

Evolution of contemporary museum architecture

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Abstract – This article deals with the development of museum architecture from the formation of the classic building architecture to the establishment of the contemporary museum architecture. Changes in the museum building architecture and displaying principles have been analysed. The 19th century was defined by the emergence of a vast number of museums serving through present as examples of the contemporary museum architecture. New styles are tried in the museum architecture along with changes in art trends which facilitates the development of the museum architecture as an individual work of art.

Key words – museum, art, development of museum architecture.

I. Introduction

A contemporary museum is not just an environment for preserving art work, but rather an architectural project that underwent changes through the centuries along with art styles. The museum has a task to accumulate and demonstrate artwork, while we need to analyze the museum architecture in order to define its purpose.

II. Classic museum building

Museum design and ideology was influenced by an idea of Gesamtkunstwerk – the term used by Richard Wagner - which appeared back in the Late Romanticism era. The term was defined as a *total work of art, ideal work of art, and universal artwork, synthesis of the arts, comprehensive artwork, all-embracing art form or total artwork* [4,p.60] in *The Art-Work of the future*. The museum architecture was perceived as a homogeneous art space due to interaction between art filling, interior, and building architecture. Accumulation of works of art was harmonically combined with the architecture of their display,

Pioneer museums of the classic types were located in galleries which reminded of palaces or temples from outside. Such museums were often known by building and plan symmetry. A piazza and natural lighting were crucial and typical components. Architects faced a challenge to design the building in a way for main exhibition halls to be filled with the natural lighting.

Altes Museum in Berlin, Alte Pinakothek in Munich Fig.1, and Dulwich Picture Gallery in London are considered practical solutions to the classic museum architecture. These buildings were pre-designed to serve as museums. Especially, Altes Museum which became an example of the classic museum building despite its classicism and monumental nature.

An approach to displaying items changes in the middle of the 19th century. A scientific interest in collections appeared which requires adequate knowledge and special training. Museums became important institutions that paid great attention to science, research, and public awareness [5,p.18].

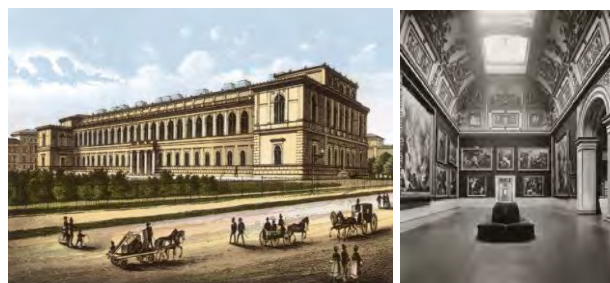


Fig. 1. Leo von Klenze, Alte Pinakothek 1836

III. In search of new museum architecture forms

New museum architecture philosophies have appeared since the end of the 19th century. Formation of building appearance is emphasized in museum building design.

The Association of Visual Artists Vienna Secession's priority was to erect its own exposition building to reflect the specifics of its exhibitional collections.

The Secession building Fig.2 opened in 1898 as designed by Joseph Maria Olbrich. Mr. Olbrich designed a contemporary building using simple cubical forms. However, the composition and accentuation reminded of the classic museum architecture [3,p.55].

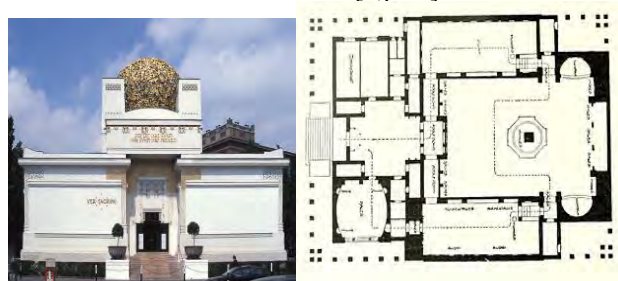


Fig.2. J. Olbrich, Secession building 1898

In the first half of the 20th century, some architects did not abandon forms which are commonly found in the classic museum architecture. The Museum of Modern Art Paris Fig.3 which appeared in 1937 serves as an example; however, there is an obvious change in planning.



Fig. 3. Museum of Modern Art Paris 1937

Increase in the number of items on display gives rise to exhibitional space expansion. New rooms for a library, auditorium, and halls for temporary exhibitions are included in the museum plan, and an administrative area is expanded.

Museum designs offered by Le Corbusier marked an important stage in the formation of the museum architecture Fig.4. Le Corbusier considered ideal museum's architecture to grow along with the collection. The museum is no longer a palace, or temple in his research, but rather takes a position of the direct art centre. The art does not stay still. It develops; new trends and styles are generated, while the museum architecture must be in line with its era.

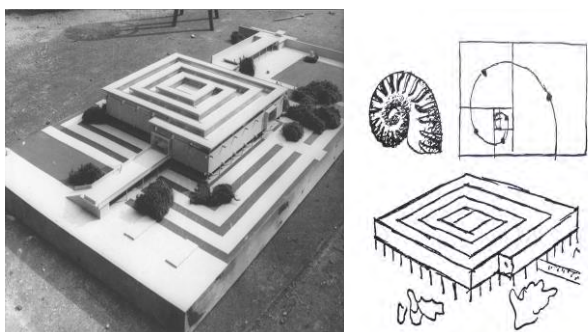


Fig.4. Le Corbusier's Project of Museum of unlimited growth, 1931

Frank Lloyd Wright offered another solution for the museum building in the form of spiral as expressed in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. However, his spiral structure was embodied in space as opposed to Le Corbusier's idea of the museum in a plane. The spiral structure in the museum allows for exploring the whole expositional area of the museum and sets a circulatory movement of the audience.



Fig.5. F. Wright, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum New York, 1959

The museum architecture has been changing due to new technologies. Great attention is paid to lighting. Large spaces demand proper lighting, while natural lighting is not compatible with preserving works of art.

Expositional principles change along with the museum architecture itself. If a salon approach to displaying works of art was widely applicable to classic museums when items were stocked one above the other from the panels to the ceiling, the expositional art underwent crucial changes in the 20th century. The art acquired new forms of expression which facilitated demonstration of just a few works to draw attention of the audience. This type of presentation was known as a „white cube”, and allowed the audience to focus attention on each individual work [1, p.29-30].

IV. Museum architecture as an item of display

It the modern architecture only that allows for preserving modern works of art, while not causing any conflict between art styles.

The perception of the museum changes following the museum revolution in the fiftieth. The museum architecture strives for bringing the museum building forward as a work of art, as long as it is far more than a just space for storing works of art.

According to John Dewey, works of art are not fully perceived, unless their environment is filled with the art. However, the expositional spaces must be perceived clearly and must not give the feeling of architecture's superiority over the items on display. A contemporary museum is in need of balance between the expositional space and architectural look [2]. Accordingly, the art apparently begins with an architect who tries to appear as an artist in his museum building design.

Architectural concepts of the museum become more evolved as they combine various phenomena, such as a common representativeness of the building, its integration into the urban environment, and accomplishment of a number of functional goals, storing, and displaying collections. The difficulty we face while supporting such phenomena is especially typical for modern art museums, where substance often contradicts form. A change in perception of functions of the museum architecture is observed at the current stage of development, i.e. it establishes itself primary as an individual work of art as opposed to the facility for storing and displaying items.

Conclusion

The contemporary museum architecture has undergone significant changes since the development of its classic type. New connections between the architectural and art space triggered changes in the museum architecture, as well as in the museum itself being a cultural institution. A mutual relation between the architecture, art, and style is now observed in the architecture, along with functional, structural, and technical specifications. The museum architecture establishes itself as an individual work of art; the museum exterior gains new forms; and expositional spaces tend to be more spatial to give dominating preferences to the items on display.

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