

Fine art as an integral part of architecture: Political and social aspects of the formation of this synthesis in the 20th century

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Abstract: The theme of the connection of visual arts with architecture, or the cooperation of visual artists with architects in post-war Europe, basically follows two lines: a theoretical line and a political-institutional line. Just as knowledge of the history of art and the history of architecture is necessary in the analysis of this period, knowledge of the political-economic circumstances is necessary in the field of realisations in architecture, because by definition, this public art is a political affair and is not an independent creation. Art in architecture was promoted not only in communist countries (for ideological reasons), but also in Western Europe as an aesthetic cultivation of contemporary architecture. From the mid-1950s onwards, visual art in architectural space appeared more and more frequently, which led to the adoption of legislative measures that regulated and supported this practice. A gradual transformation in the understanding of the task can be observed over the period under review, or the position of public art, presented as part of architecture or public space. This is naturally due to social development. If at the beginning of the 1950s it was a mission to convey ideology and indoctrinate it, in the next stage the focus shifts more towards design with the task of cultivating the environment and creating a certain atmosphere. The study also peripherally explores forms of arts support in the context of other European countries. The idea of integration between art and architecture dates back to the very origins of both disciplines. During the avant-garde movement at the beginning of the twentieth century, it acquired a new meaning and social purpose and became one of the most defining characteristics of modernism. Modernism arose from the expectation of moral and material reconstruction of the world devastated by war, which served as a tool to strengthen collective identity and, consequently, to forge the bond between the city and its inhabitants. Our study traces the development and contexts of the relationship and funding of visual arts in architecture in the Slovak and European context in the 20th century.

Keywords: fine arts, politics, synthesis, architecture, history

INTRODUCTION

Especially in Eastern European architecture and socialist construction, art had specific conditions for its emergence between 1950 and 1989. Two terms arose in the German environment that are also used in principle in translations in other parts of Europe: the term “architekturbezogene Kunst” (architecture-related art), used by the Bauakademie as an official technical term in the German Democratic Republic, and the phrase “Kunst am Bau” (art in architecture) referring to the same concept in the democratic Federal Republic of Germany, however, the term was intended to have a primarily educational function. Aesthetic education thus had the function of conveying socio-political messages (Necker, 2021). Art in architecture was promoted not only in communist countries for ideological reasons, but throughout Europe as an aesthetic cultivation of architecture. In Czechoslovakia, the number of these works increased as a result of the targeted cultural policy of the state. From the mid-1950s onwards, fine art appeared more and more frequently in architectural space, which led to the adoption of legislative measures that regulated and encouraged this practice. Our study traces the development of the relationship and funding of visual arts in architecture in the Slovak and European context in the 20th century.

FINE ART AND ARCHITECTURE – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The idea of integration between art and architecture dates back to the very origins of both disciplines. During the avant-garde movement at the beginning of the twentieth century, it acquired a new meaning and social purpose and became one of the most defining characteristics of modernism. Modernism arose from the expectation of moral and material reconstruction of the world devastated by war, which served as a tool to strengthen collective identity and, consequently, to forge the bond between the city and its inhabitants. Professional development in the Bauhaus movement was characterised by what Argan calls a “methodological-didactic rationalism” that promotes the unification of all the arts through the “Gesamtkunstwerk” (Argan, 1992). This collaboration was expected to take place even on site, bringing together intellectual and manual labour into a shared experience.

On a different scale, the integration between art and architecture through the incorporation of objects, as in Mies van der Rohe’s iconic Barcelona Pavilion, is also important. The sculpture “Der Morgen” by the German sculptor Georg Kolbe, is not essential to the pavilion. As Claudia Cabral explains, “in Mies’ delicate balance,

guided by partial asymmetries and a system of compensations, the sculpture is the only element that has no counterpart [...] Mies chose to place only one sculpture, the only figural element in his abstract plane. Within the play of pavilions with reflections, transparencies and parallels, the only possible partners for the bronze figure are we, the flesh-and-blood people, the visitors." (Cabral, 2009) As Rino Levi once said, architecture is not secondary, but neither is it the mother of all arts. There is only one art and its value is measured by the emotions it evokes in us. Painting and sculpture may be independent, but when applied to architecture they become part of a whole. This lesson about collectivity and shared experience begins during the development of a project and touches every single person who has the opportunity to visit an architectural work (Chowdhury, 2023).

The most significant definitions of art associated with architecture took place in the context of the political and social situation in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s and 1970s. The theme of the connection of visual arts with architecture, or the cooperation of visual artists with architects in post-war Czechoslovakia, basically follows two lines: a theoretical line and a political-institutional line. Just as knowledge of the history of art and the history of architecture is necessary for analysing this period, knowledge of the political-economic circumstances is necessary in the field of realisations in architecture, because by definition this public art is a political affair and not independent creation. The texts of that time often described the relationship between architecture and the artwork in architecture so as not to reduce it to a mere decoration or solo ideological agitation. The new structural and material character of contemporary architecture had to be reflected in the way the artwork was applied and in the use of new materials in artistic practice (Fig. 1). Even with the standard seriality and pre-fabrication in construction at the time, artwork had to retain its artistic individuality (Honzík, Kotlík, Sychra, Lamač, 1959).

An important part of the theoretical insight into the relationship of art in architecture is the transformation of terminology, which reflects a certain historical development, corresponding to the changes in cultural policy over the two decades under review. Among the most frequent words in contemporary discourse and reflection was the word "realisation" as a creation, execution. In the 1960s and especially in the vocabulary of the younger generation of artists, this word replaced the terms such as "decoration", "artwork in architecture", "collaboration between architect and artist", or "monumental art", as well as the term discussed below – undoubtedly because of its neutrality (Kliver, 1969).

"Creating the environment" was another established contemporary term, which appeared in the discourse in the late 1970s and remained applied until 1989. In order to understand the logic behind this somewhat unexpected outcome of theoretical considerations, we can use the contemporary definition of the theoretician Zdenek Kostka, traced by the architectural theorist Pavel Škranc (Škranc, 2017). Kostka attempted to achieve continuity by merging the ideas of "synthesis" and "creation of the environment": *"The contemporary call for a synthesis of artistic culture with the environment is therefore not only a call for some synthesis carried out in solitary unique architectural objects, but for a wider-ranging interest. It is an interest and a necessity to restore that balance which was inherent in all pre-capitalist formations and which was characterised by the intermingling of art with the whole of man's environment. (...) The formal stylistic fusion of different kinds of art is thus not the starting point but the result of the artistic mastery of the synthesis of art with life, with all its life-processing modes and ideals."* (Kostka, 1985)

A gradual transformation in the understanding of the task can be observed over the period under review, or the position of "public art", presented as part of architecture or public space. This is naturally attributed to social development. If at the beginning of the

1950s the mission was to convey ideology and indoctrinate it, in the next period the focus shifted more towards design with the task of cultivating the "environment" and creating a certain atmosphere. "Socialist" art is fundamentally opposed to individualism, yet exceptions to the rule also appeared in the period (Vičerková, 2022).



Fig. 1. Auditorium, Technical University in Zvolen, Slovakia by Vladimír Dedeček (architecture) and Jaroslav Nemeč (interior), realized in 1977 - 84. (Photo: Katarína Verešová, 2023; Seminary paper to the Public Interior course, Faculty of Architecture and Design of the Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava, Slovakia, Summer Term 2021–2022)

MODELS OF SUPPORT FOR THE VISUAL ARTS IN ARCHITECTURE IN EUROPE IN THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES

Many European countries support art in architecture not only through recommendations but also through legislation. Numerous regulations, such as the French one, came into force for the first time after the Second World War, along with the building boom. However, the first ideas of state support originated in Europe in the 1930s, with other reasons being the decline of patronage as a funding mechanism for the arts and that not only in architecture, and the need to replace this system. In another European country, Germany, the application of art in architecture at the federal level is an "optional provision". According to it, art on buildings should be implemented on buildings that are particularly important in terms of their architecture and/or function or are located in a particularly significant site. The substantial establishment of art on buildings in other European countries since the 1970s cannot be overlooked.

Like Germany, a number of European countries also apply a system of subsidies, which in a number of cases (officially and unofficially) is called accordingly: "Percent for Art" (Great Britain), "Per Cent for Art scheme" (Ireland), "Percentagere" (Ireland), "Percentageregeling" (Netherlands), "1%-artistique" (France). The amount and the basis for the assessment of state subsidies vary, while internationally, the actual resources spent are at a comparable level. In practice, it is on average 1% of the construction budget (Seidel, 2012). There are many fundamental similarities in the European comparison, including the question of criteria according to which art should be applied to buildings (new buildings, conversions, and total renovation) and which buildings and building typologies should be supported in this respect. The intention not to regulate art is also clearly visible everywhere. It is also noteworthy that the European regulations are mostly silent on the relationship between art and architecture for which they are intended. Often there are no recommendations or models for collaboration between artists and architects (Seidel, 2012). Art related to building projects is public art and an expression of a democratic attitude, and therefore requires special mediation and work with the public, for example through publications and Internet documentation, also through exhibitions. In

Denmark, the “Statens Kunstfond” reviews its activities annually in user acceptability surveys.

Several countries, or more precisely the relevant government bodies, are currently systematically inventorying and documenting their holdings. They are subjecting them to further scientific scrutiny. The organisation “BIG Art” in Austria has been searching for works of art in various buildings for years. The results are collected in an art database with more than 5,000 entries. An important concept is presented by Sweden. In 1937 the Public Art Agency Sweden, Statens Konstnad, was founded as a government agency to promote public art. In recent years, the agency has moved from supporting permanent public art towards temporary art interventions, educational and participatory art projects with different schools, but also towards urban development and comprehensive projects in the development of public space as a whole. In addition, the agency acts as a repository for artwork, which it distributes mainly to schools or other public institutions. The complexity and reach of the institution's operation makes it one of the most sophisticated models for supporting art, education, culture, creativity, and urban development. All departments are staffed by professionals who are selected through a public selection process. Financial support comes from the state, but the agency is otherwise independent. Works and authors go through a public competition and are selected by the agency. A similar system operates in Norway and Finland (Seidel, 2012).

FINE ARTS IN ARCHITECTURE IN SLOVAKIA

In 1965, Government Resolution No. 355/1965 was adopted in Czechoslovakia. Art in architecture was considered to be a work that constitutes an integral part of architecture and its design is already part of the project documentation. In practice, these works were placed in public spaces, in the interiors of buildings or in the immediate vicinity of buildings' exterior, or were part of the design of a housing estate. The works are often fixed into the architectural framework, which means that they cannot be manipulated in any other way, they can only be destroyed (Jankovičová, 2014).

The funding of these works was provided by certain rules, the basic regulation being Title V of the Construction Budget Summary in the Czechoslovak Building Code. An equation with several given coefficients was used to calculate the amount of money to be spent on a work of art in a particular building, basically taking into account the social significance of the building and the type of building. The higher the aggregate budget, the lower the percentage of the total budget that was allocated to artwork; the amount ranged from 0.5 to 2%, as stated in the 1978 methodological guidelines on the application of artwork in capital construction: “for buildings of exceptional social importance (theatres, government buildings, etc.), the percentage of the total budget for artwork was 1.6 to 2%, for buildings of social importance (cultural buildings, hotels, universities, etc.) 1.0 to 1.5%, and for other buildings (secondary vocational schools, research institutes, libraries, shops, services, etc.) it was 0.5 to 1.0%” (Jankovičová, 2014).

The works were judged by expert commissions set up by the Fine Arts Fund, but significant realisations with political significance were still subject to the control of the ideological commission of the Ministry of Culture (Jankovičová, 2014). Depending on the actual conditions, the possibilities of placing works in public spaces also varied. After the rigid 1950s, the situation depended on the degree of ideological control. In the art of the 1960s, there was a gradual loosening of conditions as socialist realism was replaced by progressive forms of art and abstraction found its place. Works from the 1970s and 1980s reflect the plurality of forms in the visual arts: from descriptive idealised realism, through diverse forms of modernism and abstract decorativism, to works representing the free creation of artists.

Ideological control was exercised by the Ministry of Culture, mostly for politically significant monuments. The artistic quality of the works created during the last twenty years of the former regime might be therefore questionable. On the other hand, many of the works are characterised by attributes of the then modern and progressive trends and it is difficult to draw a firm line between “socialist-realist political kitsch” and “artistically high-quality documentation of the regime and art of the time” worthy of preservation (Čierne diery, Repka, 2015). There were two ways in which artists could obtain such a commission. Usually there was a tendering process, but the architect of the building in question recommended a particular artist in advance. In addition, the Fine Arts Fund approached other two or three artists. Since the architect had the main say in the selection committee, the candidate chosen by the architect usually won in the end.

The other option was actually open public competitions, but these were considerably fewer in number and were only announced by the state for the most prominent sites. They were not international, however, and usually only local artists entered them. For over 15 years, art historian Sabina Jankovičová has been mapping the works of leading Slovak artists who were created between 1948 and 1989. Maroš Schmidt, a designer and director of the Slovak Design Centre, initiated the nationwide inventory. The age and value of some of the works intensified the interest of both the professional and lay public, which declined after 1989, as there were mainly ideological prejudices against such works. There is no inventory of these works because, according to Jankovičová, no one was assigned this task. For example, by the Ministry of Culture, which should also take care of this cultural heritage and conceptually address how to preserve and document it (Barát, 2021).



Fig. 2. Ceremony house – Zichy Palace in Bratislava, Slovakia by Anna Tomašáková (monument restoration) and Oľga Janáková (monument restoration and interior), and Rastislav Janák (interior), project and realisation in 1980 - 89. (Photo: Dušan Kočlík, 2023)

In her research, she focuses primarily on the best artists of the alternative scene and traces what they have been doing within the official art, created for architecture since the 1970s. According to Jankovičová, the visual art associated with architecture can be found with certainty in the typology of a marriage hall, which was built almost in every village (Fig. 2). Other frequently preserved types of interiors are various ceremonial halls (Fig. 3). Programmatically, they have been built since the 1970s (Fig. 4, Fig. 5). It is in them that one can find rare works by important artists, which today, among other things, have an extraordinary financial value on the market. It is these halls that are designed as complex wholes, refined down to the smallest detail. In Pernek there is an outstanding work by Anton Čepka. A number of wedding halls, such as the hall in Plavecký Štvrtok, present works by Milan Dobeš. Numerous artworks were created by Erna Masarova-

ičová. Marián Mudroch made the front wall in the hall in Láb. Imrich Vanek worked on the wedding hall in Nové Zámky, Jozef Jankovič in Veľký Ďur (Barát, 2021) - all mentioned towns in Slovakia.



Fig. 3. Civil registry office in Vranov nad Topľou, Slovakia by Jozef Maňuch, Ján Mokriš, Michal Czupil et al. realized in 1979 – 84. (Photo: Petra Grošíková, 2023)

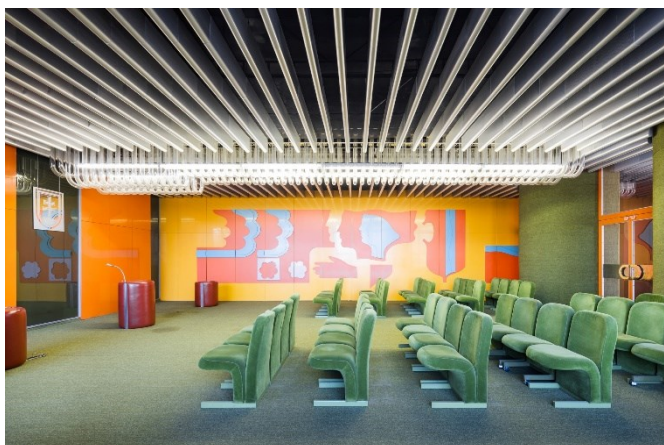


Fig. 4. Wedding hall in Šoporňa, Slovakia realized in 1976. (Photo: Matej Hakár, 2023)



Fig. 5. Wedding hall in Podbrezová, Slovakia. (Source: Sabina Jankovičová, 2023)

CONCLUSION

Over the last decades, quality art in public space across Slovakia has been gradually displaced and often replaced by empty attractions. The towns and municipalities thus find themselves without an important cultural layer. After the revolution, it was expected that art in public space in Slovakia would be provided by private investors and the market. However, semi-public or private public space often disregards the historical and cultural continuity of a town or city and the surrounding buildings. What is more, we live in the times when art can continue to be destroyed. In the 1970s, abstract sculptures were removed from several places in Slovakia as part of the normalisation process. Probably the most serious relocation concerned the sculpture *Victims Warn* by Jozef Jankovič, moved from the Slovak National Uprising memorial in Banská Bystrica to the village of Kalište (both in Slovakia).

Attitudes of people and experts towards such art are changing nowadays. Different initiatives are emerging in towns and cities. Conversely, a work of art can be ignored and, in case of disinterest, easily destroyed. This was the case of the climbing frames by Alexander Bilkovič, Viktoria Cvengrošová and Virgil Droppa, which were located in the pull-in area where the Triblavina junction on the D1 motorway is being built today. In the context of Slovakia, Section 8 of Act No. 201/2022 regulates the relationship to the artwork and relevant financing. However, the regulation still contains many disputed and unfinished aspects. The art pieces of the Normalisation era are not usually protected objects. However, it is a legitimate cultural layer of architecture that should be protected and preserved. There are many initiatives, associations and organisations in Slovakia that strive to achieve this.

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