

## Architect Friedrich Weinwurm: New Path

Exhibition at the Slovak National Gallery

Bratislava, Slovakia, 25 January – 20 May 2018

The 20<sup>th</sup> century created space for extensive development in Slovakia in both cultural and social aspects, a phenomenon visible even today in its built material legacy. Connected to the growth in Slovakia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are many personalities as practitioners of those professions that have made a significant imprint on the identity of the nation. Today, for instance, the names of the architects Dušan Samuel Jurkovič or Emil Belluš are known to the wider public as “the” Slovak architects who founded Slovakia’s autonomous architectural tradition. As such, they are regarded as founding fathers, as personalities standing on the same level as the nation’s key individuals. Their importance has, for several decades, been confirmed by a lasting interest from architectural historians and theorists, resulting in an extensive publication legacy. Since 2010, a series of extensive book-length monographs have successively appeared to present the general public with these oeuvres: starting with Dušan S. Jurkovič, and one year later presenting the work of Emil Belluš. And yet, when in 2014 the next publication appeared in this exclusive series, dedicated to the architect Friedrich Weinwurm, it represented instead the repayment of a long-overdue debt to the historic and architectural significance of this individual, long consigned to the margins of Slovak architectural history. It was thanks to author Henrieta Moravčíková that this pioneering work was undertaken.

The Slovak National Gallery (SNG) in Bratislava, as the nation’s most important art-historical institution, eventually turned its attention to Weinwurm, this unique representative of the architecture of the “New Objectivity” [*Neue Sachlichkeit*] and interwar functionalism, with a definite time-lag. Its recently ended exhibition of Friedrich Weinwurm’s work bore the title *Nová Cesta* [new path]. And this wording is significant, considering how much any evaluation of this recent exhibition program needs to take into consideration the long path that our knowledge of this major architect’s oeuvre had to traverse before finding its way into the confines of the SNG.

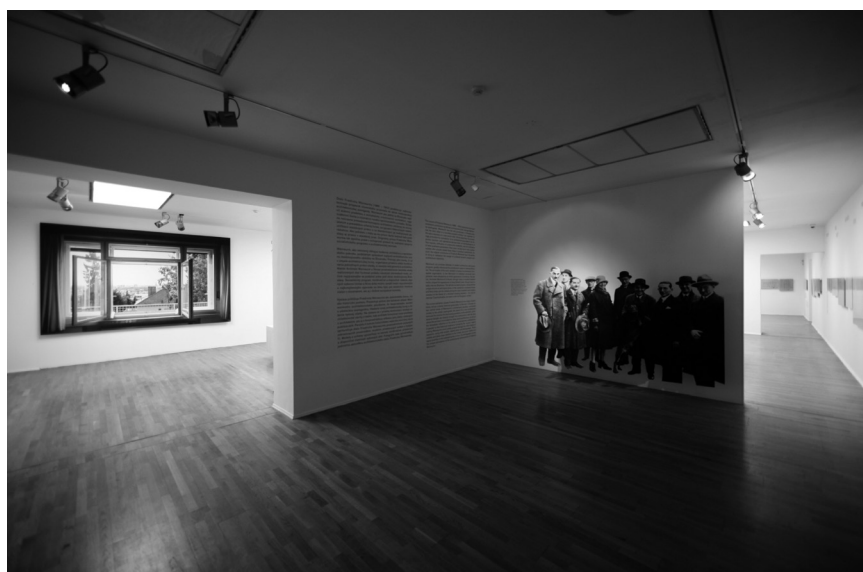
In his architecture, Weinwurm did not have the status of a creator and representative of the architectural lineage regarded as the basis of modern Slovak architectural traditions. Unlike his previously mentioned colleagues Emil Belluš and Dušan Samuel Jurkovič, Weinwurm – a German-speaking Jew who perished in the Holocaust – never in the post-war years became the subject of popular myth. Conversely, it was Weinwurm himself who bears the greatest responsibility for breaking the path for a new architecture in Slovakia. For the development of Slovak modernist architecture, he has the importance of such a figure as Adolf Loos or Hannes Meyer on a worldwide scale. For this reason, the current exhibition takes as its goal primarily the long-needed exposure of the forgotten, the presentation of an exceptional yet still insufficiently appreciated architect represented by dozens of realized structures created in his shared atelier with Ignác Vécsei.

Interpreting this exhibition (and the life of Weinwurm himself) through this sub-title has indeed set us off on new paths. It has helped us to realize that architecture is not only a game of forms, the language of the physical

arrangement of the space around us: it has shifted us away from the path of reading buildings as an *a priori* aesthetic discipline and shown us the content that lies behind the form of its representation. Such a path “beyond form” is shown in the part of the exhibition devoted to Weinwurm’s political struggle for a new architecture intended for all levels of society. The realized projects of a socially committed architecture in Bratislava’s modernist proto-estates of *Unitas* and *Nová Doba* confirm that the architect’s work at the start of the 1930s significantly determined the direction of urban planning for many decades to follow. This architecture is functionalism in its most essential presentation – form follows housing.

Of course, form also follows function: this slogan of Modernism is evident even in the actual realization of this exhibition at the SNG. The exhibition was the work of a sizeable authorial team under the supervision of Henrieta Moravčíková. Her husband Peter Moravčík was in charge of the exhibit’s architectural design and met this requirement of his senior colleagues perfectly. The minimal entrance, in the form of wooden platforms, met simultaneously the functions of a display case for publications and pedestals for architectural models. Though a highly traditional exhibition form, it did not appear banal, but indeed elevated the very content of the displays, acting on several levels or through several instruments for reaching its primary (educational) aims.

For understanding individual architectural works by Weinwurm and Vécsei, the exhibition used wall-projections of axonometric plans. These, in turn, communicated with the cardboard models of selected buildings



01 At the entrance of the exhibition Friedrich Weinwurm and members of his architecture studio welcomed the visitors on the only historical photograph of the whole exposition taken in the year 1926. Photo: Peter Moravčík.

**02** The exhibition introduced the work of the architect Friedrich Weinwurm with reduced means and minimalistic aesthetics: original drawings, contemporary photographs taken by the well-known photographer Olja Triaška Stefanović, axonometric schemes of the main exhibited works and models created by the students of the Faculty of Architecture in Bratislava. © Slovak National Gallery. Photo: Peter Gall.



**04** The large-scale photographs enabled the visitors to experience the unique atmosphere of the architecture of New Objectivity after nearly 100 years of its existence. However, the message of the photographs was somehow ambiguous expressing in the same time nostalgia and post-apocalyptic atmosphere of ruined modernism. © Slovak National Gallery. Photo: Peter Gall.



**03** The three main parts of the exhibition "A building art to match its age", "The objectivity that we followed in the present day" and "A roof for everyone" were accompanied by soundtracks presenting the three architecture manifestos of Friedrich Weinwurm. Most appealing was the last one titled "Where does the new path lead?" from 1931 connected with the projects of social housing. © Slovak National Gallery. Photo: Peter Gall.

prepared over several semesters with the assistance of architecture students from the Bratislava Technical University. Original blueprints displayed on the walls did not, themselves, serve as explications of the architecture but more as artefacts recalling Weinwurm himself within the exhibition space. And it was not only his drawings but also his words that filled the exhibition rooms. For the exhibition, the first Slovak translations were prepared of Weinwurm's German texts published between 1924 and 1931 in the journals *Moderne Welt*, *Sborník Modernej Tvorby* and *Nová Bratislava*. The photographer Olja Triaška Stefanović, whose engagement dates back to the start of the previously mentioned monograph publication from 2014, contributed photographs of buildings by Weinwurm and Vécsei,

captivating in the melancholic enchantment only fitting for long-forgotten cultural heritage. Her photographs, in both small and monumental format, document the current state of Weinwurm's built oeuvre. A sense of the actual scale of the depicted scenes brings the viewer directly into the image – i.e. the fragment of Weinwurm's architecture, captured through the technically exacting photographic narrative using the single-axis perspective matching the spirit of the Düsseldorf School.

For many years, the SNG has worked on bringing the field of architecture into its collections. Indeed, Slovakia lacks any independent cultural-historical institution that would focus exclusively on architecture and built heritage. After literature, folk culture, visual arts and design, architecture remains

the last unoccupied area of art demanding a targeted shaping of collections and systematic institutional scholarly reflection. From this standpoint, the exhibition program of the SNG creates a valuable space for reflecting on this long-underrated and overlooked area of Slovakia's artistic legacy. In one sense, it is a valuable task, yet on the other, bearing in mind the primary focus of the SNG, it will always remain merely a marginal genre. Hence it is no surprise that the realized exhibition *Friedrich Weinwurm: New Path* is the very first independent monographic exhibition for a Slovak architect held in the spaces of the SNG since Slovakia gained its independence in 1993 (!). The catalog for the exhibition directly reveals the formation of its own new paths to the presentation and exhibition of architecture: the exhibition as planned by Henrieta Moravčíková and her team has found its new path, and the public have found it to their liking, as confirmed by the attendance figures. Yet for the professional community in Slovakia, the path is not only new but long if we are to reach a broad public appreciation for the heritage of Slovakia's modern architecture.

The exhibition in the premises of the SNG in Bratislava was open from 25.01.2018 to 20.05.2018.

Martin Zaiček

Exhibition conception: Henrieta Moravčíková  
 Exhibition curators: Henrieta Moravčíková, Denis Haberland  
 Photography: Olja Triaška Stefanović  
 Architectural design: Peter Moravčík  
 Axonometric diagrams: Laura Pastoreková  
 Graphic design: Ľubica Segečová