

WIOLETTA KOZŁOWSKA*

FROM CONCRETE BUNKERS
TO THE *BUNKER OF ART*
– FROM *READY-MADE* TO THE WORK OF ART.

OD BETONOWYCH BUNKRÓW
DO BUNKRA SZTUKI –
OD *READY-MADE* DO DZIEŁA SZTUKI

Abstract

The Bunker of Art is one of the first modern buildings within the Cracow Market. Its façade is reminiscent of the military buildings of World War II. These military aesthetics were suitable for the museum of modern art, and by its raw neutrality, it created new aesthetics that matched the function of the building and were not aggressive to its surroundings. The concrete bas-relief created by the architect along with the sculptors has become a symbol of the Cracovian Planty Park and a curiosity not only for professionals. The building refers to military buildings, and it comes as if from a *ready-made* art trend, which can give it the status of a work of art. Also, its name changes the conventional approach to an art gallery and completes the whole picture. The cooperation of the architect and the sculptor working together with the material creates an unforgettable whole that does not allow the viewer to pass indifferently.

Keywords: concrete, architecture, sculpture

Streszczenie

Bunkier Sztuki to jeden z pierwszych nowoczesnych budynków w obrębie Krakowskiego Rynku. Jego elewacja przypomina budynki wojskowe z drugiej wojny światowej. Ta militarna estetyka nadawała się na muzeum sztuki nowoczesnej, tworzyła przez swą surową neutralność nową estetykę pasującą do funkcji budynku i nieagresywną dla otoczenia. Betonowa płaskorzeźba stworzona przez architekta wraz z rzeźbiarzami stała się symbolem Krakowskich Plant i ciekawostką nie tylko dla profesjonalistów. Budynek nawiązuje do budowli militarnych, a wywodzi się jakby z nurtu artystycznego *ready-made*, to może nadawać mu status dzieła sztuki. Także jego nazwa zmienia konwencjonalne podejście do galerii sztuki i dopełnia obrazu całości. Współpraca architekta i rzeźbiarza pracujących wspólnie z materiałem tworzy niezapomnianą całość niepozwalającą widzowi przejść obojętnie.

Słowa kluczowe: beton, architektura, rzeźba

* M.Sc. Arch. Wioletta Kozłowska, Institute of Structural Design, Faculty of Architecture, Cracow University of Technology.

1. Durability (*firmitatis*)

Concrete has always been perceived more as a construction material than a purely aesthetic one. Durability and formability are not its only virtues. Contemporary architects discover it anew. No longer as something shameful, grey and ordinary. The emancipation of concrete as a fashionable material has been around for quite some time now. However, it has always appeared in the role of an ornament, sometimes a little timidly and sometimes in full glory. It is not without reason that Dariusz Kozłowski calls concrete – a *new stone*. Thus, he grants it a certain social status, unreserved for it previously. It is being called mythical, new material “invented” for the creation of the works of art. Such wording is no longer new to the description of this building material.

Without abandoning the thought about the durability of concrete, one can begin with a place in the middle of the park in Vienna. There appears a problem with the description of the structure. Its purpose may seem morally ambiguous to winners, but we will describe and admire its form and not the function here. Something amazing, almost like a donjon from a medieval castle. Something for the defence of the city, but not against the cavalry, but planes of the enemy –3-G and 3-L flak towers – it is a German anti-aircraft tower and, in principle, also a bunker for civilians.

In 1942, a professor at the University of Berlin and architect, Friedrich Tamms, designed nine tower-like structures resembling castle parts. These are reinforced concrete structures, and their durability was to help them survive the thousand years of the Reich. Fortunately, they did not contribute to the final outcome of the war. The Germans lost the war, but concrete castles did not. The towers are still standing in the green, their removal has been impossible – they are from concrete, after all. After the war, Austrian authorities have undertaken several attempts to demolish the buildings, but because they are standing among houses, they failed to destroy them. The residents had to get used to them – with difficulty. Supposedly, the fascist propaganda said that after the victorious war, the towers would be covered with marble, and as a symbol of victory, they would become a place of worship. Thus, the towers remain and so one can find them surrounded by greenery in the 3rd district of the Arenbergpark, 7th in the Hof der Stiftskaserne, the 6th district in the Esterhazypark and the 2nd one in the Augarten. One cannot agree with tourist guides describing them as disfiguring the city – at least when it comes to the lovers of concrete. Residents complain that they obscure the view from bourgeois town houses, but burgesses are bothered by everything. However, one should bear in mind what Otto Wagner used to say about the residents of Vienna: *Wiener haben keine geschmack / The Viennese have no taste*, perhaps they too are not yet ready to perceive the towers as neutral works of art. Perhaps a few generations are needed to forget the military connotations of these buildings and to look at them as purely useless things adorning the green.

For now, they are one of the elements in the Baroque Park of Augarten. Augarten is the oldest baroque garden in Vienna. It is located in the second district of Vienna. It has a French-style garden, shady avenues surrounded by chestnuts, elms, lime trees, ash trees and maples. However, for us, the most important thing here is something else, unheard of in ordinary parks. Walking from the entrance, along the main avenue, we do not expect anything to stop us. Then, right before our eyes, there appears a structure measuring 40 metres in height and 37 metres in circumference. It is a real defensive tower. A donjon like from the inside of the medieval castle. The resemblance in the form is not coincidental; after all, it is a defensive

building. A fortified stronghold with foundations dug up 5 meters into the ground. In addition to the space for anti-aircraft guns, the towers could provide shelter for 25 thousand residents. After the war, after unsuccessful attempts to demolish them, the authorities had a lot of ideas for using the buildings, but for financial reasons, they usually gave them up. Only the tower at Esterhazypark was adopted in 1959 and houses the Aqua Terra Zoo, military warehouses were set up in the tower at Stiftskaserne, the tower in Arenbergpark has a similar use for the purposes of the Museum of Modern Art and turned into the MAK Tower. Here, the appearance of the name immediately warmed its image.

Today, the park building looks as if it had been touched with an artist's hand. The purely functional shape at the moment of its creation today turns into a remarkable place. Let us hope that Marcel Duchamp, the creator of the memorable *Fountain* – urinal, would like to praise it. This way, almost *ready-made* art was created, not exactly intended by its creator, though. However, the architect used other materials than Duchamp. Not the mawkish and colourful one: “[...] and [he] bought three copies of mawkish colourful lithographs of bare trees and the winding stream. He added two dots of watercolour paint to each of them – red and green like the colourful liquids on a pharmacy display”¹. On the contrary, brutal and even military, raw and rough. However, in perception after years, as was the case with the *Fountain*, one turning into a work of art, a place for walks and family trips. Durability is created here, the work, like the utopian avant-garde, dissociates itself from beauty; after all, it was to be covered with a mere ornamental stone. One needs to remember that even “avant-garde” works – abstract ones – are nowadays considered as works of art. We can see them in galleries and exhibitions, despite the fact that the artists dissociated themselves from them, or at least claimed so. Philosopher, Tadeusz Pawłowski, emphasizes yet another important aspect of various movements commonly called avant-garde, i.e. their differences in relation to one another. Pawłowski writes: “The properties of pre-avant-garde art negated by one of those currents could still be recognized by others. Speaking of questioning certain features of art, I mean their rejection by a particular avant-garde current, although other currents could still recognize these traits, or at least realise them in their activities”². This gives us the assurance that the anti-aircraft towers in the park can be perceived today as a work of art. Perhaps they have become a pretext for a brutalist approach to design. This may be the greatest compliment for these engineering structures, as they are not buildings, after all.

2. Utility (*utilitas*)

Cracow, and especially the Main Market Square, defended themselves against modern architecture. Fortunately, even here, in the period of modernism, something, which Antonio Sant'Elia might be happy to see, could finally appear. This outstanding creator, unfortunately not working for too long, postulated a new shape of architecture. He wrote in his manifesto: “I combat and despise: 1. all the pseudo-architecture of the avant-garde, the Austrians, the Hungarians, the Germans and the Americans; 2. all architecture that is classical, solemn, hieratic, stagey, decorative, monumental, pretty and pleasant; 3. the embalming, reconstruction

¹ C. Tomkins, *Duchamp, Biografia*, Poznań 2001, p. 126–127.

² T. Pawłowski, *Awangarda i wartości estetyczne*, Studia Filozoficzne No. 11–12 (204–205), PWN Warszawa 1983, p. 75.



and reproduction of ancient monuments and palaces; 4. perpendicular and horizontal lines, cubic and pyramidal forms, which are static, grave, oppressive and totally removed from our new sensibilities; 5. the use of bulky, voluminous, durable, antiquated and expensive materials ...”³. Let us hope that concrete was not antiquated at the time. Until the nineties of the twentieth century, the Bunker of Art had been the only modern building in the vicinity of the Main Market Square. The name carries the connotations of something serving defence purposes. We do not really know whether this is a defence of art or the author wanted to defend old Cracow against the avant-garde. The building was designed by Krystyna Różyska-Tołłoczko who worked with the sculptors, Stefan Borzęcki and Antoni Hajdecki. It is their relief sculpture that has become a predominant feature or even leitmotiv of the building. The elevation rather than façade made as a relief, which was not traditionally carved in stone, but already modernly moulded from the “new stone” – concrete. The building is thoroughly modernist and the authors seem to have forgotten about its corner location. We do not see the historical origin (despite the architecture, which surrounds us), it is not simply embedded into the existing frontage. Another famous architect, Massimiliano Fuksas, emphasizes his dislike of obvious inspiration in a similar way: “[...] I do not like obvious sources of inspiration. Inspiration should be sentimental, intellectual or affective”⁴. The building is thoroughly modern for its times and Cracow of the mid-sixties (it was opened September 11, 1965). The brutalist, artistically sloppy, formwork cannot be passed by unnoticed during the Sunday walk in Planty Park. Made of concrete castings in wooden shuttering, it does not resemble the accurate casts from the Atlantic Wall, German engineers would have definitely tried harder. Critics often misinterpret the use of such materials as concrete with insufficient financial resources from investors. Here, however, concrete was used deliberately as a means of artistic expression, on account of its sculptural character and ease of elevation shaping, it is hard to imagine today that it could look differently. Thanks to the sculptors’ work, the elevation is poetically deconstructed, it resembles a climbing wall, one feels like clambering inside without a ticket. The present times have treated the Bunker of Art mercilessly, attaching to this work of art a provincial shack for tourists who are uninterested in visiting the interior. Let us hope that this “adornment” will decay over time, and the bunker will last. In the end, such is its destiny, to persevere in spite of commercial attacks.

These two concrete buildings remind us of the notion of beauty, so difficult to notice in contemporary architecture. A work of art usually associated with beauty after the avant-garde’s achievements and its denial gained a new status. Beautiful is not that which usually had to be beautiful, but that which we can find in art galleries. What we see in the park in Vienna or in Planty Park in Cracow may serve as evidence. Let us start with the philosophical theory of values and certain generalizations of art and a work of art, which may be useful to us here. Let us assume that “1. There exists and it is possible to discover the absolute value, which we recognize for its own sake and as an end in itself; 2. There is a norm applying to all people, which can be discovered and justified 3. Life according to this value and norm is equipped with absolute sense”⁵. However, the universal approach in architecture unfortunately no longer applies.

³ A. Saint’Elia, *Architektura futurystyczna*, [in:] Ch. Baumgarth, *Futuryzm*, Warszawa 1978, p. 310.

⁴ Ph. Jodidio, *Architektura dzisiaj*, Köln 2003, *ibidem*: *Massimiliano Fuksas*, p. 58.

⁵ K. Kurowska, R. Rudziński, *Filozofia i wartość*, Warszawa 1981, p. 122.



It is difficult to find the beauty we can read about in dictionaries in architecture. The theory says that beauty is “«a set of qualities such as a proportion of shapes, harmony of colours or sounds that make something appealing, arousing admiration; also: high moral value»: The beauty of nature. The beauty of music. The beauty of sculptures, paintings, kilims”⁶. Avant-garde convinced us to take another approach.

One more thing is still connected with the name of the Cracow gallery – name. A military bunker, a fortified structure not associated with contemporary art. Still, the most important is the name – the Bunker of Art. Dariusz Kozłowski brings up a similar subject in the following way: “The caption under the image is like naming things; it has a special dimension: it can inform, suggest, persuade, negotiate; it can participate in an artist’s play with a viewer or with art; it can contribute to it. The title of the musical work – *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* – does not come from the author; at first, following John Cage’s footsteps – it sounded 8’ 37”⁷, and, thus, it was a completely different work”⁷. *The Bunker of Art*, which resembles the flak tower in Vienna with its concrete elevation, becomes something new, however, different, friendly to the visitor. It gives shelter to art and encourages one to explore.

3. Beauty (*venustatis*)

Both buildings are reminiscent of some ruins – the first one, due to its indestructibility, stands today despite attempts to demolish it; the other, with its decorative, imperfectly made, sculptural elevation, carries a similar connotation. James Wines from SITE architectural group explains his interest in the ruin in the following way: “It has nothing to do with demolition. It »speaks«. All of our previous buildings were associated with the American consumer culture. Those were some kind of comments about the socio-political background. But it is nothing new. Architecture had spoken in this way, talked about society, for 1500 years, it was only in the twentieth century when the idea of design emerged, and it subsided. And for me, designing is arranging rooms. This is not art. Design is something alongside art that should be an important and real part of the building. Obviously, every intelligent architect can design an object that will function. [...] But that is not the point, the fact is that all this will not provide psychological message. It will be dead. There will be no image that speaks to man. This space will be dead”⁸. The rebirth of the bunkers and the *Bunker of Art* is the result of interest in the new properties of concrete, which was used for their construction. The surrounding green in which they are located forms a new and unique whole – new holistic works of art. One should remember that “objects are just the fuel for imagination [...]. In most cases, taken out of its everyday context, an object loses its previous features and functions and becomes alienated. Commenting on this phenomenon, Wissmann says that the viewer ceases to deal with a composed picture, ceases to contemplate the expression of artistic gesture, and in return he must examine the objects themselves by virtue of their properties. For where the object is no longer transposed by traditional means of expression but presented

⁶ *Słownik języka polskiego*, Warszawa 1979, Vol. II, p. 663.

⁷ D. Kozłowski, *Miasta Niewidziane albo podwójny kolaż z pamięci*, Architektura & Biznes, No. 11, 2000.

⁸ T. Barucki, [interview with James Wines], Architektura, No. 4, 1987.



in new surroundings in an absurd or surprising manner – the viewer is challenged to re-classify it⁹. Such re-qualification of a common thing into art is more visible in Vienna, in Cracow the building was intended as a work of art from the beginning. Today, both buildings attract us with their shape and common material used for their construction. Nowadays tourist guides cannot be wrong.

In 1562 Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola in the book *The Five Orders of Architecture* demonstrates canons of beauty in drawings and explains them with the use of mathematical formulas. Such an approach was no longer so obvious for the avant-garde artists of the early twentieth century. In 1919, Stanisław Kubicki called in an expressionist spirit for losing man from the bonds of counts and number 10. This was the way to a new means of obtaining beauty, or at least that was how it seemed then. The avant-garde of the early twentieth century followed such a path, striving at the creation of works of art. The present times acquired a new ally – the ordinary material suitable for creating extraordinary things. To conclude, one can recall the words of Juliusz Starzyński remembering Eugène Delacroix: “In a short study, perhaps forgotten by readers, the author of the reflections we will read here, dared to say that beauty is not at all limited to one school, country or epoch, that it is not exclusively found among the ancients, as some people think, or only with Rafael or the painters who follow him, as others think, long before the Greeks made their masterpieces, or when the half-pagan spirit of the Renaissance inspired the Urbino painter, other people, other cultures had already realized beauty and allowed it to be admired¹⁰. Thus, before our eyes new beauty unrelated to a particular school or style is born, the beauty of concrete construction. However, no longer recognized as an element necessary for the continuance of the building, but for its uniqueness.

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⁹ P. Krakowski, *O sztuce nowej i najnowszej*, Warszawa 1981, p. 15.

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