



**Barbara Widera\***

## *Contemporary architecture in the city culture creation – the case of Linz*

### *Culture of the city*

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the city culture is based on a subtle balance of complex, overlapping relations. The nostalgic values, connected with respect for traditions and historical heritage, do not preclude active development and the newest technologies. Modern societies appreciate the rapid transfer of information and recognize the value of knowledge. Contemporary media facilitate access to art and culture. The complex system of relations requires dynamic and creative solutions in the field of architecture. Virtual reality pervades the real architecture

in more and more projects. Especially modern structures dedicated to art and culture promotion are often meant to revitalize urban fabric fragments and even entire cities. Their authors try to attract and inspire the viewer. They use innovative solutions, contrast, surprise and sometimes provocation. The atmosphere is constantly developed inside the building. Architecture has been a source of aesthetic, intellectual, and emotional experience. It is in dialogue with the user. Both material and immaterial aspects merge, creating the culture of the city.

### *Lentos Museum of Contemporary Art*

Linz in Austria is an interesting example of the use of contemporary architecture to stimulate the city culture. Over the last decade, the image of the city has been modernized, mainly with two buildings: Lentos Museum of Contemporary Art (2003) and Ars Electronica Center (2008). The former, designed by Weber & Hofer from Zurich, is located in the center of Linz along the Danube, between the Nibelungen Bridge and Brucknerhaus. It is because of its specific location that the building got its name which derives from Celtic and it means “located at the bend of the river”<sup>1</sup>. The Latin name of Linz – *Lentia* – comes from the same source. The use of the name Lentos was supposed to stress the significance of the new building

for the city and its culture. Soon after it was opened in May 2003, the museum of contemporary art in Linz became one of the most important structures of this type in Austria. It has collections of masterpieces of the European painting from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including works by Klimt, Kokoschka, Corinth or Pechstein as well as a rich collection of graphics and photographs by Rodchenko, Man Ray, Bayer. The works by Austrian and international artists in all fields of contemporary art since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the most recent times are also very well represented. The exposition program is based on three main concepts:

- art as a way of understanding the world,
- art as a catalyst of personal experiences in the real world,
- art as a measure of social capabilities [4].

Lentos Museum regularly displays exhibitions presenting achievements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century art. The exhibitions

\* Faculty of Architecture, Wrocław University of Technology.

<sup>1</sup> The origin of the name explains in his article, editor of website: [www.artmuseumsworldwide.com](http://www.artmuseumsworldwide.com) [2].



Fig. 1. Lentos Museum of Contemporary Art, exterior, designed by Weber & Hofer, 2003 (photo by B. Widera, 2011)

Il. 1. Muzeum Sztuki Współczesnej Lentos, elewacja, proj. Weber & Hofer, 2003 r. (fot. B. Widera, 2011)

are complemented with their corresponding thematic program of events, trips as well as educational and art workshops for the city residents, including a special series of classes for children.

Visitors enter the museum through a monumental cutout of the building which frees a large part of the ground floor, creating a yard providing a view of the river (Fig. 1). That 60-meter long vestibule in the open air takes the visitors into the world of art, allowing a smooth passage from urban to museum space. At the ground level there

are ticket desks, museum shop, foyer, education section and auditorium with 250 seats. In the east wing at ground floor the visitors can use the cafe and restaurant, open both inside and outside. The east side of the museum extends to the terrace accessible from the cafe from which the visitors can admire the panorama of Linz. Below, at basement level, there are two exhibition rooms, room for seminars and workshops, library, room for studies of graphics, cloakroom for visitors, storage and auxiliary rooms (Fig. 2).

The upper floor has 11 exhibition rooms of the area of 1800 m<sup>2</sup> for the permanent collection and 800 m<sup>2</sup> for temporary exhibitions. Additionally, there are cabinets for conducting art studies and reading. All rooms are well exposed to natural light.

A bold cutout on the ground floor adds variety to the clear, uniform, and regular structure of that cuboidal building with external walls made of concrete and glass. Due to its simple and clear form, Lentos Museum is a discrete yet clearly recognizable point in the city landscape. Its designers compare the building to a glass ship that anchored in Linz [1]. During the day, despite its large dimensions (130 m long and 30 m wide) which provide over 8,000 m<sup>2</sup> exposition space, the building seems to be light. In the evening its façade comes to life with the illumination of red to blue colors that slowly change the hue of the external walls. At the same time the illumination with its delicately pulsating lights is optically uniting Lentos Museum with the new building of Ars Electronica Center built a few years later on the other side of the river.

### *Extension of Ars Electronica Center*



Fig. 2. Lentos Museum of Contemporary Art, interior, designed by Weber & Hofer, 2003 (photo by B. Widera, 2011)

Il. 2. Muzeum Sztuki Współczesnej Lentos, fragment wnętrza, proj. Weber & Hofer, 2003 r. (fot. B. Widera, 2011)

The extension of Ars Electronica Center in Linz according to the design by Treusch Architecture from 2006 was ultimately completed in 2008. The main objective of the architects was to create a sculptural and modern form that would smoothly connect to both the existing structure of Ars Electronica Center and the urban landscape by the Danube<sup>2</sup> [4] (Fig. 3). The urban layout of Linz is exceptionally attractive with a green Poestling hill and its villas as well as the castle visible in the distance slightly descending towards

<sup>2</sup> Two uplifted irregular cubature with a decrease in the middle relate to the hills along the Danube. Source: [3].



Fig. 3. Ars Electronica Center, view from the Nibelungen Bridge, designed by Treusch Architecture, 2008 (photo by B. Widera, 2011)

Il. 3. Ars Electronica Center, widok z mostu Nibelungen, proj. Treusch Architecture, 2008 r. (fot. B. Widera, 2011)

the river on one side and a panorama of old Linz on the other side. The modern context was determined primarily by two structures built earlier – the neighboring building of Ars Electronica Center and Lentos Museum located slightly to the east on the other bank of the Danube.

It was the designers' intention to continue the modern, geometrical, and optically light vision of Weber and Hofer, however, without excessively restricting their own freedom of interpretation of the context. The new part of Ars Electronica Center has a transparent, cubic form leaning slightly to more dynamic look (Fig. 4). Treusch Architecture also use the methods applied in the theory of catastrophe and popular among deconstructivists such as introduction of a regular, slightly twisted network of divisions in external walls, overlapping of partly transparent unparallel layers and making use of the effect of elongation which was used to connect the smaller and the bigger part of the space in the Center.

In spite of application of various surprising and modern, formal solutions, the perception of the building remains clear. Furthermore, it is easily accessible due to the logical connections with the existing transportation infrastructure. It can be accessed from along the river side, from the river bank or perpendicularly from the Nibelungen Bridge. The underground passage helped to integrate the structure with footpaths, transportation system stops, and the underground garage.

The extension of Ars Electronica Center (AEC) was divided into three parts:

1. main building adjacent to the older part of AEC which, due to its location and because of its leaning combined with its matt and transparent glass planes that resemble a set sail, creates an important urban landmark in the corner;
2. exhibition space below ground level and covered structure of the connector called by the architects the "main deck" [5];
3. Futurelab located at the end of the connector, leaning the way opposite to the main building to optically balance directions, creates in the minds of the architects the "upper deck"[5].

The whole complex, combining the functions of a museum, an exhibition hall, offices and a cafe, has the gross area of 10,557 m<sup>2</sup>. Due to its open spaces and the proper location of skylights the building can be ventilated in a



Fig. 4. Ars Electronica Center, designed by Treusch Architecture, 2008 (photo by B. Widera, 2011)

Il. 4. Ars Electronica Center, proj. Treusch Architecture, 2008 (fot. B. Widera, 2011)

natural way. The double facade improves the conditions inside the building and prevents overheating in the summer and excessive cooling in the winter.

The neutral and simple yet unique structure made of steel and glass changes its character depending on lighting. During the day a combination of transparent and matt surfaces, the angle of incidence of sun rays, the temperature of light and weather conditions create interesting and effective relations with a river panorama of the city. However, what is really amazing is the use of the façade as a projection screen. The diversity of the shell animated with light and images radically change the appearance of the building. Especially after dark the two large buildings of the new museums Lentos and AEC create light emitting landmarks corresponding with each other. All visual impressions are intensified by the reflections in the Danube waters. This way the river no longer divides the city and by generating the reflections it provides a plane for artistic activities. The structures located almost exactly opposite each other symbolize contemporary art and technology. Their characteristic, slight displacement and clear architectural differences in spite of many similarities prevent the development of a banal mirror effect. Furthermore, if needed, the full of light structures made of glass can be equipped with LEDs and LCDs to improve artistic installations with more multimedia activities [3].

### *The bridge of culture*

The urban conception, based on the continuation of the dialog with the surrounding, has proven effective in Linz. Both centers closely cooperate with each other, creating a bridge of culture, additionally highlighted by architectural forms. The application of such scenery elements as colors, lights, and images draw attention and encourage to go inside. Consequently, the visitors of one of the museums, intrigued by the dialog of forms, shapes, materials and colors go across the river to visit the other museum. The designs of Lentos and AEC have different functions, forms, designers and they were built at different times. What they have in common, however, is their location, connection with the

contemporary culture, their forms, transparency, the impression of being light despite their large dimensions, illumination and the association with a ship which was the source of their designers' inspiration. In effect, over one decade, two structures have emerged and they significantly affect the culture of the city. They are different yet similar. In urban scale they are perceived as two parts of a uniform entirety. Their avant-garde character goes beyond their external walls and it does not reduce architecture to urban scenery. Designers try to develop solutions which would enrich the awareness of the viewers and encourage them to constant learning and research.



Fig. 5. Villa A, designed by Najjar & Najjar, 2010  
(photo by B. Widera, 2011)

Il. 5. Willa A, proj. Najjar & Najjar, 2010 r. (fot. B. Widera, 2011)

Locating two modern structures in such an important part of Linz created a climate conducive to the development of contemporary architecture discretely integrated into the natural landscape and the ambiance of the city by the Danube. The Mechatronik Building in Science Park Linz, designed by Caramel Architects from Austria, with some features of deconstructivism was opened in 2009. A lot of interesting villas are currently being built in the growing elegant residential estates located mainly in the area of Poestling Berg. The most contemporary interpretations of white modernism, designed according to the idea of sustainable growth such as Villa A designed by Najjar & Najjar (2010) (Fig. 5) or House M (2010) designed by Caramel Architects are especially worth mentioning.

Translated by  
Tadeusz Szalamacha

### References

- [1] *Jürg Weber, Josef Hofer: Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz*, edit. Eckhard Schneider, Hatje Cantz Publishers, Ostfildern, 2005.
- [2] <http://www.artmuseumsworldwide.com/index.php/Museums/2011-01-24-21-47-23-our-editor-visits-lentos-kunstmuseum-linz-one-of-the-most-important-museums-of-modern-and-contemporary-art-in-austria.html> (access: 04.01.2012).
- [3] <http://www.architecturenewsplus.com/projects/1702> (access: 03.01.2012).
- [4] <http://www.lentos.at> (access: 04.01.2012).
- [5] [http://www.treusch.at/project.php?type\\_id=1436&abau\\_id=1665](http://www.treusch.at/project.php?type_id=1436&abau_id=1665) (access: 03.01.2012).

### *Architektura współczesna w kreacji kultury miasta na przykładzie Linzu*

Kultura miasta w początkach XXI wieku opiera się na subtelnym zbalansowaniu skomplikowanych, nakładających się na siebie relacji. Nostalgiczne wartości związane z poszanowaniem tradycji i dziedzictwa historycznego nie wykluczają dynamicznego rozwoju i wykorzystywania najnowszych technologii. Nowoczesne społeczeństwo docenia szybki przepływ informacji i dostrzega wartość wiedzy. Współczesne media ułatwiają dostęp do dóbr sztuki i kultury. Złożony układ zależności wymaga dynamicznych, kreatywnych rozwiązań w dziedzinie architektury. Coraz częściej pojawiają się projekty, w których rzeczywistość wirtu-

alna przenika do realizacji architektonicznych. Szczególnie współczesne obiekty związane z promocją kultury i sztuki mają za zadanie ożywienie fragmentów tkanki miejskiej, a nawet całych miast. Ich autorzy starają się zainteresować i zainspirować odbiorcę. Posługują się w tym celu nowatorskimi rozwiązaniami, kontrastem, zaskoczeniem a czasem prowokacją. We wnętrzu budynku następuje konsekwentne budowanie nastroju. Architektura dostarcza przeżyć natury estetycznej, intelektualnej i emocjonalnej, wchodzi w dialog z użytkownikiem. Materialne i niematerialne aspekty przenikają się, kreując kulturę miasta.

**Key words:** contemporary architecture, museum, art, culture, Linz

**Słowa kluczowe:** architektura współczesna, muzeum, sztuka, kultura, Linz