

MAREK PABICH*

RATIONALISTIC ART FRAMEWORK

RACJONALISTYCZNE RAMY SZTUKI

Abstract

The architecture of an art museum constitutes the framework for the presentation of art. Although the relation between the exposition and the architectural form has been evolving for the last two centuries, the rationalism of the Age of Enlightenment also had a great impact on the successive architects designing museums. Art, created mostly thanks to the artist's intuition, can later be unravelled in the realm of a rationally shaped space. The architect designing museums relies not only on the experience of their predecessors but also on the assistance of art curators, who care for the best possible ways of displaying art objects. The discussion on the form of a museum is also joined by artists, who more often than not, unequivocally define their expectations about the display environment surrounding the exhibits.

Keywords: architecture, art museum, beauty, intuition, rationalism

Streszczenie

Architektura muzeum sztuki stanowi ramę dla jej prezentacji. Pomimo że relacja pomiędzy ekspozycją i formą architektoniczną zmieniała się na przestrzeni ostatnich dwóch stuleci, racjonalizm okresu Oświecenia wywarł wielki wpływ również na późniejszych architektów obiektów muzealnych. Sztuka, która powstaje w dużej mierze dzięki intuicji artysty znajduje później swoje miejsce w przestrzeni ukształtowanej w sposób racjonalny. Architekt projektujący muzea opiera swoją wiedzę na doświadczeniach poprzedników, ale również korzysta z pomocy kuratorów muzealnych, którzy dbają o jak najlepsze metody prezentacji. Do dyskusji na temat kształtu muzeum włączają się artyści, którzy często bardzo jednoznacznie definiują swoje oczekiwania w stosunku do najbliższego otoczenia dla dzieł sztuki.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, muzeum sztuki, piękno, intuicja, racjonalizm

* Prof. D.Sc. Ph.D. Arch. Marek Pabich, Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning, Faculty Of Civil Engineering, Architecture And Environmental Engineering, Lodz University of Technology, marekpabich1@gmail.com.

1.

For an artist (...) intuition, just like reasoning, is discovering something unfamiliar but in a different mode – it might take us by surprise as opposed to our reasoning, which never surprises us.¹

Stanisław Fijałkowski

One of the theses given by the organizers of this conference, the subject of which deals with the juxtaposition of the terms rationalism-intuition, says that architecture, while maintaining the status of the crippled branch of art, because of being born out of the utility, still aspires to be beautiful². Beauty in architecture has been defined for ages but the kernel of truth lies in the words of Władysław Strzemiński, who claims that: *Beauty (...) remains beyond the reach of our creative grasp. We can never create, evoke it directly, all we can do is to prepare the ambient for its birth: the composition of words, forms, taints, sounds. Then we can await, with hope, its bearing*³. In the case of the architect, similarly to the artist, intuition is an inalienable necessity since it guides to the most direct way to solving the given spatial and composition tasks. The situation reaches the unique dimension in case of art museums, which become both the framework and the background for the displayed art. Moshe Safdie claimed that there are only very few invariable rules in contemporary architecture⁴. It permits freedom of making decisions, latitude of choice, while at the same time encourages the building of an individual and recognisable world of architecture. Individualism does not stand in opposition to rationalism, which is reflected in the conscious work of the designer, whose actions are exposed to scrutiny at every single stage of his activity. The design of a museum building must be subordinate to specific functional rigour, while providing the opportunity for a harmonious relationship between its form and space in which the art exhibits and the whole collection being displayed. Meeting these requirements is by no means easy. A museum is one of the most fascinating, but at the same time most demanding design feats.

It is not only a diligently set function scheme for the architectural objects that decides upon its quality of utility. The key ingredient is a, difficult to define, relation art-architecture, especially when discussing art not only as a museum collection, but also as the art of architecture. Facing such challenges, an architect must possess not only an extraordinary set of designing skills, but also sensitivity to art and beauty.

¹ Z. Taranienko, *Alchemia obrazu. Rozmowy ze Stanisławem Fijałkowskim*, Warsaw 2012, p. 145.

² D. Kozłowski, *O pięknie architektury (współczesnej) – uwagi o ułomności rzeczy użytecznych*, Czasopismo Techniczne, Architektura, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Krakowskiej, Cracow 2007, p. 72.

³ W. Strzemiński, *Piękno pozostaje poza zasięgiem naszej mocy twórczej. Wywiad z prof. Władysławem Strzemińskim*, *Filozofuj* nr 1 (19), 2018, p. 25.

⁴ M. Safdie, *Język i środki architektury*, [in:] *Architektura wobec sztuki. W poszukiwaniu consensusu*, Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, Seria Problemy, nr 1/93, p. 44.

2.

*Architecture versus art*⁵

Exactly a quarter of a century ago there was an exhibition *A museum. Architecture versus Art*, which I prepared in co-operation with The Art Museum (Muzeum Sztuki) in Lodz. I mention this exhibition because, just like the subject of this conference, it focused on the relations between rationalism and intuition but not only in one domain of human activity but in two, so closely related – architecture and art.

In the preface to the exhibition catalogue Jaromir Jedlinski wrote: (...) *a museum is a home, protecting special contact, (...) is the environment of reception of art pieces by the audience, especially those who consider regular contact with art indispensable. We believe, that a museum should be such a home. We are aware that the space, the place where an art exhibition is created is an element, which co-constitutes the content and the importance of each exhibition*⁶. The exhibition presented the most outstanding achievements of the museum architecture from all over the world of the upcoming end of the twentieth century. The catalogue was an equally important element of the exhibition as its content considerably transcended the scope of the presented photograms. It contained statements and opinions by some outstanding people who oversaw museums. They shared their opinions, answering some questions asked by the organizers: what kind of art museum building had the greatest influence on the museum architecture? How to understand the mutual connection among a building, an exhibition and a museum collection exposition of an art museum. The published opinions of the experts are important because they not only help to understand the very essence of an art museum but also, they show how their knowledge and experience supports architects in the designing process. Although the exhibition took place many years ago, many ideas gathered in the catalogue are still up to date. Despite the fact, that a museum is the art home, Colin Amery, a publicist, an architecture reviewer and a Financial Times correspondent emphasized that, first, a museum should meet the requirements of its visitors, secondly, the requirements connected with the collection and lastly, those of the curators. Dieter Honisch, the contemporary director of Nationalgalerie in Berlin claimed that we should not treat a modern museum as a place for education, but we should create such conditions so that a visitor could feel that they encounter something novel and broaden their experience. Franz W. Kaiser, the custodian of Haags Gemeentemuseum said that *architecture has to facilitate the perception of an exhibition and ensure that each artwork has its proper place. Architecture plays only an ancillary role, it is not supposed to divert attention from the exhibits*⁷. Alfred Pacquement, the director of Galerie National du Jeu de Paume in Paris, who, with the architect Antoine Stinco carried out the restructuring of the bygone building of Jeu de Paume, summarized briefly this experience in the following words: *The modesty of an architect, their willingness to expose works of art, not their own person seem to be, in this case, rather exemplary. Nevertheless, it is the case of not being neutral, but with real architectural work, or, at least with the process*

⁵ *Architektura wobec sztuki. W poszukiwaniu consensusu*, Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, Seria Problemy, No. 1/93.

⁶ J. Jedliński, *Muzea i architektura. Poszukiwanie konsensusu*, [in:] *Architektura wobec sztuki. W poszukiwaniu consensusu*, Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, Seria Problemy, No. 1/93, p. 9.

⁷ F. W. Kaiser, *Ibidem*, p. 34.

of creating real, contemporary architecture. (...) Personally, I think, that the idea of display space neutrality has been lavished. Obviously, decorative or unnecessary elements cannot disrupt the perception of artwork, but good architecture is never neutral (...)⁸. Thomas Decke from Neues Museum Weserburg in Bremen, during his analysis of modern museums, noticed many instances of the display space which jeopardize the right reception of artwork. He recommended that in the case of designing new buildings, architecture should be functional. A visitor should experience primarily an encounter with art inside a museum and *an architect can prove his architectural and sculptural talent on the elevation*⁹. Jean-Christophe Amman, a historian, a museum curator was convinced that an art museum should be the place of energy accumulation, works of art constituting the source of this energy. He advised architects to provide the exhibits with the possibility of full expression. *Have full expression. In this case a visitor can perceive an Energy impulse contained in each work of art*. Art cannot be eclipsed, and the attention of a visitor must be directed in such a way so that they could see art through architecture and architecture through art. In other words, our task is to give an artwork a living space¹⁰. An architecture reviewer, Paul Goldberger, watching the museum boom of the 1970s, noticed that museum architecture was getting more and more sculptural since architects, disregarding the cost, crave to expose their individuality. He called architects the murderers of museums¹¹. It is hard to contradict Paul Goldberger, who claimed that the idea of museum-monument, which is supposed to raise the profile of a city, prove its power and wealth. Hugh Pearman from *The Sunday Times* was one who explicitly characterized the tendency predominant in the two last decades. When he was answering his own question what a modern museum building should look like, he replied that it did not really matter. The building as a medium will get more important than the collection which it houses anyway. The museum will succeed if the designer of the building is a star-architect. He was concerned that, at this rate, in the twenty first century, museums and galleries will not need any exhibits, they will just glorify their own existence. We are approaching the end of the second decade of the twenty first century and nothing of the kind has happened so far. On the contrary. No other museum has achieved the Bilbao effect on such a scale so far. Edwin Heathcote, an architect and a *Financial Times* reviewer claims that cultural institutions and city councils still want new architecture to provide something more than proper functioning and to contribute to the city development. Consequently, new architecture is supposed to become old architecture and provide a spectacular performance. Larry Shiner, University of Illinois, a philosopher and an art historian has joined the discussion on the relations art – art museum architecture recently. As most people who visit art temples, he expects museums to provide some space for reflection, not a performance inspired by the architecture itself. However, he can see the possibility of reconciling those contradictions by a skilful approach to the design of a museum building. Discussing the museums with distinctly expressive architectural nature, such as Denver Art Museum by Daniel Libeskind, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao by Frank Gehry or Milwaukee Art Museum by Santiago Calatrava, he came to the conclusion that such architectural objects, *offering us exciting but non-invasive space for art, prove that art museum architecture is at its best when it simultaneously supports reflective engagement in its*

⁸ A. Pacquement, *ibidem*, p. 36.

⁹ T. Decke, *ibidem*, p. 28.

¹⁰ *Museum für Moderne Kunst. Frankfurt am Main*, Frankfurt am Main, 1988, p. 12.

¹¹ P. Goldberger, *What should a museum building be?*, ARTnews, October 1975, p. 33.

own skill and the art which it contains¹². In his opinion, the museums which are outstanding creations not only serve art, but most of all they link architecture as art to architecture for art.

3.

*No idea can exist without mind*¹³
George Berkeley

The history of museum architecture indicates the rationalistic approach to its cultivation. It might seem that the architectural objects, where a direct and exceptional contact with art takes place, just like art itself, contain many creative activities which have been based on intuition. However, it is just an apparent impression. It was not the relation between the building and the collection which mattered most at the initial stages of the formation of museum architecture. The most important were technical skills combined with the ability to refer to the past. Since the museum as an institution originated in the Age of Enlightenment, all the aspects of its architecture had to have the clearly stated theoretical and philosophical background. The French rationalistic architect-theoreticians created some models of art museums which, above all, were supposed to reflect the order and perfection of the Universe, not to deal with real needs of an institution. Creating new types of a building, the source of patterns and inspiration was in contemporary public utilities. In the second half of the 18th century they were defined based on geometry. The typological patterns, created by architects from the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, were used, with different intensity, almost until the middle of the twentieth century. The valid designing method currently was drawing floor plans based on legible combinations of simple geometrical figures. Everything was subordinated to symmetry. The perfection of buildings depended on the skill to create a harmonious floor plan composition and to use the classic elements of an architectural forms such as: a column, a portico, a plinth. The floor plan creation was mostly based on a simple internal communication scheme, with the intersection of perpendicular corridors, emphasized by means of rotundas. The compositions of floorplans and spatial forms designed in such a way were dependent on the hierarchy of individual elements. The designing teaching methods at des Beaux-Arts mostly focused on dealing with correct floor plans whereas spatial forms were created by the extrusion of floorplans. The whole was enriched with antique elements. The first theoretical models of museums were also based on the abovementioned principles. At the end of each year the students participated in the Grand Prix de Rome Competition. The winners were awarded a one- or two-year scholarship for a Rome stay. The main objective of the stay was studying modern architecture. The 1779 competition is the most important for our present considerations. The subject was a museum for displaying artwork and natural history. One of the conditions was such a floor plan disposition so that all the designed museum halls were situated on one level, forming a piano nobile. The other requirement was that the inner division should not interfere with the symmetry of the external decoration. Unsurprisingly, two winning designs, by Guy de Gisors and Jacques-François Delannoy, were very similar to each other. Both followed the guidelines of the Paris École des Beaux-Arts.

¹² L. Shiner, *Architecture vs. Art: The Aesthetics of Art Museum Design*, [in:] *Contemporary aesthetics*, [accessed: 01.05.2018], <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7523862.0005.009>.

¹³ B. A. G. Fuller, *Historia filozofii*, Warsaw 1967, vol. II, p. 152.

Their museums were arranged on the Greek cross plan, which was inscribed into a dimetric outline, an enfilade. These were the first models for later museums. The greatest influence on architecture development in the 19th century, however, was two French architects and theorists, Étienne-Louis Boullée and Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand. A rationalist, Boullée believed in the connection between architecture and Nature and he even claimed that it should imitate Nature. He claimed that architecture is a gift from God, given to enable him to build home on Earth and *the world plan, determined by the Creator, is the representation of order and perfection*¹⁴. His museum design, which embodies his ideals and contains a centrally situated, vaulted rotunda, became a model for many future museums. The museum design by Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand¹⁵, based on a square, contains two display wings arranged on the Greek cross plan and a central rotunda in its inside. It offered future architects many opportunities for transitions.

The Altes Museum by Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1830) turned out to be a milestone for museum architecture design. One can easily find the echo of W.J.-N.-L. Durand's idea in this building. The layout with a centrally situated rotunda and a quadrilateral of display halls constitutes the continuation of the ideas of the turn of the 18th and the 19th centuries. Schinkel's museum exemplifies a functioning building which sets an excellent model for our times. It comprises the most important rules for shaping museum architecture, the following of which is vital for a good museum. The Altes Museum, with its simple floorplan, provides a good sense of spatial cognition thanks to the central rotunda and therefore ensures easy access to the chosen parts of the exhibition. Despite the diversity of paths followed by museum architecture in the twentieth century, Schinkel's model, based on the ideas of prior theoreticians, is still generally accepted. Modern museum architecture constantly refers to Schinkel's concept. Le Corbusier used his idea, suggesting two completely different solutions. First, at Mundaneum he led the spirally arranged visitors' route around a huge, empty space. The Musée de Croissance Illimitée was planned as a one-level object. The visiting starting point and the core of the whole building is the first hall, the following ones spirally emerged. Such a layout gives the opportunity for endless extension.

The development of museum architecture in the twentieth century had very varied forms but the typological model, developed when the institution of a museum originated, is still widely used, in significantly modified variants, though. Staatsgalerie Stuttgart (1982) by James Stirling and Philip Johnson's designs for some smaller museums (Amon Carter Museum, 1961, Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, 1963, Bielefelder Kunsthalle, 1968, Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, (1986) constitute the great tribute paid to Schinkel. Axel Schultes in the Kunstmuseum Bonn (1992), Stefan Braunfels in his Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich (2002) or Oswald Mathias Ungers in the Kunsthalle building in Hamburg (1997), using the modern language of geometry, all reference the theoretical considerations of the Enlightenment architects. They also refer to the Altes Museum. In Mario Botta's designs for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (1995) and the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rovereto (2002) all the layout is subordinated to the central, round space. In the Iberê Camargo building in Porto Algere (2008), Alvaro Siza references the idea of his predecessors, shaping the route which the visitor takes, skirting the central, external void. Rationalism in these designs is also conveyed by conscious references to the proven patterns and to geometry.

¹⁴ É.-L. Boullée, *Architecture. Essai sur l'Art*, Paris 1968, p. 37.

¹⁵ J.-N.-L. Durand, *Précis de leçons d'architecture données à l'École Polytechnique*. vol. I-II. Paris 1802–1805.

4.

*A good building always tells a story. It is a narration*¹⁶.

Renzo Piano

An architect, designing a museum and solving complex functional problems, faces the vital question concerning the shape of the display space. It is, practically speaking, the key issue, connected with the function of a museum. Although a museum is supposed to perform a wide range of various functions, it is erected mostly to display a collection of exhibits. The architect makes all the key decisions concerning the design, but they do not work only on their own – the people in charge of the institution are partners in the discussion on the museum shape and space. Their knowledge of the collection they hold and of art display requirements is often enriched by the artists' opinions – they define the character of the immediate surroundings of the displayed artworks. Although artistic creativity is not always based on rational premises, history proves that art comes into being due to the conscious activities of an artist¹⁷. Ancient Greek art and the canons developed at the time referred to cosmic order of the World and Nature. In the following centuries art development was based on the defined rules and new created canons. The first breach took place in the Baroque, when an artist *faces the world in motion, which requires their creativity*¹⁸. Romanticism turned towards individual feel. Henri Bergson indicated the lack of flexibility of rational cognition. Even though modern art seems to be ostensibly chaotic, it often has its own specific order. Most artists act in an organised, planned way. They build a certain structure of the piece of art which is often seemingly hidden. If we look at the development process of famous creators, we can observe a deeply intellectual background in their work. It is therefore not surprising that they are willing to have a say about the display space for their artwork. Even more so, according to Umberto Eco, a piece of art has an open form and it can be complete only now of an individual interpretation by the recipient. Although not all artists would agree with this opinion, the surrounding context of an artwork influences its reception. The aesthetic experience of our direct contact with art might be even more intense in a space which has been well-suited for this unique artistic encounter. It is quite natural for an artist to want his artwork to be perceived in an undisturbed way. That is why the artists of the second half of the twentieth century tried to define the display space referring to modernistic architecture. Neutral, well-lit exhibition halls, where it was easy to link up with art, were the best for an artist. According to a German artist, George Baselitz, art requires only space, light and a wall. Two last decades, however, indicate a slight diversion from the idea of a *White cube*¹⁹, which does not mean that the trend has lost its followers. Artists frequently work in the already existing, often post-industrial, interiors. These interiors have their own unique character and at the same time they provide an inobtrusive background for artworks. Such a space, like in the Tate Modern, designed by Herzog & de Meuron Company (2000) creates a context

¹⁶ P. Clemence, *Renzo Piano Explains How To Design the Perfect Museum*, [accessed 11.04.2018] <https://www.archdaily.com/534172/renzo-piano-reveals-how-to-design-the-perfect-museum>.

¹⁷ G. Sztabiński, *Pytanie o rolę intelektu w sztuce*, *Sztuka i Filozofia*, 3/1990, p. 69.

¹⁸ U. Eco, *Dzielo otwarte. Forma i nieokreśloność w poetykach współczesnych*, Warsaw 1973, p. 31.

¹⁹ B. O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, The Lapis Press, San Francisco, 1976.

for a piece of art, interacts with it, it is neutral but not characterless. The interiors specially adapted to museum needs refer to time and evanescence contrary to *white cube* space, which avoids any context for artwork and constitutes an abstract, light microcosmos. Museums are sometimes built deliberately to refer to the artist's studio character. Jean Tinguely's Museum (1996) by Mario Botta resembles an old La Verrerie bottle factory, which J. Tinguely bought for a studio in 1988.

5.

*A thought and intuitive cognition are inseparable.*²⁰

L. I. Kahn

According to Joseph Beuys' theory of art, creating means reshaping the existing forms whereas art can be present in every human activity. L. I. Kahn claims that a sculptor changes the surroundings with their fingers. They do not create it, they modify it. An architect creates, crafts space²¹. Not every architectural creation is architecture, not to mention an art piece. Similarly, not every art creation is worth recollection. The most fascinating thing about art galleries is the fact that they are places where a mutual interaction between the past and the future takes place. The past is not only the collection, regardless whether the assemblage is of the old or the contemporary art. The past in the actions of an architect is also often the reference to the experiences of the predecessors, which Hans Robert Hiegel defined in the following way: *Architecture is architecture only when it carries the reminiscence of the past*²². Although Louis I. Kahn advised younger architects to *turn to intuition and turn their back on pondering*²³, to him intuition was always second to none, while emphasising that, in case of architecture, it also always has to be paired with cogitation. Cogitation, in contrast to intuition, which describes *the might of human soul, which is not rational thinking*²⁴ is inextricably linked to experience and knowledge. Everything that we wish to create *possesses its source solely in intuition. The scholar knows about it. And so does the artist*²⁵. Without intuition there is no art, without intuition exceptional architecture will not be created. The words regarding art, which Wassily Kandinsky said can be projected on architecture: *Because art influences feelings, it can do so only by means of feelings. With the greatest proportions, the subtlest equilibrium, nothing true will ever originate from solely mental calculations and deductive deliberations. The right proportions do not result from calculations (...) Proportions (...) are not external but rather come from within the artist, this is what one could call the feel of the boundary, artistic refinement - the features inborn in an artist*²⁶.

²⁰ L. I. Kahn, *Silence et lumière*, Paris 1996, p. 42.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 49.

²² H. R. Hiegel, *Kleines Manifest In: Architecture in Transition. Neue Architektur. Sieben Junge Architekten aus Amerika, Deutschland, England und Italien*, Kaiserslautern 1984, p. 12.

²³ L. I. Kahn, *op.cit.*, p. 42.

²⁴ Z. Taranienko, *op.cit.*, p. 145.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ Wassily Kandinsky, *op.cit.*, p. 81.

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