

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The Historical Museum, Sarajevo

Description of the structure

The Historical Museum is one of the eminent representatives of socialist Yugoslavia's architecture and part of the rich heritage of the 20th century in Europe. It was declared a national

monument in 2012, as one of the most important examples of modern heritage in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is located in the central part of the city's Marijin dvor quarter, between a green belt (Vilsonovo Promenade along the river Miljacka) and a busy traffic road called Meše Selimovića Boulevard. Together with the neighbouring historicist complex of the Zemaljski Museum that consists of a few pavilions (built by Karel Parik in 1909) it forms the museum quarter, soon to be enlarged by the Contemporary Art Museum building named Ars Aevi (designed by



Historical Museum in Sarajevo, built in 1963, architects: Boris Magaš, Edo Šmidihen and Ranko Horvat (photo 2016)



The composition is dominated by the cube – the main exhibition space positioned on a strong pedestal



View of the Historical Museum's rear façade with garden (photo 2016)



The smaller cube, much more modest and intended to house the museum's management (photo 2016)



Steel construction with obvious and very advanced corrosion; stone surfaces also showing severe damage (photos 2016)

Renzo Piano). The Historical Museum was built in 1963, on the basis of the first-prize design at the Yugoslav Architectural and Town-Planning Competition; it was the work of Croatian architects Boris Magaš, Edo Šmihel and Ranko Horvat. The museum was named the Museum of the Revolution until the end of the 1990s and its collection of that time referred to the history of World War II in the region. Today, the Museum's collection focuses on the history from the Middle Ages to contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Museum building has to be seen as part of the specific socio-political and culturological context of post-war Europe and the efforts to institutionalise and reify the collective or official memory of World War II by means of the architectural and spatial language. It can also be seen as a component for a new city centre of Sarajevo with cultural and educational attractions. However, its architectural expression is completely devoid of any kind of ideological, archaic and folklore narration. Therefore, the expressionist character of the building's architecture opens up a dialogue with the tendencies of international contemporary architecture, which, in turn, is not formally unilateral.

The composition of the structure consists of three volumes: a dominant "hovering" exhibition cube, a smaller cube with offices, and a linear glazed corridor (with multifunctional halls), which connects them. The entire composition is laid on a white stone pedestal, thus being an early example of an urban gallery/terrace open towards the museum quarter. At the same time, the pedestal enables the creation of a delimited garden at the back façade – a reminiscence of the unbreakable bond between the traditional urban dwelling and the greenery.

It is obvious that the authors of the design with their vocabulary of shapes and selected concept mediated between the universal and the particular, giving precedence to the formation of modern local identities. Apart from the recognisable references applied (the cross-section columns, the black modular structural pattern of the glass surfaces, the free-standing wall, marked consoles, etc), modernisation processes still represented a challenge to the authors. An active dialogue was established with the tradition and it resulted in the language of abstraction. By applying reduced forms and a simple geometrical composition to the

building's appearance, this architecture seems to be shaped in the minimalist manner. However, on the contrary, a rich and complex spatial disposition was realised along with various scenarios and atmospheres. The structure neither has an extrovert nor an introvert character. Instead, with its composition and materialisation (white stone from the island of Brač and the glass facade), it skilfully balances between the full and the empty.

The structure's condition in 2016

During the war activities in the early 1990s, the Museum's structure was at the frontline, which caused significant devastation, both physically and functionally. After the end of the war, due to political reasons the status and funding of the Museum were not adequately solved. Because of the lack of thorough renovation and regular maintenance, the building rapidly fell into disrepair. Although experts have evaluated this building as an exceptional achievement of 20th century architecture, relevant institutions have not yet undertaken appropriate measures in order to prevent its present condition.

Confronted with the intolerable handling of this cultural asset of the 20th century, which is restricted to an occasional and partial "patching up" on the surface, and being fully aware of the fact that without funds work on this important cultural monument cannot be carried out, the ICOMOS National Committee in Bosnia and Herzegovina decided it was necessary to enter the *Keeping it Modern 2015* competition of the Getty Foundation in the hope of obtaining financial support to professionally and ethically conduct the restoration of the museum.

Bearing in mind that interventions so far have been made provisionally and at random, the design intended to be prepared by ICOMOS Bosnia and Herzegovina would be based on the compilation of an expert designing-conservation documentation that would include:

- detailed information about the building;
- description of the current condition of the building, including an analysis of any structural and/or material deficiencies and conservation needs;

- detailed description of the proposed conservation planning, including types of research and analysis (historic, technical, or scientific);
- objectives and expected outcomes and a rationale for each component;
- detailed information about specialists involved in the project (including the principal consultants, architects, engineers, scientists, researchers, conservators, surveyors, project supervisor who will be overseeing the architect(s), design and construction dates, etc), their roles and responsibilities, and their qualifications to undertake the project;
- in addition, images illustrating the exterior and interior of the building, including depictions of its location, architectural details, and past and present condition would be included. That photo documentation would demonstrate the continuous deterioration of the building.

All our preparations and negotiations with a representative of the Getty Foundation, as well as sincere efforts to help to contribute to the preservation of the Historical Museum and to its expert restoration and presentation were in vain, because the Museum's management did not give us their consent to take part in the *Keeping it Modern 2015* competition. The ICOMOS National Committee in Bosnia and Herzegovina does not want to speculate about the reasons for such behaviour, but must conclude that in this case the only real loser is the Historical Museum itself.

The importance of the prestigious location of the museum and the many years of conscious neglect of the building itself suggest that an inevitable demolition and the construction of some new office building may occur in the future, following the model of the current building trends in the neighbourhood.

National Committee in Bosnia and Herzegovina