 2004, when the nationwide programme "Signs of the Time" of the Ministry of Culture was launched. Its objective was to establish autonomous collections of contemporary art in every Polish province, which would provide a stimulus for setting up "centres of modernity", i. e. institutions dealing with contemporary art in individual regions. The building designed by Edward Lach is a new investment implemented in the direct vicinity of the old town. Its shape and size blends into the surrounding brick buildings. The only element that distinguishes it is a circular staircase in the corner. The centre is a problematic example, due to the fact that even though it definitely became the symbol of a modern city, this did not happen on account of its architecture, which is correct, but conservative.

2008 brought the settlement of another competition for a contemporary art institution – the Museum of Contemporaneity in Wrocław. The winning structure designed by Mirosław Nizio is a minimalist form in the shape of a slightly twisted cube, covered with black grating on the outside. The building will offer space for contemporary art collections which are compiled by the city and it will supplement the institutional image of Wrocław as the most dynamically developing Polish city with respect to cultural issues.

### **Western Inspirations**

Architectural designs of museums and art centres prepared in Poland do not differ from museum buildings currently built around the world with respect to style and technology. Nevertheless, the truly breakthrough concepts, which could revolutionise the way of thinking in architecture and set new trends or at least secure a distinguished place in the history of world museology, are missing.

The Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw will unquestionably be an interesting building. Its aesthetic values will be appreciable especially whilst looking at it from above – the view terrace of the Palace of Culture. The passers-by will not be able to see the undulating roof, which is the sole decoration of the structure. The artist's inspirations have to be looked for in the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth in Texas and its undulating roof, designed by Louis I. Kahn (executed in 1972).

Maybe a question should be asked as to whether the use of foreign models is dictated by a willingness of direct transplantation of ideas verified in the West or a willingness to work out local solutions? Looking at the example of Warsaw, the first thing that comes to mind is the typical Polish inclination to disputes, arguments and struggles. First of all, the first architectural competition was annulled; then, faced by the possibility of the selection of a design which did not meet the expectations, the museum's director resigned from his position, followed by the entire programme council. Subsequently, the ordering party, i. e. the city of Warsaw, discredited itself when, after approving the winning project and commissioning the architect to prepare the executive project, it started to wonder whether the museum should not share its space with a theatre (eventually architect had to redesign his winning project to house both a museum and theatre).

Placing the exhibition halls underground is definitely an innovative idea in Poland. In Katowice, it particularly fits the local mining tradition and constitutes an excellent combination of the city's past, which had been the Polish synonym of heavy industry for decades, with a future that symbolises a transfer to light industry, IT and investments in culture. As far as inspiration is concerned, it should be searched for in the architecture of Tadao Ando. An excellent example is the Chichu Art Museum and Art House Project at Naoshima island in Japan, implemented between 1999 and 2004.

The universal character of the architectural proposal for Wrocław results in the fact that the building could be erected in any place of the world and it would fit into the local culture (visually, it shows certain similarities to the MUMOK Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien in Museums Quartier in Vienna in 2001). The square layout, visible in the horizontal projection and in the wall façades, as well as in the black grating covering the entire structure, instils it with a timeless dimension. Moreover, the black colour on the outside contrasts with the white cube inside and emphasises its elegance.

Łódź follows the pattern of MASS MoCA (Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art) in North Adams which is the biggest centre for contemporary art in the USA. Łódź also has to be discussed in the context of the revitalisation of deteriorated city districts and changing the functions which they used to perform into cultural functions. On a wider scale, it is possible to mention the solutions implemented in Manchester, whereas in a more limited perspective – the example of Ljubljana. The internal museum space constitutes a white cube of exhibition halls, whereas the public space of the museum entrance (separated from the museum) is a place where service functions intermingle – a café, a seminar room, a bookshop, a cloakroom, a leisure area (an idea which has not yet been put into practice in Poland).

Also Krakow uses a factory complex yet it represents merging old with new architecture. Radom was clearly inspired by Tate Modern.

The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century opened a completely new chapter in the history of Polish museology. Three new museum buildings have been erected – two of them constitute adaptations, whereas the third was built from the scratch. The architectural designs are known with respect to the remaining six buildings and if the crisis (and the disputes) do not get in the way, they should be ready in the course of the next five or seven years. And ideas for new museums and centres of modern art are constantly multiplying (including in Poznań, Gdańsk and Białystok).

New museums enrich cities with interesting architectural solutions – these being more and less innovative, more Western and more local in their expression. Models for new museum buildings derive from international architecture and museology. As a result, universal designs are created (in Wrocław and also in Warsaw) or ideas strongly related with a specific place (designs in Kraków and Katowice). There are also designs which combine local needs and Western solutions ( $ms^2$  in Łódź). Making use of models and being creatively inspired by the best solutions definitely do not carry negative connotations. The building's structure is analysed not only with respect to architecture as such, but also its relation with its surroundings. Only then it is possible to see whether a new museum is a spaceship, which accidentally landed in a given area, or whether its cosmic structure is organically tied with the city's tissue.

## Resumé

Po roce 1989 se Polsko stalo staveništěm pro nové kulturní instituce. Muzejní boom, který je v současné době ve střední Evropě fenoménem, zasáhl i hlavní polská města. Nejaktuálnějším tématem jsou muzea, centra a galerie moderního umění, protože za komunismu bylo moderní umění a jeho sbírání do velké míry opomíjeno. Střední Evropa v mnoha případech nevytváří v oboru muzeologie nové prvky. Naopak se rezolutně snaží kopírovat západní řešení. Z nedostatku vlastních zkušeností následuje muzejní architektura v Polsku trendy použité např. ve Francii, Velké Británii, Španělsku a zavádí celosvětové vzory.

Během téměř dvacetiletého období byla v Polsku postavena pouze dvě muzea moderního umění: Muzeum umění v Lodži získalo novou pobočku v adaptované historické postindustriální budově situované v nákupním a zábavním středisku *Manufaktura* a v Toruni bylo postaveno na zelené louce Centrum moderního umění *Znaki Czasu* (Symboly doby). Obě muzea byla otevřena v roce 2008. Další instituce existují dosud v podobě plánů. Muzea

ve Varšavě a Krakově jsou předmětem veřejných diskuzí a debat (v denících, na internetových fórech, v odborných časopisech, na seminářích) už čtyři roky. Ve Varšavě (jde o novou budovu na pozemku v samém centru města) vznikly spory ohledně architektury muzea, které se původně mělo stát novým symbolem hlavního města, ale nakonec porota vybrala v architektonické soutěži nezajímavý projekt, který se ztrácí v městském prostoru. V Krakově je problematické umístění (adaptovaná továrna Oskara Schindlera) – mnoho lidí si budovu (chybně) spojuje s židovskou martyrologií, kde by nebylo vhodné vystavovat moderní umění. Architektonický projekt minimalisticky zasahuje do původní architektury a větší část muzea bude schovaná v podzemí. Nejnovějším návrhem je Slezské muzeum v Katovicích, které má být umístěno v budovách bývalého uhelného dolu.

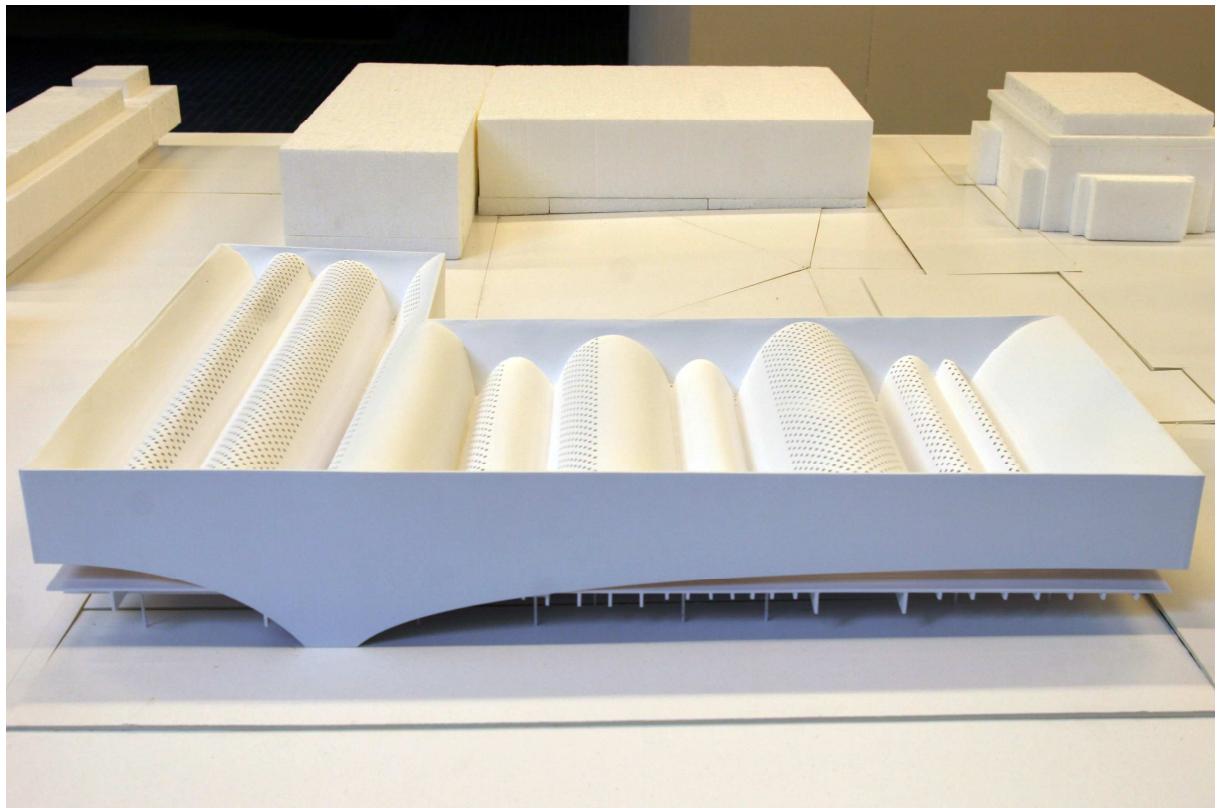
Hlavní trendy v polské muzejní architektuře jsou: adaptace postindustriálních budov, skleněné a kovové high-tech konstrukce; problém muzejních ikon.

#### **Oázky diskutované v přednášce:**

- Existují v muzejní architektuře lokální prvky?
- Kde, proč a do jaké míry používají architekti muzeí západní (celosvětové) vzory?
- Vztah mezi muzeem a městským prostorem?



Desing of the Museum of Contemporaneity in Wroclaw, Nizio Design International



Design of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, Kristian Kerez, photo Bartosz Stawiarski



Branch of the Museum of Art in Łódź, photo Katarzyna Jagodzińska



Centre of Contemporary Art "Signs of the Time" in Toruń, photo Katarzyna Jagodzińska