

Cold War and Architecture

Contributions to Austria's Democratization after 1945

Exhibition: 17.10.2019–24.02.2020 | Exhibition Hall 2

Press conference: Wed 16.10., 11:00

Opening: Wed 16.10., 19:00

After the liberation of Austria in spring 1945 and the occupation by the four victorious powers of Great Britain, France, USA, and the Soviet Union, Vienna became a central stage for the Cold War. For the first time, the exhibition 'Cold War and Architecture' highlights what was built in postwar Austria, as well as the architects and debates involved, in a context of the global East-West conflict.

During the ten-year occupation, Austria experienced the transition from an authoritarian system of government to a democratic consumer society. As Monika Platzer, curator of the exhibition, points out: "For the first time, visitors can see for themselves the extent to which the cultural endeavours of the Allies influenced postwar architecture in Austria." Each of the four victorious countries established its own extensive cultural agenda. Architecture exhibitions and trade fair presentations played a key role in their programme and brought ideologically charged content to Vienna, from zoning concepts to model kitchens, from skyscrapers to garden cities, from the newest in prefabricated production techniques to living- and lifestyles.

In the exhibition 'Cold War and Architecture' it becomes clear that in the years after the Second World War Vienna was not a grey city cut off from international life. On the contrary: the local architecture scene could experience Le Corbusier live, follow London's plans for urban expansion and visit the 'Room for Stalin'. The Cold War helped Austria to internationalise its social and cultural policies, always under the banner that the cultural policies of the British, Americans, French and Soviets served as catalysts for their respective ideologies. Their cultural "educational measures" were aimed at different target groups, from the specialist public to the general population. They encountered local traditions, interests and networks that used the conflicts of the Cold War for their own professional advancement. "The exhibition changes how we view Austrian and global architectural history," sums up Angelika Fitz, Director of the Architekturzentrum Wien.

Divided into four zones, the exhibition 'Cold War and Architecture' explores the cultural self-depiction of the Allies, and their impact on Austrian architecture. The struggle between the systems after the Second World War was all-encompassing and continued in the cultural arms race of two transnational modernist networks, CIAM-Austria and the International Summer Seminar (today European Forum Alpbach). Many photographs, plans, films and original drawings will be shown for the first time in the exhibition, including numerous documents from the Architekturzentrum Wien, Collection. In the transnational synopsis, they produce a genre picture of postwar modernism. The comprehensive show is complemented by a timeline with the global events of the Cold War.

The Cold War did not end with the withdrawal of the Allies in 1955. Neutral Austria remained the venue for political dialogue between East and West. One of the side effects of an increasingly active Austrian foreign policy under Bruno Kreisky (Foreign Minister 1959-1966) was the export of architecture to Southeast Asia and the Middle East, a spotlighted topic in the exhibition.

The four zones of the exhibition

Great Britain's Contribution to Social Planning

In view of the economic weakening caused by the war and the competition with the other victorious powers, the British relied on a modern, dynamic image of their country that claimed to play an active part in shaping the post-war order. The British path to a democratic welfare state presented itself as an alternative to the authoritarian Nazis, totalitarian communism and laissez-faire capitalism. The adoption of British planning concepts fits both Austria's integration into the West and the SPÖ's close ideological relationship with the British Labour Party. Accordingly, the Greater London Plan and the New Towns served as examples for Vienna's new beginnings as a structured and dispersed city. This made it possible for many architects to build on their plans from the Nazi era without, however, being associated with the original ideological motives.

France's Contribution to Establishing an Elite

In contrast to the other occupying powers, the French cultural offensive was characterised by a strongly personalised cultural policy. It was mainly sustained by three protagonists: the commander of the French occupational forces, Marie Émile Antoine Béthouart, and the heads of the cultural institutes (Institut français) in Vienna and Innsbruck, Eugène Susini and Maurice Besset. The focus was on emphasising commonalities between the cultural nations France and Austria, accompanied by a demarcation from Germany. But while British planning concepts were given a strong presence in the magazine *Der Aufbau*, published by the Vienna City Planning Office, there was little coverage of French architecture. Officialdom in Vienna was critical of Le Corbusier's ideas about planning. As could be seen, for example, at his 1948 appearance in Vienna. Discussion of his work was also frowned upon at the universities, although it was received with enthusiasm by young architects.

The United States' Contribution to a "Better Life"

The Americans had the declared aim of promoting an anti-communist, democratic Europe. Housing and consumer culture played a key role in the establishment of the 'American Way of Life'. At the same time, the USA was preceded by a reputation as a cultural desert. This revealed widely held scepticism in Europe towards the 'young' nation, which lacked high culture. The American government combatted this reluctance with an extensive public relations apparatus, the Information Services Branch (ISB). Modern America was given major appearances in Vienna with the exhibitions 'Architektur der USA seit 1947' (Architecture of the USA since 1947) in 1952 and 'Moderne Kunst aus USA' (Modern Art from the USA) from the MoMA collections in 1956. The Veitingergasse model housing estate (1952-1954) in the 13th district of Vienna, by Carl Auböck and Roland Rainer, was completed as a counter-design by the USA to the standard form of Viennese rental accommodation in tenements.

The “Friendly” and “Peaceful” Contribution of the Soviet Union

Vienna was occupied by the Red Army and liberated from Nazi rule in April 1945, but unlike the Americans the Soviets did not start establishing information centres until 1950. Dominant themes in exhibitions were the rebuilding efforts of the USSR with its technical advancement. From skyscrapers to apartment blocks completed with quick construction methods, the ideal socialist state was propagated through housing. The anti-communist consensus across all parties and classes in the Second Republic made it impossible for a cosmopolitan, often Jewish and left-leaning architectural community to return. The few architects who did find themselves under the patronage of the Austrian Communist Party were kept away from major building projects of the City of Vienna. The monument on Schwarzenbergplatz might be the best-known, but not the sole architectural manifestation of the USSR in Austria. Back in 1957, before the summit meeting between John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev in 1961, there was a direct confrontation between East and West at the Wiener Herbstmesse trade fair: The USA erected the American pavilion in the immediate vicinity of the pavilion of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which had been built in 1952.

The Book to Accompany the Exhibition

Park Books are publishing the richly illustrated Cold War and Architecture. The Competing Forces that Reshaped Austria after 1945, to accompany the exhibition of the same title.

Curator: Monika Platzer

Design: Michael Hieslmair & Michael Zinganel, Tracing Spaces

Graphics: Christoph Schörkhuber, Manuela Neuner, Seite zwei

Symposium

Cold Transfer

Architecture, Politics, Culture

Germany – Austria – Switzerland after 1945

Fri 24.01. – Sat 25.01.2020, Az W Podium

To accompany the exhibition 'Cold War and Architecture'
in cooperation with the Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation, Vienna

After 1945, the Allies and governments throughout Europe concentrated on coping with the consequences of dictatorship and war. Policy in the period of postwar reconstruction was characterised by the efforts of the "perpetrator nation" Germany to effect a radical break with the Nazi past as well as Austria's demand for "victim status". The search for identities for both countries after 1945 forced the formation of a nation under observation by the Allies. Switzerland, which remained neutral, served a bridging function, allowing know-how and aid to flow into the war-ravaged countries of Germany and Austria. For Swiss architects and civil engineers, there was no doubt that they would participate in the planning and construction tasks for the reconstruction of Europe. All three countries participated to varying degrees in the Cold War ideological conflict between different systems of government.

On the basis of transnational issues, the symposium examines structural practices in the three countries, and draws comparisons between the conditions of their respective socio-political frameworks, so making a contribution to a European architectural history – a history of transfer as well as of convergences and divergences in European architecture, politics and culture.

Supplementary programme to accompany the exhibition

In addition to numerous exhibition tours, the 'Cold War and Architecture' exhibition will be accompanied by dialogue tours with special guests, such as Peter Rath from the glass and chandelier manufacturer J. & L. Lobmeyr. During the Cold War, Rath designed both the lighting for the opera in the Washington Kennedy Center and the chandeliers for the Kremlin in Moscow, arousing the interest of the secret services.

City expeditions lead to forgotten scenes of occupied Vienna as well as on the trail of the "Third Woman". And the youngest visitors can build, among other things, aircraft and habitats for the Race to the Moon.

The press release as well as high-resolution, rights free press images are available for download at www.azw.at/en/press

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