



a_show. Austrian Architecture in the 20th and 21st Centuries

Permanent Exhibition

With “a_show” the Az W presents its permanent showcase for the identity of the building culture in Austria, and puts 150 years of architecture history on view. The exhibits cover about 150 architects with 420 buildings in Austria, presented in a multifaceted and varied display. Ten episodes within the exhibition intensify this survey of contemporary phenomena and currents. The a_showcase supplementary programme provides experts’ insights into a range of topical issues, free of charge and five times per year.

10 EPISODES

Prologue

The focus is on building activity in Vienna between 1850 and 1918, which covers the Ring Road architecture, Historicism and the early proponents of Modernism.

As the arena for major innovations in architecture, the metropolis of Vienna is treated as one example among numerous other centres of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Combining contemporary city life with the structures of the historically grown urban space formed the core issue in the architecture discourse of the period. As Karl Krauss said of the interminable nostalgia for Old-Vienna, "Old-Vienna was once new".

Red Vienna

In 1919 Vienna became the first city with over a million inhabitants to have a Social Democrat local government. The era of Red Vienna began, a communal social experiment primarily hallmarked by progressive policies for housing, welfare and education. Red Vienna in particular attracted worldwide attention with its large-scale community housing programme. Alongside the numerous communal housing developments ('Gemeindebauten'), social facilities such as municipal swimming baths and kindergartens were also planned and completed that took the existing qualities of the urban fabric into consideration.

Landscape

The landscape of the 'Alpine Republic' as a symbolic construct also played a key role in the tourism-dominated perception of foreigners. The adaptation of natural surroundings by buildings for the tourist industry can be seen as the symbolic appropriation of land. Infrastructure projects to make the countryside and the buildings accessible to tourists in the provinces play a key role in the topic LANDSCAPE, as does the architectural stage-management of apparently natural features, i.e. the topography.



Power

Alongside the massive socio-political cutbacks, the relationship of the one political party under Dollfuss to the social teachings of the Catholic Church marked the period starting in 1932. Church buildings became a vehicle for a programme of re-Christianisation, with 'Heimat' awareness picking up on old Austrian traditions determining the iconographic agenda. With the march of Hitler's troops into Austria in 1938 the politics of expulsion and persecution achieved a new totalitarian dimension, the expression of power by the architecture reinforced the regime's claim to political leadership.

Reconstruction

Directly after the end of the War there was an enormous housing deficit in Austria to rectify, quick action and financial prudence became the key criteria for development projects. The fast-lane Viennese building programme developed by Franz Schuster as part of the 'Zukunftsprogramm' (Programme for the Future) provided the first signals of an optimistic period of reconstruction, and allowed new approaches to be tried-out. An emerging generation of architects made its presence felt as they criticised the bludgeoning functionalism based on building-sector economics and sought new avenues to pursue.

International

After 1958 the shift to international modernity began in Austria, somewhat late. Borne by a positive faith in technology and progress, and the vision of the humanisation of the built environment, a heterogeneous group of architects (including Roland Rainer, Karl Schwanzer and Viktor Hufnagl) completed purist buildings that conveyed the new post-war Austrian self-confidence and a certain aura of cosmopolitanism.

System

As a reaction to the tendency towards the commercial rationalisation of industrial mass-production and mass consumption, a new generation of Austrian architects began experimenting. Arbeitsgruppe4, including Ottokar Uhl or Johann Georg Gsteu, among others, completed major projects with modular order, prefabricated construction elements and flexible structures. At the same time a predominately theoretical approach to the subject provided a significant basis for subsequent generations.

Utopia

In the aftermath of the 1968 student movement, major protagonists worked on the expansion of the medium of architecture, and developed visionary concepts and projects. As a reaction to post-war functionalism artists and architects worked on utopian scenarios, with which they attracted international attention. Some of the "wild young architects" of that time are now among the most established architects in the country: Coop Himmelb(l)au, Günther Domenig, Hans Hollein, Adolf Krischanitz, Laurids Ortner etc.



Collage

Stagnating economic growth and the 1973 oil crisis put an abrupt end to the utopian concepts. The topic COLLAGE stands for the diversity of approaches taken in the early 1970s in Austria, and the documentation of the development of architectural currents in the provinces (Grazer Schule, Vorarlberger Baukünstler, Salzburg Projekt).

The Present

For the size of the country, Austria today has a particularly dense and lively architecture scene. With new types of commission, new client sectors, different technology and raw materials, as well as a change in design tools, the architecture produced in Austria from the 1990s onwards has diversified strongly while also becoming successfully anchored in a broader cultural awareness. A digital presentation shows the varied spectrum of contemporary positions, proponents and projects throughout Austria.

a_show. The Book.

The book 'Architecture in Austria in the 20th and 21st Centuries' contains around 400 pages divided into ten thematic/chronological episodes, providing a tour through the historical and contemporary production of architecture in Austria. A separate section is dedicated to the topic of Housing. Birkhäuser Verlag, 2006; Ed. Az W; ISBN-10: 3-7643-7693-7. 400 pages, approx. 1,000 ill., € 51.30. Obtainable from the Az W Shop as well as in selected specialist book stores.

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