

# Architektur im Ringturm



## Aleksej Brkić – Architect in Belgrade

12 June to 8 September 2017

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- Curators:** Adolph Stiller, Bojan Kovačević (President of the Serbian Academy of Architecture)
- Venue:** Exhibition Centre in the Ringturm  
Schottenring 30, 1010 Vienna
- Opening hours:** Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm, free admission (closed on public holidays)
- Press tour:** Monday, 12 June 2017, 10am
- Speakers:** Adolph Stiller, Bojan Kovačević
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*To accompany the tenth artistic wrapping of the Ringturm, a piece by Serbian artist Mihael Milunović, in summer 2017, Wiener Städtische Versicherungsverein is devoting an exhibition to the architectural oeuvre of Aleksej Brkić (1922-1999), as part of the Architektur im Ringturm series. Brkić was one of the leading architects in post-war Belgrade and was instrumental in paving the way for Serbian modernism. The upcoming exhibition showcases many of his works, which are now seen as cornerstones of Serbian architecture in the second half of the 20th century.*

*Works by Mihael Milunović will be on display at the Ringturm Exhibition Centre as well, and there is also a focus on the oeuvre of Robert Hammerstiel, who was born in the Serbian town of Vršac and was responsible for the 2007 Ringturm covering.*

## **Aleksej Brkić – Architect in Belgrade**

Aleksej Brkić (1922-1999) was the pivotal figure in Serbian neo-avant-garde architecture in the 1960s and 70s. He can be compared with Bogdan Bogdanović, although Bogdanović focused on the theories of urban design and commemorative sculpture. For modern-day architects, the difference between Brkić and Bogdanović, who spent the last decade of his life in Vienna, lies in their potential to provoke. Aleksej Brkić stands out for the authenticity of his approach and expression, and is clearly the most significant source of inspiration for indigenous creativity in modern Serbian architecture.

Brkić's oeuvre, which meets the highest international standards, is characterised by proportion and malleability, as well as logical, functionalist composition that in part follows mathematical principles.

His relatively small number of works may be explained by the architect's exacting requirements. Two of his designs are heritage-listed buildings, and together with his other constructions they represent cornerstones of Serbian architecture in the second half of the 20th century. Brkić always worked alone, and only friendships with Bogdan Bogdanović early on in his career, and later with Aleksandar Keković, are documented. Precision, assiduousness and enormous discipline, coupled with huge energy, typified Brkić's work. His use of colour was also lavish.

During his lifetime, being closely involved in the international cultural context was another of Brkić's priorities. He analysed many icons of classical modernism and numerous historically significant constructions at first hand. In his younger years especially, he was drawn to the eastern Mediterranean and key locations in the architecture of early civilisation – from the ancient period, as well as the Byzantine and Ottoman Middle Ages.

However, his aim was not to copy the formal language of his role models; on the contrary, he questioned the justification behind modernism and distanced himself from its excesses and doctrinaire provocation. As a result of his own critical attitude to blatantly modish trends, Brkić immersed himself in every construction project, critically analysing the outcomes of modernism on the basis of a specially developed, highly personal design theory in which every last detail was thought through.

He also focused on architectural theory from an early stage, a subject he would later go on to lecture in at Belgrade Technical University – a number of publications reflect his occupation with the theoretical aspects of public architecture. Brkić studied architecture at the same university from 1940-1948, with a few interruptions. During his studies he met Bogdan Bogdanović and Mihajlo Mitrović, with whom he went on to form the triumvirate in the vanguard of post-war modernist architecture in Belgrade.

His most important mentors included Milan Zloković, one of the father figures of modernism in the capital of the new southern Slavic state after the first world war. From the outset, the young Brkić was impressed by modern, international "glass-and-steel architecture", the product of the heroic phase of renewal in the inter-war period.

Aleksej Brkić's multicultural background, which undoubtedly had a significant impact on his architectural side, also needs to be taken into account. He was born in 1922 in Kikinda in northeast Serbia, part of a family with ancestors from a host of different countries and regions. The son of an officer and a German teacher, he received a classical, polyglot education – piano lessons included. Besides his native language Serbian, Brkić spoke good English and German from childhood, and also understood Russian and Latin.

## **Aleksej Brkić – architectural highlights**



### **Belgrade grammar school**

Aleksej Brkić's design for the school resembles a collection of small, individual buildings, reflecting the backdrop of single-family houses in a village-like structure which was only integrated into the Serbian capital at a relatively late stage.

A clear layout, offset levels connected by straight staircases, and an easily recalled, interior "map" joined by straight, well-lit corridors with coloured schemes set the school apart as an outstanding educational construction.

The terrazzo flooring in the entrance hall and corridors are ennobled by the use of colour, sectioning and natural stone inlays in the form of abstract patterns, the precise geometry of which sharpens the perspectives and is vaguely reminiscent of Kilim carpets. A generously proportioned glazed facade overlooks the school yard, which is used for sports. As with all of the glazing bars on the building's windows, their individual, deliberate positioning and the interplay between fixed and moveable elements accentuate the facade's visibility. The caretaker's apartment is distinguished by means of a detached section featuring more playful details.



### **Hotel Jezero**

Today's Hotel Jezero ("jezero" is the Serbian word for "lake") originally housed engineers who worked at the hydroelectric power plants built at the nearby reservoirs.

Brkić earmarked a specific structure for each function, which gives the entire complex the air of a small, village-like settlement, with dimensions that dovetail with the construction's surroundings. This appearance is emphasised by conventional sloping roofs and supported by the use of local materials: the uniqueness of what was the architect's only project outside Belgrade lies in the accentuation of certain elements by means of natural stone walls and untreated wooden wall panels.



### **Hempro office and commercial building**

Brkić implemented his first construction project in Belgrade's elegant Terazije area, on a narrow city-centre plot that had become vacant following the bombardments of 1944 and 1945. In terms of the intensity of the architecture, the building is also his magnum opus.

The architect focused his attention on the facade, which at first glance comes across as austere understated. The ground floor is elevated on struts, behind which is the actual shop facade, while the above-ground storeys give the impression of typical floors with clear, functionalist layouts.

Designed according to Brkić's rules of proportion, the glass facade is divided into concise geometric forms by means of deliberately conspicuous glazing bars. A stone-clad frame with a balcony protrudes asymmetrically from the facade: just like every other component of the ensemble, this frame has an important function within the overall composition, and by means of the offset floors created as a result, it also underscores the malleability that Brkić admired in many examples of classical modernism.

### **Catalogue:**

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