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Architecture of the contemporary museum as the art of transmission of material and spiritual cultural values

A term 'museum' originates from ancient Greece. Museions (museion – temple of Muses) were the institutions whose patrons were Muses – mythological daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne – guardians of liberal arts¹. Libraries, which contained collections of researches, constituted the main part of them. As a kind of academy of science they provided scientists with places for meetings and discussions as well as with flats, costs of living and workplaces at the expense of the state. Fine arts such as architecture, sculpture, painting, and decorative art were regarded as handicraft and the places on which they were exhibited were named according to the exhibit kind: thesaurus (treasure-house), sculpture collection, collection of cameos and gems or collection of paintings [19]. The Ancient Greeks, and later also Romans, were in the habit of making works of art accessible for the public. They were exhibited in temples and public buildings (such as porticos, gates, theatres, odeons, nymphaeums, thermaes) as well as on squares (agoras, fora, stadiums, hippodromes) [13]. Private collections of art were very popular in the Roman Empire times. According to Vitruvius, pinacothecas often constituted a part of the Hellenic house [18].

The cradle of museology in modern Europe is considered to be the Renaissance Italy where a humanistic movement started to develop as a result of the fascination with the ancient world. During the Renaissance the notion of museum meant *collection of objects of a certain class, appropriately ordered and made accessible. This meaning has prevailed until today.* [19]. In Italy of the 15th and 16th centuries there appeared first modern buildings for museum purposes such as The Vatican Pinacotheca (A. Bramante), The Gonzaga Pinacotheca (V. Scamozzi)

in the ideal town Sabbioneta or the Museum in Como. However, most of the rooms, which served the purpose of exhibitions places, belonged to castles, palaces, patrician and middle-class houses, church and cloister buildings. At that time, there used to be a custom of building in palaces *huge, elongated halls with side lighting which firstly constituted the place of meetings and receptions. Galleries, which showed wealth of the house, began to be fulfilled with works of art and as the collector's interest increased, the galleries were decorated with paintings and sculptures according to the program* [13]. The gallery of Farnese Palace (later imitated in the Louvre Museum and Versailles) and the Medicean gallery Uffizi in Florence (G. Vasari – 1560, B. Buontalenti – 1581) whose spatial arrangements such as the central yard with colonnade surrounded by loggias, the arrangement of exhibition rooms with galleries on one side and small rooms on the other, and a culmination point in form of orthogonal Tribune with top lighting (on the model of Florence baptistery), were the most famous galleries and constituted a standard for the neo-Renaissance architecture. From Italy humanism spread to other European countries. From the 17th century, painting or sculpture galleries which were situated at residences became popular in the whole European palace architecture.

The ancient idea of making works of art accessible for the general public was also revived in Italy. In 1471 the Pope handed over the Capitoline Museum in Rome to the Roman people and in 1581 the Medicean collection of sculptures in Loggia dei Lanzi on Piazza della Signoria in Florence was opened. Some time later in 1681 in the Mediaeval castle Louvre converted to the museum, the royal collections were made accessible to the members of Academy and the talented youth, while in 1683 in England the Ashmolean Museum collections were made accessible to the scientist and students of Oxford [17].

From the 18th century on, separate buildings were erected independently of palace complexes whose found-

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¹ Muses were patrons and guardians of liberal arts such as Erato – love poetry, Euterpe – lyric poetry, Calliope – epic poetry, Clio – history, Melpomene – tragedy, Polyhymnia – choir poetry, Thalia – comedy, Terpsichore – dance, Urania – astronomy and geometry.

ers were mainly governors. They had elongated shapes and side lighting, which was typical of galleries. The spatial form was so popular that it became a synonym of the building which exhibits works of art [9] (Dresden Gallery of Wettins family – F. Algarotti, 1745–1746 or Sansoucci Gallery in Potsdam – J.G. Büring, 1756–1763). Gradually, museums acquired a more monumental character and were modelled after the palace architecture as well as on the ancient forms and arrangements thanks to which they got the shape of the art temple. Their interiors were based on spatial gallery forms which were connected in one or multi-nave halls and in this way they formed closed arrangements with inner yards or open arrangements with perpendicular wings. A room with the central arrangement accompanied with top lighting and covered with a copula, which referred to Greek and Hellenistic buildings whose most perfect example constitutes the Roman Pantheon (e.g. the Fridericianum Museum in Kassel – Simon du Ry 1769–1779 or the Vatican Museo Pio-Clementino since 1773, which was built by G. Marini, M. Simonetti and G. Camporese respectively), was used as a culmination space. Apart from the classicistic designing style of museums a romantic trend appeared in England which referred to the Gothic architecture (e.g. ‘Strawberry Hill’ near Twickenham – Sir H. Walpole, 1747). The age of Enlightenment defined the role of museum as a public and citizen institution which was supposed to be an educational place of the society. In 1759 the British Museum in London was opened as the first public museum. In 1791 by Act of the French Revolution and the French National Assembly a decision was reached concerning the creation of the National Museum in Louvre [19].

The 19th century was a period of development of museology all over the world. The first half of the 19th century continued the trend of museum buildings designing based on the ancient standards, for instance, a complex of museums at the Royal Square in Munich (L. von Klenze) built on the model of Athenian Acropolis. Altes Museum in Berlin (K.F. Schinkel – 1823–1830) determined an important monumental museum archetype which was based on the neo-classicistic stylistics with rich allegoric ornaments. The most important and culminating role, among a multi-storey series of galleries, was performed by the rotunda space covered with a copula and having top lighting on the model of the Roman Pantheon. This model was widespread in Europe and in the United States of America where it was still popular in the first half of the 20th century [19]. Also a new building of the British Museum (R. Smirke – 1823), which constituted a copy of Athenian Parthenon in its central part, became the model for hundreds of museums built all over the world [20]. A rationalistic approach towards designing museums, which originated from the Enlightenment and aimed at creating optimal conditions for exhibitions, was continued in England. Dulwich Gallery in London (Sir J. Soane – 1811–1814) with exhibition rooms lit by means of central lanterns with vertical windows became the exemplar which was met with general acceptance.

Models of the Italian and French Renaissance palaces and galleries of art as well as the Baroque palaces and

churches began to dominate since the middle of the 19th century under the influence of historicism. The old Pinacotheca (Alte Pinakothek) in Munich (L. von Klenze – 1822–1836) is considered to be the first European great museum built in the neo-Renaissance style. This style dominated almost till the end of the 19th century and its most excellent examples are the buildings of the National Museum in Prague and new tsar museums in Vienna (G. Semper i K. Hasenauer – 1872–1889).

The modernist avant-garde movement rejected the tradition of the museum as a temple and palace of art and it also rejected decorativeness with symbolic and allegoric significance. The museum architecture was supposed to express formal and ethical ideas of modernism such as transparency, ‘open’ plan, functionalism and universalism of space, technological precision as well as lack of dialog between space and exhibited objects. The problem of expressing the idea of museum was the subject of studies of the most remarkable creators of the movement like Le Corbusier (a design of the world museum ‘Mundaneum’ in Geneva – 1929, the ‘Museum of unlimited growth’ – 1931) or Mies van der Rohe (‘Museum for a small town’ – 1942). Only after World War II could the principles of architectural avant-garde be applied. The Museum of Modern Art in Sao Paulo (L. Bo Bardi – 1957) and the New National Gallery (Neue Nationalgalerie) in Berlin (Mies van der Rohe – 1962–1968) belong to the spectacular examples of free articulation of the exhibit space which ‘intermingles’ with the surroundings. Big, glass surfaces – in spite of the fact that they caused problems in the case of exhibitions – expressed a symbolic meaning of transparency, which gave the space a public character by means of ‘great freedom of access’ [14]. The open space and greenery of the landscape were recognized as the most favourable surroundings for exhibiting modern art. An idea of combining modern art with the beauty of nature found its most perfect reflection in the Louisiana Museum in Humlebaek situated at the seaside near Copenhagen (J. Bo and V. Wohlert – 1958–59). A spiral shape of the ‘Museum of unlimited growth’ by Le Corbusier can be found in R. Guggenheim Edifice of Salomon Foundation Museum in New York (F.L. Wright – 1943–1959). The owner of the radical forms of modern art collection intended to exhibit it in a completely new space and to build a monument which would be a symbol of the institution. Georges Pompidou National Centre of Culture and Art in Paris (R. Piano and R. Rogers – 1972–1977) perfectly reflects ideological declarations of modernism and at the same time it constitutes the first example of ‘high – tech’ philosophy which assumes that *a building should function like a catalyst: it should be a casing which provides technical possibilities, stimulates processes but it does not preserve them* [16].

A rational direction of designing museums in search of the most economic lighting systems of exhibitions was created by the Saeger system – a combination of a vertical window with a concave lamp which reflects and models light [17]. The rhythm of repeated round lanterns shaped the museum form and in this way it expressed the idea of functionalism. Possibilities of flexible usage of different sets and arrangements of this system made it very popu-

lar in the second half of the 20th century (e.g. Joan Miro Foundation in Barcelona, J.L. Sert – 1972–1975, Bauhaus Museum in Berlinie, W. Gropius – 1964–1979, Ludwig Museum in Koln – P. Busmann and G. Haberer – 1986). Kimbell Art Museum (L. Kahn, 1967–1972) undoubtedly constitutes a gem in the history of museums. A unique atmosphere of the interior ('sacrum') was achieved through a harmonic combination of the structure, light and space by means of traditional forms and materials and thanks to the application of a modern light technique in the process of designing.

At the end of the 20th century, museums experienced significant development as public institutions. In response to the public needs connected with the development of mass tourism and popularisation of the so called *culture of celebration* [16], a new type of museums appeared called *a trade centre of culture* or *cultural mall* [3] because its main activity consisted in generating income through stimulating consumption. Increasing needs for additional spaces functioning as educational, relaxing, entertaining places as well as commercial zones of trade and services became a characteristic feature of the museum. Museums as cultural centres and institutions dealing with research on art were supposed to function as places of cultural and social meetings, educational resources and marketing places as well as providers of pleasure coming from contacts with culture. Architects responded by designing buildings which were representative, stylistically diverse, expressing their attitude towards architecture and art and reflecting artistic ambitions of the collections' owners. V.M. Lampugnani named them '*seismographs of architectural culture*' because they gave quick answers to changing architectural trends [10]. Thanks to the functional development, the role of museums in solving urban, social and economical problems of cities increased. Museums designed as works of art influenced the attractiveness of the city surroundings by performing the role of 'urban signposts' and symbols of cultural identity.

Since the 1980s design orders regarding museums or other centres of culture have been considered to be the most prestigious and met with great acceptance in the architects' environment.

Architecture of the advanced technology, which treats natural light as indispensable in the museum space, fascinates with possibilities of its transmission to inner parts of the building by means of reflections from mirror surfaces, shafts and light channels as well as through the use of structural glass in horizontal divisions (Sackler Wing Royal Academy of Arts and Crescent Wing in Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts of East England University in Norwich – N. Foster, 1991, National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa – M. Safdie, 1983–1988). Renzo Piano worked on more and more sophisticated solutions of flat glass roofs above the museum exhibition in order to achieve ideal light conditions (De Menil Collection – 1981–1986 and Cy Twombly – 1992 in Houston; Beyeler Museum in Riehen – 1992–1997; development of High Museum in Atlanta – 1999–2005).

Postmodernist architecture, which opposed to the monotony of the international style, referred to historical

typological elements of the museum as a form of a temple or treasury, rotunda covered with a copula, spatial arrangement of a gallery, rooms en suite, elements of architectural styles and orders as well as methods of lighting: gallery windows, a copula oculus, lanterns, skylights, etc. This did not mean direct copying of historical forms but applying them in a different way aiming at presenting messages with symbolic meanings and emphasizing differences between the past and presence (e.g. development of Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, J. Sterling & M. Wilford – 1977–1984).

Fatigue with historicizing forms of postmodernism again resulted in their total negation and in architecture which denied their – as it seemed so far – inalienable rights and reached constructivist Soviet utopias and Jacques Derridy's philosophy [11]. Deconstruction in the museum architecture destroys originally created regularity and typology on purpose. The way of treating the form of a building resembles the work on a sculpture and its relations with the surroundings are unconventional (e.g. Weisman Museum of Art in Minneapolis, 1990–1993 and Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, 1991–1997 – F.O. Gehry, Jewish Museum in Berlin – D. Libeskind, 1989–2001). Expressionistic and deconstructivist designs by Zaha Hadid treat the gallery as a stage for art and architecture. They constitute a multiple and multi-planar transformation of space (e.g. Centre of Modern Art in Rome, 1999–2005) and aim at expressing the idea of museum's public accessibility (e.g. Centre of Modern Art in Cincinnati, 1998–2003 – 'urban carpet' entering the building) [5]. Rem Koolhaas' architecture on the fringes of deconstructionism, postmodernism and commercialism aims at lack of stability and shocking the recipient by using collages of contrary forms and materials [12] (e.g. Guggenheim Museum in Las Vegas, 2001).

Apart from the trends, which create the museum architecture as a show or complicated technical device, also other structures are erected such as architectural works of art in the convention of rationalism, neo-realism, classicist modernism or regionalism. Italian architects could combine modernism with tradition in a creative way. *According to Rossi, no époque should create a completely new architecture but a traditional canon should be adapted to the current requirements and 'interpreted' in a new way.* [16]. According to Álvaro Siza, *the museum architecture can be classical only (...) distanced or careful in relation to history and geography* [2]. The complex of buildings of J.P. Getty Centre of Art in Los Angeles (R. Meier, 1984–1997) has a classical (Greek and Roman) and modernist origin with references to the Roman forum – Acropolis, Hadrian's villa and Le Corbusier's creative activity. The concept of Gegenwart Gallery in Hamburg (O.M. Ungers, 1986–1996) was based on the form of a square and its geometric repetitions, which had their roots in the Renaissance (works of art by Palladio and Ledoux). In the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco (M. Botta, 1989–1995) a cylindrical form, which is situated on the axis and includes a central yard, creates a monumental atmosphere and the heart of the building. The restraint of minimalism, whose founding father is con-



sidered to be Mies van der Rohe, expresses architecture's respect towards art. Achieving excellent effects by using simple means becomes possible thanks to the following elements: a thorough analysis of the subject and location, simple and well-proportioned structure, carefully elaborated details and innovative technical solutions (e.g. Kunsthaus in Bregenz, P. Zumthor – 1990–1997, Museum in Fort Worth, T. Ando – 1997–2002).

A diversity of theories and styles is a feature which results from tolerance for various views and needs. Multi-thread character of the modern art which attempts to refer to the current problems of the world and to follow the

changing reality, progress in building technologies and the pursuit of originality do not allow defining the canon of beauty in an unambiguous and permanent way and make it impossible to adhere to the principles of one prevailing theory. Classicism determined models and archetypes existing throughout the centuries, which entered the language of architecture permanently. The modern architectural thought must have its own attitude towards these models by either accepting or rejecting them. Apart from the solutions which consciously combine modernity with tradition, we can find references to classical archetypes even in the most avant-garde designs.

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Architektura współczesnego muzeum jako sztuka przekazu kulturowych wartości materialnych i duchowych

W pojęciu kultury, rozumianej jako całość duchowego i materialnego dorobku społeczeństwa, miejsce szczególne zajmuje sztuka, jako twórczość artystyczna wywołana wewnętrznym przymusem, potrzebą wyrażania uczuć, komunikacji, rozwiązywania problemów ogólnoludzkich. Artykuł dotyczy muzeum jako miejsca, które służy zaspokajaniu potrzeb związanych z obcowaniem ze sztuką. Począwszy od drugiej połowy XX wieku nastąpił rozwój architektury muzeów pod względem funkcjonalno-przestrzennym i estetyczno-kulturowym. Służąc ekspozycji, badaniom i konserwacji sztuki, muzea stały się również miejscem spotkań kulturalno-społecznych, marketingu, rekreacji i rozrywki, edukacji. Projekty

nowoczesnych muzeów, jako najbardziej prestiżowe, tworzone są przez najwybitniejszych architektów, reprezentują aktualne oraz awangardowe nurty architektoniczne. Swobodzie wyrażania nowatorskich artystycznych idei towarzyszy konieczność rozwiązywania złożonych problemów funkcjonalno-przestrzennych oraz wymogów użytkowych. Rezultatem jest architektura konkurencyjna w stosunku do wystawianej w niej sztuki. Stosowane środki artystyczne oraz nowoczesna technologia mają na celu przyciągnięcie widzów, dostarczenie im przyjemności estetycznych oraz przekazywanie treści materialnych i duchowych związanych z ideą muzealnictwa.

Key words: contemporary museum

Słowa kluczowe: współczesne muzeum

