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Kimberly Elman Zarecor | Vladimir Kulić

The 1958 Universal and International Exposition in Brussels—or EXPO '58, as it became commonly known—was the first "world's fair" in almost twenty years. It was envisioned as a showcase of cooperation between nations and a record of humanity's social progress and technological innovation in the years since the immense destruction of World War II. Yet despite great optimism, EXPO '58's lofty goals were diminished by politics. In a scene similar to 1937, when the pavilions of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany faced off across the concourse at the Trocadéro in Paris, the large pavilions of the United States and the Soviet Union dominated the central plaza on the fairgrounds in Brussels, reflecting a new global Cold War paradigm. In contrast to 1937, however, the Soviet Union was no longer the sole socialist state, but the leader of an international bloc that physically and ideologically confronted the trans-Atlantic alliance of Western liberal democracies at the fair. In addition, a third major grouping was in the making: the recently decolonized and rapidly modernizing Third World, gathering around the Non-Aligned Movement.

In the shadow of these divisions, two small socialist states, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, emerged as the unexpected success stories of EXPO '58. Czechoslovakia won the *Grand Prix* for the best national pavilion and Yugoslavia built one of the most critically acclaimed pieces of architecture in the show. The stories of the two pavilions, and nations, with their striking similarities and paradoxical differences, show the many shades of gray that existed within the simplistic oppositions of communism and capitalism and East and West.

Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia shared historical commonalities: both were multinational and multiethnic states with majority Slavic populations, newly founded at the end of World War I from the remnants of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. But while Czechoslovakia thrived between the wars as an industrialized democratic state, Yugoslavia had a tumultuous period of inter-ethnic strife, royal dictatorship, and thwarted development. Their fates aligned again during and after World War II, when both countries were occupied and partitioned by the Axis forces and then, upon liberation, turned toward Moscow and communism, rather than to the West. Yugoslavia was the first to embrace the Soviet system in 1945 under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito, the leader of the communist partisans during the war.

In Czechoslovakia, the Communist Party, which had been legal since 1921, took power in February 1948 after the collapse of a weak coalition government. Architects in the two countries quickly reestablished the professional connections that had already been intense before the war.

Their situations diverged again in the summer of 1948, when, just months after Czechoslovakia's communist takeover, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin expelled Yugoslavia from Cominform, the international alliance of Communist Parties, because of ideological conflicts with Tito. This split forced the country to reform and liberalize its political and economic system and reestablish ties to the West, although Tito and his government remained deeply committed to communist principles and did not embrace democratic governance. In contrast, Czechoslovakia was at the beginning of its decades-long relationship with the Soviet Union in 1948. Under the leadership of long-time Party leader Klement Gottwald, the state began to implement Stalinist political, economic, and cultural policies, transforming Czechoslovakia into a compliant Soviet satellite by the early 1950s.

By the time of EXPO '58, these two countries had experienced the first decade of Communist Party rule in significantly different ways. Czechoslovakia was emerging from the hardships of Stalinism: notorious show trials; repression and censorship in the public sphere; forced Sovietization in cultural production; and failed economic policies. After Khrushchev's 1956 'Secret Speech,' denouncing the worst excesses of the Stalin years, Czech and Slovak politicians only slowly changed course. Unlike Hungary and Poland, which experienced mass unrest and political turmoil in 1956, Czechoslovakia remained stable, introducing small reforms to placate its citizens. In hindsight, the country's success at EXPO '58 proved to be a prelude to the more liberal and optimistic 1960s that culminated with the Prague Spring, widely regarded as the highpoint of its communist decades.

Yugoslavia, on the other hand, had largely escaped Stalinism and its repressive policies. The late 1950s were a period of spectacular economic growth for the country, coinciding with the development of a fast modernizing culture within a communist framework. Much of Yugoslavia's success was due to its ability to work with both communist and capitalist economies, giving it a hybrid character that would define it throughout the communist period. Relations with the Soviet Union also improved after Khrushchev visited Belgrade in 1955, but Yugoslavia never returned to the Soviet camp. Instead, by 1961, it became a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, thus distancing itself from both political blocs.

In this context, visitors to the Brussels pavilions of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia saw displays by two confident communist countries promoting their own unique visions of modernity and technological innovation as alternatives to Western capitalism and liberal democracy. They communicated their messages through an architectural language of glass-and-steel modernism, a palette that reemerged in the Soviet sphere in the wake of Khrushchev's campaign against historicist socialist realism. Yet these pavilions showed distinct expressions of socialist modernity. Czechoslovakia took a populist approach that

advertised the country as modern, prosperous, and technologically advanced because of socialism. The team of architects who designed its building had more than twenty years of specialized exhibition and retail design experience. They conceived of the pavilion as an immersive environment with colorful and fanciful displays, multimedia performances, and an upscale restaurant. Yugoslavia had a different approach, displaying a high-art pavilion by an avant-garde architect and artist, who was also experienced with exhibition design. Featuring dynamic interlocking volumes that contained gallery spaces filled with modern art, the Yugoslav pavilion in Brussels conjured a highly aestheticized image, whose avant-garde overtones directly referred to the resurrected avant-garde spirit of Yugoslav socialism.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF EXPO '58

Architectural purists do not remember EXPO '58 particularly fondly. Modernism may finally have triumphed, but this was a compromised and uncritical modernism diluted by extra-architectural motivations and purposes.[1] One of the surprises in Brussels was that so many of the pavilions, like the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav examples, were made of lightweight, prefabricated steel-frame and panel construction that suggested a universal and industrial modernist approach to which political ideology had little relevance. The gargantuan superpower pavilions, the Soviets' rectangular shed with an undulating roof and the perfectly round American pavilion, were indicative of the situation (Fig. 1). Although they offered opposing formal geometries and ideological messages—one selling the pleasures of the "American way of life," the other the advantages of communism— the architecture was strangely similar, characterized by highly formal classicized monumentality, large open interior spaces, and axial symmetry. Even more distressing to many were signs that modernism had succumbed to popular taste as the influence of American corporate architecture was palpable.

Figure 1. Interior of Soviet Pavilion at EXPO '58, Brussels.

The Belgian section was especially reviled for its abundance of brightly-colored "space-age" ornament that became known as the Expo Style or the Atomic Style. The 335-foot-high Atomium—the exhibition's chief landmark and one of the favorite attractions—captured the EXPO spirit and the era's fascination with science and technology. But the shiny silver structure, built to represent an elementary iron crystal enlarged 165 billion times and endlessly reproduced in tourist merchandise, certainly was not on par with iconic nineteenth-century British and French exhibition constructions such as the Crystal Palace or the Eiffel Tower.

Although the public's response to the event was positive, only a handful of pavilions received favorable reviews in the press. Le Corbusier and Iannis Xenakis's Philips Pavilion was a swooping "electronic-spatial environment combin[ing] architecture, film, light and music into a total experience."[2] Sponsored by the international Philips Corporation, and notable for its corporate, rather than national affiliation, it was the best remembered and most experimental of the pavilions. Sverre Fehn's Pavilion of Norway was a masterpiece of the emerging Scandinavian regional modernism, made with wood, stone, plastic, and glass. Egon Eiermann and Sep Ruf's elegant West German Pavilion was composed of eight highly transparent glass cubes and lightweight steel frames and linked by open-air walkways. Understandably, the West Germans steered away from monumental classicism to avoid the still fresh memories of Nazi architecture.[3]

By challenging lingering stereotypes about the socialist countries' preferences for monumental and classical architecture, the modern style of the four socialist pavilions was intended to surprise observers. Socialist realism and well-known contemporary projects such as Stalinallee in East Berlin were still the international face of the Soviet Bloc at the time, but the showcasing of these modernist pavilions at a highly visible global event confirmed the arrival of a new era in architecture. Moscow was cognizant of the event's symbolic importance within Cold War ideological battles, even if its small alliance included only two satellites and a socialist country of questionable allegiance. As historian Lewis Siegelbaum discovered in the Moscow archives, the Soviets even met with officials in Prague and Budapest to discuss the three pavilions, which were located as a group on the fairgrounds.[4] Like its counterparts, the Hungarian pavilion was modern in style and made out of lightweight panel and frame construction. Situated behind the Soviet and United States pavilions, its site was shallow and long facing the outer edge of the fairgrounds where its main entrance was hidden from most visitors. In contrast, Yugoslavia's pavilion was separated from the Soviet group.[5] The hosts first offered the country a site next to the Spanish pavilion, rousing an immediate protest from the Yugoslavs, who refused any association with Francisco Franco's fascist regime. Instead, the pavilion ended up in a somewhat secluded section, behind a small grove of trees in the company of other European, but not socialist countries, a subtle political statement that reinforced Yugoslavia's maverick image and did not go unnoticed by the audience or journalists. According to the Belgian newspaper *Le Soir*, "Yugoslavia did in Brussels as it does in its international relations. Parting ways with the Soviet sector… it chose its place next to Portugal, Switzerland, and Great Britain. Next to its inoffensive friends."[6]

THE ARCHITECTS

The quality of design work in the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav pavilions reflected the expertise of the architects. In both cases, the designers were not apparatchiks or regime favorites as may have been expected, but rather exhibition and retail specialists whose careers started in the 1930s and who won state-sponsored competitions for the chance to design for Brussels. They were not, however, apolitical participants. They all had ties to the Communist Party and rare permission to travel to the West and the developing

world in the years just after 1948 when most citizens of their countries were barred from all international travel. The trips were especially valuable for them because of the opportunity to acquire rare, first-hand information on foreign architecture. As professionals, they publicly supported their countries' transition to socialism and proudly promoted its successes in their respective pavilions, although representations of the Communist Party itself, including the hammer and sickle insignia, were conspicuously absent from both displays.

In Czechoslovakia, architectural practice was reorganized after 1948 and private practice abolished. All architects had to work for a system of state-run design offices called Stavoprojekt or for state-owned enterprises as in-house designers.[7] Stavoprojekt held an internal competition among its regional affiliates in 1956 to find a design team for the country's pavilion. Eight teams submitted proposals.[8] The winning team was a group of exhibition specialists from the Prague office—František Cubr, Josef Hrubý, and Zdeněk Pokorný. All three had trained with leading avant-garde modernists at the Technical University in Prague between the wars. In the 1930s and 1940s, Hrubý worked with Josef Kittrich on retail design projects; their most famous building was the Bila Labut' (White Swan) Department Store in Prague from 1939. Cubr and Pokorný first teamed up as a pair in 1937 and designed the Kotva Export Store in Rotterdam two years later. They also did a number of exhibition commissions before and after 1948, including some interior spaces of the Czechoslovak Pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair, the Czechoslovak Exhibit in Stockholm in 1946, the Venice Biennale in 1947, and the Czechoslovak Industrial Exhibitions in Moscow in 1948, 1949, and 1951. From 1949-1954, Cubr and Pokorný individually designed displays for trade fairs and exhibitions around the world, traveling as trusted representatives to events in cities such as Beirut, Damascus, Jakarta, Paris, Stockholm, and Sofia. During the same years, Hrubý worked on building commissions at Stavoprojekt and designed a trade fair display in Utrecht, as well as the Czechoslovak Pavilion and Exhibition in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The three started working as a team in 1954 and immediately won Stavoprojekt competitions for department stores in Prague; they also collaborated on a high-profile exhibition design in Moscow to celebrate the first ten years of the "People's Democracy" in Czechoslovakia. With these professional backgrounds, the architects on the Czechoslovak team can best be described as retail and exhibition specialists with proven abilities to impress shoppers and exhibition visitors. These skills would prove critical in winning the *Grand Prix* award.[9]

Architecture in Yugoslavia was less institutionalized after 1948 and individuals could still run their own design firms for much of the communist period; nevertheless, many commissions came from the state. The winner of an open architectural competition in 1956 for the design of the Yugoslav pavilion was the Croatian architect Vjenceslav Richter, who had studied architecture at the University of Zagreb under professor Zdenko Strižić, an eminent modernist and former student of Hans Poelzig in Dresden.[10] Politically active in leftist circles since his youth and influenced by Constructivism, the Bauhaus, and other progressive movements from the interwar period, Richter was committed to an avant-garde view of art and architecture as instruments of social and political change.[11] A co-

founder and chief ideologue of EXAT 51 (*Eksperimentalni atelier*—Experimental Studio), Yugoslavia's first postwar independent artistic group, he argued for a synthesis of architecture and the visual arts in the creation of totally designed environments based on abstraction and continuous experimentation.[12] His winning proposal for Brussels was a striking Constructivist-inspired structure suspended from a gigantic central pillar, thus reducing the building's footprint to a single point.[13] Apart from the spectacular structural system, however, the proposal had elegant spatial and functional qualities, particularly the exhibition spaces that cascaded smoothly from level to level.

Richter was a perfect match for the project, both for his considerable professional experience in exhibition design and for his political devotion to the Yugoslav socialist project. He became active in leftist circles in Zagreb in the mid-1930s and joined the Association of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia in 1939. Because of his political views, he suffered during the war as he was forced out of university, then wounded in resistance fighting, and finally interned at a work camp in Vienna. With this political pedigree and the completion of his studies after the war, Richter acquired modest but important commissions for various small exhibition pavilions at fairs in Yugoslavia and abroad. As was the case with the three Czechoslovak architects, the fair commissions allowed Richter to travel to the West well before that was possible for ordinary Yugoslavs to do so; his earliest pavilions abroad included those in Stockholm and Vienna in 1949 and Hannover, Paris, and Chicago in 1950. (In Chicago, he made a point of visiting László Moholy-Nagy's New Bauhaus, thus taking the opportunity to update his knowledge of the displaced European avant-garde.) From the very start, Richter's designs demonstrated an allegiance to modernism, even at the time of the official pressure to impose socialist realism. By 1950, this allegiance acquired a much more specific tone that revealed references to constructivism, which Richter himself repeatedly emphasized as a major influence on his work. Besides exhibition pavilions, Richter designed only a handful of significant permanent buildings, but he also had a significant international career as sculptor and painter, carving out a unique professional niche for himself.

Both Richter and the Czechoslovak architects shared roots in interwar avant-garde modernism, but they also felt a kinship with the EXPO '58 organizers who, "bearing in mind the human suffering caused by the Second World War and its nuclear apotheosis… intended to promote the positive aspects of scientific achievements in the hope they would outshine the risks and dissipate anxiety."[14] The organizers chose the motto, "a review of the world for a more humane world" to express these intentions. The portrayal of technology as a force for good in the world resonated, in particular, with the committee putting together the program for the Czechoslovak Pavilion, which had its own motto, "we live in 1958, the year of technological miracles, when all is possible."[15] Its optimism is evident in the pavilion's varied displays from ideas for new energy sources to children's toys to exuberant art glass and scientific machines. The Yugoslavs focused more on the "humanist concept" proclaimed by the organizers, which resonated with the post-1948 shift in Yugoslavia's own politics as they moved away from a bureaucratized Stalinist system and towards a decentralized form of governance that placed greater emphasis on the well-being of the individual.[16]

The global perspective of the event, stressing cooperation and tolerance between countries, also resonated with Yugoslavia's independent foreign policy that, by the time the exhibition opened, was already being formulated into the ideology of non-alignment.

THE PAVILION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

According to polls taken at the time, the Pavilion of Czechoslovakia was one of the most popular among visitors. Numerous awards including the *Grand Prix* and individual awards for attractions within it, such as the multimedia theater shows Laterna Magika and Polyekran, validated their individual impressions. These successes were well publicized to the Czechoslovak public through the mass media, although because of severe travel restrictions fewer than 6,000 Czechs and Slovaks were able to visit the Pavilion in situ, compared to the estimated 6,000,000 other people who came through its doors.[17] As the *Grand Prix* winner, and a global advertisement for socialist Czechoslovakia, the building achieved a cult status at home in the years immediately following, particularly among architects and designers, most of whom knew the building only through photographs and second-hand accounts.

Figure 2. František Cubr, Josef Hrubý, and Zdeněk Pokorný, Pavilion of Czechoslovakia at EXPO '58, 1956-1958.

As exhibition specialists, the architects chose to design a skillful building that was more of a backdrop for the objects on display than an ambitious piece of design work on its own. The pavilion had two parts: a primary two-story exhibition pavilion with an L-shaped floor plan and a two-story restaurant tucked into the courtyard of the L plan. The main pavilion had a clear glass entry hall flanked on either side by opaque glass volumes made

of experimental prefabricated panels of foam glass (crushed glass mixed with limestone or carbon) and polycarbonate plastic mounted on a steel frame; a model Kaplan turbine tower stood out front (Fig. 2). In the recent exhibition catalogue, *Brussels Dream*, Czech architectural historian Martin Strakoš notes that there were competing formal agendas in the Pavilion, a classicizing impulse in the entrance facade and the relationship of the entrance hall to the exhibits and an industrial sensibility, relating to materials and construction.[18] The Stavoprojekt branch in Gottwaldov (formerly Zlín) oversaw construction. It is noteworthy that this is the same Stavoprojekt branch that was continuing the research work of the famed Baťa Shoe Company, which had been researching industrial prefabrication technologies for buildings for decades. In fact, during the same time that the pavilion was being fabricated and prepared for shipment to Brussels, some of the first Czechoslovak concrete panel apartment buildings were being erected under the supervision of architects and engineers from the same office.[19]

The interior displays were organized around three themes—work, leisure, and culture—and a narrative structure called "One Day in Czechoslovakia" which was introduced to visitors in a brochure that they were given at the entrance by specially trained guides. Historian Cathleen Guistino writes that each section sought to depict "non-elite Czechoslovak citizens' everyday routines."[20] The displays included exhibits on energy, machinery, glass and ceramics, and agriculture in the work section; aesthetic taste, including clothing, shoes, and designed objects, children and puppetry, and free time in the leisure section; and literature, science, music, and art in the culture section. The final stop on the processional tour through the pavilion was the theater for the Polyekran and Laterna Magika performances. Visitors could then go into the courtyard and eat at one of the two restaurants in the smaller building. Highly respected theater designers, exhibition designers, artists, and architects were part of the team which created the displays that were universally praised for their creativity, materials, didactic value, and variety. Even the food at the restaurants was popular, although politicians from Prague complained that it was too expensive (Fig. 3).[21]

Figure 3. František Cubr, Josef Hrubý, and Zdeněk Pokorný, Pavilion of Czechoslovakia at EXPO '58, 1956-1958. Restaurant.

Some of greatest successes of the Czechoslovak Pavilion were its multimedia presentations, the Laterna Magika, the Polyekran, and Karel Zeman's film, *Vynález zkázy* (translated literally as "A Deadly Invention," released in the United States as *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne*) also shown in the theater, which won the prize for the best film at EXPO '58. The multimedia shows relied on a literal collaboration between humans and technology. The world-renowned Laterna Magika integrated projection screens and filmic images with

musicians and actors on the stage who responded to and interacted with the pictures on the screens. The Polyekran was a film and music presentation with an avant-garde spirit. Zeman's film combined live actors and animation in an innovative, and prescient way.[22] In much the same way, the pavilion and its exhibits were a backdrop for the human events unfolding inside of it—a spatial marriage of humans and technology. Seen this way, the Pavilion itself was a form of theater that combined and showcased people, exhibits, and the technological construction of the spaces. The consistency of this concept throughout the Pavilion may explain why it was such a popular and critical success, especially given the mood at the Expo and the interest in technology as a positive force.

THE PAVILION OF YUGOSLAVIA

Richter's original design for Brussels, which proposed to suspend the whole building from an enormous central cable-stayed mast, inevitably evoked Constructivism and its penchant for suspended structures, most famously exemplified in Ivan Leonidov's project for the Lenin Library in Moscow (1927), or Hannes Meyer's *Petersschule* in Basel (1926). At the same time, it also had more populist connotations, resonating with such contemporaneous landmarks of international exhibitions as the "Skylon," a gigantic cable-stayed tower erected for the Festival of Britain in London in 1951. From the very start, however, the idea proved structurally problematic due to huge wind deflections. Despite Richter's protests, the pavilion was eventually built on twelve cruciform steel columns, albeit thin enough to retain the impression of an open ground floor. Instead of a central mast, Richter constructed a daring obelisk consisting of six tensile arches, which marked the position of the pavilion and symbolized Yugoslavia's six constituent republics.

Figure 4. Vjenceslav Richter, Pavilion of Yugoslavia at EXPO '58, Brussels, 1956-58.

Even without the mast, the pavilion was a masterful realization of Richter's ideas about the synthesis of visual arts. The building's interlocking volumes appeared to float above a luxurious plaza interspersed with rectangular water pools, creating a dynamic cascade of split levels with no barriers between the exterior and interior (Fig. 4). Rather than a fair pavilion, the building resembled an elegant, sparsely furnished art gallery, in which every exhibit yielded to an aesthetic of black and white three-dimensional grids interspersed with occasional splashes of color. Indeed, Richter took full aesthetic control of all displays, creating a powerful total work of art in the service of state representation. It was, however, the building itself that conveyed the most powerful political message, its open, free-flowing space evoking a reformed, open, and modern Yugoslav socialism, liberated from Stalinist oppression.

An important quality of Richter's split-level layout was that it gave clear spatial articulation to the four parts of the exhibition, while maintaining easy circulation and visual connections between them. The main entry to the pavilion led across a plaza, past the souvenir booth, and then either half a floor down to a sunken Gallery of Economy, or half a floor up to the Gallery of State and Social Organization. From the latter, another half-level up, one accessed the Gallery of Art, perched above the entrance, and the Gallery of Tourism. This organization, with the economy firmly anchored to the ground, the rest floating above it, made the Marxist tropes of "social basis" and "superstructure" materially tangible.[23]

The ground levels were lavishly decorated with sculptures, reliefs, and murals, artfully combined with water pools, colorful marble paving, and islands of greenery to create an atmosphere of restrained opulence and grace. In such settings, even the few exhibited pieces of industrial machinery looked like objects of art. The tone changed upon entry to the Gallery of State and Social Organization, politically the most important part of the exhibition. Reduced to two-dimensional graphics, the information lacked the visual appeal of the rest of the pavilion. Some of the key political messages, about the democratic nature of Yugoslav socialism and its broadly participatory character for example, were cast in decidedly poetic terms, circumventing overt ideological symbols and thus avoiding the impression of propaganda. The other three galleries—Economy, Art, and Tourism—supported this political narrative, but also served more pragmatic purposes. The Gallery of Economy advertised colored metals as one of the country's largest exports, showing mineral specimens in attractive display cases. The Gallery of Art advertised not only the flourishing of the national culture, but also the liberation from the constraints of Socialist Realism. Finally, the Gallery of Tourism, with its displays of natural beauties and traditional artifacts, supported the nascent tourist industry, which in the following decades would attract visitors from both the East and the West.

Figure 5. Vjenceslav Richter, Pavilion of Yugoslavia at EXPO '58, Brussels, 1956-58. Interior.

Richter's pavilion was first and foremost an architectural success. The prestigious British journal *Architectural Review* ranked it among the "six outstanding pavilions" at the whole exposition. For the French daily *L'Express*, it fared even better, among the top four.[24] Gurus of modernism, such as Alfred Barr, Jr. of the Museum of Modern Art in New York and Jean Cassou of the Paris Museum of Contemporary Art, praised the building, as well as the art show displayed inside. This positive reception, however, frequently revealed stereotypical views of Yugoslavia, manifested in a perpetual surprise that a socialist and Balkan country was able to produce such a modern and sophisticated structure (Fig. 5). As one of the hosts put it, "People were surprised that we build such modern and beautiful architecture. Many even asked if we were allowed to build in such a way in the country, too, and emphasized the difference between ours and Russian architecture."[25] Such a positive reception of the architecture was in itself a political message that further strengthened the existing Western views of Yugoslav modern art as a symptom of the country's break from the Soviet orbit.[26] It was not much of a leap to interpret particular qualities of the building in political terms, too. The building's openness, for instance, was seen as analogous to Yugoslavia's open borders and its emergent international policy of "peaceful active coexistence."[27]

The pavilion's success with educated Western elites was counterbalanced by a much cooler popular reception. Many ordinary Yugoslavs who came to Brussels thought that it was "empty" and "too modern."[28] Some foreigners, too, observed that the elegant but cool building conveyed nothing of the country's "vibrancy."[29] Ultimately, however, it was the attendance that proved the most disappointing, as less than ten percent of EXPO's forty-five million visitors ventured towards the pavilion. Of course, its position was rather secluded and it could not compete directly with the enormous pavilions of the two superpowers, filled with all kinds of technological wonders. But Czechoslovakia demonstrated that, through sheer ingenuity and smart planning, a small country with no cutting-edge technology could create a spectacular exhibition capable of attracting huge crowds. Unlike Czechoslovakia's *Grand Prix*, Yugoslavia's Gold Medal—one of thirty-five—was awarded by the international jury solely on account of the elegant building and the art exhibition; as the jury noted, the pavilion's "didactic quality" was utterly disappointing.

It was under such circumstances that during the last month of the EXPO a collection of hand-made dolls in folk costumes, created by an amateur ethnographer, was displayed at the Gallery of Tourism. The dolls' intricate costumes and smiling faces finally attracted the desired attention: almost every major Belgian paper and both existing television channels covered them, at the same time boosting the numbers of visitors by at least ten percent. The dolls, however, directly undermined the key message of Richter's building, which cast the country as modernizing quickly and oriented towards an optimistic, experimental future, rather than a sentimental past.

LEGACIES

For many citizens of both Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, the positive responses to their national pavilions were signs that their countries and political systems could compete with the rest of the world in the broadest sense. Conversely, such responses revealed that Cold War divisions could be softened, if not totally overcome, as millions of predominantly Western visitors happily strolled through the pavilions of the two socialist states, enjoying what they found inside. Long after Expo '58 both pavilions survived as artifacts, as well as the sources of cultural legacies, but in different ways and with different connotations.

The Czechoslovak Pavilion was brought back to Prague after Expo '58 and the main pavilion installed at the Prague Fairgrounds amongst other notable historic pavilions from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The restaurant was installed separately on a site in Letná Park overlooking the city center. In 1959, Cubr, Hrubý, and Pokorný built a permanent home, and controversial glass block building, to house the Laterna Magika in a prominent position in Prague next to the National Theater. In 1989, the Laterna Magika was the headquarters of Václav Havel's political operation, Civic Forum. Sadly, the main pavilion burned down in 1991, a decade before it was "rediscovered" by a recent generation of admirers, who like their earlier compatriots, had come to know the building primarily in photographs. This generation was behind the 2008 exhibition and catalogue, *Brussels Dream*, which commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of Expo '58. The restaurant operated

for many years, but was closed and then renovated recently as offices for a private company. Within the historiography, the Pavilion is often associated with a change in design culture in Czechoslovakia from socialist realism to something that might be called an international modern style with socialist flare – what came to be known as the "Brussels Style." Architecturally the Pavilion was not something unexpected or anti-establishment; rather, its design exemplified the official culture in 1956, just as a socialist realist Pavilion would have done three years earlier.

The Pavilion of Yugoslavia also survived the show: it was sold to a Belgian contractor and reassembled as the St. Paulus College in the city of Wevelgem, Belgium, where it still stands in a somewhat altered shape. The lingering memory of its success continued coloring the foreign perceptions of Yugoslav architecture for a long time.[30] Yet the pavilion did not mark an architectural watershed for Yugoslavia, it only cemented the already established predominance of high modernism as the aesthetic formulation of socialist modernization in the country. The Brussels success, however, was arguably a turning point in Richter's career. He was given virtually free reign in designing two other national pavilions, for Turin in 1961 and for Milan in 1963, both much smaller than the one at Expo '58 but aesthetically even more daring.[31] More importantly, Brussels opened the door for Richter's successful international career as an artist, which allowed his sculptures to find their way into prestigious international collections, such as that of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Like his Czech colleagues, Richter was a firm believer in the socialist project, but he was also able to take advantage of the relative permissiveness of the Yugoslav system and carve a unique professional niche for himself, which allowed him to act with considerable independence, unattached to any official institutions. His very career thus embodied the declared ideals of Yugoslav socialism: devotion to perpetual experimentation, openness to international cooperation, relative cultural autonomy, and concerted efforts at modernization. His pavilion at Expo '58, however, also revealed the inherent contradictions in that image, perhaps best summarized in the contrast between the building and the exhibition of dolls in folk costumes—an apt metaphor for the multiple intersections at which Yugoslavia stood at the time: between modernity and tradition, between the ideological blocs of the Cold War, and between political and economic systems.

Considering that in political and cultural terms the USA and USSR were almost irresistible centers of gravity at the time of Expo '58, it is noteworthy that both Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia reconstituted and hybridized the models set by the super powers, both in terms of content (American popular display vs. explicit Soviet propaganda) and aesthetics (American appropriation of high-modernist aesthetics vs. the lingering classicism of the Soviet pavilion executed in a highly technologized form). Within this frame of reference, Czechoslovakia combined the American popular/populist approach to the displays with hybrid aesthetics reminiscent of the Soviet pavilion. Yugoslavia did the opposite: the content was largely political propaganda and high culture, but the form was uncompromisingly avant-garde/high modernist. The tensions between populism and high art, as well as

between progressive and conservative aesthetics, had been a staple of world's fairs all the way back to the Crystal Palace, regardless of the political specificities of the moment; it was precisely the resolution of these tensions that had always been at the heart of each national presentation. From such a perspective, both the Pavilion of Czechoslovakia and the Pavilion of Yugoslavia at Expo '58 emerge not as peripheral echoes of imperial centers, but as original achievements that provided new formulas for the key dilemmas of modernity. In this way, they both succeeded in transcending the limitations of geopolitics, even if they could not escape the long shadow of Cold War dominations and narratives.

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[1] For overview, see Rika Devos and Mil De Kooning, *L'Architecture moderne à l'Expo 58. 'Pour un monde plus humain,'* (Brussels: Fonds Mercator and Dexia Banque, 2006).

[2] Marc Treib, *Space Calculated in Seconds: The Philips Pavilion, Le Corbusier, Edgard Varèse* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 3.

[3] Greg Castillo, "Making a Spectacle of Restraint: The Deutschland Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels Exposition," *Journal of Contemporary History* 46:1 (January 2012): 97-119.

[4] Lewis Seigelbaum, "Sputnik Goes to Brussels: The Exhibition of a Soviet Technological Wonder," *Journal of Contemporary History* 46: 1 (January 2012): 120-136.

[5] György Péteri, "Transsystemic Fantasies: Counterrevolutionary Hungary at Brussels Expo '58," *Journal of Contemporary History* 46: 1 (January 2012): 137-160.

[6] Quote from *Le Soir* of May 14, 1958, reported in TANJUG press-clipping, June 28, 1958; Archive of Yugoslavia, Belgrade, (AY), Fond 56, Fascikla 6.

[7] See Kimberly Elman Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity: Housing in Czechoslovakia, 1945-1960* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011).

[8] Daniela Kramerová and Vanda Skálová, eds., *Bruselský sen: Československá účast na světové výstavě Expo 58 v Bruselu a životní styl 1. poloviny 60. let* (Prague: Arbor Vitae, 2008), 92.

[9] See Otakar Nový and Jiří Setlík, eds., *Cubr, Hrubý, Pokorný* (Prague: Nakladatelství Československých výtvarných umělců, 1962).

[10] Marijan Susovski, ed., *Zbirka Richter Collection* (Zagreb: Zagreb Museum of Contemporary Art, 2003).

[11] Ibid., 17.

[12] Ješa Denegri and Želimir Koščević, *EXAT 51: 1951-1956* (Zagreb: Nova Gallery, 1979).

[13] Vladimir Kulić, "An Avant-Garde Architecture for an Avant-Garde Socialism: Yugoslavia at EXPO '58," *Journal of Contemporary History* 46:1 (January 2012): 160-183.

[14] Fredie Flore and Mil De Kooning, "The Representation of Modern Domesticity in the Belgian Section of the Brussels World's Fair of 1958," *Journal of Design History* 16:4 (2003): 319.

[15] Kramerová and Skálová, eds., *Bruselský sen*, 14.

[16] Anon., "Tekstovi za katalog Međunarodne izložbe u Brislu 1958. godine," n.p., AY, Fond 56, Fascikla 21.

[17] Kramerová and Skálová, eds., Bruselský sen, 84.

[18] Ibid., 93.

[19] See Kimberly Elman Zarecor, "The Local History of an International Type: The Structural Panel Building in Czechoslovakia," *Home Cultures* 7:2 (Spring 2010): 217-236.

[20] Cathleen Guistino, "Industrial Design and the Czechoslovak Pavilion at EXPO '58: Artistic Autonomy, Party Control and Cold War Common Ground," *Journal of Contemporary History* 46:1 (January 2012): 200.

[21] Ibid., 209.

[22] On the multimedia presentations, see Kramerová and Skálová, eds. *Bruselský sen*, 14-87, 156-163.

[23] Anon., "Izveštaj o nekim problemima i iskustvima našeg istupanja na Izložbi u Brislu," n.p. AY, Fond 56, Fascikla 6.

[24] "Six Outstanding Pavilions: Jugoslavia," *Architectural Review,* 124: 739 (August 1958): 116-18.

[25] Report by the host Mirjana Brujić, AY, Fond 56, Fascikla 6.

[26] On foreign views of Yugoslav architecture during the Cold War, see Vladimir Kulić, "'East? West? Or Both?': Foreign Perceptions of Architecture in Socialist Yugoslavia, " *Journal of Architecture* 14:1 (2009): 87-105.

[27] Richter himself doubted architecture's ability to capture the character of a nation, even though he eventually acknowledged that his pavilion expressed Yugoslavia's "optimism and openness." Vjenceslav Richter, "Osvrt na arhitektonske rezultate izložbe u Bruxellesu 1958," *Arhitektura* (Zagreb) 12 (1958): 56-62.

[28] "Knjiga utisaka," n.p., AY, Fond 56, Fascikla 26.

[29] Ibid.

[30] For example, recalling the success at Expo '58, the *Architectural Review* noted, "If there is an architecture which stands in need of shrewd and deep interpretative study at present, it is that of Yugoslavia;" quoted in George E. Kidder Smith, *The New Architecture of Europe* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1961), 332.

[31] See Vladimir Kulić, Maroje Mrduljaš, and Wolfgang Thaler, *Modernism In-Between: The Mediatory Architectures of Socialist Yugoslavia* (Berlin: Jovis, 2012), 43-44.

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2-3. Public domain image from *Architektura ČSR.*