



Boris Podrecca – Architecture

31 January to 20 March 2020

Press tour: Thursday 30 January 2020, 10am

Speakers: Boris Podrecca and Adolph Stiller

Official opening: Thursday, 30 January 2020, 7pm (by invitation only)

Curator: Adolph Stiller

Venue: Ringturm Exhibition Centre
Schottenring 30, 1010 Vienna

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm, free admission
(closed on public holidays)

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Download at <https://www.airt.at/en/projects/podrecca2020/>.

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Architecture as the poetics of differences

The Architektur im Ringturm series is presenting a cross-section of Boris Podrecca's most recent work, in an exhibition space specially designed by the architect himself. Before the turn of the millennium, Podrecca was commissioned to redesign the foyer of the Ringturm and transform the counter area into a modern exhibition centre. The show includes a selection of fascinating projects from the past few decades, with detailed accompanying texts. Besides architectural models, visitors can also look forward to publications comprising an impressive collection of international critiques of Podrecca's work. There is an emphasis on the incredible diversity of his oeuvre, as well as Podrecca's outstanding ability to integrate his designs into existing settings. In addition, the exhibition showcases some older works in unusual locations, including in Venice, Piran, Belgrade, Graz and Vienna.

Location and diversity

He is one of Europe's most internationally renowned architects: Boris Podrecca. He had a multilingual upbringing, and works in a multicultural milieu, be it Belgrade or Ljubljana, Trieste or Venice, Vienna or Stuttgart. The parameters of his work have their origins in architectural theories of the late 19th century, from the likes of Semper, Böttcher, Viollet-le-Duc and Labrouste. Influenced by Wagner and Plečnik, he places an emphasis on structure and materials; he picked up ideas on the stratification of space from Loos; meanwhile, his extended journeys to the East taught him about the intangible nature of light. *"My training in Central Europe was based on intersections of various cultural vectors and forming connections between eclectic social areas. They share the same origin but are still full of diversity. Diversity has nothing to do with vernacular, it is not just a matter of regional cultures. This diversity has a more complex background including a mental and emotional structure of its own,"* Podrecca explains, showing why he prefers to use the label 'archiculture' instead of architecture.

Podrecca's designs are the product of a polyphonic process, and this approach means his works do not bear a clearly recognisable signature. In this era of the globalisation of architecture, which nowadays is increasingly serving purely as a brand, Podrecca's anthropological method allows him to move in a direction all of his own. He is constantly on the lookout for a specific identity and context resulting from the uniqueness of the sites of his projects. His designs are not characterised by an easily recognisable symbolism, nor by gestures or minimalisation. *"For me, modernism lies in controlled diversity that has to take account of global communication, digitalisation and decarbonisation, and which cannot be deftly eluded by means of monotheistic design,"* says Podrecca.

Taking the consciousness and complexity of the surrounding area as their starting point, planners must interpret the setting from a contemporary viewpoint and develop its resonance. This dialogue with the location takes shape by means of an ennobling, and occasionally a conflictual approach, depending on the quality of the fabric that is already in place. Podrecca always attempts to satisfy technical, energy-related and financial requirements with his new "musculature" and fine-tune the principles of type and place: *"When I work in a place that has an energy, a colour and a temperament all of its own, I'm happy to go along with that. But if the location is messed up and incoherent, I formulate a solution for an autonomous, contrasting or even contrary identity."* A symbol, but never a gesture. A typical example is his design for Croatia's largest hotel resort, the Punta Skala in Zadar (2011), which incorporated parts of the previous substance to a minimal degree, but in its entirety gave it a comprehensive thematic makeover, so that the natural environment and the ocean horizon combine to form a new and unique amalgam.



Punta Skala Resort (Falkensteiner Hotel & Spa Iadera)
Zadar, Croatia (2011)
Boris Podrecca
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Materials and textile architecture

Podrecca talking about the large desk in his studio in Vienna: *“A slab of Greek cipollino, a type of marble often used by Loos, with a complex grain that forms an eye-catching set of associations. Every time I look at it, I discover streets, squares and towns, and this leads to a trove of memories of reflection and imagination. This is the language of texture that I always try to tap into when I have sufficient resources, when I can choose from a wide variety of contemporary materials.”* This is an important element in Podrecca’s design philosophy: setting apart the bare wall end cap in a room in favour of an interpretative covering and the quest for a chromatic tone. Some of his designs even appear to take shape from the choice of materials, for instance when stone quarried on the site – monoliths stacked without any kind of mortar binding – is complemented by Spanish cherry wood panelling that harks back to Istria’s nautical traditions. Another example of the choice of different categories of material is the cladding for five residential properties on the island of Giudecca in the south of Venice. The local Grassello marble plaster technique is juxtaposed with mundane brickwork, and traditional Kirmenjok stone from Istria sits alongside a metal rooftop terrace structure, all of which combine to form a high-on ethnological enfilade.

Urban and intangible architecture

“Even when I design a chair, metaphorically speaking I still think of a town. I was influenced by Roland Rainer’s urbanist ideas, and not so much by his architectural views. When I design a building, I make an effort to put across a dual meaning: its specific physical features as well as an echo of the city that surrounds it. But that doesn’t make it urban planning, or what they call spatial planning. It means that I bring into focus, I emphasise the property’s participation in a dialogue with the city,” Podrecca explains. Alongside the physical aspect of his architecture, the recurring significance of natural and artificial light is another important intangible component in his designs. It is not so much the design dictate of having lights inside and out that counts, rather the technical solution adopted to minimise adaptation and accommodation in the visual perception.

This is primarily reflected in Podrecca’s designs for over 30 public spaces across Europe, as well as his numerous exhibition designs. In terms of the perforation of walls and ceilings, the distinction between zenithal and lateral lighting is an aspect that is constantly readdressed in his research. In his eyes, architecture in public spaces is about finding an equilibrium amid plurality, where there are no set rules, because the configuration of public space is usually heterogeneous and hybrid. The architect’s solutions include elements designed to bring order to an overstimulated society, working in harmony with the type of user, which the new site either acquiesces to or contrasts with. Here, the textural symbolism of ground-level squares, streets and green spaces that supports the new element of urban reanimation or its redesign plays a decisive role.

When selecting the site for the Millennium Tower, Podrecca fought to secure the greening of the axis joining the Danube Canal and the Danube, which runs through the inner courtyard of the Basler Versicherung building which he designed. In Ljubljana, he also created a new urban link in the shape of a bridge for pedestrians and cyclists. The view from the middle of this piazzetta above the river extends beyond Plečnik’s riverside architecture to the city’s first high-rise, the work of one of Plečnik’s students – a dialogue on the lines of a new echo chamber.

Contrasts

Referencing Walter Zschokke, for Podrecca architecture is a welcome opportunity to highlight urban powers, spaces and bodies where a city's "muscles and tendons" are found. This gives rise to a complex incongruity that is just waiting to be addressed. Podrecca's building designs combine the language of architecture with the overall musculature of the property and its surroundings, in which the wide variety of layers – which at the same time represent contrasts – determine his architectural approach.

Boris Podrecca: *"I'm interested in the architecture's nervous system, the tensions that converse with one another, which is why I do not search for an answer in the shape of an ostensible style, but for diversity that intensifies the milieu and does not offer enclosed, a priori poetics."* Friedrich Achleitner labelled the modern character of this approach "the poetics of difference". The design for the refurbishment of Wiener Städtische's provincial head office and Donau Versicherung's branch in Graz involved integrating two interlocking buildings. At the same time, the vertical development reveals an X-shaped intersection in the stairwell, from which the individual properties extend.

A completely different type of tension is addressed in the remodelling of the International Gallery of Modern Art in Venice's Ca'Pesaro palace, where old and new come together in a contrasting design. These stand-alone interventions deliberately give the history of the most beautiful Baroque palace on the Grand Canal, the work of Baldassare Longhena, a wide berth: an appealing, 30-metre-high staircase featuring a complex steel frame fitted with transparent and translucent Murano glass connects the different floors, which are of different heights. A new sculpture piazzetta along with a cafe-restaurant, shop and gallery round out the new ground floor area of the museum complex, with exhibits on display from the first floor upwards. These essentially architectural adaptations of the historic building fabric create an independent exhibition space enclosed within a traditional museum. *"My strategy was to make a clear distinction to Longhena by penetrating the aura of the old stone monoliths using contemporary implants and prosthetics that support the building, but always resonate with a certain Venetian spirit. These two worlds exist in parallel."* A grandfather and his grandchild stroll through the city – a symbol of Podrecca's desire for broad temporality in his architecture.

Catalogue

Architektur im Ringturm LVIII: *Boris Podrecca.* Architecture Adolph Stiller (ed.), with contributions from Boris Podrecca, A. Coppa (Milan) and Adolph Stiller. Approx. 200 pages. Mürysalzman Verlag. Price: EUR 29