

# ART NOUVEAU & SOCIETY ART NOUVEAU & SOCIÉTÉ

Historical lab II  
Laboratoire Historique II



Réseau Art Nouveau Network

## NATIONAL IDENTITY AND INTERNATIONAL TRENDS IDENTITÉ NATIONALE ET TENDANCES INTERNATIONALES

European colloquium  
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Mestna občina Ljubljana



Education and Culture



Ljubljana:

## **The art at the turn of the 19th century and national identity**

by Damjan Prelovšek, *Director of the Cultural Heritage Directorate within the Ministry of Culture of the RS*

Art around 1900 had, in particular within the Habsburg Monarchy, a strong national component, which was manifested in various stylistic features. What was of concern here was a search for visual elementariness which, particularly in Slavic nations, was reflected in imitating rural architecture. An important role in creating the Secession style in Vienna was played by the Slovenian architect Jože Plečnik (1872-1957). Influenced by Otton Wagner, he rejected the practice of resorting to ethnography and suggested that the national expression should be sought for in a specific understanding of classical forms. In his architecture proportions, syntax and emotions always played an important part. His fellow-countryman Maks Fabiani, who was a couple of years older than him, soon replaced the Secession artificiality with austere Mediterranean forms which to some extent is a different answer to the same question of the national in the art of the Fin-de-siècle.

Ljubljana:

## **Encouraging developments in middle-class Ljubljana at the turn of the 20th century**

by Damjan Ovsec, *Ethnologist and cultural historian, independent researcher and writer*

At the turn of the 20th century - over a period of thirteen years - the provincial capital Ljubljana, the centre of the former Carniola and the later Slovenia, was affected by a wide range of major internal and external changes.

In 1895, the great earthquake not only severely damaged this Austro-Hungarian town but also symbolically destroyed something old in order to make way for the new, the 'modern', the Slovenian. During the 'students' revolt' in 1908, the majority of German inscriptions were removed from house frontages in Ljubljana.

In 1896, the new legislation also gave the town the renowned mayor, patriot and Slavophile Ivan Hribar who, with his dynamic attitude, ideas and generosity, became a symbol of that period. Slovenian became the official language at the Town Hall.

The town expanded in administrative terms, took on the town planning documentation and a series of novelties: from electricity and the tram to the cinema, from paved streets to the tree nursery, parks and public facilities. With only a short delay, the

Secession also came to Ljubljana. In 1903, the largest and the most state-of-the-art department store was built in that style, and just two years later the most state-of-the-art Hotel Union. Both before and after that a series of other significant Secession buildings which, during a period of fifteen years following the earthquake, were accompanied by another 434 new buildings.

The turn of the century also saw the significant Slovenian literary modernist movement 'Moderna' (Cankar, Kette, Murn, Župančič). Moreover, there was a group of Slovenian impressionists whose exhibition in 1904 caused a great sensation in Vienna as well as in other European cities from London to Belgrade.

The townspeople were divided into two groups in national terms. Despite the fact that the Germans were the large minority, the new individualism was readily combined with a lively and merry lifestyle of the upper middle-classes of Ljubljana. The lifestyle, for which they had been renowned for ages, was now fixed within the standards and norms of upper middle-class life.

Nancy:

## **L'Ecole de Nancy, entre lotharingisme et Art nouveau européen**

par Hervé Doucet, *chargé de cours à l'Ecole d'Architecture de Normandie à Rouen et à l'Université de Paris-Sud XI-Orsay*

«Nous nous sommes toujours élevés ici en faveur de la protection locale d'abord, régionale ensuite et nationale enfin, contre la concurrence du dehors, aussi bien contre celle de l'étranger que contre celle de Paris, ou même celle d'ailleurs que chez nous, quand nous trouvons autour de nous des matériaux, des produits, des travaux, des hommes qui valent autant sinon plus que tout ce qui nous arrive de loin», écrivait Emile Jacquemin dans les colonnes de L'immeuble et la construction dans l'Est, en 1895. Ces propos, relayés par les écrits d'Emile Gallé - qui encourageait ses confrères nancéiens à puiser leur inspiration de la nature lorraine -, rendent compte du contexte farouchement régionaliste qui vit naître l'Art nouveau à Nancy. Cependant, le repli - pour ne pas dire l'enfermement - communautaire qui apparaît en filigrane dans de tels discours ne résiste pas à l'analyse des productions lorraines: Nancy, comme les autres centres de production de l'Art nouveau, participa au jeu complexe d'influences réciproques caractéristique de l'époque.

Bruxelles-Brussel:

## **Brussels architecture in the last quarter of the 19th century - the search for national identity linked to the desire of architectural innovation**

by Linda Van Santvoort, *University of Ghent, Department of Art and Architecture*

Belgium was founded in 1830 and from the start was very much concerned with legitimizing its cultural identity. Neoclassical academic art and architecture was no longer experienced as appropriate and therefore rejected. An inspiring example was found in the 16th century when Art and Architecture flourished as never before. This gave birth to the Flemish renaissance revival (the so called neo-Flemish renaissance) that was noticeable in architecture and design in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. At the frequently organised world exhibitions nations were invited to demonstrate their national identity as well as to prove international competitiveness on an industrial (technical) level. At the Paris world exhibition of 1878 the Belgian pavilion designed by architect Emile Janlet demonstrated a confident national identity that was expressed in the picturesque and artistic neo-Flemish renaissance architecture.

Under pressure of the international industrialisation art and architecture was accelerated. Artists and architects were invited to deal with possibilities of technical improvement and the application of new materials.

The Wagnerian idea of 'gesamtkunst' and the influence of the English Arts and Crafts movement and its vision on a total concept were manifestly present in the architectural renewal. The influence of structural rationalism as propagated by Viollet-Le-Duc was of great importance, not only for the gothic revival.

Hendrik Beyaert was one of the key figures of neo-Flemish renaissance. In his workshop a new generation of architects (among them Paul Hankar) was trained for whom architecture was rooted in national tradition and identity but was nevertheless innovative and "modern". Even Victor Horta recognised the importance of neo-Flemish renaissance architecture for the development of contemporary architecture.

Catalunya (Barcelona, Terrassa, Reus):

## **Nationalism and Architecture in the Catalan Modernisme**

by Mireia Freixa i Serra, *Universitat de Barcelona*

The movement we know in Catalonia as Modernisme is not merely the Catalan version of the movement internationally identified as Art Nouveau. It is true that Catalan

Modernisme and Art nouveau share an internationalist desire and a cosmopolitan spirit. Undoubtedly, the principal characteristic of Art nouveau is the desire to create an international architectural style which reflects the cosmopolitan culture that dominated fin-de-siècle mentalities. But the Catalan movement presents a clear paradox: holding on to its roots yet defending the most radical modernity. In Catalonia, the new forms, the sinuous line and the stylisation that leaves historic styles behind, preserves its own roots and traditions and are superimposed on historical forms, mainly of Gothic origin. The cosmopolitan mentality is translated in Catalonia as a general idea of modernity, but a modernity that wants to project the country towards the future by absorbing its deepest roots.

La Habana:

## **Modernism in Havana: its aesthetic dimension through the mould**

by Patricia Baroni, *specialist, Master Plan for the Comprehensive development of the Historical Center, Historian's Office of Habana City*

The irruption of art nouveau in the architectural context of Havana at the beginning of the XX century was closely linked to the Catalan community settled in the city since the previous century. Migrated from their homeland because of the bad prevailing socio-economic conditions, they decided to try fortune in the New World, carrying their wide know-how in construction techniques and handcrafts. They founded 'workshops for the production of prefabricated decorative elements', decisive in the diffusion of the modernism. A great variety of elements that supplanted the decoration of the eclecticism (bounded mainly to the facades) came out from them. This face of the modernist repertoire known as 'mould architecture', it contributes the most characteristic and extended expression of their exponents.

Alesund:

## **Gerhard Munthe's fairytale world and Art Nouveau in Norway**

by Widar Halén, *senior curator at the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo*

Gerhard Munthe (1849-1929), Norwegian painter and designer - was one of Norway's most international artists and a leading figure of the reform movement and Art Nouveau around 1900. Munthe was trained in the conventional naturalistic style, but from the mid 1880s more abstract and decorative elements began to enter his work.

This change was inspired by his growing inspiration from Japanese art which also awakened an interest in indigenous Norwegian crafts, literature and fairytales. Borrowing motifs from traditional Norwegian fairytales, medieval tapestries, woodcarvings and the local fauna, Munthe argued for the development of a native form of aestheticism which eventually merged with Art Nouveau in Norway. Munthe's Fairytale room at Holmenkollen Hotel (1897) epitomized his new and inventive style and was the first "Gesamtkunstwerk" in Norway.

Helsinki:

## **Pohjola Insurance Building (1899-1901) - International concepts are conveyed as a synthesis of national motifs and genuine materials**

by *Sari Saresto*, curator, Helsinki City Museum

This national romantic style building, with its distinctive Finnish highlights, bore witness to the beginnings of economic activity in the Finnish language.

Its façade was of natural stone, not granite as originally intended. With its massiveness and extravagant ornamentation, the building attracted considerable attention when completed. What was originally a rather modest design commission developed into one of the most remarkable achievements of the Gesellius, Lindgren and Saarinen architects office.

Rīga:

## **National Romanticism apartment buildings of Riga**

by *Anita Anteniške*, lecturer at Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning, Riga Technical University

The reign of National Romanticism in Art nouveau architecture of Riga was brief (1905-1911), but productive. Fuelled by half-a-century long process of national awakening, aspirations of Latvian developers and architects (E. Laube, A. Vanags and J. Alksnis being the most productive among them) created a new face for the city. Romanticizing early medieval history of Latvia, the style got inspiration both from local vernacular architecture and general Nordic, especially Finnish, trends. Rapidly developing poetry, literature, arts and stage design provided a general background for the castle-shaped apartment buildings in angular forms displaying creative composition of volumes and creative interpretation of folk ornaments. Buildings located on street

corners were the most impressive examples often anticipating the principles later used in Modern Movement and Art Deco architecture. Romantic attitude towards nations past came back in various artistic forms during the 20th century, but never gained such an apprehension in architecture like on the very dawn of the century.

University of Ljubljana:

## **«Ciril Metod Koch»**

by *Robert Simonišek*, Postgraduate student of Art History at the Faculty of Arts

Three moments in the architecture of Ciril Metod Koch: traces of conservative, modern Secession tendencies and an attempt to create a national language

The Slovenian architect and urban planner Ciril Metod Koch (1867-1925) worked in the Ljubljana town office for almost three decades. He graduated in Vienna, where he was a pupil of the architect Karl Hasenauer. After the 1895 earthquake, he designed many secular buildings in Ljubljana: at least 38 can be attributed to him on the basis of archival reports. At the time of Mayor Ivan Hribar, Koch was ambitiously developing his sensitive and original form of expression. Typical of him are the characteristic use of free lines, imagination in the processing of details, and the simplicity of construction masses. In iconographic terms, he used geometrical, vegetable as well as figurative decorative forms. A characteristic feature of his architectural activity is stylistic variety. In his modern works, Koch took international European streams as a model, thereby considerably moving towards the aesthetics of the Viennese Secession. In some buildings, he remained committed to the more conservative tradition of historicism. Also important is his contribution to the attempted creation of a national architectural language which, however, was never completed.

Within individual constructions, the three abovementioned moments can be found interlaced in an original manner.